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Anarchism and Moral Philosophy

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Introduction

Max Stirner argued that the essence of the individual is always more than its definition: "nothing that is designated as my essence exhausts me."[1] So, too, any statement about anarchism is not exhaustive, for it can always be met with counter-examples. The various accounts of anarchist moral philosophy are indicative of the limits and incompleteness of any single description. Nonetheless, different anarchist theorists and movements can, in part, be identified by their distinctive arrangement of meta-ethical beliefs and identification and prioritization of different ethical principles, and the ways in which they are applied.

Because of this plurality and pervasiveness of ethical discourses, moral analysis has been identified as one of the core characteristics of anarchism, especially in contexts where it is distinguished from revolutionary movements, such as orthodox Marxism. As the philosopher Simon Critchley notes: "Anarchism has tended to be an ethical discourse about revolutionary practice."[2] The radical anthropologist David Graeber makes a similar observation: "Politically, what is most compelling about anarchism is its emphasis on ethics as a binding factor in political practice."[3] By contrast, orthodox Marxism is associated with

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[1] Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own* (London: Rebel Press, 1993), 366.
[2] D. Graeber, "The Twilight of Vanguardism" (2003), 6, available online at http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/david-graeber-the-twilight-of-vanguardism.pdf, p.6. Note that this is a slightly different version of a paper with the same title by the same author in J. MacPhee and E. Reulan, eds., *Realizing the Impossible* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2007), 250-253.
[3] S. Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding* (London: Verso, 2007), 93

broader economic analysis as part of a broader theory of revolutionary strategy.[4] Graeber goes on to develop, nuance, and evaluate this apparent dichotomy, highlighting the intersections between heterodox Marxist interests in concrete, ethical practice and anarchist interest in high theory, a point borne out in, for instance, the works of autonomists like Harry Cleaver and the autonomist-influenced David Harvey.[5] However, Graeber argues that anarchism is

> …primarily an ethics of practice; and it insists, before anything else, that one's means most be consonant with one's ends; one cannot create freedom through authoritarian means; that as much as possible, one must embody the society one wishes to create.[6]

Graeber's description of anarchism is pertinent to this article for three reasons. First, he confirms the priority given to ethical evaluation within anarchism. Second, he ties this ethical analysis to material practices; and thirdly, he identifies a commitment to prefiguration—that the means have to be in accordance with the ends. These latter two points will be developed later to argue that anarchism is more properly understand as a sophisticated materialist ethical theory. So as well as providing a survey of ethical positions found within the main anarchist currents, this contribution will argue that it is more productive and consistent with the main features of anarchism to regard it as closer to the radical virtue theory of Alasdair MacIntyre and the revolutionary Aristotelian tradition, rather than, for instance, a rights-based ethical theory as some proponents and critics present it.[7]

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[4] Graeber, "The Twilight of Vanguardism," 6; Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding*, 146. See also J. Heckert and J. Biehl, quoted in M. Wilson, *Rules Without Rulers: The Possibilities and Limits of Anarchism* (Winchester, UK: Zero, 2014), 88-89.

[5] See, for example, H. Cleaver, "Kropotkin, Self-valorization and the Crisis of Marxism," *Anarchist Studies* 2:2 (1994), 119-35, available online at http://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/kropotkin.html; See also D. Harvey, *The Promise of Revolutionary Humanism*, Striker Pocket Pamphlet Series 3 (London: Strike, 2015).

[6] Graeber, "The Twilight of Vanguardism," 6-7.

[7] G. Baldelli, *Social Anarchism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 79-114; D. Knowles, *Political Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2001), 249-50; Wilson, *Rules Without Rulers*, 2-3, 94-95; R.P. Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* (New York: Harper, 1970); J. Wolff, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), 30, 46-7.

Amongst the key theorists of the classical anarchist canon, William Godwin, Michael Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Emma Goldman, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon all directly address the nature of anarchist ethics or have impacted on the development of (1) meta-ethics, (2) normative ethics, and (3) applied moral analysis.[8] Similarly, moral terminology is a significant feature of contemporary anarchist activist discussion even if it is sometimes inconsistent or under-developed. Key concepts like "equality," "freedom," "solidarity," and "justice" are pervasive features of anarchist discussions, being important enough to feature in the titles of activist groups.[9] This account of the intersection between anarchism and moral philosophy is structured on these three sub-disciplines (meta-ethics, normative ethics and applied ethics) in order to identify and evaluate the distinctive, albeit overlapping variants of anarchism.

Taking into account the chapter's opening assertions—first, that the prevalence of moral discourse is a core characteristic of anarchism, and, second, that for any assertion about anarchism there are counter-examples—then it is unsurprising that there are anti-moralist currents within anarchism. It is appropriate then to begin with these amoralist and nihilist positions.

Meta-ethics

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[8] See for instance William Godwin, *The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin* (London: Freedom Press, 1986), 64-87; Mikhail Bakunin, *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, ed. G.P. Maximoff (New York: Free Press, 1953), 120-69; Peter Kropotkin, *Ethics: Origins and Development* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1992), especially 268-279; Peter Kropotkin, *Anarchist Morality* (Edmonton: Black Cat, 2005); Emma Goldman, "The Victim of Morality" [1913], available online at http://www.positiveatheism.org/hist/goldmanmor.htm; M. Hewitt, "Emma Goldman: The Case for Anarcho-Feminism," in *The Anarchist Papers*, ed. D. Roussopoulos (Montreal: Black Rose, 1986), 170-71; Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, "Justice in Revolution and in the Church," in *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology*, ed. I. McKay (Oakland, CA: AK, 2011), 619-684;. A. Prichard, "The Ethical Foundations of Proudhon's Republican Anarchism," *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy*, ed. B. Franks and M. Wilson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 86-112.
[9] For example, the Freedom Press Group, Climate Justice Committee, the British Libertarian Group (1961-92), Solidarity, etc.

Amoralism and nihilism are meta-ethical positions. The nihilist argues that moral values are undiscoverable,[10] whilst the amoralist, by contrast, does not dispute that moral principles may exist and are discoverable but that they have no binding force. Interwoven with these traditions is a tendency to consider ethical principles and moral values as simply the product of dominating power wishing to silence or channel dissent.[11] Goldman's denunciation of "morality" is a good example, as she sees such discourses as a way for dominant powers to discipline women for their own ends.[12] Other examples of amoralism can be found in the early egoist movement[13] and more recently in the individualist insurrectionist current:

> With no sovereign systems of morality, theory, principles or social abstractions standing above the singular individual, the nihilist-anarchist attacks all systems, including identity and ideology systems, as obstacles to our self-realisation. The struggle is against not only the domination of controlling social organisation and widespread tranquilisation, but also against inherited repressive programming and the force of daily life, and so our struggle is a constant tension where what we must destroy and transcend is much more obvious than where we might end up.[14]

The nihilist argument is right to criticize the position found in other anarchisms (as will be discussed below) that there are discoverable, universal moral principles, as there seems no indisputable method for ascertaining them. Such appeals to universal morality obscure the power relationships by which values are constructed and maintained. The problem is that nihilists and amoralists, despite their rejections of morality, still use moral arguments to defend their position, as when they attack the "dishonesty," "wilful ignorance," and

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[10] J. Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity: from Kierkegaard to Camus* (London: Routledge, 1995), 173.

[11] The impact of Friedrich Nietzsche's deconstruction of normative ethics may be relevant here. See, for example, J. Purkis, "Anarchy Unbound: A Tribute to John Moore," in John Moore and Spencer Sunshine, *I Am Not a Man, I Am Dynamite*, ed. J. Moore and S. Sunshine (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 5-8: 5; and D. Colson, "Nietzsche and the Libertarian Workers' Movement," in ibid.,12-28.

[12] Goldman, "The Victim of Morality."

[13] See, for example, D. Marsden "The Illusion of Anarchism," *The Egoist* 1:23 (September 15, 1914).

[14] DMP, "Beyond the Movement—Anarchy!," in *Anarchy Civil or Subversive* (n.d.), 12-14, 12, available online at http://325.nostate.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/civil-anarchism-book.pdf.

"cowardice" of other anarchists who fail to actively and consistently resist oppression[15] and support the "fraternity" and "courage" found in individualist insurrectionary movements.[16] Goldman, too, has an account of the fully flourishing person, capable of full-liberated social relations, as opposed to the "grey-grown victim of a grey-grown Morality."[17] If values really were unimportant then there is no reason to favor the honest, wise, liberated, and flourishing individual over the selfish, gutless, and bewildered.

Instead, the anarchist nihilist and amoralist tend to construct an ethical basis on the individual's own moral feelings and individual conscience: "As an anarchist, I reject moral codes, but I have the measure of my principles to hold against my life."[18] This move from amoralism to subjectivism (associated with Stirner) has its own problems.[19]

Subjectivism has a number of attractive features. It avoids the ontological problems of a fixed set of universal principles, which undermines human freedom, and the epistemological problems of determining a methodology by which this universal set of values can be identified. The rejection of universal standards means that individuals are free to create their own goals. It avoids the recreation of hierarchies of power upon which universalisms rest (as discussed below). However, there are substantial problems with such subjectivism.

Amongst the most serious flaws in the belief that the individual (or individual consciousness) constitutes the basis for morality are: (1) it denies the possibility of moral disagreement and thus the potential to transform ethical principles and practice; (2) it can be used to justify all manner of actions which are inconsistent even with the proposed position

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[15] Ibid. See also Anarchist-nihilists, "Against the British 'Anti-capitalist Movement': Brief Notes on Their Ongoing Failure," in *Anarchy Civil or Subversive*, 18-24: 20, 23; Anarchist-nihilists Against the Activist Establishment "Fuck Indymedia and the Anarcho-Left," in *Anarchy Civil or Subversive*, 52-53.
[16] Anarchist-nihilists, "Against the British 'Anti-capitalist Movement,'" 24; DMP, "Introduction," in *Anarchy Civil or Subversive*, 3-7: 6.
[17] Goldman, "The Victim of Morality."
[18] L., "Fragment: Illegality," in *Anarchy Civil or Subversive*, 37-38: 37.
[19] Whether this subjectivism is consistent with Stirner's Egoism is a matter of debate. At first glance it seems consistent with his fluid, but self-prioritizing, unique subject. The individual egoist, according to Stirner, is the ultimate arbiter of value: "If it is right for me, it is right" (Stirner, *Ego and Its Own*, 191).

of individualist insurrectionists, including the promotion of hierarchies; (3) it ignores the material, social conditions that form a necessary (but not complete) part of ethical discourses; and thus (4) it has an incomplete account of agency.

If the individual is the single, ultimate arbiter of moral knowledge then there is no basis to challenge a moral statement. A moral dispute becomes simply a disagreement between two rival consciences, one approving of the action and the other disapproving.[20] There are no external grounds for resolving disagreements or for revising and transforming current principles or changing behaviors. Thus, for a subjectivist, any disagreement between an anarchist committed to contesting hierarchies of oppression and a statist approving of discrimination and racial hierarchies is reduced to a matter of preferences. A subjectivist can argue that whilst you may find cowardice, dishonesty and ignorance inferior to bravery, integrity, and solidarity, that is merely a matter of opinion. So a rejection of murder, child abuse, or wanton environmental destruction becomes reduced to personal preference, with the most powerful will taking precedence.

Similarly, the appeal to conscience fails to recognize that individual preferences and cognitive structures for decision-making and articulation of those choices are partly the product of (as well as partly constituting) material social practices. The types of differentiation, the forms of analysis and what is raised as a problem worthy of consideration, take place because of absences, contradictions, and/or conflicts in material practices. These are not just the product of an individual conscience (as standard idealists would argue), but the interplay of different consciousnesses (inter-subjectivity), their labor, and other material resources (dead labor). This account is in agreement with John P. Clark's anarchist reading of Hegel, who argues that transformation occurs by recognizing the conflicts caused by material

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[20] H. Gensler, *Ethics: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2006), 24-25.

limits and seeking ways of going beyond them.[21] Transcendence from existing practices and values is a necessary feature of a radical moral theory which aims to promote substantive economic and social change.

By failing to link moral decisions to the concrete practices in which judgements arise, subjectivists fail to recognize how ethical subject identities are partly constituted by their engagement in these activities. Instead of an abstract consciousness or "empty field," moral actors acknowledge that they have particular, but alterable (and negatable) social roles in different social contexts. The duties of a physician, for instance, are different from those of a member of a citizen's militia.

Whilst Stirner is conventionally regarded as a subjectivist, Saul Newman suggests a potentially fruitful (but also potentially anachronistic) post-structuralist reading of Stirner in which the Stirnerite ego is a "singularity"[22] or "swirl of singularities."[23] These singularities have no essential positive characteristics, but are formed in the interactions between different practices and are open to radical transformation through self-activity. Although Newman's Stirner is much more materialist than his standard critics would suggest,[24] his account does not altogether escape the accusation of promoting hierarchies as it is still the singularities that constitute Stirner (and other self-identifying egoists) that take priority.[25]

The inclusion of Stirner in the canon of anarchist thinkers is largely based on the German jurist Paul Elzbacher's initial construction[26] and is partly responsible for anarchism

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[21] J.P. Clark, *The Impossible Community: Realizing Communitarian Anarchism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 64-65.

[22] S. Newman, quoted in D. Rousselle, "Postanarchism and its Critics: A Conversation with Saul Newman," *Anarchist Studies* 21.2 (2013), 74-96: 80.

[23] Ibid., 81.

[24] See, for instance, K. Marx, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress, 1976), 130ff; for an alternative anarchist-communist reading of Stirner see I. McKay, *An Anarchist FAQ*, volume 2 (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2012), 646-48.

[25] "Egoism does not think of sacrificing anything, giving away anything that it wants; it simply decides, what I want I must have and will procure" (Stirner, *Ego and its Own*, 257).

[26] R. Kinna, *Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 10-11, although Plekhanov included Stirner—alongside Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, and various "smaller fry," such as Grave and Reclus—five

being associated with and dismissed as idealism, a criticism most commonly associated with orthodox Marxism.[27] Yet Stirner's inclusion is highly contested. Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt argue that the abstract individualist and idealist features of Stirner's work (a representation that Newman contests) make Stirner's egoism incompatible with the broadly social orientation of anarchism.[28] Kropotkin, too, in his incomplete final work, ends with a criticism of Striner's inadequate moral theory (which he describes as "anti-morality"). Kropotkin argues that Stirner ignores the biological, social, and psychological resources in which agents build their identities and mutually beneficial social practices.[29]

Kropotkin, Bakunin, and contemporary advocates like Schmidt and van der Walt contend that anarchism is a materialist theory. However, the materialism to which anarchism adheres is not synonymous with the strict determinism of historical materialism. Orthodox Marxists and other economic determinists argue that moral principles are irrelevant to social change, as real transformation occurs as a result of technological changes in the economic base which follow predetermined laws of development.[30] Anthony Skillen points to instances of Marx's texts in which he appears to reject moral analysis, seeing ethical discourse as simply a phenomenon of bourgeois control of the means of production.[31] Similar lines of thought can be found in some forms of social anarchism. Class War's Adrienne Lintzgy, for instance, argues that the legal institutions predicated on notions of rights, as well as the entire

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years before Eltzbacher. See *Anarchism and Socialism* (Minneapolis: New Times Socialist Publishing, 1895), available online at http://www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1895/anarch/index.htm.

[27] See Plekhanvov, *Anarchism and Socialism*; Joseph Stalin, *Anarchism Or Socialism?*, available online at http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1906/12/x01.htm.

[28] M. Schmidt and L. van der Walt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2009), 64-5.

[29] Kropotkin, *Ethics*, 338.

[30] See, for example, K. Marx *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), 20-22.

[31] A. Skillen, "Workers Interests and the Proletarian Ethic: Conflicting Strains in Marxian Anti-moralism," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* Supplementary Volume 7 (1981), 155-70: 55-56.

conceptual apparatus of rights itself, are simply tools to maintain the bourgeois order and to obscure the reality of class domination.[32]

However, even here alternatives and contradictions can be found. Lintzgy, for instance, ends his injunction against liberal conceptions of rights with a call for "class justice." What is often at stake is a confusion over repeated rejections of "moralism" for a rejection of moral analysis. The term "moralism" appears to be used in a wide variety of senses. Sometimes it refers to the deliberate construction of principles to defend hierarchical practices,[33] sometimes to the application of potentially radical moral principle (but in an unconsciously inconsistent way in order to serve the interests of the powerful[34]); and sometimes to the general application of apparently universal and neutral principles without recourse to the social contexts in which they arise and are applied.[35] As will be discussed, a consistent moral analysis includes identifying the material conditions which form, and are formed by, social relationships, shared practices, and their discourses. One of the criticisms made of academic ethics, within which this contribution rests, is that it often ignores the particular material conditions of its own construction and therefore is blind to its own biases and lacunae.[36]

The main Enlightenment positions on meta-ethics have been universalist theories. They share a number of characteristics, namely: (1) that there are objectively identifiable universal moral principles; (2) that these are not partial to any particular class or the ideal product of the superior dominant class; (3) that they can be applied objectively, even if, in

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[32] A. Lintzgy, "Human Rights or Class Justice," *The Heavy Stuff* 1 (n.d.), 4.
[33] Goldman, "The Victim of Morality."
[34] Harvey *The Promise of Revolutionary Humanism*, column 1.
[35] See, for example, R. de Witt, "An Anarchist Response to Seattle: What Shall We Do With Anarchism?," *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory* 4:1 (2000), available online at http://flag.blackened.net/ias/7seattle.htm; Workers Solidarity Movement, "Book Review - *Anarchy's Cossack: Nestor Makhno*," *Black and Red Revolution* 10 (2005), 17-19: 19.
[36] See, for example, M. Le Doeuff, "Long Hair, Short Ideas," *The Philosophical Imaginary* (London: Athlone, 1989), 100-27.

practice, they are used in a distorted ways; and (4) that misapplications or misidentifications of moral principles can be identified through the use of some rational procedure.[37]

The main examples of Enlightenment, universalist ethics are realism (largely deontological) and naturalism (primarily utilitarian consequentialist). Despite, their significant differences, they are both committed to a dispassionate, systematic basis for identifying and justifying ethical principles. In the case of naturalist ethics, like John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism, empirical study demonstrates the veracity of utilitarian principles. For deontologists, like Immanuel Kant, pure Reason is the only sure way of discovering universal ethical principles. An exception to moral naturalism and realism is intuitionistic ethics, which regards moral truths as being inherently hardwired into the human subject: they are either self-evident or else identified through a separate moral sense, irreducible to reason or evidence. Intuitionists have a number of problems: first, explaining why there are moral disagreements if there is a common ethical sense; and second, accounting for the fact that the epistemological basis for an unknowable moral instinct takes moral analysis outside of critical discourse and reduces it to theology.[38]

Critics of "moralism" are right to be skeptical of the claims to universal value found in the Enlightenment ethics of realism and naturalism. Such universalism is ontologically and ethically suspect as humans would no longer have the freedom to develop their own values. In addition, it is highly unlikely that there are grounds for discovering universal knowledge which can be applied impartially in societies divided by class (as well as race, ethnicity, religion, etc.).[39] The assumption that there is a single universal reason or scientific method for the identification of values implicit to specific forms of social practice is also highly disputable.

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[37] D. D. Raphael, *Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 18-22; P. McLaughlin, *Anarchism and Authority: A philosophical introduction to classical anarchism* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 40.
[38] Bakunin seems to be anticipating this criticism of intuitionism See *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, 150-51.
[39] Mikhail Bakunin, *God and the State* (New York: Dover, 1970), 33, 35, 66-67.

However, this is not to reject ethics, or base it on contentious subjectivist grounds. A materially grounded ethics is possible and consistent with anarchism. Here values are generated by, and specific to, the stable social practices or traditions that form them, although there will be overlaps and continuities with similar and adjacent social practices. Humans are creatures that have some (albeit changing) biological and psychological needs which can be met in a variety of ways, and critical imaginations which are able to empathize and conceive of alternatives. To meet ever-changing needs and desires humans develop productive practices.[40] Many of these practices have internally generated rules which are necessary for their operation, though these are not coercively imposed or indisputable. Indeed, practitioners may adapt and change them. So, for instance, the social goods associated with communal cooking and feasting require materials (equipment, power source, and ingredients) and human labor. Anarchists argue that organizing practices in as anti-hierarchical manner as possible will generate the greatest inherent goods and produce sustainable external benefits.[41]

Some critics have argued that having an explicit and identifiable meta-ethics would be too restrictive.[42] However, the critical materialism identifiable in many anarchist approaches sees values as a necessary, and indeed unavoidable, part of any social practice, although it does not identify any single value as dominant or universal. This non-universalist approach still provides grounds for shared, albeit incomplete and non-universal, criteria by which moral discussion and evaluation can take place.

It is not necessary to have a fully developed meta-ethics to have practical normative or situated ethical guidelines (however provisional and open). Many activists and critical practitioners do not, for good reason, focus on meta-ethical debates, concentrating instead on practical solutions to pressing social problems. So although the meta-ethical status associated

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[40] See, for example, Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid* (London: Penguin, 1939), 180.
[41] See, for example, C. Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: Freedom, 1982); Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1993), 180-81; Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, 180, 216-17.
[42] S. Newman, *The Politics of Postanarchism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 50-51; Newman quoted in Rouselle, "Postanarchism and Its Critics," 82.

with normative positions can be questionable, the reasons for advancing these principles are usually based on more pragmatic and political goals than on philosophical consistency.

Normative and Situated Ethics

There are two main normative traditions. The first, consequentialism, involves assessing actions on the basis of how effectively they achieve a pre-given goal. The main consequentialist theory is largely utilitarian ("acts are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness"[43]). The second main normative theory is deontology (rights-based ethics) which, in its classical Kantian form, is based on the rational subject's freedom to make logical decisions concerning his or her own destiny. Such rational, autonomous decisions may well not produce individual or collective happiness.

Both deontology and consequentialism capture important features of anarchism. The first emphasizes individual freedom (and the necessary principle of minimizing coercion) and the second a concern with social well-being. However, whether taken individually or together (if it were possible to fully synthesize them) they are not sufficient. Consequentialism can be found in the works of thinkers as diverse as William Godwin, Johann Most, Bakunin, and Sergei Nechaev. Godwin, like the later Mill, prioritizes the promotion of higher pleasures in their various forms.[44] Both emphasize the protection of rights, although these are based on the hypothetical ground that they are the best guarantor of achieving socially desirable goals.[45] This suggests that rights may be violated where there is significant social benefit. Like Mill, Godwin's utilitarianism sometimes merges into a form of virtue theory,[46] as it stresses the

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[43] J. S. Mill, U*tilitarianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998),55.
[44] William Godwin, "Summary of Principles," in *The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin*, 49-50.
[45] Ibid., 50-52.
[46] See Mill's discussions of higher pleasures and of the role of justice in *Utilitarianism*, 57-58 and 105-06

development of a rounded and socially-located individual, rather than just a pleasure-seeking one. Most, by contrast, is more straightforwardly consequentialist:

Ethics? The end of revolution is freedom; the end justifies the means. The struggle for freedom is a war; wars are to be won and therefore to be waged with all energy, ruthlessly [...] using all there is to be used, including the latest in technology and the first of chemistry, to kill oppressors forthwith.... [47]

Similarly Nechaev proposes a strict consequentialism:

The revolutionary is a dedicated man (*sic*). He has no interests of his own, no affairs, no feelings, no attachments, no belongings, not even a name. Everything in him is absorbed by a single passion – the revolution.

[…] He knows only one science, the science of destruction. To this end, and this end alone, he will study mechanics, physics, chemistry and medicine. […] His sole and constant object is the immediate destruction of this vile order.[48]

Despite important differences between Nechaev and Bakunin,[49] Nechaev's influence can be found in the latter's call for a strategic anarchism based on a unified, disciplined body able to create the singular event of a revolution.[50] However, strict consequentialism is criticized on many grounds, including by Bakunin. First, there is ontological doubt as to whether a single, universal goal exists and, if it does, whether it is discoverable. Secondly, such strict consequentialism can impact severely on the autonomy of the individual, reducing human subjects to mere instruments in the satisfaction of the grand plan. Third, as the quotation from Nechaev indicates, consequentialism damages the character of the individual: such instrumentalism reduces moral subjects to little more than coldly calculating machines. The

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[47] F. Trautmann, *The Voice of Terror: A Biography of Johann Most* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 99.
[48] Sergei Nechaev, *Catechism of the Revolutionist* (London: Violette Nozieres Press and Active Distribution, 1989), 4-5.
[49] See P. Averich, *Bakunin and Nechaev* (London: Freedom, 1987).
[50] Mikhail Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 215-7.

consequentialist calculation is similar in form to capitalist exchange. It assesses (anti-)

political tactics on the basis of whether resources invested in them are going to reap a suitable

return over and against alternative actions. It is for these reasons that Nechaev's

consequentialism is considered antithetical to the main forms of anarchism.[51]

Deontological ethics is the one most associated with the term "anarchism" in political

and moral philosophy.[52] Philosophers such as Richard Dagger and Dudley Knowles have

constructed "academically respectable" versions of anarchism based on deontological

principles which are then contrasted with the supposedly irrationally violent social

movement.[53] This narrow iteration of anarchism (known as "philosophical anarchism") holds

a significant position in moral and political philosophy, being close to Nozickian liberalism.[54]

It is based on one supreme principle: the autonomy of the rational individual. This requires an

absolute avoidance of coercion and total respect for negative rights. Some have modified this

largely right-libertarian (or "propertarian") account of anarchism to also include principles of

equality.[55]

There are a number of problems with deontological accounts of anarchism. Even

advocates accept that it is hard to conceive of societies where coercion is entirely absent.[56]

Without an agreed external authority, as Jonathan Wolff notes, the philosophical anarchist

relies solely on private judgement.[57] This leads to the problems previously noted regarding

subjectivism, wherein there is no way of resolving disputes when the ultimate arbiter is

individual conscience. The problem of conflicting judgements is resolved, at least initially, by

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[51] See for instance Avrich, *Bakunin and Nechaev,* 28-30.

[52] Thus Plekhanov writes in *Anarchism and Socialism*: "The morality of the Anarchists is that of persons who look upon all human action from the abstract point of view of the unlimited rights of the individual" (77).

[53] R. Dagger, "Philosophical Anarchism and Its Fallacies: A Review Essay," *Philosophy and Law* 19:3 (2000), 391-406: 391-2; D. Knowles, *Political Philosophy*, 249.

[54] Although there are differences, particular around Nozick's limited minimal state. See R. Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974) and some of the essays in R. Long and T. Machan, eds., *Anarchism/Minarchism: Is a Government Part of a Free Country* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008).

[55] See for instance A. Carter, "Analytical Anarchism: Some Conceptual Foundations," *Political Theory* 28:2 (2000), 230–53.

[56] R. Wolff , *In Defense of Anarchism* , 82.

[57] J. Wolff , *Introduction* , 46–7.

claiming that anarchists hold a metaphysical belief in a benign human instinct. Without the distorting influence of malign state practice individuals would agree to the most cooperative solution.

Appeals to humanism or, indeed, any sort of essentialism, are inherently weak and open to all sorts of criticisms. One is epistemological: by what means can one derive a core, universal characteristic common to all humanity? Others are practical. If humans are essentially benign, as Wolff argues, then why do oppressive institutions like the state develop in the first place?[58] In light of these and other criticisms, the defense of anarchism fails and the theory can be easily refuted. Anarchists themselves understandably reject explanations such as Wolff's. Instead, they recognize that humans have many conflicting instinctual drives[59] and that anarchism, whilst not necessarily incompatible with nature, is not naturally ordained.[60]

More standardly, deontological theories are viewed as inadequate by anarchists because they: (1) support and enhance inequalities; (2) have an inadequate account of freedom; (3) require hierarchical social institutions (whether a public or private enforcement agency); and (4) are based on a flawed account of human agency which corrupts social relationships.

Whilst anarchism is critical of hierarchies of economic, social, and political power, classical rights-based theorists consider economic inequalities to be desirable, since they provide provide incentives to greater productive endeavor,[61] either else of no concern provided they are the result of just exchange[62] Contractual arrangements tend to exacerbate pre-existing inequalities, which further undermines the social standing of the weaker and

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[58] J. Wolff , *Introduction* , 29–30.

[59] Peter Kropotkin, "Law and Authority: An Anarchist Essay," available online at http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/ Anarchist_Archives/kropotkin/lawauthority.html.

[60] See, for example, E. Malatesta, "Peter Kropotkin: Recollections and Criticisms of an Old Friend," in *Life and Ideas*, ed. V. Richards (London: Freedom, 1984), 257-268

[61] J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

[62] Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.

lessens their economic power and the representation of their interests within a market economy. Such inequalities can lead to slave-like circumstances in which the economically vulnerable have no choice but to comply with the demands of a monopolistic employer.[63]

Classical deontology argues that respect for rights allows parties to make consensual, mutually beneficial agreements. Such arrangements are the ideal form of freedom: "There is in the operation of the market no compulsion and coercion."[64] However, socialist critics point out that those in economically subservient relationships have no choice but to sell their labor to survive.[65] It is for this reason that the anarchist anthropologist David Graeber revives the notion of "wage-slavery."[66]

Deontological principles rest upon institutions for their enforcement and as such are antithetical to the anarchist rejection of hierarchical social structures. Liberal contracts are a social relationship between mutually competitive individuals primarily seeking their own individualized benefit regardless of the deleterious impact on either the other party to the contract or external groups. As such they differ from the "free agreements" favored by Kropotkin, which involve finding areas of enterprise that are mutually beneficial and thus require no enforcement.[67] Liberal contracts, by contrast, are based on agents seeking personal advantage and so require an apparatus of enforcement. For this reason, as social institutions have been increasingly structured on classical liberal norms, the state has not withdrawn, as proponents had argued, but become more significant because it is necessary in order to police such contracts.[68]

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[63] This can be the case without any violation of just transfer. See K. DeClark, "Autonomy, Taxation and Ownership: An Anarchist Critique of Kant's Theory of Property," in Franks and Wilson, *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy*, 69-85.

[64] L. von Mises, *Human Action* (London: Hodge, 1949), 258.

[65] Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, 196.

[66] D. Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2004), 70.

[67] Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, 199-200.

[68] S. Harper *Beyond the Left: The communist critique of the media* (London: Zero, 2012), 15-16.

The underlying moral agent presumed in deontological theory is the abstract individual who is the sole owner of her body (as property) and private property. This is a flawed account of human agency. First, it is another essentialism and thus prone to the problems of a universal account of the individual as discussed above. Second, as Graham Baugh points out in reference to Bakunin's critique of liberalism, the account of agency is insufficient.[69] Lockean, Kantian, and Rousseauian individualisms are based on moral subjects abstracted from the social setting—that is agents, who have no shared concepts or language by which to enter into meaningful social practices or contracts. Such agents would be stranded in a "nihilistic desert."[70] Thirdly, important social practices are damaged by being based on deontological norms. Reducing all relationships to transactional ones, as MacIntyre and Michael Sandel have argued, undermines solidarity and other important social virtues.[71] This position is shared by Bakunin and contemporary social anarchists, who also point to the "corrosive" impacts of individualism on practices based on cooperation, compassion, and camaraderie.[72]

Despite being portrayed as a theory that supremely privileges individual rights, anarchism's commitment to prefiguration results in a rejection of deontology, which privileges means over ends, as well as of consequentialism, which prioritizes ends over means. Prefigurative methods do not reject the importance of good outcomes but neither do they make methods solely instrumental to their achievement. Instead, prefiguration encourages tactics that embody, as far as possible, the values inherent in the goals. Ends are not fixed, but they are inherent in material, social practices.

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[69] G. Baugh, "The Poverty of Autonomy: The Failure of Wolffs Defence of Anarchism," in Roussopoulos, *The Anarchist Papers*, 107-121.

[70] Baugh, "The Poverty of Autonomy," 166-67.

[71] See, for example, M. Sandel and S. Hoffman, "Markets, Morals, and Civil Life*," Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 58:4 (2005), 6-11; A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1984), x, 220-23.

[72] Bakunin, *Political Philosophy,* 168-69; and I. McKay, ed., *An Anarchist FAQ*, volume 1 (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2008), 339.

Perfectionism and virtue theory, like prefiguration, recognize that social relationships contain internal goods as well generating external goods. For perfectionists these non-moral goods, like health, are also required for a flourishing individual and society,[73] whilst virtue theorists consider these non-moral goods to be resources for the generation and maintenance of virtues. Virtues are inter-personal attributes that are desirable in themselves and preferable to their opposites (so bravery is preferred over cowardice or rashness, generosity is favored over miserliness or being a spendthrift, etc.) but by developing and practicing relationships that embody these values they encourage the (re)production of other desirable social relationships. The generation of virtues is likely to produce a flourishing individual and society. For radical virtue theory, the contestation of hierarchies is a vital feature of virtues (bravery, for instance involves standing up to a bully and not encouraging modes of domination, wisdom involves sharing rather than monopolizing knowledge, etc.). Anti-hierarchical relationships are a goal, and these forms of social relationship should be embodied in organizations and methods.[74]

Virtue theory has the advantage of including many of the key concerns of deontology and utilitarianism, but sees them as moderating, and being moderated by, other values, such as solidarity, liberality, and compassion, which embody anarchist anti-hierarchical commitments. Deontological principles of respecting the freedoms of others and fulfilling one's duties are consistent with virtues like integrity and justice, whilst utilitarian concern for the well-being of others is captured in virtues like compassion and generosity. The virtues act in unity. If someone is acting without wisdom or compassion, she is not demonstrating genuine bravery but rashness.

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[73] See S. Clark, "Kicking Against the Pricks: Anarchist Perfectionism and the Conditions of Independence," in Franks and Wilson, *Anarchism and Moral philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 33-44: 35.

[74] James Guillaume, quoted in Mikhail Bakunin, *Marxism, Freedom and the State*, trans. K.J. Kenafick (London: Freedom Press, 1984), 7.

Whilst some virtue theorists are individualists, concentrating on individual self-improvement, other virtue theorists like the renegade MacIntyre and his "revolutionary Aristotelian" followers[75] prioritize the social, inter-personal character of the virtues. Virtues require social practices, which in turn are rule-governed activities that require resources and which produces shared goods, both internal and external. These rules are necessary for the practice to function, but do not necessarily require a centralized or fixed, hierarchical system of reward and punishment in order to operate. The principles that underpin that practice will change over time, though some may remain wholly stable. For instance, a competitive association football (or soccer) match requires materials such as pitch, goals, balls, and human labor (team-mates, competitors). It has shared discourses ("attack," "formation"), rules (governing foul play and legitimate sanctions), identities ("team-mates," "opponents," "spectators"), and its own internal goods (such as camaraderie, physical bravery and athleticism). Practices develop over time into traditions, and different attributes are prioritized in different locations: in Scottish football, for example, hard tackling is considered a core attribute, while in Catalan football ball control is privileged over aggressive play. However, the main norms remain central to both, as do many of the internal goods and the key concepts. There are shared characteristics which make the game comprehensible to practitioners from different cultures, though it would be incomprehensible to someone from the same culture who only knew only ice-hockey or American football.

At the same time, virtue-rich social practices can become corrupted. MacIntyre, consistent with anarchist critiques of capitalism, explains how virtuous social activities become undermined. First is when entrants into a practice become more concerned with achieving external goods rather than maintaining the activity's internal goods: for example, when people only play football in order to gain the prize money that comes from winning the game. Here the practitioner may cheat or use other forms of gamesmanship (such as abusing opponents) to try to gain an unfair advantage, which undermines the game's internal goods, discourages future participants, and fosters instrumental

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[75] See, for example, many of papers in *Revolutionary Aristotelianism: Ethics, Resistance, and Utopia*, ed. K. Knight and P. Blackledge (Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius, 2008).

interactions.[76] When external goods are prioritized, the internal goods of a productive practice are necessarily marginalized. Kropotkin, for example, points to the ways in which the drive for efficient production undermines important social and aesthetic values and creates great harms.[77]

Social practices become corrupted when inappropriate goods are imposed onto a practice, or when external goods are given supreme priority over internal goods, or a single value (usually exchange value) takes absolute precedence over all other values. Managerialism and neo-liberalism are associated with just corruption. Because different practices have different constellations of virtues, distinctive rules, and discourses, practitioners (and those in adjacent disciplines) are usually best positioned to understand how to conduct a practice. Bakunin, in his famous discussion on what constitutes just authority, explains that while there is legitimate authority of knowledge, both practical and theoretical, no one could have total knowledge. The authority of knowledge is limited and contextual: "Therefore there is no fixed and constant authority, but a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination."[78] Where there is management external to the practice, autonomy is reduced and the virtues are undermined; where practitioners remain in control of their activity, virtues continue to flourish.

Continual exposure to corrupt practices degrades those who undertake them. This leads to a problem identified by the heterodox Marxist David Harvey: if dehumanizing, hierarchical behaviors are pervasive, how is it possible to rediscover humane ways of living?[79] Harvey's answer is that one must confront vicious practices. Anarchists like Bookchin and the Trapese Collective agree, but they also stress than in contesting these practices the modes of opposition used by the oppressed must embody, as far as possible, the humane social relations they wish to see realized in a liberated society.[80]

Whilst a radical virtue theory is, I argue, the form of ethics most consistent with anarchism's commitment to anti-hierarchical, prefigurative social relationships to generate

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[76] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 192-93.
[77] Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, 1-3, 92-93.
[78] Bakunin, *God and The State*, 30.
[79] Harvey *The Promise of Revolutionary Humanism*, columns 3-4.
[80] Ibid. See also M. Bookchin, "Anarchism," in *The Murray Bookchin Reader*, ed. J. Biehl (London: Cassell, 1997), 143-171: 146, Trapese Collective, *Do it Yourself* (London: Pluto, 2007), 1-9.

mutual social goods, this is not to say that it is overtly recognized as such by anarchists themselves even though there is a pervasive use of virtue terminology in the evaluation of their own tactics as well as the political strategies of their opponents. Even within the pages of *325 Magazine*, which purportedly targets "civil anarchism" and promotes "amoralism," the failings of its opponents are analyzed in terms of cowardice, exclusionary elitism and lack of solidarity, and integrity:[81] values which are social and practice-dependent. Social anarchists also use a wide variety of concepts drawn from virtue theory: When they discuss the joys of urban insurrection, Class War also highlight how the rediscovery of the power of the oppressed can be used to foster solidarity, anti-hierarchy and "new ways of relating to one another."[82] Likewise Malatesta stresses that the appropriate anarchist agent is one that is passionate about the welfare of others as well as himself, but such passion must also be tempered by wisdom. Inappropriate anarchist acts—and here Malatesta is referring to certain spectacular incidents of propaganda by deed—lack self-discipline and care even when they are by right principle.[83]

In some arenas, because of particularly extensive and powerful forms of domination, all social practices are at risk of being corrupted. It is not surprising in these circumstances if activists are more concerned with resisting this form of oppression. Thus, there can be locations in which the concentration is on one particular form of resistance, which is accompanied by a singular ethical discourse. In the late 1940s and 1950s, with the intensification of the Cold War, some anarchists prioritized discourses based on "individual freedom" since it seemed as though social practices which included respect for individual sovereignty were most under threat by Soviet Marxism, on one hand, and the statist,

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[81] DMP "Introduction," *Anarchy: Civil or Subversive*, 3, 5-6.

[82] Class War, *A Decade of Disorder* (London: Verso, 1991), 47. See too the Anarchist Federation which, in its account of international resistance to hierarchical governance, discusses Min, a female Chinese worker in order to highlight her appropriate self-regard and ingenuity: Anarchist Federation, "Made in China: Gender and Resistance in the 'Factory of the World'," *Angry Women Win: Resistance Special* (2014), 9, available online at http://afed.org.uk/res/resist157.pdf.

[83] Errico Malatesta, "Pensiero e Volanta," in *Anarchism and Violence* (Johannesburg, SA: Zabalaza, n.d.), 8.

militarized democracies, on the other. The problem is that if a particular value (and corresponding single moral agent) is taken as universal, then this undermines other values and damages social practices based on these plural goods.

A range of ethical theories (normative and meta-ethical) can be found within anarchism. However, it is the revolutionary Aristotelian tradition of virtue theory that appears to be most consistent with the main analyses and practices of anarchism. Radical virtue theory starts with a materialist interest in social practices which generate internal and external goods, and thus prefigure wider benevolent social practices. Virtues, because they work in unity, are antipathetic to hierarchy, as social relationships based on domination generate vices such as callousness, brutality, and injustice. Virtues are multiple; they are not reducible to a single, supreme value. To this extent virtue theory, like anarchism, is critical of capitalism, which prioritizes a single (exchange) value.

The existence and persistence of a range of ethical stances within anarchism has a number of positive features. It encourages internal critique of existing practices and promotes dialogue amongst activists. Deontological anarchists will remind others of their shared commitments to liberty, whilst utilitarian interventions restrain socially negligent behavior. The shared interest in ethics, even from rival traditions, nevertheless demonstrates a mutual concern with the interests of others, even if there is disagreement on who "the others" are, as well as with which interests take priority. The language of moral discussion nevertheless provides one method (amongst others) for fruitful engagement and collaboration. Amoralist interventions, despite their weaknesses, nevertheless encourage reflection on the emergence of evaluative principles and the recognition that ethical discourse is not the sole language for collective action.

Applied Ethics

There are a number of major areas where anarchist ethical principles have been a significant (albeit minor) current in professional debates. Anarchist influence on pedagogy, for example, has been well-documented,[84] and anarchist interest in the micro-dynamics of political organization has been subject to systematic analysis, both historically and with the rise of social movements like Occupy.[85] Whilst Occupy is diverse and many of its manifestations were not explicitly anarchist, these protest groups embodied many anarchist concerns with non-hierarchical social organization.[86] Within explicitly anarchist organizations there have been debates around the use of tactics: those concerning violence and animal vivisection have had particularly significant exposure. More recently, such diverse private and public activities as business practices[87] and gardening[88] have been subject to anarchist analysis and intervention. Similarly, a long-running concern of anarchists—that of freedom of speech versus protection of minorities from abusive or apparently abusive speech-acts—remains contentious.

There is insufficient space to deal adequately with any significant applied ethical dilemma. Instead, this section provides a general anarchist approach to applied ethical analysis and its critique of standard analytical methods. Much standard applied ethics involves clarifying and assessing regulations or norms promoted and/or enforced by state or quasi-state authorities, and the responsibilities of, and duties to, the individual.[89]A necessary feature of legislative guidance is that it provides an authoritative basis for decisions across all

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[84] See, for example, J. Spring, *Wheels in the Head*, third edition (London: Routledge, 2007); J. Suisa, *Anarchism and Education: A Philosophical Investigation* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010).

[85] See, for example, D. Graeber, "Occupy and Anarchism's Gift of Democracy," *The Guardian* (15 Nov 2011), available online at http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/53317/1/Graber_Occupy_anarchism's_democracy_2013.pdf; M. Gibson, "The Anarchism of the Occupy Movement," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 48:3 (2013), 335-348; M. Bray, *Translating Anarchy: The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street* (Winchester, UK: Zero, 2013).

[86] Bray, *Translating Anarchy*, 42-3.

[87] See *Ephemera* 14.4, Special issue on Management, Business, Anarchism (2014).

[88] S. Yuill *spring_alpha:diggers* (2007), available online at http://www.scottisharts.org.uk/1/artsinscotland/ visualarts/projects/projectsarchive/simonyuill.aspx.

[89] Whilst "social policy" starts by being described in general terms, as the intersection of social practices and relationships develops to enhance well-being, the description soon shifts to central administration of these relationships and institutions. See, for example, H. Dean, *Social Policy* (London: Polity, 2012), 1-5. Michael Hill makes the link between central authority and social policy more explicit. See, for example, his *Understanding Social Policy*, seventh edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

social domains within a specific geographical region (referred to as "universal"). For universally applicable legislation, there has to be a singular definition, or formula for the generation of definitions, which can identify and interpret these norms, hence the analytic tradition's concentration on conceptual clarification.

Anarchist applied ethics, by contrast, argues that there is no single method of study or interpretation that can authoritatively and accurately identify, categorize, and evaluate all concepts outside of the social practices within which they arise. Universal definitions, anarchists argue, are almost certain to be defective and likely to damage diverse, irreducible social practices. Rather than concentrate on conceptual clarification, or emphasize the development of universal rules (such as those based on Lockean property rights) for dealing with social problems, the concentration shifts to a more micropolitical analysis of power and identity. An anarchist method explores specific activities from the perspective of the practitioners and those affected by the practice; it does not assume that there is an objective position from which to make a universally valid judgement. This method identifies the power relationships within and between those participating in or subject to the social activity and the connections and disjunctions between one practice and adjacent practices. It might also refer to the subject position of those making the judgements. This method identifies how affirming or reducing particular features of these rule-goverened activities (a shift of resources, a tweaking of the norms) might assist in the further generation of social goods. It would also explore how hierarchical impositions, whether state-, capital- or patriarchal-centered, can disrupt or corrupt social practices.

Rather than a universalist, legislative approach, anarchists argue for one which is epistemologically and strategically more modest. Here, practitioners and participants identify the particular norms, resources, identities, and immanent goods (and harms) within particular traditions. Practitioners rather than legislators should take the lead in protecting their virtuous

practices from discriminatory and hierarchical interference. This does not necessarily rule out some manipulation and use of social power against coercive and abusive behavior, but in countering these threats, the methods used should also encapsulate the virtues, such as bravery, justice, compassion, and modesty.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided both an overview and an analysis of anarchist perspectives on meta-ethics, normative (and situated) ethics, and applied ethics. Distinctive meta-ethical and normative positions help shape, and are shaped by, the different constellations of anarchism. Thus egoist and certain post-anarchist formations support and are structured by subjectivist and nihilist positions, whilst some individualist anarchisms develop principles and practices consistent with liberal deontology. In addition to providing a survey, however, this contribution also argues for an account of anarchist ethics that is materialist, but not determinist or universalist, and which is consistent with revolutionary Aristotelianism. It recognizes that values are generated in material social practices. These values are vital to the continuation of these practices, but adapt over time. As social practices differ, different values take precedence, and indeed can be discovered or produced. Such a flexible, non-universalist account is consistent with the prefigurative principles and non-universalist epistemologies that are core to anarchism.