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Anarchist Pedagogies Reflection

In this paper I want to reflect on the core anarchist values, and therefore the potential paradox of anti-hierarchical education, that Robert H. Haworth presents in his *Anarchist Pedagogies*. This is important to investigate, as clarification is desperately needed in order to "demystify" anarchism of its straw man misunderstanding of utter chaos. In doing so, we can then address the potential issue of how a system of beliefs whose aim is to liberate individuals from hierarchy isn't self-defeating. I will conclude with some comments on anarchist and Freirean pedagogy.

I believe that one of the first hurdles that anarchism faces is the straw man, or the misunderstanding of what anarchism means. To many, anarchism is the eradication of all structures of organization, specifically that of government. Although anarchism in its original latin definition is this, anarchist thought has progressed far from this. Justin Mueller writes that:

> Rather than social disintegration, the normative principles and organizational ideas in anarchist theory advocate social, economic, and political arrangements that affirm a strong valuation of individuals as ends in themselves, a commitment to egalitarian and democratic methods, and a staunch opposition to hierarchical institutional power arrangements that subordinate some individuals to others. *Fundamentally, anarchist theory operates under the notion that people can and should determine the direction of their own lives, and that social arrangements should be constructed with this aim in mind.*[1]

Contrary to the common understanding of a total absence of structure, Mueller's definition of anarchism appears to provide a kinder and more organized claim as to what anarchism is. However, it is unclear so far about the finer details, i.e. a more individualistic versus a more social variant of anarchism. I'm under the impression that the former is closer to the libertarian ideology (a more egotistical/social darwinist belief[2]) and would therefore be contrary to the type

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[1] Haworth, Robert H. *Anarchist Pedagogies: Collective Actions, Theories, and Critical Reflections on Education*. Oakland, CA: PM, 2012. Print. 15. (emphasis added). At first glance the last part of this quote seems to nurture the egoist. I will revisit this later when examining anarchism, Freire, Buber together in theory. However, it does appear that the earlier concepts put this last point in check.

[2] This is something that I would need to research even further into, i.e. traditional libertarian, American libertarian, and social darwinist approaches. All of these mention seem to really assist and sit cozily with neoliberal tendencies, and therefore counter to the anarchist method as described in this paper...

of anarchism that I am searching for, i.e. anarchism that is compatible with Freire and Buberian fundamentals. Now that we have some sort grounding for a definition to anarchism, I will investigate the core three values presented in *Anarchist Pedagogies*: liberty, equality, and solidarity.

Liberty and freedom are essentially synonymous and is best understood with the anarchist's conception of human nature. Human nature is:

> Human nature [...] is neither tainted by an original sin nor a *tabula rasa* [...] it is malllable, and certain aspects of human behavior can become more prominent depending on context [...] it is the situations and social structures in which we find ourselves that play a significant role in determining which of these features of our "nature" will be more likely to exhibit.[3]

Human nature is essentially determined by the structures and such that influence our decisions and our actions. I think this is an excellent understanding of "human nature" which successfully supports anarchist's further claim that, "It is precisely *because* we are capable of both good and ill that we should abolish hierarchical political institutions and social relations."[4] Whether it be education that promotes a certain way of thought or the economic structures that promote inequality and competition, humans do have have the ability to do good and evil and abolishing hierarchical structures seems good. I might argue that besides oppressive structures and systems to be abolished, there may be hierarchical relations that are absent of oppressive relations, and are even necessary. Personally I think anarchists may be hyper-sensitive to any sort of relations of hierarchy. However, I just looked up the definition of hierarchy and it is "A system or organization in which people or groups are ranked one above the other according to status or authority," and "An arrangement or classification of things according to relative importance or inclusiveness." With that said, it does appear that hierarchy entails the severing of the other, a duality of superiority and inferiority. From that then, I think that anarchism is correct in desiring to abolish hierarchical political institutions and social relations. Before I return back to the core value of liberty, I'd like to present another excellent quote regarding the anarchist conception of "human nature":

> If a child is to grow to value cooperation and solidarity with others, then she must practice cooperation rather than institutionalized competition with her peers. If a child is to grow to challenge received truths and

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[3] Haworth, 20.

[4] Haworth, 21.

think for herself as an adult, then she must grow to challenge received truths and think for herself as an adult, then she must, while young, learn in a way that encourages her to practice individual inquiry and challenge authority.[5]

Returning back to the notion of liberty now that we have examined the anarchist notion of "human nature," liberty/freedom is "Freedom for everybody...with only limit of the equal freedom for others; which does not mean… that we recognise, and wish to respect, the 'freedom' to exploit, to oppress, to command, which is oppression and certainly not freedom."[6] This is an interesting point that sounds great at face value and appears to coincide with Freirean and Buberian thought. It also appears to help distinguish a divide between a more individualistic and more collective based anarchism -- a point of concerned mentioned earlier. To further clarify this point, Mueller continues by stating that freedom "is something that is cultivated within, rather than separate from, a given social context, and cannot be understood without reference to society. It is not a goal for a hypothetical and archetypal individual Person, but for actual people to pursue alongside and - ideally- in cooperation with others."[7] I enjoy this clarification as it emphasizes the real world rather than theoretical practicality, which would coincide with the notion of praxis.

For anarchists, "*Equality of conditions and opportunity* are seen as instrumental and necessary conditions for everyone to be able to fully develop and express their individuality."[8] I don't see a conflict between this and Freirean and Buberian thought. I suspected that this core value is *the* essentially agreed on concern for radical theories. I would note that the way that this value of equality has been described most explicitly includes unfair treatment that all minority groups suffer, specifically LGBTQ groups as well. Not to say that other definitions didn't include or imply this, but perhaps Buber and Freire didn't make this as explicitly (probably due to the times they lived in -- I'm curious as to their thoughts on the treatment of animals as well…).

The final core value at the heart of anarchism is solidarity. This value seeks to reinforce the need for cooperation and the complete disdain for social darwinism. Mueller uses a quote from Peter Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, "That cooperation and fellow-feeling, not just competition and domination, have been a factor in the evolution of many species, including human."[9] Science has studies confirming this quote that cooperation, rather than competition, is better in an

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[5] Haworth, 21.
[6] Haworth, 17.
[7] Haworth, 17.
[8] Haworth, 18.
[9] Haworth, 18.

evolutionary sense. Further, Mueller clarifies this notion further quoting Judith Suissa, stating that solidarity means "Encouraging active empathy and identification with others. It is, at an individual level, a 'moral disposition' or 'attitude' towards others, wherein others are seen not as competitors to be defeated or as means to an end, but as moral equals to be respected and valued."[10] I think that this coincides with Buberian thought, as it emphasizes the relations between people and how to treat/view one another.

These core values are excellent in clarifying a widely (and perhaps misdefined) misunderstanding of anarchism and what is stands for. Potential conflict seems to mostly arise from the anarchist notion of liberty, however; when liberty is combined with other core values and the notion of "human nature" I believe that anarchism can be more easily reconciled with Freirean and Buberian praxis. Interestingly, Mueller includes a chapter critiquing Freirean thought, which I would like to briefly discuss.

Although much of anarchist and Freirean thought works together, the main distinction the Mueller discusses between the two camps is the notion of perspectives and frameworks. Mueller quotes Richard Kahn who claims that Freire is the equivalent of Prometheus and anarchism that of Epimetheus of Greek myth. The former is the "forethought" of planning and action, while the latter represents the "afterthought."[11] Kahn states that "Prometheus (Freire) remains bound and chained by his own creative deed," while Epimetheus is "A disposition of reflection on the potentially harmful limits of transformation and appreciation for mutuality in the present."[12] What I get from Kahn's point is that Freire is too forward looking and less open to certain changes in it fundamentals, while anarchism permits a more open methodology that includes more than just the Marxist background. Mueller does note that these aren't mutually exclusive, as "One cannot have an afterthought if there has not been a forethought."[13] In fact, I believe that if we combine that two, Prometheus and Epimetheus, we can forge a praxis that is more encompassing and more self-critical than if we just take either of these camps independently.

One of the concerns that I'd like to discuss is that anarchist notions of anti-hierarchy and education. There appears to be a paradox between this agenda and the practice of education. However, I believe that anarchism can successfully defeat this concern, as an anarchist pedagogy would "develop educational systems that gravitate around the needs of the individual child."[14] I believe that this is what Freire seems to be getting at with his chapter that focuses on immersing educators into target cultures in order to learn and address what is of importance and meaningful

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[10] Haworth, 19.
[11] Haworth, 24.
[12] Haworth, 24.
[13] Haworth, 24.
[14] Haworth, 26.

to them respectively. It also permits a grounding as to how to relate and discuss a praxis. Various anarchist educational theorists point to three levels of relations that ought to be the focus for education"

1. **At the level of the individual:** Autonomy, student-directed learning or self-help, and active learning;
2. **At the level of the community:** Participation, mutual aid, social/political action, and participation;
3. **And lastly at the structural level:** decentralized management and non-hierarchical relationships.[15]

This is the anarchist format of conduct among each interrelated level of society. To address the concern of a self-defeating pedagogy mentioned earlier, it is not self-defeating if hierarchy in the classroom is replaced with active student/teacher teacher/student relations.

In conclusion, the anarchist theory of education appears to be the further development and enrichment of Freirean thought. At either's core, there is an aim to free people from domination and oppression. Both also critique hierarchy and the current state of education for its curricula of docility and obedience. In my opinion, Freirean and anarchist thought is nearly similar, the exception being that Freire's work itself is from the 1970's, while anarchist work that I have investigated is more current and therefore more developed.[16] In fact, it appears that Freire foundations generally seem to be the prototype to the modern anarchist readings that I have examined here. My notably are the notions of the *specific* types of education (banking and problem posing) and the hierarchy of teacher/student. The anarchist readings seem to already agree and move theoretically further. Connecting the critique of Freire that anarchism had discussed earlier, I think that Freire, like the anarchists, are open to change and the dialectical nature of praxis. To support this, Freire mentions that:

> It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world,
> nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with
> the people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of

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[15] Haworth, 75.

[16] This is not to negate later Freirean thinkers, e.g. Giroux, as my reflection here is limited to strictly Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I say this only to understand the context of Freire's work, which is momentous even to today, but especially for its time. The key lacking feature may only be to the extent that Freire pushes his critique, i.e. explicitly hierarchy, and what exactly are the core values. However, anarchist thought seems to only clear up this issues, while maintaining compatibility.

the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world.[17]

Freire acknowledges the dangers of hierarchy, especially the risk of becoming a self-defeating pedagogy (an anti-hierarchical, hierarchical method) and so this appears to support the anarchist pedagogy. Also from the quote, the "Reflects their *situation* in the world" is in agreement with the core anarchist understanding of "human nature." It is environment which encourages people to do certain actions, whether they be of greed or selflessness. Modern anarchist thought only seems to more explicitly drive the point home about this.

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[17] Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Print. 96.