

# **Anarchism and Ethics**

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## Abstract

This chapter defends the centrality of ethics to anarchist theory and practice. It starts by describing some of the main meta-ethical and normative positions associated with different constellations of anarchism and postanarchism. It then explains and argues for an anti-hierarchical virtue approach as being the most productive and consistent with the main anarchist ideological constellations (socialist anarchisms), its key classical proponents and contemporary practitioners. It demonstrates that this practice-based virtue approach is consistent with anarchism's wider materialist philosophical commitments—including its critiques of universal values—and micropolitical orientation. This chapter explores and critically evaluates post-left and postanarchist critical rejections of ethical analysis, which uses Max Stirner's radical egoism as a basis. It goes on to argue that as these critics increasingly engage with material problems significant areas of convergence develop between them and social anarchisms. The chapter further illustrates the pertinence of the revolutionary Aristotelian virtue approach by providing examples of anarchist practices that are rich in virtues and showing that anarchist virtue theory provides a strong basis for dealing with some standardly contentious questions, such as defending freedom of speech or supporting anti-fascist interventions against discriminatory and oppressive speech acts.

## Introduction

Anarchism is often distinguished from other revolutionary traditions by the priority it gives to moral evaluation<sup>1</sup> rather than, for instance, the largely economic analyses associated with orthodox Marxism.<sup>2</sup> The importance of ethics, especially with regard to everyday decisions, is because the main forms of anarchism have tended to emphasise the micropolitical.<sup>3</sup> Other revolutionary traditions, by contrast, tend to focus on the macropolitical (decisions, policies and institutional norms at the international and state level) and consider the micropolitical as important only insofar as they change or support the former. Because anarchism concentrates on everyday activities and contestation and repositioning of power relations of civil society, there has been a rich tradition of anarchist writings concerning social activities that offer practical guidance on, critiques of and alternatives to:

- Anti-social activity, crime and punishment
- Food production
- Housing
- Personal and sexual relations

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, W. Price, 'Libertarian Marxism's Relation to Anarchism', *Anarchist Library* <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/wayne-price-libertarian-marxism-s-relation-to-anarchism>, D. Graeber, 'The Twilight of vanguardism' in J. McPhee and E. Reulan, *Realizing the Impossible* (Oakland: AK, 2007): 250–253; E. Rayner, 'Moralism is no substitute for a materialist Understanding' *International Communist Tendency* 15 June 2012, <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2012-06-15/moralism-is-no-substitute-for-a-materialist-understanding>.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, K. Marx, 'Preface to' *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 198), 21.

<sup>3</sup> See L. Portwood-Stacer, 'Micropolitics' in B. Franks, N. Jun and L. Williams, (Eds), *Anarchism: A conceptual approach* (London: Routledge, 2018 (forthcoming)), 203–218.

- Schooling
- Media
- Social research

These topics cross over with practical questions of organisation: identifying and applying the principles for effective, anti-hierarchical and mutually satisfying forms of social interaction in order to achieve wider benevolent, egalitarian goals.<sup>4</sup>

It is within practical activities that questions about individual choices and collective decisions arise, not just about how to perform the activity but whether it is worth performing at all and the erroneous moral thinking that sustains the more unnecessary and/or detrimental.<sup>5</sup> As such this chapter defends the centrality of ethics to anarchist theory and practice. It then argues that a particular form of moral analysis—anti-hierarchical virtue theory—is the most consistent with the main anarchist constellations (socialist anarchisms) whether espoused by classical anarchist (pre-1940) theorists or contemporary anarchist activists and advocates. This is not to argue that all anarchists are explicitly or inherently virtue theorists—indeed, as will be shown, different sub-categories of anarchism are partly identifiable through their distinctive ethical frameworks—but that virtue theory provides the best fit with core analytic principles, epistemologies and practical approaches of the main historical traditions of social (also known as ‘class struggle’) anarchism.

### Three Areas of Ethics

The three main areas of moral philosophy are of meta-ethics, normative ethics, and applied moral analysis. Meta-ethics deals with the status of ethical pronouncements and their epistemological basis. For some, like Immanuel Kant (and Kantian influenced anarchists), moral principles are universal and found through pure reason; or for naturalist philosophers they are found through the scientific method (Kropotkin may be such an example), whilst for others, for instance, subjectivists and egoists, moral expressions values are entirely individual and have little explanatory power but as indicators of personal preference.<sup>6</sup> Normative ethics deals with the principles, rules and characteristics or traits that are involved in moral decision-making such as those referring to right action, good outcomes, admirable character or desirable activity. Applied ethics involves assessing the pertinence and priority of particular ethical norms and values to specific controversies or fields of action. Sustainability principles, such as re-using discarded materials for social benefit, are highly applicable to most contexts but cause deep upset if the material in question is the medical tissue of a dead child re-used for research without parental (or guardian) consent.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, D. Graeber, ‘The new anarchists’, *New Left Review* 13, January–February 2002; I. McKay ‘Organisation’ in B. Franks, N. Jun and L. Williams (Eds), *Anarchism: A conceptual approach* (London: Routledge, 2018 (forthcoming)): 115–128; R. Rocker, *Anarchosyndicalism* (London: Phoenix, undated).

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, David Graeber (2013) ‘On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs: A Work Rant’, *Strike* <https://strikemag.org/bullshit-jobs>.

<sup>6</sup> For more on anarchist and postanarchist meta-ethics, see B. Franks ‘Postanarchism and Meta-Ethics’, *Anarchist Studies* 16.2 (2008): 135–153.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, the Alder Hay scandal; BBC News ‘Organ scandal background’, *BBC Online* 29 January 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/1136723.stm>.

All ideologies are identifiable, as Michael Freeden explains, through the structures of core concepts that encourage particular ways of viewing the world. These concepts identify some social phenomena as problems (and ignore others) and privilege some solutions over others (whilst not recognising others as a potential remedy).<sup>8</sup> By providing ways to identify and privilege responses, ideologies necessarily have a normative character. They also include meta-ethical and applied principles. Ideologies tend to have their own epistemologies, some preferring tradition (conservatism) or science (Leninism) or reason (liberalism), which structures the legitimacy of their principles and the institutions from which solutions will be found. Similarly, the particularity or generality of solution has an applied element. For instance, in the United Kingdom contemporary constitutional conservatism adopts principles of ‘equality of opportunity’ as a way of stabilising institutions that have operated on liberal norms for decades, but conservatism makes an exception for the head of state, who is still appointed on a heredity basis.

Even apparently non-evaluative concepts like the *individual*, *property*, *community* or the *state* become part of judgement making, partly because their location next to more clearly normative principles such as equality, liberty or fairness helps to decontest the evaluative principle. ‘Liberty’ becomes about individual freedom understood in terms of property rights when located next to these terms (such as in classical liberalism) but becomes closer to modern liberalism when the freedom is located next to ‘individual’ and ‘community’. So too differences in forms of anarchism can be identified by the constellation of principles and their priority and position given to each component. Core values like anti-hierarchy, prefiguration (means being in accordance with end) and a social view of the self are stable and core to all social anarchisms, but the relative priority given to ‘non-human biotic entities’ will shape how far the sub-ideology is a green or eco-anarchism. Thus, battles within and between ideologies often take the form of competing moralities.<sup>9</sup>

## Anarchism and Normative Ethics

The three standard positions of normative ethics, deontology or rights theory, consequentialism and virtue theory, have been supplemented by ethical approaches such as *casuistry*, *perfectionism* and the more explicitly multi- or anti-value positions that influence, and are adopted by, more post-structural theorists like *Nihilism*, *Subjectivism*, *Egoism*, *Perspectivism* and Levinasian *first philosophy*.<sup>10</sup> It is not possible in just a short chapter to offer in-depth descriptions and analyses of all and every ethical position and how it relates to anarchism. Even Kropotkin’s book *Ethics: Origin and Development*,<sup>11</sup> which provides a structured history of moral theory, is notably both unfinished and reticent on how far the many different ethical traditions he discusses support or

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<sup>8</sup> M. Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); M. Freeden, *Ideology: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Carl Levy (2007) “‘Sovversivismo’: The radical political culture of otherness in Liberal Italy”, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 12: 2, 147–161: 151–155.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, S. Newman, *Bakunin to Lacan* (Oxford: Lexington, 2001); S. Newman, *The Politics of Postanarchism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> P. Kropotkin, *Ethics: Origin and Development* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1992). The project as George Woodcock points out had a far longer origin as well as earlier outputs (G. Woodcock ‘Introduction’ to P. Kropotkin, *Ethics: Origin and Development* Montreal: Black Rose, 1992), pp. vii–xxvi.

challenge anarchism.<sup>12</sup> Instead, this chapter provides a brief outline of some of the main ethical positions and how they have influenced or been incorporated within some forms of anarchist thinking. These principles structure their identification and evaluation of social problems and their types of organisation and forms of action. It also defends the virtue approach as providing the best fit.

## Anarchism and Virtue Theory

Whilst once a re-discovered minority tradition within post-Enlightenment ethics, coming a poor third to the scientific naturalism of *utilitarianism* and rationalism of *deontology*, virtue theory has gained an increasingly significant position both in moral theory and political theory.<sup>13</sup> There are many competing forms of virtue theory: some theorists, like Roger Scruton, consider virtues to be inherently hierarchical and conservative,<sup>14</sup> whilst others, like Paul Blackledge, view virtue theory as more consistent with Marxism. Anarchists, too, promote and use the language of virtue theory throughout their analyses of current events, even if it is not often part of an explicit or conscious virtue-ethics strategy.<sup>15</sup> Some features of virtue theory are common across these traditions. Character traits or attributes of interpersonal relationships are admired because they are good in themselves as well as having an extrinsic value.

Opposing each virtue are (often) two corresponding vices. Vices are considered undesirable in themselves, as well as likely to generate bad outcomes. For instance, the two corresponding vices to the virtue of generosity are meanness and profligacy. To be generous means avoiding the extremes of never spending money on others or wasting resources unnecessarily. Thus a virtue is seen as being in the middle of two opposing tendencies.<sup>16</sup> The mean is not a mathematical average between the opposing vices, but a heuristic to avoid under- or over-reaction.<sup>17</sup>

For virtue theorists these attributes work in unity. To be generous is to identify someone who needs help (wisdom) not to waste effort and resource on those already spoilt (compassion). For radical virtue theorists, virtues flatten hierarchies. Being brave, for instance, involves standing up to bullies, not supporting them. Compassion is about equalising resources, not hoarding them amongst the rich.

In anarchism, actions are praised for being ‘just’, ‘fair’ and ‘brave’, whilst hierarchical and oppressive responses are rejected because they exhibit vices like ‘lack of wisdom’ or because they are ‘cowardly’ or ‘selfish’. Even the more easily forgotten virtues like ‘wit’ are significant features of anarchist publications.<sup>18</sup> Wit supports other anarchist values like solidarity, through building on shared values. It often courageously mocks the powerful and helps develop courage

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<sup>12</sup> G. Woodcock ‘Introduction’ to P. Kropotkin, *Ethics: Origin and Development* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1992), pp. vii–xxvi: xix–xx.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, C. Laborde ‘Republicanism’ in M. Freeden, L. T. Sargent and M. Stears., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 511–524: 511, 520.

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, R. Scruton, *On Hunting* (London: Yellow Jersey, 1999) and *England and the Need for Nations* (London: Institute for the Study of Civil Society, 2004), esp. 22–28, 35.

<sup>15</sup> Although contemporary anarchist international relations theorist Alex Prichard points out that Pierre-Joseph Proudhon also ‘believed that anarchy had distinct virtues’. *Justice, Order and Anarchy* (London: Routledge, 2015): 134.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Ethics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1976), 101.

<sup>17</sup> Hughes, G. *Aristotle on Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2001): 62–63.

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Mr Block (or Blockhead) in *Industrial Worker*, Wildcat in *Freedom*, *Strike’s* situationist-inspired détournements.

to overcome dominating forces.<sup>19</sup> Wit also provides a space for self-criticism and appropriate, modest reflection on the limits of a group's abilities.

According to Aristotle, the more people practise virtuous behaviour, the easier it is to act virtuously: it becomes an in-built part of one's character.<sup>20</sup> For Alasdair MacIntyre, the more virtues are embedded into social activities, the more these practices flourish.<sup>21</sup> In neo-Aristotelian ethics, unlike Kantian philosophy, a morally good person might no longer be rationally deducing correct action, as it simply becomes part of their ingrained personality. Those who prioritise the development of individual character are more commonly associated with individualism, whilst the virtue theory most consistent with anarchism is based on material practices.

The notion of practices is derived from MacIntyre and the revolutionary Aristotelian tradition. Practices are rule-governed activities that generate internal and external goods.<sup>22</sup> Internal goods are things that are valuable in themselves without recourse to later benefits: such virtues as friendship, compassion or developing wisdom are cherished not just because they might generate some other good outcome in the future but because they are intrinsically valuable. If someone tried to justify being helpful or friendly because they might generate for themselves some positive benefit in the future, then they aren't being genuinely friends or exhibiting true benevolence. Nonetheless virtuous action foreseeably produces better outcomes, a happy society, less alienated and anti-social people, but it is not the main justification for undertaking these actions.

Practices which generate internal and external goods tend to be resilient, sustaining over long periods and between different geographies and develop into traditions. Though 'traditions' have certain conservative associations, it is pertinent to point out that there are many anti-hierarchical customs and longstanding institutions, such as bottom-up labour organising (syndicalism) and squatting organisations. In addition, traditions are not fixed but evolve. They are also capable of radical transformation because they interact with other social activities, developing and responding to changing circumstances, and thus producing new virtues (transcendence). Different social practices develop different combinations of virtues, with none universally at the fore, so consistent with anarchist commitments to self-management, it is the practitioners themselves and those in similar, adjacent activities who can best appreciate the value of an activity.

Traditions can become irrelevant due to changing technologies (bookbinding was once a major artisanal profession in British anarchism) and disappear, or they can be corrupted and degenerate. Competitive cycling is a good example of this. The wrong goals were imposed on a practice, those of maximising financial reward, and thus key practitioners engaged in it for the wrong reason, justifying cheating and the bullying of others in order to achieve their financially motivated goal. As a result fewer people felt motivated to take up the sport or give it practical support. Revolutionary organisations have been subject to similar criticisms by anarchists. By pursuing the grand overarching goal (*telos*) of the revolutionary event, group members and the revolutionary subject are manipulated and exploited.

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<sup>19</sup> J. 'Breaking the Frame: Anarchist Comics and Visual Culture'. Belphegor. 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Aristotle, *Ethics*.

<sup>21</sup> A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1985): 273–274.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 187–190, 221.

## Anarchism and Consequentialism

There are a number of consequentialist ethical theories. The dominant one within contemporary political-economy is productivism, where policy decisions are formulated and justified on the basis of achieving measurable economic growth (either in terms of maximising the number of available material goods and services or in terms of maximising profit). For instance, changes in primary, secondary and higher education are often promoted by governments on the basis that the 'reforms' will increase the economic activity of the nation. Closely related to productivism, and a more standard position in moral philosophy, is utilitarianism. Utilitarianism in its most basic form proposes, as John Stuart Mill explains, 'actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness'.<sup>23</sup> Happiness is calculated on the basis of collective or communal satisfaction and absence of pain rather than on a purely individual (hedonistic) level. Utilitarianism's affinity with productivism arises from the assumption that greater availability of goods will necessarily increase societal happiness, an assumption though that is not necessarily borne out.<sup>24</sup>

There are a number of features of utilitarianism that make it attractive to social anarchism and explain the significant number of utilitarian-style arguments and concepts that appear in activist literatures. These include a compassionate concern for the wellbeing of others, with a corresponding rejection of individualistic hedonism; equality of consideration where one person's happiness is worth as much as another person's; and the development of a dispassionate, unbiased and accessible basis for making decisions.

First and foremost utilitarianism is concerned with producing good social outcomes and having socially benevolent goals, which is a key feature of social anarchism. One of the two motivations for anarchist activism, identified by Gabriel Kuhn, is the desire to 'change the world'.<sup>25</sup> Johann Most,<sup>26</sup> Sergei Nechayev,<sup>27</sup> Mikhail Bakunin<sup>28</sup> and British anarchists like Class War with their slogan 'Class War By any Means Necessary'<sup>29</sup> often utilise deeply consequentialist slogans. These powerful rhetorical devices express both the wretchedness of the situation for the economically, patriarchally and colonially oppressed but also the intensity of the desire for revolutionary action that will radically improve the lives of the vast majority. Such ends-driven idioms are often undercut or nuanced, especially by Bakunin and Class War, with the recognition that not anything goes. Action has to be by the appropriate agent; otherwise it becomes paternalism or

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<sup>23</sup> J. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 55; see too J. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1791) available at <https://www.utilitarianism.com/jeremy-bentham/index.html> Chap. 1.

<sup>24</sup> China, despite rapid rises in economic output in the last 25 years has had no noticeable rise in general happiness according to the *UN World Happiness Report*, Chap. 3 [http://worldhappiness.report/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/03/HR17-Ch5\\_w-oAppendix.pdf](http://worldhappiness.report/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/03/HR17-Ch5_w-oAppendix.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> G. Kuhn, 'Anarchism Today', *Enough is Enough* 30 December 2016. <https://enoughisenough14.org/2016/12/30/gabriel-kuhn-anarchism-today/>.

<sup>26</sup> 'Ethics? The end of revolution is freedom; the end justifies the means.' Q. Most, F. Trautmann, *The Voice of Terror: A biography of Johann Most* (London: Greenwood Press, 1980), 99.

<sup>27</sup> Sergei Nechayev, *Catechism of the Revolutionist* (London: Violette Nozieres Press and Active Distribution, 1989), 4-5.

<sup>28</sup> M. Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), e.g. 197, 217.

<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, *Class War* 47, 1.



vanguardism.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, almost all meaningful activities take place with a goal in mind, even if the goal itself changes as time goes on.

There are a number of further positive features of utilitarianism that attract anarchists. First, as Kropotkin notes, it takes the basis for ethical analysis out of the hands of religious authorities. It provides a basis for evaluation that is clear and accessible and thus suitable for developing compassionate social action.<sup>31</sup> Further, utilitarianism contains some, at least initially, egalitarian features. The happiness or unhappiness of each and every individual entity is included in the utilitarian calculation. The calculation does not discriminate in making a rich person's additional utility count for more than a poor person's, a man's happiness is not preferred over a woman's or an abled-bodied person over someone with disabilities. For environmentally focussed utilitarians, like Peter Singer,<sup>32</sup> this means the interests of pain/pleasure feeling non-humans also need to be taken into account, an idea that was originally raised by Jeremy Bentham, another early advocate of utilitarianism:

It may come one day to be recognized, that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum* [bone at the base of the spine], are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or, perhaps, the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they *reason*? Nor, Can they *talk*? But, Can they *suffer*?<sup>33</sup>

In short the affinities for utilitarianism with anarchism are its concern with making social improvement, rather than being just individually focussed, based on apparently non-authoritarian secular basis. Utilitarianism, from an anarchist perspective, also provides a substantive version of equality from which to challenge discriminatory actions that overlook the major interests of one group for the minor interests of another.

However there are significant and substantive areas of division and incompatibility between utilitarianism and anarchism, and these differences centre on the supremacy of outcomes as the overriding principle. First, utilitarianism does not necessarily produce egalitarian outcomes. In its classical form maintaining long entrenched inequalities that benefit a majority population might generate greater happiness than a disruptive egalitarian outcome.<sup>34</sup> Second, meta-ethically, despite the attempt to provide a clear ground for ethical decision-making that is distinct from the obscurantism of religion, Mill's argument that there is a scientific basis for utilitarianism is deeply flawed, showing only that on-the-whole individuals prefer to choose actions that fulfil their personal interests rather than frustrate them.<sup>35</sup> It does not show a drive towards utilitarian concern to meet other interests or that people *should* pursue them. Indeed, earlier Mill accepts

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<sup>30</sup> Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 182–183, 197.

<sup>31</sup> Kropotkin, *Ethics*, 240–244.

<sup>32</sup> P. Singer, *Animal Liberation*. Second edition (London: Pimlico, 1995); P. Singer *Practical Ethics* Third edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> J. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Chap. 17, n121, *Library of Economics and Liberty* [http://www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnthPML18.html#anchor\\_a122](http://www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnthPML18.html#anchor_a122).

<sup>34</sup> R. Crisp, *Mill On Utilitarianism*. London: Routledge, 1997, 169.

<sup>35</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 81–82.

that ‘questions of ultimate ends are not amenable to proof’.<sup>36</sup> There are epistemological problems associated with claims to know the greater good for others,<sup>37</sup> as they seemingly justify colonialism and paternalism in order to emancipate supposedly primitive or backward others.<sup>38</sup> Anarchists criticise the political epistemology of Leninist vanguard politics because it reduces the working class to mere clients of the vanguard party’s leadership, who are supposedly best equipped to efficiently guide the masses to the predetermined revolutionary goal.<sup>39</sup>

As mentioned in the discussion of anarchist virtuous practices, imposing targets on diverse, goods-rich social activities can have corrupting impacts on those social activities. Despite different social practices having different resources, rules and discourses, whether it be maintaining an allotment (or community garden), being a member of an amateur sports team or engaging in domestic cookery, they are all rich in virtues like collegiality, benevolence and developing practical and theoretical wisdom, though the priority of each virtue alters within different practices. However, in order to make the utilitarian calculation, the diverse values embedded in different social practices have to be reduced to a single exchange value, so that radically different activities and diverse, irreducible benefits can be traded off. Virtues, for a utilitarian, only become relevant if they can be *cached out* in terms of social utility.

There are sub-divisions within utilitarianism based on the difference in the desired social ends: maximising pleasure or, for negative utilitarians, prioritising the minimising pain, or for preference utilitarians, the satisfaction of desires (even if they cause personal discomfort). Utilitarianism fails to attend to the questions as to what should people find happiness in? Or what sorts of preferences deserve to be satisfied? As Robert Nozick’s anti-utilitarian thought-experiment of the *experience-machine* indicates, there is much more to moral decision-making than the meeting of particular mental states or the satisfaction of particular preferences.

Nozick imagines a situation in which people are given the free choice to have ‘any experience you desired’ but in reality you were ‘floating in a tank, with electrodes attached to your brain’<sup>40</sup> or to continue to live life unattached to the machine, but experiencing the hurt, frustration and despair of contemporary living. There are numerous reasons why we might, as Nozick expects, reject being plugged into the experience-machine for anything other than an experimental few minutes or for a brief moment of respite. Even though unplugged people are unhappier or unfulfilled, it seems a better model for how to live as those who are plugged-in are not active agents in the world. Nozick suggests that utilitarians have their moral account back to front: contentment and satisfaction matter because they are a product of our interactions with the world, because we have done something worthwhile, not just as a stand-alone feeling.<sup>41</sup>

Political change requires acknowledging that collective (and sometimes individual) action can make change, that there is agency. Further, it means engaging with social activities as they currently are, in all their interesting and often infuriating complexity. But in challenging existing conditions personal and collective transformation is often achieved, with people gaining new

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Bakunin, *God and the State* (New York: Dover, 1970), 32–33; 39–40; E. Malatesta in R. Vernon (Ed). *Life and Ideas*, (London: Freedom 1984), 38–47.

<sup>38</sup> M. Rammath, *Decolonizing Anarchism* (Edinburgh: AK, 2011), 33.

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, E. Goldman, *My Disillusionment with Russia*, 79 <https://libcom.org/files/Emma%20Goldman-%20My%20Disillusionment%20in%20Russia.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> R. Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 42.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 43–44.

skills, forming new relationships and developing new identities. Being a brain in a vat offers no such possibility for making material change.

## Anarchism and Deontology

Nozick advanced the challenge to utilitarianism as part of his influential advocacy of right-libertarianism (also known by supporters as ‘libertarianism’ and by opponents as ‘propertarianism’). Propertarianism and other rights-based theories popularised by Karl Popper and Isaiah Berlin were rooted in the Enlightenment thought of John Locke and Immanuel Kant. Liberalism is split into two largely rival traditions: classical liberalism (of which neoliberalism and propertarianism are contemporary versions) and modern liberalism. The former is based on the absolute priority of negative freedom (rights of non-interference) over the individual’s conscience, body and legitimate products of their labour,<sup>42</sup> although there are some notable exceptions.<sup>43</sup> From this one core, supreme principle, a rejection of coercion—it is never justified to interfere with someone unless they are interfering with you or your property (‘negative freedom’)—comes the rejection of the redistributive state. In classical liberalism relations between autonomous subjects are based on consensual contract-making.

Modern liberalism concentrates on positive freedom, the freedom to do things, to achieve life goals. It considers classical liberalism’s account of liberty to be too restrictive. For a classical liberal someone starving to death because they lack resources is suffering no restriction on liberty unless it was the result of direct interference. For modern liberals some interventions are legitimate if they extend self-development and thus increase ability to make rational choices. Thus modern liberalism prohibits slave contracts and supports some degree of redistribution to extend the life chances of the poorest, so long as this best maximises liberty over all. Given the need for redistribution it encourages capitalist production to provide wealth to redistribute. Modern liberalism is criticised by the orthodox left for its support for substantive inequalities and the corresponding humiliations these generate, and by neoliberals, for its generation of a powerful managerialist class tasked whose redistribution undermines negative freedom. Although the distinctive variants of liberalism have similar origins and key terminology, like ‘rights’, ‘autonomy’, ‘individual’, they are as Freedman notes, substantially different ideological clusters, because they surround these terms with other concepts that radically shift their meaning.<sup>44</sup>

These liberalisms developed significant support during the rise of Stalinism and the Cold War. New right versions of classical liberalism offered a critique of faltering national economies that blamed the welfare state, which found favour with economic elites. The discourse of rights and individual freedom was also attractive to social anarchists, especially in the late 1930s to the 1980s, who wanted to demarcate their tradition from the growing hegemony of—and discontent with—the oppressive authoritarianism of orthodox Marxism. For instance, the social revolutionary activist and theorist Giovanni Baldelli concentrates on principles of individual autonomy and lack of coercion, but with additional egalitarian principles of harm minimisation, at least minimal equality of welfare and thus a rejection of absolute property rights,<sup>45</sup> generating a similar—but

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<sup>42</sup> Nozick *Ibid.*; John Locke *Two Treatises on Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), esp. 285–302.

<sup>43</sup> See, for instance, S. M. Okin. *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic books; 1989), 74–88.

<sup>44</sup> Freedman, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 272–295.

<sup>45</sup> G. Baldelli, *Social Anarchism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

not identical—calculation matrix to John Rawls’ modern liberalism. Similarly, David Weick’s description of anarchism as being based on both negative freedom (what he terms ‘liberty’) and positive freedom demonstrates a rhetorical as well as theoretical commitment to liberal principles as well as socialist ones.<sup>46</sup> These follow veteran anarcho-syndicalist Rudolf Rocker who described ‘modern anarchism’ as ‘the confluence of the two great currents which during and since the French Revolution have found such characteristic expression in the intellectual life of Europe: Socialism and Liberalism’.<sup>47</sup> Rocker argues that not only can liberal principles of individual freedom be compatible with socialist principles of equality but that rights of self-ownership (‘right of man [sic.] over his own person’) cannot be realised under a system of economic exploitation which leaves the propertyless ‘compelled to submit to the economic dictation of another if he does not want to starve’.<sup>48</sup>

As liberal principles become increasingly prominent and take priority within an ideological cluster at the expense of socialist ones, then these forms of anarchism became susceptible to an organised ideological takeover by propertarians (or ‘anarcho-capitalists’), who appeared to share similar terminology but utilised it for distinctive purposes.<sup>49</sup> This was a move endorsed by the then mainstream of analytical political philosophers such as Robert Paul Wolff<sup>50</sup> and Andrew J. Simmons<sup>51</sup> who discussed anarchism in the same thin terms as a movement based on a single deontological principle: absence of coercion.

‘Philosophical anarchism’, proposed by Wolff, is based on this thin account of anarchism, with supreme value given to the autonomous individual, understood in terms of total respect for negative rights.<sup>52</sup> There are, however some versions of anarchist individualism, which whilst espousing absolute liberty for the individual, do not hold that the right of non-interference extends to property holdings.<sup>53</sup> However, for the main part, ‘philosophical anarchism’ takes propertarian positions and is largely rejected by social anarchists on a number of grounds: (1) because it supports and enhances social and economic inequalities; as a result it has (2) an inadequate account of freedom; which in turn is (3) based on a flawed account of human agency; that (4) undermines value-rich social activities; and (5) requires heteronomous, hierarchical institutions for its operation.

Propertarians and other neoliberals consider (1) social and economic inequalities in material wealth that come about through just contracts as of no concern<sup>54</sup> and to be positively celebrated as they provide incentives for greater economic productivity.<sup>55</sup> As the primary social relationship is based on contract-making and contracts invariably favour the most powerful partner in

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<sup>46</sup> D. Weick, ‘Essentials of Anarchism’ in R. Hoffman (Ed), *Anarchism as Political Philosophy* (London: Aldine-transaction, 2010), 86–97.

<sup>47</sup> Rocker, *Anarchosyndicalism*, 16.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>49</sup> There was a deliberate attempt to win over the new left to the new right by using apparently similar language but shifting its meaning; see Murray Rothbard’s *Left and Right: A Journal of Libertarian Thought* (1965–68), <https://mises.org/files/left-and-right-journal-libertarian-thought-complete-1965-19682pdf>

<sup>50</sup> R. P. Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* (London: Harper Torchbooks).

<sup>51</sup> A. J. Simmons ‘The Anarchist Position: A Reply to Klosko and Senor’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 16.3. (1987).

<sup>52</sup> R. P. Wolff. *Defense of Anarchism* (London: Harper, 1976).

<sup>53</sup> See, for instance, P. Valentyne, H. Steiner and M. Otsuka. ‘Why left-libertarianism is not incoherent: indeterminate, or irrelevant: A reply to Fried’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 33.2 (2005), 201–215.

<sup>54</sup> Nozick, *Anarchy*.

<sup>55</sup> A. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 118–120; M. Friedman and R. Friedman, *Free to Choose* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980), 145–148.

a contractual negotiation, inequalities between the two contractors are likely to widen. As a result (2), someone deprived of access to the goods necessary for survival, due to their economic circumstances (born into poverty or lack of saleable assets or skills) are still free according to classical liberals, because no one is interfering with them. To be unwillingly starved to death because of the oligarchical control of resources is for Nozickian liberals still compatible with freedom, whilst for anarchists and other socialists it is anything but.

The negative account of freedom is based on (3) a conception of the individual as the sole owner of her body (as property) and private property. Graham Baugh points out, with reference to Bakunin's critique of liberalism, the insufficiency of this account of the individual.<sup>56</sup> Liberal individualisms are based on moral subjects abstracted from the social setting—that is, agents, who have no shared concepts or language by which to enter into meaningful social practices or contracts. Instead, for Bakunin, agents are already inter-related through their historical, material circumstances<sup>57</sup> and thus have links of solidarity or pre-existing causes for mutual opposition.

The individualist account of individual freedom and corresponding deontological norms based on contract (4) damage important social practices, especially anti-hierarchical ones. MacIntyre and Michael Sandel have argued that important social virtues are undermined by reducing all human activities to transactional ones. Friendships or other inherently valuable relationships become meaningless if they were bought and sold.<sup>58</sup> Financial values crowd out other social values, like compassion and mutual respect.<sup>59</sup>

Unlike mutual aid where all partners engage because they wish to participate and gain from the experience, contracts require: (5) enforcement. The difference between proprietarians, like Nozick and anarcho-capitalists, like Tibor Machan, David D. Friedman and Murray Rothbard and groups like the Libertarian Alliance, is over whether an ultra-minimum state is required to enforce contracts, protect private property and punish transgressors, or whether private, contracted-in security services can perform this function. Minimum statist argue that a single private, protective agency is likely to become dominant in a given area as few would be willing to pay for an agency that could not protect them against a more powerful competitor. More traditional classical liberals have supported democratic, but minimal, state institutions, with strong constitutional constraints on property interference, as the best guarantor of rights protection. Nonetheless, for social anarchists it makes little difference if the armed response militia and prisons are state-run or operated by private finance; these are in themselves oppressive and hierarchical as well as maintaining unequal and damaging economic relationships.

The positive account of freedom as being more than non-interference is found in many anarchist texts, such as Baldelli, Weick and Rucker mentioned above. Others, like De Cleyre try to find a nuanced position between the two separate accounts of freedom—one based on proprietarian negative rights and commitment to private property and the other more critical. So whilst initially following Benjamin Tucker that 'Individualism supposes private property to be the cornerstone of personal freedom',<sup>60</sup> De Cleyre goes on to modify the belief, recognising the

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<sup>56</sup> G. Baugh, 'The Poverty of Autonomy: The Failure of Wolff's Defence of Anarchism', in D. Roussopoulos (Ed), *The Anarchist Papers* (Montréal: Black Rose, 1986): 107–121.

<sup>57</sup> M. Bakunin, *Bakunin on Anarchy* (Ed) S. Dolgoff (pirated edition, npl, npb, nd of Vintage, 1972), 234–236.

<sup>58</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*; M. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2012), 93–97.

<sup>59</sup> Sandel *ibid.*, 119.

<sup>60</sup> V. De Cleyre, *A Loving Anarchist! The spirit of Voltairine de Cleyre: Selected works and writings of Voltairine de Cleyre – Anarchist, Feminist, Genius* (Ignacio Press) e-book.

socialist case that free and equal access to the resources of material production are necessary for a society without economic domination.<sup>61</sup> De Cleyre's solution is to suggest that both could, at least initially, co-exist in an anarchist society with 'experiment alone' identifying which takes precedence. It is not clear which criteria determine the success of the experiment, whether it is equality, general satisfaction, productivity or respect for rights.

## **Anarchism and Casuistry**

The concern for experimentation and resistance to absolute values fits with some everyday sceptical approaches to ethical decision-making. All too frequently in ethics, responses to tricky problems are decontested by claiming that they will be resolved on a 'case-by-case basis'. This slippery phrase can be interpreted in many different ways. It might be simply about allowing an adjudicator some leeway in judgement, so as to mitigate against particular harms, which suggests a fixed set of rules still being applied in a reasonably non-arbitrary and consistent manner. It might mean allowing an adjudicator to apply different standards on a whim or a self-serving basis; it might mean applying different rules in distinctive circumstances, like De Cleyre suggests, which still raises the question of which rules apply in each circumstance and what determines which protocol to use. This latter interpretation rightly draws attention to the fact that different activities have different norms and values, as does virtue theory, but lacks the clarity for determining them.

'Casuistry' like every other major term in ethics is open to diverse interpretations and developed different theoretical tools. By and large, it suggests that the other, more standard, ethical methods share a similar epistemological flaw of starting from abstract principles derived from abstract reasoning, which is then applied to real cases.<sup>62</sup> Sana Loue's account of casuistry is to examine particular examples of a practice or a problem, then to identify the similarities and difference in the cases (typification), from which typical rule of thumb can be categorised (relationships to maxims) that form the activity and then (certitude) how consistently does following one set of principles produce the desired (or undesired) outcome. As cases diverge from standard patterns, the more likely different principles need to be applied.<sup>63</sup>

Casuistry shares much with anarchist—especially anarchist virtue—approaches. It is critical of universalism which questionably assumes that fixed, unchanging principles can be ascertained outside of the activity under consideration. Similar practice approaches and casuistry claim that you need to understand a practice before ascertaining its merits, which suggests that practitioners rather than external legislators are in the most suitable position to evaluate and make changes. However casuistry in its purest form assumes an epistemological naïvety. Typification is expected to take place without a bias towards any preference for pre-existing particular values, but this is a flawed expectation. Casuistry assumes the possibility of a value-free observer, but each individual is already socially located in sets of practices (in capitalist, gendered and racialised societies) with their own implicit and explicit ideological norms and identities. Instead of casuistry and its supposedly naïve investigator, anarchists recognise there are pre-existing power relations and values; the researcher attempts to identify these social structures that have formed them and the nature of their enquiry, in order to critically reflect on and, if need be, challenge them.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> A.R. Jonsen 'Casuistry as methodology in clinical ethics'. *Theoretical Medicine*. 1991 Dec 1; 12.4: 295–307, 296.

<sup>63</sup> S. Loue, *Textbook of Research Ethics: Theory and practice* (London: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 1999), 45–46.

## (Re)constructing an Anarchist Ethic

Western political philosophical and ethical debates for much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have largely been between either forms of consequentialism and deontology (Leninism versus liberalism for instance) or between rival forms of liberalism (modern versus classical or neo-liberalism). Consequentialist theories have enormous strengths in that they recognise the importance of ends in formulating beneficial practice, whilst liberalism is justly critical of the negative impact on individual freedom and responsibility in ends-driven policy and the importance of active participation in the world. Whilst there have been some attempts at marrying the two together through forms of rule utilitarianism, where the rule ‘respect individual freedoms’ is justified on utilitarian grounds, these invariably fail as the two opposing universalist theories necessary create an irresolvable tension. Either one ultimately respected rules (‘rule-worship’) irrespective of outcome or else one allows for violation of rules on consequentialist grounds, in which case the regulation was only hypothetical.

There is a problematic division of means and ends that is common to both utilitarian and deontological traditions in which the one can be sacrificed to the good of the other. Concentrating on consequences at the expense of methods means that internal goods corrode, whilst concentrating on means (respecting rights) at the expense of social outcomes can be negligent to the avoidable harms to others and overlooks the ways in which in the process of political action, means and ends become interchangeable. As David Lamb points out, with reference to G.W.F. Hegel, the hierarchical authoritarian Leninist party was only supposed to be the means to the end of egalitarian, libertarian revolutionary change (and the ‘withering away’ of the state). But because for Leninism the party was the sole means for effective revolutionary change, building the party became the ultimate goal replacing the revolutionary *telos*. As Errico Malatesta identified, if oppressed subjects and practitioners are reduced to just clients of revolutionary vanguards, it will create a ‘suffocating tyranny’.<sup>64</sup> Thus anarchists prioritise prefiguration, where the means foreshadow goals.<sup>65</sup>

Prefiguration does not mean just that isolated values or a specific form of social organisation is foreshadowed. As theorists of prefiguration like Marianne Maeckelbergh<sup>66</sup> and Luke Yates<sup>67</sup> indicate, it operates in multiple dimensions. These include developing political practices that try to produce in the here-and-now forms that embody anarchist values in decision-making, interpersonal relations that generate immediate shared goods as well as enable anti-hierarchical social transformation. Prefigurative approaches thus share key features with practice-based virtue ethics. Activities have to generate internal goods (virtues) and these are constitutive of a flourishing society.

Because no virtue takes absolute precedence, virtue theory is better at accommodating important features of rival theories and finding an appropriate balance between them than modern

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<sup>64</sup> E. Malatesta, *Conversations on Anarchism* (London: Freedom, 2005), 116.

<sup>65</sup> See B. Franks, ‘Prefiguration’ in B. Franks, N. Jun and L. Williams, *Anarchism: A conceptual approach* (London: Routledge, forthcoming). For a different evaluation of the pervasiveness of prefiguration in anarchist thinking see U. Gordon ‘Prefigurative Politics Between Ethical Practice and Absent promise’, *Political Studies* (2017) online version: 1–17.

<sup>66</sup> M. Maeckelbergh, ‘Doing is Believing: Prefiguration as Strategic Practice in the Alterglobalization Movement.’ *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest* 10 (2011), 1–20.

<sup>67</sup> L. Yates, ‘Rethinking Prefiguration: Alternatives, Micropolitics and Goals in Social Movements.’ *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest* 14 (2015), 1–21.

liberalism is at accommodating consequentialist principles or rule utilitarianism is at incorporating rights-based principles, such as autonomy. For rule utilitarianism must still make outcomes supreme, otherwise it is not a utilitarianism, and thus respect for rights is undermined; whilst deontology must ultimately respect autonomy, otherwise it is not a rights-based theory. Virtue theory shares with utilitarianism concerns with the welfare of others, through values such as compassion and benevolence, whilst virtues of impartial justice and integrity share with deontology commitments to respecting rights and fulfilling duties. In addition, virtues of solidarity, liberality (friendship), fairness and modesty also add egalitarian and anti-hierarchical values. As no virtue takes priority but each moderates the others, they are mutually sustaining rather than in conflict. For instance, to be truly brave involves acting wisely and with compassion; a bully or a person attacking the wrong person (however well-intentioned) is unjust and rash.

Similarly virtue approaches share many of the strengths of casuistry in that they both recognise that values and norms are dependent on material activities and recognise that values are non-universal. However virtue approaches recognise that research itself is a social practice that already has its own constitutive norms and values (as well as identities and resources), thus there is no pretence at a value-free investigation. It also highlights how similar practices tend to have shared norms and values, with significant overlap with other practices. Thus, the social organisation behind community-run gardens will share many (though not all) principles with allotment societies and these will share similar features with autonomous education collectives, pirate radio stations or co-operative maker and repair groups.

Virtue approaches are rarely explicit within anarchist texts, especially activist materials, which are generally concerned more with practical knowledge sharing than underlying theoretical reflection. But readings of activist texts (as well as more overtly theoretical texts) indicate the prevalence of virtue analysis, with criticisms of the vices of arrogance,<sup>68</sup> cowardice<sup>69</sup> and injustice<sup>70</sup> as part of the analysis of dominant, hierarchical practices but also part of movement self-critique. Virtue approaches are secondary to more pressing concerns such as providing practical advice, identifying a danger or motivating collection action. Some theorists have come closer to a more overt and systematic moral theory embracing virtue positions. Herbert Read's *The Philosophy of Anarchism*<sup>71</sup>—partly due to its concision—does not spell out a fully developed anarchist ethic, but does draw out many of the core themes identified here: the rejection of universalism, the importance of virtues and prefiguration and the possibility of developing transcendent identities and values.

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<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, Curious George Brigade, 'The End of Arrogance: Decentralization and Anarchist Organizing', *Anarchist Library* (2002), <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/curious-george-brigade-the-end-of-arrogance-decentralization-and-anarchist-organizing>; Class War 'Labour and UKIP join forces to No-Platform Class war', *Class War* 23 April 2015 <http://www.classwarparty.org.uk/labour-and-ukip-join-forces-to-no-platform-class-war/>; Paul Goodman, 'The Black Flag of Anarchism' (1968).

<sup>69</sup> See, for instance, Mark R. 'I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels by Albert Meltzer [Review]' *Bulletin of the Kate Sharp-ley Library* 36 (2003) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/vq84dr>; Ian Bone, "Tariq Ali – You're a Cunt!" 31st January 2008, *Ian Bone* blog <https://ianbone.wordpress.com/2008/01/31/tariq-ali-youre-a-cunt/>; Bristol Anarchist Federation 'Bristol Joins Actions Against Byron', *Bristol Anarchist Federation* August 7, 2016 <https://bristolaf.wordpress.com/tag/solidarity-federation/>.

<sup>70</sup> For instance, Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment with Russia* (1923), *The Anarchist Library*, 47, 60 available at <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/emma-goldman-my-disillusionment-in-russia.pdf>.

<sup>71</sup> H. Read, *The Philosophy of Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1942).



## Challenges: Post-Left and Postanarchist

As mentioned in the introduction, other competing revolutionary traditions tended to be critical of anarchism for the centrality it places on moral analysis and ethical action—yet intriguingly those seeking to move anarchism beyond socialist and labour movements are similarly critical, sharing with more orthodox Marxists a seeming rejection of moral argument. For instance, Bob Black pronounces in characteristically contrarian fashion: ‘Anarchism, properly understood, has nothing to do with standards and values in a moral sense’.<sup>72</sup> In his provocative *Anarchy After Leftism*, he criticises what he sees as ‘moralism’ within the anarchist movement, which he associates with puritanism.<sup>73</sup> In addition, Black claims that moral principles have no epistemologically justified grounds and are often just a cover for manipulation by the powerful or power-seeking.<sup>74</sup> In its place Black supports Max Stirner’s egoism as an alternative basis for ethics, locating Black’s post-left anarchism as conceptually close to some of the main forms of postanarchism,<sup>75</sup> such as those promoted by Saul Newman.<sup>76</sup>

It would be misleading to position Newman and Black as simply inconsistent amorality because both use ethical analysis within their criticisms. Newman, for instance, prioritises principles of equality and freedom (‘equaliberty’)<sup>77</sup> and promotion of ‘ethical relations’,<sup>78</sup> whilst Black criticises opponents for their ‘incivility’ and ‘dishonesty’,<sup>79</sup> whilst admiring ‘honesty’<sup>80</sup> and the importance of friendship.<sup>81</sup> A fairer account, is not that postanarchists and post-leftists dismiss morality per se (despite some rhetorical turns in this direction), but the universality of moral principles. They share Stirner’s powerful critique of universal principles as ontologically and epistemologically vulnerable and share his rejection of an underlying metaphysical human essence upon which these claims to universality are often predicated.<sup>82</sup>

Practice-based virtue approaches similarly reject the universality of values. The difference between postanarchists and virtue-based approaches is that for the latter values are a necessary feature of social practices and pre-exist any particular consciousness, with many values and norms being pervasive, whilst for Stirner they are dependent on the egoist’s consciousness alone. Egoism has the further problem of being unable to respond effectively to moral disagreements as these become irresolvable (down to simple subjective will). Egoism thus provides no critical recourse against another who favours oppressive relationships which undermine shared, virtue-rich social practices.

Sociality, which is necessary for so many productive pursuits, rests for Egoists on a voluntary union of intersecting subjectivities. These are individual encounters between individual egoists

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<sup>72</sup> B. Black, ‘Theses on Anarchism After Post-Modernism’, *Anarchist Library* (2009).

<sup>73</sup> B. Black, *Anarchy After Leftism* (Columbia: C.A.L. Press, 1997), 25–26.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 35, 39, 67, 83.

<sup>75</sup> See Black, ‘Theses on Anarchism’.

<sup>76</sup> See, for instance, S. Newman, *Bakunin to Lacan*.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–24, 144–145.

<sup>78</sup> S. Newman, *Postanarchism* (London: Polity, 2016): 41–44, 79, 144–145.

<sup>79</sup> Black, *Anarchy*, 14.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 12n2, 39.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>82</sup> See, for instance, B. Black ‘Chomsky on the nod’ *Anarchist Library* (2014) <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/bob-black-chomsky-nod>.

‘each of whom has only himself before his eyes’.<sup>83</sup> There are no social values outside of these encounters. Indeed Black seems to reject any such possibility of commonality not based on immediate subjectivity-to-subjectivity interaction as just a cover for oppression. ‘By maintaining the public image of a common struggle against oppression, leftists conceal not only their actual fragmentation, incoherence and weakness, but—paradoxically—what they really do share: acquiescence in the essential elements of state/class society’.<sup>84</sup>

However there are possible commonalities between the postanarchist/post-left approach to ethics and practice-based virtue approaches. Both Black and Newman stress a materiality to their egoism that is largely absent from other interpretations of Stirner. The Stirner they admire is not a proponent of ‘amoral egoism... [that] is indifferent to or entirely agnostic about social and economic formations... [but] assume[s] as axiomatic the need for a social matrix for individual efflorescence’.<sup>85</sup> How then is the social to be realised? One is to enter into social action without any preconditions, labels or values to see what comes out.<sup>86</sup> But this seems to fall foul of the problems of casuistry mentioned above, namely that subjects are always already socially located, with particular (albeit changeable identities) and engaged in rule-governed social relationships.

Instead, practice-based virtue accounts share with post-left and post-anarchisms a rejection of universalism but avoid the subjectivism of egoism, whilst virtue theory recognises that values exist outside of our consciousness alone and helps to shape our identities and activities. These are not fixed and capable of being transcended. Newman’s most recent text on postanarchism, which repeatedly stresses the importance of practices as sites for production of anti-hierarchical identities and values,<sup>87</sup> accepts the plausibility of contingent but core goals, and prefiguration<sup>88</sup> and shows the possibility for such an affinity. In his discussion of Sorel’s general strike, a tactic strongly associated with the syndicalism of classical anarchism, but of which Newman approves, he identifies how mutual struggle sustains and generates anti-hierarchical values. ‘While Sorel’s moralism might be a strange fit with anarchist politics, it nevertheless points to the need to cultivate certain ethics and virtues for political struggle and autonomous experience’.<sup>89</sup> What I hope this chapter has shown is that moral analysis is not strange for anarchism and that it is a characteristic of anti-hierarchical theory and practice.

## Example of Practice-Based Approaches

The practice-based virtue approach, like post-left and postanarchist approaches, rejects universal principles that can be applied objectively and dispassionately. However, it recognises that norms and values are necessarily part of social practices. Positing and imposing a universal set of guidelines for resolving practical problems outside of the activity itself (or adjacent activities) risks replicating the corrupting, managerial universalism of deontology and utilitarianism.

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<sup>83</sup> M. Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own* (1845) Anarchist Library <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/max-stirner-the-ego-and-his-own#toc24>.

<sup>84</sup> Black, ‘Theses on Anarchism’, 5.

<sup>85</sup> Black, *Anarchy*, 36.

<sup>86</sup> Newman, *Postanarchism*, xii, 35–36.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, xii, 1, 15–16, 29, 51.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 64–65.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

Discussing virtue approaches provides indicators for clarifying particular applied problems. Take, for instance, the rise of ‘no platform’ movements in response to organised fascism, racism, homophobia and transphobia. One response within and outside the anarchist movement is to support such bans on negative utilitarian lines. Others, like Matthew Wilson, describe ‘no platform’ as contradictory to anarchism’s apparent universal principles of freedom.<sup>90</sup> One solution to this apparent problem, proposes Wilson, is that anarchists are developing a different account of freedom: albeit one that is currently inadequately supported or articulated sufficiently strongly to be pervasive.<sup>91</sup>

Another solution, hinted at by Wilson, is one that establishes ethics on non-universal, but not entirely subjective grounds, but stable (but challengeable and changeable) grounds that are constitutive of social activities.<sup>92</sup> Different arenas require different types of regulation of free speech. These are not a universal or fixed set of principles but specific to that activity, which best enable that activity to flourish to maintain the mutually supporting anarchist and which enable virtues to flourish. These regulations are usually best determined by practitioners and those in adjacent (that is to say, affected) activities. So a discussion in a university seminar on political ideas requires discussion of rival, controversial viewpoints and arguments, in order to evaluate them and hone different methodologies of political analysis. This is not to say that anything goes in this venue but that different norms and values are to the fore in this forum, as opposed to a horticulture class where racist expressions can only be disruptive to the norms of good education and undermine virtues of wisdom and justice. Preventing fascists from organising is often necessary to protect goods-rich practices from being corrupted or destroyed (including the university politics seminar), whilst policing bigoted speech in every location can lead to paternalism and oppression of the already disadvantaged.

## Conclusion

This chapter has identified the centrality of ethical analysis to anarchist theory and practice and how different constellations of values identify different ideological structures of anarchism. It argues that the broader social anarchist tradition fits more easily with an anti-hierarchical, practice-based virtue approach than either the other main ethical universalist competitors of deontology and utilitarianism or rivals such as casuistry or egoism. This practice-based virtue approach is consistent with anarchism’s wider materialist philosophical commitments—including its micropolitical orientation and its critique of universalisms. It suggests ways in which anarchist virtue theory provides a strong basis for dealing with contentious contemporary problems in a manner that is compatible with broad anarchist principles and traditions.

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<sup>90</sup> M. Wilson, ‘Freedom Pressed: Anarchism, Liberty and Conflict’ in B. Franks and M. Wilson, (Eds) *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), 116–117, 123–124.

<sup>91</sup> M. Wilson, *Rules without Rulers: The possibilities and limits of anarchism* (Alresford: Zero, 2014).

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

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