

Freedom

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Abstract

In this chapter I survey the ways in which anarchists have understood the concept of freedom. I argue that anarchists have understood freedom in three ways, which often overlap and combine. Anarchists understand freedom negatively, as freedom from domination, positively, in terms of the enabling conditions of freedom, and freedom with or freedom in, or the necessary institutional parameters for freedom. This latter conception of freedom is arguably more central to the lived anarchist movement than many have recognised, pervading the major anarcho-syndicalist unions and most anarchist groups. I link it to negative and positive accounts of freedom in order to defend a wide and plural account of anarchist accounts of freedom. The institutional focus of the chapter also enables an approach to freedom that takes inter-group freedoms seriously and allows us to link anarchism more coherently to the dynamics of international relations. Each of these aspects of the problem of freedom in anarchist politics demands a reappraisal of the constitutionalising practices of anarchist groups, and I conclude by pointing to some of the most recent research on this topic.

Introduction

In his famous essay *On the Solution of the Social Problem*, in 1848, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon argued that ‘The Republic is a positive anarchy [...] it is the liberty that is the MOTHER, not the daughter, of order’.¹ What he meant by this was that the communities that anarchists build are the positive institutional embodiment of the negative principle of anarchy. Anarchy denotes a condition of liberty, of freedom from the arbitrary domination of government. But the positive incarnation of this is a set of rules and principles, rights and duties that members of a community agree amongst themselves in order to constitute an order that will be the best means for them to realise their vision of the good. In this sense, institutions are central to freedom.

No doubt this way of prefacing a survey of anarchist approaches to freedom will raise eyebrows. Aren’t anarchists antithetical to rules and institutions? The simple answer is no. In fact, Proudhon’s view of anarchy and the republic has, with considerable variation, constituted the largest part of the anarchist tradition ever since. It was a system which drew from the functional federation of the watchmakers of the Jura and the complex institutional design of the Swiss confederation, both influencing the thinking of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin, which fed through to the innumerable experiments in anarchist syndicalism, including the CNT and the IWW, transnational worker federations like the International Workingmen’s Association, the confederalist visions of political community in Bookchin’s municipalism, now taken and modified by Abdullah Öcalan and the Rojava cantons of Kurdistan, and in Colin Ward’s post-statist visions for the European Union.²

¹ P.-J. Proudhon, ‘Solution of the Social Problem’, in I. McKay (Ed), *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* (Edinburgh: AK Press, [1848] 2009), 280.

² See, for example, S. Hirsch and L. Van der Walt (Eds), *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870–1940: The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism, and Social Revolution* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); L. Van der Walt and M. Schmidt, *Black Fame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2009); C. Ward, ‘The anarchist sociology of federalism’, *Freedom*, June/July, 1992; C. Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872–1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); M. A. Bakunin and S.

While the institutional imagination is central to the problem of freedom for anarchists, it is also premised on a sophisticated political philosophy, and it is this which this chapter will primarily focus on, as a way of defending or substantiating this retelling of the story of anarchist approaches to freedom. I will first look to provide answers to questions such as what does it mean to be subject to arbitrary domination? How can one freely make oneself in community? In what ways are power and freedom related? What do we need to be free? Do anarchists think differently about the freedoms of groups to those of individuals? Have anarchists all and always thought about the need for institutions? In short, what do anarchists think freedom is?³ The aim is to show that answers to these questions have almost always resulted in innovative institutional design.

My argument is that for the majority of anarchists you can only be free in conjunction with others, and most anarchists have developed quite elaborate institutional designs to defend this anarchic community. Taking society seriously means we also need to take seriously the problem of the ways in which societies should relate to one another, such that we can be collectively free in the presence of those who also want to be collectively free from you. Are the same theories applicable to free groups that are applicable to free individuals? This is a subject that is routinely overlooked when we discuss freedom, and not only by anarchists. Usually group freedoms are denied because only individuals, it is argued, can be bearers of moral right, and it is only through individuals that the right can be enacted or realised.⁴ But this argument doesn't seem to hold, ironically enough, when it comes to the rights of states. States are sovereign, it is argued, and their freedom is inviolable (except when other states chose for it not to be). Moreover, it is routinely argued, it is from this sovereign collective that the individual gets their freedom, and, ironically, while individuals cannot be trusted to live alone without states, and their immediate communities are denied political autonomy and representation (unions, families, tribes, cities, etc.), states can and must be trusted to co-exist without descending into mass violence.⁵

In this chapter I will show that anarchists develop a robust theory of freedom that links individuals with groups and groups with each other and articulates conceptions of freedom with what ought to be present and what ought to be absent in order for us to be free. I will show that the anarchist theory of freedom has roots in three traditions of political thought, republican socialism, liberal utilitarianism and left Hegelian and that these origins shape the broad contours of how contemporary anarchists approach the question of individual and collective freedom in

Dolgoff, *Bakunin on Anarchy. Selected Works by the Activist Founder of World Anarchism. Edited, translated and with an introduction by Sam Dolgoff* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973).

³ Liberty is a concept more central to the Anglo-analytical tradition of moral philosophy, while freedom and emancipation are concepts used more in the history of political thought and critical theory. For the purposes of this chapter, I will use liberty, freedom and emancipation interchangeably. Freedom translates as liberty in most Romance languages (e.g., *liberté*, *liberdad*, *libertà*), and these remain the conceptual vocabularies for non-Anglo anarchists. The association of liberty with the liberal rights tradition may explain some of the preference for thinking and speaking in terms of freedom. In this chapter, I use the concepts interchangeably. For good general discussions of liberty and freedom in the Anglo-American traditions of political philosophy, see J. Filling, 'Liberty', in *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2014) and N. J. Hirschmann, 'Freedom', in *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2014).

⁴ On this, republicans and libertarians are remarkably close. C. List and P. Pettit, *Group agency: The possibility, design, and status of corporate agents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 180–185. C. Kukathas, 'Liberalism and multiculturalism: The politics of indifference', *Political Theory*, 26 (1998), 686–699.

⁵ A. Prichard, 'Collective Intentionality, Complex Pluralism and the Problem of Anarchy', *Journal of International Political Theory*, 13 (2017), 360–377.

modern society. While the context is important, I also divide these three approaches analytically, to show what they imply in terms of three types of freedoms: negative freedoms from external domination; positive freedoms, meaning rights to certain conditions and visions of the good; and freedoms in or substantive claims about the sorts of institutions anarchists ought to build. I close the discussion with a set of claims about what anarchists ought *not* to defend. I argue that while autonomy, empowerment and independence are valuable, they ought not to be seen as absolute values to be defended without due regard for the competing demand for institutionalisation and constitutionalisation. This claim will strike many as implausibly anarchist, but I will show that in fact it is consistent with much of what anarchists have always done, even if they haven't always articulated it in these terms. The fullest freedom possible, for the most people and in defence of the primary values, I will argue, hinges on durable anarchist institutions.⁶

The Philosophical Context of Anarchist Accounts of Freedom

One thing that has been remarkably consistent in the history of anarchist thinking about freedom has been to contrast ideas about what it means to be free with a specific antonym: domination. Uri Gordon puts it like this: '[t]he term domination in its anarchist sense serves as a generic concept for the various systematic features of society whereby groups and persons are controlled, coerced, exploited, humiliated, discriminated against, etc.—the dynamics of which anarchists seek to uncover, challenge and erode'.⁷ He continues that 'any act of resistance, is in the barest sense, "anarchist" when it is perceived by the actor as a particular actualisation of a more systemic opposition to domination'.⁸ Not only is domination shorthand for multiple intersecting regimes that render us less free or unfree, but to combat these directly is what makes anarchists anarchists.

Domination has historically been a key object of attack for anarchists, and it was often treated as synonymous with authority, hierarchy, slavery, law, and so on. This conceptual proliferation was generally caused by the populist rhetoric of anarchists, but also the range of concepts used by those they engaged, and has no doubt resulted in much conceptual confusion. For example, authority means something quite different during the death throes of absolutist states than it does today, in societies with advanced and impersonal bureaucracies. Likewise hierarchy can mean rank ordering as well as a relation of domination, and the former is not always synonymous with the latter. Law was often the expression of the will of monarchs and leaders, whereas, today, there is at least democratic access to lawmaking in principle, even if in practice it is very distant from our grasp. Cutting through this complexity is important if we are to understand what it is we want to be free from.

One concept that united thinking about freedom, and still has incredible heuristic value for us today, is slavery. Slavery as an institution and as a condition epitomises what it means to be unfree. A slave is subject to the arbitrary domination of the slave master. The slave master forces the slave to act against her will and, even in the absence of direct interference, will remain a looming threat that will cause those subject to his or her command to toady and submit, limiting

⁶ For more on this, see R. Kinna and A. Prichard, 'Anarchism and Non-Domination', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, (forthcoming), and www.anarchyrules.info.

⁷ U. Gordon, *Anarchy Alive!: Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 32.

⁸ Gordon, *ibid.*, 33.

the fullest realisation of who that person could be by conceiving oneself as simply the property, and hence an extension of the will of the owner. This is not simply an individual-individual relationship, but an institution and structure of social relations from which many benefit(ed) indirectly, whether it kept the wages of non-slaves artificially high, the costs of goods artificially low or the pleasures of life, whether legal equality, or the ability to have a public life, premised on the exploitation and inequality of slaves.⁹ Slavery was not abolished in the United States until 1861 and Russia in 1863, that is, at precisely the time anarchism became a mass movement Europe-wide.

But what is also crucial is the language through which this account of freedom from slavery was articulated, and at this time, there were three primary sets of discourses that shaped anarchist thinking: liberal utilitarianism, republicanism and socialism.¹⁰

The liberal tradition is vast and practically impossible to summarise in a few lines here, but in so far as liberals considered the problem of freedom and slavery, the response was in terms of self-ownership, and the problem was to theorise and extrapolate the consequences of self-ownership for social order. If I am self-governing and your interference with me is a violation of this autonomy, how can society exist, and where would it come from? From Hobbes to Adam Smith to Mandeville's fable of the bees, the general proposition was that liberty consisted in harmonising individual self-interest. For liberal political society to exist, the alienation of one's property in the self to the state, and to the employer was vital. Thus merchants and industrialists, as well as the state, could in principle rely on the voluntary relinquishing of your right to your self-ownership, leasing your body to an employer, or giving up part of your autonomy in return for state protection.

This vision of freedom repulsed Rousseau, arguably the modern political philosophers who had the most influence on the development of anarchism. Chapter one of his *Social Contract* opens with the following words: 'Man is born free; but everywhere he is in chains'.¹¹ The reason for this slavery is the iniquity of the systems of autocratic domination, in which the people are governed by force rather than law, slaves to their material interests rather than the good, and, in giving their tacit consent to the autocratic institutions of the state, had in effect enslaved themselves once more. Money, luxury and self-interest were the bane of society, which led to a psychological enslavement to common mores, and the endorsement of a tacit political enslavement to the Old Order. Only a system of universal laws, agreed by direct, voluntary or presumed consent, could counter this political enslavement.

The second most famous formulation of the problem of slavery and freedom in the nineteenth century is Hegel's master-slave dialectic.¹² Here, while the master and slave face each other as unequals, their demand that the other recognise their status as (non)master or (non)slave demands a mutual recognition, which is the motor of the development of self-consciousness, destroying the particularity, or assumed transcendent nature of that relationship, and waking

⁹ For an excellent discussion of this, see A. Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹⁰ For fuller discussions of each, see K. S. Vincent, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); J. P. Clark, *The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Van der Walt and Schmidt, *Black Flame*.

¹¹ J.-J. Rousseau, 'Of the Social Contract or Principles of Political Right', in V. Gourevitch (Ed), *Rousseau: The Social Contract and other later Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 39–152.

¹² For an excellent discussion of the uptake of Hegel in anarchist thought, see N. Jun, 'Hegel and Anarchist Communism', *Anarchist Studies*, 22 (2014), 28–54.

both to the equality at the heart of social relations. Hegel believed that the ideal context for this mutual recognition is the legal state, in which citizens can attain collective sense of their social nature, something which was primordial in the people but overlaid by unjust institutions which distorted this nascent freedom.

William Godwin (1756–1836) is arguably one of Rousseau’s first anarchistic readers, but a reader steeped in the utilitarian traditions of eighteenth-century liberal England. Whether he is an anarchist or not need not detain us here. What is more significant is the way in which so many have read him as such and have deployed his ideas to anarchistic ends over 200 years after his death. His utilitarianism presumed that the greatest happiness for the greatest number could only be attained by each coming to the fulfilment of their own rational and moral self-direction, and that all means to that end of general happiness were permissible, come what may. This is not, however, a strictly consequentialist logic. Godwin objected to Rousseau’s social contract on the grounds that the alienation of individual liberty to the lawmaker, for example, was antithetical to the absolute injunction to independence of will. But Godwin’s rejection of bourgeois property relations on utilitarian grounds. Private property precipitated poverty and inequality, which in turn made the poor dependent on the wills of the rich. For Godwin, freedom is only possible where individual judgement is unimpeded, and in relations unconstrained by force of habit, of will, or of condition.

Slavery was the antithesis of freedom for Godwin, and his wife Mary Wollstonecraft, and a typical example of this bourgeois slavery was the marriage contract. This system of legal bondage rendered women unfree by habitual resignation to the norms of society that dictated she would be a second-class citizen, dulling her sense of self, all the while consecrated by state and church and through the economic means of dowry and family contract, most obviously in the nobility and aristocracy.

From Godwin, then, we can trace a conception of anarchic freedom that is utilitarian, rationalist and concerned primarily with a rejection of the interference of the state or of other bodies in the autonomously developed ideas of the individual. But we can trace another reading of Rousseau and slavery to the ideas of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865), who deployed Rousseau’s ideas in order to reject catholic morality, republican democracy and the emerging liberal capitalist relations of mid-nineteenth-century France. Like Rousseau, Proudhon argued that inequality of conditions and of status rendered people unfree, and like Godwin, Proudhon disagreed that the republican state, democratic and/or legal, could provide for this freedom, precisely because through individual political representation the political and social capacity of all the constitutive collective forces that shaped society, from the town to the guild, from families to regions, was elided and actively suppressed.¹³

Proudhon connected the state to the emergence of capitalism, and both to slavery and domination in a way that had not been done before. Proudhon’s argument was that defending claims of property in the person as the basis of liberal freedoms, was a transformation of slavery into wage slavery, rather than its abolition. To be a self-owner was no less ludicrous than to be a rightful owner of anyone else, he thought, because Proudhon rejected the idea that there were natural rights to property in the self or anyone else. Rather, he argued, given the social construction of our individuality, as well as society itself, we are all of necessity beholden to one another and

¹³ For more on this, see A. Prichard, *Justice, Order and Anarchy: The International Political Theory of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

therefore have an equal right to stipulate the terms of our social relationships. Tolstoy took this argument to its logical conclusion in a way that Proudhon did not.¹⁴ He argued that all law and right, republican law too, in so far as it prohibited the free association of peoples and the free development of human capacity, was based on force, and so far as force was needed to compel people to order, that order was merely a transformation of slavery, not its abolition. Tolstoy, like Proudhon, agreed too that the state, because it required capital to persist, would press the interests of the propertied against those of the propertyless, which produced a clear class cleavage in society, between workers and employers, and between employers and the state and everyone else. The republican state's defence of Catholic morality, with its focus on providence, transcendental hierarchies and irrationalism, was central to possibility of this new slavery.

In his later works Proudhon linked this twin process of state-building and capitalism to colonialism and imperialism, relations which he also understood to be enslaving. The republican freedom of the French was predicated on the unfreedom of the non-French, whether in Algeria, Mexico, the Italian peninsula or elsewhere.¹⁵ This oppression of 'foreign' peoples had its correlate in the oppression of the diverse cultures and nations of France, which Proudhon counted in the hundreds in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, before the Napoleonic centralisation and homogenisation of the country. We can see similar processes in all major state-building exercises.¹⁶ Freedom, for Proudhon, could not therefore be an individual or formal status, it had to be collective and formally so too. For him, freedom was only possible in shared political institutions, institutions that defended the autonomy of groups in relation to one another as much as the freedoms of individuals, and he called this federalism.¹⁷ In Proudhon's hands these republican institutions look completely unlike anything that his contemporaries would have recognised as a state, being more localist and transnational, but federalist in spirit and law (I discuss this in more detail below).

While for Godwin, freedom is an individual mental state that requires certain social conditions to help it flourish, for Proudhon freedom is social, and in so far as groups are not free, nor are individuals. Contra Godwin, Proudhon praised society as a vital, irreducible source of our own individuality. He claimed that both 'I' and 'we' must be free for society to be dynamic and open. His conception of what anarchic freedom is became civic, republican, rights based and institutionalised, in a way that for Tolstoy, and most anarchists that followed him, it was not—at least not explicitly. This majority tendency tends to trace its evolution to Hegel. But this Hegelian legacy in anarchist thought divides spectacularly between the works of Michael Bakunin (1814–1876) and Max Stirner (1806–1856), both of whom were active participants in the Young Hegelian movement in the late 1830s. Both Stirner and Bakunin were drawn to the idea that political subjectivity was inherited and socially constructed, and both saw this to be almost wholly nefarious. But where Bakunin was profoundly influenced by revolutionary republicanism and the writings of Karl Marx, Stirner was not.

¹⁴ L. Tolstoy, *The Slavery of Our Times* (Maldon: The Free Age Press, 1900).

¹⁵ A. Prichard, 'Deepening Anarchism: International Relations and the Anarchist Ideal', *Anarchist Studies*, 18 (2010), 29–57.

¹⁶ J. C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ P.-J. Proudhon, *The Principle of Federation and the Need to Reconstitute the Party of the Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979).

From Hegel, both Stirner and Bakunin agreed that human consciousness was historically and socially located and that our conceptions of freedom were inherited from religion, primarily. The objective of being free was to take control of this process of self-consciousness. The question was, where ought this to take place and how. For Stirner, any attempt to create new doctrines of freedom, or to make the construction of individuality a social process, would automatically re-inscribe new external dogmas. For Bakunin, the individual's 'freedom and reason, are the products of society, and not vice versa: society is not the product of individuals comprising it'.¹⁸ The point is that society proceeds us and we are its products, and only at the margins is our individual influence felt. Thus, the only way to come to true ideas about freedom was to first liberate society from the historical forces that constrained it and in so doing, consciousness itself would emerge. The way in which this would take place was through a dialectical process of destruction and renewal, where the experience of injustice, or of domination, awakens in the subject a desire for recognition, which is always contextually bound, generates a rebellion and a then reconstruction. For example, drawing on his reading of Marx's *Das Capital*, Bakunin argued that the emergence of capitalism had awakened the workers to their new status as wage slaves, forced to sell themselves in order to live.¹⁹ The class conflict that ensued was the motor of history. Where he departed from his German contemporary was on the status of the state in this process of emancipation, and on the virtues of freedom as such.²⁰

For Bakunin and Stirner, freedom and unfreedom were not reducible to the social conditions that produced them but rather emerged dialectically within them. Where Stirner breaks from Marx and Bakunin is in finding freedom in a pre-social domain. Stirner argued that the idea of freedom was itself shaped by social ideas, and didn't reflect anything transcendent or necessary. Republicanism was therefore an ideology of freedom, not the fulfilment of it, and in so far as ideologies tend to result in their uncritical acceptance by their followers, rendered them unfree at the same time. The ideas meant to emancipate us enslave us. Stirner looked at the pre-ideological state and asked, what do those who would emancipate themselves draw from? The fact that slaves are able to choose to be free and have a sense of their unfreedom independent of these ideologies, and are compelled to freedom in spite of this relative ignorance, implies an ontological freedom that is pre-social that they are seeking to recover. It is in recognising this ontological freedom (and implied equality) that our 'ownness', poorly translated as egoism, is to be found.²¹ Where this takes us in terms of social order is not clear, and I explore this below, because there is nothing in this account that permits of a vision of the good, and it pulls against the social. There are also clear links here with Godwin's ideas, specifically the notion that freedom is a cognitive or epistemic status. I explore this further in the final section of the chapter. But before we throw this out for lacking appropriate socialist credentials, it is important to see that Stirner shows us that freedom is not a domain towards which we can flee, nor is there such a place against which our

¹⁸ Bakunin cited in M. Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995), 6.

¹⁹ M. A. Bakunin, 'The Capitalist System', *Anarchy Archives*, http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/bakunin/capstate.html [Accessed 27.11.2017].

²⁰ For more on this, see P. Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists* (London: Routledge, 1980).

²¹ S. Newman (Ed), *Max Stirner* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), S. Newman, "'Ownness created a new freedom': Max Stirner's alternative concept of liberty", *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, ONLINE FIRST (2017), 1-21.

contemporary liberty can be benchmarked. Rather, what matters for Godwin and Stirner is the individual, and for Proudhon, Bakunin and Tolstoy social, conditions of (collective) emancipation.

What can we take from this first set of observations? Firstly, the systems of domination we face are historical and social, and freeing ourselves *from* them is the primary demand of an anarchist ethics. This demands a critical philosophy able to uncover these systems of domination and (as Stirner tells us) to be able to see within these social philosophies the legacies of domination too, whether of inherited ideas, or the ways in which theory sustains other modes of domination. Secondly, classical anarchists wrote extensively on the necessary conditions *for* freedom, but they disagreed on what these would be. Finally, anarchists disagreed about the appropriate institutional frameworks *in* which we might realise freedom, if any were appropriate at all. Distinguishing freedom from, from freedom to and freedom in, is a very useful way of theorising freedom from an anarchist point of view, and it is to this that I now turn.

Freedom From

One way to explore the legacy of these ideas, and to unpack their logic a little more, is to do so via a useful but somewhat distracting distinction between positive and negative liberty, devised by Isaiah Berlin in 1958 as an analytical tool to distinguish liberals from socialists during the Cold War.²² Negative accounts of freedom stipulate what you ought to be free from without stating what this would necessarily entail, while positive accounts of freedom denote the social or political conditions necessary for the flourishing of individuality, the latter being synonymous with freedom. For Berlin, the problem with positive accounts of freedom is that the struggle to put into place the conditions necessary for freedom might well undermine negative freedoms and tends to a consequentialist logic. For example, the Soviet drive for equality, and the denial of negative freedoms, led to the gulags.

This framing makes it very difficult to theorise anarchism as a political philosophy of freedom. Anarchists are stern advocates for social and material equality as preconditions to human flourishing, and argue that very particular forms of social organisation are central to the possibility of freedom, from municipal organisations, to revolutionary syndicalist unions, to affinity groups, intentional communities, communes, and so on and so forth. But anarchists also declaim the state and all manner of other forms of arbitrary domination and suggest that freedom can only be realised in their absence. Can the two concepts of freedom be reconciled? Let's first unpack what anarchists mean by negative liberty, then we will look at positive accounts of freedom in anarchist thought, before looking at the question of institutions in more detail in the penultimate section of this chapter.

The first thing to note is that for a theory of negative freedom to be valuable at all, it must be unhooked from any necessary predicates. You can't be strictly free in the negative sense if your freedom depends on the a priori presence of some other thing. In other words, to be free in the negative sense of the term cannot presuppose or necessitate the state, for example. For anarchists in the nineteenth century, this meant that there was no negative freedom worth defending that also had the nation state, positive constitutional law or capitalism as its necessary social and institutional form.

²² I. Berlin 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in I. Berlin (Ed), *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 121–154.

Patriarchy is a good example here. Proudhon's sexist conception of freedom from domination presumed that in order for men to be free, men must have the fullest scope for participation in the public institutions that shape our social life. The state could not provide that in the nineteenth century and arguably fails to do this to this day. But part and parcel of Proudhon's argument was the claim that in order for men to have this public role, women need to run the home and refrain from taking public roles. While Proudhon rejected the bourgeois marriage contract as enslaving, he nevertheless believed (incorrectly) that women were naturally physically and mentally weaker than men. He also believed the quack science of his day that women played no role in procreation except as receptacles of the 'seed'. Given this passive nature and having no public role, the home was women's rightful domain, a matriarchy where they could focus on raising children and countering masculine virtue.²³

Anarcha-feminism first emerged out of a critical engagement with Proudhon's ideas, pushing them further in a negative sense that he did. Henriette Wild, responding to Proudhon's writings on love and marriage, wrote the following: 'Sainte Proudhon [...] the right of the strongest, constitutes the most sinful of properties [...] and in love, property is [thus] rape'.²⁴ One of his most vocal and forthright critics, Jenny d'Héricourt, put it like this: 'You have naively mistaken the scalpel of your imagination for that of science'.²⁵

Twenty years later and across the Atlantic, Voltairine de Cleyre made similar arguments, arguing that women ought to reject the logic of property and selfhood: 'Young girls! If any one of you is contemplating marriage remember that is what the contract means. The sale of the control of your person in return for "protection and support"'.²⁶ De Cleyre called for 'equal freedom', where freedoms are not relative to this or that social status or role, but of a fundamental ontological nature, where men and women are recognised as being equal, and that this equality consists in their freedom to be who they desire to be and engage freely with others as equals, free of social, intellectual and material constraints.

An early twentieth-century brand of Stirnerite feminist egoism took this argument one step further. Rather than present an immanent critique of patriarchal anarchist theory, Dora Marsden, for example, rejected the anarchist tendency to kowtow to doctrines, emancipatory or not (Kinna 2011). This tendency to defer to established critical theory was typical of the women's movement more generally, she thought, imposing doctrines of liberty, rather than encouraging independent free thought. Appeals to the virtues of femininity, as opposed to masculinity, or to universal human qualities, imposed conceptions of what it meant to be these things upon others. Spontaneity and individuality, the hallmarks of anarchism, were only possible in the absence of doctrine.

If we take this line of thinking to one extreme, it is not difficult to pigeon hole anarchists as extreme liberals, or 'hyper-liberals',²⁷ vigorously defending a sphere of non-interference, clam-

²³ A. Copley, 'Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Reassessment of his role as a moralist', *French History*, 3 (1989), 194–221.

²⁴ For a working translation of this, and other feminist critiques of Proudhon's anti-feminism, see Shawn Wilbur, <https://libertarian-labyrinth.org/working-translations/henriette-artiste-letter-to-proudhon-1849/> [Accessed 27.11.17].

²⁵ M. J. d'Héricourt, *A Woman's Philosophy of Woman or, Woman Affranchised: An Answer to Michelet, Proudhon, Girardin, Legouvé, Comte, and Other Modern Innovators* (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1981), 58.

²⁶ V. de Cleyre, 'The Gates of Freedom', in E. C. DeLamotte (Ed), *Gates of Freedom: Voltairine de Cleyre and the Revolution of the Mind* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, [1891] 2004), 238.

²⁷ S. Newman, *Power and Politics in Poststructuralist Thought: New Theories of the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), 26.

ouring for a pristine refuge from the social and epistemic clenches of society, somewhere where they can live a life unencumbered by the pressures of other people. This no doubt resonates with some of the more primitivist conceptions of anarchism,²⁸ and would also likely find support in the ideas of some of the reclusive communalists scattered across modern societies. Here, rejecting the imposition of rules, of hierarchies of domination and rank ordering, and of oppressive social norms, is the corollary to a conception of freedom as a state of unencumbered isolation. But to conflate anarchism with this tendency would be a mistake. Indeed, as I will show, this freedom from can be institutionalised in impressive ways, ways that are consistent with anarchist ideals. In order to get a fuller sense of what an anarchist institution ought to look like, we must first get a sense of what it is they ought to promote, beyond the removal of regimes of domination.

Freedom To

For women in the nineteenth century, the right to work was central to freedom from material dependence on men. For anarchists, and revolutionary socialists of other varieties too, the struggle this involved meant devising ways of emancipating labour too, since to work for a master, under the strictures of modern capitalism meant nothing but wage slavery, whether you were a woman or a man.²⁹ The question then was less what should we get rid of in order to be free, but what do we need in place such that we can be free?

Positive theories of freedom can be understood as justifications of particular scope conditions, or necessary enablements and attributes, needed in order to be able to be free. They might also be virtues in the presence of which, or through the practice of which, we can be said to be human, the fulfilment of which is the purpose of the good life, or *eudemonia*. For example, I may have all the rights in the world, and be free from all immediate acts of interference, but without the means to exercise these freedoms am I really free? Also, without a positive conception of what it means to be a human being, what exactly do my negative freedoms afford me? A pure negative liberty would leave me directionless and treading water. Without the resources to develop, and a sense of what to develop into, in what meaningful sense am I free?

Two of the most outstanding statements of the positive conceptions of anarchist freedom are undoubtedly those of John Clark and Murray Bookchin, comrades and brothers in arms in many respects, though they differ vociferously on the detail of their social ecology. What unites both thinkers is their defence of Hegel and how he can be used to anarchist ends to theorise positive conceptions of freedom. Hegel is used by these two social ecologists in two ways: as a method and in order to conceptualise the positive society. Both Bookchin and Clark lament the failure of anarchists to take Hegel's dialectics seriously, for in it, they argue is an important set of observations about how direct action, that is individual and collective attempts at relatively unmediated attempts at the transformation of society, is constitutive of that future society. This may seem self-evident, after all, how else is society changed, but given the legacy of Hegel in social theory, it is an important move to make, placing agency in the hands of individuals and communities, without ignoring the social determinates of social action. Furthermore, for both Clark and Bookchin, the dialectic of recognition is an ecological one, in which humans come

²⁸ J. Zerzan, *Future Primitive and Other Essays* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1994).

²⁹ For more on this, see P. Abufom Silva and A. Prichard, 'Anarchism and Nineteenth Century European Philosophy', in N. Jun (ed), *Brill's Companion to Anarchism and Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 434–453.

to understand themselves in dialectical relation with nature.³⁰ Finally, given that the process of self-understanding and social development is open, there is no necessary telos to this process, for Clark at least.

In *The Ecology of Freedom* and *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, Murray Bookchin takes this notion of complexity and chaos, and aligns it with a Hegelian notion of social emergence, to ground a positive conception of political community and freedom.³¹ For him, no society that permits of formal, or informal but socially enforced or sanctioned, rank hierarchies of domination meets the demands of mutual recognition, or of equality. Gender parity, the end of anthropocentrism (or post-humanism in another key) and so on are all the prerequisites of his social ecology. An ecological society must also be built from within the society in which we find ourselves. It will need to be highly complex, Bookchin argues, such that the diversity and the openness that this implies, creates endless possibilities for becoming and social transformation. Bookchin rejected anarcho-syndicalism as the ultimate form of social order, and preferred the revitalisation of municipal politics as the locus of politics, and the federation of municipal centres transnationally.³²

There is no doubt here that the struggle for recognition is prefigurative, in the sense that the ends and means of struggle are codetermined. For Ben Franks, this account of prefiguration aligns neatly with the virtue ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre.³³ MacIntyre denies that there is any transhistorical conception of reason that can undergird a theory of the good, or any transhistorical notion of freedom that can shape our actions today.³⁴ Rather virtues, such as courage, justice or solidarity, are historically and culturally specific, sustained through practices and defended through the establishment of institutions. Institutions in anarchist terms can vary from affinity groups to revolutionary syndicalist unions, from the general assemblies of the Occupy Wall Street to the Paris Commune. I will discuss these in a little more detail in the following section, but suffice to say that none of these are the best or final way of realising the good for anarchists. They perform functions, can be instrumentalised, but also are explicitly animated by the virtues, or values, that anarchist hold dear, and in this sense are always historically and spatially contingent expressions of the good and of freedom from an anarchist point of view. But most importantly, they are nurseries in which society itself is raised. Proudhon called these expressions of collective reason and collective force and, like Bookchin later, argued that these ought to be federated and constitutionally defended.³⁵ Let me develop these ideas in a little more detail.

³⁰ J. P. Clark, *The Impossible Community: Realizing Communitarian Anarchism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 63–78.

³¹ M. Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1986), M. Bookchin, *The ecology of freedom: The emergence and dissolution of hierarchy* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991).

³² M. Bookchin, *Urbanization without Cities: The Rise and Decline of Citizenship* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1992).

³³ B. Franks, 'Anarchism and the Virtues', in B. Franks and M. Wilson (Eds), *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2010), 135–160.

³⁴ A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981).

³⁵ P.-J. Proudhon, 'Little Political Catechism', in I. McKay (ed), *Property is Theft!: A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2010), 654–684. See also, Ward, 'The anarchist sociology'.

Freedom In or Freedom With? Anarchism and the Question of Institutions

If we take the view that freedom is something we have to experience with people in groups, but also a freedom from constraints or dominations, this doesn't tell us much about how these groups ought to be formed, nor does it imply that the groups so formed will automatically be freedom-enhancing. Indeed, one of the most significant critiques of the lack of institutionalisation of affinity groups in the women's movement also bears directly on the anarchist movement. Jo Freeman's influential article 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness'³⁶ argued that in groups without formal institutional frameworks and clear decision making procedures, informal elites will and do emerge. These are often simple friendship groups to begin with but result in ossified and informal social structures of power that make it very difficult to locate accountability and to democratise participation (where democratising means facilitating the whole demos to speak). Groups that lack formal institutions can be and are often tyrannous.

A similar argument is made about the international order. The relations between states are largely informal and therefore structured by relations of domination and hierarchy. For numerous authors, anarchy is the solution, a formal anarchy in which the autonomy of states is de jure guaranteed by the defence of sovereignty, an 'anarchic freedom' of sorts.³⁷ But this anarchy tends to cement the power of the most powerful. The alternative is to constitutionalise, formally balance powers against one another, but again, the constitutional process in world politics tends to favour the most powerful and status quo distributions of wealth.³⁸

So, should anarchists institutionalise and constitutionalise or not? For Uri Gordon, the answer is no.³⁹ Anarchist societies are anarchist in so far as they are fluid and the possibility of change is always there. Institutionalisation closes this down. Gordon defines institutionalisation as the adoption of binding and formal rules, which in so far as they are binding make them un-anarchist, and if they are not binding, then they are not institutionalised. This is a real puzzle and one worth exploring to elaborate the third dimension of freedom in anarchist thought.

First, what is an institution? Institutions are not too dissimilar to regimes, a term Gordon uses (above) to denote informality. In International Relations (IR) scholarship, perhaps an odd place to turn, there has been extensive discussion of institutions that anarchists might draw on here. Formally at least, the international domain lacks a final point of authority. What scholars disagree about is what maintains order in this stateless domain. Is it capitalism, the biopolitics of neoliberalism, the balance of power between states, patriarchy, or institutions like NATO, OPEC and the UN? Norms often shape behaviour more than laws, and laws neither write nor enforce themselves. Bearing this in mind, we need to see institutions as a complex of norms, rules and decision making procedures, as Steven Krasner puts it, that are shaped by and shape behaviour.

When we think about it carefully, there is not a collection of anarchists anywhere that is not governed in some way by something like formal or informal rules or emergent structures of power. Whether this is a set of decision making procedures or an informal set of rules, norms or

³⁶ J. Freeman, 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 17 (1972), 151–164.

³⁷ S. Lechner, 'Why anarchy still matters: On theories and things', *Journal of International Political Theory*, 13 (2017).

³⁸ S. Gill and A. C. Cutler (Eds), *New Constitutionalism and World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), G. W. Brown, 'The Constitutionalisation of What?', *Global Constitutionalism*, 1 (2012), 201–228.

³⁹ Gordon, *Anarchy Alive*, chapter 3.

habits that reproduces their communities. What marks the anarchists out is the ways in which these rules, norms and decision making procedures are benchmarked against positive and negative accounts of freedom, and the degree to which participation and active involvement are key to being able to tell how anarchist they are. To this end, anarchists have proven to be real innovators when it comes to institutions. From unions, to intentional communities, communes, worker-owned factories and so on and so forth, each consist in a set of formal and often informal rules, subgroups nested or affiliated within or alongside one another, and elaborate and varied decision making procedures aimed at maximising participation and inclusivity.

Freedoms are constituted by the mutual constraints placed upon free agency by our agreed decision making procedures, while the rules developed collectively and collaboratively shape mutual interactions, and the nature of that decision making. Where these rules are written down they give longevity to those groups, enabling them to outlive 100% of their participants and persist in a recognisable form into the future. The most successful such institutions in the anarchist movement have been the anarcho-syndicalist unions. The CNT in Spain had 700,000 members at the height of its influence, while today it has a fraction of that. More work needs to be done to see whether the constitutions of these groups exclude or include, whether they are historical millstones or important rallying points. But one thing is clear, they are enduring. As Lucien van der Walt and Steven Hirsch have pointed out, syndicalist and revolutionary syndicalist unions were stronger and more numerous outside Europe and North America, and a global context for understanding these institutions is central to understanding the global historical institutionalisation of anarchist movements, not to mention their roles in shaping twentieth-century world history.⁴⁰

What is as interesting for our purposes is the way in which most anarchist labour organisations have historically been federations, and the ways in which this federative model pervades anarchist organising. Federalism was central to the normative and institutional vision of Bakunin, Kropotkin and Proudhon, as I have discussed above. For all three, what was to be federated was much more than geographical locales and the centres of power therein. Rather, all had in mind the multiple and plural groups and economic units that workers and citizens would reclaim. Each economic unit would meet the needs of the locale, or functional body (like unions, postal services, etc.), each locale would act as a regional administrative unit, each regional or functional administrative unit would be federated with others to coordinate across wider scales, but would not supersede the others in an institutional hierarchy. Rather the economic and administrative units would nest within one another, with members from each taking part in the administration of the other, and vice versa, cooperatively.⁴¹ Proudhon believed that the formalisation of these relations was inevitable, and that the authority structures that would emerge would need to be counterbalanced with the liberties that people demanded.⁴² And this was a vision of order and freedom that was remarkably consistent throughout his life. As he put it in *What is Property?*:

⁴⁰ L. Van der Walt and S. Hirsch (Eds), 'Rethinking Anarchism and Syndicalism: The colonial and post-colonial experience, 1870–1940', in Hirsch and Van der Walt, *Black Flame*, xxi–lxxiii. See also, D. Berry and C. Bantman (Eds), *New perspectives on anarchism, labour and syndicalism: The individual, the national and the transnational* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010).

⁴¹ T. A. Wachhaus, 'Anarchy as a Model for Network Governance', *Public Administration Review*, 72 (2012), 33–42.

⁴² Y. Simon, 'A Note on Proudhon's Federalism', in D. J. Elazar (ed), *Federalism as Grand Design: Political Philosophers and the Federal Principle* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), 223–234. See also T. O. Hueglin, 'Yet the Age of Anarchism?', *Publius*, 15 (1985), 101–112.

Liberty is equality, because liberty exists only in society; and in the absence of equality there is no society. Liberty is anarchy, because it does not admit the government of the will, but only the authority of the law; that is, of necessity. Liberty is infinite variety, because it respects all wills within the limits of the law.⁴³

Freedom and institutionalisation are co-dependent. Community-building is necessarily an institutionalising project, embedding social practices such that they become relatively durable and give all a sense of the rules of the game and a hand in shaping them. But as institutions become durable, they also become outward facing, concerned with their own longevity, and they grow and change internally and in their relations with other groups. This complex and non-linear process will throw up challenges and problems that, according to MacIntyre at least, invariably lead to the sacrifice of the virtues and the development of vice. Whether states or communes, institutions need critical care and attention, reflection and analysis. Developing this critical understanding is partly what creates them, gives them direction and is an indication of, and enables, mass participation.

Against Empowerment, Autonomy and Independence

Thus far I have argued that freedom is always relative to a social material and intellectual context, and to be durable will need to be institutionalised. In short, there is no non-social domain of freedom. If this is the case, there are three concepts that anarchist regularly use to understand freedom that probably ought to be rejected as foundational principles for anarchist ethics and theorising freedom. These are empowerment, autonomy and independence. It is not that anarchists ought not to be empowered, autonomous or independent, only that that these cannot be consistent groundings for an anarchist social theory of freedom in the absence of institutionalisation.

Take away all social impediments and consider the subject as an ontological singularity. Assume that all social imaginaries, like law and the state, place the possibility of freedom outside ourselves in institutions, and so must be rejected. Who we are, or who we would become, is left to the happenchance of our ability to achieve a status within these epistemic domains. Unless I can determine the conditions of my own identity, I am not free. For Stirner, realising our freedom consists in mastering all these external forces such that each is a voluntarily chosen part of ourselves—we internalise the social, in other words, we remove all social impediments to our personally defined subjectivity. For Stirner, being free is not the same as realising it in any given context. Realising one's freedom is about self-mastery and the appropriation of social and epistemic properties you require to make you who you are. Saul Newman sums it up like this: 'Freedom, for Stirner, should be a question of self-empowerment and the recognition and affirmation of one's own self as the condition and measure of freedom, rather than any external condition'.⁴⁴

But how can I be free in the absence of other people, and if there are other people, how do we regulate our coercion and our mutual attempts to be ourselves, without recognising needs and

⁴³ Proudhon, 'Solution', 136.

⁴⁴ S. Newman, "'Ownness created a new freedom": Max Stirner's alternative concept of liberty', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, ONLINE FIRST (2017), 6.

demands, or visions of the good, beyond ourselves? For Uri Gordon freedom is also centrally a question of empowerment. It is through empowerment that we are able to resist domination. Following Starhawk, Gordon argues that empowerment is first a critique and battle against ‘power-over’, that is the rule of others over us. In order to actualise or realise the promise of this critique, we have to develop ‘power to’ and power with’. These three faces of power map neatly onto our conception of freedom outlined above. ‘Power to’ relates to mastery and learning, ‘power with’ to the cooperativeness and support necessary to personal empowerment in mutualist communities. Central to realising this is the redistribution of power to the end of ‘equality’,⁴⁵ a system in which we are all equally unable to dominate, rather than one in which a distribution of goods reaches universal parity.⁴⁶ This can be a fluid and negotiated rebalancing of power relations in accordance with principles of solidarity and equality, but it is one which is primarily predicated on communities of identity, not institutions of collective self-rule.⁴⁷

Gordon rejects the institutionalist argument for anarchist politics on the grounds that formalisation does not counter the imbalances of power, but would sediment new ones, and it would remove the intersubjective form of the anarchist political culture that has been so central to its effectiveness and the possibility of realising equity and ‘power with’. Gordon prefers the anarchist impulse to ‘decentralisation’, the multiplication of centres and ‘diffuse social sanctions’. A truly anarchist politics, Gordon argues, refuses institutionalisation, both in principle and in practice.⁴⁸

At some point, however, this struggle for autonomy, empowerment and independence will result in the end of society itself. The Stirnerite injunction to question all social norms and to adopt only those that accord with one’s self-creation, would render a shared society impossible, unless of course a shared conception of the self is desirable, in which case oneness itself becomes a less stable ontological category, and more an epistemic one. Gordon’s understanding of ‘power with’ will in some senses mollify the brute struggle for power empowerment entails, while the development of epistemic communities of power/knowledge that a more Foucauldian sensibility might suggest would develop ‘power with’ in more epistemic terms. But neither is particularly durable. When people become burnt out, tired or disillusioned, or they begin to dissociate with the group, the society will falter and fail. Likewise, it seems an implausible way to structure inter-group relations to rely on ideological cohesion or identity.

Identity and epistemic community are necessary but not sufficient components of freedom. In order to develop the durability of communities, and to enable the linking of communities across time and space, institutionalisation is required, and for this to flourish, notions of right and contracts are probably necessary. We need to think creatively about the relationship between articulating the voice of the anarchist demos, as well as the limits of modern democracy, and how this would sit in productive tension with a set of rules and institutions that can provide the formal structure for those processes, without undermining anarchist values. There is no simple answer to this problem, but anarchist political thought provides a sophisticated set of critical tools to that end.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Gordon, *Anarchy Alive*, 56.

⁴⁶ Gordon, *ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁷ See U. Gordon, ‘Anarchism and Nationalism’, in N. Jun (Ed), *Brill’s Companion to Anarchism and Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 196–215.

⁴⁸ Gordon, *Anarchy Alive*, 69.

⁴⁹ For more on this, see M. Egoumenides, *Philosophical anarchism and political obligation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

Conclusions

In this chapter I have focused on one prominent tradition in the history of anarchism more than I have on others: the republican tradition of anarchist praxis. This wing of the anarchist tradition engaged with freedom from the perspective of the social construction of the subject, and with a conception of the social conditions of freedom. This majority tradition was also highly institutionalised, whether in the syndicalist unions, in intentional communities, co-ops, federations, community organisations, municipal administration and military organisations like Durruti's column, Mahkno's units or elsewhere. These institutions were constituted along lines that defended maximal participation in the decisions that were likely to affect those who took part. In so doing they shaped an anarchist ethos through institutional design, producing anarchist subjects in the process. In their failings, as well as in their successes, they also acted as nurseries of the development of future anarchist thinking and practice, often highly critical of the structures of domination that had emerged in those institutions or within society at large. From the French mutual aid societies and the Paris Commune, through to Occupy Wall Street, Decolonize Oakland and the Rojava constitution, the urge to freedom has always been a contextual affair.

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