ANARCHY is ORDER

a manifesto

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Abstract
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# 1 Introduction

This extended essay is presented as a manifesto because it contains some ideas about what might be done to improve the world. Its not a political manifesto, anti-political, or at least apolitical. More than that, it consists of some ideas on how you might find a way of life which helps to make the world the way you would like it to be.

I'm a thinker rather than a doer, so this essay is a fantasy about how ideas might change the world. I present my own view of the world, which is unlikely to be yours, even if you make your way through to the end. But that’s OK, I expect everyone to have their own view, and that we progress by their exchange.

I’m going to start out by presenting the first philosophical ideas which I can remember having. Not because these are particularly original or profound, but because the form the base on which my present world view has gradually been constructed over many years, and so it will make it easy to present the whole picture by beginning with them.

These first ideas are elements of naive practical philosophy. Naive in the sense that they are arrived at just by thinking about certain problems, rather than by reading about what others have said about such problems. Practical in the sense that they are problems which impacted my life, to which I seemed to need to know the answer.

## 1.1 On The Existence of God

**version 2** The first and least practical problem was that of the existence of God. I came to think about this problem, not out of any intrinsic interest it might have had for me, but because when I began to attend secondary school at the age of 11 I was obliged to attend church services, was subjected to regular lengthy (so they seemed) sermons, and could not really begin to understand these sermons without having some conception of what God is.

This tells you a little about my character. I am not the kind of person who naturally takes things on trust.

Anyway, my attempt to understand God was doomed, I failed, and from this failure I concluded that God does not exist. Was I distressed by this? Not at all. I did have a bit of trouble understanding how so many distinguished, important, intelligent people could falsely believe in God, so that caused my to struggle for an intelligible conception of God for longer than I might otherwise have done.

I spent less than a year thinking about God before deciding he did not exist, and since then I have never really given the matter any further consideration.

So I’m not the kind of guy who needs to have a God or a religion.

**version 1** At the age of 11 I was sent to grammar school as a boarder. On Sundays, attendance at a church service was compulsory, and this usually involved sitting through a sermon. Naturally I tried to understand what the Vicar was telling me, and since God was often mentioned, this made me wonder about who or what God might be.

I had great difficulty figuring this out, the things we were told about God really didn’t make a lot of sense to me. I tried out a few ideas, about what kind of thing God might be, but none of them worked. None of them accounted plausibly for the attributes which God was supposed to have.

I don’t recall any of the detail, or how long it took me to conclude my cogitations, but by the beginning of my second year, when called upon to make a decision about whether to be "confirmed" in my faith, I then quite definitely did not believe in the existence of God, and therefore declined.

In this process, I have no recollection of consulting any book or person, I don’t think it occurred to me to seek advice. I wasn’t hard to figure out what they would have said. The problem was whether I could
make sense of the idea of God, and if not, then the question of his existence did not arise, he was a nonsense. I didn’t take seriously the idea that He might be too mysterious for me to understand (but still very real). It would have been OK for him to have complicated corners that I couldn’t get my head around, so long as the basic idea made some kind of sense.

The greatest stumbling block in my giving up the search for meaning and settling for disbelief was the huge number of people, very respectable and important people, who professed belief in God. Was it possible that they were all wrong? Well I decided they were.

So this eleven or twelve year old boy, after a bit of a tussle, preferred his own untutored judgement to that of about half a world of his betters. This is symptomatic of a character trait, independence of mind, and a disrespect for authority, which makes me by nature rather than by conviction, a kind of anarchist.

This isn’t the whole of it, and I will touch upon other aspects in time, but I just want to use this to make a couple of points here. Firstly, I don’t imagine that many other people are the same, so my ideas about how I would like the world to be are unlikely to be widely shared. Secondly, this isn’t the kind of difference you can get over with an enlightening conversation. It’s a fundamental character trait. It’s conceivable (if improbable) that I might persuade someone that the idea of God makes no sense, and hence that he cannot exist. But to persuade someone who looks to his betters for answers in these matters that he should instead just think it through and come to his own conclusions? Not much hope.

Now this was a bit of naive philosophising. There was no scholarship involved. I did not study the literature, examine the arguments, sift out the good from the bad and determine the true answer. Nor have I ever since been inclined to pay much attention to arguments about whether God exists or not. The idea of God didn’t make sense to me, you can’t even begin to argue about whether he exists until you can make sense of the idea.

1.2 Personal Anarchism

Personal anarchism is a lightweight philosophy of life which I adopted as a young man.

Round about my 22nd birthday I was working in an unfamiliar place with few friends, no woman, plenty of hormones. From time to time I would get a bit depressed. Depressions are often not very informative. You know something is wrong, but you are left guessing about exactly what the problem is. What I tend to do is think a lot, focus on anything that seems wrong with my life and see if I can find a way to fix it.

At this time I must have been doing a lot of this, because I was going through a lot of self-devised “isms” schemes for putting my life in order, of which I am going to mention just two apparently contradictory schemes, “rationalism” and “anarchism”.

I don’t suppose anyone will be surprised to hear that I often thought through my problems, devised a scheme for fixing them, and then failed to implement the scheme. “Rationalism” was the meta-scheme that one ought not to do that. It seemed that there was no hope in life if, when one considered matters very carefully, thought them through and decided on the best course of action, if one then failed to act on the conclusions. So I thought to fix this by attaching great significance to the general principle that one should carry through, regardless of how trifling the particular issue at stake might be.

I should perhaps say here, in mitigation, that there was no presumption that the deliberations involved should be particularly logical or rational. Any amount of emotion, perhaps even the toss of a coin, might have played its part in determining the outcome of my deliberations, the only point on which my “rationalism” insisted was that once my mind was made up, I should get on and implement my decision. It was just the supreme irrationality of making a decision and then not acting on it which I sought to expunge.

“Anarchism” when it came to me, was just the converse of “rationalism”. The denial that we should expect conscious deliberations and the conclusions which they reach to rule the roost.

Presumably I had been reading something about
anarchism that I should have chosen that name, probably a collection of readings edited by Irving L. Horowitz which I acquired about that time.

There is no rocket science here, its all pretty elementary. My “rationalism” is self-discipline. The idea is that conscious mental processes should be “in charge” of what we do, but that there are some other aspects of our mental world which are a bit unruly and don’t always cooperate. What you have to do is use your will-power to force compliance. “rationalism” required that I routinely impose my decisions on the rest of my mind.

The contrary idea is that the mind is a community of cooperating mental processes and no-one is in charge. Conscious intelligence is an important element in the mix, but is liable to be ignorant about what the game of life is really about, and for that reason may come up with ideas about what should be done which will not fly. What we end up doing is something which emerges from these diverse mental processes and dispositions in ways that we don’t understand. It doesn’t help for one part of the mind to try to coerce the whole into implementing its agenda.

So this “personal anarchism” endorses what actually happens. It doesn’t deny the importance of thinking things out. This will often make a big difference to what actually happens. But the idea is you think things out, and then you do whatever feels right.

There is almost nothing here. I say to myself, do what you will. What else could I have done?

Oddly enough, this almost wholly vacuous personal philosophy was a terminus for me. No further -isms were forthcoming, no further searching for a rule for life. For the next forty years I thought only occasionally on such matter, usually when things were going wrong. In such circumstances, in moments of doubt, I simply re-affirm to myself the idea that I cannot do better than my best, and that the best I can do is to carry right on doing what I do.

Though that could easily be misleading. The idea is not that when you make a mistake you pay no account, don’t learn from it, and just go right on making the same mistake over again (though sometimes that seem to be just what I am doing). There is no intention to curtail the post mortem from transforming the way you approach similar situations in the future. All it does is mitigate the despair.

There are different layers going on here, this relates to how we are told to deliver feedback to others. Criticise the behaviour not the person. In this case the person is yourself, and the idea is partly to prevent the perception of failure from becoming fundamental self-doubt, and to avoid fear of failure from inhibiting you from doing whatever it is that you are about to do. Also, to look for teamwork, not to expect intellectual considerations to take precedence over feelings. After a thorough analysis one may think that there appear to be conclusive reasons for some course, but nevertheless feel that it is the wrong thing to do, or that it is the wrong thing for you to do. It is the feelings which count at the end, if the arguments have enough weight then they will change the way you feel, if not then they should not carry the day.

This makes it sound a bit more static than it was, for through these years from time to time the world would find new ways of testing my resolve, of engendering self-doubt, and each time this empty doctrine of personal anarchism would somehow richen and make a more solid base for me.

the sequel Around these inauspicious beginnings this manifesto, with its revolutionary pretensions, is woven.

My first steps will be to elaborate on my personal anarchism partly by reference to the two systems of ideas closest to them. These are anarchism in its more common sense as a modern western political (or anti-political) philosophical position, and the ancient Chinese philosophy or religion known in the west as Tao. After this elaboration we find that my anarchism has transmuted into its opposite, which I called rationalism.

The rest of the manifesto is then a sketch of how this notion of rationalism can be elaborated, the elaboration which is the purpose of the book for which this manifesto is a prospectus.
2 Anarchism

Anarchism is a relatively recent family of political philosophies. The title of this manifesto comes from one of the distinguished anarchist thinkers, Proudhon.

Anarchism as a political doctrine is the idea that the state should be abolished.

Alternatively anarchism may be characterised as an abhorrence of coercion.

3 Tao

version 2 I don’t think I knew anything about the Tao when I came up with my personal anarchism, though I might well have come across Zed Buddhism, which I now understand to have roots in both Buddhism and Tao. When much later I came across the Tao, there seemed much in it which connected with my own ideas, as well as a quite a bit that didn’t.

The connection was with some of the ideas about how to live. The Tao builds around some nice ideas about life, a whole religion, speaking as if the Tao were some thing (or perhaps everything) and making the achievement of some mystical union with the Tao into an ultimate aim of life. These appearances may be deceptive.

When you start learning to play the piano, you are likely to be given some simple rules to observe. e.g. don’t play the black notes with your thumb. When you get a bit more advanced, for example if you look at Chopin’s études you find that the rules have to be broken. The rules are in fact useful. When you begin the music you play will be easier to play if you stick to the rules. Later on you learn to break them when necessary.

Writings on the Tao are similar. You are told that the Tao cannot be described, in a work which seems to have no other purpose. You are told of yin yang the unity of opposites, which seems awfully like the doctrine that whenever you think you have an important truth you will find that its converse is also true.

version 1 I’m going to refer occasionally to ideas which come from the ancient Chinese philosophy called Taoism. I am not myself a Taoist, but my own philosophy which will be presented here contains some elements which seem to me similar to Taoist ideas, and reference to the Tao may help me to explain it. I do not have a scholarly knowledge of Taoism, so it is certain that what I say about it will be not quite right, but I hope it will nevertheless be helpful in explaining my own philosophy.

Three ideas from the Tao will be helpful here in describing the character of this work. They are wu wei, yin-yang and te.

Sometimes one can try too hard, and this interferes with your performance and prevents you from realising your goal. Sometimes it would make sense to advise someone to try less hard wu-wei may be thought of as taking this to an extreme. It is the idea of achieving things without effort, or better perhaps, spontaneously. It is the antithesis of command and coercion.

The idea of yin-yang

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\(^1\)From Raymond Smullyan [Smu77]
References