

A Case Against Anarchy

Since the dawn of society, governments have accompanied the continual development of humans around the world, with the earliest records of a government tracing back to around the 4th millennium B.C.E. in ancient Mesopotamia. Contrary to the long, pervasive history of government, the ideals of anarchism states that all forms of hierarchy in a state is illegitimate in nature and its existence in society cannot be justified. As Mikhail Bakunin, a proponent of anarchism states, “if there is a State, there must be domination of one class by another and, as a result, slavery; the State without slavery is unthinkable—and this is why we are the enemies of the State” (Bakunin 1873 [1990: 178]). The crux of this clash between governments and anarchists lies within the idea of legitimate power and societal hierarchy, which an anarchist would claim is of no substance and cannot be justified under the principle that all humans are equal. A compelling argument can be made supporting both a government and an anarchist state, but the pitfalls of anarchy in a practical setting do not allow it to manifest into anything but mere idealistic theories of a utopian society.

Citizens of a government willingly sacrifice certain liberties to the government in exchange for protection and safety provided by their institutions, such as the law enforcement and the legal system, giving power to a higher authority. They are abiding by what is known as a social contract, wherein members of a society follow a certain set of rules set out by those members and based on commonly accepted values and morals. For centuries, the social contract has varied throughout a multitude of geographical regions and has developed as the times have changed: what this generation finds acceptable might become immoral for later generations.

In the modern era, the relationship between individuals of a state and its government has been widely accepted to become a part of the social contract, and the foundation of this belief is based on the idea that a stronger power is going to protect its citizens, and, to do so, some liberties of the citizens must be yielded to that stronger power. In essence, the government is supposed to serve as a tool for the people in order to enforce the social contract they have created, which leads to the creation of political power used to uphold the government's obligation to the citizens. This, of course, creates an inevitable hierarchy of power within society, beginning with the government and leading to the people, which is a major point of criticism from the anarchist perspective. There are, however, a number of ways a society can combat an abusive political authority, including checks and balances placed on the governments and rights and freedoms guaranteed by the law. The idea surrounding the existence of a government is that people accept being ruled over by a powerful government, as long as their rights and well-being are secured by that entity. The social contract, in this case, has shifted to accepting this authority, and unless the public turns against the idea of a government itself, the idea will continue to rule.

Anarchism is justified in theory. All human life is of equal importance and anarchism promotes that. Hierarchy, in itself, can lead to exploitation of the weak and can build greater inequality between the privileged and the underprivileged. Aside from the hierarchical nature of a government ruling over a nation, however, another greater, more ubiquitous form of hierarchy must be addressed: the hierarchy created by wealth. It can be argued that, from the spawn of food surpluses from the First Agricultural revolution, wealth inequality was born, and it is an undeniable fact that it has existed throughout history. Through the development of ideologies, such as Communism and Socialism, people sought to correct the deeply ingrained wrongs of a socioeconomic hierarchy, in which the rich exploited the poor. However, social status or class

based on wealth is an unavoidable reality in a society of limited governments, which impedes the viability of an anarchist state creating a society in which all citizens are equal.

Socioeconomic hierarchy is not created by a governing body, and a government does not prevent the dissolution of economic classes. In fact, deregulation of economies and lesser government influence in the economic and social sectors throughout history could be seen to have increased the division between rich and the poor, the Industrial Revolution and Gilded Ages being a prime example. Even if governments were to be abolished, inherent hierarchies would still be prevalent. Economic inequality is, arguably, a major driving force behind society's hierarchies, which is apparent in the great economic influence intertwined in the politics of many nations and the ability of the rich to continually accrue vast amounts of wealth, reinforcing social classes. To dissolve this hierarchy of one person being more powerful than the other, the powerful and wealthy would need to surrender their wealth, or be forced to do so.

The destruction of government doesn't lead to the end of social hierarchies, but it does create an opportunity for more exploitation and a society that drifts further away from public morality in favour of personal and corporate greed. Nothing would compel the already rich and powerful to willingly give up their influence and ultimately, the power vacuum created by a lack of government would be filled by those who were already on top. This is why the idea of a government continues to persist. Political authority and its tools are the most effective and legitimate means to seize control of a state, restoring morality to what the citizens regard as just. The reason people revolt and turn against a government is because a regime is ineffective at solving or addressing the problems the masses find pressing. When a government is overthrown, by either democratic or violent means, they are replaced by a new government because the people need a problem solved, and the problem is not caused by the idea of a government itself.

As long as people have a government system they believe serves them, the people will support the ruling regime, giving it legitimate support and authority.

Furthermore, even if inequality were nonexistent and the public believed a government to be acting against the interests of the people, an anarchist state could not work in practice, as the flaws in an “anarchist state” are the flaws in human nature. Anarchism depends on the fact that all human beings in the anarchist society will behave selflessly. The reason governments have persisted throughout history is because all people cannot be trusted to behave altruistically with no consequences or laws that coerce them to act in a way the population considers just. It is inevitable that some people will take advantage of the anarchist system, proliferating fear and distrust within society. Moreover, the inherent flaws of human nature is what causes social inequality and inequity in the first place. If people were able to come together and behave as a society in which rulers and governments did not need to exist, it already would have happened. That world would quickly become a textbook utopian society in which the individual serves society and society serves them. This is an unrealistic expectation of how society would perform when laws and ruling bodies are lacking. Although the anarchist state would be able to make an abstract set of rules to follow, according to their accepted values, there would be a complete lack of order with respect to who enforces, creates, and records the social contract citizens must abide by.

These shortcomings within the anarchist ideal stem from a major flaw in the anarchist ideology: the assumption that all humans are equal. While it is undeniably true that humans are deserving of equal rights and opportunities, a simple fact is that not all humans are born as equals regarding skills and abilities. In any society, no matter how equal the opportunities received have been, there will always be those who are smarter, stronger, and better than the rest. This

fundamental truth is the root cause of hierarchy and, even in the most basic iterations of society, a hierarchy of people will eventually form according to the attributes of an individual. To say that, without government, the exploitation and ruthlessness of social classes will vanish is simply a flawed utopian ideal and could not be justified, considering that to achieve a perfect equilibrium in society is to effectively hinder achievement. The means of attaining such an anarchist society would be controversial to destructive at best, unless all people unanimously decided to destroy the idea of government, which is near impossible considering that the people benefit from such institutions. In conclusion, anarchism cannot be justified as, ironically, the most effective way to change an unjust hierarchy would be to create a stronger, benevolent hierarchy, and even if hierarchies were to be destroyed by some means, another hierarchy would ultimately be created.

Citations

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