

The Embargoism of Anarchism

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Whatever its form, anarchism, the “libertarian creed,” is basically a bad dream that laments political conflict and seeks the end of the intrusion of individual interests and self-assertion in social life. It is a fantasy that, sooner or later, appeals to morality and the internal police of conscience to repress and renounce the self by “respecting” the interests of the other.

The exhortations to morality, conscience, right, and respect in the “libertarian creed” tend to favor the strong and powerful over the weak and powerless, contrary to the intentions of the anarchists. The anarchist appeals to liberty, conscience, and morality function as a form of social control by marginalizing the weak and gullible from the war of each against all.

The fact to be borne in mind is that whether one “should” or “should not,” the strong natures never do. The powerful allow “respect for other’s interests” to remain the exclusive foible of the weak. The tolerance they have for others’ “interests rests” is not “respect” but indifference. The importance of furthering one’s own interests does not leave sufficient energy really to accord much attention to those of others. It is only when others’ interests thrust themselves intrusively across one’s own that indifference vanishes: because they have become possible allies or obstacles. If the latter, the fundamental lack of respect swiftly defines itself.

Part of what enables domination, or the stratification of rich and poor, powerful and weak, is that the rich and powerful have been able to convince others to renounce themselves and their interests. History and society are the domains where the rich and powerful assert and fulfill their interests while proselytizing the poor and weak about liberty, rights, and respect. History and society record little more than the “respect” the rich and powerful have for their neighbor’s interests. The rich and powerful succeed because they are concerned only for the imposition of their interests wherever their whim or purpose is focused. “Their success has been proportional to the unformedness of the characters with which they have had immediately to deal.”

For egoists, the decentralization and pluralism of democracy is an advantage because compulsion, the imposition of interests, can be exercised from an increased number of centers. The multiplicity of laws does not signify the oppressiveness of the state, as Proudhon, Tucker, and anarchists complain; instead it indicates the detailed channels through which interests are imposed and potentially fulfilled.

It is too vague to say that democracy represents the liberty of the people: rather one would say democracy represents the increase in the number of people who are prepared to take liberties (i.e., per persuade by personal violence), with the people who refuse assistance in the furthering of the audacious ones' interests. It is the increase in the number of those who have the courage and ingenuity to become in an open and unequivocal fashion the tyrants we all are subtly and by instinct. It is part of the trend toward human explicitness.

In a democratic regime, liberty "is the ghostly spirit the moralists would have the meek always carry inside their waistcoats: it plays the policeman inside the man." The "libertarian creed" of the anarchists is only able to help subjugate the poor and weak because those who can rule and dominate will rule and dominate, regardless of the preaching of the moralists. Those who do not have the strength or will to assert their interests, espouse the "gospel of liberty" as a substitute for living. Those who have wealth and power will be given more because they seek it. Those who have less, will have more taken away for the same reason. The cry for liberty and respect for rights is "hoisting of the white flag followed by an attempt to claim victory in virtue of it."

"Archist" is just another name for the person. Until they encounter morality, the church, and self-renunciation doctrines like anarchism, each person intends to establish, maintain, protect, and extend his or her own life, identity, and interests with all available means. Marsden says that the first inclination of living human beings is to assert their own vitality and the importance of their own existence. Interest is the conceptualization of the person's assertion of their own value. Interest is the claim, assertion, and fight for a place among a myriad of other claims, assertions, and fights. Even aggression must be interpreted in light of the existential circumstances persons inhabit. The person who grows physically or intellectually is aggressive; growing life-forms are always aggressive and intrusive on the space and resources. Life guarantees that both aggression and conflict are inevitable.

We are one another's daily food. We take what we can get of what we want.

We can be kept out of "territory" but not because we have a compunction about invading. Where the limiting line falls is decided in the event, turning on the will, whim, and power of those who are devoured and devourers at one and the same time. Life is feasting and conflict: that is its zest. The cry for peace is the weariness of those who are too faint-hearted to live.

The world belongs to the archists, to those who are willing to assert themselves by valuing their lives, their growth, and their prosperity. The social world is "a bundle of interests" and a contest among those who choose to push their own outwards. Moreover, the other assesses the vitality and quality of the person by the sweep and intensity of interests she or he asserts. The more successful the person is in accomplishing goals, the more appealing she or he is to others; they excite stronger passions and evoke more intense images. The attitude of the world is friendliness toward, and admiration for, strong, bold, and successful interests because they are indicative of survival, security, growth, health, and prosperity.

For Marsden, this is why anarchism, and all forms of "embargoism," never succeed at gaining large numbers of committed adherents. Anarchism is always abandoned by persons who have their wits and abilities about them because they reject placing an embargo on their ability to appropriate themselves, their relationships, and the world around them.

The social world is a field where interests encounter and collide. At the encounter or collision of interests, the anarchist places a limit, or an embargo, on what can be valued and appropriated by individuals. Anarchism is constraint. Anarchism differs from statism because the embargo is self-imposed. Conscience and morality, or the internal policeman, demarcate what the individual can and cannot do, what the individual can and cannot want, value, or appropriate. Anarchism is always a form of humanism and moralism, despite its objections.

Tucker's concept of equal liberty establishes moralistic constraints in the behavior of persons to ensure that the "natural and just" rights of the other are respected and protected by the individual. In individualist anarchist thought, individuals are free to pursue their own interests as long as they do not invade or intrude on the interests of others. Individualist anarchism, like all forms of humanist thought, attempts to immunize the "human" from "egoism," or the individual's pursuit of his or her interest. It attempts to insulate the "human" from "archism," or the individual's challenge to limits or boundaries.

The "human" ensures that individuals can go "this far but no farther." The "human" must be protected in anarchist thought; it is the shield that confers right. Anarchism, the libertarian creed, is another form of humanism. Even in Tucker's individualist anarchism, the egoist is a lower form of life, subordinate to the human. For Marsden, Tucker's individualist anarchism is not a break from modernism, but another expression of it. Like the Christian and the socialist, the anarchist loves humanity, and benevolently extends the concept of "equal liberty" to encompass all.

But the Christian, the socialist, and the anarchist despise humans; the mass of whom who reject embargoism, and embrace egoism and archism. In anarchist thought, equal liberty is the foible or opiate of the poor and weak. The ragamuffins monopolize the virtues, while the archists and egoists monopolize the world.

Marsden's critique of anarchism is in no respect a defense of the state, or an attempt to develop a philosophic legitimation of political authority. It is an antistatist alternative to anarchism. In Marsden's egoist critique of politics, the state is little more than organized coercion. She defines it as the "National Repository for Firearms and Batons Company," which is owned, directed, and exploited by "state's men" whose main task is to preserve the state's charter granted to it by the people, the chief terms of which are:

1. The state cannot be dissolved;
2. It can do no injury sufficiently serious to justify retaliation or attack;
3. It can acquire as much money from people as it deems prudent;
4. It can use any and all resources to defend its interests; and
5. It can make alliances with those who can further its interests.

Marsden does not believe that governments serve any interests other than their own, nor does she believe that they serve any higher purpose than their own reproduction. She suffers no illusions about the presumed beneficence of governments, no illusions that they meet any needs of individuals or societies, and no illusions that they can be improved. Moreover, she rejects the notion of limited government or libertarianism because no state will place an embargo on what it can and cannot do to serve its own interests or to ensure its own permanence.

Marsden differs from anarchists in that she does not think that the state can be abolished. Nor does she think that the blame for its permanence and abuse can be completely attributed to the malevolence of politicians and bureaucrats. A major part of the problem anarchists attribute to government is actually the na'ivete and subservience of the subjects, which anarchism unintentionally promotes through concepts like equal liberty and a foolish fantasy of an improved future.

A modern "poor" citizen appears so unmitigatedly a fool in his attitude towards the "state" that suggests he is not merely a fool but a knave in addition.

One of the awestruck crowd of toilers, who when they are not licking their wounds in jail for not minding their manners, are performing forced labor to feed and fatten those who dare to govern . . . They dream of heaven, toil, starve and are penalized: then lisp of liberty. All the same, they seem to be able to stand it. If these things have a lesson to teach, the meek at any rate have not learned it.

Part of the reason why governments have power is because the poor and weak fail to challenge them; they refuse to become egoists and archists.

Echoing Stirner's comments on the proletariat, Marsden argues that the poor will cease to be poor when they refuse to be exploited by the rich and by the state. The "downtrodden" will disappear when they decide to resist. "The hungry will have bread when they take it." The anarchists are at least partly to blame for the poor's acceptance of domination since the anarchist theory of social order includes an "embargo" on the person wanting "too much" power, autonomy, wealth, and enjoyment. Instead of attempting to "level up" by embracing egoism and archism, the anarchists and all other "saviors of society," insist on leveling down, reducing all desires, aspirations, motivations, and outcomes to the lowest possible level. Their ideal person is the ragamuffin. Marsden counters that "one cannot desire enough." There is no limit to individual desires, aspirations, intentions, and achievements. As a social theory, anarchism functions to "level down" by imposing conceptual, ethical, and political boundaries on what the poor and powerless can think and do.

Marsden asserts, anarchism will not liberate the "down and outs." They will liberate themselves through a "self-assertion" that will obliterate anarchism and the "saviors of society" who impose artificial limitations on the thoughts and actions of individuals.

The egoist or archist opposition to anarchism is based on the notion that belief in the sanctity or legitimacy of government is gone. Also gone is the belief that government can be improved or made ethical and accountable.

Without legitimacy, democratic regimes are revealed as nothing more than "individual caprice," the first, final, and only basis of the will to govern. The anarchist notion of a harmonious society, purified of inequality and egoism is analogous to reformist ideas of "clean government," or arguments that government can liberate the proletariat or respond to the will of the people. Governments are not neutral and they do not serve. Egoism reveals the will to govern as an ineradicable force that is expressed on an individual and a collective level. Whether it is welcome or unwelcome, the will to govern is an important form in which power inevitably expresses itself.

The anarchist opposition to the state because it is a state, is futile and delusional. For the egoist, the abolition of the state is a "negative, unending fruitless labor." "What I want is my state: if I am not able to establish that, it is not my concern whose state is established."

The egoist's cause is to establish his or her "own," to acquire and defend his or her property. Egoism does not defend an abstract master concept of social order. The egoist works to mold the world according to his or her aspirations, including power relations in everyday life. Failing to either establish his or her "own," the egoist does not pretend that there is no state or external world at all. More powerful others will see that there is.

When one state or form of government is overthrown or disintegrates, another one arises. "The state has fallen, long live the state." The most consistent, thorough revolutionary anarchist cannot evade the simple fact that power is an inescapable feature of life, in the face to face relationships between individuals and among large numbers of people. What happens on the day after a successful anarchist revolution? To protect the new regime, the anarchists will need to develop and implement policies, programs, and structures. The anarchistic blueprint of society and individuality must be defended. Anarchists will find themselves protecting their own interests with all the power and weapons they can acquire and use. They will necessarily have to repress the statist, egoist, and archist who will surely attempt to reassert their will and exert power over others. Anarchists will protect their revolution and whatever social formation follows it, formulating law and maintaining order through persuasion and coercion. At least, until more honest archists arrive to overthrow and supersede them.

Marsden argues that anarchists confuse the attitude that refuses to hold law, power, and authority sacred with the attitude that refuses to acknowledge the existence of law, power, and authority. All "saviors of society" tend to believe that their vision of an improved world will inevitably triumph, but the anarchists are especially prone to the confusion that saying it is so, makes it so. Egoists and archists do not believe that government and law are sacred, but they respect any and every law for the volume and severity of retaliatory force there is behind it. Respect for "sanctity" and respect for "power" are different. The anarchist confuses the two, believing that the elimination of the first automatically entails the elimination of the second; the egoist and archist dismisses the first but acknowledges the persistence of the latter.

In concert with Stirner, Marsden's egoism rejects the legitimacy or sanctity of existing regimes, but not their reality. Egoism assesses the power of the state, and challenges, confronts, and evades it as circumstances warrant.

Egoism rejects any concept of utopia, or the imposition of any idea that places an embargo on how individuals can act. It rejects any final solution to the problems persons encounter in living, particularly those that pretend that force and power can be eliminated in social life. Life cannot be subordinated to an artificial blueprint because individual egoism soon asserts itself in opposition to others and to external constraints.

Anarchism is an illusory path to freedom because the forces of human survival, security, and prosperity are directed in the opposite manner.

Persons constantly challenge limitations and embargoes on their thought and behavior. They are unlikely to accept any regime, like anarchism, that uses ideology, conscience, and moral coercion to promote compliance and conformity. It is the nature of human beings to create, construct, and direct their will on the world of events. This will never be restrained by any ideology or cultural value that promotes a "spiritual embargo," despite the best efforts of anarchism and other humanist ideologies. Ultimately, the anarchist is a "derieo-libertarian" who glosses over the aspirations of "a unit possessed of the instinct to dominate – even his fellow-men."

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