

FASCISM, ANARCHY, AND SOCIAL ORDER

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Introduction

Typically, we forego serious philosophical study of fascism and anarchism, treating these positions as forming the lunatic fringes which boundary the range of more legitimate social philosophies. But this practice may be naive and misguided in crucial and perhaps politically imperiling respects. As Wittgenstein ably demonstrate,¹ when conceptual investigations are focused upon extreme and borderline cases, they may yield rare and valuable insights into the nature of a bounded region.

In the case at hand, I shall argue that critical analysis of the defending rationales underlying fascistic and anarchistic thinking indicates: 1) that these two positions grow from a fundamental dichotomy of philosophical orientations concerning the foundations of social order, 2) that choices between the basic tenets of these polarized rationales are unavoidable, 3) that there are rational standards pertinent to these choices, and 4) that the issues involved are of fundamental importance to our basic intellectual and political stances regarding the moral and legal dimensions of social order.

Examination of the underpinnings of fascistic and anarchistic thinking clarifies what is most fundamentally at stake in choosing among rival social philosophies, *viz.* how we confront the ultimate philosophical problem of the legitimation of social order.² In turn, such an examination illumines our own form of political life in terms of the rational defensibility of its legal regulations.

¹ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Philosophical Investigations*, transl. by G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953).

² For a provocative general treatment of this problem see Jurgen Habermas. *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

The Tasks and Standards of Social Philosophy

A preliminary methodological discussion will serve to introduce the analysis proper. It would not suffice, as a philosophical investigation, merely to describe and advocate visions of worlds in which we might dwell. Inherent disciplinary demands require that our advocacies within social philosophy be pursued argumentatively, and that the cases built for and against rival views be subjected to critical scrutiny in terms of such intellectual standards as the logical requirements for proper inferences and the empirical requirements for factual claims. The implication of these seemingly obvious points is that normative and intellectual standards play asymmetrical roles in social philosophy: while the discipline needs to be *governed by* intellectual standards, it is concerned with the *espousal of* normative standards and ideals. The significance of this is that the philosophical appraisal of contributions within social philosophy ought *not* be through *presupposed normative standards*. Insofar as social philosophies construct and espouse normative political ideals, the legitimacy of their reasoned defenses cannot be assessed in terms of such norms themselves without begging the questions at issue.³ While there is a diversity of normative principles which might be employed in making such appraisals, none constitute neutral grounds of evaluations; hence none can serve to *assess* the philosophical propriety of the variously endorsed social orders.⁴

Accordingly, we might distinguish between *internal forms of philosophical criticism* via intellectual standards and *external forms of ideological criticism* via presupposed moral and political ideals.⁵ Admittedly, in terms of an ideal of personal integrity, we may respect the endorsement and condemnation of social philosophies based on one's own normative commitments and moral values; but such personal bases do not resolve the philosophical problem of legitimation, since they neither demonstrate the *rational legitimacy* nor justify the *social adoption* of any system of social order and values. Such reliance upon personal (or cultural) norms in *social philosophy* would *beg* the question of legitimation through its presumptive and subjective

³ See the concise and balanced treatment by Louis Katzner in *Man in Conflict* Encino, California: Dickenson Publishing Company, 1975), esp. Chapter 1.

⁴ See D.C. Williams, "Ethics as Pure Postulate," reprinted in W. Sellars and J. Hospers (eds.), *Readings in Ethical Theory* (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, Inc., 1952).

⁵ This distinction seems to be implicit in the general strategy employed by Leslie Stevenson in *Seven Theories of Human Nature* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1974); see esp. Chapters I and II.

grounds. Such a route would reduce social philosophy to apologetics and collapse the distinction between a *discipline* of social philosophy and the rationalizations of personal and cultural ideologies. In general, the pursuit of ideological criticism *as* social philosophy ought to be recognized as a confusion which both masks and belabors the fact of disagreement over ultimate normative standards.

By deliberately bracketing personal commitments to normative standards and ideals, the ensuing investigation into the foundations of social philosophy will bring into sharp focus the difficulties of legitimizing any particular order of substantive social values.⁶ Nevertheless, an *a priori* assumption at this point of skeptical and nihilistic results would be premature. Indeed, I shall argue that in important and well-defined respects, our commitment to intellectual standards alone can significantly govern our critical and political responses to rival social philosophies. Specifically, this *commitment* requires: 1) that we endorse and embrace what is justified according to these standards; 2) that we condemn and avoid what they show to be intellectually fraudulent and unwarranted; 3) that we permit and tolerate *as such* what is neither demonstrably prescribed nor prohibited according to these standards.

I pose these tenets, not as categorical norms, but as an explication of what is demanded by our commitment to be bound by such consequences for our actions as our own intellectual standards might indicate. Accordingly, as these standards ought govern resolution of the philosophical problem of legitimation of a social order, they serve to⁸ delineate the lines of professional integrity for the social philosopher who would license his behavior through the intellectual standards of that discipline itself.

In turning to the analysis proper, I should acknowledge that I am personally repulsed by both fascistic order and anarchistic chaos. But, setting this aside, I shall try to show that intellectual standards suffice for a significant appraisal of the philosophical bases of fascism and anarchism: 1) that fascistic thinking ought to be condemned as intellectually fraudulent and unwarrantedly presumptuous, 2) that anarchistic thinking is unwarrantedly stunted but could be critically developed into a social philosophy which is intellectually reputable, 3) that the premisses which provide the argued defense for overtly fascistic policies and practices appear to be shared by most if not all non-

⁶ For a general treatment of this critical issue see Herbert Feigl, "Validation and Vindication: An Analysis of the Nature and the Limits of Ethical Arguments", reprinted in W. Sellers and J. Hospeis (eds.) *Readings in Ethical Theory* (New York: appleton Century Crofts, In., 1952).

anarchistic social philosophies. The significant exception would be a genuine philosophical liberalism which tolerated diversity and fostered specific social values only through education and example. If this analysis proves correct, then those who share my disdain for fascistic developments ought take serious warning that even in the midst of most democratic polities we harbor the very premisses for fascistic thinking, and hence the immanent and ever-present danger of the overt development of fascistic policies and practices.

The Philosophical Bases of Fascism and Anarchism

Perhaps our typical views of fascism and anarchism, as lunatic fringes boundarying the range of more legitimate social philosophies, derive from our conceptions of fascism as club-wielding mob rule of the right and anarchism as bomb-throwing terrorism of the left. Though such extremist behaviours are not improperly labeled, neither do they exhaust or reveal what is essential to the thinking which constitutes fascistic and anarchistic social philosophies.⁷ In their stereotypic versions, fascism and anarchism appear akin in terms of both the violence of their tactics and their intolerances of rival views. But, considering their philosophical foundations, we need to recognize that the violence—whatever its degree—is a chosen *tactic* in pursuit of strategic goals,⁸ whereas the intolerances mentioned—while of quite different kinds—are essential characteristics of the strategic goals themselves. Perhaps, misled by the apparent similarities of their extremist versions, we easily gloss over the extraordinary differences between the systematic ways of thinking which constitute fascistic and anarchistic social philosophies. Such shortsightedness, in turn, may distort our understanding of the relations between these positions and those we view as more moderate and viable social philosophies.

What seems essential to fascism is the effort to institutionalize an order of social values so as to triumph over and suppress dissenting views.⁹ We might distinguish versions wherein the order sought merely expresses the preferences of the imposing group and those wherein it is thought to be ultimately justified; the latter, insofar as it is

⁷ For discussions of such caricatures and their effects see George Woodstock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (New York: The New American Library, 1962), and also the useful and substantial collection of anarchistic writings found in Leonard I. Krimerman and Lewis Perry (eds.), *Patterns of Anarchy* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966).

⁸ See Woodstock, *op. cit.* pp. 15-16; and also see Krimerman and Perry, *op. cit.* pp. xvi-xviii.

⁹ See Katzner, *op. cit.* pp. 103-106.

alleged to be rationally defensible, constitutes the fascistic social philosophy of concern here. In what follows, I shall refer to the premisses of this position as “fascistic thinking,” identify their acceptance as “latent fascism,” and call the enactment of policies and practices designed to realize the conclusion of these premisses “overt fascism.” What I understand to be “fascistic thinking” involves four major premisses:

- P1: That there is an uniquely determinable order of true and proper social values.
- P2: That the moral social order can be achieved only if the proper social values are institutionalized as such, since the triumph of spurious values would constitute an immoral social order.
- P3: That we are obliged to bring about the moral social order and to actively oppose its rivals.
- P4: That we have correctly identified the uniquely proper social values.

When stringently and narrowly interpreted, these four premisses appear sufficient to rationally defend the policies and practices of “overt fascism.”

Assuming this provides a fair characterization of fascistic thinking, some of its features are worth noting: 1) The means for achieving the institutionalization which fascism demands remain a tactical matter, and may involve democratic, demagogic, or dictatorial processes. 2) Taken individually, the first three premisses of fascistic thinking seem ordinary and innocent, so much a part of our very basic moral rhetoric concerning the social realm; indeed, we encounter these same premisses throughout the range of non-anarchistic social philosophies. For example, they are at least tacitly assumed wherever principles of legal paternalism, legal moralism, or moral offensiveness serve to limit liberties of social behavior. 3) While such rhetoric as these premisses express may sketch our common moral grammar for social thinking, the fascistic interpretation of these premisses is a decidedly narrow and intolerant one. 4) The set of premisses remains politically inert without P4, whose specifications mark the guidelines for concrete political action. 5) Obviously, P1 is the most fundamental in content; but it is the combination of P2 and P3 which is so revealing of fascistic thinking. 6) At least a weak version of P4 is implicitly assumed in nearly every non-anarchistic social philosophy insofar as each would institutionalize some order of substantive values over others. 7) Objections against *impo-*

sing the allegedly proper social order upon dissenters would not cut against the validity of the reasoning, but against the acceptability (or interpretation) of the set of premisses itself. 8) Once the premisses of fascistic thinking have been accepted, the opposition of dissidents appears as *immoral* behavior, and concerns to protect the “rights” of the dissenters appear as the irrationality and political naïveté of confused liberalism. 9) That the rhetoric of these premisses is so widely shared, even within the thinking which underlies democratic orders, shows how perilously and immanently subject these orders are to overt fascistic developments.

Against the background of this characterization of fascistic thinking, we can now focus upon what constitutes anarchistic thinking.¹⁰ What seems essential to anarchism is the principled resistance to the imposition of any particular institutionalization of social values, and therewith an effort to undermine any order of *de facto* imposition. Again we may usefully distinguish between mere preferences to resist rule by others and forms of such resistance which are alleged to be rationally justified; the latter constitute the anarchistic social philosophy of concern here. I construe its argued rationale as diametrically opposed to that of fascistic thinking: essentially, it denies P1 that there is a uniquely determinable order of true and proper social values. But the denial of P1 demands rejection of the entire set of premisses of fascistic thinking: P2, P3, and P4.

Thus, according to anarchistic thinking: 1) we cannot be obliged to bring about any particular order of social values; 2) no order of social values ought be institutionalized so as to triumph over rival endorsements; and 3) the claim by any group that it has determined the uniquely proper social values is not merely false, but a blatantly fraudulent device for institutionalizing a preferred but unjustified social order. Hence, the fundamental demand of anarchistic social philosophy—its resistance to the imposition of any social ordering—derives from its opposition to doctrinaire efforts to subjugate the interests and values of some to those espoused by others. Anarchistic thinking rejects the institutionalization of any particular ordering of social values as inherently prohibiting and obstructing the pursuit of *no-less-justified* rival values and interests. Every such institutionalization is seen as an essentially fascistic order, an irrationally-grounded imposition, a dogmatic effort to have the preferences of some triumph over and suppress rival postures and interests. Seen in this manner, the

¹⁰ Both Woodstock's *Anarchism* and Krimerman and Perry's *Patterns of Anarchy* provide general background studies and writings in the anarchistic tradition.

philosophical anarchist insists upon our limited capacities for justifying particular schemes of social values and seeks a form of social life consonant with our standards for rational defensibility; this is how he defends his resistance and active opposition to the doctrinaire impositions of social order which fascistic thinking demands. It is thus a maligning of such anarchistic thinking to treat it as essentially *seeking* social chaos; rather, it implicitly assumes a field of differing social values and interests which are mutually compatible and harmoniously realizable. However naive it may seem to others, the anarchist allows that the pursuit of differing social values need not introduce social conflict.

But such an ungoverned harmony has remained an empty ideal, and anarchy and impotent ideology, both because 1) the boundaries of harmonious social values have not been delineated, and because 2) the anarchistic tradition has shied from any institutionalization of policing powers to protect a domain of harmonious pursuits from infringement by those seeking social and political privileges and authoritarian political powers. Without the protection afforded by an institutionalized policing force, and without a formalized decisional ground for discerning which social values and pursuits *are* mutually compatible, there is neither the power nor the guidance to fashion and protect the form of social life which the anarchist seeks. In a world menaced by those who would seek to impose their wills upon others, anarchism's naive and unilateral opposition to every form of institutionalized order poses a false dichotomy between essentially fascistic social orders and anarchistic chaos.

In principle, the anti-fascistic orientation of anarchistic thinking could be preserved in a form of society which is both radically liberal in its tolerances and radically libertarian in its protections, *if* the field of individual liberties permitted and protected are self-limiting and non-infringing upon the equal liberties of others. From a philosophical viewpoint this would constitute a *permissible* social order whose format is *not* formally prohibited or disqualified by either its implicit structure or its defending rationale, *providing* both individual behaviors and policing pursuits are properly licensed under a rule of mutual non-infringement upon equal liberties. Notice, however, that such a form of social life is demarcated by a *formal rather than a substantive limitation*, as such, it would not improperly subjugate the valuative pursuits of some to those of others. This formal limitation derives from the recognition that our standards of rational defensibility demand an *agnostic rather than dogmatic posture* with regard to which *substantive* social values are *proper*.

While such an agnostic posture would undermine and disqualify all dogmatically held social intolerances and prohibitions, it would permit all self-limiting valuative pursuits *just insofar as* they are mutually-tolerant. Such a view would not entail or endorse social chaos: in appealing to our limited capabilities for justifying our social value preferences, it *formally disqualifies* those postures which seek *unwarranted privileges* vis a vis their rivals. If no order of substantive social values can be singularly justified as the proper one, *every* claim for such status is fraudulent and ought be opposed on rational grounds.

Further, the rule of mutual non-infringement, which serves as the demarcational principle for this form of social life, functions in a deontological rather than teleological manner: individuals must refrain from encroaching upon the equal liberties of others, governments are licensed to guarantee such mutual liberties by protecting individuals from such encroachments. Unlike fascistic and other non-anarchistic positions, no substantive order is to be institutionalized; the duties of citizens and government alike are restraining ones, limited to the exercise and protection of mutually tolerant liberties, their duties do not extend toward the political realization of any specific order of social values.

Conclusion

The set of premisses, P1-P4, may serve as a sorting device across the field of social philosophies: their acceptance, though it may vary in interpretational stringency and narrowness (hence in the degree of tolerance which the imposed scheme permits), constitutes the foundations of fascistic thinking; their rejection, while it provides the foundations for anarchistic thinking, also permits the endorsement of a maximally liberal and libertarian form of social life. While the basic choice between an imposed social order, an anarchical society, and a protectively tolerant form of social life seems unavoidable at the foundations of social philosophy, the ultimate grounds for the decision need not rest upon presupposed normative ideals, but can be founded upon standards of rational defensibility and intellectual integrity.

If the critical assessment of rival social philosophies has properly bracketed appeals based upon preferred moral and political norms, the problem of legitimation of social philosophies essentially pivots on whether any specific scheme of social values can be established in a non-question-begging manner as the right and proper social order. Unless such a scheme can be singularly justified: 1) no imposed social order is rationally defensible, 2) all forms of fascistic thinking are intellectually fraudulent, and 3) the properly agnostic posture toward

the true social values requires endorsement of either anarchical or protectively tolerant forms of social life. It is decidedly insufficient that we believe-ever-so-firmly in our values, that we hold them dearer-than-life-inself. We would need to be able to demonstrate their singular propriety without presupposing *any* other normative standards as prior postulates. I submit that we have no way of accomplishing this. We can construct rationally defensible orders of substantive values *only upon the basis* of presupposed ultimate social norms and goals; the latter, we can only espouse, since they lie beyond demonstration.

This view is already implicit in the philosophical criticism which anarchism directs against fascistic thinking. But anarchism's opposition to every form of social ordering and every policing power is also unwarranted. Despite our limited justificatory capabilities, there remains a defensible form of social life which permits diverse endorsements and pursuits within a formally-demarcated field of self-limiting, mutually-tolerant values, as well as a policing force duly limited to the protection of such pursuits against the encroachments of privilege-seeking schemes.

The defensibility of our social institutions ultimately rests upon our *commitments*. Where such basic commitments are shared entirely and unanimously in a society, the fundamental problem of legitimation of social order collapses. Shared basic commitments suffice, right and proper social values are a needless fiction. But where basic commitments are not fully shared, the choice between essentially tolerant and protective orientations seems unavoidable.

In forms of society which institutionalize some social values over others, we ought recognize the ultimately unjustified character of the order imposed and the arbitrary privileges given to the values of some at the expense of others. Here it is incumbent upon those who would commit themselves to the intellectual integrity which philosophy demands: to minimize the severity of the order imposed and the violence with which dissent is suppressed, to maximize the tolerance for diverse valuing, to make the authorizing base for institutionalizing social values as widely populist as possible (though there would still be a tyranny over dissenters), to remain evermindful of the preferential status of institutionalized values against the equal-earnest interests of dissenters. For if, instead, we glory in the triumph of the institutionalization of *our* values over those espoused by our fellows, we demean our limited human dignity by fraudulently claiming to be more than we really are: citizens in a world of fragile and un certain values of our own personal social construction.