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# Anarchism and Moral Philosophy: A Review

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The combination of ethics and anarchism provokes a wide variety of discussion in the eleven essays that comprise this volume, which ranges widely along both academic and anarchist traditions. However, the book *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy* is aimed at a particular audience (academics), specifically ones with a background in moral and ethical philosophy. Some anarchist traditions are inclined to dismiss moral philosophy as merely another dominating ideology, but many of these writers see ethics as an important foundation of anarchist projects and moral theory necessary for finding our away out of state and capitalist societies. This book adds significant material to recent debates on whether or not anarchism provides only a political analysis. These anarchists take questions of ethics as seriously as politics and are not afraid to seek questions and answers from figures ranging from Immanuel Kant to Emma Goldman.

The book is divided into three parts: Philosophical Anarchism, Anarchism, Property and Autonomy and Alternative Anarchist Ethics. Throughout the three parts, the philosophers have to struggle with themes familiar to moral and ethical theory, such as questions of duty and deontology, ethical calculations and consequentalism and the challenge to these traditional categories by the new system of virtue ethics. A number of scholars within *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy* investigate the potential of virtue ethics (most explicitly Benjamin Franks, Thomas Swann and Samuel Clark). Franks elaborates the similarities and differences between virtue ethics and the anarchist practice of prefiguration. He leaves unexplored the question if the

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affinity between anarchists and virtue theory in part derives from both positioning themselves as the alternative: anarchism has traditionally positioned itself as the third way out of capitalism and state communism and virtue theory is commonly understood as the new the third way out of the debates of deontology and consequentialism.

Anarchism's revolutionary tradition would lead one to expect a strong affinity between anarchism and consequentialism, as the great violence and sacrifice required by revolution could only be justified by the revolutionary outcome. Interestingly, consequentalism gets little play in this book. Instead Kant, the stalwart of deontology, is investigated for anarchic affinities in Kory DeClark's essay on "Autonomy, Taxation and Ownership," and in Alex Prichard's essay "The Ethical Foundation of Proudhon's Republican Anarchism," in which he contrasts Kant's and Comte's influence on the first eponymous anarchist (89–100). This high regard for deontological claims on the nature of ethical duties may make action orientated readers suspicious.

Such suspicions should be put aside, as these writers seem to be aware of the trap of making anarchism solely an academic lens. Their aversion is in part due to the tradition of what is usually called "philosophical anarchism," exemplified by Robert Wolff's book *In Defence of Anarchism.* Wolff's argument was based on the privileged position of individual autonomy and demanded that people act out of their own ethical considerations rather than in response to authoritative pressure. As Paul McLaughlin notes, traditional philosophical anarchism results in a disengaged position that is often reluctant to make calls for ethical action (13). McLaughlin goes onto to articulate his own theory of weak but engaged philosophical anarchism (25–31) and this concern about the need for anarchism to be more than a theory in books is echoed by other writers (60–4), including Franks' theory of practical anarchism (139–42).

Philosophical anarchism is not the only school of thought that these writers define themselves against, as postanarchists such as Richard Day or Saul Newman are quoted frequently. The tension between postanarchism and anarchism primarily results from the question of how we should receive the thoughts and ideas of the classical anarchist writers of the 19$^{th}$ and early 20$^{th}$ century, in particular their idea of human nature. Swann explores this question with his essay "Are Postanarchists Right to Call Classical Anarchisms 'Humanist'?" in which he moves beyond merely quoting early anarchist writers and attempts to reconstruct the opinions on humanism and

human nature of classical anarchisms by examining the foundations of their ethical theories (232–40). Ultimately, Swann agrees with contemporary anarchist writers such as Jesse Cohn, Shaun Wilbur and Franks that the writers at the beginning of anarchism's philosophical tradition had a complex understanding of the rationality and teleology of individuals and society. This complex interplay between society and individual, Swann argues, contradicts the assertion that anarchists such as Goldman, Proudhon or Kropotkin naively believed that once government and capitalism were brushed aside, humanity could be guided by its intrinsically good nature.

But while anarchists may object to postanarchists' portrayals of classical anarchism, the relationship between anarchism and postanarchism appears amicable and intellectually fruitful. In his essay "A Well-Being Out of Nihilism: On the Affinities Between Nietzsche and Anarchist Thought," Jones Irwin concludes with saying "Perhaps the great fertility of the Nietzsche-Anarchism dialogue, in the contemporary world, derives from exactly the vehemence of both its agreements *and* its disagreements" (223). Jamie Heckert's essay is an excellent example of a similar cross tradition fertility. Drawing heavily from the agreements and disagreements of anarchist, poststructuralist and feminist thought, Heckert sketches an ethical theory in "Listening, Caring, Becoming" that places sensation and care in the forefront of what anarchism can and should offer all of us and to look for a way to move out of a world characterized by "a multitude of opportunities for intimacy lost" (201).

While poststructuralism, feminism and postanarchism appear to have an affinity for cross-fertilization with anarchism, this anthology also features essays grounded firmly in the Anglo-American analytical tradition. Analytic and continental philosophy, in stark contrast to the dialogue of Nietzsche and anarchism, often do not appear to listen to each other at all. Analytic philosophy, with its emphasis on explicit logic, rigorous arguments and clear definitions, would seem to be most suited for the disengaged philosophical anarchism of Wolff, but Matthew Wilson's "Freedom Pressed: Anarchism, Liberty and Conflict" demonstrates that analytic arguments can also be deeply rooted in lived experience and furthermore can challenge us with practical questions. In particular, Wilson asks us to consider how to resolve conflicting freedoms in an anarchist society. The gap between analytic and continental philosophy may not be as wide as it is sometimes portrayed to be. Clark's essay on anarchist perfectionism, while firmly rooted in the analytic tradition of rigor-

ous argument, also describes itself as a failed vision of an anarchist utopia (40–3). Such a self redacted narrative invites poststructuralist analysis and intervention.

Elisa Aaltola analyzes the narratives of deep ecology and primitivism in her essay titled "Green Anarchy." The inclusion of deep ecology and primitivism may appear odd at first in this collection of moral philosophy, for as Aaltola points out, both philosophies reject moral and political theories in order to emphasize ontology (168–9). Aaltola wishes to reinvigorate philosophical debate on ecology — in particular questions of the value of nature and non-human beings — and her essay does an excellent job of stating and confronting the many criticisms levelled at both deep ecology and primitivism. Nevertheless, she is not an apologist, and calls these world views to task for simplification (179) and critiques their elevation of ontology over ethical and political concerns (180). Noting phenomenology's similar emphasis on intuition and empathy, Aaltola suggests looking to and drawing on other worldviews for a more sophisticated path for these green anarchies.

This wide variety of approaches to moral theory and ethics should suggest that contemporary anarchist philosophy is full of potential. These scholars demonstrate that anarchism is flexible enough to encompass traditions ranging from deep ecology to analytic philosophy to poststructuralism. Most encouraging to me, however, is that these academics are willing to theorize about their own social position as academics (63). As more anarchists enter academia (and hopefully as more academics become anarchists), honest dialogue about what it means to be an anarchist in a university becomes more important. Anarchist theorists frequently have to face the disdain of other radical intellectuals that their tradition is not sufficiently rigorous, and it is important both to continue such intellectual work and to ensure that is not devalued. As McLaughlin notes, "Thinking is not disengagement, even if it is insufficient engagement" (21). This book encourages anarchists to follow their tradition of direct action and direct engagement even as they continue to theorize — our future depends on our thoughts *and* our actions.

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