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Green Anarchism: Towards the Abolition of Hierarchy
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recognised the essence of anarchism: *equality in all things*. What he perhaps did not recognise, as might instead be a deed reserved for the anarchists of today's world, is what it means to follow this essence to its logical conclusion. If we are going to take the idea of equality seriously, should we not ask whether, rather than being confined by the boundary of our own species, our struggle should emphatically transcend it?

In order to overcome one form of domination, we must ultimately overcome them all: we must overcome hierarchy in general. Moreover, in order to do this, we need to do more than merely understanding hierarchy, and must dedicate ourselves to building a broad and coherent movement – an *ecology of resistance* – that is capable of opposing it on all fronts. This may well be the most interesting time that we could ever have hoped to be alive: we will create the most exciting – and the most *revolutionary* – epoch that there ever has been, or we will remain confined by our prejudices until all hope of survival has rotted into dust.

- Corin Bruce

in social problems, then the solutions to these ecological problems too must find their roots in radical social change. The ambition of this social change would be to dismantle the hierarchical structures that pervade our own society, and replace them instead with genuinely egalitarian ones. These would find their form in decentralised, community-based, directly democratic means of organisation – the atoms of a*green* anarchist society – that would cater for the widest range of human need, and locate a thorough ecological concern as its basic tenet. It would only be then, once we have found balance within our own society, that we might be able to find a sustainable balance with the natural world as well.

However, social ecology should not be mistaken for an anti-technology or anti-civilisation critique that strives to find balance with nature by returning to some kind of pre-industrial tribal society. 'Primitivism' can be described as seeking social transformation along these lines, and can certainly come infused with interesting anarchist currents, but this is not the focus of social ecology, nor is it the focus of this essay. On the contrary, social ecology seeks to synthesise what might be regarded as some of the most desirable aspects of more primitive societies, such as their decentralised and ecological means of existing, with some of the most desirable aspects of modern society, such as its alleged focus on reason, science, and technology.

Conclusion: Towards the Abolition of Hierarchy

At this point we will be in a position to venture a hypothesis, namely that green anarchism, rather than being some misanthropic parody designed for radicals with dreadlocks, represents instead an expression of anarchism in its most highly developed and most coherent form. It is not merely humans that are the victims of State, capitalist, and – more generally – hierarchical destruction: the common victims of this complex of domination are ultimately all forms of life on Earth. Peter Kropotkin once said: "Equality in all things, the synonym of equity, this is anarchism in very deed." It seems that Kropotkin, perhaps the single most celebrated hero of anarchism,

Contents

Introduction 5
Social Anarchism 6
Green Anarchism 7
Animal Rights 8
Social Ecology 9
Conclusion: Towards the Abolition of Hierarchy 10

If we remove the veil of speciesism, and recognise the capacities that non-human animals often genuinely *do* possess, then what are we left with? Despite the sometimes vast differences between humans and non-human animals, one property that we seem to hold in common is that which is argued to be crucial for moral consideration: 'sentience'. Sentience is understood as the capacity to be conscious of the world, or in other words to have experiences from one's own point of view, which – perhaps most importantly for animal rights – translates into the capacity to feel pain and pleasure. It follows that when a sentient non-human animal such as a pig, donkey, or fish is dominated by a hierarchical structure, that they suffer harm in much the same way that a human being does. As such, it is argued that what species one happens to be a member of is ultimately irrelevant, and that it is whether or not one is sentient – be they human or not – that is crucial for moral consideration, meaning that anarchist struggles should be broadened to include animal liberation as well.

Social Ecology

Murray Bookchin first proposed the notion of social ecology, which can be relayed quite simply as arguing that the idea that we as humans must dominate the natural world stems from the idea that we as humans must dominate each other. As such, social ecology asserts that social issues and ecological issues are inseparable, because social hierarchy is ultimately responsible for our hierarchical attitude towards the non-human world. This manifests itself in an understanding of the natural world as human property, which reduces it to a mere pool of resources that is evaluated exclusively according to its instrumental use for human desires. However, even if this attitude might be said to serve our short-term interests, its long-term consequences have culminated in an ecological crisis – involving issues such as global warming, resource scarcity, pollution, mass extinction, deforestation, and soil degradation – that has come to threaten the very possibility of our species continuing to survive.

Beyond merely analysing these issues, social ecology finds a truly revolutionary translation: if our ecological problems find their roots

bottom of what is worth opposing about any one form of hierarchy, we recognise that the very same structure is reproduced in all others. As such, it is argued that the most consistent struggle for liberation must be total, and not merely oppose those forms of hierarchy that appeal the most to our convenience, but strive instead for the liberation of all forms of life from hierarchical domination. Having said this, we can now add two more examples of hierarchy to the list that was mentioned in the last section: speciesism, and environmental domination. These will be explained separately in the following two section.

Animal Rights

The idea of animal rights proposes that the kind of moral consideration that is often granted to members of our own species should be extended to non-human animals as well. This thinking goes hand in hand with green anarchism, because it can be seen to argue – upon recognising that the hierarchies that pervade our own society should be abolished – that the hierarchies that involve the human subordination of other species of animals should be abolished for much the same reasons.

Central to this approach is the notion of 'speciesism', which refers to a prejudice in favour of the interests of members of one's own species, and against the interests of members of other species. This type of hierarchy is not based upon the recognition of any actual capacities held by members of other species, but instead on the mere fact that they are not members of our own group. Importantly, the logical structure of speciesism is argued to be the same as all other forms of social hierarchy. For example, it is integral to the attempted justification of racism, which locates what someone's race happens to be as a basis for dominating them, and just as well to sexism, which depends instead on one's sex. As such, proponents of animal rights argue that speciesist logic is just as irrational as that of any other form of domination: just because someone else is different to me, does not mean that they do not count morally, or that they can be dominated as if they were a resource for my own ends.

Freedom presents an essay by contributor Corin Bruce, intended as an introduction to 'green anarchism' and the ways in which it can challenge hierarchies.

Introduction

In the last few decades new forms of activism have begun to emerge that concerned not merely the fate of human society, but of the non-human world – including non-human animals and the environment – as well. In their most radical forms, these struggles culminated in what has been termed by some as 'eco' or 'green' anarchism. Green anarchism can be taken to consist in any political doctrine that takes some of the key components of anarchist thought – whatever these are deemed to be – and applies them towards critiquing the interaction of humans with the non-human world. This definition is a good start, but is perhaps like many definitions of anarchism unsatisfactorily vague. This essay will propose a more specific definition of green anarchism, which will later be explained as the political doctrine that strives for the abolition of hierarchy in general.

In order for this to make sense, it will first be necessary to say some important things about social anarchism, and in particular its emphasis upon opposing social hierarchy, and from here this perspective will be applied to explain what is meant by green anarchism. I will then tie in some of the most exciting topics of green anarchist thinking – namely animal rights and social ecology – and for this reason I hope that this essay will provide a solid introduction to those that are new to the topic. I will then conclude with an adventurous assertion: green anarchism, as it is here understood, represents the most developed and the most coherent expression of anarchist thinking. I hope that the reader will be enticed (or outraged) enough by this claim to accompany me on an understanding of why I think it is fair.

Social Anarchism

The green anarchist perspective can be described as emerging from a more general anarchist outlook, which will be described here as 'social anarchism'.

Social anarchism: *the view that all social hierarchy should be abolished.*

What is meant by 'society' will be taken to refer quite simply to the human world, whilst what is meant by 'hierarchy' is a system of domination that involves the subordination of the interests of one individual or group of individuals by another. Accordingly, we can see that social anarchism strives to eliminate hierarchy from the human world entirely, or in other words that it desires for human relations to be ordered amongst genuine equals, meaning that no one human should have the right to treat another – formally or informally – as their property.

Social anarchism has much in common with more orthodox strains of radical thought, such as classical anarchism, which tends primarily towards opposing the State, as well as Marxism, which maintains instead an economic focus on class and capitalism. Whilst social anarchism shares these aims in common, where it diverges from these ideologies is in its refusal to recognise the State or capitalism as being at the foundation of all that is wrong with today's world. Rather, as according to a perspective that is broader and more radical, it regards the State and capitalism as being at the surface of a complex structure of domination that casts its roots much deeper: hierarchy.

With this point of view in mind, we can explain why, as anarchism developed throughout its history, it began to focus its efforts upon opposing *all* forms of human domination, which include – but are not limited to – the State and capitalism. Here are some other examples of social hierarchies: racism, patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, ageism, ableism (etc.). Social anarchism strives to abolish all of these, and places a particular emphasis upon the intersection between them. It is argued that one form of domination cannot be understood – let alone opposed – without recognising the common roots that it shares with all others, meaning that particular instances of domination

cannot be separated from the broader hierarchical system that they all arise from. As such, we could say that social anarchism goes beyond recognising the opposition to different forms of hierarchy as distinct struggles that are merely compatible, and recognises them instead as different aspects of the *very same* struggle, namely the struggle for social anarchy.

Green Anarchism

Having looked at relevant components of social anarchism, we will now be in a position to turn to the focus of this essay, which is 'green anarchism'. Whilst social anarchism limits its scope to critiquing power structures that are confined to our own species, green anarchism applies precisely the same perspective towards also critiquing the way that humans interact with the non-human world.

Green anarchism: *the view that all hierarchy should be abolished.*

The definitions of green and social anarchism that have been provided are indeed very similar, but the crucial difference between is that the word 'social' has been removed from the definition of green anarchism. As such, we can see that social anarchism is more specific, because it focuses upon dismantling all hierarchical *human* relations, whilst green anarchism is more general, because it strives to remove all hierarchy *in general*, not merely from how we treat members of our own species, but from the way in which we treat non-humans as well. It should be clarified that this is not proposing that we interfere with hierarchies that exist outside of the sphere of human activity (assuming that non-human hierarchies even exist, which is a contentious point that will not be covered here). Rather, green anarchism proposes that all hierarchies that are a consequence of human activity – whether they are contained within our own society or not – must be dismantled.

This view is often translated into the struggle for 'total liberation,' which can be seen to strive not merely for the fulfilment one or more particular liberation struggles – for example for racial equality, or for gender equality – but for the united fulfilment of *all* liberation struggles in unison. According to this position, when we get to the