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# The timeliness of anarchism

Simón Royo Hernández

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When we look at what remains of the glorious and spectacular anarchist movement, the fullness of which we can situate between the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sadness and nostalgia come over us, for it is no longer with us today. Those 100 years of anarchism saw the theoretical works of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Proudhon or Malatesta, together with practical works such as the Paris Commune or the anarchist communities in the Spain's civil war in Catalonia and Aragon. It is a pity that today there are no such thinkers and deeds as those, but it is precisely the anchoring of anarchism in those thinkers and deeds that prevents there being others like them today.

Today, however, when we look at anarchist publications and movements, what can be observed is their obsolete character, due to their focus on 19<sup>th</sup> century theoreticians and early 20<sup>th</sup> century proletarian iconography, with posters of the Spanish civil war mixed in with articles on 19<sup>th</sup> century anarchist thinkers, sometimes of laudable and didactic erudition, but resulting in political proposals that are enormously out of date, simple hermeneutic commentaries, at best, like those made in that institution of

techno-feudalism we call the university, where, as we well know, anarchism is absent.

This gives the impression that anarchist argumentation is outdated and anchored in the past, and although there are groups on social networks with as many as 20,000 members, their memes, ridiculous and superficial, individualistic punk protests, barely receive one or two interactions and no comments from anyone. Out of step then, current anarchism seems to want to educate children in the goodness of Rousseau but without delving into the thinker who promoted the idea of the good savage, whom it considers outside its political orbit and philosophical atmosphere.

There is a dogmatic closure in theoretical-political anarchism, centred on its representative nineteenth-century authors and their twentieth-century commentators, which impoverishes its discourse and makes it residual, by copying in its midst, as we have been saying, that academic exegesis of biblical origin, today eminently university-based, centred on hierarchising the discourse on the basis of authors sanctified by devotees of mutually exclusive churches. The same thing that happens to the Spinozists, the Kantians, the Marxists, the Aristotelians, not to say the Christians or Muslims, who are stuck in their philosophical or religious provinces, questioning dead thinkers in order to say on their giant shoulders the things of dwarfs, happens to the anarchists.

Thus anarchism, like those other cults, finds itself in a state of zombie political movement; it moves, yes, but it is not alive, for its vitality was exhausted in those hundred years we mentioned earlier and now it only seems that what exists is a cult of the mummies of its Egyptian past.

Anarchism was born as a well-established political theory in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, together with its praxis as a political movement, but only as a theory can it be revitalised, hence the nineteenth-century anarchist thinkers, well learned, must give way to the anarchist thinkers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, just as the iconography and art of the anarchism of the past would have to take on the appearance of

Updating anarchism is tantamount to igniting the future, burning that future determined by capitalist globalisation which implies its decline. It requires an openness of the anarchist movement of such an order that it embraces everything anarchist that has happened in the history of humanity, thus permeating all current anarchist approaches and all future anarchist prospects.

today's art rather than continue to use proletarian posters from the Spanish civil war.

The cure for zombie anarchism, the antidote, lies in a break with the way of looking at what, theoretically and practically, it meant to be an anarchist. To be an anarchist today does not mean belonging to the CNT, even if that syndicalist institution is friendly and conducive to us and we are very much in agreement with its postulates; because today, to be an anarchist, is more and less than being a militant. We can already say what it means: to be guided by the principle of *an-arkhé*.

If the search for the *arkhé* (principle, foundation, government, command), according to the triumphant and dominating tradition, initiates philosophy and with it the expropriation of common reason, equality and freedom of expression and understanding, by taking up the position of its refusal, in a situation of *an-arkhé*, rejecting all principles, foundations, government, command, hierarchy, one is already in the position of anarchism. Thus it becomes a movement that now crosses horizontally all social classes, all cultures and retroactively, all the past.

Not only did the great nineteenth-century anarchists take this position, that of ontological anarchism, but from the prehistory of mankind and throughout the history of philosophy, as well as in our own day, one can trace the anarchist or anarchising position, which can be found in many authors, even in those whose work as a whole has been opposed to it, if one reads them carefully.

Anarchism, thus considered, is no longer a doctrine, confined to certain political institutions or to specific authors, nor is anarchism, thus considered, something proper to the aristocracy of the proletariat, which surpassed the Marxists as the most cooperative and libertarian. Thus it ceases to be a dead object of history for historians and regains a life that had been taken away from it.

Plato is an anarchist when he says: "if there were to be a State of good men, there would probably be a struggle not to rule, just as there is now a struggle to rule" (*Republic* I, 347d), just as Rousseau

is an anarchist when he says: “The first man, who, after enclosing a piece of ground, took it into his head to say, “This is mine,” and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. How many crimes, how many wars, how many murders, how many misfortunes and horrors, would that man have saved the human species, who pulling up the stakes or filling up the ditches should have cried to his fellows: Be sure not to listen to this imposter; you are lost, if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong equally to us all, and the earth itself to nobody!” (*Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Part II, first paragraph) Plato, taking into account his work as a whole, would be a kind of pre-Marxist socialist or communist, while Rousseau, taking into account his work as a whole, would be a kind of social democrat or republican, according to the most usual categorisations.

Anarchism is thus neither a doctrine, nor a syndicalist movement, nor a particular philosophy of one or more nineteenth-century authors, nor is it a definite political stance, although all this may derive from it and although it has manifested itself eminently in famous authors and in egregious political movements, but anarchism today is a topology, that is, it is a place outside space and time, a utopian position. Landauer would have called it atopic, a position that can be found in the present, in the past and in the future, feeding back on itself as it is actualised.

Thus, we already find the anarchic position in classical Greece, but it can also be traced in prehistory and in other cultures; we find it in the anarchising aspects of the works of writers, artists, scientists, poets, who are not regarded as anarchists given the exegesis of their works as a whole by their own confraternities, but who were so at some point or at many moments that can be rescued and retraced. There is an urgent need for a History of Anarchic Philosophy, ranging from the Cynics of ancient Greece to the Sufis of modern Iran, from Zenon of Citium to Omar Khayyam and beyond.

We now have in contemporary thought some anarchist authors and others who already dare to openly and directly thematise their anarchism, which often leads to ostracism, indifference or derision among their envious and jealous academic colleagues, but the new anarchist philosophical theorising has yet to hybridise and co-operate with the traditional anarchist political movement. The recent publications of Catherine Malabou or Donatella Di Cesare, of Andytiás Matos or Jordi Carmona, have yet to find translation into a more sharable language: we theorists must become more militant and abandon our ivory tower, and the politicians must study more and abandon their constant militancy, all in order to join together in a theoretical-practical anarch-action that will put anarchism back in the place it had in the century we have mentioned above.

Tomás Ibañez has been one of the few voices in Spain who has adopted this double praxis, because in reality, both thinking and doing are an act, advocating an anarchism in movement that is characterised by its openness instead of sticking to its nuclear tradition. Theoretician and militant at the same time, he is an example; he has not hesitated to present Foucault, Deleuze or Castoriadis, as anarchist thinkers.

Of course we are interested in maintaining a constant anarchist position, but to be anarchist today and to remain anarchist, the anarchist cannot limit her/himself to what anarchism has been circumscribed to in the history books of ideas, nor to the anarchist practices of the laudable institutions that under that name still fight and act from a marginalised social place and against immense opposing forces.

It is all very well, of course, to be a member of one anarchist organisation or another, or to abound in the thought of one or another of the specifically anarchist thinkers, but if this nucleus is not enriched by an enormous openness and plurality, it will become obsolete and cloistered, making it difficult to keep up with the times.