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RESTORING (DIS)ORDER: SANCTIONS, RESOLUTIONS, AND “SOCIAL CONTROL” IN ANARCHIST COMMUNITIES*

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This essay explores the restorative implications of anarchist communities through an analysis of processes such as norm formation, sanctioning, conflict resolution, and economic exchange. The study explores ways in which anarchist communities employ various restorative measures to maintain group cohesion and achieve a modicum of social control through the application of natural phenomena such as diffuse power, fluid authority, community consensus and mutual aid. Drawing upon studies of communities manifesting anarchist tendencies—including utopian experiments, indigenous cultures, and the unique case of the Rainbow Family of Living Light—a picture begins to emerge wherein conceptions of property and the social dynamics that inhere within a community are inextricably linked, suggesting the propensity of anarchist communities to promote an organic synthesis of self, society, and nature. In the end, by exploring tenets associated with the nascent restorative justice paradigm, it is observed that anarchist communities manifest principles that challenge the dominant conceptions of criminality and legality, providing a framework for envisioning models of justice-in-practice that appear on the horizon of possibility and potentiality.

Keywords: Anarchy; Community; Norms; Conflict; Authority; Subsistence

There is no authoritarian hierarchy here. We have a tribal anarchy where we take care of each other, because we recognize that we are All One. The Gathering works because each of us takes the responsibility for doing what needs to be done, and for teaching others. Part of that responsibility is a pledge we keep to each other: We pledge to walk lightly on the earth; We pledge to respect and care for each other and all living things; We pledge to drop all violence as we deal with each other; We pledge to deal with each other up front and with open hearts.

Rainbow Guide (1995)

We are not afraid to forego judges and their sentences. We forego sanctions of all kinds, even obligations to morality. We are not afraid to say: “Do what you will; act as you will”; because we are persuaded that the great majority of [hu]mankind, in proportion to their degree of enlightenment and the completeness with which they free themselves from existing fetters will behave and act always in a direction useful to society . . . All we can do is give advice. And again while giving it we add: “This advice will be valueless if your own experience and observation do not lead you to recognize that it is worth following.”

Kropotkin (1993)

RESTORING ANARCHY, RESTORING COMMUNITY

Processes of restoration are fundamental to the condition of existence, and thus serve as a prerequisite of life itself. To be alive is to experience continual renewal, a constancy of

change, and an impetus toward healing. The human body is such a device, replacing cells and memories in an eternal dance of assimilation and adaptation. In a very real sense, this is the business of all life, to incorporate the new and seek progressive states of equilibrium. In this formulation, it soon becomes apparent that everywhere and in everything, nature “restores” in the sense of subsuming conflict and change into a seamless flow of adaptive advancements. The human being as part of this experience of nature, therefore, is gifted with the restorative powers of life itself.

As innumerable ecofeminists, deep ecologists, neo-utopians, and primitivists have often lamented, however, the great tragedy of modern human existence lies in our increasing violation of this natural tendency toward restoration and our willful attempt to strike a one-sided balance that forces the world to adapt to us, in direct contrast to the spirit of the mutually adaptive practices that sustained life on this planet for millions of years. With extinction rates and deforestation increasing, agribusiness and monoculture proliferating, and indigenous wisdom vanishing, it seems all too clear that society as presently configured is not sustainable and may be approaching its structural and historical limits.

In the face of humanity’s wanton egocentrism and cultural colonialism, nature continues its restorative processes, seeking to maintain diversity in the face of increasing uniformity. As “civilization” continually imposes regimes of “order” across the globe, nature increasingly generates points of divergence and loci of adaptive resistance—in effect, restoring “disorder” in the face of homogenization. Asserting its alleged God-given dominance, Eurocentric culture has historically subjugated nature, women, and indigenous cultures in its never-ending quest to impose order on chaos—replacing gods with God, communities with the state, tools with technology, life-ways with the law, and pluralism with universalism. In confronting such daunting realities and appearances of inevitability, many have begun to embrace the processes of nature as beacons of hope and strategies of resistance. The challenge is to create spaces of divergence and models of unity-in-diversity that encourage harmony and healing: in effect, restoring our innate powers of restoration. How we get from here to there remains an open question, and the search for “anarchist community” represents at least one kind of plausible future—one that is greatly informed by its time-tested past.

In this regard, a central aim of anarchism has always been to formulate an integrated theory of self, society, and Nature in particular through the promotion of nonhierarchical social and ecological forms. Anthropological and ethnographic studies of various anarchist communities and their socio-ecological dynamics are highly illustrative, as are certain utopian tracts with demonstrably anarchistic impulses. Indeed, the coexistence of both anthropological and utopian strands in studies of anarchist communities indicates the presence of a perspective akin to what John Zerzan (1994) has called “future primitive”—that is, the recognition that anarchy is both very old (time-tested and dated to antiquity) and at the same time radically new and forward looking.

An analysis of the workability and/or desirability of anarchy as a principle of social order is informed by studies of certain communities and cultures that have manifested anarchist tendencies, including the absence of coercive authority and codified law, a penchant for processes that are participatory and spontaneous, and an inherent impetus among community members to associate voluntarily and cooperatively. We can divide such studies into three broad categories, encompassing:

- (1) indigenous nations, also termed “organic” societies or “primitive” cultures (Barclay, 1990; Clastres, 1994; Morris, 1998; Reclus, 1891);
- (2) alternative cultures arising within the framework of the dominant culture, such as communes and intentional communities (Bouvard, 1975; Kanter, 1972; Veysey, 1973),

- squatters' movements, and the unique case of the nomadic Rainbow Family (Niman, 1997);¹ and
- (3) utopian visions of worlds that have not yet come to pass (P.M., 1995; Huxley, 1961; LeGuin, 1974; Morris, 1995; Piercy, 1976; Sargent, 1983).

This indigenous–alternative–utopian perspective captures the essence of anarchism by indicating its past–present–future quality and provides a basis for exploring the socio-structural dynamics of communities existing beyond the strictures of statism.

In a similar spirit, practices comprising the restorative justice paradigm have sought to discern extralegal alternatives to state-bound treatments of crime and modes of punishment. Such visions often harken back “to the days when conflicts were resolved at the level of the family, clan, group, and community,” and embrace principles including, first, that “crime is primarily an offense against human relationships, and secondarily a violation of the law,” second, that after crime occurs, “there are dangers and opportunities,” including a “teachable moment for the offender,” and lastly teaching that responses to crime must employ “minimum coercion” through the use of “voluntary and cooperative processes” (Braswell, Fuller, & Lozoff, 2001, pp. 141–43). In the introduction to their volume analyzing restorative practices among aboriginal societies and Western cultures alike, Galaway and Hudson (1996, p. 2) similarly identify three fundamental premises of restorative justice:

First, crime is viewed primarily as a conflict between individuals that results in injuries to victims, communities, and the offenders themselves, and only secondarily as a violation against the state. Second, the aim of the criminal justice process should be to create peace in communities by reconciling the parties and repairing the injuries caused by the dispute. Third, the criminal justice process should facilitate active participation by victims, offenders, and their communities in order to find solutions to the conflict.

Thus, the search for a justice that is restorative necessarily includes the search for “restorative community,” grounded in practices where “participants continually remain open to each other’s concerns, ideas, needs, feelings, desires, pain and suffering so that each can see the other [as] a person engaged in an unending struggle to become human, with dignity” (Sullivan & Tifft, 2000, p. 17). Drawing upon visions of “restorative processes that foster just community,” (p. 25) Sullivan and Tifft issue a call to action that is both specific in its call for restorative communities and implicit in its utopian sensibilities: “We must move to create social arrangements, communities, that promote relationships that are nonhierarchical, non power-based, in short, relationships that are structured to make each a success by taking into account the needs of all” (Sullivan & Tifft, 2000, p. 28). These sentiments serve as a basis for tracing the boundaries of communities premised on restoration.

All of these themes resonate strongly with the nascent images of anarchist communities that will be developed and depicted here. The central aim will be to assess the feasibility of such communities both as theoretical models for discerning patterns of justice-in-practice and as open-ended experiments in restorative practices that have implications for harmonizing the past, revolutionizing the present, and visualizing the future. Human communities are complex, fragile yet strong, and fundamentally necessary for survival. Despite sometimes being coopted by forces of “totalization,” enforcement, and regimentation (Zerzan, 1994, p. 157), notions of “community” are as old as life itself and comprise the foundation as well as the horizon of human sociality. Given the practical necessity and historical utility of community, it is important to consider the genesis of the concept, along with the revelations it brings to bear on notions of individual autonomy, social cohesion, and natural interconnection.

CONSCIENCE AND COMMUNITY

The anarchist tradition has always reflected an uneasy tension between the priority of the individual and the necessity of community, even at times referring to the “genuine dilemma of anarchism,” a situation in which it appears that “community negates itself, or at least is either unstable or compelled to resort to anarchistic methods of social control” (Condit, 1987, p. 56). Such concerns might be alleviated somewhat were we to envision the presence of a common moral apparatus, something universally attendant to existence and consciousness, that is sufficient to hold together a community of individuals—but without a rigid ethical code in place, without privileging one set of principles over another. Indeed, from place to place and at different times community standards and expectations will change; likewise from person to person the urges of autonomy will vary. In this sense, we might conceive a personal, subjective imperative of morality, yielding “a social order in which each is able to live and act according to his or her own judgment” (Tiff & Sullivan, 1980, p. 146). That most will reach the same or similar moral conclusions does not mean that we have taken to universalism; it only means that people are more alike than different, and that sociality and reciprocity are fundamental moral impulses manifested in “the consciousness of an overriding human solidarity” (Read, 1954, p. 155). As Kropotkin wrote, “In that constant, everpresent identification of the unit with the whole, lies the origin of all ethics, the germ out of which all the subsequent conceptions of justice, and still the higher conceptions of morality, evolved” (Kropotkin, 1968b, p. 61).

Applied to the individual–community dilemma, this nascent “conscience-ethic” (Sullivan & Tiff, 2000, p. 33) enables us to glimpse the possibility of a community of autonomous individuals who are morally self-directing. To be sure, sanctions may yet at times of necessity be employed in any subutopian community. By constructing any “coercive” apparatus from the individual outward, however, rather than bringing it to bear from the community on to the individual, we can ensure that any community sanctions will be only secondarily employed, and even then as the exception and not the rule. Only in this way, from the bottom up, is it possible to envision a true community of free, morally self-guided individuals. In this formulation, the integrity and priority of the individual is retained by conceiving authority and power as diffuse and accessible to all members, while still enabling the community to function as it must. Moreover, cooperation in the community is likely to develop and sustain itself, since the autonomous conscience, in being called upon to consider the consequences of its actions, necessarily accounts for the interests of others before directing the actions of the moral self. In this sense, the conscience-ethic can be said to incorporate a spirit of mutuality, a concern for the “other” (Bauman, 1993).

Indeed, as Kropotkin (1968b) has shown through his extensive biological and zoological research on ethics the moral impulse in nature precedes the existence of human life. Early humans, according to Kropotkin (1968b, p. 50), developed the moral urge by observing the processes of nature, “and as soon as they began to bring some order into their observations of nature, and to transmit them to posterity, the animals and their life supplied them with the chief materials for their unwritten encyclopedia of knowledge, as well as for their wisdom, which they expressed in proverbs and saying.” For Kropotkin, the moral lessons that humans have derived from nature include: sociality; a prohibition against killing one’s own kind; the clan, kinship, or tribal structure; the advantages of common endeavor; play; and a notion of reciprocity in responding to wrongful acts under this view, the overarching tendency in nature toward mutual aid—and not competition, as the social Darwinists have argued—has principally enabled the survival of species in the animal kingdom, including of course species of the genus *Homo*. In this light, human morality and natural morality are taken to be coeval,

deriving from the same starting point—suggesting a potential framework for developing a workable synthesis of self, society, and nature.

A realistic assessment of the prospects of attaining such visions nonetheless requires an acknowledgment that even in anarchist communities there are mechanisms for ensuring group cohesion and promoting social control. It is equally apparent that in anarchist settings, the processes for doing so strive to reflect a delicate balance of “egalitarianism and personal autonomy in the context of group cooperation” (Zerzan, 1994, p. 34). These practices often begin with the primacy of the individual and end with the reality of nature, and along the way confront the necessity of community. In a sense, this is what an anarchist vision of “justice” entails, in both theoretical and pragmatic terms: the maintenance of “order” through open-ended processes that simultaneously promote individual liberty, community solidarity, and natural morality. As it turns out, order is most effectively preserved through processes that restore a sense of disorder by problematizing the institutional nature of law, crime, sanctions, resolutions, and decisionmaking. Not unlike common misperceptions of anarchy as “disorder” or “chaos,” early colonizers of New Zealand considered the restorative sanctioning practices of the indigenous Maori to lead to “uncertainty and inconsistency;” in Western law-and-order terms, the informal, diffuse, and public nature of Maori resolution methods, “instead of restoring order, seemed to lead only to further disorder” (Pratt, 1996, p. 142). By embracing such methods, restorative justice likewise contributes to this spirit of promoting disorder through practices of conflict resolution, sanctioning, and community building that support values often rejected in state-defined methods and institutional settings. It is critical, therefore, to explore these themes further, primarily by illustrating the restorative potential of anarchist communities, as well as the anarchist possibilities of restorative justice in theory and practice.

LAWS AND NORMS

At the outset, a principal aim of anarchist practices has always been the abolition of codified, formal laws: “Anarchism . . . has from the time of Godwin rejected all written laws” (Kropotkin, 1968a, p. 176). Instead, the community would be “regulated by customs, habits and usages” (Kropotkin, 1968a, p. 201; cf. Nietzsche, 1996), as well as the urges of conscience experienced by each of its members. The anarchist view is that reference to external, written laws represents an abdication of the individual’s capacity for moral self-direction and responsibility—an essential element of a social order without institutional coercion. As Kropotkin opines (1968a, p. 197):

We are so perverted by an education which from infancy seeks to kill in us the spirit of revolt, and to develop that of submission to authority; we are so perverted by this existence under the ferrule of a law, which regulates every event in life—our birth, our education, our development, our love, our friendship—that, if this state of things continues, we shall lose all initiative, all habit of thinking for ourselves.

Moreover, codified laws require some institutional body for administration and enforcement, whereas internalized social “norms” can serve to cultivate deeper instincts for determining “right” and “wrong” by promoting broader access to the community’s moral pulse (Purchase, 1996).²

In anarchist communities, laws as such would scarcely be required since the greater part of formal law has “but one object—to protect private property,” while much of the rest serves to “keep up the machinery of government” (Kropotkin, 1968a, p. 210; see also Purchase, 1996; Ward, 1973). In the anarchist society, both the state and notions of private property will have been dissolved and along with them the need for intricately-worded and inaccessible

laws Morris, 1995; Purchase, 1996). Further, as developed in the following sections, power and authority in the community will be diffused and decentralized, indicating (as Weber has implicitly argued) a trend away from the predominance of codified, formal rational laws (Inverarity, Lauderdale, & Feld, 1983; Weber, 1958). As to the rest of the space occupied by law, namely, “the protection of the person and the detection and prevention of ‘crime’” (Kropotkin, 1968a, p. 214), informal norms of conduct derived from custom, habit, and sociality can fill the space and provide a measure of nonauthoritarian social control (Purchase, 1996; Ward, 1973).

Thus, Kropotkin (1968a, p. 231) intimates that, “society as a whole is responsible for every anti-social act committed,” arguing that a society organized around private property and institutional law will always cultivate individuals inclined toward possession and acquisition, and the abdication of personal conscience and community solidarity (Purchase, 1996; Sullivan & Tifft, 2000)—which inevitably leads to what are commonly known as crimes and to the construction of individual transgressors as deviants (Ward, 1973). What Kropotkin proposes instead is a social order of “healthy education . . . mutual aid . . . fraternal treatment . . . [and] moral support” (1968a, p. 235), since “liberty, equality, and practical human sympathy are the only effectual barriers we can oppose to the anti-social instincts of certain among us” (1968a, p. 218; cf. Ward 1973). Kropotkin concludes his assessment of crime by observing that “such means will be far more powerful to protect society from anti-social acts than the existing system of punishment which is an ever-fertile source of new crimes” (1968a, p. 235). As Purchase (1996, p. 107) concludes, “If the State is supposed to resolve violence and conflict then it really has proved to be an extremely poor mechanism for doing so.” The anarchist perspective on crime and social harm, then, would take as its point of departure the abolition of formal laws, indicating a commitment to extralegal mechanisms for managing criminality and deviance, paralleling similar trends in restorative justice.

SANCTIONING, DIFFUSELY

The next step in the analysis would be to enquire as to what forms of crime and punishment exist in the absence of the state and its associated cultural and economic logic. Another way to phrase the query is to explore whether sanctioning is an intrinsic feature of any human community, raising Durkheim’s postulate that all social orders, consciously or not, at times resort to ritual punishment for the purpose of galvanizing social solidarity in response to a crisis in the fabric of the community—particularly where the crisis is due to an external threat (Inverarity *et al.*, 1983). Does ritual punishment of the sort detailed by Durkheim, despite the anarchist’s theoretical objections, nonetheless occur in the absence of the state? The analyses of Barclay (1990), Black (1976), and Kropotkin (1972) suggest that punishment in anarchic settings is more likely to be directly and instrumentally responsive to a particular transgression and not to serve the larger, proactive purpose of solidarity enhancement. When intervention is required and punishment meted out, the sanction “typically protects the life of relationships . . . [and] is more remedial than accusatory” (Black, 1976, p. 129). “The aim seems to be not so much to determine guilt as to re-establish group harmony” (Barclay, 1990, p. 97; see also Kropotkin, 1972; Tifft, 1979).

Nevertheless, Durkheim’s shadow persists in reminding us that all groups establish norms of conduct and employ sanctions of some sort, even the best utopian–anarchist examples that we might locate today (bolo’bolo? Rainbow Family? Zapatistas?). It is essential to note, however, that the anarchist society always aspires to be deviance-free and crime-free (cf. Tifft, 1979) by creating a space where community norms are subjective and voluntary³ and where each member is equally entitled to define the parameters of the group’s moral

boundaries (Blum, 1977). As Colin Ward (1973, p. 134) explains, “There must be room for deviance in society, and there must be support for the right to deviate.” This is the essence of diversity—voluntary norms, participatory decisionmaking, and the coding of negative deviance as positive difference—and its contours are inextricably linked with the workings of power and authority in the community.

There are of course risks in pushing too far beyond the moral boundaries of the group, and even in anarchist settings sanctions can ensue in such cases. Barclay (1990) analyzed anthropological studies of a number of indigenous cultures, including Inuits, African bushmen, and various North American Indians, as well as “modern world” examples such as intentional communities, and observed that, “anarchists use a variety of diffuse sanctions . . . [including] gossip, name calling, arguing, fist fighting, killing and ostracism.” Black (1976, pp. 126–27) likewise notes the presence of social control devices ranging from “banishment and beating to ridicule and teasing,” as well as “revenge, compensation, and voluntary exile.” Purchase (1996, p. 22) discusses a range of devices, from simple sanctions including shaming, ridicule, and gossip, to more extreme sanctions including excommunication, ostracism, duels, and combat, concluding that the dominant social sanction in stateless societies is “the withholding of essential forms of economic cooperation.” Taylor’s (1982) study of anarchy and community/considers sanctions including gossip, shaming, ostracism, denial of benefits, and expulsion (which is rarely utilized). Finally, in analyzing sanctioning, healing, and restorative justice among Canadian aboriginal communities, Griffiths and Hamilton (1996, pp. 180–81) note that:

Gossip, mockery, derision, and shunning are among the more informal sanctions employed in traditional Aboriginal communities. Formal sanctions include song or drum duels, banishment, various corporal punishments and, in rare instances, death. For Aboriginal peoples, the primary objectives of social control and the imposition of sanctions are resolution of the conflict, restoration of order and harmony in the group or community, and healing of the offender, victim, and community.

While it is clear, then, that anarchist communities employ mechanisms of punishment and social control, it is crucial to grasp the diffuse nature of these processes.

This is the meaning of diffuse: responsibility for and the right to impose the sanction is spread out over the community. Society as a whole has the power. There is no special elite which even claims a monopoly on the use of violence as a sanctioning device (Barclay, 1990, p. 24).

As Purchase further observes, “diffuse sanctions can be applied by any member, [yet] the control of antisocial social acts in stateless societies [is] maintained by the community itself, through the continued action of all its members” (Purchase, 1996, p. 84). Put another way, not unlike that envisioned in the hypothetical “state of nature,” in the anarchist community every member possesses the executive authority of the “law” and is charged with the task of cultivating positive conduct and discouraging antisocial acts, tempered of course by the ubiquitous possibility of “reciprocal justice,” which can have a distinct chilling effect on one’s readiness to sanction another frivolously or spitefully (Barclay, 1990). Moreover, the penumbra of the community extends to conflicts and crimes, further abating the individual’s ability to sanction abusively.

Thus, it is apparent that anarchist communities sometimes engage in punishing but more often do so restitively or restoratively—with the critical point being that in anarchic settings there is no state or other institutional apparatus to carry out such punishments. Diffusion of power not only strikes crime and violence at their roots but, through reciprocity and direct participation, it likewise nullifies the utility of “deviance,” both as a means of asserting power in the face of oppression and authoritarian hierarchy, and as a labeling construct perpetuated to serve the ends of power-based forces (Lauderdale & Amster, 1999;

Niman, 1997). When sanctioning does ensue, the face-to-face nature of punishment relations in the anarchist community at least gives social control a more human quality than the mediated, institutional, and repressive methods of the state.

However, in a well-known sociological study of communes and intentional communities, Rosabeth Moss Kanter notes the common contention that,

"If communal orders do succeed, critics contend, it is because they substitute one form of coercion for another. The argument runs that when communal groups affect harmony between members and develop a smooth, intimate, cooperative life, they often achieve this at a terrible cost to the individual. Though communes may remove the repressive control of distant, impersonal institutions, they replace it with the control of the intimate, face-to-face group of peers, which is perhaps a more benign kind of coercion, but coercion nonetheless (Kanter, 1972, p. 231).

Nonetheless, after noting in passing the age-old queries of whether social life can be sustained without social control, and whether groups and individuals are doomed to be antagonists, Kanter goes on to remind the critics that:

... it is important to remember the general features of communes: they are voluntary social orders, based on free entrance and exit, regardless of how much pressure the group may put on the individual to stay; their social practices tend to reflect the choices of the members themselves; they usually reject the use of physical violence; they frequently employ practices of mutual criticism and feedback, in which whoever is playing the role of leader is also subject to the criticism of others; they often rotate positions and have frequent meetings in which to share information, so that all members are highly involved in the life and decisionmaking of the group; and whatever power there is is usually highly visible, for no matter how much figures such as charismatic leaders are infused with mystery, special privilege, and social distance, they are still physically present and highly accessible to members (Kanter, 1972, p. 232).⁴

Pursuing this line of inquiry further, she asserts that,

It is also important to remember that a certain amount of order seems to be necessary for sustained social life, and communes, at least, often attempt to find ways to establish order that are as equitable as possible. In some ways, order is merely another name for clarified expectations, and structure is another name for an agreement on the part of the group. The importance of clear expectations and group agreement is stressed by even the most anarchistic commune theorists (Kanter, 1972, p. 232).

Kanter (1972) instructively concludes her assessment of group pressure and social control with an admonition that seeks to transcend the familiar dichotomies of social theory and focus the inquiry at its fundamental human level:

The issue need not necessarily be phrased as the group versus the individual, as community or privacy, as organization or freedom. Rather, the question for the future is how to promote the growth of the individual and to respect his privacy in the context of a close loving community that also has the degree of organization needed to continue to meet the needs of the individuals within it (Kanter, 1972, p. 234).

This remains a central aim for any community experiment in anarchy.

CONFLICTS AND RESOLUTIONS

"All societies, even the most cooperative of them, have to find methods of resolving conflict, [since] conflict is just one part of social life. It is a natural and integral dimension of human interaction and activity" (Purchase, 1996, p. 84). Closely related to sanctioning practices, then, we must consider those social processes often denoted as "dispute resolution"—which is not a distinct sphere in anarchist settings but merely the flip side of the same coin (crime and punishment) that has been analyzed thus far. Are theft (property) or assault (person), for instance, crimes against the community or are they better conceived as personal disputes

between individual parties? In the anarchist setting, without a central state apparatus for administration and enforcement, acts such as theft or assault are more likely to be treated as disputes of a civil nature, with the added dimension that the community itself is directly involved in the resolution process.⁵ What is left that we might term “crimes” is conduct that violates social norms and for which there is no specific victim except the community itself. At Rainbow Gatherings, for example, potential loci of such community crimes include: breaking the pledge of nonviolence, the only transgression for which one can be turned away; the acceptance of money at the barter circle, which jeopardizes the right to use public land; and the use of alcohol, which it has long been a Family tradition to discourage (Rainbow Guide, 1995).⁶ However, these mandates are seen as voluntary proscriptions and, even in those few cases where reasoned argument and gentle persuasion are unavailing, the rule of thumb is to try civil resolution first, focused on restoring the relationship, and to employ more repressive sanctions such as ostracism or banishment only as a last resort (Barclay, 1990; Niman, 1997).

Of critical importance, then, are the processes by which disputes are resolved in anarchist communities, since dispute resolution serves as both a means of resolving conflict and as a form of social control (cf. Griffiths & Hamilton, 1996). In this regard, Tift (1979, pp. 397–8) notes that:

... experiences of personal conflict are essential to creative assessment and change. It means that we must restore life and the settlement of disputes to a direct face-to-face and collective process. This means no institutionalization of conflict resolution. It means airing the complexities of the dispute situation and of all our collective futures to reach toward new understandings while cherishing the reality of returning to work and living with others . . . Face-to-face justice is an outgrowth of life, needing no special or permanent personages or languages, no office of authority or imposition. [Therefore] a response to interpersonal conflict cannot be reasonably articulated before the conflict has arisen, only afterwards and after it has not been resolved to the mutual satisfaction of the persons involved.

The first level of dispute resolution, then, is the affected parties themselves working out a mutually agreeable and socially productive arrangement; only in cases of intractable impasse is a more formal process with community involvement required (Barclay, 1990).

By way of illustration, resolution processes employed in anarchist settings such as Rainbow Gatherings include: the disputants facing each other and venting the nature of the conflict (often in the form of a “heartsong”) while encircled by community members who encourage resolution;⁷ each disputant arguing their side of the conflict to a circle of community members and agreeing to accept the decree of the circle; the direct intervention of community members in separating the disputants until such time as they become able to privately resolve the issues; and mutual agreement on a mediator, often a respected elder, to facilitate resolution (cf. Lauderdale, 1997; Niman, 1997). Indeed, analogous processes have been noted in many indigenous cultures, and Barclay (1990) cites numerous examples, including: North African pygmies where the entire community is involved in resolving intractable disputes; the Konkomba of Togo where disputes are to be settled by mediation, and no violence is tolerated; and the Yurok Indians of Northern California where go-betweens serve to facilitate mediation. Black (1976) analyzes similar processes among the Nuer of the Sudan and the Ifugao of the Philippines, where a mediator is appointed and the Navajo Indians of North America, where local influentials, chosen for wisdom and diplomacy, work with interested parties to resolve disputes. Black (1976, p. 129) also notes that “in other societies an informal court, a moot or conclave, would convene for the same purpose . . . Whether an individual or a group, however, the third party typically is more an agent of compromise than of judgment.” Kropotkin (1972) observes analogous mechanisms at work among certain “pre-historic” cultures, as does Purchase (1996, pp. 86–7), who points out that the hallmark of the mediator is that he possesses “no power or authority to enforce his decisions.”

In Weberian typology terms, these methodologies might be said to have a distinctly “substantive irrational” quality, characterized in part by: the presence of a charismatic figure serving as arbiter; case-by-case, reactive not proactive, decision making; reliance on extralegal (e.g., moral or spiritual) grounds when reaching decisions; and the lack of an autonomous legal system for resolving disputes (Barclay, 1990; Inverarity *et al.*, 1983; Weber, 1958). This type of decisionmaking has an inherent flexibility and responsive quality, sacrificing uniformity and predictability, that renders it particularly appropriate to the anarchist community dynamic. Similar themes are often sounded in popular justice or community mediation discourses, and one strand of popular justice in particular—the communitarian tradition—bears a resemblance to anarchist resolution methods. Communitarian justice generally employs local or indigenous law-ways and not state law; is bound up with attempts to create a new religious or utopian social order, advocates decentralization and the application of community norms instead of legal rules of procedure; and focuses on feelings and individual expression (Merry & Milner, 1995). Substantially equivalent conceptions have been propounded in the restorative justice paradigm (Braswell *et al.*, 2001; Galaway & Hudson, 1996; Sullivan & Tift, 2000, 2001). Thus, some of the resolution techniques employed in anarchic settings such as the Rainbow Gathering are grounded in processes that are well documented in the social science literature.

AUTHORITY, POWER, AND CONSENSUS

As the foregoing discussion implies, anarchist communities do not entail the elimination of attributes such as power and authority but contemplate new applications of these endemic tendencies (Taylor, 1982). In such settings, authority might be characterized as “recognized competence within a certain field, and the right to take and carry out decisions with the assent of every person whom the decisions affect. Authority thus defined is not the opposite or the enemy of freedom but its necessary complement” (Baldelli, 1971, p. 75). In *Social Anarchism*, Baldelli provides initial guidance as to how this might look:

Coercive power must be reduced to a minimum and put in as many hands as possible . . . Claims to authority must be rejected if they are established by force . . . Each authority must be answerable to several others that are equally responsible to several more . . . No person in his relationship with another should be exempt from judgment by a third . . . Overwhelming power should always be with the third party . . . Access to a third party, available to everyone, should be to many third parties, not to one only (Baldelli, 1971, pp. 86–88).

Compare this to Murray Bookchin’s discussion of authority in organic societies, which he defines as “primitive or preliterate communities” (Bookchin, 1991, p. 43):

What we flippantly call “leadership” in organic societies often turns out to be guidance, lacking the usual accoutrements of command. Its “power” is functional rather than political. Chiefs, where they authentically exist and are not the mere creations of the colonizer’s mind, have no true authority in a coercive sense. They are advisors, teachers, and consultants, esteemed for their experience and wisdom. Whatever “power” they do have is usually confined to highly delimited tasks such as the coordination of hunts and war expeditions. It ends with the tasks to be performed. Hence, it is episodic power, not institutional; periodic, not traditional (1991, p. 55).

Similarly, consider Clastres (1994), who further illuminates this distinction between power and prestige in the organic “societies against the state” in the Amazon basin; Mbah and Igariwey (1997) nothing the same among traditional African societies; Mander (1991, p. 260) observing that coercive forms of authority are unknown among “virtually all traditional tribal people;” and Lauderdale (1997, p. 138), analyzing indigenous sanctioning practices that existed in “the absence of prisons [and] centralized authority.”

Putting all of this together, a vision begins to emerge of an anarchist community in which individuals are free to exercise authority in areas of particular skill or interest while following, assisting, and learning in other spheres, creating a space “where reputations and other statuses fluctuate from one day to the next” (Black, 1976, p. 137). Thoroughly diffuse and decentralized, power becomes an energy that flows freely through every hair of the community, finding its way into action through those best attuned to its resonance for the task at hand (Ward, 1973; Mander, 1991). Power so conceived fosters an air of spontaneous creative energy, in which chores become “happenings” and works are events (Ward, 1973)—and still somehow structures are erected, people fed, fires fought, and babies born (Niman, 1997). In this way, the community gets the most out of the energies of its members, maximizing its human potential while preserving both individual autonomy and group consensus.

On this last point, it has often been observed that in the absence of central authority, laws are generally established by consensus, in which community norms and decisions are unanimously agreed upon through processes of active participation and open debate, aimed at facilitating a “deeper and deeper probing into meanings and motivations until a common ground is found” (Zablocki, 1973, p. 173). This is also discussed by Barclay (1990), Mbah and Igariwey (1997), Mander (1991), and Kropotkin (1972) who notes (p. 133) the tribal process of “unanimity” in which “the discussions continue until all present agree to accept, or submit to, some decision,” since there exists “no authority in a village community to impose a decision.”⁸ The Rainbow literature similarly instructs:

Consensus is how we govern ourselves. Consensus means coming to solutions acceptable to everyone, not just a majority. Consensus gives every person a chance to be heard and have their input weighed equally. The smallest minority has a chance to change the collective mind if their vision is keener. It is possible that Spirit has given them a message that is presently beyond the perception of the rest of the council. Consensus works in an environment of trust, where everyone suffers or gains alike from the decision. Everyone must: listen and participate, get informed, be rational, and be part of the process from the beginning (*Rainbow Guide*, 1995, p. 2).⁹

As is the case with the concomitant processes of sanctioning, dispute resolution, and authority, the appearance of power in the anarchist setting is diffuse in the sense that every member of the group is equally entitled to be a direct and active participant in the creation of community norms and in the entire decisionmaking process itself. In this way, individuals acquire a deeper sense of the meaning and purpose of the law extant in the community, rendering superfluous the need for institutionalization and even codification. The benefits of conceiving the social contract as an organic, ongoing agreement derived through direct participation and consensus decisionmaking are manifold, not the least of which is to encourage an environment in which cooperation and not competition becomes the predominant aim of both the group and its individual constituents (cf. Kropotkin, 1972), and where the community itself exists in a cooperative relationship with the earth (cf. Sullivan & Tift, 2000). As Tift (1979, p. 399) concludes,

Where there are personally equivalent inputs and mutual confidence, people hold all goods in common and take what they need. They institute the principle of justice—to each according to need, taking into account the resources available to the community.

SUBSISTENCE LIVING AND THE ENVIRONMENT

There is a significant body of literature describing the relationship of anarchist communities to the land. These studies fundamentally demonstrate that communities constructed upon beliefs such as participatory politics, diffuse sanctions, pervasive social welfare, open admissions, and voluntary mutual aid, invariably maintain a particular relationship to the

earth itself. Specifically, it is clear that such communities are defined by their rejection of private property interests in the land, and that the social practices that inhere in such communities are initially enabled by the simple fact that materiality is shared by all and owned by none. Thus, it is the abolition of this original hierarchy of private property ownership that is the hallmark of anarchist communities and the linchpin of egalitarian, inclusive, and noncoercive social practices. As Rousseau asserts:

The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying "This is mine", and found some people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars, and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: "Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody (Rousseau, 1973, p. 84).

Therefore, a primary component of the anarchist community must be its material or economic life, which cannot be separated from its political and social aspects (Clastres, 1994; Taylor, 1982; Mander, 1991). In many such settings there exists an emphasis on cooperation, mutualism, and reciprocity, and to that end the dominant forms of exchange among community members have often been barter (Mbah & Igariwey, 1997), gifting or sharing (Ingold, Riches, & Woodburn, 1988; Rogers, 1994), and hospice (P.M., 1995; Zerzan, 1994; Mauss, 1966). Significantly, there is a dearth of examples in the literature indicating any dominant presence of capitalist economics (based on profit, exploitation, and obsessive growth) in anarchistic settings. Rather, such communities are distinguished by their maintenance of an economic safety net in which members are at least guaranteed access to essentials such as sustenance and shelter (Bookchin, 1991; Mbah & Igariwey, 1997; Ward, 1973). Zerzan (1994, p. 17) observes that "food sharing has for some time been considered an integral part of earliest human society," indicating "the benefits of being part of a society where everything is shared" (p. 30). In a strong sense, then, restoring the community–environment relationship entails the maintenance of egalitarian and mutually supportive relations among community members as well.

Extending such insights further, upon observing (Clastres, 1994, p. 111) that "primitive societies are societies that refuse economy," Pierre Clastres notes the prevalence among indigenous nations of an "anti-surplus principle" that is usually framed negatively in terms of poverty or hardship without grasping its fundamental interconnection to the entire social structure of the nation–tribe. Jerry Mander likewise notes this indigenous tendency toward "deliberate underproduction" and "the choice of subsistence." In addition to citing Marshall Sahlins' famous insight that such "primitive" cultures are the "original affluent societies" due to their abundance of leisure time and diversity of diversions, Mander (1991, pp. 252–4) goes on to consider the positive aspects of this "refusal of economy" which include: an optimistic attitude toward nature and its impulse to provide food in abundance, rendering superfluous the need to stockpile; the persistence of a nomadic identity and the desire to travel light; a reduced impact on the environment arising out of an inherent respect for and symbiosis with the earth; community sharing of resources; and the prevention of social hierarchies and economic inequalities (see also Clastres, 1994; Mies & Shiva, 1993; Zerzan, 1994).

As it has been said of certain renunciate implications in Taoism (Clark, 1998, p. 18):

The life of "simplicity" is in no way the impoverished life of one who seeks escape from the corrupt world and its temptations. Rather it is something much more affirmative: it is the consummate existence of one who has rejected whatever would stunt or distort growth and personal fulfillment. Simplicity is not, however, a quality with implications for personal life alone. It refers also to social institutions which will promote rather than hinder self-realization. A society based on social status, or one glorifying the pursuit of material wealth and permitting economic domination, is inevitably destructive, producing conflict, disorder, envy, and crime.

Myriad indigenous cultures, alternative communities, and utopian experiments have long perceived this intimate connection between material subsistence and social existence. As Maria Mies (in Mies & Shiva, 1993, p. 322) observes:

Wherever women and men have envisaged a society in which all—women and men, old and young, all races and cultures—could share the “good life”, where social justice, equality, human dignity, beauty and joy in life were not just utopian dreams never to be realized (except for a small elite or postponed to an after-life), there has been close to what we call a subsistence perspective . . . Sustainability is not compatible with the existing profit- and growth-oriented development paradigm.

Indeed, the utopian longings of writers including Morris (1995), Huxley (1961), and Callenbach (1975), bolster the larger point maintained here that a central function of anarchistic experiments is to achieve a balanced relationship with the environment that enables harmonious relations among community members. Treading lightly on the earth, promoting agrarianism, and living close to the level of need are all important components of this subsistence-based ecological outlook and the restorative processes it engenders.

CONCLUSION: RESTORING (DIS)ORDER

In the spirit suggested by the introduction to this essay, I continue to maintain that anarchy entails the constant (re)alignment of community processes with similar patterns found in nature. In essence, anarchy thus envisioned is simply the restoration of harmonious relations between human communities and the environment, a vision that necessarily includes restoring a sense of dignity and mutual respect to relations among individual community members. It is this nexus of self, society, and nature—whose very absence defines the downward spiral of civilization—that offers hope for the future, and that lies at the heart of both anarchist theory and practice as well as at the core of the emerging restorative justice paradigm.

Accordingly, a central task in this essay has been to assess the structural elements and practical efficacy of envisioning anarchist communities characterized by informal norms, diffuse sanctions, consensus decisionmaking, and mutual aid. In many ways, these are the roots of our shared human past, a place which some still strive to create in the present. Far from comprising some quixotic endeavor, these connective strands indicate the potential for restorative communities to both harmonize and revolutionize conceptions of self, society, and nature. Indeed, in light of civilization's ongoing imperative that “all dis-order must be banished, the spontaneous taken firmly in hand” (Zerzan, 1994, pp. 41–42), the highest end a set of principles can attain is to restore (dis)order in the face of an ever-ascending cultural impetus toward predictability, control, law, and order. By passing it through an anarchist prism, the restorative justice ideal shines as an ebb-and-flow strategy for simultaneously challenging present configurations of authority and fostering a new vision of social reality through the creation of models of restorative justice in practice.

Notes

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1. The Rainbow Family of Living Light is a self-styled nomadic tribal anarchy and utopian movement that manifests in “Gatherings” held on National Forest land throughout the US and on other public sites around the world

(see generally Niman, 1997). Despite the nomadic and diasporic nature of the Rainbow Family “tribe” and the constant flux of names and faces at Gatherings, there is a nascent Rainbow Nation cultural identity that is grounded in appearance, dress, demeanor, and aura, as well as an ideological inclination towards a minimalist lifestyle, a relationship with nature, and a spiritual consciousness that incorporates elements of Native American traditional, Eastern mystical, and medieval pagan philosophies and cosmologies.

2. Consider: Kropotkin (1972, p. 110), discussing tribal cultures and their “unwritten rules of propriety which are the fruit of their common experience as to what is good or bad;” Clastres (1977, pp. 148–58), analyzing unwritten “primitive law,” which functions as a general “prohibition of inequality that each person will remember;” Reid (1970, p. 70), noting that the unwritten “laws of customary usage” of the Cherokee Nation yielded “rules that every Cherokee understood and almost every Cherokee obeyed;” and Pat Lauderdale’s (1997, p. 132) analysis of the “law-ways” of indigenous cultures: “For most North American Indians law was accessible to everyone since the oral tradition allowed it to be carried around as part of them rather than confined to legal institutions and inaccessible experts who largely control the language as well as the cost of using the law.” As Thomas More notes in *Utopia* (1965, p. 109), “Human nature constitutes a treaty in itself, and human beings are far more effectively united by kindness than by contracts, by feelings than by words.”

3. “There is no law, no obligation of that kind” (Nietzsche, 1996, p. 261).

4. See Clastres (1994, p. 91), noting that in primitive societies, “The chief is under surveillance; society watches to make sure the taste for prestige does not become the desire for power.”

5. See: Blum (1977, p. 44) analyzing theft in Christiania as “an act that is [seen as] necessary for the offender, an act caused by certain social and economic circumstances, a problem which can only be solved collectively”; Kropotkin (1972, p. 125) observing that among barbarians, “every quarrel arising between two individuals was treated as a communal affair [and] had to be repaired by amends made both to the individual and the community,” and discussing similar trends in the medieval city; Lauderdale (1997) noting the close association between indigenous law-ways and civil law, which places an emphasis on restoring relationships, especially at the community level; McCold (1996) discussing the standing of the local community in remediating crimes occurring between community members; and Presser and Gaarder (2000, p. 182) noting that restorative justice often entails “restoring victims’ wellbeing and reintegrating victims and offenders into communities of concern.”

6. See also Blum (1977), discussing the norms in Christiania that prohibit selling or profiting from hard drugs.

7. See Presser and Gaarder (2000, p. 184): “The restorative justice encounter is not designed to achieve a specific end, but rather to allow healing processes to occur. Healing for the victim involves the opportunity for story-telling in a forum that encourages the telling and validates the story.” Compare to Galaway & Hudson (1996, p. 2): “All parties have responsibilities associated with participation in the dispute settlement process. Offenders are responsible for acknowledging the wrong done, making apology, expressing remorse, and being willing to compensate or make reparation. The responsibilities of victims are to accept the expressions of remorse made by the offender and to express a willingness to forgive. Community members participate by providing necessary support and encouragement to the parties to arrive at a settlement and provide opportunities to carry out the agreement.”

8. Similar processes can be found in the practices of certain indigenous North American cultures: “During the process of Haudenosaunee deliberations, for example, each speaker is allowed to speak until he or she has said all they have to say. Conversely, etiquette requires that the speaker be brief and to the point. Everybody is expected to give their full and undivided attention to the speaker. People are expected to speak to the issues and not the personalities involved. People are expected to speak in a calm and deliberate manner. It is difficult to express exactly how this works, but Haudenosaunee people are socialized to feel uncomfortable in the presence of debilitating harangues and embarrassed for the person who is making such a presentation” (Clark, 1990, p. 95).

9. See also Bouvard (1975), McLaughlin and Davidson (1985), and Melville (1972) on analogous processes in intentional communities.

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Biography

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