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Anarchy in Political Philosophy

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inspired by specific and distinct sensibilities, and experiences may be organized differently from each other.²⁸ Therefore, the blanket rejection of anarchists by political philosophers who argue that its political realization is impossible necessarily impoverishes our philosophical thinking and our understanding of the complexity of real political life.

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²⁸ The line "here and now" may be found in Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (New York: Collier Books-Macmillan Publishing Company, 1949 [1946]), p. 81. See also: Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z-The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (Autonomea, 1991 [1985]); Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of the Bread* (1892); Elisée Reclus, "Anarchie," lecture delivered in Brussels, 1894 (<www.bibliolib.net>). Murray Bookchin is very critical of TAZ and of what he calls "lifestyle anarchism." He rejects the vision of micropolitical tactics, preferring a more strategic approach (*Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future of the Left: Interviews and Essays, 1993-1998* [San Francisco-Edinburgh: AK Press, 1999]). Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 3 et passim.

regarding how to defend and promote it. In this sense, an anarchic regime is nothing more than an ideal type which can never be achieved.

Such a tension between optimism and pessimism does not prevent anarchy from finding its place within political philosophy, that is to say, as a type of regime which must inspire thinking rather than mockery or hatred. The silence which political philosophy exhibits regarding anarchy as an eventual legitimate regime deprives the political imagination of a stimulating subject for thought. Anarchism invites us to think of politics in other than global or strategic terms. The philosophical tradition tends to conceive of political communities as being globally defined by the nature of the political authority which heads them. Classical anarchist thinkers, such as Proudhon and Kropotkin, contemporary anarchists such as John Clark and Todd May, as well as political philosophers like Foucault and the "postmodernists," suggest, in very distinct ways, that politics be looked at as a world composed of multiple margins and cores, layers and cells, as well as intertwining and tactical relations of power.²⁷

The Occident is currently dominated by impure regimes which incarnate the traditional principles of republicanism: balance and the separation of authority. Within their territories there can be sites or politics which function according to other principles. Anarchism is a political philosophy concerning any form of non-authoritarian political organization dealing with local and daily life. Consequently, it can incarnate itself just as well within a regime as it can within political groups, housing cooperatives and squats, newspapers and publishing houses, co-operatively managed enterprises, etc. Anarchy can live here and now, and different anarchisms

²⁷ Clark, "The microecology of communities"; Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 7-15. See also F. Dupuis-Déri, "L'altermondialisation à l'ombre du drapeau noir."

What is the best political regime? This is the fundamental question to which occidental political philosophy has traditionally seen itself as having to respond. According to tradition, the contest is between four types of regimes, three of which are "pure" (monarchy, aristocracy and democracy), and one which is a "mixture" (republic) of elements of the three former pure regimes.¹ Under certain conditions, those who exercise authority in all of these regimes might seek and secure the realization of the "common good" for the entire community as well as "good life" for every member. Conversely, those who exercise authority in pathological regimes (tyranny, oligarchy, etc.) only seek to egotistically enjoy the good life (in a material rather than a moral sense) at the expense of the "common good" and their subjects' "good life." With regard to "anarchy," the most influential traditional philosophers have identified it as the pathological and corrupt form of democracy, here understood in terms of its direct form whereby all citizens can participate in the assembly where collective political decisions are taken.

To equate anarchy to a corrupt direct democracy is a serious error which impoverishes political philosophy. Instead, I argue that a complete typology of political regimes must include anarchy not as a deviant form of democracy, but rather as one of the ideal types of legitimate political regime. I will identify anarchy as a fourth type of pure political regime in which all citizens govern themselves together directly through consensual deliberation and without resorting to an authority which relies upon coercive apparatus. To sustain my argument, it is necessary first to synthesize the quantitative discourse of political philosophers on the types of pure political regimes, to analyze the qualitative approach used by philosophers to

¹ The occidental tradition is deeply influenced by Ancient Greek and Roman philosophers and historians. Anthropology offers a broader perspective (see David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004).

distinguish between "good" and "bad" political regimes, and finally, to discuss the nature of anarchy.

The Typology of Political Regimes: A Quantitative Perspective

For more than two thousand years, the majority of the most influential occidental philosophers have restricted themselves to identifying three ideal types of pure political regimes: monarchy, aristocracy and democracy.² These regimes are given different names at times depending upon the individual philosopher ("oligarchy," for example, can be exchanged for "aristocracy") and certain philosophers will not always be consistent or coherent in the ways they use this typology.³ Nevertheless, three fundamental regimes remain, mainly because this typology rests upon a mathematical calculation insofar as official political authority may rest in the hands of a single person (monarchy), a few or a minority (aristocracy) or a majority of the people (democracy).

This calculation is often presented as being self-evident, as with Aristotle, for whom "The sovereign must necessarily be

² Socrates (as cited by Plato in *The Politics*, 291d-292a), Aristotle (*The Politics*, bk. 111, ch. 7, 1279-a), Machiavelli (*Discourses*, bk. 1, ch. 2). Calvin (*Institution Chrestienne*, 1560, IV), James Harrington (*The Commonwealth of Oceana and a System of Politics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], p. 10), Jean Bodin (*Republic*, II, I), Samuel Pufendorf (*On the Duty of Man and Citizen* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], p.142), Thomas Hobbes (*Leviathan*, ch. XIX), Baruch de Spinoza (*Political Treatise*), John Locke (*Second Treatise of Civil Government*, ch. 10, § 132), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*The Social Contract*, bk. III, ch. 3), Friedrich Hegel (*Philosophy of Right*, § 273).

³ See also, *inter alia*, Socrates (in Plato's *Republic*, bk. VIII, 557 A), Aristotle (*The Politics*, bk. III, ch. 7, 1279-2 [3]) or Montesquieu (*L'Esprit des Lois*, bk. II, ch. 1).

In regarding political authority with such disdain, the anarchist is tempted to practice a mathematical simplification which results in one of two binaries: on one side there is anarchy, on the other tyranny. But the defenders of republics or mixed regimes (according to Aristotle, Machiavelli, Montesquieu, or Madison), call upon the anarchist to be more moderate. For though they are imperfect, the balance of political forces (between the presidency and the upper and lower chambers) and their separation (between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary), as well as the Charter of rights, of any number of liberal republics, help to avoid, in principle, political authority that is nothing more than pure and arbitrary violence. Yet modern "democracy," despite the republican inner organization, lacks a genuine democratic element: there is no popular assembly where the people might express their will. Such a flaw fuels the authoritarian tendencies within modern republics. Moreover, even if such a democratic touch was added to modern republics, it would only introduce a new form of authority, i.e. the majority rule. Such a republic would still be an imperfect mixed regime, because of the lack of any anarchist elements or branches.

A pessimist anarchist will say that even the idea of a "common good" is an invention of those who govern in order to deceive the governed. For instance, monarchs, aristocrats, and the members of the majority, have claimed to govern on behalf of the common good. According to the pessimist, each society is constituted by divergent, opposing, interests and there will always be one or more individuals who will not accept the anarchist way of life and against whom the anarchist regime must exercise a certain amount of coercion (by excluding or eliminating them). Even more problematically, there would be a plurality of ways of being an anarchist and self-proclaimed "anarchists" would without a doubt be incapable of coming to an agreement in the course of a consensual deliberative process about a definition of the common good and even less so

Authority	nobody	one	a minority	a majority	all
Authority's goal	chaos	monarchy	aristocracy	democracy	anarchy
good		despotism	oligarchy	tyranny	
own interests		(by one)		(by the majority)	

Table 1.2 A New Typology in Which Anarchy Is a Model Type

Anarchy: Between the Macropolitical and the Micropolitical

If we agree to think of anarchy in its non-degenerate form, we can adopt either a pessimistic or an optimistic vision. The optimistic anarchist will claim that it is only possible to hope to attain the common good within regimes without formal authority. In effect, according to the political philosophy of anarchism, individuals in positions of authority do not help achieve social peace nor the common good. As a matter of fact, the process of exercising formal authority changes the psychological and socio-political mind set and attitude of those who exercise it, such that they eventually come to defend and to promote their own authority rather than the common good. In short, since the exercise of authority inevitably corrupts those who exercise it, any regime accepting formal authority is corrupted and incapable of defending and promoting the common good. Consequently, anarchy is the only conceptual and practical response to the issue of the common good defined as the good of all community members.

either the One, or the Few, or the Many.”⁴ The Greek etymology of these regimes’ names also underlines the mathematical foundation of this typology. “Monarchy” comes from the Greek words *mona*, which signifies one (person), and *kratia*, which signifies “to govern.” “Aristocracy” also comes from the Greek, and *aristos* signifies “the best.” An aristocracy is therefore the regime where the best govern. But to say “the best” implies that a division exists between said group and others, and that aristocrats are a minority of individuals who are superior to the average person. An aristocracy thus signifies a regime in which a minority of individuals within a community exercise authority. Finally, within the word “democracy,” *demos* signifies “people.” By democracy, traditional political philosophy understands a regime based upon the Ancient Athenian model whereby those who are considered citizens—the people—have the right to present themselves at the agora to participate in the Assembly and take a direct role in the process of political decision making.

If this typology is primarily associated with classical philosophy, it will be taken up also by Ancient historians, and by political philosophers and actors at the beginning of modernity.⁵ In the course of the debates around the American war of independence, for example, a number of texts—speeches, pamphlets, etc.—make explicit reference to this typology. Zabdiel Adams, the cousin of the second president of the United States, John Adams, would declare in a speech of 1782 that “three dif-

⁴ *The Politics*, bk. III, ch. 7, 1279-a [2] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 114 (emphasis added).

⁵ See J. de Romilly, “Le classement des Constitutions jusqu’à Aristotele,” *Revue des études grecques* LXXII (1959), pp. 81-99. The republican philosopher, James Harrington, stated that “[g]overnment, according to the ancients and their learned disciple Machiavelli, the only politician of the later ages, is of three kinds: the government of one man, or of the better sort, or of the whole people; which by their more learned names are called monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy” (*The Commonwealth of Oceana and a System of Politics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], p.10) (emphasis added).

ferent modes of civil rule have been prevalent among the nations of the earth, a *monarchy*, *aristocracy*, and *democracy*.⁶ Conscious that this first typology does not permit one to grasp all of the complexity of political reality, some philosophers will come to believe it important to introduce a second typology, which mirrors the former in a distorted fashion, by proposing an eventual degenerate or pathological form for each pure regime.

The Typology of Political Regimes: A Qualitative Perspective

Aristotle is the first to emphasize the importance of adding the distinction of linking the morality of a regime to its mathematical classification. A just regime distinguishes itself from an unjust regime insofar as the object of the first is the common good while the object of the second is uniquely the good of the person or the people who govern.⁷ Several philosophers will also propose a typology of regimes which takes account of the moral aspect of the exercise of political authority. The risk of corruption is great in pure regimes because nothing in their institutional structure—such as the Constitution—prevents those who govern from turning their backs on seeking, defending

⁶ Charles S. Hyneman & Donald S. Lutz, eds, *American Political Writing During the Founding Era 1760-1805*, 1 (Indianapolis: Liberty Press Edition, 1983), p. 541 (emphasis in the original). This typology is taken up by others on other occasions. See pp. 330, 420, 614-616, of James Otis, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*, Boston 1764, in Bernard Bailyn, ed., *Pamphlets of the American Revolution 1750-1776*, 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 427.

⁷ Aristotle asserts this as follows: "We may say that when the One, or the Few, or the Many, rule with a view to the common interest, the constitutions under which they do so must necessarily be right constitutions. On the other hand the constitutions directed to the personal interest of the One, or the Few, or the Masses, must necessarily be perversion" (*The Politics*, bk. III, ch. 7, 1279-a [2] [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958], p. 114).

lution of the community and the collective decision-making process, where everyone is against everyone. There is then no more political community and politics, because nobody rules anymore. Thus, from a mathematical perspective, the relation is from the all to zero, and there is therefore no mathematical correspondence between anarchy and its degenerate form. Anarchy is the self-government of all, its degenerate form is the dissolution of politics, it is a situation where nobody rules.²⁶ As a result of this discussion, a new typology can be schematized:

²⁶ The so-called anarcho-capitalism must then be classified, according to our new typology, under the category of chaos. According to anarcho-capitalism, the members of a community do not take collective political decisions since such a society has the capacity to control and regulate itself thanks to the mechanics of individual economic actions and relations within a free market. But such a regime is not political: rather than making political choices individuals limit themselves to making economic decisions which permit a Stateless capitalist economic regime to regulate itself naturally. In other words, individuals are no longer citizens but producers and consumers: instead of deliberating they buy and sell (goods or their labor). Such individuals ultimately have no need to discuss things, since communication happens via the exchange of money or goods (barter). According to anarcho-capitalism, the conquerors of the market—the owners of the means of production—can legitimately luxuriate in their authority over their employees and can even resort to coercive means in the form of protection agencies. Such a regime, without citizens or political acts, certainly can not be identified as a *political* regime. At its best it is an *economic* regime which deploys relations of authority, coercion, violence and submission (in principle, by mutual consent), at its worst it's chaos. From the point of view of political philosophy, capitalism *without politics* may be one of the dark sides of anarchy, one of its degenerate forms. See David Friedman, *The Machinery of Freedom: Guide to a Radical Capitalism* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1989); Pierre Lemieux, *Du libéralisme à l'anarcho-capitalisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983).

ods might lead the majority to reconsider a situation and to change its mind, if the dissenter(s) view about the common good is determined through deliberation to be the best. In real political life, consensus does not mean pure unanimity, and anarchist communities may function even though some individuals abstain or block a decision from time to time.

On the other hand, anarchy, like other regimes, faces the threat of degeneration if such attitudes—withdrawing and blocking—are driven by egoistic interests rather than concern for the common good, or if the majority decide that it is in its own interest to overrun the dissenting stance. In such situations, one individual, a minority or even a majority, feeling uncomfortable about the process or its expected results, may claim that some form of authority (by one, a few or a majority rule) must take over consensus.²⁵ Such a crisis may result in a coup against anarchy, in favor of monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy. While anarchism implies a radical criticism of other regimes, the latter may be seen by some people as tools to solve some problems in anarchy, or to secure their own interests. There is, thus, a tension and a rivalry between regimes. Yet, if the crisis does not go beyond the conceptual and political limits of anarchy, the regime switches from its pure to its degenerate form, which is chaos, i.e., the disso-

²⁵ Even amongst anarchist philosophers, the distinction between direct democracy and anarchism which is articulated around the practice of unanimous consensus has failed to achieve consensus principally for reasons of a practical order. For an anarchist who encourages the search for consensus, see the anarcho-syndicalist, Erich Mühsam, "La Société libérée de l'État: Qu'est-ce que l'anarchisme communiste?" [1932], E. Mühsam, *La République des Conseils de Bavière-La Société libérée de l'État* (Paris: La Digitale-Spartacus, 1999), p. 165. For a more critical approach to consensus which valorizes recourse to a decision by the majority, see Murray Bookchin, "Communalism: The Democratic Dimension of Social Anarchism" in M. Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future of the Left: Interviews and Essays, 1993-1998* (San Francisco-Edinburgh: AK Press, 1999), pp. 146-150.

and promoting the common good to luxuriate unduly in the power at their disposal. Government by one thus becomes a tyranny; government by a few, is an oligarchy; and government by many, is anarchy.

authority authority's goal common good (just) own in- terests (unjust)	one monarchy despotism	a minority aristocracy oligarchy	a majority democracy anarchy
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Table 1.1 The Traditional Division of Political Regimes According to a Mathematical Calculation

This is where a newly named regime occurs, that of the "republic." The term "Republic," from the Latin *res publica* or "public thing," may be attributed to any just regime⁸ as well as to a mixed constitution composed of the three elements the pure regimes incarnate. One must distinguish, here, classical republicanism from modern republicanism. The former rests upon an organic vision of the republic, at the heart of which the three aforementioned elements of society find themselves in concert in the public sphere in search of the common good. Modern republicanism rests, on the other hand, upon a mechanical vision whereby the diverse elements of a society pursue their divergent interests (the modern idea of a pluralist so-

⁸ As when Jean-Jacques Rousseau writes: "I . . . give the name "Republic" to every State that is governed by laws, no matter what the form of its administration may be: for only in such a case does the public interest govern Every legitimate government is republican" and, more precisely, that monarchies, aristocracies and democracies can be "republics" (*The Social Contract*, bk. II, ch. 6 [in *The Social Contract and Discourses* (London: Everyman, 1993), p. 212]).

ciety) but interact with the goal of protecting their private lives from public despotism, thereby creating a complex structural regime in which the diverse powers are separate and balance out one another. A republic is constituted by an equilibrium of diverse social orders, be it a monarchy (or a president), an aristocracy which sits in the Senate or in the House of Lords, and the "people" who are represented in the democratic branch of the Republic (known as the National Assembly, House of Commons, House of Representatives, etc.). According to most political philosophers, of whom Aristotle and Cicero are foremost, a mixed constitution is necessarily a just regime because none of the three forces can impose its will over the others. The three forces neutralize one another and the common good comes out the winner.⁹ In its classic version, as in its modern version, the republic is incompatible with a pure, absolute, authority.

Since the nineteenth century, politicians, like the philosophers, have developed the habit of using the term "democracy" (qualified as "modern," "liberal" or "representative") to designate the republic, such that today the terms for the two regimes are more or less synonymous. However, modern "democracy" is a distant cousin of Ancient democracy. In the latter, those enjoying the title of "citizen" had the right to assemble at the agora and participate directly in the deliberative decision-making process. Then, the majority would win the day (majority rule). In a modern "democracy," several forms of authority coexist and compete within the official political system. The real majority of the people does not express its

⁹ In a republic, according to the contemporary theorist of republicanism Philip Pettit, "the authorities are effectively checked and balanced: [the power is] effectively channeled into the paths of virtue" (in P. Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997], p. 234). See also James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana and a System of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 10 and Charles Blattberg, *From Pluralist to Patriotic Politics: Putting Practice First* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 5.

degenerate form of anarchy?²⁴ It is *chaos*, that is to say the absence of a collective, communal, political organization. Here, the inclusion of anarchy within the traditional typology of political regimes highlights and undermines, simultaneously, the simplistic mathematical schema. Indeed, by definition, one, a few, or the many holding authority may seek personal interests that are incompatible with the common good. All, however, cannot. This is not to suggest that an anarchist assembly always reaches clever decisions and implements them wisely. Anarchists may make mistakes, and reach a consensus or implement a decision in such a manner that it will lead to unexpected problems for the community, and therefore undermine the common good. A consensus, however, implies that the decision is made by all for the good of all, and not for the good of some. Even if a consensual decision deals more specifically with only a part of the community (the women or the youth, for instance), it is thought—in principle—to be for the good of all. Consensus is then by definition about the common good. Yet, seeking consensus is not always easy. Still within the conceptual paradigm of anarchy, a single individual has the capacity to block the process by opposing the majority. If the peer pressure is too strong, the individuals who disagree with the expected decision may decide to withdraw from the community, freeing themselves from the consensual process and its results. It is worth noting that actual anarchist groups do include the right to "abstain," or stand aside, from a decision-making process when an individual disagrees with the majority but does not want to paralyze the group, or the right to "block" when s/he has fundamental reasons to oppose the decision. Such members might abstain or block in order to promote the common good, if they believe that the majority is mistaken. These meth-

²⁴ This concept is proposed by John Stuart Mill (*On Liberty*, ch. 1) and Alexis de Tocqueville (*De la Démocratie en Amérique*, vol. I, part 2, ch. 7), both of whom speak less of political tyranny than of a social pressure upon the individual to conform.

of political regime: there are several forms and networks of informal authority and domination in a monarchy, aristocracy, democracy and a republic, even if these regimes claim to secure the common good and, in the latter regime, despite a republic's pretense of neutralizing power. Hence, a realist-anarchist doesn't dream of a world without conflict or domination. Real anarchists—often inspired by radical feminists—have thought of and experienced several methods to respond to problems of informal inequalities within their communities or groups. Some methods include the implementation of a speaker's list which alternates between men and women (because men in the Western world are generally more willing than women to speak in public, thereby giving them more influence in a deliberative process²³), and/or prioritizes the individual who wants to speak for the first time over those who have already spoken. In addition, there are role-play simulations which aim to identify existing informal inequalities and influences, and also non-mixed groups formed among the less influential members of a same sub-community (defined by their gender, age, class, etc.) in order to empower themselves, etc. In other words, and as in the other forms of political regimes, all anarchist communities or groups do not have exactly the same decision-making procedures: they may adopt and adapt specific procedures and practices in order to deal with specific challenges to their core principles (liberty, equality, solidarity, consensus, common good), and they may modified them through their experiences and history.

What is the degenerate form of anarchy? If the tyranny of the majority is the degenerate form of democracy, what is the

²³ Nina Eliasoph, "Politeness, power, and women's language"; Margaret Kohn, "Language, Power, and Persuasion: Toward a Critique of Deliberative Democracy," *Constellations* 7:3 (2000), pp. 408-429; Iris Marion Young, "Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy," Seyla Benhabib (ed.), *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 120-135.

voice, even in the so-called "democratic branch," where only an extremely small minority of "representatives" deliberate in the name of the majority, or of the entire "nation."¹⁰ As Jean-Jacques Rousseau noted, the majority has only the authority to select the happy few who shall rule the community. To draw a comparison, one might wonder, then, ought a regime in which one individual—known as the "king" or the "queen"—whose only political function would be to elect a few "representatives" every four or five years to rule on his/her behalf, be known as a monarchy? Such a regime should be most probably seen as a phony monarchy and as a true aristocracy. It might still be labeled "monarchy" for traditional or ideological reasons, despite its obvious aristocratic nature. In the same vein, a regime in which the aristocrats' only political function would be to elect one "representative" every four or five years to rule on their behalf should most probably be seen as a true monarchy. Similarly, modern "democracy," which is ruled by elected aristocrats, is very much closer to a real aristocracy than to a democracy. Such a fact finds echo in the tradition of political philosophy, in which Aristotle¹¹, Spinoza¹², and Montesquieu¹³, amongst others¹⁴, as well as some of the most influential founders of modern republics

¹⁰ The majority really rules only when the elected aristocrats dare to hold a referendum about a specific issue.

¹¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, IV, 15, 1300-b-21.

¹² Spinoza, *Traité de l'autorité politique*, chapter 8, § 2.

¹³ Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des Lois*, I, bk. II, ch. 2.

¹⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du Contrat social*, bk. IV, ch. III; James Harrington, "Oceana" (1656), in John Pocock (ed.), *The Political Works of James Harrington* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 184. Philodemus [Thomas Tudor Tucker], "Conciliatory Hints, Attempting, by a Fair State of Matters, to Remove Party Prejudice" (Charleston, 1784), in Charles S. Hyneman & Donald S. Lutz (eds.), *American Political Writing During the Founding Era 1760-1805*, 1 (Indianapolis: Liberty Press Edition, 1983), p. 615. Bernard Manin, *Principes du gouvernement représentatif* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1995), pp. 19-61.

(Thomas Jefferson¹⁵ and Maximilien Robespierre¹⁶, for instance), openly stated that election—i.e., the selection of an “elite”—is truly aristocratic and clearly alien to democracy in its very nature. Modern “democracy” is a “representative,” “popular,” “elected” or “liberal” aristocracy, hidden under the deceitful label of “democracy” in the wake of rhetorical games motivated by political struggles.¹⁷ Throughout the remainder of this chapter, the use of the word “democracy” will identify a regime where the people govern (themselves) directly, respecting the sense the word had during almost two thousand years of the philosophical tradition.

Democracy and Anarchy: A Mathematical Confusion

The mathematical relationship between (real and direct) democracy and anarchy evidences an error in terms of the way political philosophy understands anarchy. If despotism (by a single despot) is not mathematically distinguishable from monarchy (government by one person), nor oligarchy (by a clique) from aristocracy (government by a few), there nevertheless exists a clear mathematical difference between a democracy and anarchy. From an etymological point of view, “anarchy” comes from the greek word *anarkhia* at the

¹⁵ In Giovanni Lobbano, “République et démocratique anciennes avant et pendant la révolution,” Michel Vovelle (ed.), *Révolution et république: l'exception française* (Paris: Kimé, 1994), p. 56.

¹⁶ In his “Lettre à ses commetants” (Sept. 1792), in Gordon H. McNeil, “Robespierre, Rousseau and Representation,” Richard Herr & Harold T. Parker (eds.), *Ideas in History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1965), p. 148. Murray Bookchin, *Remaking Society* (Montreal and New York: Black Rose Books, 1989), p. 174.

¹⁷ Francis Dupuis-Déri, “The Political Power of Words: The Birth of Pro-Democratic Discourse in the 19th Century in the United States and France,” *Political Studies* 52 (March 2004), pp. 118-134.

In the real political world, anarchy—like other regimes—faces several challenges that jeopardize its stability and its coherence. Yet a large number of so-called traditional societies functioned for thousands of years without political authority (neither a State, nor police): the Inuit, the Pygmies, the Santals of India, and the Tivs of Nigeria. More recently, some anarchist organizations have taken place on a large scale (during the Spanish revolution of 1936-1939, for instance) and on a small scale (in communes or libertarian political groups).²¹ In short, the experience of a political organization without a leader is not simply utopian but is an integral part of human history.

Philosophers such as Marx, Nietzsche, and Foucault, as well as sociologists and anthropologists, have forcefully argued that the question of power, of its conservation and its effects of domination and resistance, are not only limited to the official structure of a political regime. Nor do traditional societies without a State or police necessarily lack situations of domination based on sexual, religious, economic cleavages, for instance. Thus, one must not presume that the process of anarchist decision-making is exempt from social and psychological tensions and paradoxes. The search for consensus is a complex process in the course of which appear certain sociological and psychological dynamics of normalization and self-censorship, informal exclusion, etc.²² In an anarchist society, influence and domination inevitably articulate themselves around symbolic struggles. But what is true for anarchy is also true for the other types

²¹ See Harold Barclay, *People Without Government: An Anthropology of Anarchy* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1996); Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology* (New York: Zone Books, 1988 [1974]).

²² Donald Black, *The Behavior of Law* (Orlando: Academic Press, 1976), ch. 7 (“Anarchy”); Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, pp. 24-37; Joseph Pestieau, “La tyrannie de l’État et son contraire,” Guy Lafrance (ed.), *Pouvoir et tyrannie* (Ottawa: Éditions de l’Université d’Ottawa, 1986), pp. 95-98 (the section entitled “De la tyrannie des coutumes”).

to a way of governing a community in order to organize its collective life, anarchy must be understood as the best regime for individuals who wish to live together in a context of real liberty and equality, without having to submit to a political authority exercised by some privileged citizens. In their collective participation in the assembly, where they attempt to achieve a consensus, the citizens give themselves the power to act collectively (in this chapter, I deal exclusively with "politics," although anarchism is also about radical liberty and equality and self-rule with regard to economic, ecology, identities [cultural, gender, etc.], etc.).

If we reconsider the myth of the "social contract," anarchy would be the result of a contract in which the contractors decide to live together peacefully but without delegating their "sovereignty" and their power to legislate to a political authority separated from the multitude of citizens. There would thus be a popular assembly where collective goals would be discussed, but the assembly would seek to attain a consensus rather than a simple majority and it would not have recourse to a coercive branch to impose its authority (everyone agreeing, no coercion shall be necessary).

Is anarchy viable? The preceding comments demonstrate that it is possible to think of anarchy as a political regime via which a community decides to govern itself without authority, that is to say, without coercion or violence. This conceptual definition of anarchy must be understood within the frame of theoretical thought. Political practice clearly responds to other pressures when it is incarnate in a world obviously not as neat or ordered as that of philosophical typologies. To know whether such an anarchist regime is possible from a military, economic or cultural perspective, for example, is subject to debate. This debate deserves to be pursued, but too often the philosophers have simply avoided reflecting upon and discussing anarchy by affirming that it is not a viable regime.

heart of which the root *an* signifies "without" and *arkhia* "military chief," which eventually comes to denote simply a "chief" or "leader." From an etymological point of view, therefore, "anarchy" refers to the absence of a leader. From a mathematical perspective, it signifies no, or zero, leader. If one looks at historical examples of anarchy (free-communes, squats, militant groups and collectives, etc.), she will find indeed no formal and official leader(s). However, she will also find that anarchy is a form of political organization in which (1) all members may participate directly in the collective and the deliberative decision-making process, through which (2) they seek consensus. Thus, stating that there is no (zero) leader (or despot) does not imply that there is no politics, nor collective decision-making procedures. In anarchy, there is no leader(s) or authority exercising coercion over some people, because all rule together in a consensual way (i.e., all agree to agree with the collective decision).

Hence, to introduce anarchy as a legitimate political regime implies confronting the tradition of political philosophy, especially its mathematical based definition of democracy. Indeed, some political philosophers refer to democracy as being the rule of the many (a majority), while others as the rule of all.¹⁸ The mathematical confusion results from a lack of distinction between the collective deliberative process and the decision itself. In conceptual and organizational terms, democracy and anarchy can be, at first glance, difficult to distinguish: the two regimes function thanks to a general assembly to which all of

¹⁸ According to Hobbes, for instance, "the Representative *must needs* be One man, or More: and if more, then it is the Assembly of All, or but of a Part. When the Representative is One man, then is the Common-wealth a MONARCHY: when an Assembly of All that will come together, then it is a DEMOCRACY, or Popular Common-wealth: when an Assembly of a Part onely, then it is called an ARISTOCRACY. Other kind of Common-wealth there can be none: for either One, or More, or All, must have the Sovereign Power" (*Leviathan*, ch. XIX [emphasis added]).

the citizens can participate in and the two regimes don't have a leader/s. But to say that there is direct democracy is not to say that there is an absence of political authority and coercion. In democracy, the Assembly possesses authority—as the incarnation of the general will—to oblige everybody to obey. Hence, it seems correct to suggest that democracy is the rule of all only if one thinks of who has the right to be part of the deliberative decision-making process (whom may enter in the agora to participate in the popular deliberation). Yet, a democratic popular assembly does not seek consensus. At the end of the deliberation, the majority (i.e., the many, not all) imposes its will upon the minority (majority rule). Thus, with regard to authority and coercion, democracy is a regime where the majority (the many) rules over the minority, rather than the rule of all.¹⁹

If we are to remain true to the mathematical logic of the tradition of political philosophy, anarchy (the rule of all) must be distinguished from democracy (the rule of the majority). Mathematically speaking, "all" and "many" are not synonyms and therefore there is no mathematical correspondence between a democracy (majority rule) and anarchy (consensus rule and genuine self-government). Hence, to affirm, as the philosophers do, that the latter is a pathological form of the former is a mathematical error. Anarchy cannot be the pathological form—a "perversion," as Aristotle puts it—of democracy for the simple reason that anarchy and democracy are not equivalent from a mathematical point of view.

Anarchy as a Political Regime: Political Considerations

In respecting the mathematical rule of traditional typology, it is logical to include anarchy not as a corrupted form of the

¹⁹ As Robert Paul Wolff recalls: *In Defense of Anarchism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998 [new edition]).

democratic regime, but rather as a particular form of political organization in which all rule. This raises three questions: (1) Is it legitimate to say that an anarchist community where there is no longer any government constitutes a political "regime"? (2) If it is in effect a regime, is it viable and is it worth our discussing it seriously? A final consideration returns one to the question of the qualitative element of regimes: (3) What would be the degenerate form of anarchy? These concerns merit responses.

Is anarchy a political regime? It is necessary to make distinctions between "governance," "authority," "coercion," "power" and "violence" in order to better understand the specificity of anarchy. To loosely appropriate a distinction which the philosopher Hannah Arendt makes, a political authority (of one, a minority or a majority) exercises coercive means, that is to say that it can physically force an individual over whom it has authority to act or not to act depending upon the will of the authority. The political authority has the physical means to coerce—impose its will upon—individuals who immediately lose their autonomy and their liberty. According to Arendt, coercion is not "power," but rather, it is "violence" or the threat of violence. All authority is potentially coercive and therefore violent. "Power"—as distinct from "violence"—constitutes itself collectively, as the result of a collective will based upon deliberation amongst free and equal individuals who seek to understand one another and give themselves the power to realize things together, to create a common world.²⁰ From a theoretical point of view, anarchy does not so much signify the absence of "government" as it does the absence of a leader/s, that is to say an official/s who wield officially recognized authority. Thus, if we understand "political regime" to refer

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1970), pp. 44-47 and Jürgen Habermas, "Hannah Arendt: On the Concept of Power," in J. Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 173-189.