

**Political Ideologies: Contexts, Ideas and Practices**  
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**Lecture 20 Anarchism 4/4 32:07**  
**Evaluating Anarchism - Debates and Examples**

Hello everyone again, we're just about ready to conclude our study of topic five on this NPTEL ideologies course 2019-20. Our topic five is anarchism, we're coming to the end of that and we'll look at examples of it, as a sort of worked example or worked exercise. So, I've got links up. I can give you the links, which are not copyright - the content of course is copyright. But we'll talk through some examples of, well, contemporary anarchism and anarchist communities.

We'll talk briefly through the links first. Here they are, you can have these of course and they're all freely accessible as far as I know. The first one is a discussion by Steven Metcalfe in a well-known current affairs and ideas journal called *Slate*, published in the United States. It's on why Robert Nozick, supposed to be the father of libertarianism who's been described as that, of modern libertarianism, why Robert Nozick gave up on libertarianism itself. It's a detailed, lengthy interview or - [can't remember] it's a detailed discussion of Nozick's reasons for giving up on libertarianism.

The next item here is by Matt Kennard and Ana Caistor-Arendar published in the *Guardian* in 2016 and it's a short article on the Occupy movement in Buenos Aires on how Argentine workers cooperated to occupy disused factories and try and run them themselves. I think they even bought some of them out themselves during the time of a catastrophic economic crash in Argentina.

Now the next one is by Elias Isquith, he is from *Salon*, another American journal of current affairs and ideas and it's on, well, how the Occupy movement got much further than just Wall Street, on how Occupy movement activists did things on the ground, recognizing that public services were in a state of great difficulty partly caused by significant underfunding, and by over-controlling bureaucratic systems, and they started helping people with everyday ground-level things like claiming state benefits to which they were entitled by law, like making sure that remote computer driven administrative systems did not cut off their electricity or power, getting them on the voting register, and so on. That is by Elias Isquith.

The final one here is by Carlo Vercellone, it's a report produced by the European Union on an anarchist approach to data which regards data as common property, as part of the commons. This is a lengthy project, this report is I think 220 pages long, and constitutes ideas for ways in which a body such as the European Union could in effect counter the dominance of private tech firms over big data, which then becomes of course for them a commercial commodity from which they make money we are well aware of the - you are no doubt well aware - of the controversies around that.

So, those are some of the items you can look at - those are freely accessible; we'll also go on to look at these three items in detail, three here which we'll use for our seminar, they are all freely accessible. A dialogue in the journal *Dissent* published in the United States in 2015 by two professors - Sherry Berman criticizing anarchism 'No cheers for anarchism' - that is the title.

We'll talk through the key points of that; we'll then talk through the key points of a response to Sherry Berman, it's called 'The anarchist Spirit', it's a kind of counter-argument to Sherry Berman. We'll then look at an example of what may be the world's most successful, perhaps longest-standing, anarchist community; I say specifically anarchist community because anarchist ways have had, as we saw last time, much more of an impact than we might realize in the ways in many of the ways we do things.

So, what about the Sherry Berman item? This was a critique of anarchism written in 2015 - published in 2015 at least - and Sherry Berman is, well, very critical. First of all she points out that - well she asks the question, 'What are the uses of anarchism?' What are they? I mean what purpose does it serve? She says, Sherry Berman says, there are not many uses and anarchists are better dreamers than doers, that is a close paraphrase of what she says.

Yes they reject all forms of authority. They must not be confused with libertarians - at least in the U.S. context, libertarians in the United States are people who think everything should be thrown open to the market, there should be a minimum of laws, and virtually no state at all. It is a very different approach - Nozick took that for a time and we have seen some of his some of his work in relation to liberalism and criticisms of it of it. But Nozick is one of those noted libertarians, others include Hayek, libertarians are not to be confused with anarchists according to Sherry Berman, I would add at least in the U.S. context.

Anarchists also, according to Berman, reject capitalism, as coercive libertarians see capitalism as the guarantee of individual freedom and that is a significant difference between anarchists and libertarians. Anarchists are for the most part very cautious about capitalism

precisely because of its inherent tendencies to monopoly, to requiring that the whole world follow the same system, otherwise it collapses itself, and so on. But for libertarians the market, the unrestrained market, is the guarantee of individual freedom and that is a significance difference between anarchists and libertarians. Well that is the argument.

Now what is the kind of evidence that Berman provides to support her arguments against anarchism? She points out, and this is historically perfectly accurate, that after the Second World War Social Democrat parties, Social Democratic parties created, I quote, 'an unprecedented period' end of quotation, an unprecedented period of democracy, economic growth and social stability especially in Europe including Scandinavia and the United States.

That could in its own way be true of India as well. I may already have referred to work for example by Pulapre Balakrishnan dated 2007 in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, [dealt in which] in a very detailed article perhaps 15000 words long, Balakrishnan shows how the much-criticized Nehru period of India, what might be called that, from 1947 to 1991 enabled India to lay the foundations for what has been called the neoliberal, what have been called the neoliberal reforms of 1991onwards.

What Balakrishnan points out is that when various other factors are taken into account such as the oil price shock 1973 and a further oil price shock resulting from the Iran-Iraq war of 1979 to 89, when such factors are taken into account, India enjoyed remarkable stability and economic growth through that period. So, the argument, Berman's argument, is historically accurate - after the Second World War Social Democratic parties provided unprecedented stability political stability through democracy, economic growth, and social stability.

We're very familiar with that. The new deal in the United States was very greatly expanded after the war and post-war reconstruction in Western Europe and Scandinavia (where damage had not been so severe), post-war reconstruction after Second World War in Europe and Scandinavia provided unprecedented expansion, social equalization, and a great democratization of society, institutions, and culture.

So that is Berman's argument - her argument is that this was brought about by social-democratic parties, not anarchist parties. She does not say it wasn't brought about by communist parties, but she may not have thought she needed to say it. Now in the late 20th century - Berman's right about this - anarchism saw a revival; anti-globalization groups, whom we have talked about briefly already, anti-globalization groups highlighted important issues, especially deepening inequality and environmental degradation.

But according to Berman this had little impact, and she contrasts this little or minimal impact with say the US National Rifle Association, the NRA. This organizes grassroots members to flood legislators' offices with emails, letters, etc, all demanding that the United States Second Amendment be left as it is.

The Second Amendment, as you'll remember, states that a constitutional right is the right to bear and use arms in self-defence. The background to it is more complex than we are often told it is, it had a lot to do with the formation of citizen militias in the slave states of the Deep South, if I am not mistaken partly because the landowners and slave owners of Deep South were terrified of slave rebellions and they wanted to be able to raise citizen militias to defend themselves in case - should a rebellion occur and they also wanted weapons, so as to shoot escaping slaves on site.

So, there's a somewhat complex background to the US Second Amendment. But, there is no significant prospect of its abolition or even significant amendment at present. Now Berman is right to say that the National Rifle Association is enormously effective - very powerful, very well-funded very highly connected with very wealthy and very powerful people as members, and as Berman points out, this is far more effective in preserving the Second Amendment, then as she says anarchist movements have been in bringing about significant change, other - as she says - significant developments in bringing about major social change have been through Social Democratic parties working through the ordinary liberal democratic state.

Well, that's Berman's criticism: anarchism has had comparatively little impact; therefore anarchists are better at imagining than at doing, in effect. Well what does this have to do with - well, is this accurate? Marina Sitrin in the same issue of *Dissent*, that is the fall, the autumn of 2015, says Berman isn't quite right about this and she makes a strong response. First of all yes, there is no global anarchist movement today, but there are many movements around the world with an anarchist ethos or an anarchist attitude.

There's a great deal of opposition to capitalism and the state, to all institutional forms of hierarchy and the use of power over others. Now such groups emphasize face-to-face relationships. They also - many of them also embody prefigurative approaches. What is a prefigurative approach? It means organizing one's own group on the lines of the society we wish to create.

So, if we would like to see a society organized on certain lines we organize our own group on those lines. The ways we organize debate discussion and disagreement, reach conclusions, reach agreement and reach agreement on how to go about acting on our

conclusions and decisions - those are prefigurative approaches, in which we organize our own group, on the lines of the society we want to create.

Well that is Sitrin's response to Sheri Berman. But where do we go from there? The point is that there are well, we need to look at an example of, of precisely this kind of thing. I'll pause here because I need to get more material up on screen. Right, let's look at an example of a long-standing and very successful anarchist community. Let's just remind ourselves first: anarchists are not opposed to organization, they're not opposed to structure, they're not opposed to rules, they're certainly not opposed to accountability, and they're certainly not opposed to decentralized government.

So anarchism is not chaos, it's not the kind of thing libertarians seem to want where absolutely everything is left to the market. Let the market sort itself out - if we do not get the right result in one court let's go to another one. That's actually been said by a number of libertarians. But anarchism is not opposed let us repeat this to organization, or structure, or rules, or accountability, or decentralized governance. It focuses on all of these, but does so in a way that attempts not to replicate the hierarchical and closed structures of most other forms of organization.

So, let's look at an example - certainly there are several examples we can draw on. For anarchism direct action is often the first step instead of petitioning, lobbying or putting demands to those in power, and it's the first step even if those who take this kind of action do not actually identify themselves as anarchists, they don't have to do so.

For example, the Zapatistas in Mexico in 1994 were made up of small autonomous communities. They totalled tens of thousands of people around Mexico. They decided their own approaches to health care, to education, to defence, and to governance. In Argentina in 2001, after the 2001 crash of virtually the entire economy, bank accounts were frozen. The former working class and the unemployed gathered in periurban areas, many of which were badly rundown. They took over closed factories, factories which had been shut down because the owners were bankrupt and the economy had crashed and so on. They ran these collectively; ordinary people blocked Monsanto's plans - that's the great American agribusiness conglomerate.

Ordinary people blocked Monsanto's plans to build the world's largest genetically modified seed processing plant. In Greece and Argentina, more recently since then people have blocked mining companies, even if they have got licences from the European Union or from

the domestic governments to mine in certain areas in Greece. People have got together and the effect has been that the licenses have been cancelled or suspended or delayed.

In Chicago, in San Francisco, in Berlin - people have blocked mortgage foreclosures and those have happened particularly in the wake of the 2007 and onwards financial crash; and people who have done this have prevented - in Berlin, have prevented rich buyers from surveying properties in working-class areas. Very rich buyers were presumably attempting to buy the property when it was cheap and make rather substantial profits from renting or from sale later when land values rose. This was in, if I'm not mistaken the Kreuzberg district of Berlin.

But, well this seems, this looks as though such movements were partly engaging in direct action themselves and partly doing so to get reactions from institutions of state or local government and so on. So, why should, why should people turn to institutions which are often themselves the cause of the problem? Anarchists certainly do have an impact from time to time on official institutions, but that's only part of how they work.

They are much less dependent, what they use - this direct action - to compel response. Now this may account for some of the left's general hostility to such movements. The left - this is a bit of great generalizations, a vast generalization - the left tend to consider that institutions of state are there to do what the law says, they do in liberal democracy, and that is broadly to serve the public; that does then imply that direct action is a threat to such institutions and a threat to ideologies which support or favour such institutions.

Now certainly hostility between the left and anarchism is not new; some of it can be very serious and very severe. The left are, well, I shouldn't say just noted the attitude on the part of the institutionally supported left towards anarchism has been almost without exception very hostile.

But let's look at an example of successful anarchist living and let us see what sort of issues involves. This will also show us whether or not Berman's criticisms or for example institutional left or official left criticisms of anarchism are justified; we have already noted by the way that communist parties have often been extremely hostile to anarchism. This happened tragically in in Spain at the beginning of the civil war, we've seen the details - we saw the details earlier.

But what about a real-life Anarchist community? This is an article by Athlyn Cathcart-Keays or Keays published in the *Guardian* in September 2016 on a real anarchist community. This

is the Christiania community, Christiania community in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark. It was established founded in September 1971 as a squat, an occupation of - I'm not mistaken a disused military base, not I do not think an operational base, but a sort of military, military compound, and it was set up for the free use of cannabis, which was and still remains illegal in Denmark.

This group built or renovated the buildings, they built their own homes on the, in the compound. They invented a thing called the cargo bike for transporting larger amounts of things which we could not carry on an ordinary bicycle and they banned motor cars; as far as I know motor vehicles are generally banned from the area anyway.

Now in 1973, the social-democrat government called the Christiania community a social experiment; I understand that this caused some unsettlement within the community because they just weren't consulted about what to be called, and it's also quite likely they did not see themselves as an experiment - they were extremely serious about what they did.

In 1989, the Danish Parliament passed what's come to be called the Christiania law, and it provided formal recognition of the community, of the space, by the Danish state. The Christiania community bought the land collectively. They have an internal consensus, they act by internal consensus on policies on building and so on. They also collaborate with the municipality to provide their own social services as far as possible. But they do use municipal schools and hospitals. They run their own common areas, they run kindergartens for small children, they run their own sewage system, sewerage system and waste collection, and they have an overall budget of about 4 million Euros a year.

Now is that so peculiar? Neighbourhoods in India, in cities in India - as far as I know these tend to be upmarket wealthier neighbourhoods - are starting to organize their own rubbish sorting and rubbish collection procedures, although, and this includes my neighbourhood, we are still dependent on the corporation which have contracted-out the overall collection service.

We're still dependent on the corporation to collect the rubbish that we have sorted and put out. That's not very different from what happens in a lot of industrial countries for example in the United Kingdom in many, in many councils particular in urban areas, you put your rubbish out in a wheelie bin, you sort it out in a bin with wheels. So, one is for garden cuttings, one is for recyclables and we're told generally told what what's recycled and what's not. One is for household rubbish which has to be bagged in certain kinds of bags and so on, or non-recycled rubbish - we put these out on designated days, but we do it ourselves. The

council, our corporation, have given us the procedure. But in a lot of urban neighbourhoods in India, people are starting to organise the internal procedures themselves and then put the rubbish out for the corporation-organized collection to take place.

The system works variably but it's starting; nothing so unusual about it. Now that's a form of consensus backed self-organization. What about the Christiania community? Are they doing anything that different they call themselves, um, Freetown Christiania I think that is the formal title they're still in existence and it's now nearly 50 years later, they're collaborating with the municipality, they run everything else themselves. Is that so implausible?

There have been problems, yes the community is still in existence. I am not sure exactly when, but because cannabis was freely sold and used within the within the confines of the community international drug mafias moved in and that some of these were very powerful; at least one as based as far away as California. Because of the ban on Outsiders moving in or setting up businesses and activities within the neighbourhood, these are international drug mafias; powerful and big organizations used residents as agents and there were episodes of violence, and in 2016 there was a drug gang shooting death in which a police officer was also involved - police officers do occasionally visit and no doubt the residents collaborate and cooperate with them over pertinent matters. But there was a shooting death and the consensus response by the community was to say enough was enough.

They pulled down the row of shops selling cannabis - it was called Pusher Street, which is entirely appropriate, they pulled it down and police video surveillance was installed. Now this is an example of self-generated action and self-generated collaboration and cooperation with the institutions of the state such as the police. The point is that it arises from consensus; any serious anarchist would say, yes they debated it, they reached collective agreement on this and then they acted.

Today, according to the report, there is a very different atmosphere in Christiania, because the element of fear, the involvement of drug gangs often using agents local residents as fronts, as front operators - the atmosphere is we gather very different. But there is another issue they might have to face before long; around the community land values land prices are rising, so they may well have to face another issue, and it's quite likely that developers or landowners or various corporates view the space as something they could no doubt make a lot of money from.

So, it's quite likely that the Christiania community will face some other issues that they'll have to deal with. The ways they'll deal with them, it's very likely that they will, it seems very likely



that they will continue to act on consensus, to reach agreement on what to do and how to collaborate with the authorities of the state and the local municipality.

So that's a real live example, it's still going, there may well be many more around the world. There may be many local neighbourhoods where local municipalities, where the state even nationally accepts the *de facto* authority over the space and where internally things are done on anarchists lines, consensus is reached, regulations, rules and regulations are the result of free and fully informed consensus and agreement and debate, and are not imposed. So, that may be a model for the future; it's certainly perhaps the world's outstanding example of a long-standing anarchist community.

I would raise something for you to think about, which is that the Christiania community may well raise the kind of question I raised about the Anderson and Hill paper, which we saw earlier, which we met earlier on the wagon trains and Wild West settlers in the 1850s and 1860s onwards in the United States. They seemed to have worked quite successfully in reaching their own agreements, for example on the conduct of disputes, on how to establish rules for mining camps and mining communities and so on.

They seem to have reached agreement fairly easily on those and on how to resolve disputes and how to observe common agreements, and so on. But I suggested that something Anderson and Hill, the authors of the paper, may have missed was the extent to which these communities broadly shared a single culture - insofar as that means anything- broadly shared major elements of a culture and may well have been overwhelmingly white European Protestants or white northern European Protestants. Now it is possible - I'm only suggesting this, that the success of the Christiania community draws on a possibly unacknowledged inheritance from a broadly, I repeat broadly, shared set of cultural backgrounds. Faith itself may not be quite so significant in the late night 20th and early 21st century as it was in the European culture and European-derived cultures in the 19th century, but nevertheless there may be broad assumptions about authority, about reaching agreement about how to follow agreements, about what constitutes complying with agreements and so on, and these may be largely based on a generally Northern European culture in the Christiania community.

I realize I'm making assumptions about this, but we do have to think what might happen say if people from very different cultures or religious inheritances or from, even from parts of southern Europe - perhaps I am only guessing here, speculating - move in enough numbers to start making a difference to tacit or background agreements about what it is to live in a community.

So that is an issue I raise for us to think about. Meanwhile it would take a very hard-hearted person not to wish the Christiania community long life and success in all they continue to do.

So, that concludes our examination of anarchism. We've looked at the historical background, which is quite lengthy. We've covered the main ideas and the main thinkers involved, we've looked at the relationship of anarchism to other ideologies, we've looked briefly at that, we've also looked at internal differences between anarchism - and that includes looking at libertarianism - and we've looked at the main problems in anarchist ideas. And we've concluded by looking at the, at examples of anarchism and criticisms of anarchism. Christiania of course offers a significant example of success. There may well be many others around the world - this is the one that tends to get attention. So, that concludes our topic of anarchism and we shall pause there and then we'll move on to our sixth topic, which is feminism.