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The Virtues of Anarchism

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Anarchy counts as one of the most prominent IR key concepts, and a vast amount of its theories revolves around questions that tackle and address the anarchy problematique. Yet, despite the seeming omnipresence of *anarchy* in IR, *anarchist* political thought is strangely absent from the discipline. IR has been paying a great deal of attention to anarchy, but it has so far failed to incorporate anarchism into its conceptual repertoire. Conversely, anarchist political theorists have demonstrated little interest in joining debates on international politics. The article argues that IR needs to pay attention to philosophical anarchism and advances five points in favour of an anarchist take on IR theory.

Kenneth Waltz: The Reluctant Anarchist

The Origins of Anarchy in Inter-state Politics: Managing the Circulations of Violence

One of the key questions addressed by Waltz in the 1979 classic *Theory of International Politics* deals with the challenge of how to regulate the circulation of violence within and across domestic and international political spaces. Departing from the observation that the "state among states conducts its affairs in the brooding shadow of violence" Waltz motivates his readership to acknowledge an inconvenient truth, namely the intimate intertwinement of social life with the latency of violent conflict, before eventually concluding – somewhat consternated – that "the hope that in the absence of an agent to manage or to manipulate conflicting parties the use of force will always be avoided cannot be realistically entertained" (Waltz 1979, 102). While the latency of violence penetrates the deep structure of social and political conduct, attempts to manage and regulate the occurrence of force vary across contexts. It is of importance to acknowledge at this point that the common distinction between the domestic and the international is not a qualitative one between non-violent and violent spaces. Politics is always underpinned by violence regardless of its location (ibid., 103). The domestic/international-binary highlights instead two fundamentally different regulative ideas, each of which employs a distinct mechanism for the coordination of conflict.

Domestically the state monopolizes the deployment of force and puts itself in a position that enables it to appear as the exclusive and legitimate arbiter of violence. Via the government's executive branches coercive structures are maintained – i.e. the police, state bureaucracy, or the military – which serve the single most important purpose of curtailing security competition by means of disabling rivaling claims for legitimacy within a given political space. Violence hence does not disappear but becomes monopolized (through the state), institutionalized (through governmental agencies), and rationalized (through the principle of authority and the monopoly of violence) (ibid., 104).

While a veil of authority covers the latency of violence in the domestic setting, force becomes readily visible when directing one's perspective towards the international. Unlike the domestic the international lacks an authority-consensus and must govern itself devoid of overarching coercive structures. The prerogative to use violence does not rest in the hands of a single *Leviathan* but see-saws through the capillaries of the international. The institution of sovereignty that attempts to tame the unhampered spread of violence within states is then also responsible for the ambivalence and unpredictability that harrows international affairs. States expose certain possessiveness and defend their domestic prerogatives jealously. What translates into a situation of hierarchy within states leads to anarchy among them: domestically as well as internationally Westphalian polities do not recognize the existence of any higher power over and above themselves. The inter-state system is then characterized by the absence of

government and the multiplied presence of sovereign polities, each of which possesses authority in its own right. It is the necessity to manage the circulation of violence in the first place – and the specifically statist response to it, which divides politics into domestic and international zones – that leads to the emergence of anarchy in inter-state politics. Hierarchy and anarchy are two opposing faces of the same coin, and while the regulation of violence through the creation of 'islands of order' pacifies one political space (the domestic), it also leads to competition and enmity in another (the international).

The Willingness to Cooperate and the Fear to Do So

The multiplication of competing authority structures on the international level severely hampers the possibility of cooperation among states. On the domestic level the state solves the problem of violence through monopolization and by means of providing the guarantee to its citizens to care for their security and to protect them from violent assault. Citizens do not need to worry about their security and can instead engage in other, i.e. economic, activities. States even encourage the members of their societies to specialize in a given trade and to integrate as far as possible into a system of mutual interdependency. The lack of guarantees and the absence of an authority consensus on the international level has the exact opposite effect and encourages states to attain a level of greatest possible autonomy and perhaps even autarky (ibid., 106). While the state offers security to its citizens, no agent is capable of providing the same service to the state.

Waltz remarks that a "national system is not one of self-help. The international system is", and further "The domestic imperative is 'specialize'! (…) The international imperative is 'take care of yourself'" (ibid., 104 & 107). The emerging situation is both undesirable and tragic: states do recognize that a deeper integration and a division of labor among them would be much more beneficial than a continued insistence on their ontological independence. Yet, the structure of the international forces states into a prisoners dilemma and encourages them to remain only loosely connected and in a mode of interdependency: collectively beneficial outcomes cannot be achieved due to the absence of a guarantor and enforcer who would regulate states collective behavior (ibid., 105). States can only control their own behavior and determine the payoff that results from their own actions – the actions of their peers remain beyond anybody's control. States might even prefer to cooperate, integrate, and harvest the fruits of positive-sum games, but the absence of guarantees throws them back into a logic that makes them susceptible to relative gains while bolstering their own security (ibid.). Individual actions that attempt defy the logic of interdependency and autonomy are incapable of changing it for good since states that act counter to the logic of self-help risk falling prey to the exploitative behavior of competing units.

The Virtues of Anarchy – Or: Why Anarchy Has Its Perks Too

Anarchy regulates interaction among units and puts constraints on their behavior. Yet, while the leaderless makeup of the international sensitizes actors for relative gains, encourages a self-help mentality among them, and limits cooperation to interdependency it is important to acknowledge that anarchy has its perks too. The heading of the section reads – somewhat heretically – "Kenneth Waltz, the reluctant anarchist". Waltz was not an anarchist, at least not in a strictly ideological sense, but he was certainly willing to acknowledge that anarchic modes of organization could offer a series of advantages. One could say that Waltz is a reluctant anarchist, an anarchist out of necessity not conviction, one that refrained from openly endorsing anarchism as a political regime while concurrently advocating anarchist politics. The central theme that runs through *Theory of International Politics* is the already addressed question of how to manage the circulation of violence. Waltz feared that if one attempted to break down the domestic/international-barrier and the well-established practices that regulate force within certain political spaces (i.e. the domestic monopoly of violence and the historically grown practices of international society) events could spiral out of control and descend into a disastrous series of wars.

Anarchy is a virtue because it simultaneously constrains and stabilizes political conduct. Furthermore, anarchic regimes do initiate a series of politically desirable outcomes that can lead to a number of beneficiary effects – a claim constantly advanced by anarchists since the 19th century and eventually phased into IR by Waltz in 1979. What are the virtues of anarchy then?

- Anarchic orders can be maintained more easily and cheaply than hierarchic ones, mainly due to their decreased proneness to internal power struggles. Waltz remarks that in cases of power struggles "substantive issues become entwined with efforts to influence or control the controllers" (ibid., 111). Especially larger, more powerful hierarchies can easily become the subject of hostile takeovers. Anarchic orders are certainly not immune to high-jacking but their high degree of diversification hampers monopolization and centralization far more effectively than a hierarchical order does.
- Anarchic orders are pragmatic. The politics of the organization that rid hierarchies pressures them to justify their right to existence on a constant basis. Hierarchies develop a distracting interest in maintaining and protecting themselves, which diverts resources that could have otherwise been used for attending the organization's original mandate (ibid.). The decreased proneness to internal power struggles does of course not imply that anarchies are more cost efficient than hierarchies. Anarchic orders are indeed labor and resource intensive as they require ongoing coordination between their constituent parts. Anarchic orders are then not necessarily cheaper than hierarchies, but resources are directed towards more substantive issues, i.e. the coordination between units, instead of wasting them on fights over institutional control.
- Anarchic orders are resilient, and shocks such as war or the private use of force can only disperse with great difficulties through the system as a whole. Decentralization is self-stabilizing to the extent that it erects a multitude of firewalls between individually fragile units. In the event of a shock the integrity of isolated units might be threatened, but this applies hardly to the overall stability of the anarchic realm as such (ibid., 112).
- Anarchic orders are flexible and adaptive. Unlike domestic forms of organization international politics cannot rely on hierarchical modes of decision making, bureaucratic oversight, or effective policing. Out of necessity and due to the absence of more complex institutional politics decisions are necessarily made at the bottom level. Accommodation and adjustment are realized through mutual adaption and not via top-down enforcement. The bottom-up nature of international politics and the thin layer of actual policies ensures that the system remains as flexible as possible while retaining a high degree of adaptiveness (ibid., 113).
- Anarchic orders foster restraint. States are war-machines and their efforts to mitigate violence are not exclusively directed towards their inside. States monopolize, wield, and direct violence, and even small and supposedly less powerful states are still in the position to marshal disturbingly destructive amounts of lethal military capabilities. The omnipresence of violence, the absence of a durable authority-consensus, and the logic of self-help requires units to cautiously maneuver the political landscape. Manipulations of the system are possible, but they must happen within feasible boundaries. Demands can be made and interest may be articulated, but the ever presence of violence as the ultimate corrective requires restraint and prudence from actors (ibid., 113 f.).

Anarchy without Anarchism

The vices and virtues of anarchy have occupied one of the center stages of IR research well before Waltz' 1979 reformulation of classical realist thought. Even IR's predecessors, late 19th and early 20th discourses on geopolitics, have struggled with the question of how newly emerging, territorially unified, economically potent, and increasingly militarized states would be able to regulate their intercourse under the absence of an overarching authority structure that would be capable of overseeing their various dealings. The origins of the anarchy problematique are embedded within these late 19th century approaches to geopolitics and anthropogeography, and despite the fact that early geopolitical thinkers where not yet in the possession of the elaborate theoretical vocabulary of their 20th/21st century IR-peers, they anticipated the discourse and its central questions well before the First Great Debate and prior to the arrival of the term 'anarchy' on IR's conceptual scene.

A discourse so readily willing to accept anarchy as one of its core tenets must have shown some interest in anarchist political though and in anarchism at some point!? After all, it was the 19th century anarchists who repeatedly highlighted the 'virtues of anarchy' that where later praised by Waltz. Far from it! On the contrary, a systematic engagement of IR with anarchist political thought is still largely absent from the debate. There is certainly no lack of normative and analytical models in the IR-field that would make suggestions on the possible structure and the shape of global political regimes. Visions of a world state in the form of a supra-national body have been lined out by realists like Niebuhr and the late Morgenthau in the 50s and 60s, and more recently by Craig in *Glimmer of a new*

Leviathan.[1] Liberals and cosmopolitans[2] are both imagining an ideal type of global politics that rests on individualism and Kantian universalism, while proponents of the communitarian camp suggest a particularist political project that features a collective community-based social ontology.[3] On the functional level one will find EU-globalism and neo-medievalism with suggestions for a federated political regime that embraces subsidiary dispersions of powers.[4] Additional approaches are presented by the English School and constructivism, which adopt realism's state-centric ontology while highlighting the possibility of thick patterns of cooperation in a community or a society of states.[5]

The above mentioned theories work within and across the confinements of the anarchy problematique. However, one will not encounter a framework that would utilize the theoretical and normative insights provided by the philosophical tradition of theoretical anarchism. Anarchy as an ontological property is present in the debate, but anarchism as a socio-political approach to IR has not arrived in the field yet. The contemporary literature shows a remarkable and in some ways unacceptable silence about the possibilities of global politics based on the premises of anarchist thought. So far IR-scholars did not pay enough attention to the question of whether the discipline should look at the dynamics of international politics through an anarchist lens, despite the fact that there are good reasons to do so. There exists a distinct anarchist approach to international politics, a fact that has already been highlighted by Alex Prichard in the 2013 monograph *Justice, Order and Anarchy* on the international political thought of Pierre Joseph Proundhon (Prichard 2013, 142). The remainder of this article will depart from the conceptual plateau build by Proudhon and aims to insert his anarchist philosophy into the context of contemporary IR theory. Five separate yet intertwined suggestions are offered in favour of an anarchist approach to the field of IR.

The Virtues of Anarchism

Towards a Theory of Constituent Power in Global Politics

Over the past decades IR has developed an impressive conceptual toolkit which enables the discipline to study varying types of power and their dispersion through the international system. Dahl's relational power approach argues that "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (Dahl 1957, 202 f.). To this first layer of power – direct influence – Lukes has added a second and a third dimension: setting/structuring agendas, as well as shaping preferences (Lukes 2005). Barnett and Duvall eventually parse the latter one into two more facets, namely structural and productive power (Barnett & Duvall 2005, 43). Last but not least one will find a vast amount of post-structural takes on the concept that locate power in the realm of biopolitics and discourses (Foucault 1994).

What is strangely absent from IR is an account of *constituent power*. The effects of the "democratic forces of social transformation, the means by which humans make their own history" (Hardt 2009, vii-viii), and the attached capacity to act in a genuinely sovereign and autonomous way by making "something from that which is not something and thus is not subject to laid-down laws" (Schmitt 2005, xxvii) have not been systematically addressed by the discipline (Patberg 2013, 225). IR tends to assume that constituent power is a prerogative of the domestic, the realm of genuine politics. The international, the realm of anarchy and necessity, must bow to the structural constraints of uncertainty and is forced to limit its politics to a sterile set of 'relations' underpinned by the latency of violence.

Proudhon's theory of *natural groups* and his concept of *social force* offers a way out of this dilemma. The *natural groups* perspective argues that all political outcomes are produced by proto-polities that impose a certain degree of coherency upon themselves. Natural groups can be found in almost any socio-political domain, i.e. families, workshops, battalions, unions, whole industries, and even states and empires. The most important aspect in that regard is every group's potential ability to wield a certain degree of constituent power through the *social force* it mobilizes. Social force is divided into material and ideational properties and exists by virtue of agglomeration and commutation. The difference between 'the absolute' (constituted power) and 'progress' (constituent power) has been extensively addressed by Proudhon in *Philosophy of Progress* (2009, 10). In combination with his theory of natural groups it becomes a powerful device to traverse the domestic/international binary for the purpose of accessing the effects of constituent power in international politics.

Beyond Westphalia: Sovereignty and Anarchy in the Light of Constituent Power

Elsewhere I have highlighted the structural relationship between notions of power and diverging types of sovereignty. I argued that prevalent accounts of Westphalian inter-state sovereignty are heavily influenced by a reading of power that emphasizes the mobilization of coercion and violence (Pfenninger 2015). The reasons for this fixation on force and compulsion have also been addressed in greater detail above during the preceding engagement with Waltz' take on anarchy. Westphalian polities count as purpose build arrangements dedicated to regulate the circulation of violence within and across domestic and international political spaces. Sovereignty, the institution employed to authoritatively govern certain political spaces through a rationalization of violence, must then be necessarily coercive – a non-coercive, i.e. a productive account of sovereignty is neither required to exist nor intended to flourish within the logics of inter-state politics. Coercive sovereignty leads eventually into a constraining account of anarchy. Anarchy, the void between Westphalian war machines breeds struggle and anguish, not by design, but due to its structural intertwinement with violence and coercive sovereignty.

Under the auspices of coercive sovereignty anarchy is perceived as a dead end, a problematic state of being that emerges in the context of the poweràsovereigntyàanarchy nexus. Constituent power – i.e. Proudhonian *social force* – displaces this unidirectional logic of Westphalian politics. It offers instead a re-conceptualization of sovereignty alongside constituent lines and provides for a cyclical account of anarchy. The poweràsovereigntyàanarchy nexus remains intact, yet its connotation changes. Other than the restrictive and punitive power that backs Westphalian sovereignty constituent power highlights the founding and positing forces immanent to politics (Kalyvas 2005, 225). It circumnavigates the monopolizing gravity of the state and can be found in multiple locations. The rhizomatic appearance of constituent power and its capillary dispersion throughout various global political spaces is perfectly captured by Proudhon's theory of *natural groups,* or, more recently, in Hardt and Negri's image of the *Multitude*. Constituent power then translates into productive, i.e. democratic and republican accounts of sovereignty: "Machiavelli's people in arms (…) animated by the power not only to rebel against and overthrow the current order but also to create from below new democratic forms of social organization" (Hardt 2009, vii-viii). The anarchy that eventually grows from a productive account of sovereignty is still underpinned by competition, struggle, and strives over hegemony, similar to the Westphalian model. Yet it allows for a much broader array of interests. While statist polities engage by default in fierce security competition, *natural groups* are not exclusively driven by a survivalist rationale. Against this backdrop anarchy is not the death of politics but its *Alpha* as well as its *Omega*. Global politics among natural groups is possible because – not despite – the high degree of ontological anarchy that enables their existence in the first place. Analogously, the interplay between natural groups is characterized by a high degree of fluidity between those proto-polities that manage to wield constituent power successfully.

Complex Ontologies: Deep Anarchy of the Global

Directing IR's focus of investigation towards certain anarchist themes, i.e. the role of*constituent power* and *natural groups* in world politics, will not only alter the discipline's view in regard to key concepts such as sovereignty and anarchy, but raises additional questions about its ontological core assumptions. Jackson & Nexon remark that most IR theories depart from a substantialist assumption that presumes "that entities precede interaction, or that entities are already entities before they enter into social relations with other entities" (Jackson & Nexon (Jackson & Nexon 1999, 293). This already quite one-dimensional view is narrowed down even further by the broad acceptance of statist ontologies. The complex dynamics of global politics are often reduced to one particular element: international relations – which derives from the latin phrase *inter nationes* and translates literarily into relations *between nations*.

The assumption that global affairs can be reduced to inter-state politics gives rise to a flat, state-centric ontology of the international and perpetuates the image of a universal Westphalian republic with sovereignty as its governing principle. Actors other than states are not completely ignored, but their importance is often diminished since it is assumed that the nature of structures such as the international is defined by its major actors, not by all the actors in it (Waltz 1979, 93). Employing an anarchist narrative draws attention away from absolute substance and towards ontological intangibility: emergent properties, non-reductionist processes, nested units, network structures, autopoiesis (self-making and self-reproducing), as well as random shifts between linearity and non-linearity (Cudworth & Hobden 2010, 403). Rather than emphasizing certainty, stability, or truth, philosophical anarchism highlights ontological anarchy and the substantial uncertainty that constitutes global politics way before sovereignty-induced inter-state anarchy appears on the scene.

The Geopolitics of Anarchism: Multi-polity Perspectives and Porous Sovereignties

Displacing substantialist claims in favor of anarchic ontologies opens room for conceptual maneuver that allows IR to gaze beyond the limitations of the international and grasp the topography of the global. Geopolitical developments are more and more characterized by the emergence of multi-nodal and multilayered structures: "international politics works as an increasingly complex institutional and behavioural superstructure crisscrossing with both domestic politics, domestic and transnational society, and sub-units of states" (Cerny 2014, 15). These multi-dimensional political processes are not limited to patterns of strict horizontal or vertical linearity, and they cannot be monopolized by actors of a certain kind or location (i.e. by states acting within the international). This observation is shared by the already addressed *natural groups*-approach which differs strongly from system-centered theories due to the sociological narrative it employs. From a *natural groups* perspective the global is constituted by an assemblage of proto-polities that mobilize *social force*. Within this configuration certain groups are capable of wielding additional constituent power which allows them to inflict long-lasting, structural change to the makeup of the global. The elevated position held by these proto-polities allows them to act in a genuinely sovereign way while lacking the discrete distinctiveness of the state: they can hence be described as being *porous sovereignties.* In order to increase our understanding of how the global as a political space is constituted one needs to understand how material and ideational resources are wielded by porous sovereignties and how they relate towards each other in the first place. Their location, be it local, national, international, or global, as well as their socio-political function is only of secondary concern in that regard. What matters is their structural impact on the configuration of global political realms.

A heightened awareness of anarchic ontologies, coupled with an increased susceptibility towards the topographies of the global, directs IR's attention towards the multiplicity of geopolitical spaces that regulate the intercourse between a wide series of actors. Classical geopolitics exposes a strong and narrow fixation on Westphalian spaces and characterizes them "as a series of blocks defined by state territorial boundaries" (Agnew 1994, 55). A critical approach would argue that structural spaces need to be taken into account as well if one wants to understand properly how global political outcomes are produced – a move that follows logically from the previous discussion on porous sovereignties. An account on structural spatiality highlights the fact that the essence of political space is first and foremost characterized by its constituting set of power relations and not by its territoriality. Departing from this assumption Agnew employs a reading of structural space that describes it as "geographical entities of one sort or another, nodes, districts, regions, etc., have spatial effects that result from their interaction or relationship with one another" (ibid.). From this perspective the geopolitical makeup of the global fails to appear as a patchwork made up exclusively of discrete territorial spaces but reveals itself instead as a complex interplay of structural spaces. Only a few of them can actually claim to own territory, while the vast majority fails to comply with this criterion – a fact that diminishes only their quality to act as genuinely Westphalian sovereigns, while leaving their ability to perform as *porous sovereignties* completely intact.

Geopolitical Spaces and the Ethics of Porous Sovereignties

Last but not least it is also of importance to acknowledge the normative potential inherent to *porous sovereignties.* This potential is realized through an ethical interrogation of the spatializing practices that underpin contemporary world politics. Political spaces are institutions whose existence is heavily dependent on multiple sets of intertwining power relations. Hence they cannot be reduced to simple, neutral, regulative mechanisms. Instead they reflect a specific set of ethics – ways of acting, being, and relating towards each other – which derives from their ability to generate agency and to impacting heavily on the structure of inter-human relations. Westphalian spaces convey an *ethos of survival*: they are structurally dependent on ontological binaries such as hierarchy/anarchy, inside/outside, or self/enemy in order to enforce the narratives of self-help and survivalism that legitimizes statist practices (Odysseos 2002, 404 f.). Two particular problems emerge in this context:

Firstly, the supposed necessity upon which these binaries rest derives from an image of the 'other' as a well-spring of violence that needs to be brought under control. This depiction is in itself based on a mere assumption, grounded in political theory, and by no means supported through empirical evidence. Its origins can be traced back to the Hobbesian state of nature which exalts a firms conceptual grip on IR and impacts heavily on how the discipline justifies the existence of the state (ibid., 406-408).

Secondly, it leads to a monopolization of political and ethical conduct through the state. Waltz seemingly technical stance on statist spaces as *mechanisms* necessary for the regulation of violence has a submerged *ethical* side to it: it crowns the state as the principal polity resting in the heart of all politics. Statist spaces position themselves at the center of inter-human affairs: all political conduct is either initiated or supervised by them, every social relationship is forced to take place against the backdrop of territorially constituted spaces. Global politics is eventually reduced to international relations, and the provision of certain political goods, i.e. democracy, is supposedly possibly only within states, not across or above them.

Employing *porous sovereignties* as an ethico-political principle creates room for agency in world politics that reaches beyond the conceptual hegemony of the state. The nature of states as purpose-build war machines, and the climate of enmity they create in global affairs, has already been noted earlier. *Porous sovereignties* – natural groups that wield constituent power – harbor the potential to break with the vicious circle of inter-state anarchy and self-help that rationalizes the existence of Westphalian spaces. The primary interest of *porous sovereignties* cannot be reduced to bare-bones survivalism. Their interests are instead multifaceted and dependent on their socio-political function and their location within the global political realm: workshops, unions, armies, industries, NGOs that act on a local, national, and/or global level do not usually succumb to the Hobbesian *ethos of survival* inherent to statist practices. In a more agonistic fashion they are instead driven by a Lockean *ethos of competition* that entails strives over the realization of hegemonic political projects. Within this setting the outbreak of violence is certainly not off limits – yet its likelihood is massively decreased due to the fact that actors whose primary purpose does not comprise in the mobilization of force are capable to participate in the production of global political outcomes as well.

Notes

[1] in *Scientific Man versus Power Politics* and *Politics Among Nations* Morgenthau still rejected this vision but revised it later. For an example see: Mitrany, *A Working Peace System*, Introduction – see also: Craig (2003): *Glimmers of a New Leviathan*

[2] Rawls (1971): *A Theory of Justice*, Koenig-Archibugi (2003): *Taming Globalization: Frontiers of Governance,* Beitz (1979): *Political Theory and International Relations*, Pogge (1989): *Realizing Rawls*, Held (1995): *Democracy and the Global Order* & (1996): *Models of Democracy*, Caney (2005): *Justice Beyond Borders – A Global Political Theory*

[3] Waltzer (1994): *Thick and Thin: Moral Arguments at Home and Abroad* & (1995): *Towards a Global Civil Society*

[4] Pogge (1992): *Cosmopolitanism and Sovereignty*, Linklater (1998): *The Transformation of Political Community*, Etzioni (2004): *The Emerging Global Normative Synthesis*

[5] Bull (1977): *The Anarchical Society*, Buzan (2004): *From International to World Society?,* Wendt (1999): *Social Theory of International Politics*

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