

Letting Go of Social Change

So much of anarchism, and radical politics in general, seems to be about envisioning an ideal society, strategizing about how to get there, and charging forth on that mission. For me, I don't really believe in that. I mean, yes, envisioning an ideal society (or two, or three, or three hundred) can be fun, and strategizing about how to get there can be an enjoyable way to pass the time, but in the end I simply do not believe it.

The way that I see it is that while the concept of a utopia can be enchanting, it is essentially just a work of fiction. While I do believe that all kinds of different possibilities exist for how human beings can live together and organize their affairs, I do not believe that it is healthy or wise to think that such-and-such a society is on it's way towards becoming a reality, or that you are the harbinger for a new era.

This is to say, then, I no longer believe in social/political change. Perhaps it is inaccurate to say this, since change of all kinds is a constant in life. Things have changed in the past, things are changing now, and I fully believe that things will change in the future as well. What I don't believe is that things will change in the way that I (or you) want them to. I would love it if that did happen, and it could happen, I just don't put my faith in it.

The reason why I say this is that we live in a world of 7.4 billion human beings, give or take a few million. All of these different people are in their own ways influencing the world to change in some way or another. I can have my influence, and then immediately have it be counter-acted by another person, and then another, and on and on. Or I can even inadvertently counter-act my own influence myself by saying or doing something that goes against the kind of world that I would like to see.

And then there are various non-human influences as well, such as the various forces of nature, always in motion, which in their own way also affect the direction that human societies change over time. It is all simply too much, which leads me to throw my hands up in the air at the prospect of being a "change agent" in the world. This is yet another rat race that is pointless to pursue.

And yet, we are still alive, and for as long as that lasts we still do have the power to make choices and determine what actions to take. It is from this basis that I appreciate the perspective of individualism, which emphasizes this ability of individuals to choose and act on their own, if they so desire. This then leads to the kind of anarchism that I value being a kind of philosophical anarchism in that it does not necessarily imply any particular action being done, while at the same time serving as a set of conceptual tools and frameworks to use to look out at and interpret the world around us. Ideally, I would like for this philosophical anarchism to be a form of quietism, in that it would serve a personally

therapeutic purpose, helping people to reconcile themselves with the world that they find themselves in, relieve personal distress, and increase personal clarity.

Through my saying all of this, I am not meaning to imply that I no longer have an interest in big picture projects, utopias and social/political movements of various stripes. I find all of that to be quite interesting indeed, I just do not believe in them, or that the intended results that people want will necessarily come about. I may even choose to participate in some of these myself, for reasons that are similar to how I choose to be employed and work at a job. That is, to meet various needs of mine, none of which being that of high-minded idealism.

That being said, I still do find some sense of solace and direction in the philosophy of Buddhism as well. This is namely through the understanding that everything has a merely apparent existence through various different interacting component parts, that suffering is something that we bring upon ourselves through our own choices of which kind of state of mind to maintain, and that change itself is constant and inevitable. With that in mind, the best way to find happiness in this fleeting existence is to do what you can to contribute to the well-being of others, and to work to have love in your heart.

As is often the case, all of this stuff is easier said than done. But I would rather tread this difficult path than to have my head stuck in the clouds, trapped in the various competing illusions & delusions of competing political utopias, political movements, and an exaggerated sense of our own importance. The kind of anarchism that I embrace is not so much that of “burning it all down”, but rather one of seeing through the smoke in a world that is already in flames.