

The Importance of Autonomy in Anarchy and Statelessness

Rocco A. Astore

Original Submission 7/6/2017

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Abstract: As commonly understood the term “anarchy” sends shivers down the spines of many. Usually, disorder, danger, and chaos are what comes to mind when one hears “anarchy.” Despite this novice view of a society without leaders, what if anarchy were the most freeing form of coexistence? This article will begin with a more precise definition of freedom by explaining philosopher Immanuel Kant’s views concerning the refined and matured concept of dutiful freedom, or autonomy. Next, there will be demonstrations concerning why anarchy is most compatible with people’s autonomy, through the lens of philosopher Robert Paul Wolff. After that, this piece will draw from Robert Nozick’s philosophy as to why a stateless, or minimalist economy best fits with autonomy, and hence, anarchy as well. Lastly, this essay will close with why anarchy and statelessness rests on autonomy, and how with that understanding in mind, people can at least rethink this political outlook more open-mindedly.

Introduction

In modern times, people still associate the word “anarchy” with sedition, destruction, brutishness, and violence. However, what if anarchy were not simply *ochlarchy*, or mob-rule, and instead an ideal condition in which all people enjoy true liberty? The purpose of this piece is to first shed light on a more accurate view of freedom. Afterward, this piece will apply that view to help demonstrate why anarchy best suits autonomy. Next, there will be a description of how the economics of statelessness are most compatible with autonomy and anarchy. Finally, this article will suggest that conceptually anarchy and statelessness rely on autonomy, and how a better understanding of this honed definition of freedom can, in turn, lead people to a more levelheaded view of a society, or state, without the need of masters.

Understanding Freedom

One major contribution of 18th-century philosopher Immanuel Kant, was his improved definition of freedom. To Kant, freedom is autonomy, or the ability to be self-governing. To come to his conclusion, Kant merged how people understand freedom with how that power genuinely translates into experience. For example, Kant would claim that people cannot naturally live underwater since they do not have gills, displaying that there exists at least one inherent limitation on their abilities to be free. At the same time, people can imagine that they have the power to breathe underwater because their minds are inherently free to think of the endless possibilities of experience. Now, to Kant, one may claim that people are both free and unfree, rendering what one commonly understands by “freedom” to be a misnomer.

Now, the more accurate concept that describes humanity’s agency is autonomy, and it is an ideal condition that all people can come to know. To Kant, autonomy is dutiful freedom, or a state of awareness in which people do not consider what is unethical since they know what is not in their nature to perform, and what is moral. Through a Kantian lens a moral, or autonomous person is one who bridges the gap between his/her personal desires and what is best for all other people. For instance, Kant would claim that one who is autonomous, or moral is a person who would give back too much change received at a register since if all people decided to keep the change, all stores would go out of business. That is, to preserve the ability that all people possess to shop at a store, one should forego the immediate benefit he/she would gain by not correcting

the clerk's mistake. Kant believes this to be so since as a part of humanity that individual's choice can potentially affect the well-being and agency of others, especially if all people chose to conceal the attendant's mistake.

From this, one may infer that freedom involves duty, not only to the self but also to the shared reality in which all people partake. To Kant, autonomy, or a moral consciousness which recognizes itself as a part of the entirety of rational agents, acts in a way that does not infringe on another's power to acknowledge that same fact, making it true or dutiful freedom. One reason why Kant believes this to be so is that people cannot cease to be volitional, and since they naturally possess agency, they can never transfer that power to another. At the same time, since individuals coexist in a common reality, it follows that people should maintain a level of respect for one another since together they share in the same humanity. Therefore, to Kant, autonomy is true freedom since it allows people to choose alone, while also being mindful of the dignity and responsibility they and others possess as rational beings.

In other words, to Kant, one should never use another just to use that individual, since no one is a tool, but instead a thinking agent deserving of the same treatment that any other rational being would expect and enjoy. As such, it would not be illogical to think that autonomous, or ethically free people, recognize others as they recognize themselves. That is, autonomous people, by dutifully accepting total selflessness, compassion, or that which results from acknowledging the limits of their nature, with complete individuality, or their ability to posit their freedom for only their success, interact with others appropriately since they live wisely. Finally, since wisdom is a product of autonomy, and because both are forms of reason, it follows that all people can become autonomous since the capacity to at least understand it is inherent to all.

Furthermore, this moral form of freedom, or autonomy, is possible for all people to embrace. To Kant, when all people operate in harmony or genuinely submit to follow the rules of rational beings by deeming those rules also fit for themselves they are contributing to the formation of what he calls the Kingdom of Ends. In other words, an ideal state of existence begins when all people recognize their autonomy and treat one another as inherently rational beings whose existence entails rights and duties respected and shared by all. Broadly, one may claim that Kant's vision of *utopia* is a place where dutiful freedom, or autonomy, or more simply Reason, is the disposition of all, and from that standpoint, all decisions would satisfy the freedom of each as well as that of the group.

Anarchy as Most Fitting for Autonomy

To philosopher Robert Paul Wolff, anarchy, or a society without the need of leaders, best fits with autonomy, or dutiful freedom since only it can sustain the individual and collective aspects of liberty. For example, one cannot claim that democratic republics of today cohere with people's innate capacities for freedom since each election is a "tyranny of the majority." That is, it is impossible to claim that democracies truly embrace freedom since they do not require unanimous decisions to push forward policies that will affect all people. As such, democracies do not represent everyone's autonomy, and because they only represent and work best for the majority, the autonomy of those who lose in an election cycle goes mute.

At the same time, Wolff shows how societies which choose to embrace extreme individual freedom also fail to capture autonomy and are thus unsuitable for truly free people. To Wolff,

when a society allows for unbridled individualism, it fails to acknowledge the collective elements of freedom. Now, through Wolff's lens, when one person, or a small group of people, or even 49.9% of a population can decree for the rest, it restricts how most people wish to be free. Accordingly, the problems with a monarchy, oligarchy, or any other form of minority rule is that it illogically places one, few, or less than most, ahead of the autonomy of an outnumbering group. Again, the problem of how to genuinely represent everyone's autonomy, at the individual and group level, arises. To Wolff, this issue is virtually irresolvable with the range of governments available in modern civilization, leaving anarchy, at least in theory, to be the only solution to the problem of political legitimacy.

Also, anarchy best fits with autonomy because a self-governing person recognizes that his/her innate capacity for freedom cannot transfer to another. That is, though a government can claim to serve the interests of all, it does not have the authority to decide for anyone since autonomy, as a natural capacity, is unalienable. As such, if one dissents from a group, that individual has every right to do so, whereas governments, which do not have that same right, due to them acknowledging and agreeing to protect the rights of all their members, can only imperfectly represent their populations. By being unable to embrace the decisions of all, while claiming to guard everyone's autonomy, government authority is questionable even if only one disagrees with the will of the rest. In other words, a government cannot claim to represent everyone's autonomy when one of those people refuse to acquiesce since a population is a totality without exceptions. Hence, anarchy, or a society without the need of leaders, best preserves the autonomy of the individual as well as that of the group since it bars any person or collective from having power, or authority over another.

Moreover, if a government could accommodate to serve the interests of one and all, its leaders still possess a right that their populations do not have, which is the legitimate use of violence. That is, modern governments only vest power in the hands of civil servants, courts, bureaucracies, and leaders to apply force on those who violate the law domestically, and in some cases, internationally. Though violence, by no means, is ever justifiable, this example should resonate with the reader because it shows that present-day governments, made up of citizens, can use their autonomy in a way which outweighs that of other citizens. Consequently, anarchy, or a society without the need of leaders, could cease recognizing violence as a conduit to any end, and by doing so simultaneously equalize the autonomy all share.

Stateless, or Minimalist Economies as Best Matched with Autonomy and Anarchy

Through the lens of philosopher Robert Nozick, statist economies fail to protect the autonomy of both the individual and the group. First, in the case of free-market economies, there tends to be unavoidable wealth inequality which is not only noticeable but also inherent to that financial system. Consequently, since the design of capitalism creates different classes of people, it follows that it is not uncommon for the richest to hold the most power, and therefore influence legislative decisions which will affect much more people than just themselves. Accordingly, when a few hold power over an economy or the state, it follows that those who generate their wealth, or the many workers who compose their respective labor forces have little to no say in which policies will become laws that they will come to follow.

Hence, a capitalist system, which can potentially generate gross divisions between the “haves” and the “have-nots,” breeds political inequality or underrepresentation for those who labor the most for the profit of the “haves.” As such, when the autonomy of a few outweighs the autonomy of the many, there exists an imbalance in an ability both innately possess. Finally, an anarchist or stateless state not only avoids problems inherent to capitalism, but also levels the playing field so all can face minimal resistance in their quests to become self-governing members of society who are respectfully mindful of the sapience, serenity, and purity of the autonomy they and all others hold.

Moreover, centralized economies which benefit the many and hamper the rights of the few are also incompatible with humanity’s autonomy. Antithetical to capitalism exists government-dominated statist bureaucracies, which determine the occupations they see fit to suit each member of society, and by doing so deny the autonomy that each possesses to determine themselves. Though it may be the case that this type of economic scheme equalizes wealth and thus avoids class-conflict, it can also negate people’s talents, and thus, stop them from working in careers that reflect their inner passions.

Consequently, under a statist regime, which selects the occupation of its members, despite potentially helping the plights of many individuals, nevertheless fails to protect the autonomy of anyone. In other words, when everyone must submit to the power of the state, no one’s autonomy is their own. Thus, regardless of whether one is economically secure or not, when a state chooses what is best for anyone, no one is in command of his/her autonomy since none can directly pick or work toward which occupation will fulfill his/her desire to give back to the good of society. Without this ability, those who labor in a communal state lack a freedom that they inherently possess, rendering that type of state to be repressive in regards to autonomy. Therefore, like the issues inherent to *laissez-fair* economies, collectivism has its problems as well, leaving only a truly stateless, or anarchist state able to retain the personal choice of the individual while at the same time the autonomy of all collectively.

Furthermore, to Nozick, an anarchist state would be one which recognizes every person’s basic rights and securities with minimal authority to intrude in economic matters, since a minimalist state, to protect autonomy, must satisfy the volitions of both the individual and all other people. That is, by allowing people to freely conduct business, while at the same time protecting them all only insofar as violence, exploitation, and coercion goes, maintains justice, or the duty of one to recognize another, as an end-in-themselves, as well as the volitional power people inherently possess. Hence, a state which is minimal is best for autonomy since an entirely unrestrained economy, of either an extreme communal or capitalist’s nature, does not fulfill the statist promise to provide for all equitably while maintaining the dignity of personal choice. Lastly, since an anarchist, or minimalist state, best reflects dutiful freedom or autonomy, one may claim that it can surpass the need for an economic state since the liberty and security of one and the rest would never be in jeopardy.

Why Autonomy is the Basis of Anarchy and Statelessness

Autonomy, or the quality of being self-ruling, or dutifully free is the foundation of anarchy and statelessness. In regards to anarchy, autonomy can exist without anarchy, but anarchy would be simply *ochlarchy*, or mob-rule if autonomy did not. That is, though no form of government except

anarchy best suits true freedom, one may consider autonomy as a necessary element in anarchy since if no one were autonomous, then anarchy could only exist as that chaotic reality which people usually understand it to be.

To justify this claim, one may look to both experience and theory. First, experience has and continues to demonstrate that modern government though non-anarchistic, still house autonomous individuals. As such, one may claim that despite the existence of humanity's power to be self-aware to the point of all acting only per what is truly free, or morally rational and best for one's will as well as the collection of rational wills one coexists alongside, there still exists political structures which stifle that. Consequently, though one's autonomy relies only on one's self to cultivate and express, all present-day governments nevertheless attempt to monopolize that power, which may prevent *ochlarchy*, but does not allow for genuine anarchy or that state of coexistence where all equally recognize and embrace their dutiful freedom to form.

From this, one may claim that governments of today prevent what anarchy truly involves, since governments, like anarchy, cannot subsist without autonomy, whereas the power to be autonomous only relies upon itself. That is, modern governments need the submissive, or voluntary aspect of freedom to thrive, whereas autonomy, or that meeting between radical freedom and the humble recognition of the wills of others, needs only itself to subsist. Though one would be correct to claim that anarchy needs autonomous people as a prerequisite for its success, it is only anarchy that can match best with autonomous people since, like them, anarchy equates to rule by the agency of one and all.

Furthermore, in theory, autonomy is a requirement of anarchy since it is only when all people embrace their power to posit freedom in a way that matches their will with the will of everyone else, that anarchy can truly be representative of freedom, universally. In other words, all people must express their freedom dutifully, or coherent with their desires and the wants of all other individuals, so that anarchy can genuinely be a society without the need of leaders, or one in which voluntary individual compassion, or autonomy reigns. Lastly, anarchy, to best reflect the liberty of all, can only sprout from autonomy, because, like that ability, it preserves, considers, and recognizes everyone's dutiful freedom without exclusion.

In regards to statelessness, autonomy is the bedrock on which it rests. First, autonomy or that ability to treat another as a rational being whose existence entails the same rights and duties as any other individual is integral to a true anarchist mode of exchange. That is, anarchist economics begin when people not only satisfy their autonomy to gain, but also when they extend that satisfaction to someone else because it is just, fair, and morally rational to do so. Hence, autonomous people do not increase their coffers through using one another solely for personal benefit; rather they benefit for themselves as well as anyone who does business with them because they are reverent of their shared autonomy. Consequently, if people were not autonomous, an anarchist state could not function because there would be a lack of esteem between people, which, in turn, would lead to a statist economy. Hence, one may claim that the possibility of an anarchist state can only arise from autonomy, and if autonomy were to cease to be central to all, that anarchist state would collapse into something unlike itself. Finally, if an anarchist state ceased to revolve around autonomy, or stop being a genuinely anarchist economy, one cannot truly claim that it reflects and protects the dutiful freedom of all if it barred anyone from the respect deserving of a person.

Also, autonomy is the root of statelessness since it captures the entire spectrum of what a stateless economy would be. First, an anarchist economy must revolve around autonomy, since

only autonomy can protect the rights of the individual and all others simultaneously, and always. That is, for an anarchist economy to be truly anarchistic it must embrace autonomy since only dutiful freedom represents the entire range of liberty, which is what an anarchist economy respects, embodies, and preserves. Accordingly, an anarchist economy, as being neither blindly individualistic nor oppressively conformist matches the essence of autonomy or that inherent power people possess to be both dutiful and free.

Conclusion

To debase the stigma surrounding anarchy this piece first drew the reader to Kant's more accurate definition of freedom as being autonomy. Next, by demonstrating how modern governments cannot uphold the will of the individual and the autonomy of all simultaneously, and always, displayed that anarchy, in theory, is the only solution to the problem of political legitimacy. Afterward, detailing why a stateless, or minimalist economy is best fit for autonomy, assisted in setting the stage to reveal the importance of dutiful freedom in making anarchy a more concrete reality. Lastly, this essay attempted to present why autonomy grounds anarchy and statelessness, so that more people can grow aware of what a society without the need of leaders truly involves.

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Original Submission 7/6/2017

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