It was about 1982, two years after the first issue of Social Anarchism was published that I received a call from David Wieck, one of our editorial board members. David, like most of those on the board, had been invited to serve because of his articles which we had reprinted in our first anthology, Reinventing Anarchy. He had become a regular writer for us, and following each issue he would call to let me know what he thought of it. He was a tough taskmaster and was often on target with his comments. This call was different.

"Could you use about 1,000 copies of Giovanni Baldelli's Social Anarchism? They'd make great premiums for new subscribers."

I had to admit I had never heard of Baldelli and confessed my ignorance to David.

"I'll send you a copy. See what you think."

When I did receive and read the book, I was impressed by two aspects of Baldelli's work. One was his "moral anarchist philosophy" and the other was the creative manner in which he dealt with economics. So, getting back to David, who it turned out had translated and edited the book, I asked the natural question, "What are you doing with a thousand copies?"

As far as I can recall from our conversation, Wieck and Baldelli had submitted the manuscript to Atherton Press of Chicago. It was a moderate-sized academic press, and Social Anarchism fit with their political books series. At some point while the book was being printed, Atherton merged with Aldine and shortly thereafter, the combined publishers declared bankruptcy.

Some hard copies of the book had been distributed in England, but the entire paperback edition, according to David, went straight from the press to a warehouse in New York City where it sat for almost 12 years. At that point, David was offered the books as long as he paid the cost of shipping. So it was that we came to be the distributor of this interesting book, and it certainly helped bolster our insecure finances. We do still have a small number of copies left which you can buy for $5 dollars. (A true book bargain, and certainly a worthwhile addition to your anarchist library.)

Baldelli died in 1986, only a few years after we received the book. From the standpoint of an author, I have often thought about the frustration and disappointment that he must have felt. An article-length obituary of Baldelli appears in issue #12 of this magazine. David Wieck died in July 1997, and a memorial essay appears in issue #24.

We reprint the introduction to this book offering a sampling of Baldelli's ideas, ideas hopefully opening a door to his unique view of anarchism. As he says in this piece: "Anarchy will come if and when, and only insofar as, it is wanted. To want it is the first step, and in a sense, that step is a realization of anarchy."

Introduction

Anarchism is the purity of rebellion. A pig who struggles wildly and rends the air with his cries while he is held to be slaughtered, and a baby who kicks and screams when, wanting warmth and
his mother's breast, he is made to wait in the cold -- these are two samples of natural rebellion. Natural rebellion always inspires either deep sympathy and identification with the rebelling creature, or a stiffening of the heart and an activation of aggressive-defensive mechanisms to silence an accusing truth. This truth is that each living being is an end in itself; that nothing gives a being the right to make another a mere instrument of his purposes. The rebel against authority holds to this truth in everything that concerns him and recognizes no other judge than himself.

Natural rebellion is an outburst of energy against constriction, a statement of a will whose identity and integrity are threatened, and it aims at nothing more than removing an obstacle or breaking free from a cage. But natural rebellion can be a shortcut to tyranny. Not every rebel is an anarchist. The man experienced in rebellion knows how to forestall it in others; the professional rebel assimilates the mentality and methods of the oppressor, to which he may even have felt a strong attraction from the start.

Rebellion can act as an illumination and when that happens, and faith is kept, the rebel becomes an anarchist. For the anarchist, rebellion is not only a statement of will but a statement of rightness and truth. It is such a statement if the truth and rightness of rebellion are recognized for others as well as for oneself; if no words are spoken against other men's truth; and if nothing is done to others that, done to oneself, would cause one to rebel.

Because oppression takes many forms, anarchists have often stressed one or another particular motive for rebellion so passionately as to obscure their original inspiration. Anarchism is not a philosophy. A man's philosophy is his way of giving unity and coherence to his thoughts, and if he is asked to organize his thoughts other than as he himself chooses, the demand is in contradiction to anarchism. But if it is not a philosophy, anarchism is far more than rebellion. As is suggested by its being an "ism," it rests on more than one intuition and embraces a variety of methods and actions. The truth that is so vivid in the experience of rebellion does not cease to be true once rebellion is spent. If rebellion sought to defend something worthwhile, there must be values of which it is the defender.

Anarchism must rest on fundamental principles that are the result of an act of choice and are operative as an act of faith, regardless of whether they may be fitted into one philosophical system or another or whether they may have received rational and even scientific support. The context of these principles is the interplay of human actions, and their function is to give unity of style to a person's life and judgments. Since no single authority can decide what is or is not anarchist, and since anarchists can be recognized only by their allegiance to anarchist principles, the latter require clear and unequivocal statement.

The Human Person Is Primary. The individual alone is a seat of consciousness. Without individuals there are no historical or social events, no forces or entities, with which mankind could be concerned. God, race, country, State, class, history, progress, party, are creations of individual minds and have no reality outside them; to none of them may the individual be sacrificed. That such entities are invoked when the sacrifice of an individual is sought, means that they are functioning as a justification of murder, as a mask for expediency and self-interest. The mortality of individuals, and the immortality or relative immortality of God or State or history, may be felt to justify the sacrifice of the individual. But if a man is told that he is nothing
but an ephemeral piece of dirt, he can reply: Precisely because I must die, and know it, I can engulf all such entities now into that nothingness which will be mine only when I die.

Human Life Is Sacred. Man creates his own values, his own rational and affective attachments, and his own motives for action. To live is not enough, he needs reasons to live. But without life there are no reasons to live, no values. Life, therefore, as the essential condition of all values, must be cherished above them all, and must be held sacred. Any counterargument is invalid because the mind that advances the argument would not be there if life were not respected. Sacredness is a religious concept but nothing less is sufficient to resist ideas, attitudes, and actions that make life cheap and replaceable and of only a functional or numerical value. As sacred, human life must not be destroyed, or played with, or impaired, or willfully and callously exposed to afflictions.

Coercion Must Be Rejected. Every organism possesses the motive force and equipment necessary to cope with its milieu. For man this milieu includes society, and when society protects each and all of its members it exercises its function. Coercion, whether by society or individuals, runs counter to the needs and purposes of the individual and is therefore evil. It forces a human being to behave according to the needs, feelings, thoughts, and will of another, as if he had none himself; he must use some of his most precious energies to distort and modify his own being. Of course, the individual must not be a parasite upon society, but instinctual promptings, reason, and love are capable of assuring social order; coercion, on the other hand, is needed by and is the resort of the antisocial, the parasite, and the mistrustful.

The End Does Not Justify the Means. The tree is known by its fruit but the so-called ends of political organizations and movements seems never to manage to ripen. Let the tree be judged, then, by what it feeds upon, the so-called means. To say that the end justifies the means is to acknowledge that the means, judged separately, are unjust. If they are unjust, it is because there are concepts of justice prior to, and independent of, the ends to be realized. What will not be permissible tomorrow is permitted today in order that it not be permitted tomorrow. This is to declare today's humanity in some way inferior to tomorrow's, and to burden the latter with a debt of gratitude unasked-for and more likely to be cursed than blessed.

Double Standards Are Unacceptable. Moral standards have played an important part in shaping the life of societies to the benefit of most of their members. With the sharpening of class consciousness and the increasing militancy and militarization of political ideologies, the same practices have come to be judged good or bad according to how they affect one's own or some opposite ideological camp. Different vocabularies are used to make the same practices appear essentially different in the two cases. Belonging to one society or section of society rather than another is mainly an accident of birth, and a truly moral standard abstracts from such accidents. In particular, no one is to be disqualified as a human being by the label of "enemy." What the enemy does to us and what we do to him must be weighed by the same scales and described by the same vocabulary.

Basic principles must be as few as possible so as to avoid theoretical and practical contradictions. Thus we have not listed among the basic principles above that "human nature is fundamentally good" or that "right and wrong are not decided by history." One may behave as an anarchist and
not believe that man is good; and although any subordination of right and wrong to history is a subordination to might, unacceptable to an anarchist, he could conceivably regard anarchist principles as valid only for his time and the future. "The State must be abolished" is a corollary to the principle condemning coercion. "Workers' control" and other anarchist slogans are similarly contingent.

Workers' control may be chosen by some anarchists as part of an anarchist-inspired economic structure but may be rejected by others: the workers themselves may not want it, and a different economic structure might be more efficient and ethically equal or superior. Anarchism, in fact, cannot be linked to a particular economic system. Justice is social rather than economic, and injustice and oppression are compatible with any economic system so far devised. There can be no freedom where the modes of production and consumption are decided on any grounds other than a particular society's needs and resources. That economic questions are important, and that talk of freedom to a starving man is idle, no anarchist will deny, but for anarchists it is not a question of giving today's poor either freedom or enough to eat, but of finding a way for them to have both freedom and enough to eat. Enough to eat for everybody must, and can, be provided without coercion. The economic system acceptable to anarchists is one free from coercion; its name and particular modes of operation are of secondary importance. Economy subordinated to ethics and not controlled by power -- that is the anarchist formula.

If such are the aims of anarchists, why does the man in the street see anarchism as an endorsement of all that is socially disruptive? Why does he not see in men inspired by anarchist principles his best friends and ultimately his greatest hope? Why is it not realized that in order to be truly social one has to be an anarchist?

Chiefly responsible for the bad name of anarchism are the supporters of political power, but anarchists too have contributed by being vague and perfunctory concerning the social side of their doctrine and by frequently espousing the cause of rebellion without insisting on its social illumination. Antisocial impulses and practices may only too easily find in anarchism a pseudo-rational justification. For these reasons the adjective "social" is a useful addition to the word "anarchism" -- in order to be truly anarchist one has to be social.

Rebellion presupposes the existence of oppression and, on the psychological plane, deification of rebellion creates an affective compact with oppression. Experience teaches that ugliness and horror are most rife in a struggle against them. He who needs something to rebel against is less of a social anarchist than he who seeks to create something against which there is no need to rebel. There may be no end to the ugly, sordid, and horrifying things against which an honest man cannot help but revolt, but there are also things that are beautiful, joyful, and pure. If it were wrong to attend to the latter while the former still thrive, then a hopeless perpetual struggle would become the only meaning of life.

A myth has arisen that the oppressors are few and the oppressed many and that all that is needed to end oppression is for the many to get rid of the few. The myth has led to contempt for the passive oppressed who do not rebel overly -- contempt, that is, for the common man, the bulk of mankind. It is fashionable to present hate and contempt for humanity as the exasperation and despair of compassion, but in that case rebellion should be against existence itself. When a man
who is horrified by the basic evil of the world and his own existence, and who sees no God to
rebel against, takes revenge on his fellow beings, he is a coward and a hypocrite. Perhaps the
ugly, sordid, and horrifying things of which there is no end have always been produced by
hypocritical and cowardly rebellion against existence, but that is not the rebellion of the social
anarchist.

"Social anarchism" means that anarchism is intended to be for the good of society, not for the
exploitation of society. More explicitly it means that men are not to be molded or bludgeoned
into an abstract scheme called anarchism, but that because they want certain things and hold
certain things dear they will find in anarchism the best system to safeguard them.

Every man, insofar as he belongs to his society, is conservative, and the word "society" applies
particularly to those activities which can most aptly be compared to the circulatory, respiratory,
and digestive functions of a living body. Anything that disturbs such activities is contrary to
health. In the consciousness of each of its members and in the reality of their life-serving
interchanges, a society keeps its identity and continuity -- as an individual keeps his -- thanks to
constancies and regularities and a modicum of security and satisfaction, not less vital for being
referred to contemptuously by revolutionaries as "bourgeois." There is an order in society, of
which parties of the Right claim to be the defenders, knowing that they can find a response in
men of all classes, particularly among producers of prime necessities. Revolutionaries, like
politicians, are apt to dismiss as irrelevant the fact that, while they are changing society and
making history, production and essential services will be kept going by those who will suffer
more immediately and more drastically from disruption than will revolutionaries or politicians.

It is not entirely surprising, therefore, that Proudhon, the anarchist with the keener sense of
social realities, should have been thought of as a man of the "Right." Other anarchists, while
priding themselves on being mentally emancipated iconoclasts, have often bowed abjectly to the
mystique of the "Left." Both Right and Left are systems of mystification and political
exploitation; to a country, they are what superpowers are to the world, namely the premise and
instrument of war -- called "civil" in the former case. Inevitably and significantly, any Left that is
triumphant becomes the new Right, thus showing how false, and merely convenient, was its
claim to represent the oppressed against the oppressors. Any man who genuinely cares for his
society will keep clear of any alignment of Right against Left or vice versa, just as a pacifist will
have nothing to do with armies arrayed to slaughter one another.

Too many reactionary governments have been established in the name of revolution for the
social anarchist to identify reaction with the Right and revolution with the Left. Nor will the
anarchist seek revolution for its own sake. If he did, he would be against a host of things but for
none, except for finding his own self-realization in conflict. A truly anarchist and social
revolution will not be the work of revolutionaries but of society itself.

The professional revolutionary cannot be anarchist because he has two vocabularies and two sets
of standards. While he speaks of freedom and happiness, he relegates them to the future. What he
wants and offers now is a struggle for power, discipline, and all the excitements and hazards of
civil war. It is time to apply to the mystique of revolution the same critical intelligence that has
been applied to the mystique of war. The liberation of society and the individual cannot be
effected without bringing to an end any mystique that demands their sacrifice. A dedication to the absolute of Revolution, chosen for oneself and will for others, is no less an alienation of self than that imposed by other absolutes such as God, the Fatherland, the Race, the Dialectics of History, or the Working Class.

Very few people find the meaning of life in surrender to an absolute. People do not want to fight in order to live, or live in order to fight; they simply want to draw from life some sensual or other pleasure, and to achieve some measure of fulfillment in love, companionship, service, and creative work. For the sake of these they surrender each day some of their time and energies to the demands of a life-negating system, of whose life-negation they are often more aware than the revolutionaries themselves because they often suffer from it more directly. They also usually have enough sense not to believe in miracles, and to perceive that, after the Revolution, life-negating demands will still be made upon them, while in the process they may lose whatever they hold dear, and life itself.

In contrast to the revolution proclaimed by the professional revolutionaries, an anarchist revolution is one of generalized rebellion, without leaders and masses. Each social unit shakes off the fetters and mechanisms imposed on it by political and economic powers. An anarchist revolution may be violent, but not of necessity. The revolution is of society, by society, and for society, and the degree of violence will depend on the volume, obstinacy, and resources of the antisocial forces that oppose the revolution. State and capitalist machines can crack at any and all of their joints. Many men now holding key or subordinate positions in structures of oppression and exploitation could come to see themselves as social beings first and foremost, and act accordingly.

If sufficient wisdom and social consciousness have been attained so that violence from any quarter is regarded with abhorrence, revolution could take the form of the anarchization of a democracy, by the gradual abolition of laws and of rules and regulations based on political power. Each law could be suspended for a trial period, and if the evil and inconveniences it was supposed to prevent did not occur, or if there were positive gains from the suspension, that would be proof that, as far as the particular law was concerned, the people were ready for anarchy.

The paths to anarchy, it can be seen, are many, as they should be, but none of them is a shortcut. Anarchy will come if, and when, and only insofar as, it is wanted. to want it is the first step and, in a sense, that step is a realization of anarchy. For the will to anarchy not to be wasted, divided, turned against itself, or betrayed, ideas concerning an anarchist society and the essential conditions of freedom should be as clear as possible. Clear ideas are the surest bastion against fraudulence and malicious nonsense. This is a book of ideas. If the reader does not always find them clear, we trust that he will be helped to form clearer ones of his own, and thus be better equipped than he was before to detect fraudulence and malicious nonsense, however learnedly disguised, and however militantly and engagingly presented.

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