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Reflections on, Reactions to Molly Tov

Bob Black

In “A Message to ‘Anarchist’ Men, and Then Some” (in *Profane Existence* and *Practical Anarchy*), Molly Tov voices so many criticisms of anarchist men that she understandably overlooks the way several of them apply to anarchist women — or at least to Tov herself — too.

For a while as I read her rant I was congratulating myself that an anarcho-feminist had come, ten years after my “Feminism as Fascism,” to my point of view, but I was the one who had come — too soon. Tov complains that anarchist men have learned to mouth feminist rhetoric to get laid or otherwise get women to do what they want. I said so ten years ago, although I also observed, as Tov does not, that women, such as leftists and/or lesbians, can mouth feminist catchphrases for the same self-serving reasons.

Even those men, if there are any, who aren’t just feminists for immediate personal gain are feminists, Tov suggests, the way they are everything else-ist’s: in descending order of self-interest. Anti-racism is easiest since it authorizes fighting with skinheads, etc. with, finally, ageism (they being young) and ableism (they being

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<http://spunk.org/texts/writers/black/sp000061.txt>

Some of you may have seen Molly Tov’s editorial in several anarchist papers and zines. Here’s Bob Black’s response which he sent to me:

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able enough to fight with skinheads) bringing up the rear somewhere behind anti-sexism even if they are sincere about all of this.

Preliminarily, why *shouldn't* people start with their *own* oppression? There's no better place to start. And then, for them to notice others, too, are oppressed, often by a common enemy. For example, point out to black sexist men that they are treating women the way whites treat blacks, or point out to Jewish Zionists that Israel treats Palestinians the way Zionists complain Gentiles have long treated Jews.

"How did some isms become more important to others you ask?" Actually, I didn't ask, Tov did, but what is her answer? Is there an objective rank-ordering of victim-groups in descending order of suffering or powerlessness? I doubt very much anarchist theory, or any theory, provides one. Certainly Tov doesn't have one, since she contradicts herself back-to-back on this one. "We [sic] already know that all men are sexist, just as all white people are racist..." Okay, so what happens when a white woman (all whites are racist) squares off ideologically against a black man (all men are sexist)? This is no hypothetical, it's been happening since the 1860's.

Tov's hypothetical of anarcho-male priorities was amusing but what are *her* priorities? I am going to go out on a limb here and assume that Ms. Tov, is a white female who is not a victim of speciesism (since she is human), not a victim of ageism and not a victim of ableism. I might be wrong in one or more of these assumptions, but I'll make book I'm not wrong about all of them.

What then is Tov's first priority? Ableism? Speciesism? Ageism? Racism? hell no it's FEMINISM, which she prefers to her second choice, ANARCHISM, apparently. But isn't it SELFISH of her to place FEMINISM, because it benefits her, above ableism, speciesism etc. in which she has no immediate personal interest? How does this differ from how the anarchist men she berates arrange their priorities? Is *she* the member of each and every possible downtrodden group? If not, how does she decide which ones to put any effort into succoring? In the unlikely event she

is a member of every known victim-group she is probably too powerless to do anything for any of them and the rest of us, more favored if maybe not by much, will have to make our own choices.

My impression is that Tov's critique is very specific — and if it is, this adds to its power — to a very specific setting, the leftists-anarchist *scene* (perhaps the one in Minneapolis, although I am sure what she says applies to others). A *scene* is just that, a stage, a public arena. She is talking about a situation in which activists are actors for one another. I consider these scenes pernicious. They are encapsulated in subcultures (usually punk) which provide social (and sexual) fields for some of those alienated from the usual fare, but they fail to reach out to the general population to just the extent they succeed in pulling their wagons into a circle to protect their own. Group dynamics in such scenes (or, as they sometimes turn into, cults) are intense, introspective and in time pathological for the minority which they haven't driven away.

Maybe Tov should drop the quotation marks, stop worrying so much about "anarchists" vs. anarchists, "anti-sexism" vs. anti-sexism, and instead of complaining why some isms are more equal than others, blow off isms altogether, including feminism. And get out of whatever ghetto has so soured her on her "anarchist" fellows. Just as Christians are the best argument against Christianity, it is all too often true that anarchists are the best argument against anarchism. But long after anarchism has withered away, the dream of ANARCHY will live on.

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Black's essays convinced me long ago to avoid using the word "anarchism," so now I usually just say anarchy. There are a lot of anarchistic people out there who aren't anarchists —chuck