No—Your Other Left: Newman's *The Politics of Postanarchism*

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Saul Newman, *The Politics of Postanarchism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. US$45.00 (paperback). US$105.00 (hardcover). 200 pp. ISBN 978-0-7486-3495-8.

Probably, it has happened to us all. A moment of befuddlement in the company of others: someone suggests a left turn, but you mistakenly drift rightward instead, and then in response someone archly pipes up, "No—she meant your *other* left." Minus the sarcasm, Saul Newman's book primes us on why that other left—namely, postanarchism—is the correct left and why the more dominant variants of left theory—those clustering around the writings of Chantal Mouffe, Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, and team Michael Hardt/Antonio Negri—are not the ones meant for contemporary radical politics. Indeed, in Newman's estimation, these other, variously Marxist, approaches might no longer count as radical at all. Always forceful in its argumentation, occasionally polemical in its assessments of radical thought since Hegel, Newman's *Politics of Postanarchism* is poising itself to instigate an insurgency whose effect would be to push politically engaged Euro-Atlantic theory toward its other left.

Newman is known as one of the pioneers of the *post-* turn in late modern anarchist theory and is associated most closely with "postanarchism," although this major turn in anarchist thought is given different monikers, identified by the monographs of two other major proponents. Todd May offered the first sustained, book-length analysis with *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* in 1994 (Pennsylvania State University Press), and, in 2002, Lewis Call published *Postmodern Anarchism* (Lexington Books). Newman's own initial study of postanarchism, *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Lexington Books), preceded *The Politics of Postanarchism* by nearly a decade in 2001. To be perfectly schematic, I would characterize May's critical reconstruction of anarchism as having the closest affinities with epistemology and moral philosophy, Call's as taking its bearings from countervailing trends in the cultural logics of late capitalist societies, and Newman's as orienting itself most closely to contemporary political problematics. To be sure, Call and May do not avoid the political: cultivating an anticentralist, antiauthoritarian ethos is focal to their respective projects. However, neither engages so squarely as does Newman in the task of theorizing possibilities for practical resistance and autonomous political association in the wake of the global capitalist, neoliberal upheavals of states, civil societies, and economies after *circa* 1980. It is therefore appropriate and telling that Newman gives pride of place to *politics* in the title of his new contribution to this ongoing conversation, but he does so, as I explain in greater detail anon, by arguing that postanarchism overcomes anarchism's fraught, anti-political relationship to politics. In this regard, Newman insists, against those who have taken umbrage at the over-and-done-with implications of *post*anarchism, that "postanarchism is not a transgression or a movement beyond the terms of anarchism; it does not leave anarchism behind but, instead, works within it as a constant engagement with its limits" (5).

However labeled, the *post-* turn brings poststructuralism or postmodernism to bear on anarchist thought by way of two mutually supportive tactics. Either it highlights

the unacknowledged anarchistic character of poststructuralist theories—for example, it explicates the implicit antistatism or the power-decentering effects in Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus* or Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. Or it deploys postfoundationalist interventions against classical anarchist thinkers—Mikhail Bakunin, Pietr Kropotkin, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon—in order to renovate anarchist thought by cutting it loose from naturalist and humanist ontological assumptions inherited from or at least codified by Enlightenment philosophies later rendered untenable by the abiding critique of foundations in postwar European thought. (Call also develops a third tactic by precipitating and theorizing postmodern anarchist visions of subjectivity and political geography in cyberpunk literature and film.)

Newman pursues both primary tactics in *Politics of Postanarchism*, which picks up exactly where his earlier *From Bakunin to Lacan* left off. Whereas the latter concluded with a chapter called "Toward a Politics of Postanarchism," @@@@@@@@@@which sketched an ethics of anti-authoritarian resistance by drawing on a Lacanian notion of constitutive lack at the center of all claims to power, mastery, or authority, the present book fills out that sketch by elaborating its initial insights, then applying them to a variety of pressing political problematics-the fin-de-siècle expansion of national security states, for example-while also deploying the rubric of postanarchism as a standpoint for the critique of other radical theories, including the Marxist, Maoist, and communist currents that left academics are au courant of.

Indeed, each body chapter tackles a discrete set of literatures, usually by way of a double move that homes in on other approaches' weaknesses while making postanarchism emerge as a theoretically rigorous and less fraught alternative. The first such juxtaposition divides between Chapters One and Two: Newman shows that certain difficulties that classical anarchist theorists from William Godwin to Kropotkin generate for themselves on the basis of implausible ontological premises are evaded by an ethically-grounded postanarchist ontology deriving from poststructuralist thinkers as well as (perhaps unexpectedly) the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Chapter Three addresses Marxism's and Leninism's ambivalence toward European state-forms and the sovereigntist legacy in a certain strand of Schmittian left political theory in order to argue that the twin threats of neoliberalism and securitization-whose simultaneity is only superficially contradictory-should reawaken and fortify the anarchist suspicion of statism on the left, including the ersatz proposal of a "transitional" state that is retained only so long as threats to communism remain to be dismantled. Unapologetically-even iconoclastically, one might say, considering the strength of their respective followings-Chapter Four confronts, from a critical postanarchist perspective, limitations in the work of those darlings of Euro-Atlantic radical thought, Badiou, Hardt/Negri, and zizek. Finally, the fifth chapter shows that the late twentieth-century variants of anarchist thought articulated by Murray Bookchin and John Zerzan rely untenably on unreconstructed essentialist humanism and naturalism to do their critical work. The critical confrontations Newman stages in each chapter always draw on careful, sympathetic analysis of a body of thought, and even when he edges toward the polemical-most

noticeably in the chapters on recent Marxist, communist, and anarchist theoreticians-Newman concedes the importance of some of his interlocutors' points.

Those familiar with Newman's From Bakunin to Lacan will note apparent overlaps between it and the new book with respect to both argumentative strategy and specific interlocutors: not only did the earlier postanarchism book also devote chapters to Marxism and classical anarchism (although Godwin and Lenin were not examined therein), but also it, too, made postanarchism emerge by negation from a series of critical examinations of dominant theoretical positions on the left (i.e., postanarchism is not classical anarchism, not Marxism, not quite Stirner, not quite Foucault, etc.). However, The Politics of Postanarchism goes beyond making postanarchism manifest itself negatively through critical difference. In what is certainly its most important contribution-which was present only in outline form in the earlier work-it synthesizes key insights to fill out postanarchism as a substantive positivity, i.e., not just a shadowy theoretical innovation that deftly sidesteps others' pitfalls. (Below I offer some hesitations about some of the effects of positing too forcefully, though.)

Hence, arguably more generative than Newman's critical textual engagements with interlocutors on the left is the conceptual work he does in his own voice as a theoretician with a unique perspective on why postanarchism deserves to be considered a privileged site for radical politics, in theory and practice. The Politics of Postanarchism constructs an armature for postanarchism by joining a handful of concepts, some in wide currency although here advantageously reiterated, others (such as equal-liberty) less familiar. The four main concepts are equal-liberty, the politics of anti-politics, an-archy, and utopia; and to get a sense of the perspective undergirding the argument of the book as a whole, it behooves us to attend to each concept in turn.

It may seem curious to yoke equality and liberty by a hyphen, since, on a certain conventional view, the two terms stand in opposition. According to liberal orthodoxy, the enjoyment of individual freedom may in fact entail inequalities across a given society because any social and especially governmental schemes to curtail individual (or corporate) excesses in the name of arriving at greater equality and social balance will necessarily infringe on individuals' free disposal of themselves and their resources. In contradistinction, socialist thought and a conception of "democracy" that cleaves closely to nineteenth-century usages by figures such as Alexis de Tocqueville would have it that, for better or for worse, an equal society necessitates impinging on individual liberties in the name of a greater total harmony and stronger overall adhesion for the polity. Hence, according to the discursive parameters that crystallized in the wake of the French Revolution of 1789 (and renewed at subsequent revolutionary moments in 1848and renewed at subsequent revolutionary moments in 1870, and, in its own way, 1968), never the twain shall meet between liberty and equality. The anarchist tradition had managed to ascend to a vantage point above the great ideological fray of the nineteenth century. Thus, against this double ideological orthodoxy, Newman argues that Bakunin got things very right when he insisted, "I am free only when all human beings surrounding me-men and women alike-are equally free" (quoted on p. 20). As Newman puts it,

"Equal-liberty is simply the idea that liberty and equality are inextricably linked, that one cannot be had without the other" (20). Newman notes that it is possible to cast equal-liberty in social-Darwinian terms as natural-rights libertarianism or in state socialist terms as engineered welfare, but what defines the more radical iteration of equal-liberty are its antistatism and its rejection of naturalism. A postanarchist ethics ought to cultivate both antiauthoritarianism and antiessentialism, even if the latter puts it in tension with the classical anarchist tradition. In sum, not only is equal-liberty a defining tenet of anarchism, but also postanarchism defines a privileged view on the political because it arrives at a radical view on equal-liberty, one that transcends other views' inadequacies. Consequently, a properly radical-qua postanarchist-embrace of democracy is conditional on an ethics of equal-liberty.

As regards the politics of anti-politics, *The Politics of Postanarchism* drives home a related claim. Newman suggests that postanarchism is a privileged bearer of radical thought for two reasons that are welded to each other as recto and verso. First, all modern political theories take the descendants of the polis for granted. Even those revolutionary theories that would overturn or abolish or deliberately wither the state necessarily orient themselves to government, if only to organize a transitional political authority-for example, the party-state of Leninist stripe-that would off itself after directing the forces of society away from counterrevolutionary temptation and toward full flourishing. Second, classical anarchist theory champions itself as anti-political because driven by antistatism and antiauthoritarianism, and Bakunin especially was keen to point out that Marx and the Communists merely recapitulated leftwing statism and party-centered authoritarianism meanwhile criticizing the capitalist state and bourgeois authority. Classical anarchists made their claim to anti-politics from the standpoint of society, which would flourish organically and unproblematically in the absence of interference from authoritarianism whether in the guise of government, party, or church.

While anarchism readily positions itself on the far side of the politics/anti-politics antinomy and the state/society polarity, postanarchism situates itself within the antinomy in order to agitate it internally. Postanarchism thus offers a critique of anarchism's comfortable, uncritical acceptance of social organicism. According to postanarchism's immanent critique, anarchism's anti-politics may end up (negatively) fetishizing the authoritarianism of the state as the very paradigm of all politics, meanwhile misrecognizing that anarchists must themselves engage practically in quotidian politics in order to enact their own nonstatist, autonomist visions of participatory decentralized organization. Newman notes: "in its desire to do away with politics, classical anarchism was also constructing a politics-it involved movements, organisations, strategies, programmes, ways of mobilising people against the state, ideas about the structure of future societies and so on. All of this implies a politics, even if it is aimed at the abolition of politics" (69). Classical anarchists, then, were in fact actively constructing political forms even as they were depoliticizing their activities by designating them as merely the restoration of humanity's authentic "nature" and thus disavowing all things

political as thoroughly artificial. Rather than transcending the antinomy between politics and anti-politics through some kind of pat dialecticism, postanarchism acts as an agitator between the two poles by refusing all authoritarian forms and effects of politics, yet striving through political struggle and experiment to bring into being new collective practices of equal-liberty.

Agitating in this way both with and against the legacy of classical anarchism, postanarchism unleashes from within anarchist thought its most (self-) critical impulse, identified as "an-archy." The emphasis introduced by the internal hyphen serves to recall readers to the active negation of the omnipresent operation of arché, referring to rule qua reign but also rule qua fundamental principle, a Greek concept that will be more familiar to American readers from Hannah Arendt but that Newman elaborates from a different former student of Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, and a scholar of Heidegger's philosophy, Reiner Schürmann, as well as recent work by Miguel Abensour. In Newman's hands, an-archy gives play to the most authentic moment in anarchism, for, if an-archy implies the negation of governing foundations, then anarchy's true spirit is antifoundational and thus must question even its classical forebears' humanist, naturalist, essentialist, and social organicist foundationalisms. Hence, he emphasizes: "anarchy implies the notion of a critique or questioning of the authority of ontological foundations, including those of anarchism itself. What I want to suggest here is the idea of a transcendental moment within anarchism itself: that there is, within the potentiality of anarchism, an an-archy that exceeds and transcends it" (51). In short, an anarchism-indeed, any radicalism-worthy of its name ought to employ an-archy so as to open itself up to the critique of authoritarianism not only in its philosophical foundations but also of those foundations themselves. Anarchy could help anarchism to be more properly Oedipal, one might say, rather than simply to recognize the traditional authority of anarchism's nineteenth-century fathers.

To be clear, reference to Oedipalism is not something that Newman himself has much recourse to, although he is the only one among the three thinkers of the post-turn in anarchist theory to take psychoanalytic theory as a touchstone. In fact, he puts specifically Lacanian motifs to brilliant use in his judgment of Zerzan's primitivist anarchism as a pathological and incoherent desire for *pre-Oedipal* wholeness, as though the rift or gash that is constitutive of subjecthood were not irreducible (156). Precisely because Newman, after Lacan, takes the constitutive lack as central to subjectivity-i.e., he takes for granted that the subject is produced by a division between itself and its representation-he does not deploy the concept of utopia in a way that smacks of jouissance. There are no final, total fulfillments, no returns to primordial wholeness, because healing the rift constitutive of subjectivity is impossible.

Rather, Newman puts utopia to use for purposes that would appear, from the standpoint of psychoanalytic theory, neither pathological nor reactionary but instead generative and even radical. For Newman, a fact both pernicious and tenacious about authoritarian power is the late modern subject's desire for it, desire for domination by it, desire, in other words, for voluntary servitude and subjection. On this point, both

Freudo-Marxists (Wilhelm Reich et al.) and critics of Freudian orthodoxy (Deleuze and Guattari) converge (although the latter see the former as complicit with the problem they mean to diagnose). Cultivating utopian possibilities-not as indisputable answers finally resolving problems of power but as incitements to question the political present relentlessly-exercises transformative desires in subjects otherwise resigned to their authoritarian desires. "Therefore, the potency of utopia," Newman concludes, "lies not in providing a way of ordering society after the revolution, but in disordering society as it exists today, in providing a point of rupture in existing social relations, introducing into them an element of radical heterogeneity" (68). Utopia, then, ought not to function for postanarchism as a blueprint for a total overcoming of alienation and achievement of pure authenticity or a fantasy of harmony as the Truth of the social and the self. In contradistinction, postanarchism draws on a concept of utopia whose moorings are closer to the sense given the term by Thomas More: a nonplace that reveals the lack of self-adequation of our current place and incites other desires.

Here the main conceptual pieces come together: "Postanarchism is in this sense an active anti-politics of utopian desire" that takes for granted "the intractability of power" and actively confronts it as a limit rather than presumes a utopia altogether beyond power (70). Because such an anti-politics "makes sense only if it takes seriously the tasks of politics: building, constructing, organising, fighting, making collective decisions and so on," then this anti-politics of utopian desire must open itself to the possibility of new practical experiments in equal-liberty. Yet at the same time, such new iterations of equal-liberty themselves must in turn be open to an-archy, the moment by which anarchism transcends and exceeds itself. After all, even new, emancipatory lines of flight that provide alternatives to the centralized structures of power can themselves congeal into new structures with their own "authoritarian potential": an-archy must actively bear witness to this possibility lest the spirit of equal-liberty be compromised in being delimited to its past instances (57, 139).

What is so very brave about The Politics of Postanarchism is that it seriously entertains infra- and parastatal political sites against the authoritarian forms and effects of the modes of political and economic centralization so familiar to late modern subjects. Making a politics of postanarchism necessitates not the total rejection of organization but rather collective forms that balance organization with anti-authoritarianism and resistance to ultracentralist trends. One of the refrains of The Politics of Postanarchism is the need to initiate and foster "experimentation with new ways of living, different non-authoritarian political practices and structures, and even alternative economies" and to expand autonomous political and economic zones that already exist (128). And such experiments and alternatives do exist: "squatters' movements, blockades, worker occupations, alternative media centres, communes, numerous activist networks" (116). For Newman, the significance of such alternatives is not simply that they already exist and enable different, presumably better, conducts for living from the perspective of their participants. Moreover, perhaps more importantly, they serve to prove a bigger point:

> If autonomous communities and organisations are increasingly able to perform the functions traditionally carried out by the state-for example, the way that in the wake of the economic crisis in Argentina in 2001, cooperative and local assemblies provided basic social services in the absence of a functioning government-then the future of the state is by no means guaranteed (116).

Newman makes specific reference to several other exemplary cases in his Conclusion (174), and together they emblematize the alreadyness of a politics of postanarchism, the actualities of equal-liberty, the dynamism of anarchy, and present effects of utopian disjunctures in desire.

The insistence on actually existing postanarchisms is brave-especially at a moment when some on the left would feel comfortable slipping into zizek's or Badiou's Jacobinism as the most expedient means for responding to the current global financial crisis. For latter-day Jacobins, economic redress and the holding of capitalist firms and governmental authorities to account can only come from institutionalizing "democratic insurrection ... through revolutionary terror" (130). However, Newman insists that we should be unremittingly suspicious of the lionization on the radical left of Robespierre and Saint-Just, Lenin and Mao-and especially of ultracentralist proposals for the revolutionary administration of their ideas on behalf of the People.

Personally, I agree with Newman that the line toed similarly by zizek and Badiou is the wrong left and that "[t]he Jacobin temptation" which they have "fetishized" "should be resisted" (177). However, it does seem descriptively wrong, somehow, to say that the Jacobin or Maoist version of radicalism is "completely defunct and outmoded" (116). And this raises questions as to whether, in the moment of Occupy Wall Street and its affiliates, Newman's claims that postanarchism represents the correct left are convincing and for whom and to what effect. Converging under the banner of what is called the Occupy Movement are many lefts, some postanarchist and interested in taking this moment to initiate new infrastatist and postcapitalist cooperatives of the Argentinean type, but others for whom a proper new Revolution against the ruling and capitalist classes is the radical solution to the immiserating excesses of parallel and overlapping but not uniform nor monolithic accumulations of wealth and governmental authority. (The Politics of Postanarchism recalls us to Nicos Poulantzas's thesis about the equilibrating function of the state on, hence its relative autonomy from, the capitalist classes' immediate pursuits of self-interest-equilibration that leads to a more stable capitalist system in the longer term (77)-and should remind us that there are pious supporters of financial reform within the one percent and capitalistic political élites among the ninety-nine.)

My point in mentioning the diversity of motivations, investments, and incitements within the Occupy Movement is simply this: the Jacobin line may be the wrong left (among other possible lefts), but it is not moribund. Newman sets forth a persuasive case for the functional importance of equal-liberty, the politics of anti-politics, an-

archy, and radical utopianism in renovating and fortifying anarchist theory, but he is less convincing when he makes anarchism a litmus test for left radicalism per se as he does in asserting "that anarchism is more than a political or philosophical tradition-it also constitutes a universal horizon of emancipation which all forms of radical politics must necessarily speak to if they are to remain radical" (20). Although he argues against a politics of prescription and proscription, Newman does make this anarchist litmus test for radicalism focal to his argument (cf. 181, 2, 19, 67). And so I begin to wonder whether the nomothetic effects of designating correct and incorrect lefts, live and dead radicalisms might not cramp the politics of postanarchism? What if a specific practice instigates anarchist effects at one level of analysis, intra-associationally, but fails a strict test of equal-liberty from an interassociational perspective? More abstractly: what would be the effects of taking a critically an-archic and radically polythetic view of what anarchism might include? It would not mean that any politics would count as anarchism, but it might mean that, epistemologically, we can only define what anarchism is not rather than what it positively is.

The Politics of Postanarchism studiously follows such a negative approach for the most part. Occasionally it steers askew-but without ever running aground.

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