

Anarchism & Human Rights

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Anarchism is perhaps the least understood of the major political theories – particularly in American academia, though it has been and continues to be the driving ideology behind social movements all over the planet. This paper will attempt to lay out a clear analysis of the status quo and outline the basics of Anarchist thought as an analysis of that status quo, stopping along the way to make comparisons to the other major theories where appropriate. We will first examine the basic question of whether people are inherently good or evil, Secondly we will examine and debunk the claim that hierarchy and reckless individualism are “natural” and exist in all human and animal societies. Third, we will apply that understanding to social contract theory, capitalism, and the free market, fourth we will analyze the social contract in terms of the class system, fifth we will examine the nature and the function of the state, sixth we will examine the anarchist analysis of law and governance, seventh we will (briefly) touch upon the discussion of ends and means, and eighth and finally we will examine the international system.

The first and most basic argument that anarchists make regarding the nature of Man (and Woman) is that people are neither angels nor demons – they are people. Arguments over whether people are basically “good” or “bad” are irrelevant, since people are basically interested in advancing their own self interests. Things that serve those self-interests are perceived as “good” and things that oppose them as “bad.”¹ Therefore the Realist dialogue, which argues that people are inherently “evil”

¹ Summarized from the original argument presented by Max Stirner in The Ego and It's Own, most recently reprinted by Cambridge University Press, Mass. In 1995

because they are primarily interested in their own self-interests, is nonsensical. Self-interests may be constructed narrowly (individual only) or broadly (what is good for my community is good for me), depending on culture, class, individual choice, and other factors, but it is always self-interest that motivates people. This is not a good or a bad thing, it simply is; and any social institution that fails to recognize this will fail.

Secondly, Anarchists argue that self-interest among social beings dictates cooperation, not coercion or reckless individualism. The Realist conflict between self-interest and cooperation is based on a faulty understanding of history and human nature. In healthy societies self-interest does not dictate selfishness, it dictates cooperation. Humans are social animals, we need the love, trust, and acceptance of other humans, and the only way to obtain these social goods is to cooperate with them. The failure to understand this basic truth is one of the root causes of the alienation and misery inherent in capitalism. Hobbes and the so-called “Realists” utterly fail to grasp this simple point. Instead, they make the utterly absurd claim that absent a strong coercive state individuals will only look after themselves. This world view is best captured in the “hunters dilemma”, which Hobbes and his “Realist” disciples use as the starting point of their argument that self-interests over-rides cooperation. In a nutshell, the hunters dilemma contends that given an opportunity any rational and self-interested member of a tribal hunting party would bail out of the hunt early in order to catch the food he needs for his own family and leave the rest of the tribe to starve. Unfortunately for them, this claim is clearly contradicted by reality. Anthropological studies of actual hunting and gathering societies show very clearly that not only would that type of behavior not be tolerated, it would be suicidal. That’s why ostracization is the ultimate punishment in such societies – any individual left to their own devices will starve. Therefore the “Realist” argument for Self-help (which proceeds from the hunters’ dilemma to argue that since people are fundamentally

untrustworthy and selfish and nations are essentially people writ large, cooperation between nations should be avoided) is revealed as nonsense. In actual hunter-gatherer societies cooperation is the rule, not the exception. Further, Hobbes social-Darwinist depiction of a “state of nature” as a permanent state of war and constant fear of death is factually inaccurate; hunter-gatherer societies had and have far more leisure time – and frequently better diets - than societies using any other economic model. Finally, in regards to the social-Darwinist argument, Kropotkin proved over a century ago that cooperation is every bit as important as competition in the process of natural selection and evolution, and that since evolution occurs in groups – not individuals – Social Darwinist justifications of me-first “individualism” are absurd.² In short, the basic rhetorical and pseudo-scientific frameworks upon which Realist explanations of human nature are built are fundamentally inaccurate.³

A surprising number of writers justify hierarchy and stratification in human society by arguing that it is natural and exists in animal societies, a contention which is so widespread in western culture that it is assumed to be a truism and does not require evidence. If we stop and examine such claims, however, they unravel fairly quickly. The anarchist analysis, which like so much else originates with Kropotkin’s work as a biologist, argues that 'hierarchy' as it exists in non-human animal communities is a fundamentally different phenomenon from hierarchy in human societies since (a) much of the time it

² Kropotkin, Peter. Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution. Originally published in 1902, republished by Porter Sargent Publishers in 1976. Archived on line at

http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/kropotkin/mutaidcontents.html

³ In fact, it’s worth pointing out that the vast majority of “primitive society” hypothetical situations that form the basis of “enlightenment” rhetoric and theory are based on untested, unsupported, arguably racist, and undeniably euro-centric assumptions about the nature of “primitive” societies, made by members of the European upper-class who had little or no direct contact with those societies.

doesn't actually exist and it's perception is the product of our projection: i.e., "queen" bees don't order "worker" bees around or exercise any kind of coercive authority, they just lay eggs; and (b) when it does actually exist, it is fundamentally different than the hierarchies it is used to justify and normalize. As a concrete example, wolf packs are typically dominated by an “alpha wolf”, but an alpha wolf is hardly analogous to a King. To start with, the dominance of an alpha wolf is based on a meritocracy and is an example of ‘leadership by example’ since the basis of the alpha wolf’s dominance is his fighting ability – a critical asset if not *the* critical asset for any predator. Secondly, that dominance is temporary and subject to constant challenge by other members of the pack. Third, mutual aid still functions and the alpha wolf cannot disenfranchise other members of the pack - the alpha wolf may get to eat first, but all the wolves get to eat; and in most circumstances wolf packs will even care for and bring food back to injured and older wolves that can no longer hunt. Fourth, this stratification is only one layer deep - the alpha wolf doesn't have administrators and there is no delegation of power. It's also typically a hierarchy of access (who gets to eat the best part of the kill or gets to eat first) and not a decision-making hierarchy, which is a fundamental distinction.⁴ In all cases where such hierarchies exist (they are exclusive to predatory mammals, interestingly enough) the social group is based on free association and individuals can leave if they want to, something that happens fairly frequently in most such groups and helps prevent inbreeding.

The human parallel of such natural “hierarchy” is not a king or a president, but a tribal hunter who is given respect and a seat of honor by his or her peers for his or her expertise in hunting, a skill that benefits the group as a whole.⁵ Such

⁴ Mech. David L. Alpha status, dominance, and division of labor in wolf packs. Canadian Journal of Zoology. Issue 77. pp 1196–1203, 1999

⁵ We could even argue that such intra-group status differentiation in recognition of outstanding contribution to the group is not hierarchy at all,

leadership by example is completely compatible with anarchist societies so long as it is rewarded with social capital (the respect of ones peers) and not with a granting of coercive authority over other members of the group. In short, the fact that among some types of predatory social mammals individuals of extraordinary ability are awarded status reflective of their contributions is hardly a justification for the immense and immensely destructive stratifications of wealth, power, and access that typify industrial capitalism.

The idea of a “social contract” was originated by Hobbes during the enlightenment to explain why the masses need elites, and posited that individuals decided at some point to form a “social contract” in which they voluntarily created a hierarchy and gave away their rights in return for a promise of protection. In reality, however, humans have never at any point in our history lived as isolated individuals; we have *always* been social animals, since long before we were “humans.” So the idea that somewhere in the dawn of time a bunch of rugged individuals came together and formed a social contract is absurd. We live and function in groups because evolution and the biology shaped by that evolution dictates that we do so in order to ensure the continuation of our species. Further, out of the 10,000 years or so that our species has been on this planet, we have spent the overwhelming majority of that time living in non-hierarchal un-stratified societies.⁶ Hierarchy

since in political theory terms hierarchy is generally defined as a systematic stratification of wealth, power, and access.

⁶ To be more specific, political and economic stratification is virtually unknown in hunter-gatherer societies, and those are exactly the types of societies in which virtually all humans lived up until the agricultural revolution. Even in most agrarian, horticulturist, and pastoralist societies, however, economic and political hierarchies have been the aberration rather than the norm. Tribal societies may develop limited hierarchy, but the strictly local nature of those societies prevents the kind of normalized and institutionalized stratification typical of Feudalism, Mercantilism, Capitalism, Fascism, Marxism, etc.

and stratification are violations of the social contract – not its goal.

There is limited validity to social contract theory, however, since evolution and biology dictate that we live and work in groups to advance common interests. We do not, however, give up our rights or our freedoms when we do so. Banding together in groups is useful primarily because through cooperation we can improve our standards of living and enhance our security⁷ – these being the same two reasons that all primates (as well as thousands of other species) form groups. So there *is* a social contract, but it is not unique to humans – every social animal in existence operates by it. It is thus more of a “natural law” than anything else. Any grouping that fails to meet these objectives is invalid and should be dissolved. Human rights can thus be seen as rights that a functioning social contract must guarantee to all of its participants, and Natural Laws as codes or norms of behavior necessary to safeguard those rights. These include political rights – freedom of speech, expression, association, freedom from discrimination, and the right to be directly involved in making decisions that affect your life, and economic rights such as basic guarantees of food clothes and shelter, along with the right to not have the product of ones labor stolen. Economic rights make sense because as social beings we all have a clear and present interest in the welfare of the people with whom we share our world, and it is in everyone’s interest to make sure that everyone has at least their basic needs met. The UN recognized many of these rights in much greater detail in it’s 1948 “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,”⁸ and anarchists generally agree with that declaration, with the important caveat that they do not believe that those rights can

⁷ Anarchists use a Feminist definition of “security,” which emphasizes individual security rather than the security of the State, and thus include economic well-being, freedom from discrimination, personal freedoms, and other related issues.

⁸ Archived at <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

or will be guaranteed in a world order based on nation-states. A contention that would seem to be born out by the failure of any UN member State to actually fulfill its obligations under the Declaration.

Also relevant is the analysis of Capitalism, which is viewed as institutionalized theft in which elites use their control of the means of production and distribution to systematically violate the rights of workers and steal the fruits of other people's labor. As Peter Kropotkin put it, all of the accumulated knowledge, technical expertise, physical infrastructure, and other sources of wealth are "the common heritage of humanity." No individual, social group, class, or nation can claim sole credit for bringing these things into being and so no one has the right to convert them into a means of personal enrichment at the expense of the rest of society. Likewise, none of us created the Earth, and so claiming to own land is patently absurd; individuals who attempt to assert private ownership of land are, in reality, thieves. Equal access to the common heritage of humanity is thus one of our most fundamental human rights, and the assertion and defense of human rights and natural law is thus the primary goal of Anarchist theory and action.

It is important to note that, unlike Stalinism, Anarchism does not necessarily oppose the Market as an institution. In fact there is a long and diverse tradition of Anarchism, usually referred to as Mutualism or Individualist anarchism and going all the way back to Proudhon which argues that the Free Market must be the basis of any anarchist economy. As with all forms of Anarchism, Capitalism is rejected in this analysis because it is based on private ownership and wage labor, which in the Anarchist tradition would be replaced by community-level ownership of the means of production and worker's self-management through a system of shop-floor democracy. For Mutualists and Individualist Anarchists, planned economies are seen as inherently tyrannical because whoever does the

planning gains essentially dictatorial power over the entire economy. Naturally, the debates back and forth between Mutualists and Anarchist-Communists have been rather heated. This is but one of many ongoing debates that illustrates the diversity of the movement.

The third key point within anarchist theory is its class analysis. The anarchist class analysis predates Marxism, drawing its lineage from the early socialist movement. Anarchists argue that there are three "classes," which have relevance to social change - not two. Roughly, these are the working class (which includes everyone whose labor is involved in producing and distributing goods as well as much of the so-called "service" industry), the coordinating class (which includes everyone whose labor is primarily concerned with "coordinating" and managing the labor of the working class), and the elite or "owning class," (which derives its income from its control of wealth and resources).⁹ Anarchism further contends that Marxism fails, and will always fail, because it creates a dictatorship of the coordinating class. Even if Marxist vanguards actually were made up of workers (which they virtually never are), as soon as those workers become members of government they cease being workers and become members of the coordinating class with the Party Elite taking the role of the Elite since they control the wealth of the societies they dominate. Dictatorship of the proletariat is therefore a logical impossibility.

Fourth, applying Class to the Social Contract, we see that the twin goals of economic advancement and enhanced security are the primary motivators for every group within society. Elites, after all, band together and cooperate in order

⁹ In recent years some neo-marxists have recognized the existence and importance of the coordinating class and sought to expand the definition of "proletariat" from including only urban factory workers to include all working people, which is a good thing. But Anarchists were making this argument over a hundred years ago, so we should give credit where it's due.

to enhance their own standards of living and security via their domination of the State, and non-elites tend to likewise band together to achieve these twin goals within whatever framework of common-interests their culture dictates. Since we have already established that the primary goals of a social contract are the promotion of economic goods and security for society as a whole – not an elite minority – it becomes clear that there can be no social contract between classes. The problem is that stratification and hierarchy destroys the coherence of society and leaves it fractured into smaller competing sub-societies, each with their own *internal* social contract – but without any functional contract between classes. The result is class warfare – a “war of each against all” that could never exist in a state of nature but is the inevitable result of a stratified society in which people are forced to compete in order to survive. Within the context of this ongoing class war, human rights are seen by elites as obstacles to be overcome, circumvented, or ignored. Accordingly, there can never be and will never be universal respect for human rights until the class war has been ended, and so the key issue here is how to end the class war and build a broader social contract that would include the entire society. The most obvious solution is to abolish hierarchy and stratification, since social contracts only function within a framework of common interests, and stratified social structures destroy that common interest. To return briefly to the Hunters Dilemma, no tribal hunter in any “primitive” society on the planet would engage in actions that he or she knew would bring suffering starvation and death to other members of the tribe, but members of the elite class in America and other “civilized” nations engage in union-busting, mass layoffs, and other activities that have similar results all the time. The difference is that tribal societies are bound by a single unified social contract, while industrial capitalist societies are not.

Further, if different classes are bound by separate, parallel, social contracts according to their common interests,

there is no reason for members of the working class to have *any* loyalty to the other two classes, since neither of those two classes is concerned with the welfare of the workers. As the IWW puts it in the preamble to their constitution “The working class and the employing class have nothing in common.”¹⁰ While not strictly true in the universal sense – environmental issues are one area in which we may very well have common interests (though elites seem remarkably slow to act on them) – it is absolutely true in regards to economic and political issues. Class warfare is the operant reality. Contracts require freely given mutual consent, and a contract entered into under the threat of violence is null and void. Hierarchy and class stratification thus negate any possible social contract between classes and are the largest barriers in the way of human rights. From this perspective the only possible relationship between members of the working class and the Owning and Coordinating Classes¹¹ is warfare and violence. That violence may be manifested as direct repression or as systematic and structural violence, but it is *always* present. The division within anarchism over nonviolent vs. violent tactics revolves around which means is the most effective for opposing the violence of the elite-controlled State, not whether the State itself is violent. All schools of anarchist thought begin with this basic realization that hierarchy and stratification are predicated upon systematic violence.

Fifth, in regards to the role and behavior of the State, Anarchists agree with Realists that it is a fundamentally self-serving, untrustworthy, and violent institution. However,

¹⁰ Archived at <http://www.iww.org/culture/official/preamble.shtml>

¹¹ The Owning and Coordinating Classes operate in an unequal alliance with the owning class in the dominant position under Capitalism and the Coordinating Class in the dominant position under Fascism and Marxism. Under liberal Capitalism the coordinating class serves the interests of economic elites, whereas under Fascism and Marxism (as well as Mercantilism and Feudalism) the owning class served the interests of political elites. In all cases, however, the two operate in alliance.

anarchists argue that this is not because States are accurate reflections of human nature writ large, but rather it is the result of the structure of States as an institution, and the means used by States to achieve their ends. All state power is predicated upon coercive authority, specifically its ability to inflict violence at will within the territory it claims, and to provide a sufficient threat of retaliatory violence against its neighbors to ensure that they do not attack that territory. This goes back to Max Weber's classic (and widely accepted by all major schools of political theory) definition of the State as a "monopoly of the legitimate use of [physical force within a given territory](#)".¹² States have other functions, of course, but the monopoly on violence is the States sole unique – and thus defining – characteristic, since other institutions can and do carry out all of its other functions. It is this monopoly on violent coercion that allows the State to grant "security" by guaranteeing that within its claimed territory no other individual or institution can perpetuate violence without the States permission. Since, as we have established, States are always and everywhere dominated by Elites (the owning class); the inevitable conclusion is that the State, in its essence, is an instrument of warfare administered by coordinators and run by elites to dominate workers.

This reliance upon coercive authority is not unique to the State; it is a common feature of all hierarchal institutions and especially of those hierarchal institutions predicated upon economic stratification. As James Madison argued during the constitutional convention, "the primary role of government [meaning the State in this case] is to protect property from the

¹² Weber, Max. "Politics as a Vocation." *Politics*. Published 1919. The caveat "legitimate" use of force is used to refer to the need for states to gain "legitimacy" by being recognized as such by other states, a convention which dates to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1649. Weber went on to argue that "if no social institutions existed which knew the use of violence, the concept of "state" would be eliminated, and a condition would emerge that could be designated as 'anarchy' in the specific sense of this word".

majority."¹³ Meaning that the most fundamental role of the State is to prevent "we the people" from redistributing the wealth. Since we have already established that the goals of the social contract are to enhance security and promote economic goods for *all* participants, and since the State has as its primary goal the maintenance of a fundamentally oppressive social order, it becomes clear that even if there could be a social contract between classes, the existence of States would negate it. States are thus parasitic and oppressive institutions, which dominate Nations and use Nationalism and Patriotism to artificially conflate the interests of the Nation and the State, drawing off critical resources from the majority of the nations population to serve the interests of ruling elites. Since being subject to the arbitrary violence of States is a direct threat against the security of the majority of society, States - and all other hierarchal and stratified social institutions - are illegitimate. This is just as true in a (totally impossible) idealist Marxist State, which distributes all political and economic goods with complete equity as it is in capitalist States, since both allow the Elite to exercise coercive violence against the majority.

States serve elites. To a limited extent they may also serve the interests of the coordinating class, but they will always and everywhere serve the interests of elites first. The term "populist government" is an oxymoron. At best the elites who run the State may recognize the threat of active independent popular movements to the status quo and make whatever token concessions are necessary to undermine and defuse those movements; and - at such a time as those movements cease to be a threat - the original status quo reasserts itself and the "reforms" are rolled back.¹⁴ At worst,

¹³ as quoted by Noam Chomsky. (Chomsky, Noam. [For Free Humanity, For Anarchy](#). 1995)

¹⁴ It was, after all the threat of a socialist revolution that forced FDR to implement the New Deal, co-opting elements of the socialist platform. Now that the cold war is over and socialism is no longer a threat, we are seeing

Elites use state terrorism to confront and destroy such movements. “Democracies” are a bit more likely to attempt cooption before resorting to repression, but when push comes to shove they can be every bit as repressive as any other type of State. Liberals have it half-right, the State is the forum and the playing fields within which different factions of the ruling elite compete for control - and may on occasion even become a forum for non-elite interest groups if those groups pose a significant enough threat to the interests of elites or in some way serve the interests of elites - but it is far from a level playing field. In the long-term its actions always serve the elite to the detriment of all other sectors of society.

Since all States – regardless of ideology – are inherently oppressive, attempts to seize or reform them are pointless. For Anarchists the core issue is hierarchy. Any institution which gives decision-making authority (and particularly coercive authority) to people who are exempt from the consequences of those decisions and/or who make those decisions without the explicit and active involvement and approval of the people who *are* impacted by them is illegitimate.¹⁵ In order to create a unified social contract and create the conditions in which everyone can enjoy human rights, physical security, and

the last remnants of the New Deal being stripped away. The goal was never to create equity; it was (in FDR’s own words) to “save capitalism.” The same phenomenon is underway in Western Europe as well, as evidenced by the current dismantling of Social Democracy by European elites.

¹⁵ This is why Anarchists were so involved in the Anti-globalization movement. While progressives object(ed) to the WTO/IMF/WB/etc because of concerns about sovereignty and the demise of protectionist trade policies, Anarchists primary objection was that it creates a new level of hierarchal organization which was even less accountable than traditional States. In the words of one of the so-called “black bloc” anarchists in Seattle, the issue was that the WTO is “making decisions that affect my life without even asking for my consent or input, and I don’t care if I like those decisions or hate them, it’s the fact that they’re making them at all that I object to.” The issue is hierarchy. ([Breaking The Spell](#), Pickaxe Films. Eugene, Oregon 2001.)

economic goods, the State itself must be abolished and replaced by a non-hierarchal form of governance.

Our sixth point, the issue of governance and Law, is typically a sticky one for anarchists, and there is significant diversity of opinion on the subject. All anarchists, however, agree that hierarchal, centralized, and authoritarian systems are clearly untenable, and seek to abolish and replace them with systems that provide much stronger guarantees of individual liberty. In classical Anarchism this led to the complete rejection of what Emma Goldman called “man-made laws”¹⁶ (as differentiated from “natural” laws), and in general terms that is still the majority position within the movement today. In order to understand this position, we must first analyze the role and function of law in a hierarchal society. In a nutshell, States make five kinds of law, these being policy relevant to the regulation of the economy, policy relevant to the regulation of the state bureaucracy itself, laws for the protection of private property, laws relevant to the enforcement of “public morality,” and laws intended for the selective enforcement of some natural laws. Policy makes up the vast majority of the “laws” on the books in most states, and is also the easiest to dispense with. Since Anarchism eliminates the state and its bureaucracy entirely law related to the running of that state become irrelevant. As to economic policy, since Anarchism empowers communities and workers to exercise direct & democratic control over the economy and set policy according to their own needs, values, and priorities this entire realm of law can be considered accounted for. This leaves laws for the protection of private property, public morality, and natural laws. For the purpose of clarity, we will deal with these one at a time.

First of all, the protection of private property and the maintenance of a hierarchal, stratified, and class-based society

¹⁶ Goldman, Emma. “Anarchy: What it Really Stands For.” [Anarchism and Other Essays](#). Dover Books. New York, NY, 1969.

is one of the most fundamental functions of Stateist law, and in a very real way is the supreme social “good” that States deliver to the elites they serve. We have already established, however, that this division is a fundamental violation of the social contract and of the human rights of the vast majority of the population; which leaves us little choice but to condemn such laws as oppressive and actively seek their abolition. In other words, the main purpose of Stateist Law is the violation of Natural Law, and if we respect the latter we must oppose the former.

As for the enforcement of moral codes and standards, Anarchists argue that morality must be determined within communities and by individuals themselves, and that attempts by nation-states to impose moral values are inherently repressive. The brutal track records of states all over the world that have used “morality” as an excuse to persecute women, queer people, religious minorities, and others is a testament to how fundamentally untenable this type of law is. Accordingly, Anarchists would abolish it entirely and allow individuals and communities to set their own moral standards according to the dictates of their own consciences.

The third category, Natural Law, refers to basic codes of conduct that are observed in all healthy human societies and includes all of the basic guarantees discussed earlier in reference to human rights. Basic things like prohibitions against murder, rape, abusing the defenseless, etc. all fall in this category, as do prohibitions against the violation of all the human rights listed earlier. In reality, far from protecting people against such abuses, states are typically the worst offenders. As evidence, in the last century over three times as many people were killed by the actions of States acting within their own borders as in warfare between States.¹⁷ As discussed earlier, States – far from being granters of security - are

¹⁷ Rummel, R.J. “War isn’t this century’s biggest killer” Wall Street Journal. July 7, 1986

actually the most clear and present danger to the security of the populations they dominate. From an Anarchist perspective, the fact that Capitalism, Marxism, Fascism, and other hierarchal forms of governance violate these basic natural laws as a matter of course is sufficient grounds to oppose such systems, and for some anarchists even legitimizes the use of revolutionary violence in order to oppose the systematic violence of such systems. In this analysis, no hierarchal system of governance can actually implement the rule of law since in the final analysis they all rely on the use of violence and coercion to maintain their power, thus violating natural laws and the fundamental rights of the people under their rule. Anarchism, far from being opposed to “law,” would therefore be the most lawful form of governance.

Within an anarchist system, placing ultimate decision making authority in the body politic itself (as opposed to in the hands of a ruling elite) safeguards natural laws and sovereignty. This is accomplished through the use of a directly democratic system of governance based on local autonomy, confederation, and mutual aid. Some forms of social anarchism, notably AnarchoSyndicalism, utilize recallable delegates and workers councils for the purpose of working out compromises between groups with differing views, but (unlike in a hierarchal “democracy”) the final decision is made by a popular vote of all those affected. In this way large numbers of people can resolve contentious issues without creating a split between rulers and ruled and the basic integrity of the social contract is preserved. The very fact that so many people are involved and must be persuaded (through free and open debate in a community-owned media system which provides free and open access to all factions) of the rightness of any policy enacted provides a critical safeguard against the enactment of policies that contradict natural laws. It also ensures that – unlike in hierarchal societies – law must be written in clear, and easily understandable language, and prevents the creation of a class of lawyers whose sole function is to interpret and

argue the details of an arcane and incomprehensible legal system. The difference between an Anarchist system of governance and a State is somewhat akin to the difference between a standing army and a militia – they server similar functions but are worlds apart in terms of operation.

The specific mechanics of how this or that anarchist political system operates (there are literally dozens of models) is less important here then the key defining features that they all have in common – egalitarianism, direct democracy or consensus, local control, freedom of association, non-hierarchal organization, and mutual aid. Any social system that meets these requirements can be accurately classified as Anarchist, regardless of the ideology of its members. So it is that contemporary writers are able to describe groups as different as the Amish in Pennsylvania, the historical governing structures of the Iroquois League and Mohawk tribes in North America, and the Nuer tribes of North Africa as Anarchist. Despite the considerable differences in world view, values, economics, decision-making structure, economy, and geography; all these groups are Anarchist because they share a common understanding of Law as something that is organized in accord with natural principles and which is best implemented through consensus in a community of equals, rather than through coercion by an unrepresentative and authoritarian State.

The final and most critical point in the Anarchist analysis of governance and law is that since hierarchal systems (and nation-states in particular) are fundamentally violent and repressive institutions whose very existence is predicated on their ability to inflict suffering and death, they are manifestly unfit to enforce any law worth enforcing. In the final analysis, all State power can be reduced to the power to inflict violence on those who do not bow to the State’s demands, and since the most fundamental natural law is that it is unacceptable to inflict violence on those that cannot defend themselves, a respect for

natural laws demands that we begin by abolishing the State itself.

The seventh key point in Anarchist theory is the discussion of ends and means – and of the role of morality in politics. Realists and Marxists both argue that the ends justifies the means, and that they are thus exempt from moral considerations since they serve a “higher purpose” – the glory and power of the State for Realists and the “dictatorship of the proletariat” for Marxists. With very few exceptions Anarchists reject this position and argue that the means used will determine the ends reached.¹⁸ The merger of “ends” and “means” means that all Anarchist organizations are organized along non-hierarchal lines¹⁹ and that anarchists adamantly reject “vanguards.” Anarchist organizations utilize the same sort of governance structures that they would like to see employed on a global scale, relying heavily on direct democracy and using federated structures based on immediately recallable delegates to coordinate activities when and where direct democracy is not practical.

With reference to human rights issues, Anarchists make a conscious effort to use means compatible with the ends they seek to implement. As an example, Israeli Anarchists against the Wall – an Israeli anarchist organization dedicated to fighting for human rights in Palestine and the occupied territories, and which adamantly opposes the containment wall currently being constructed by the Israeli state – has organized dozens of marches, teach ins, sit-ins, direct-actions, and other forms of nonviolent protest over the last several years.²⁰ Other similar groups exist in North Ireland, South Africa, and many

¹⁸ For a good discussion of means and ends from an Anarchafeminist perspective, refer to Freedom and Revolution: The Bolshevik Experience, By Aileen O’Carroll. <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/rbr/freerev.html>

¹⁹ This is as much a matter of definition as anything else since at the point where an organization adopts hierarchal structures, it ceases to be anarchist.

²⁰ For more information, check out the wikipedia entry on them: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anarchists_Against_the_Wall

other countries. Along the same lines, Food Not Bombs, an explicitly Anarchopacifist organization, maintains a global network of hundreds of small groups that prepare and serve free vegan meals for homeless people, frequently by salvaging food that would have otherwise been thrown away.²¹ For these organizations the rejection of violence and coercive authority means a rejection of violence or coercion in their own activism, and so they seek to create change through nonviolent action. Anarchopacifism, as this trend within the movement is called, originated with Leo Tolstoy and the Christian Anarchist movement of 19th century Russia (which Gandhi cited as a major source of inspiration); and has since developed Buddhist, Taoist, and Atheist-Humanist strains.

Other organizations, such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW – which was the first American labor union to actively recruit and organize women and people of color and is still America’s largest explicitly anti-capitalist organization) – see human rights primarily in economic terms and thus seek to implement change primarily in the economic sphere. From the AnarchoSyndicalist perspective, poor people are denied their rights because they are poor and powerless, and so the best way to ensure human rights is to fight for workers rights - things like living wages, better conditions, shorter workweeks, and the abolition of the wage system and the State.²² The wobblies are also significant in American labor history because, while they

²¹ See The Food Not Bombs website for more information: <http://www.foodnotbombs.net/>

²² See the IWW website for more detailed information: <http://iww.org>. The IWW is particularly interesting because it originated as a Marxist organization but adopted an Anarchist approach to organizing and eventually became Anarchist in structure as well as the rank-and-file grew tired of all the infighting between the various Marxist factions. The final straw came when the Bolsheviks ordered their Marxist followers in America to leave the Union in favor of the A.F.L. Abandoned by their self-proclaimed leaders, the remaining wobblies re-organized the union along anarchist lines. The IWW website contains a much more detailed history along with copious source documents.

clearly focus on economic issues, they also have a long history of standing up for human rights that are not directly connected to bread and butter issues – the Free Speech fights of 1907-1917 being a classic example. In an effort to suppress unionization during this period, local governments throughout the country passed a series of ordinances banning public speaking on the sidewalk, the reaction from the IWW, the main target of such laws, was swift and furious:

“The IWW fought for free speech by exercising it, and exercising it on such a wholesale scale wherever it was threatened that the jails bulged and the streets echoed with the forbidden word until the authorities rued the day they had ever banned it. ... literally thousands of them converged between 1909 and 1912 on Spokane, Fresno, Denver, Kansas City, Duluth, New Castle, San Diego, New Bedford, and Missoula, climbing on a soapbox upon arrival and promptly lifting their voices in cussing out the capitalists ... As soon as one was carted off to jail another took his place. Sometimes vigilantes and police clawed up at platforms, trying to pull down workers reading from the Declaration of Independence. ... Taxpayers began to complain that they were feeding whole armies of jailed Wobblies. The courts became so clogged they could handle little else but free speech cases. ... [As a result of these fights] in most ... towns where free speech fights were waged, any citizen could address any assemblage on any street on any subject at any time by the end of 1912.”²³

At the more “militant” end of the spectrum, the Anarchafeminist Mujeres Creando group in Bolivia has built a network of activist women in rural indigenous villages throughout the country. When the IMF convinced the Bolivian government to privatize the water infrastructure in 2001, they activated that network to organize massive nation-wide

²³ quoted from Bayer, Richard O. Labor's Untold Story: The Adventure Story of the Battles, Betrayals and Victories of American Working Men And Women. United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America, Pittsburgh PA, 2000.

demonstrations. At one point during the anti-privatization struggle (which they won) thousands of armed women stormed several of the largest banks in La Paz, taking the bankers hostage and wrapping their prisoners in cords of homemade dynamite for most of a day.²⁴ No one was actually injured, but they scared the hell out of a lot of rich men. Other tactics included highway blockades by rural villagers, mass demonstrations, and other forms of direct action and protest aimed at preventing “business as usual” from continuing. In another classic example of direct action, during the Spanish Civil War the Anarchafeminist Mujeres Libres group objected to the treatment of women involved in the sex trade, so they led a organizing drive which unionized the prostitutes. Once unionized the prostitutes executed their pimps and converted all the brothels in Barcelona into worker-owned collectives.²⁵ The emphasis on and preference for Direct Action – that is, actions which directly achieve their goals (as opposed to symbolic protests intended to convince the State or some other agency to fix things) – is one of the key defining characteristics of Anarchist thought, and the clearest indicator of the merger between means and ends. In an anarchist ethos you don’t fight for human rights by talking about why they’re important or begging States to recognize them, you defend human rights by asserting them, and taking direct action to dismantle any institution which would suppress them. States are seen as potential threats to human rights at best and active abusers of human rights at worse. To quote Utah Phillips: “the degree to which you resist is the degree to which you are free.”²⁶

²⁴ The original article I read on the action is archived at <http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/ws/2001/66/bolivia.html>, and you can read an interview with one of the organizers at <http://www.eco-action.org/dod/no10/creando.htm>

²⁵ For more information on Mujeres Libres, refer to http://blackcat.enzyme.org.nz/mujeres_libres, or http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/ws99/ws57_mujeres.html

²⁶ Phillips, Utah. *I’ve Got To Know*. AK Press, Oakland, CA. 2004.

The eighth point is that the international system is clearly structured. Anarchists very loudly disagree with the “Realist” depiction of the international system as “anarchy.” Clear hierarchies of wealth and power mark the global capitalist system - both within nations and between them - and the system is very clearly ordered around the interests of the capitalist elite. Chomsky goes so far as to argue that at this stage it can no longer even be called capitalist since it is based on an oligarchic structure which operates in collusion with States to distort markets, fix prices, prevent competition, and control growth, it is thus a fundamentally different system than that described as “capitalist” by Adam Smith.²⁷ In either analysis the system is very clearly an ordered one. The “realist” use of the word “anarchy” to describe the status quo is thus slanderous at best and blatant disinformation at worst.

In regards to their vision of international politics, Anarchists look forward to a world-order in which Nations – and more importantly their composite communities – cooperate towards common goods through freely formed networks of mutual aid, free from the threat or exercise of coercive violence. States are seen as an obstacle in the way of this vision and must therefore be dismantled in order for it to come to fruition. The parasitic nature of states - particularly in nations where they were imposed through European colonization – is confirmed by the theory (and reality) of structural imperialism, the key common point between Anarchist and Structuralists analysis; though the two schools differ as to their interpretations of that system. The key differences between Anarchist and Marxist/Post-Marxist understandings of Structural imperialism are that (a) Anarchists apply the three-class analysis and recognize that the governments of both core and periphery nations are taking orders from the same global economic (owning class) elites,

²⁷ Chomsky, Noam. *Power and Terror: Noam Chomsky in Our Times*. First Run Features, Japan. 2002

and (b) anarchists believe cooperation between oppressed peoples in core and periphery nations is not only possible but is facilitated by the globalization of our common enemies since working people everywhere have more in common with each other than they do with the elite or coordinating classes.²⁸ Anarchists also differ from Structuralists in that they recognize culture and identity politics as legitimate and important arenas of struggle – both at the national and international levels. In the Anarchist analysis reality is consensus-based – the world is the way it is because we believe that it is. This network of agreements about how things operate (Social Infrastructure) is what shapes our interactions with each other. However, once created, social institutions become very real so simply altering the discourse (as post-modernists suggest) is not an effective means of implementing change. Culture thus plays a critical role since it is the means by which Social Infrastructure is constructed and maintained.

In reference to human rights issues in the international arena, Anarchists have multiple strategies, all of which are organized around efforts to combat the hierarchies at the core of virtually all such abuses. The first and most obvious of these is that Anarchists seeking to oppose violations of human rights abroad find indigenous anarchist group to support. In the absence of explicitly anarchist organizations, solidarity organizing is generally the preferred method. For example, The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA – a militant Afghani feminist organization) receives considerable aid from Anarchist groups in America and Europe. RAWA had originally been formed to oppose the soviet invasion, continued it's organizing after the Soviet withdrawal in an effort to oppose the Taliban, and is currently organizing against the US occupation and the warlords. Their

²⁸ This was the basis of the classical anarchist argument that working class people “have no nation” and should therefore reject nationalist appeals by elites, particularly in regards to nationalist appeals for enlistment and material support during wartime.

anti-Marxist rhetoric meant that much of the established left refused to deal with them or support them, but their communiqués and requests for assistance were freely distributed through anarchist news services and anarchists all over the world organized fund raisers and teach-ins about their cause.²⁹ Similarly, some the strongest international supporters of the Zapatista's have been Anarchists. Like RAWA, the Zapatista's do not call themselves anarchist, but the civilian end of their organizing structure is compatible with anarchist principles, as are their goals and most of their methodology. As an example of this solidarity organizing, the Workers Solidarity Movement, an anarchist-platformist group in North Ireland, has maintained a close ties with the Zapatistas since the uprising first began 14 years ago and many of their members have spent time in the jungles of Chiapas. Along with anarchist groups in Spain, Italy, and the US, they have been critical in spreading international awareness and raising support for the rebellion.³⁰

The second major tactic for Anarchists working for human rights has been to oppose neo-imperialist policies in the core nations where they originate. The misnamed “anti-globalization” movement³¹ is perhaps the clearest example of this. It was Anarchists who formed the core of the organizing

²⁹ As evidence, a goggle search of A-Info's, the Internet's largest Anarchist news service, revealed 66 articles by and about RAWA from 1999 (when A-Info's started archiving it's posts) to 2005 (when the first draft of this paper was written). RAWA's website is <http://www.rawa.org/>

³⁰ Refer to Libertarian Chiapas, an interview with an Italian Anarchist who spent 3 years in Chiapas working with the Zapatistas (http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/accounts/lib_chiapas_00.html) and Zapatista's on the March Again, written by an Irish anarchist who also spent several years in Chiapas. (http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/wsm/news/2001/zap_march_feb.html)

³¹ The movement was never opposed to “globalization” per se, rather it was and is a movement for bottom-up globalization which aims to create “networks of resistance” among peripheries in core and periphery nations. Hence the popular slogan “our resistance will be as global as capital.”

group for the WTO protests in Seattle of 1999 and who organized the Direct Action Network (DAN) that planned, organized, and coordinated the wave of mass protests that swept the country for two years after it. They deliberately chose not to refer to the networks and organizations they built during this period as Anarchist because the negative bias against Anarchism in the American mainstream would have made the coalition-building that was so critical to that movement impossible, but the decision-making structures and emphasis on direct action were anarchist in origin, and many, if not the majority, of the people doing the on-the-ground organizing for the protest movement in North America were Anarchists.³² In other countries anarchists are more or less prominent, but they have played and continue to play critical organizing roles in every major anti-globalization protest.

To conclude, the Anarchist perspective can be summarized thusly: First, people are not fundamentally good or evil - they are driven by their perceived self-interests as defined by culture, class, gender, sexuality, and other identities. Secondly, we are social beings and as such self-interest should dictate cooperation and mutual aid, not narcissistic self-indulgence and oppression. The fact that within modern industrial society self-interest has been redefined to mean “me first” is an indictment of that society, not of human nature. Third, attempts to normalize and justify hierarchy and stratification by referring to “primitive” societies and animal behavior are based on faulty science and do not stand up to even the most cursory examination. Fourth, as social beings we owe it to ourselves and each other to create a world order in which everyone’s basic human rights are respected and everyone has a place at the table of life. Class stratification and all of the other institutions that are obstacles to this must be abolished. Fifth, the State – as the most violent and repressive

of those institutions – must be the first to go. Sixth, a respect for natural law demands the systematic dismantling of Stateist law. Seventh, We cannot accomplish this task unless we use means compatible with the ends we seek, and so we would do well to employ Direct Action and act directly to achieve our goals of freedom, liberty, and equality. Eighth, the international system is clearly structured within a framework of neo-imperialism. We in the core nations have a responsibility and an opportunity to attack and dismantle that system where it is most vulnerable, and to extend solidarity to our neighbors fighting for similar goals. Freedom and human rights cannot be imposed; they must be fought for and won by the people who wish to exercise them.

In the final analysis this paper cannot claim to provide definitive answers. No one can predict whether the world order that Anarchism seeks will ever become reality and if the change will be peaceful (as the Tolstoyans, Mutualists, and many others hope) or violent (as the AnarchoSyndicalists and Anarcho-communists expect). What we do know is that as long as there is tyranny there will be someone resisting it, and with every such act of resistance the seeds of Anarchy are sown.

³² The author is speaking from personal experience here as a participant in the movement for over ten years.