

Evil Institutions: Steven Bartlett's Analysis of Human Evil and its Relevance for Anarchist Alternatives

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ABSTRACT

The study of human evil, defined in a non-religious sense as serious damage to other people, animals and the environment, can be used to assess different social arrangements. Steven Bartlett's analysis of the pathologies of human behaviour and thought provides a fruitful starting point for examining social institutions. Systems based on hierarchy and control, notably the military, bureaucracy and the state, provide the greatest facilitation of evil. Egalitarian systems are better placed to restrain the human capacity for causing harm. The study of evil offers a useful approach for understanding both the advantages of anarchism and the obstacles to moving towards it.

Keywords: *evil, social institutions, anarchism, bureaucracy, the state, the family*

INTRODUCTION

It is easy to observe that humans, as individuals and as a species, do many things damaging to each other, to other species, and to the environment that supports them all. War, torture, terrorism, dictatorship, racism and systematic exploitation are just some of the toxic features of human societies. As well, humans enslave and exploit numerous other species, while humans themselves overpopulate and destroy the ecological systems that support life on earth. This is a roll call of destructive behaviours, individual and collective.

One way to try to understand the proclivity of humans to hurt each other and destroy the environment is through the concept of human evil. Because of its reli-

gious connotations, this concept may not appeal to anarchists but, nevertheless, it potentially enables an understanding of a diverse set of social phenomena in a way that offers insights for anarchism. However, before examining secular analyses that conceptualise evil, it is first useful to note what anarchists have said about it.

Here, I present a selection of references to evil from anarchist sources.¹ As will be seen, these most commonly use ‘evil’ as a way of describing or referring to a practice or institution that is particularly bad, or as a way of making a contrast with ‘good’. In these usages, ‘evil’ serves to pass judgement, with no attempt to articulate a specific concept or offer a definition.

Bakunin (1953, pp136-145) makes several references to evil. In his critique of the contract theory of the state, he describes the state’s view: ‘Hence human liberty produces not good but evil, man being *bad* by nature’ (p143). In this, Bakunin refers to evil as the opposite of good. He also writes, ‘So it follows that it is just as impossible to ask whether society is good or evil as it is to ask whether Nature – the universal, material, real, absolute, soul, and supreme being – is good or evil’ (pp144-145). Again, the term ‘evil’ is used as the opposite of good.

In a different context, Bakunin writes, ‘And I do not hesitate to say that the State is an evil but a historically necessary evil, as necessary in the past as its complete extinction will be necessary sooner or later ...’ (p145). Here, ‘evil’ is used as a descriptive term.

In yet another place, Bakunin writes ‘... from the point of view of true morality, of human and not divine morality, the good which is done by command from above ceases to be good and thereby becomes evil’ (p145). In this mention, ‘evil’ is again used as a contrast with good.

Kropotkin (1886) refers to evil in a few places. He states, ‘In existing States a fresh law is looked upon as a remedy for evil’ and refers to ‘... a law to put a stop to all the vices and all the evils which result from human indolence and cowardice’. In each case, the term ‘evil’ refers to something bad. Kropotkin later says to ‘weigh carefully both good and evil’ and refers to ‘all the evil passions awakened in mankind’. ‘Evil’ in these usages serves as the opposite of good or as an adjective indicating something is bad.

Emma Goldman (1913) in ‘The failure of Christianity’ mentions evil in one passage: ‘Every intelligent being realizes that our worst curse is the poverty of the spirit; that it is productive of all evil and misery, of all the injustice and crimes in the world’. Here, ‘evil’ refers to bad things.

Contemporary anarchist commentary also contains passing references to evil. The following, drawn from the Anarchist FAQ (Anarchist Writers 2020), are illustrative.

Only life, as Bakunin stressed, can create and so life must inform theory – and so if the theory is producing adverse results it is better to revise the theory than deny reality or justify the evil effects it creates on real people.

In this quote, ‘evil’ seems to be a way of saying ‘negative’ or ‘harmful’.

Anarchists have seen these new institutions as being linked with the need of working class people to resist the evils of hierarchy, capitalism and statism, as being the product of the class struggle and attempts by working class people to resist authority, oppression and exploitation.

Here, hierarchy, capitalism and statism are referred to as evils.

As the present state of affairs is based on the oppression, exploitation and alienation of the working class, any tactics used in the pursuit of a free society must be based on resisting and destroying those evils.

In this quote, ‘oppression, exploitation and alienation of the working class’ are referred to as evils.

These examples show that when anarchists use the term ‘evil’, it is typically either as a contrast with ‘good’ or a way of saying that institutions or practices are bad. In the anarchist canon, there seems not to have been any sustained attempt to develop a theory of evil, or even to define it. Of course, it may be that no concept of evil is useful for anarchists, but whether this is so should be tested rather than assumed. In any case, to see whether a conception of evil has value, in particular whether it has value for anarchists, it is necessary to turn to non-anarchist treatments.

Simon Baron-Cohen (2011, p148), in seeking to take the discussion of evil ‘out of the domain of religion and into the social and biological sciences’, says there is an ‘empathy circuit’ involving ten regions of the brain, and gives neurological evidence that when some of these regions are not as active as usual, there can be a failure of empathy, leading to the potential for cruelty. Roy Baumeister in his book *Evil: Understanding Human Violence and Cruelty* (1997) looked at evidence of the psychology of people such as murderers, terrorists and war criminals. He found that such perpetrators commonly think their actions are justified or that what they’ve done is not all that important. This is contrary to the belief, common in popular culture such as Hollywood movies, that evildoers are driven by implacable hatred and a desire to do harm.

Some philosophers have explored non-religious conceptions of evil. For

example, Garrard (1998) probed the difference between evil and wrongdoing. Other philosophers have studied evil and individuals, evil environments and ideologies, and responses to evil, with case studies ranging from bullying to genocide (Harrosh and Crisp 2019; Vetlesen 2005). Social psychologists have looked at various topics relevant to understanding harm-inflicting behaviours including free will, racism, dehumanisation and the role of bystanders (Miller 2016).

The concept of evil, in a non-religious sense, pulls together threads from a number of other concepts including violence, oppression, repression, exploitation and domination. What these have in common is humans, or human systems, harming other humans. Exploitation and domination can include, as well, harmful treatment of non-human nature. To talk of evil, in a non-religious sense, is to group together a number of causes of harmfulness, which can be useful if there are common features to the varied behaviours and systems responsible.

For the purposes of an analysis of institutions using the concept of evil, I draw primarily on Steven James Bartlett's book *The Pathology of Man: A Study of Human Evil* (2005). Bartlett studied a vast range of writings about human thought and behaviour, searching for insights about the psychology of human evil and the thought processes relating to it. *The Pathology of Man* is a massive and erudite text, addressing treatments of pathology and analysing the views of writers on the psychology of evil (such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Erich Fromm). It also addresses the work of Lewis Fry Richardson on the quantitative study of human destructiveness, Konrad Lorenz on human aggression, and numerous studies of genocide, terrorism, war and ecological destruction. As the title of his book suggests, Bartlett argues that the human species can be understood as a pathogen. Far more than other philosophical and psychological treatments of evil, *The Pathology of Man* delves into the way the human capacity for violence and cruelty, and for tolerating it in others, is built into systematic shortcomings in human psychology and cognition, and as such is a promising basis for further explorations.

My aim here is to extend Bartlett's analysis from individual and group psychology to patterned social arrangements which are here called 'social institutions'. The next section provides a brief summary of some highlights from *The Pathology of Man*. In the following section, drawing on Bartlett's analysis, I propose four criteria for judging whether an institution facilitates manifestations of human evil. After this are sections on bureaucracy, the family and the state, and the degree to which they satisfy the four criteria. In 'Implications', the relationships between systems of self-management and the four criteria are examined. Bartlett's analysis provides some cautionary concerns about the challenges facing those seeking to build anarchist alternatives.

BARTLETT ON EVIL

Bartlett, on the basis of a careful study of theories of disease, provides what he considers to be a non-moralistic definition of human evil, saying it ‘refers to apparently voluntary destructive behavior and attitudes that result in the general negation of health, happiness, and ultimately of life’ (2005, p65). In saying ‘general negation’, Bartlett is referring to seriously damaging actions such as murder, torture and war, as well as major harm to other species and the environment. He is not thinking of protesters breaking a few windows.

One of Bartlett’s key themes is that most of the people who engage in seriously harmful actions are psychologically normal (see also Bartlett 2011, 2013). ‘Normal’ here refers to standard assessments used by psychiatrists. A person who does not fit one of the standard psychiatric disorder categories, such as antisocial personality disorder or narcissistic personality disorder, is considered psychologically normal. Bartlett’s point is that you don’t need to be mentally ill to undertake seriously harmful actions. The implication is that just about anyone could, in the right circumstances, become a perpetrator. This is best illustrated via Bartlett’s analysis of the Holocaust.

Bartlett argues that the existence of persistent anti-Semitism is evidence that humans have a capacity, readily evoked, to feel prejudice and to persecute others. Yet most of those who are anti-Semitic are psychologically normal, suggesting that what is normal can be pathological. That was the case in Nazi Germany. Bartlett cites a range of sources testifying to the psychological normality of most Nazi leaders, Nazi followers, and personnel directly involved in killing operations.

G.M. Gilbert, who spent a year examining imprisoned Nazi leaders, wrote:

The suggestion is often made by both clinicians and laymen, when inquiring about the examination of Nazi leaders, that ‘these men must have been a lot of psychopaths to have done what they did’. That statement rests on the popular assumption that since atrocious crimes are abnormal manifestations of social behavior, the people who participate in them must be abnormal. We have already detected a flaw in that assumption (Gilbert 1950, pp280-281).

Neil Kressel in his study *Mass Hate* observed:

Few of Hitler’s followers met formal criteria for any diagnosis of psychopathology. Most cannot be distinguished from others in a normal population on the basis of their mental health. Though psychopaths and sadists in Nazi Germany and elsewhere frequently made the most of opportunities afforded by

genocidal programs, the preponderance of crimes of mass hatred can be traced to those whom psychologists would regard as 'normal' (Kressel 2002, p223).

A study by Eric Zillmer et al. titled *The Quest for the Nazi Personality* made this assessment:

To the objective observer acquainted with history, it should become quite clear, then, that the German conduct as such is not enigmatic or related to a national character. In this sense, no contemporary historian of Nazi Germany would argue today for the existence of a psychopathic Nazi personality. Historical and psychologically informed inquiries have reached this conclusion on vast and solid evidential foundations. Most historians agree that the leaders of Nazi Germany were for the most part extremely able, intelligent, high-functioning people (Zillmer et al. 1995, p8).

Using sources such as these, and many others, Bartlett looks at evidence about the psychology of five groups, each of which had a particular relationship with the Nazi genocidal operations from 1941 to 1945.

First are the Nazi leaders, including Hitler and others at the top of the regime. Available evidence shows that most of them were psychologically normal. Many were intellectually brilliant but had low levels of moral intelligence.

Second are Nazi doctors, the ones who carried out heinous acts such as the misnamed 'euthanasia' programme to kill people with disabilities. Again, most of them were psychologically normal.

Third are bystanders, those who knew about killings but did nothing about them due to conformity, lack of empathy and low moral sensibility. This was the largest group, and again most were psychologically normal.

Fourth are refusers. In Nazi Germany, when men were called up to join squads that carried out killings and other atrocities, it was easy to refuse to be involved. There were few penalties for opting out. Nevertheless, refusing was unusual: most men preferred to remain in the squads and engage in killing rather than being sufficiently nonconformist to refuse to participate.

Fifth are resisters, those who actively opposed the Nazi genocide. They were a small minority, able to stand aside from dominant ideas and values, and to be emotionally isolated and independent of group solidarity and the attractions of collective hatred. In this, the resisters were unusual psychologically. Bartlett says many resisters may have been motivated more by anger at perpetrators than empathy for the victims.

One of Bartlett's lessons from the study of genocide is that when evil deeds are carried out, most ordinary people – ordinary in the sense of being normal by the usual psychological criteria – become perpetrators or bystanders. This phenomenon brings to mind Hannah Arendt's (1963) famous reference to the banality of evil: Nazi figures such as Adolf Eichmann were not fiends but typical bureaucrats, cooperative cogs in an enterprise of mass murder. Bartlett takes a stronger line than Arendt. By looking at the complicity of much of the population, he refers to the evil of normality or, inverting Arendt's phrase, the evil of banality. This refers to the capacity for causing harm being deep-seated in the human psyche. *The Evil of Banality* was later the title of a book (Minnich 2017).

After analysing the psychology of genocide, Bartlett turns to other topics, including terrorism, war and ecological destruction, exploring evidence about the psychological characteristics of those implicated. In the case of terrorism, he finds perpetrators share several psychological tendencies, the same ones found during genocides, including

a collective projection of hatred built upon what he and fellow terrorists reproach and oppose ... The enemy assumes the proportions of a dehumanized object of hatred, an abstract object incarnated in its flag, its architectural monuments, its system of values, its music, and so forth. Innocent people who are members of the enemy group or state cease to be persons in their own right, and become mere counters or poker chips ... (Bartlett 2005, p201).

Bartlett's analysis of the psychology of war is revealing. Peace activists are well aware of the power of nationalism, the essential role of obedience, and the creation of the enemy, who is attributed all the features that need to be hated and destroyed. It is revealing that researchers have hardly ever made comparisons between the psychology of terrorists and the psychology of soldiers: according to Bartlett, there are many similarities. More generally, he argues that most humans do not oppose war, and that militarisation and war-making continue because most humans do not want to act against them. While vast sums are spent on militaries, not a single government supports significant efforts to tackle the roots of war.

Bartlett has a chapter about research on obedience, covering for example Stanley Milgram's (1974) famous experiments. However, Bartlett says that it should not have been necessary to turn to Milgram to confirm the power of obedience, because there was already sufficient evidence from the study of genocide and war.²

INSTITUTIONS THAT FACILITATE EVIL

Bartlett's examination of human evil focuses on psychology. To be applied to social institutions, his analysis needs to be extended and adapted.

A social institution can be thought of as a way of organising social life that has become routinised so much that, for most of the people involved, it seems to be natural. Examples include the family, churches, the military, government, bureaucracies, corporations, the state system and trade unions. Each of these ways of organising human relationships encompasses many variations. For example, the concept of the family covers both the extended family, with dozens of members, and the nuclear family, with as few as two members. For most of the purposes here, variability within a type of institution is less important than its basic features.³

Social institutions are typically long lasting and resilient. They are not fixed but are continually recreated and contested by people through their participation, support and occasional challenge. Despite emerging from people's interactions, institutions can be felt to be permanent and inevitable, so much so that they are simply accepted as the way things are. To call something an institution is to recognise regular and predictable patterns in human behaviour. For example, schooling can be understood as an institution: parents expect children to attend school and to conform to expectations of teachers and classmates, and significant deviation from acceptable behaviour predictably leads to certain types of reactions, such as poor grades or expulsion. While it is possible for an individual to resist institutional expectations, to change the behaviour of significant numbers of others, namely those who follow institutional dictates, is extremely difficult, something that indicates the combined power of conventional thinking, habits, conformity, convenience and mutual expectation.

It is possible to analyse the rise of modern social institutions, for example tracing the human proclivity for violence and war to the creation of surpluses via settled agriculture and the subsequent struggles over control of resources (Bregman 2020; Eisler 1987; Mansfield 1982). Here, though, the focus is on contemporary institutions.

According to Bartlett, humans as a species are pathological in a fundamental way: their ways of behaving and thinking are dysfunctional, enabling destructiveness of each other, non-human animals and the environment.⁴ However, human psychology is intertwined with social arrangements, so the next question is whether a social institution encourages or inhibits damaging patterns of behaviour and thought.

To do this, it is useful to propose criteria for assessing whether institutions facilitate the manifestation of evil in psychologically normal people. There are many possibilities. Here I select four, each of which grows out of Bartlett's analysis.

1. The institution is based on obedience to authority.
2. The institution encourages hatred of out-groups.
3. The institution inhibits the development of moral intelligence.
4. Within the institution, resistance is rare and is attacked.

Criterion 1, obedience to authority, is a central theme in genocide and war, which are important manifestations of evil. In many situations, group norms serve as a type of *de facto* authority. This is usefully illustrated by contributors to ecological destruction. Many people drive cars, have large houses, and buy consumer goods that, collectively, lead to major environmental damage. Few people resist to the extent of joining campaigns to drastically cut back on the use of fossil fuels, plastics and sources of air pollution, or advocate a reduced population to reduce human impact on the environment. In many circles, to adopt an abstemious lifestyle or to become a campaigner is to deviate from group norms. For the purposes of criterion 1, group norms are like authorities when they are externally generated or imposed. On the other hand, when group members collectively participate in choosing some of their own norms, for example in affinity groups, the norms are less like authorities.

Criterion 2, hatred of out-groups, is also a central theme in genocide and war. Some institutions foster this sort of hatred more than others.⁵

Criterion 3 concerns moral intelligence, which Bartlett sees as vitally important in restraining destructive impulses. For Bartlett, morally intelligent individuals do not receive emotional gratification from human evil, have a full capacity for empathy, feel disgust at evil, and have conviction to behave according to their beliefs. In his words, a morally intelligent person must be:

deeply averse to human evil; compassionate in understanding another's life, interests, and feelings; sensitive and critical in ways that lead the individual to feel disgust and contempt for cruelty, violence, and other forms of human evil; and convinced to a degree such that the individual's consciousness of moral principles is fused with a need to act consistently with those principles (Bartlett 2005, p280).

For example, in relation to climate change according to this definition, the second and fourth facets of moral intelligence are feeling concern about the impact of

present-day practices on the lives of future generations (empathy) and doing something about it (displaying conviction).

Criterion 4 concerns the treatment of resistance within institutions. Resistance here refers to any challenge to leaders, power structures or group norms. It need not involve violence and indeed usually does not. In many institutions, to simply question routine ways of thinking and doing things, or to behave in an unorthodox way, constitutes resistance. In some cases, questioning is welcomed and encouraged; in others, it is treated harshly.

These four criteria are a selection of the possible criteria that might be drawn from Bartlett's analysis of human evil. Others might select different criteria or use an entirely different approach for relating a psychological analysis to an institutional analysis. For the purposes here, the four criteria offer useful tools for an initial assessment of institutions. It is useful to distinguish between ideal types of institutions, for which the criteria might or might not apply in a dichotomous fashion, and actual social arrangements that are inevitably messy and for which the criteria are likely to be satisfied only in part.

The next three sections address three different social institutions – bureaucracy, the family and the state – assessing each one in terms of the four criteria. These three institutions are quite different in size and reach. Each, though, is well-established, is familiar to nearly everyone, and has been studied extensively. They thus provide useful cases for applying the four criteria for assessing institutions in terms of their facilitation of human evil. Others might wish to assess other institutions, or to use different criteria.

Much more could be said about each of these three social institutions. The discussion here is brief, limited to material sufficient for applying the four criteria.

BUREAUCRACY

For sociologists, bureaucracy is a way of organising work based on hierarchy and a division of labour in which workers are interchangeable cogs. In the ideal type of bureaucracy, there are rules for action, and relationships between workers are formal (Abrahamsson 1977; Graeber 2015; Hummel 2007; Jacoby 1973; Perrow 1979). In contemporary societies, bureaucracy is the most common way of organising work in governments and large corporations, as well as many churches, trade unions and non-government organisations.

In common parlance, bureaucracy is often assumed to refer to governments, and has a negative connotation, being associated with 'red tape'. Sociologists, on the other hand, understand bureaucracy as a way of organising work that is not specific

to the operations of government. Although states rely heavily on bureaucratic organisational forms, bureaucracy as a social institution can be conceptually distinguished from the state.

By definition, one of the core features of bureaucracy is hierarchy. It is a type of command system, in which information flows upward and orders are issued downward. Bureaucracy thus satisfies criterion 1: it is based on obedience to authority.

However, there is nothing inherent in bureaucracy that necessitates hatred of out-groups. This is a feature of some but far from all bureaucratic organisations. So criterion 2 is not satisfied.

In contrast, moral intelligence has no particular value in bureaucracies. Obedience is prized, as is carrying out one's specialised function, so no one, except possibly bureaucratic elites, is expected to think beyond the task at hand. Moral intelligence involves thinking on the basis of principles, which is not the task of functionaries. So bureaucracy satisfies criterion 3: it inhibits the development of moral intelligence.

Those working within bureaucracies who resist are typically treated badly. Whistleblowers, who speak out in the public interest, are commonly met with reprisals such as ostracism, reprimands, harassment, demotion and dismissal. Deena Weinstein (1979), in a penetrating analysis of bureaucracy, likened it to an authoritarian state: dissent is treated like treason. Bureaucracy thus satisfies criterion 4.

In summary, bureaucracy as an organisational form satisfies three of the four criteria, drawn from Bartlett's analysis, indicating that a social institution fosters human evil.

It is informative to look at one particular institution that is organised as a bureaucracy: the military. In its use of the system of command, the military is close to the ideal type of bureaucracy. Soldiers are trained to follow orders, of course, and dissent in the military can be treated ruthlessly.

Militaries are premised on being prepared to fight enemies, whether identified as foreign armies or terrorists. Militaries thus satisfy criterion 2, encouraging hatred of out-groups. This might be manifest as a visceral hatred or as dehumanisation, which enables dropping bombs on an unseen population. The military as an institution thus satisfies all four of the criteria, which is fitting given that militaries in practice are an embodiment of human evil, causing untold suffering and environmental damage.

In relation to bureaucracy, prominent anarchist figures have much the same analysis as implied by the criteria derived from Bartlett's analysis of evil. Although classical anarchists did not comment on the bureaucratic form as conceptualised by

contemporary sociologists, they did condemn the rise to power of state functionaries. Bakunin (1973, pp343-344) reported on the 'new bureaucratic aristocracy' of young men in Turkish Serbia who were corrupted by their service to the state. Bakunin also (1950) famously foresaw the dangers of revolutionary Marxism leading to what has been called 'red bureaucracy' (Pellicani 1979). This analysis ties in with (non-anarchist) class analyses of intellectuals and the state, with skilled administrative workers called the new class or the professional-managerial class (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979; Gouldner 1979; Konrád and Szelényi 1979). While anarchists have critiqued state bureaucracy, they have not given the same attention to bureaucracy as an organisational form that has increasingly dominated in corporations, churches, hospitals, universities and trade unions.

THE FAMILY

The family, a long-standing social institution, refers to small intimate groups of people related to each other by kinship, which includes consanguinity, marriage and adoption. To assess the family by the four criteria, it is useful to look at two contrasting types. First is the patriarchal family, in which the patriarch rules as a mini-potentate. Obedience is expected, moral intelligence is inhibited and resistance by wives and children may be treated harshly. Criteria 1, 3 and 4 are satisfied, but not criterion 2, because hatred of other families is not inherent in the family as an institution (though there are many cases of inter-family feuds).

Second is the democratic family, in which adults consider themselves as equal partners, while children are encouraged to develop their potential (Giddens 1992; Gross and Simmons 2002). This sort of family, based on 'emotional democracy,' is quite different: it does not satisfy any of the four criteria.

The example of the family is a useful reminder that some institutions can take different forms. Therefore, in analysing institutions it is important to try to identify essential characteristics.

Commentary on the family by a number of classical anarchists meshes with this analysis derived from Bartlett. In his 1866 'Revolutionary catechism', Bakunin proposed 'Abolition not of the natural family but of the *legal* family founded on law and property. Religious and civil marriage to be replaced by *free* marriage' (1973, p93). 'Free marriage' refers to people uniting or separating at their own discretion, without interference by the state. He said children should be reared by both parents and the commune. Malatesta (2005, pp88-97) argued that the family as an economic institution should be opposed, and instead sexual unions should be based on love. Malatesta said women should be treated equally as men

and, like Bakunin, said parents have a special affection for their own children, who would be supported and educated by society. Goldman (1969, pp227-239) railed against marriage as a means of oppressing women. She argued instead that for 'true companionship and oneness' (239), the basis would be love rather than marriage. These anarchist views about marriage and the family resonate with those of contemporary advocates of the democratic family.

THE STATE

Analysing the state as a social institution is complicated because there are different types of states, and the characteristics of states can vary depending on circumstances. One type of state can be labelled authoritarian, which includes dictatorships. Civil liberties, such as freedom of speech and assembly, are denied. In authoritarian states, obedience is demanded. Typically, hatred of out-groups is encouraged. The out-groups might be foreign enemies or internal enemies such as criminals, ethnic minorities or class enemies, or they might be anyone who potentially threatens the ruler. In such circumstances, the development of moral intelligence is inhibited. Finally, resistance is treated harshly. It is easy to see that authoritarian states satisfy all four criteria for facilitating the manifestation of evil.

Another type of state can be called liberal or social democratic: civil liberties are allowed, within limits, and rulers allow themselves to be subject to removal via elections. Loyalty to the government of the day is still expected: being an agent of another government, especially a hostile one, is not welcome. Even in liberal states, hatred of out-groups is common. Thinking of the world from the point of view of the state is ubiquitous, in what has been called banal or everyday nationalism (Billig 1995). Moral development can occur, but is limited by the dominant values, which may include industrialism and human chauvinism. Resistance to the current state elites, via electoral politics, is routine, but resistance to the structures of the state itself is rare and, when it occurs, repressed. The liberal state thus might be considered to satisfy the criteria for facilitating evil, but in a much less emphatic way than the authoritarian state.

During wartime, the liberal state acquires many of the characteristics of the authoritarian state (Rossiter 1948). For example, loyalty is demanded, enemies are demonised and resistance is treated harshly. War, itself a manifestation of human evil, shapes the nature of the state.

As noted, anarchists have long seen the state as a key locus of domination (Bakunin 1950; Kropotkin 1970). Their condemnation encompassed both authoritarian and representative forms of the state (Kropotkin 1892). Indeed, for many

anarchists, opposition to the state is the defining feature of anarchism (Kinna 2009).

IMPLICATIONS FOR ANARCHIST ALTERNATIVES

This analysis of institutions, inspired by Bartlett's study of human evil, has a number of implications for the anarchist project. Some are confirmations of anarchist values; others are warnings concerning facets of anarchist alternatives.

Anarchism classically was based on a critique of systems of rule, especially the state, capitalism and the church. It has evolved to include a critique of all systems of domination, including patriarchy, racism and human chauvinism (Marshall 1992). Anarchist critique, in rejecting forms of social organisation based on one group having power over another, closely meshes with an analysis of institutional evil.

Anarchism is sometimes criticised for assuming that humans are naturally good, so that they can work together in harmony in self-managing groups. However, it is also possible to interpret the anarchist critique of domination as implicitly recognising that humans have a capacity for harming each other and the environment, and that systems of domination mobilise rather than inhibit that capacity. In other words, anarchism is based on an avoidance of the dangers of having power over others, both because this power can be misused and because power tends to corrupt (Keltner 2016; Kipnis 1976, 1990; Robertson 2012).

Bartlett's analysis puts an even greater emphasis on the dangers of readily evoked human capacities for causing harm. A central theme in Bartlett's work is that people who are psychologically normal are capable of evil deeds and willingly participating in evil systems. In other words, the problems in human society are not just due to a few individuals with antisocial or narcissistic personality disorders, but are associated with tendencies and capacities in those who have no obvious psychological problems. Potentially, nearly everyone is capable of evil, in the right circumstances, even anarchists. How to deter or limit this possibility is thus a great and important challenge.

Anarchism, of all political philosophies, has the best prospect of containing the dark sides of human behaviour and thought. It is antithetical to dominant social institutions in which hierarchy, obedience and hatred of out-groups are routine.

It is possible to draw from Bartlett's analysis some ideas for sharpening anarchist analysis and strengthening anarchist practices, all with an emphasis on reducing opportunities for the manifestation of evil. To do this, it is convenient to look at the four criteria used for assessing social institutions, applying them to the classical anarchist model of self-management. This model involves decision-making

assemblies, for example of workers, that deliberate on issues and reach agreements by consensus or voting (Ness and Azzellini 2011). For coordination of activities, there are bodies composed of delegates from the assemblies. The delegates are bound by their assemblies and can be recalled or replaced at any time (e.g., Dupuis-Déri 2010). Note that the suggestions here are about improving anarchist practice without making a judgement about the extent or seriousness of current or future problems with this practice.

The first criterion for assessing institutions is that the institution is based on obedience to authority. The anarchist model of assemblies has no bosses, so obedience to authority is minimised. On the other hand, there is a danger of obedience to group norms. If a worker believes that nearly everyone else favours a position – for example, on what products to produce, or whether to invest in new machinery – this may encourage conformity. In principle, the deliberative process in the assembly should discourage conformity but in practice there may be a desire to go along with the crowd. This problem can be acute in small groups using formal or informal consensus decision-making methods (Janis 1983; Mansbridge 1980). There is no need to resolve this issue. The point is that normal humans are commonly obedient to authority and group norms, and this should be taken into account in designing and using methods of self-management.

The second criterion is that the institution encourages hatred of out-groups. It is an illusion to imagine that replacing bureaucracies with assemblies automatically eliminates the dynamics of in-groups and out-groups, whether based on sex, ethnicity, ability or some other factor. Anyone with experience in groups, including those aspiring to be egalitarian, knows that prejudice and power plays are routine (Landry et al. 1985; Vannucci and Singer 2010). It can be argued that these problems are a result of upbringing in a dysfunctional society, and that with the flourishing of anarchist practices, group problems would become less serious. On the other hand, it can also be argued that difficulties and challenges in groups are a feature that will persist even when everyone involved is skilled and astute. This would accord with Bartlett's view that the capacity for hatred is part of normal psychology.

The implication is that building a society around self-managing groups is likely to be more difficult than imagined, because there will continue to be tendencies to form in-groups and to treat out-groups as enemies. This conclusion aligns with those who see struggles against sexism, racism, ableism and the like as part of the anarchist programme, and that creating self-managing groups is only part of what needs to be done. In other words, self-management may be insufficient in itself to deal with all the damaging patterns of thought and behaviour in psychologically normal individuals.

The third criterion is that the institution inhibits the development of moral intelligence. Institutions may do little to reduce the willingness of individuals to participate in or not intervene against war, genocide and environmental destruction. Does self-management encourage the development of moral intelligence? There is evidence that the process of deliberation – hearing various points of view and addressing points of difference – can encourage thinking about the welfare of all and limit the impact of self-interest (Fouke 2009; Mansbridge 1990). Workers at Lucas Aerospace developed a plan that sought to serve human needs, not just profit, which is evidence that these workers collectively thought beyond self-interest (Wainwright and Elliott 1982). Whether this meant that individual workers changed in their thinking and behaviour, for example causing them to become disgusted with violence and active against war, is unknown. Perhaps, though, collective decisions are more important than the transformation of individuals.

Following Bartlett's analysis, it can be useful for proponents of anarchist alternatives to assess whether the design and operation of self-managing alternatives make a difference to the moral intelligence of individuals and groups. If they do, this could offer guidance for making choices between different methods of social organisation.

The fourth criterion for an evil-facilitating institution is that resistance is rare and is attacked. The converse is that resistance is common and accepted, indeed so common and accepted that it is no longer seen as resistance but welcomed as productive disagreement. This may be the most challenging of the criteria, given that pressures for conformity can foster antagonism towards dissidents. This is seen within small groups using formal consensus decision-making techniques, in which blocking consensus is a serious matter and can be unwelcome to the majority. Within activist groups, it is common for there to be splits, sometimes leading to individuals being expelled in a far from harmonious manner (Vannucci and Singer 2010).

Much research shows that humans are highly susceptible to group formation on even trivial grounds, and that in-groups can easily become antagonistic towards those categorised as out-groups (Deikman 1990; Lichtenberg 1994). Some anarchists are intolerant of those who do not follow their preferred line. If the tendency to form inward-looking groups is a feature of humans acting together, with the consequent antagonism towards those who disagree on fundamentals, then there should be a priority put on developing alternatives that mitigate the worst impacts of this tendency.

This brief overview of how anarchist alternatives relate to the four criteria for institutions that foster the manifestation of human evil shows two things. First,

evidence suggests that anarchist alternatives give less encouragement to expressions of human evil than the dominant institutions in the world today. Second, there are still many ways in which proponents of self-managing alternatives can learn how to limit the potential for human evil. In other words, looking at the dangers of human self-interest and destruction can be a useful way of assessing how to design ways of interacting and organising life that minimise these dangers.

CONCLUSIONS

As noted in the introduction, anarchists occasionally use the term 'evil' to describe something as bad, or as a contrast with good, but apparently have made no attempt to propose and investigate evil as a category for understanding patterns in human thought and behaviour. It is understandable that the concept of evil, because of its religious associations, is seldom used by anarchists, but this should not deter seeking insights from secular perspectives. The potential value in having a concept of evil is pointing to patterns in human thought and behaviour that are found across issues described by terms such as oppression, repression, exploitation and domination. Hence it is worthwhile examining conceptions developed outside the anarchist tradition for their potential value.

Here the focus has been on the work of Steven James Bartlett who provides a non-religious definition of evil, using it to describe human destructiveness towards other humans, animals and the environment, destructiveness so potent that it threatens the human species itself. The damaging consequences of human activity, according to Bartlett, are not primarily due to a few disturbed individuals, but are due to the behaviour and thought of people who are psychologically normal.

Anarchists usually direct their concern, and often their ire, towards systems of domination, including the state, patriarchy and capitalism. Among anarchists, there are differing views about how humans behave in systems of self-management, free of domination. One view is that people have the capacity for spontaneous self-organisation, as revealed in revolutionary episodes such as Spain in the 1930s and in everyday activities such as learning outside of schools. In this conception, society will be naturally self-organising once free of systems of hierarchy and violence.

Another view, inspired by the observation that power tends to corrupt, is that self-management is needed in order to prevent the oppression that inevitably accompanies systems of power-over. This view is more compatible with Bartlett's analysis. However, Bartlett's view is even gloomier, suggesting that continual vigilance is needed to prevent the damaging behaviours and ways of thinking of psychologically normal people.

Bartlett's analysis is at the level of individual and group psychology. The depth and range of this analysis make it a suitable basis for application to other areas. Here I have extended Bartlett's analysis to look at social institutions, which are systematic ways by which people organise their interpersonal relationships. I selected four characteristic foundations for the capacity for evil as explained by Bartlett: obedience to authority, hatred of out-groups, lack of moral intelligence and intolerance of resistance. Using these four criteria, it is possible to assess social institutions according to whether they facilitate the manifestation of evil, in other words whether they enable human destructiveness. Three institutions were examined here: bureaucracy, the family and the state.

The outcome of this preliminary examination accords with typical anarchist analysis: institutions based on hierarchy and obedience are ideally structured to facilitate evil, whereas those based on equality and self-determination offer greater prospects for limiting the potential for evil. Bartlett's analysis, extended to institutions, thus meshes neatly with anarchist theory and practice.

However, Bartlett's analysis provides some additional strictures that deserve attention. If psychologically normal people, individually and collectively, have a readily evoked capacity for destructiveness towards each other, other species and the environment, then it may not be enough to eliminate the state, patriarchy, capitalism and other systems of domination. Humans have the capacity for self-management but also the capacity for damaging thought and behaviour. This suggests that self-management is not a stable alternative, in the sense that there will always be tendencies towards recreating hierarchical and oppressive relationships.

Bartlett's analysis provides some pointers for building alternatives, including dealing with the lure of obedience to authority and group norms, countering the tendency to hate out-groups and welcoming disagreement within groups. Perhaps most remote from usual anarchist discussions is the idea of fostering moral intelligence, in particular to encourage people to think beyond self-interest and in-group identification. Self-management may provide a fruitful basis for promoting moral intelligence, but this is not guaranteed.

One implication of Bartlett's analysis is that the challenge of building self-managing alternatives is even greater than usually conceived. It is obvious enough that systems of domination are remarkably powerful purely as mechanisms for the exercise of power to maintain inequality and exploitation. What is more daunting is the complicity of ordinary people in patterns of thinking and behaviour that enable the continuation of domination.

Bartlett argues that hope is part of the problem: by continually seeking signs of hope, humans look away from the dark side of their species. The implication for

anarchists is to continue to oppose domination and to build self-managing alternatives but to be continually alert to pathology inherent in humans.

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NOTES

1. I thank an anonymous reviewer for recommending how to track down anarchist references to evil. The method is to search websites hosting anarchist writings for the word 'evil'. Specifically this involves searching the Anarchy FAQ using the search term 'site:anarchism.pageabode.com/afaq/evil' and searching Anarchy Archives by using 'site:dwardmac.pitzer.edu evil'.
2. It is sometimes argued that Nazi Germany is an anomaly and that studies of Nazi leaders and the German people have limited wider relevance. This view can be supported by referring to the particular circumstances surrounding the rise of Nazism. Milgram's experiments were motivated by a desire to test whether US citizens would show a willingness to obey commands to cause harm, and thus to see whether Nazi Germany was an anomaly. Milgram's studies have been widely interpreted as showing that the obedience to authority is widespread. Bartlett (2005, pp227-236) provides a careful examination of obedience experiments by Milgram and others. For a critical perspective on Milgram's experiments, see Bregman (2020, pp161-177).
3. Some social institutions overlap with each other. For example, as discussed later, much of the state apparatus is organised bureaucratically. Analysts of social institutions have not tried to partition the conceptual space of human interactions into mutually exclusive categories, no doubt because the complexity of society makes such an attempt of limited value.
4. Some might object to Bartlett's analysis on the grounds that it relies on biological or psychological determinism, which clashes with anarchists' belief in the potential for humans to collectively organise their lives without systematic oppression. To this it can be replied, firstly, that alleged determinisms need to be assessed on the basis of evidence and not automatically rejected by applying a stigmatising label. Secondly, Bartlett leaves open the question of whether humans can overcome their demonstrated

capacities to harm each other and the environment. He analyses patterns of thinking and behaviour that seem to be deep-seated in humans, but whether these patterns can be changed is an empirical question, not settled by an a priori commitment for or against some form of determinism. Furthermore, Bartlett notes that some percentage of people have developed ways of resisting pressures to participate in or not intervene against evil, for example through the development of what he calls moral intelligence (discussed anon), which indicates that human thought and action are not inevitably driven by some form of determinism. Bartlett's assessment that humans as a species are pathological is a result of his analysis, not the basis of it. To use an analogy: to say that relationships in an organisation are toxic (e.g., Wyatt and Hare 1997) does not imply that all individuals in the organisation are implicated in toxic behaviours (though all might be affected by them), still less that the relationships are determined in some way. Similarly, an assessment can be made of the human species – specifically, by Bartlett, that it is pathological – without implying that every person is implicated, still less that the human species is subject to some form of determinism.

5. Bartlett (2005, pp237–252) devotes a chapter to 'The phenomenology of hatred'. Among the many points he makes are that: hatred involves wanting the destruction of the thing hated; it involves a special focus of attention, a separation from the hated object, and difference from it; people who hate are resistant to changing their hatred; hatred gives emotional benefits of emotional security, tension/excitement, addiction and anxiety reduction; in normal people, hatred can bring pleasure; in groups, shared hatred builds a sense of community, provides a cause and helps overcome the fear of death. Bartlett (2005, p250) says, 'In short, hatred involves a shift in emotional response and cognitive interpretation that disables both the emotional capacity to empathize and the cognitive ability to stand back from experience, to reflect and reason. The experience of hatred leads to a single-minded disregard of the feelings of those who are hated, and at the same time it disables the capacity to think clearly and to use the resources of reason'.

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