

Introduction

We are told that the word Anarchy needs constant explanation; that whenever used in its literal sense it must be defined. Is there any other word of which this is not true? The introduction of new ideas into a man's mind is not accompanied by the use of a specially coined word, but by the adaptation of old words to broader uses.

Lucy Parsons, "Anarchism"

This book aims to provide a philosophical defense of egalitarian anarchism, more popularly known as *social anarchism*. It is certainly not the first book to attempt to defend this position; numerous egalitarian anarchists across time and place have already produced something of a canon of works expounding and arguing for the ideology.¹ However, this book stands apart from these prior efforts in that it employs the tools of contemporary analytic philosophy to construct its argument. While popular defenses of anarchism generally seek to persuade through the use of rhetoric and informal argumentation, this book aspires to provide something closer to a *proof* of its thesis, with heavy reliance on logic, the precise definition of terms, and concepts developed by academic philosophers.²

This book will also differ from canonical anarchist texts in that it defends a moral position rather than a social arrangement. Typically, anarchist texts present social anarchism as a socialist, stateless political

¹ Some influential examples include Mikhail Bakunin (1953), Alexander Berkman (2003), Murray Bookchin (2004), Noam Chomsky (2013), Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin (2021), Luigi Fabbri (1922), Emma Goldman (1911), Daniel Guérin (1970), Peter Kropotkin (1995), Nestor Makhno (1996), Errico Malatesta (1994), Louise Michel (1896), Ito Noe (2005), Lucy Parsons (2004), Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1876) (though Proudhon is claimed by many anarchist traditions), Elisée Reclus (1899), Rudolf Rocker (2004), and Charlotte Wilson (2005).

² The downside to this approach is that it will make the book less accessible to those who do not have prior philosophical training. However, the hope is that non-philosophers with an interest in anarchism will still be able to follow the broader argument even if some of the details get a bit technical.

system. They then attempt to explain how the system works in practice, appeal to moral principles to justify the system, propose strategies for realizing it, and address various objections that might call into question the viability or general attractiveness of the proposed system. By contrast, this book is strictly concerned with the moral principles that motivate social anarchists to endorse the abolition of the state and capitalism. Thus, when the book talks of “social anarchism” or “egalitarian anarchism,” it is using these terms to refer to a specific set of moral principles (to be introduced in the subsequent chapter) as opposed to a way of structuring political institutions, society, and the economy.

In addition to the so-called canonical anarchist texts, there have been a few anarchist philosophers who have employed the tools of analytic political philosophy to either explicate or defend anarchism *qua* moral philosophy. However, this book stands apart from these prior efforts in that it *defends* an *egalitarian* anarchist position. Typically, when philosophers write about anarchism, they are primarily concerned with explicating the anarchist position rather than defending it.³ While some do attempt to provide a sustained defense of anarchism, they generally argue for a more minimal version of the position that merely maintains that people are not obligated to obey the laws of the state.⁴ Or, alternatively, they defend a more expansive *market* anarchist or *anarcho-capitalist* position that assigns each person the power to unilaterally acquire a robust set of property rights over an unlimited quantity of natural resources.⁵ This posited power opens the door to a significant degree of licensed inequality, as some individuals might acquire much more property than others. Those with less would then have moral duties to respect the property rights of those with more even though doing so leaves them comparatively worse off.

Notably, this property-friendly anarchist position is not one that most self-identified anarchists would endorse. Rather, the bulk of the anarchist movement is composed of self-identified *anarcho-communists* or *social anarchists* who favor equality and reject capitalism, markets, and the private property rights on which these institutions rest. Indeed, as will be discussed subsequently, a popular opinion among these anarchists is that anarcho-capitalism – and, to a lesser extent, market anarchism – are not even genuine forms of anarchism, as they lack the egalitarian and

³ See, for example, Alan Ritter (1980), David Miller (1984), and Paul McLaughlin (2016).

⁴ Robert Paul Wolff's (1970) influential book on anarchism takes this approach. For a more recent defense, see Crispin Sartwell (2008).

⁵ See Michael Huemer (2013) and Gary Chartier (2013).

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anti-capitalist commitments that are essential to anarchism. While the book will not take a stand on this question, its purpose is to propose and defend a moral position that will be much more amenable to these egalitarian anarchists.

The outline of the book is as follows. The remainder of this introduction discusses the general aims of the book and situates the book within the broader ideological landscape by explaining the relationship between its argument, the anarchist movement, and some of the defended position's philosophical rivals. Specifically, Section I.1 begins by considering the question of what it means for a moral position to be an *anarchist* position and whether the position defended by the book can be reasonably characterized as "social anarchism." Section I.2 then discusses the central aims of the book in a bit more detail, the primary two being (1) showing that social anarchism is coherent (in a sense to be described subsequently) and (2) showing that the position is independently plausible. Finally, Section I.3 argues that social anarchism will be attractive (in at least some respect) to partisans of a number of rival philosophical positions. In this way, the section aims to show that the theoretical costs of accepting the position are not as high for these partisans as it might first appear.

With this introductory groundwork in place, Chapter 1 begins the main argument of the book by introducing the five moral principles that make up the social anarchist position. Specifically, it defines social anarchism as the conjunction of the following five theses. First, there is the consent theory of legitimacy. This thesis holds that persons are obligated to obey the laws of the state only if they have consented to do so. Given that practically no one has consented in this way, this thesis entails the *philosophical anarchist* conclusion that all existing states are illegitimate, that is, they lack the power to oblige. Second, there is the Lockean proviso. This proposition places a constraint on persons' powers to convert unowned natural resources into private property. A defining commitment of *right-libertarianism*, this proviso holds that persons can acquire property rights over some bit of land or natural resource if and only if they leave "enough and as good" for others. The third anarchist thesis is the self-ownership thesis. This thesis asserts that each person has the same set of ownership rights over her body that she would have over a fully owned thing (including a permission to use her body, a claim against others using it without permission, etc.). Fourth, the anarchist position asserts that persons do not have private property rights over any external natural resources. And, finally, the social anarchist position includes an endorsement of luck egalitarianism as the moral principle regulating the

permissible use of unowned external objects. (This will be called “the anarchist conclusion”.)

Notably, the social anarchist position includes both principles that are standardly associated with libertarianism and egalitarian principles that are widely endorsed by socialist philosophers. This pairing is not without precedent; left-libertarian philosophers have influentially endorsed both varieties of principle and defended their compatibility.⁶ However, it will be argued that social anarchism represents a distinctive synthesis of libertarian and egalitarian moral positions, both because of the particular theses that it posits and because of the stronger logical relation that it claims obtains between them (more on this in Section I.2).

The five anarchist theses having been introduced, Chapter 2 argues that these principles can all be derived from a single meta-principle that limits which moral theories qualify as theoretically acceptable. This posited *moral tyranny constraint* holds that a theory of duties is acceptable only if full compliance with that theory (and the demands of morality more generally) would not allow any person to unilaterally, discretionarily, and foreseeably act in a way that would leave others with less advantage – that is, whatever it is that matters morally vis-à-vis distributive justice – than they would have possessed given some other choice by the agent. The chapter then explicates the various components of the constraint, defends the constraint’s plausibility, and explains how it entails three of the posited anarchist theses (with subsequent chapters arguing that these theses entail the two remaining anarchist theses). Finally, the chapter addresses three potential objections that might be raised against the moral tyranny constraint.

Chapter 3 begins the process of explicating the logical relations that obtain between the various anarchist theses. Taking the Lockean proviso as its starting point, it argues that this thesis entails two further conclusions embraced by social anarchists. First the chapter argues that, contrary to what

⁶ Left-libertarians differ from right-libertarians in that, while both endorse the self-ownership thesis and affirm that people can acquire private property, left-libertarians believe that this acquisition is subject to demanding egalitarian constraints. For example, Peter Vallentyne (1998) both posits that people own themselves – a core libertarian thesis (discussed in detail in Chapter 1) – and that a society can justly tax away the full benefit that a person receives from natural resources without violating said self-ownership. Similarly, Michael Otsuka (2003) argues that one might endorse a particular version of the self-ownership thesis while still insisting that justice obtains if and only if the acquisition of private property is constrained such that each person has an equal opportunity to obtain welfare. Hillel Steiner (2000) defends a position wherein he accepts the libertarian right to self-ownership while simultaneously affirming the egalitarian position that each person is entitled to an equal share of external natural resources. And Philippe Van Parijs (2000) posits that self-ownership can be balanced with an egalitarian maximin principle that structures resource ownership in a way that maximizes the opportunities available to the worst off.

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right-libertarians typically maintain, the Lockean proviso implies that no one owns (or could reasonably come to own) any natural resources. This is because any appropriation of such resources would leave others worse off in a way that the proviso does not allow, which, in turn, implies that no such appropriation of natural resources has occurred. By contrast, the chapter argues that the proviso is *necessarily* satisfied when it comes to each agent's own body. Thus, while people do not own any external resources, they can easily come to own themselves via acts of self-appropriation.

Chapter 4 provides an alternative argument for rejecting private property. While Chapter 3 attempts to derive this conclusion from the Lockean proviso, this chapter begins with the consent theory of legitimacy as its starting premise. It then argues that property ownership is a form of legitimate authority. Thus, if one accepts a consent theory of legitimacy, one would also have to maintain that property ownership has consent as its necessary condition. However, given that no one has ever consented to the appropriation of natural resources, it follows that no one owns any such resources. The chapter concludes by considering three objections to this argument. It also discusses what the consent-based argument against private property implies vis-à-vis the self-ownership thesis.

Notably, both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 begin with a libertarian starting premise. They, thus, put significant dialectical pressure on libertarians to reject their standard conclusion that persons have property rights over land and objects. However, Chapter 5 notes that this result underdetermines which positive position libertarians (or, strictly speaking, any property rights theorist) ought to endorse. One option is to simply concede that people lack any sort of claim rights when it comes to natural resources. The chapter labels this proposal “the *Hobbesian conclusion*” and argues that it must be rejected because it violates the moral tyranny constraint. Given the theoretical unacceptability of this option, the chapter contends that libertarians and property rights theorists should, instead, accept what it calls the *anarchist conclusion*. This thesis holds that persons *do* possess certain claims against others using unowned resources, where these claims correspond to the prescriptions of a luck egalitarian principle of distributive justice. The chapter then argues that libertarians have limited basis for rejecting the anarchist conclusion, as it is compatible with both their favored property-based theories of justice and the arguments that support such theories. Finally, it argues that libertarians' tacit presuppositions also commit them to the egalitarian aspect of the anarchist conclusion.

In short, Chapter 5 suggests that libertarians ought to accept that people have some variety of egalitarian distributive claims vis-à-vis natural

resources (as opposed to property claims). While it does not establish that these claims should correspond to a *luck* egalitarian theory of distributive justice, this conclusion follows from Chapter 2's argument that luck egalitarianism satisfies the moral tyranny constraint in a way that strict egalitarianism does not. However, Chapter 6 points out that the dominant interpretation of luck egalitarianism fails to fully satisfy the moral tyranny constraint. To resolve this problem, it offers an alternative interpretation that both eliminates the possibility of moral tyranny and rescues luck egalitarianism from two other prominent objections that have been raised against the position. In this way, the chapter demonstrates that there is a plausible egalitarian distributive principle that follows from the moral tyranny constraint (by way of various libertarian moral theses). This result completes the book's defense of the social anarchist position, with the first six chapters having collectively shown that there is a coherent and plausible set of libertarian and egalitarian theses that all follow from the moral tyranny constraint.

Social anarchism *qua* political philosophy having been presented and defended, Chapter 7 notes that there is a significant lacuna in the posited social anarchist position. One might expect that any view described as an "anarchist" position will include an endorsement of the *political anarchist* thesis that the mere existence of a state is unjust, with some persons thereby having an obligation to abolish any existing states. However, this contention does not appear among the five social anarchist theses defended by the book. Rather, as noted previously, social anarchism includes only the endorsement of the weaker philosophical anarchist thesis that all existing states lack the power to impose obligations on their purported subjects. Chapter 7 defends this choice by arguing that political anarchism is implausible. Specifically, it contends that political anarchists must provide an analysis of statehood that entails that (a) any group that qualifies as a state is unjust in a way that its non-state counterpart is not and (b) there are existing states. It then argues that there is no plausible analysis of statehood that satisfies both of these *desiderata*. Thus, political anarchism fails by its own lights. Finally, the chapter concludes by considering and rejecting a recent argument that philosophical anarchism collapses into either political anarchism or statism.

I.1 The Boundaries of Anarchism

The book aims to defend a set of moral theses that it calls "social anarchism." However, this label raises the difficult question of what counts

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as an anarchist philosophical position. The difficulty emerges from the fact that many different people have claimed the term “anarchism” for their views despite the fact that those views differ in significant ways and, quite often, conflict with one another. For example, as noted previously, most self-identified anarchists – both past and present – are anarcho-communists or social anarchists who call for the abolition of the state, capitalism, and private property. By contrast, a small but vocal group of anarcho-capitalists argue that the state should be abolished but not capitalism. In their view, each person can rightfully acquire and exchange private property, and they call for market-based services to replace much of the activity typically carried out by states (e.g., private security companies would replace the police and military).⁷ Notably, social anarchists often wish to deny the “anarchist” label to anarcho-capitalists, arguing that genuine anarchism is incompatible with an embrace of property, markets, and capitalism.⁸ Obviously, anarcho-capitalists disagree. Thus, a question is raised regarding how one might resolve this dispute – and, more generally, how one is to determine whether *any* given position (e.g., the one defended in this book) is a genuine anarchist position.

As a starting point for answering this general question, it is helpful to consider some of the arguments philosophers have advanced to try to resolve the debate over whether or not anarcho-capitalism is a genuine form of anarchism. A popular strategy for denying anarcho-capitalism the “anarchist” label involves arguing that anarcho-capitalism’s pro-market commitments contradict an essential anarchist thesis. For example, John Clark posits that “the essence of anarchism is . . . not the theoretical opposition to the state, but the practical and theoretical struggle against domination” (1984, 70), where inequality and private property are forms of domination (120). Thus, one might appeal to the conjunction of these premises to conclude that anarcho-capitalism is not a genuine form of anarchism, as it licenses both inequality and property.⁹ By contrast, Roderick Long argues against this conclusion by noting that there are many influential thinkers who are widely recognized as anarchists by social

⁷ For some influential defenses of this position, see David Friedman (1989) and Michael Huemer (2013).

⁸ Some examples include Alan Carter (2013, 259), Peter Sabatini (1994–1995), and Iain McKay et al. (2008). See also Barbara Goodwin (2007, 143).

⁹ McKay et al. (2008) appeal to Clark in this way as part of a lengthy and detailed argument against counting anarcho-capitalism as a genuine variety of anarchism. That said, Clark does not direct his quoted comments directly against anarcho-capitalists, and other remarks of his suggest a willingness to count those who oppose the state but endorse property as genuine anarchists (1978, 19, 21).

anarchists despite holding views that social anarchists otherwise consider disqualifying when it comes to anarcho-capitalists (2018, 287–95). Given that there is no principled basis for denying the “anarchist” label to anarcho-capitalists but not these paradigmatic anarchist thinkers, he concludes that social anarchists should accept that anarchism is a big tent that includes anarcho-capitalists.¹⁰

The problem with both of these argumentative strategies is that they rest on premises that a critical interlocutor could easily reject. The former argument presupposes that there is some commitment that is essential to anarchism such that any broader anarchist position must be at least compatible with this commitment or, more strongly, must follow from it. While the essentialist claim may not, itself, be terribly controversial – though anti-essentialists might reject it and contend that the various anarchist positions merely bear a “family resemblance” to one another without sharing any single property – there will inevitably be controversy over which commitment is the essential one. Is a rejection of domination the defining feature of anarchism? Why not think, instead, that anarchism’s essential feature is a respect for property rights (with opposition to the state following from the fact that states necessarily violate such rights)? It is not clear how one might resolve such disagreement. Thus, the essentialist argument for the claim that anarcho-capitalists are not anarchists seems to rest on an indefensible premise.

Long’s argument encounters a similar difficulty. He is right that many social anarchists have been willing to grant the “anarchist” label to thinkers who embrace positions associated with anarcho-capitalism (e.g., Benjamin Tucker and Lysander Spooner). However, suppose that someone insisted that this was a mistake. Such a rejection of Long’s starting premise – namely, that social anarchists are *correct* to judge that these thinkers are anarchists – would render his argument unsound. Of course, critics can dispute the core premise of any argument, but, in this case, there is no obvious way to defend the premise in question without rendering Long’s argument superfluous. Note that any argument for the proposition that the thinkers in question are genuine anarchists would seemingly have to appeal to some general account of which positions qualify as anarchist positions. However, if one had such a general account, then one could

¹⁰ Contra Long’s argument, McKay et al. (2020, section G) argue that there are important differences between anarcho-capitalists and the property-sympathetic thinkers that social anarchists recognize as anarchists. Thus, they would insist that there *is* a principled basis for uniquely denying anarcho-capitalists the “anarchist” label.

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forego Long's argument and appeal to that account directly to resolve the debate over whether anarcho-capitalism is a genuine variety of anarchism.

The foregoing discussion reveals that both of the prior arguments suffer from a common vulnerability: They each assume as their starting premise that one can uncontroversially apply the "anarchist" label to specific commitments or thinkers. However, in each case, there is no obvious supporting argument for this assumption that does not beg the question. To defend a particular application of the "anarchist" label, one must seemingly posit a general theory demarcating which ideas and/or thinkers are anarchist in character, where this theory will be just as controversial as the particular judgments that it is supposed to support. To see this, consider how one might resolve a disagreement between someone advancing one of the just-discussed arguments and an interlocutor who (a) denied that the posited commitments (or thinkers) were anarchist in character and (b) rejected any general theory of anarchism that had this implication. Given these positions, there is no obvious rejoinder available, as one seemingly needs a general theory to resolve disputes about particular commitments/thinkers but also established judgments about particular commitments/thinkers to resolve disputes about the general theory. Granted, one might accuse the interlocutor of simply not grasping the relevant conceptual truths; however, this reply is implausible given that it seems to be at least an open question whether a given commitment (or thinker) is, in fact, an anarchist position (or thinker). Thus, both arguments about the proper boundaries of anarchism appear to be ultimately inconclusive.

This result might suggest a more general form of skepticism about the book's claim that it is presenting and defending an *anarchist* political philosophy. On this skeptical view, the apparent intractability of debates over what counts as anarchism reveals that one ought to adopt a *non-factualist* understanding of these debates. Specifically, the non-factualist holds that the best explanation of this intractability is that there is simply no fact of the matter as to whether or not a given thinker/social arrangement/philosophical position is anarchist in character. Thus, the proposition that the book presents an anarchist viewpoint is neither true nor false, which is to say that it is lacking in genuine semantic content.

Alternatively, one might adopt a *quietist* view that takes debates over the boundaries of anarchism to be merely verbal rather than substantive. This variety of skepticism begins with the observation that there are millions of distinct ideological positions, where these positions are individuated based upon the particular propositions they affirm. When two people intractably

disagree about whether one of these positions is a variety of anarchism, their disagreement results from the fact that they mean different things when they use the term “anarchism,” with one person using the term to refer to a particular set of positions while the other uses it to refer to a non-identical set. For this reason, the quietist maintains that the disagreement is apparent rather than genuine, as it can be dissolved through greater verbal precision: the person who says the position is a form of anarchism is really saying that it is a form of anarchism₁ while the person who disagrees is denying that it is a form of anarchism.₂ In this way, the quietist can (i) explain why there is disagreement – namely, the disagreeing parties are using the same word to refer to different things – (ii) resolve the disagreement by showing that the two asserted claims are actually compatible, and (iii) still affirm that there is a fact of the matter when it comes to whether a given position is appropriately classified as anarchism₁ (or anarchism₂, or anarchism₃, etc.).

While the quietist does assign a truth value to the proposition that the book is advancing an anarchist position, her view strips this claim of any philosophical significance. Once her demand for verbal precision has been met, the truth of such a proposition becomes simply a matter of definition: if anarchism₁ is defined as including some position *p*, then it is an analytic truth that *p* is a form of anarchism₁. Thus, the book’s assertion that it is defending an anarchist position would either be false or trivial depending on one’s stipulated definition of “anarchism.” If “anarchism” is defined such that the book’s posited position is (part of) its extension, then the book’s assertion is true; if “anarchism” is not defined in this way, then the claim is false. Either way, the result is uninteresting, and the assertion does not seem worth making – at least on the quietist view.

So, what, then, should one think of the book’s claim that it is presenting and defending an anarchist philosophical position? Against both of the just-discussed skeptical positions, the book’s contention is that this claim has both semantic content and philosophical significance. Specifically, the claim has nontrivial semantic content because it is an assertion about the relationship between philosophical ideas and a particular social movement. The task of the remainder of this section is to briefly describe this relation and this movement, beginning with the latter.

As a matter of social fact, there are many people across time and space who have called themselves anarchists. While there is likely no single belief that these people share, there is a constellation of beliefs that they will endorse at much higher rates than will people outside of this group. These beliefs include the contention that the state should be eliminated, that