

A CRITICAL OVERVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY ANARCHISM: A SOLUTION TO REMODELING THE SOCIETY

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Abstract

The problem of individual freedom, the authority of state and the obligation of citizens to the state have been the point of focus and debate over the years. This enigma has led many political philosophers and political gladiators within the political arena to proffer certain theories with the assurance that if logically monitored will lead to social nirvana. Within this thinking, many philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes and Lock are of the opinion that individuals will attain the highest potentials of their personality under the state and its apparatus. In contrast to this view is the traditional problem of the liberalist political theory- the anarchists who rather deny the supremacy of authority over the individual. The anarchist believe in the individual's authority over the state as both the Alpha and Omega. It is within these extremes that this research seeks to investigate backdrops of anarchist caveats, expose their political philosophy, state their attack on state property and law, its attainment to the demise of the State and recommend the anarchists moderm for remodeling the society using the critical, analytic and explanatory methods as research methodology.

Keywords: Anarchism, Philosophy, Politics

Introduction

In the course of the years gone by, the problems of individual freedom, the authority of the state and the obligation of citizen to the state have been the point of focus and attraction. Many as there are political philosophers have offered certain political theories with the belief that if logically followed will lead to social nirvana. And it is the view of many philosophers that individuals will attain the highest element or personality of their potentials under the state and its government. Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, have propounded theories entrenching the supremacy of state's function to the individual's realization of their potentials. The State is an association with a view to some good opines Aristotle. In a further vein, he holds that the individual when isolated from the state is not self-sufficient, therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole (Wolf & World Reading in Philosophy 1973:348).

Contrary to this view and in answer to the traditional problem of liberal political theory- the limits to the authority of society (states) over individual, the anarchists believe in the individual autonomy and attribute him to be both the alpha and omega of their social theory. In this regard, Robert Wolff writes" I am unable to find any valid and persuasive argument justifying the authority claimed for the state". (Wolf, 1973:349). From this, we can infer that for the anarchist, the individual freedom and

development is better assured without government. This is the idea of political philosophy called Anarchism.

But political theories such as Democracy monarchism, socialism support the indispensability of the state. Against the anarchist view, political thinkers in these theories are of the opinion that liberty, property and life are better secured in the state. All these have the state as a means to some end, and that the rights of the individuals are subsumed under the state. For a better understanding of this research paper; we will critically look into what is meant by anarchism. In exposition of the concept – ‘anarchism’, we will see the anarchists attack on the state’s authority, law and property. This paper will also show the prescriptive relevance of anarchism with a view to draw out the law strings inherent in its tenets.

What is Anarchism?

As a theory in political philosophy, anarchism has been given various definitions by different people of different epochs, but the remarkable and unifying fact there is that all the definitions boil down to the point-the abolition of the state and its paraphernalia. Anarchists’ temperament involve a criticism of society as it is, a vision of a desirable alternative society as it is, a plan for proceeding from one to the other. Macmillan Encyclopadia (1983:47) sees anarchism as “a political theory advocating abolition of state and all government authority.” Encyclopedia Americana (1985) defines it as “a theory of social organization that represents the extreme of individualism. Terry M. Perlin in his “The Recurrence of Defiance” says Anachism is anti-politics. Etymologically, the word ‘anarchism’ is derived from a double Greek word ‘Archon’ meaning ‘a ruler’ and the prefix ‘an’ indicating ‘without’. Therefore, with the combination of these two words, ‘anarchy’ means the state of being without a ruler. Derivatively, anarchism is the doctrine which hold that government is the source of most of our social troubles and that there are viable alternative forms of voluntary organization (Wolf, 1973: 412). Hence the anarchist is the man who sets out to create a society without government. It suffices to deduce here that dilating on these definitions, anarchism looks upon all laws and government as invasive, the twin sources of nearly all social evils. In most anarchists advocate voluntary co-operation between individuals than the state and laws which they see as a moral way of organizing society orderly and effectively.

Proudhon (1977:200) in line holds that, “The highest perfection of society old society is the union of order and anarchy.” From this then, care must be taken to avoid the confusion of terming anarchism as “confusion” and lawless state of affairs. Anarchists do not conceive of a society without orders but order they visualize arises out of voluntary association preferably through self-governing groups. Men for the anarchists is superior to any form of government. Man, as anarchists sees him is good. He can be

trusted without government, or at least he will do less evil without government than with it. (Proudhon, 1977:15) In the same vein, Robert Paul Wolf in his “In Defence of Anarchism” in confrontation with the traditional problem of political theory, confesses that he is unable to find any valid and persuasive arguments justifying the authority claimed for the state, the individual is left as both the alpha and omega of social theory. The old anarchy is the kingdom of the unrestrained individual, free of government. (Proudhon, 1977: 294)

Though anarchism has been an old political theory, modern anarchism started with Pierre J. Proudhon’s essay “what is Property? Other anarchists are William Godwin, Michael Bakunin, Max Stirner, Per Kropotkin, Benjamin Tucker. Meanwhile, there are many types of anarchism including individual and communal, pacifist and revolutionary anarchism etc. but this is not the concern of this paper.

Philosophy of Anarchism

As it has developed over the centuries anarchism has come to represent an extreme view of individual freedom and the possibility of social organization without hierarchy or authority. In fact, the word “Anarchism” means having no government. With regards to the first premise of anarchism- the only authority that has moral and legitimate force is the authority each gives to himself. Nobody can be constrained to do anything or perform any act unless the act is derived from his or her own independent will. Here is a question is posed: does the state have the authority to command obedience from the citizens, their own moral views notwithstanding? In answer to this, Wolf (1973: 358) reflects on what it means to be a moral agent. Thus he writes, “a moral agent must be autonomous, thinking and judging for himself, and accepting responsibility for his actions... A citizen, therefore has no duty to obey; laws, even though he may decide to obey them for self-interest or prudential reason.”

Going by J.J. Rousseau’s understanding of popular sovereignty anarchists in the twentieth century have argued that the individual’s right to legislate for himself is inalienable, it cannot be delegated. According to Rodee (1973:348), “The administration of law may be delegated, but not the making of law. Legislation and policy making are the exclusive right of each individual as he or she reflects on his or her own interest and needs” The anarchists accept the social contract in a particular way which he believes to be the way most justified by reason. For the social contract in Rousseau’s perspective guarantees the surrendering of each individual’s will for the common good, with the view that is only in this way that the individual’s will can be safe-guarded. But Liberty and order which dominates the anarchist ideal society. But order for the anarchist is not something drawn from above. It is a natural order and is given self-discipline and voluntary co-operation. Having drawn these differences, it is the anarchist’s position that the state (government) is a usurper of right over individual liberty, natural and tends towards diminishing the value of man in society. Against this background Proudhon (1977: 351) declares that “to be

governed is to be watched over, inspected, spied on, directed, legislated over, regulated,... ordered about by men who have neither right or knowledge nor virtue ... that is government, its justice, its morality.”

For the anarchists, the autonomy and freedom of individual cannot be compromised for the imposition of the state. For states and laws in the first place are enemies they hold. For them, freedom is not something to be decreed and protected by laws and states. It is a thing to be shaped by oneself and shared with one’s fellow man. On this rests the different spectrum of anarchists, beliefs or opinions which is unanimous. In that regard, another anarchists William Godwin (1971:861) supports this attack to demonstrate the loathsomeness of state to the anarchists, “the anarchists see government as oppression which finds its highest perfection in the degradation and dehumanization of man in society. It is in this that promoted winstanley to declare: “Everyone that gets an authority into his hand, tyrannizes over the others.”

As for constitution in politics, the anarchists have continued to regard the ad fixed and guaranteed political system which edify the State and institutionalize the exercise of power, which should be replaced my economic and social organization on the basis of free contractual agreement between individuals. With regard to the question of conflicts between individual and state, the anarchist is of the view that the abolition of the state and its agents are necessary because they assume that is every citizen would be up to appreciate the beauty and harmony of laws inherent in nature, he would be as an enduring one. For the anarchists, democracy has the form of anarchism that is, going by its ideals nature whereby every citizen is autonomous and is party to every legislation. But with modern Anarchism the right of individual living in democracy where individuals have delegated authority, you no longer have a democracy. This is contained in Reed’s (1974:16) view that “to them democracy has to do with individual autonomous liberty. Under a state the individual’s liberty is determined by the state.”

The Anarchist noted that the mistakes of every political thinker from Aristotle to Rousseau have been due to their use of the abstract conception of man. Their system assume the substantial uniformity of this creature of their imagination and hence propose various forms of authority to enforce uniformity on man. Nevertheless, against this theorists, the anarchists recognize the uniqueness of the person, and only allows for organization to the extent that the person seeks sympathy and mutual aid among his fellow. To this effect, Reed (1974:17) writes that “In reality therefore the anarchists replaces the social contract by functional contract, and the authority of contract only extended to the fulfilling of specific function.

Anarchists’ Attack on Property and Law

Anarchism frowns at property and its attack on property is a corollary of the glaring gigantism and the impersonality of modern state. The state (ad its agents) are viewed as inhumanity of man against man, and as a means to achieve supremacy over others in the bid to exploit and protect the position of a class against others. Proudhon’s book

What is property? is explicit about the attack of anarchists on maintain it against the good sense and just feeling inherent in humanity” (Proudhon, 1979:18) Thus, for the anarchists, law-civil code in each country serves no other purpose than to maintain this appropriation, this monopoly for the benefits of certain individuals against the whole of mankind. In anarchists’ condemnation of the law, it is their position that a great many of our criminal laws have the same objective in view- to keep the workman in subordinate position towards his employer, thus affording security for exploitation. Thus because of this exploitation and of the monopolists through appropriation of human labour, the anarchist calls for the extinction of their existence and advocates for a social revolution to put an end to them.

In this attack on the state and its position on wealth, Franz Oppenheimer in Zinn’s book points out two mutually exclusive ways of acquiring wealth. One is through the production and exchange which he calls “the economic means”. The other which does not involve productivity is “the seizure of another’s good or service by use of force and violence” (Zinn, 1979: 17). This he calls the method of one sided confiscation or theft of the others property. This is the method which Oppenheimer termed “political means” to wealth. For him the former (economic means) is natural path for man whereas the political mean is coercive, exploitation contrary natural law, it is parasitic. Hence he explains further, “For instead of adding to production, it subtracts from it. The “political means” siphons production off to a parasitic and destructive individual, or group,... it also lowers the incentive to produce beyond man’s own existence. In the long run, the eliminating the source of his own supply ... (Zinn, 1979: 20).

Anarchists Society: Alternative to the Demise of the State

The concept of society without government is essential for an understanding of anarchism. In his criticism of political society as it is, the anarchist has a vision of a desirable alternative society and means of achieving it. If government is undesirable as shown through the explanation above and the means to abrogating it, the question then is, what is the alternative means of human organization that will enable us to live without state? To this question Kropoktin (19:111) argues “that far from thriving on competition, natural selection sought out the means by which competition could be avoided and those means he calls “mutual aid”. Again, anarchist opponent possess a critical question thus: what happens to the characteristics of a state (like modern state boundaries- rivers, seas, mountains, military treaties, etc)? How could boundaries between states (societies) be determined if there should be no state? To the anarchists, he would suppose to ignore these boundaries or abolish them. Human beings will voluntarily associate themselves into groups for mutual aide, voluntarily organize an economy which assures the satisfaction of their needs. This principle, the anarchists make the foundation of their social order and upon which they believe they can build a democratic from of society which Rousseau felt was reserved for the gods.

This arises from the anarchist believe in the inherency of natural law in man's nature which urges voluntary co-operation- the basis of society. By this, anarchist are really trying to find out a solution caused by the alienation that contemporary world because of its vast organizational ramifications has led man to being isolated among the masses of his follows. What has happened according to anarchists is a kind of "polarization- the state has taken over from the individual the communal responsibilities that once gave his personal life the extended dimension of fellowship both in the local setting and ins the world in general. The anarchists will also advocate the principle of decentralization in order to eliminate the distance which authority places between individual men. For the anarchist the basis of this principle of decentralization is the view that what characterizes the state, apart from its foundation on authority and coercion, is the way in which it cumulatively centralizes all social and political functions and in doing so put them out of reach of the citizens whose lives they shape. Hence men are deprived of their freedom to decide on their own futures, consequently, they lose their sense of purpose. Some people are cautioned by wealth and privilege.

For this reason, the anarchist proposes necessary basis for any transformation of society, the breaking down of gigantic impersonal structures of the state and of the great corporations that dominate industry and communication. Instead of attempting to concentrate social functions on the largest possible scales, which progressively increases the distance between the individual and the source of responsibility even in modern democracies, we should begin again from the smallest practicable unit of organization, so that face to face contacts can take the place of remote commands and everyone involved in an operation cannot only know how and why it is on, but can also share directly, either as a worker or citizen. Such an attitude according to Woodcock of course implies the activity of the functional groups into which society divides itself will be voluntary. For the anarchists, this has a pragmatic analogy seen in the voluntary organization that already exist and seeing to what extent they are capable of becoming the units in a democratic society e.g. trade unions, syndicates, professional unions all those groups which crystallize around a human function.

As a solution to modern democracy, the anarchists, propose what is known as decentralization via federalism. Decentralization for the anarchists does not mean fragmentation as critics will bring against anarchism, rather to the anarchists, it means the strengthening of social bonds and social virtues by reinforcing relationships at the most basic grass root level. In their defense, Sam Dolygoff (1977: 112) writes: "Decentralization and autonomy does not mean the break-up of society into small isolated economically self-sufficient groups, which is neither possible nor desirable. Here there is a reversal of state power. The most important units of society in their view is that in which people co-operate directly to fulfill their immediate needs. The

basic nuclear unit appears in various forms to the anarchist writers. Godwin calls it the 'Parish', Proudhon calls it the 'Commune', while the syndicalists call it 'The Workshop'. The name matters very little, the fact of direct collaboration and consultation between the people most intimately involved in a phase of living is the important thing.

In the pre-industrial era, libertarians writers like Proudhon and Godwin never saw social co-operation and organization beyond the house, street, village and the community. But with the advent of industrial Revolution and modern technology modifications are made to take care of larger areas and to meet up with the complexities of societal organization. In essence what this means is that libertarians (anarchist organization) must reflect the complexities of social relationship and promote solidarity on the widest possible scale. It can be defined as Federalism: that in co-operation and co-ordination through free agreement, locally, regionally nationally and internationally as different from the federalism of the federal constitutions of America, Canada, Switzerland, Nigeria, etc, which has a monolithically centralized state machine with the corollary of centrifugal tendencies of a decentralized society. As against the question critics pose; how can anarchism cope with the vast technological development as its federalism lack the potency of the state to organizes with sanctions.

Anarchist will respond to this, citing bourgeois' economists, sociologists and administrators like Peter Drucker, Gunner Myrdal, John Kenneth and others who now favours a large measure of decentralization not because they suddenly become anarchists but primarily they suddenly became anarchists but primarily because technology has rendered anarchists form of organization "operational necessities". Sam Dolgoff has argued that "the bourgeoisie reformers have yet to learn that as long as these organizational forms are tied to the state or to capitalism, which connotes the monopoly of political economic power, decentralization and federalism will remain a fraud- a more efficient device to enlist the co-operation of the masses in their own enslavement (Kropoktin, 1977: 113).

Again, the anarchists are grateful to modern communications technology stating that communication speed up direct communication of self governing unit. They maintained that facilities such as tape libraries, computer Laundromats closed television and telephone circuits, communication, sterilities and a plethora of other devices are making instant direct communication of a world scale accessible to all. According to the anarchists, "this will make face to face democracy a corner stone of free society. In conclusion of this section, Schiller's defence of anarchism readily project anarchism's fame against the state bringing anarchism to its conclusive understanding thus "it is thus, that concrete individual life is extinguished in order that the abstract whole may continue its miserable life... at length, society weary of having a burden that the state takes so little trouble to lighten, falls to pieces and is broken up... (Zinn H, 1979: 274-275).

Critical Evaluation

Going by the analysis of anarchism one will apparently see that anarchism is the most lofty and plausible theory that remedies the flaws inherent in other theories that purport to support the supremacy of the state over the individual liberty. Anarchism in all its ramifications has to do with individual's freedom in the society. To its adherents, anarchism is grand and noble struggle against evil, a secular crusade against the debasement of self, a fight against social degradation that the idea and reality of the state seem to represent. Again, the ingenuity and originality of anarchist writers, their remedial picture of society is a blissful nirvana or paradise which an insightful and thought-reflective and provoked mind can hesitate to swallow, hook line and sinker. They believe that anarchism is a blue-print of action to a realistic conception of reconstruction and reform. Morality is the power of the sustenance of anarchism over the years, in spite of its non-realization. However, one of anarchists most cogent contributions to social theory is the proper emphasis on how political institutions, in turn mold economic life. Based on this anarchists rejects fanatical economic fatalism. Equally significant is the importance attached to the will of man, delineations of man from the shoulders of automation, the moral factors and above all, the spirit of revolt in the shaping of human history.

All these lofty pictures of anarchism notwithstanding, anarchism cannot go without flaws and loopholes. Critics have always asked: Can mutual understanding resolve conflicts that naturally exist between men, considering man's license to individual freedom? They argued that there is no enforcement machinery (government) to regulate and balance the activities of men. The society will fall back to the claws of Hobbesian state of nature. It is in this regard that critics see anarchism as "anarchy". In support of the state indispensability, Senex warns that political sovereignty can be attenuated but cannot be conjured out of existence by a revolutionary fiat... able or even willing to come to terms with the inescapable realities of political power of the state (Zinn H.1979: 275). Critics remind the anarchists that egoism is a natural tendency in man. They argue that in voluntary communism through man tries to be altruistic or dispassionate; he would unconsciously show his egoistic productivity. Also it does not seem to occur to the anarchists that a minority of scientific and technical workers would, in society. As another criticism against Anarchists, experience has proved their idea wrong. For the peculiarity of anarchism's leaders as observed is its failure to secure a popular fellowship.

Conclusion

In view of this thorough but not exhaustive work on anarchism, the paper cannot be concluded unless one or two positive remarks for anarchism. For they however often

played a reformatory role in politics- especially in the granting of certain rights to the people by government through propaganda, manifestoes, demonstrations, strikes and other forms of actions. It is also plausible in the area of voluntary organizations of the present day. In the area of alleged lawlessness and anarchy, anarchists uphold that they are peace lovers and would say they favour direct action by individuals including acts of terrorism and assassination against representatives of government that they considered oppressive such as M.F. Sadi Carnot, President of France. The present Nigerian experience has shown that government is no longer necessary. People have no confidence in the government.

In driving the purpose of this research home, we equate anarchism with political Atheism. This is founded on the basis that the anarchists simple do not believe in reality of political power. He sees national politics as essentially mythical. This paper shares the belief that in the anarchists hierarchy of values, it is the primacy of the aesthetic that is most evident. This is understood when the anarchist poet writes “what matters is the victims provided the gesture is beautiful” (Sydner, 1978:384). I further recommend as a best tool that anarchism should be used a watch- dog to check the excesses of government. In conclusion, this paper holds that anarchism in all its tenets hardly qualifies as a movement. It is a movement of imagination of real men, mundane needs only come second.

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