

Individualism as a Modern Social Anarchy

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Abstract: *Social anarchism sometimes referred to as socialist anarchism is generally considered to be the branch of anarchism which sees individual freedom as being dependent upon mutual aid. Social anarchist consideration generally emphasizes community and social equality. Society in the modern period is in a critical situation of not only economy and social system, but also in the remarkable aspects of the very existence of human beings. Unless one finds a reliable approach to prevail calamity, its social life is bound to be lost. How did humankind fall into such a critical state -a state that endangers its social life? The present study aims at exploring a chance to clarify the loss of social identity and the crisis beyond it.*

Keywords: *individual, social anarchy, modern society.*

Introduction

A dictionary defines sociology as the systematic study of society and social interaction. The word “sociology” is derived from the Latin word socius (companion) and the Greek word logos (speech or reason), which together mean “reasoned speech about companionship”. How can the experience of companionship or togetherness be put into words or explained? While this is a starting point for the discipline, sociology is actually much more complex. It uses many different methods to study a wide range of subject matter and to apply these studies to the real world.

The sociologist Dorothy Smith (1926) defines the social as the “ongoing concerting and coordinating of individuals’ activities” (Smith 1999). Sociology is the systematic study of all those aspects of life designated by the adjective “social.” These aspects of social life never simply occur; they are organized processes. They can be the briefest of everyday interactions—moving to the right to let someone pass on a busy sidewalk, for example—or the largest and most enduring interactions—such as the billions of daily exchanges that constitute the circuits of global capitalism. If there are at least two people involved, even in the seclusion of one’s mind, then there is a social interaction that entails the “ongoing concerting and coordinating of activities.” Why does the person move to the right on the sidewalk? What collective process lead to the decision that moving to the right rather than the left is normal? Think about the T-shirts in your drawer at home. What are the sequences of linkages and social relationships that link the T-shirts in your chest of drawers to the dangerous and hyper-exploitive garment factories in rural China or Bangladesh? These are the type of questions that point to the unique domain and puzzles of the social that sociology seeks to explore and understand.

One may say that a good society is one in which individuals are left free to pursue their private satisfactions independently of others, a pattern of thinking that emphasizes individual achievement and self-fulfillment. However, the nature of the individual and her/his relationship with other individuals is one of the most important questions in philosophy. Is the individual solitary, outside of society? Should the individual be submerged within the group mind? What is the relationship between individualism and freedom? Are we free to be ‘you and me’, to be ourselves? What is the nature of the self?

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The term "Modern" is used to describe a wide range of periods in social science. There have been numerous attempts, particularly in the field of sociology, to understand what modernity is. To describe it in short, modernity means the embracing of all social patterns resulted from the process of industrialization. By such definition, modernity refers to the present pertaining to the past. Sociologists include in this concept the social patterns set in motion by the Industrial Revolution beginning in Western Europe in the middle of 18th century. Modernization is the process of the adoption of those patterns of behavior which have been considered as modern. The rise of modernity is a complex process involving many dimensions of change. These dimensions could be: cultural patterns, social structure, social institutions, and social change. A wide variety of terms are used to describe the society, social life, driving force, symptomatic mentality, or some other defining aspects of modernity.

The roots of modernism emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century, in France with Charles Baudelaire in literature, Eduard Manet in painting and Gustave Flaubert in prose fiction. In the 1980s, a strand of thinking began to assert that it was necessary to do away with the old norms entirely. In the 15yrs of the twentieth century, some writers, thinkers, artists, made the break with traditional means of organizing literature, painting and music. Modernism in general, includes the activities and creations of those who felt the traditional forms of art, architecture. The modernist literature was characterized by a rejection of the 19th century traditions and of their consensus between author and reader (baldick 159). Modernist tried to break away from the conventions of the Victorian era. They wished to distinguish themselves from the history of art and literature. Ezra Pound with his famous dictum 'make it new' captured the essence of modernism. Therefore, in order to create something new, they had to create new forms of writing. J.M.W Turner being one of the greatest landscape painters of the 19th century believed that his works should express significant historical literary or other narrative themes unlike the French impressionists who had unconventional formulas.

Industrial revolution had a great impact on modernism as some innovations like steam powered industrialization helped in development of railways which started in Britain in 1830s. Some advancement in physics, engineering, was also a great achievement. The crystal palace which was the huge cast iron and plate exhibition hall built for the great exhibition of 1851 in London. Two of the most significant thinkers of the period were biologists Charles Darwin (1809-1882), author of on the origin of species by means of natural selection and a political scientist Karl Marx (1818-1883) author of das capital. Darwin's theory on natural selection undermined religious certainty and the idea of human uniqueness. While Marx argues that there were fundamental s and that workers were anything but free within the capitalist system. This gave the rise to the working class as the poor ones lived in bad conditions whilst the few cream of the profits.

As we may find in the present paper, individualism encouraged by different reasons, leads to a threatening anarchy. Anarchism literally means 'without rule'. It has traditionally been associated with chaos, social disorder, destruction, violence and even terrorism. For example in the latter stages of the French Revolution the so-called Enrages who were critical of the Jacobin government for their failure to do more to help the poor and the disadvantaged were described by the government as "anarchists" and since then the word "anarchist" has often been used, particularly by moderates as a term of political abuse. However increasingly from the late C18th political theorists building on long standing political criticisms of authority developed an altogether more positive interpretation of the term anarchism.

The case for Anarchism has come to rest essentially on the idea that political arguments in support of political authority and particularly arguments in support of the state are flawed. In the anarchist view the state does not guarantee social order, nor protect individual liberty, nor create the economic conditions for the improvement of working class life as conservatives, liberals and non-anarchist socialists would argue: rather the state constrains the individual and creates social disorder. Conversely the anarchists claim it is only individual freedom and the abolition of the state which will result in real human self-development and social harmony. To see this let us discuss the Anarchist logo.

We must recognize that although the ideology of Anarchism contains important core elements there are also major divergences within this ideology. Anarchists are committed to the cause of individual liberty. They believe that individuals are the best judges of their own best interests and that they should therefore possess the high degree of liberty necessary to enable them to think and act as they see fit. The exercise of individual liberty will result also in social order and social harmony whereas if individuals are constrained by other individuals and organizations and especially if they are constrained by the State the result will be social disorder and social disharmony. All anarchists of all types are united in their opposition to authority and in particular to the authority of the State. Whereas Liberals, Conservatives and non-Anarchist Socialists advance various justifications for the existence of the State Anarchists argue that States destroy individual liberty and in doing so undermine social order and harmony.

All anarchists oppose all forms of the State. They obviously reject dictatorships as tyrannical but they also reject liberal democratic states and the theories which seek to justify them and they are perhaps particularly critical of so-called state socialist states which according to anarchists have perverted the aims of anarchist libertarian socialism. People are different in characters, choices, potentials, weaknesses and skills. Difference makes it possible for us to discover our own weaknesses and understand the benefit we gain from people's traits and skills when combined.

Literature Overview

Individualist anarchism is not a single philosophy but refers to a group of individualistic philosophies that sometimes are in conflict. Thereafter, it expanded through Europe and the United States. Benjamin R. Tucker, a famous 19th-century individualist anarchist, held that if the individual has the right to govern himself, all external government is tyranny. Extracted from the philosophy of Max Stirner, the egoist form of individualist anarchism supports the individual deeds exactly what he pleases — taking no notice of God, state, or moral rules. To Stirner, rights were spooks in the mind, and he held that society does not exist but "the individuals are its reality" — he supported property by force of might rather than moral right. Stirner advocated self-assertion and foresaw "associations of egoists" drawn together by respect for each other's ruthlessness.

For American anarchist historian Eunice Minette Schuster, American individualist anarchism "stresses the isolation of the individual — his right to his own tools, his mind, his body, and to the products of his labor. To the artist who embraces this philosophy it is "aesthetic" anarchism, to the reformer, ethical anarchism, to the independent mechanic, economic anarchism. The former is concerned with philosophy, the latter with practical demonstration. The economic anarchist is concerned with constructing a society on the basis of anarchism. Economically he sees no harm whatever in the private possession of what the individual produces by his own labor, but only so much and no more.

In European individualist anarchism a different social context helped the rise of European individualist illegalism and as such "The illegalists were proletarians who had nothing to sell but their labor power, and nothing to discard but their dignity; if they disdained waged-work, it was because of its compulsive nature. If they turned to illegality it was due to the fact that honest toil only benefited the employers and often entailed a complete loss of dignity, while any complaints resulted in the sack; to avoid starvation through lack of work it was necessary to beg or steal, and to avoid conscription into the army many of them had to go on the run. "One whose desires and impulses are not his own, has no character, no more than a steam engine has a character." This statement by Mill shows the way he connects desires and impulses of an individual to the development of his/her character. He believes that a society in its early levels of development individuality could be seen too much. In these stages with a large individuality there appears a high danger of crash of different desires and impulses. He argues that in this case people can develop their individuality and thus, they are able to value themselves and to make themselves valuable to other members. An individual, when well developed, can choose his/her own life style. There is no one correct pattern telling us how to live. Therefore, a healthy developed society should provide atmospheres for its members to get developed and use their potentials.

Tocqueville, while appreciating the 19th century individualism, somehow accepts it as a threat for social life because it may shake social obligations. His views in this issue are ambiguous, praising the individualism in American democracy he cannot hide his anxiety about the political knots which appear in it. Two aspects of American society are mentioned by Tocqueville, one being the faith in individual reason as the base of common opinion, the other being preoccupation with private issues. The second aspect mentioned by Tocqueville is represented in pervasive egoism, i.e. the tendency to leave public affairs and concentrating on private affairs of his/her family. In societies in which the way towards power and possession was open to all, the competition was fierce. Thus, Tocqueville asserts that individualism is a threat to the society in liberal aspects. United States democracy is based on the equality of all members and individuals. Tocqueville believes that when an individual comes across a public attitude different from hers/his, s/he will feel powerless.

Nowadays the term individualism is mostly used in such a political and social terms "liberal individualism" or "laissez-faire individualism". These philosophies represent the term to insist on the importance of individual freedom of choice. This use first was made by Adam Smith who presented the laissez-faire thoughts in Britain and also Jeremy Bentham who used the concept in economic and political theories. Herbert Hoover, United States president utilized this level of usage in his speeches in 1928 in which he appreciated "rugged individualism". It stresses the minor role government plays in affairs such as economy, religion and society. This concept of individualism contrasts with that of collectivism in which common interest is valued over individual's. As we may find there is a variation of theories. In order to make difference we may use their feedbacks, since it is the point that can distinguish them. Asocial history hypothesis and also parasite stress hypothesis adopt a fixed environment that each individual may adapt with. The other hypothesis we mentioned before is material insecurity hypothesis which argues that when institutions provide benefits for people, they tend to invest in institutions in order to make even better future investments.

Aristotle considers the man as a social animal whose needs and nature are the products of his/her society. Jean-Jacque Rousseau considers the collective will over individual's and in this way he is against the idea of individualism. In his famous treatise Social Contract writes that every single individual should submit his/her will to the "general will" of the whole society, though this general will may not be the absolute will.

Individualization

Individualist anarchism refers to several traditions of thought within the anarchist movement that emphasize the individual and their will over external determinants such as groups, society, traditions, and ideological systems. The concept of individualism is related to the freedom of an individual and his/her right to have interests and defend them against society's interests. Tocqueville, the French writer, was the first to use the term. By individualism he meant individual selfishness, i.e. an individual cares only for his/her own interests and those of his/her family and friends. As you see the impression of this word was negative rather than positive, because it was a reaction against collectivism of Enlightenment and French Revolution. At the time this word was coined, individualism was supposed to be the source of social anarchy.

Modern society is established on the foundation of individualism. Modernization does not only involve structural change but also a change in the relationship between the social structures and social agents. As modernization reaches a certain level agents become decreasingly controlled by structures and therefore more individualized. In effect, structural changes force social actors to become freer from the existing structure. For modernization successfully to progress the agents must release them from structural constriction and actively shape the modernization process (Lash & Wyanne, 1992). Specific historical developments have led to individualization by disrupting the experience of historical continuity and cutting people off from their traditional ties, beliefs and social relationships. As a consequence, individuals have lost their traditional support networks and have to rely on themselves and their personal fate which involves many risks, opportunities, and contradictions (Beck, 1992).

This is the primary phase of individualization process; the socially prescribed answers have steadily been worn away. In the next stage, which was especially apparent in the second half of the 20th century, people are confronted with a range of questions and choices but not provided any traditional guidelines (Beck & Beck Gernsheim, 1995). Individuals are thus compelled to make themselves the center of their own life plans and behavior. This independence from traditional ties gives people's lives an independent quality which makes an experience of personal destiny possible for the first time in history (Beck, 1992). Loneliness, with which suicide can be associated, is rising in our societies. Many studies show that the existence of a clear link between the rise of loneliness and the erosion of social capital. As loneliness is clearly related to various objective situational and social factors, to a high extent, some experiential precursors of loneliness are social isolation, a lack of social contact, the loss of contact or termination of relationships that is most often conducive to the development of loneliness, though some research suggest that it is emotional conflict within on-going relationships. Although (relationship status, relational stress, being isolated or rejected, etc.) it appears to be even more strongly related to subjective psychological factors including expectations regarding relationships and satisfaction with available friends and relationship partners. Increases in factors that inhibit or disrupt close, warm, reciprocal and mutually satisfying relationships increase the likelihood of loneliness, and this would include situational and culturally determined influences such as individualistic as compared to collectivistic values and practices.

Modernity as Hope, Modernity as Doom

Modernization brought a series of seemingly indisputable benefits to people. Lower infant mortality rate, decreased death from starvation, eradication of some of the fatal diseases, more equal treatment of people with different backgrounds and incomes, and so on. To some, this is an indication of the potential of modernity, perhaps yet to be fully realized. In general, rational, scientific approach to problems and the pursuit of economic wealth seems still too many a reasonable way of understanding good social development. At the same time, there are a number of dark sides of modernity pointed out by sociologists and others. Besides these obvious incidents, many critics point out psychological and moral hazards of modern life - alienation, feeling of rootlessness, loss of strong bonds and common values, hedonism, disenchantment of the world, and so on. Likewise, the loss of a generally agreed upon definitions of human dignity, human nature, and the resulting loss of value in human life have all been cited as the impact of a social process/civilization that reaps the fruits of growing privatization, subjectivism, reductionism, as well as a loss of traditional values and worldviews. Some have suggested that the end result of modernity is the loss of a stable conception of humanity and/or the human being.

Individuals in Society

All sociologists are interested in the experiences of individuals and how those experiences are shaped by interactions with social groups and society as a whole. To a sociologist, the personal decisions an individual makes do not exist in a vacuum. Cultural patterns and social forces put pressure on people to select one choice over another. Sociologists try to identify these general patterns by examining the behavior of large groups of people living in the same society and experiencing the same societal pressures.

Understanding the relationship between the individual and society is one of the most difficult sociological problems, however. Partly this is because of the reified way these two terms are used in everyday speech. Reification refers to the way in which abstract concepts, complex processes, or mutable social relationships come to be thought of as "things." A prime example of this is when people say that "society" caused an individual to do something or to turn out in a particular way. In writing essays, first-year sociology students sometimes refer to "society" as a cause of social behavior or as an entity with independent agency. On the other hand, the "individual" is a being that seems solid, tangible, and independent of anything going on outside of the skin sack that contains its essence. This conventional distinction between society and the individual is a product of reification in so far as both society and the individual appear as independent objects. A concept of "the individual" and a concept

of “society” have been given the status of real, substantial, independent objects. As we will see in the chapters to come, society and the individual is neither object, nor are they independent of one another. An “individual” is inconceivable without the relationships to others that define his or her internal subjective life and his or her external socially defined roles.

The problem for sociologists is that these concepts of the individual and society and the relationship between them are thought of in terms established by a very common moral framework in modern democratic societies, namely that of individual responsibility and individual choice. Often in this framework, any suggestion that an individual’s behavior needs to be understood in terms of that person’s social context is dismissed as “letting the individual off” of taking personal responsibility for their actions. Talking about society is akin to being morally soft or lenient. Sociology, as a social science, remains neutral on these type of moral questions. The conceptualization of the individual and society is much more complex. The sociological problem is to be able to see the individual as a thoroughly social being and yet as a being who has agency and free choice. Individuals are beings who do take on individual responsibilities in their everyday social roles and risk social consequences when they fail to live up to them. The manner in which they take on responsibilities and sometimes the compulsion to do so are socially defined however. The sociological problem is to be able to see society as a dimension of experience characterized by regular and predictable patterns of behavior that exist independently of any specific individual’s desires or self-understanding. Yet at the same time a society is nothing but the ongoing social relationships and activities of specific individuals.

Research Findings

The fundamental political conflict in society today is, as it has been for a century, individualism vs. collectivism. Does the individual’s life belong to him—or does it belong to the group, the community, society, or the state? Individualism is the idea that the individual’s life belongs to him and that he has an inalienable right to live it as he sees fit, to act on his own judgment, to keep and use the product of his effort, and to pursue the values of his choosing. It’s the idea that the individual is sovereign, an end in himself, and the fundamental unit of moral concern. One way of summing up the anarchy we may find in the current situation of modern society is to say that these societies are emphasizing individual freedom and the pursuit of individual affluence in a society with a most un-Lockean economy and government. We have the illusion that we can control our fate because individual economic opportunity is indeed considerable, especially if one starts with middle class advantages; and our political life is formally free. Yet powerful forces affecting the lives of all of us are not operating under the norm of democratic consent. In particular, the private governments of the great corporations make decisions on the basis of their own advantage, not of the public good. We should not forget that we are living in a community which is in the form of a group living. This means each member of a community depending on the other member makes the overall system by which the stability and assurance guarantees the benefit of each one in such a system.

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