

May 2016

The Ideology of the 21st Century: Anarchist Conservatism

Emre Baysoy
Namik Kemal University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/csp>

Recommended Citation

Baysoy, Emre (2016) "The Ideology of the 21st Century: Anarchist Conservatism," *Culture, Society, and Praxis*: Vol. 9 : No. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/csp/vol9/iss1/3>

This Main Theme / Tema Central is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Journals at Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Culture, Society, and Praxis by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.

The Ideology of the 21st Century: Anarchist Conservatism

By Emre Baysoy

Summary.

Although it is mostly accepted that the ideologies of conservatism and anarchism are at the very opposite sides of the political thought spectrum, this paper is based on its own speculation that conservatism and anarchism are based on the same grounds. In fact, apart from sharing some philosophical roots, these two ideologies are establishing a neutral alliance spontaneously on the basis of anarcho-capitalism. As a matter of fact, one step further than alliance, conservatism and anarchism are becoming two sides of the same coin and this new ideology can be labelled as anarchist conservatism. This essay aims to reveal and highlight the characteristics of this new ideology in a critical manner.

Introduction

In the 21st century, ideologies and ideological confrontations are accepted as out of date and irrelevant to the realm of politics. Especially with the declaration of “the End of the History” by Francis Fukuyama (1992), Liberalism is thought to be victorious over the other ideologies with the claim that Liberalism is not an ideology, but the only true path to peace and prosperity. In contrast with this general acceptance, it can be argued that any new power structure which created new power groups inevitably holds an ideological standpoint in order to preserve this new political structure. Thus, contemporary politics generates an ideology to conserve the status quo as well as to control the change.

After its usage by Baron de Tott in the meaning of ‘the science of ideas’, the term “ideology” gained a pejorative meaning with Karl Marx. According to Marx, ideology was the dominant class’s tool for dominance (Goodwin 1997:19). Although Marx highlighted one feature of ideologies (that is, as a tool for class dom-

inance) he missed the fact that ideologies are also patterns to demand power. Ideologies legitimize and shape what is desirable, eligible and feasible by the people. Following Marx’s consideration ideologies have their roots in social class structures. People’s knowledge is determined by their class position (Goodwin 1997:18). Broadly speaking, Liberalism can be accepted as the ideology of the bourgeoisie, socialism that of the proletariat and conservatism that of the aristocracy.

In parallel, Karl Mannheim was the first to claim that ideologies are “incongruent with reality” but he accepted that this contradictory reality is to preserve the status quo (Goodwin 1997:21; Mannheim 1936):“Mannheim distinguished the particular conception of ideology from the total conception of ideology. The former refers to a set of ideas particular to a group’s special interests, which promotes these interests and decides other groups” (Goodwin 1997:21). On the other hand, according to Barbara Goodwin ideologies have five dimensions (1997:22). First,

they carry certain kinds of beliefs; second, they have an explanatory power about the general structure of the issues and events; third, they display a persuasive force for people; fourth, they claim to be scientific; and fifth they all have irrational and illogical side for the sake of integrity. In short, ideologies are the strategic tools of any political structure. By

By bearing in mind all these functions of ideologies, Conservatism and Anarchism display a great potential to serve neo-liberal policies. In fact, it can be argued that this coalition has already been established in practice since the beginning of the 1980's. At the beginning of the 21st century, this partnership is much more certain than ever. Moreover, rather than a practical partnership, it is possible to say that a new ideology is forming. This study aims to examine this new ideology.

Conservatism and Anarchism are generally thought to be the most counterposed ideologies to each other. In conventional terms, the former puts a great emphasis on authority whereas the latter is totally against the authority and all the authority figures. Conservatism takes inequality as a neutral fact and accepts that all of politics and society 'ought to be' based on this condition. Anarchism, on the other hand, argues that inequality is an outcome of state and authority, that is why it is wrong and 'ought to be' abolished along with the state. However despite these very basic oppositions between them, these two ideologies have more in common than their disparities. Especially in the contemporary era, Conservatism and Anarchism have merged almost totally. This new ideology can be labelled as anarchist conservatism.

To show the similarities between Conservatism and Anarchism, the general

bringing up some certain ideas and beliefs, they define and/or persuade people as to what reality is (no matter if it is rational or not), they define and/impose what is legitimate (with the claim of being scientific) and they serve to prevent any uncontrolled change which could lead to a change in the system.

characteristics of Anarchism and Conservatism are mentioned. However, detailed assessment of these two ideologies is out of the scope of this study. These ideologies will be covered only in terms of their main characteristics and the main focus will be on their similarities rather than their dissimilarities. The various subdivisions or alternative interpretations of each ideology will be investigated only to the extent that these alternations affect the general argument of the paper. From these characteristics, their similar points will be highlighted. Finally, the question of why and how this 'bizarre' alliance is about to be formed will be answered in reference to the coming age Anarcho-Capitalism.

Anarchism

After the usage of the term pejoratively in the times of the French Revolution, Pierre Joseph Proudhon was the first to declare himself as an anarchist in a positive and systematic set of ideas (Heywood 2007:175). In a sense, it can be said that its pejorative meaning and Proudhon's declaration was overlapping since anarchism, in general, is against all the ideals of the French Revolution. Anarchism rejected modernism and showed resistance to progress by attacking all enlightenment notions such as nationality, rationality, and libertarianism. Coming from the word

Anarchy¹ with its meaning “absence of authority” (Goodwin 1997:121) and “without rule” (Heywood 2007), anarchism is totally against the state and government and all kinds of authority. In contrast with the conventional conceptualization of politics that started with Aristotle’s claim that “Man is a political animal” which implies politics and society are inseparable and there is no escape from politics; anarchism asserts that “state and society are completely separable” (Heywood 2007:121). “No government necessary for our welfare. Man a social being: his wants and inclinations make for association and mutual effort... law and order the worst disorder” (Berkman 2005:xxxiii). However, society is “totally absorbed by the state” (Bakunin 1937 in Morrow 1998:48). While society emerges as a ‘natural formation’ (Goodwin 1997:121) with its own rules and order, state is an “artificial manipulative force” (Goodwin 1997:121; Morrow 1998:47) which is evil and unnecessary (Heywood 2007:178-81). Unlike the Hobbesian conceptualization of state as the sole provider of the order, for anarchists “order is an exclusively social phenomenon” (Morrow 1998:46). Thus, rather than providing peace and order, the state is the main reason for inequality and disorder (Morrow 1998:46).

Although “it is hard to generalize anarchist thought” (Goodwin 1997:122), some general characteristics of anarchism can still be mentioned. Where the state is against all kinds of freedom, anarchism’s core value is “personal autonomy” (Heywood 2007:177) and “rational independ-

ence” (Goodwin 1997:138; Morrow 1998:94). With its remarks on “negative freedom”², anarchism rejects the idea and the practice of “social contract” that modern societies rest upon (Heywood 2007:180): “No combined interests to manage... All interest and responsibilities must be entirely individualized...” (Warren 1970 in Morrow, 1998:102).

For anarchism, mankind is “good” by nature and does not need any outside constraints like law and religion. Since religion is a source of authority and since religion produces “obedience and submission” (Heywood 2007:184), state and religion work together for oppression by “conforming standards of good and evil” (Heywood 2007:184): “Religion, the domination of the human mind; Property, the domination of human needs; and Government, the domination of human conduct, represent the stronghold of man’s enslavement and all the horrors it entails” (Goldman 1911:59 in Morrow 1998:47).

Instead of any legal system and of religious standards, moral autonomy should be the organising principle of society. For instance, anarchist thinker Max Stirner took the ego as the basis of his philosophy and argued that there should be no constraints upon the ego (Morrow 1998:101; Stirner 1995). Moreover this egoistic human perfection leads to the economic freedom notion that is against managed capitalism (Heywood 2007:185). Like society itself, economy has its own “natural order”.

The question of the economy and how it will (or should?) operate, creates the main subdivision of the anarchist thought: the collectivist and the individualist anarchism. Collectivist stream has its roots at

¹ Anarchy does not equal to ‘chaos’. Anarchy means without a central authority while chaos equals to a situation where there is no any order and formal or informal organization. See G. Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*, (London: Verso, 2002), p. 30.

² For the concept of “negative freedom” see I. Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958).

socialist thought (Heywood 2007:186). Solidarity and ‘mutual aid’ are the most important elements that a society is based upon. Bakunin (1973) claimed that “Social solidarity is the first human law; freedom is the second” (Heywood 2007:186). The economy will operate according to the principle of mutualism “in which individuals or groups bargain with one another, trading goods and services without profiteering or exploitation” (Heywood 2007:186). However, for collectivist anarchism the issue of private property is blurred in spite of the famous saying of Proudhon that “Property is theft”. Still, for Proudhon there are (or should be?) “possessions” of “independent small holding peasants, craftsmen and artisans” (Heywood 2007:187). Another notion of collectivist anarchism regarding the economy is “anarcho-syndicalism” under which workers will unite and take direct action like general strikes and boycotts. More importantly, syndicates will be “the model of decentralised and non-hierarchical society of the future” (Heywood 2007:189). For another main anarchist thinker Kropotkin “federation of decentralized territorial communes” or “voluntary associations” (Tucker 1970 in Horowitz) should be the founding principle of society (Morrow 1998:100; Kropotkin 1970:127, 123).

What is essential to and characteristics of the federal contract... is that in this system the contracting parties ... not only undertake bilateral and communicative obligations, but in making the pact reserve for themselves more rights, more liberty, more authority, more property than they abandon (Proudhon in Morrow, 1998:95-6).

Individualist anarchism, on the other hand, shows a positive attitude to capitalism and is far from being socialist; it “re-

garded the demands of society as a threat” (Morrow 1998:94). In this sense, Anarchism can be defined as the extreme wing of liberalism. However, unlike liberalism which argues that there should be a minimum state power to establish a legal order so that market forces can operate, individualist anarchism rejects the idea of any state and government control. Being self-interested egoistic entities, individuals should enter into voluntary interaction in unregulated market competition (Heywood 2007:194). Even the public goods and services such as the “maintenance of domestic order”, “the enforcements of contracts” and “protection against external attack” should be privatized and instead of police force and courts, “protection associations and private courts” as well as private prisons should be established (Heywood 2007:194-5). Since these agencies will operate on the basis of profit making, they would be experts on their job and besides they will provide much better service than the state because competition between these agencies will make these services cheaper and more efficient (Heywood 2007:195; Tucker 1970:181). No matter how problematic these ideas are, the fact is, these agencies are already established and have started to operate. In the USA and in the UK there are private courts and private prisons replacing the police and arbitrating force. The Police force is supplemented by “neighbourhood watch”. Again private armies like Blackwater³ are operating in other countries like Iraq and Afghanistan.

Conservatism

³ After being sold, the company’s name changed to “Academi” in 2011. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academi>).

Conservatism first came into the political scene as a reaction to the French Revolution and its ideals like equality, freedom and nationalism. According to the conservative figures like Joseph de Maistre and Edmund Burke, French Revolution “was an evil act” (Vincent 1992:74)⁴. Like anarchism, conservatism is against all the institutions which conservative thinkers call “artificial”. There is a “divinely ordained order in society” (Goodwin 1997:156), and political life is implicitly organic therefore it “cannot be imposed” on society synthetically (Vincent 1992:73-4). In this sense constitutions have “no real meaning” (Vincent 1992:73-4). Humans are “constant over time and circumstances” (Vincent 1992:73-4) and it is a dangerous act to call for equality and freedom in the name of constitution. There is a neutral hierarchy in nature and in society and inequality exists not only between individuals and classes but also between men and women (Goodwin 1997:156). “Knowing your place” (Goodwin 1997:156) is the main rallying cry of conservatism in the name of “keeping something intact” (Vincent 1992:55) with a political anti-philosophy” (Allison 1986 in Vincent 1992:56). According to conservatives, “social differentiation, hierarchy, and functional rather than mechanical consensus are as vital to freedom as to order” (Nisbet 1986:64). In short conservatism is against change and “conservation can often best be brought about by inaction” (Goodwin 1997:165).

Conservatism is far away from being consistent theoretical thinking and it has no “clear theoretical answers to political questions” (Vincent 1992:82), however, it

is still possible to classify some different branches of conservative thinking as ‘authoritarian conservatism’, ‘paternalistic conservatism’ and ‘libertarian conservatism’ (Heywood 2007). To start with paternalistic conservatism, it can be said that it is the moderate branch in contrast with the authoritarian and the liberal branches. It can be summarized as being “cautious, modest and pragmatic” against change. Instead of rejecting and resisting change totally, it tries to be the middle way between the conservation and revolution. Edmund Burke was the banner-bearer of this thinking (Heywood 2007:81). According to Burke change is inevitable but it should be managed for conservation of basic institutions and notions (Heywood 2007:81): “Pragmatic conservatives support neither the individual nor the state in principle, but are prepared to support either, or, more frequently, recommend a balance between the two, depending on ‘what works’ (Heywood 2007:82).

Although conservatism is generally known as an authoritarian ideology, in fact, the second type of conservatism can be accepted as the crudest one with regard to freedom and change. As befits the name, authoritarian conservatism was against the French Revolution and its notions as ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’. Against these ideals autocracy was advocated in favour of the ancient regime (Heywood 2007:79)⁵:

“Probably nowhere has the innate feudalism of the conservative ethic been more visible than in the recurrent response of conservatism to the successive liberationist movements of the modern world” (Nisbet 1986:50). This antagonism against the French Revolution even-

⁴ “All of the early conservatists, and no more deeply than Burke, were horrified by the Jacobin blows to the church in France” (Nisbet 1986:68).

⁵ The French conservative philosopher Joseph de Maistre, was the front man of this perspective.

tually led to support for extreme regimes like those of Benito Mussolini in Italy and Adolf Hitler in Germany. This type of conservatism can be regarded as outdated or at least marginal in politics since almost all conservatives in the contemporary era accept some liberal principles especially in economics. As the best pragmatists, conservatives eventually turned out to be supporters of laissez-faire capitalism eventually.

The third type of conservatism deserves the main attention and focus in terms of the aims of this study. While authoritarian and paternalistic forms of conservatism can be regarded as out of date and out of fashion, libertarian conservatism continues to be effective in domestic, international and/or global politics. Before coming to its function in politics, the main characteristics of this trend can be summarized as ‘atomistic individualism, advocacy of minimal rule of law state, negative liberty notion and support of personal rights’ (Vincent 1992:65). In contrast with conventional conservatism (especially with the paternalist conservatism which gives central importance to social responsibilities and social duties), libertarian conservatism applauds human egoism and rejects any kind of outside constraints to the individual freedoms (Heywood 2007:87). In this sense they are against all kinds of state power. They can be regarded as an extreme wing of liberalism. Especially in terms of the economy, libertarian conservatism argues that there should be no government regulation of the economy. Although liberals accept minimum state power and control is needed in the market, libertarians reject this idea and claim that market has its “natural laws” (Heywood 2007:87). Therefore any kind of intervention should be abolished. Moreover, libertarian conservatives accept market force as an in-

strument of social discipline (Heywood 2007:87).

Although Libertarian conservatism is generally accepted as a relatively new ideological position and is equated with neo-liberalism (Heywood 2007:88-95), its roots go back to the second half of the 19th century. In 1880’s Britain, syndicates like Spencerian Liberty and Property Defence League, Personal Rights Association, Political Evolution Society (later State Resistance Union) were already been established (Vincent 1992:65). Again in Britain, in the 1970’s and early 1980’s, the Institute of Economic Affairs, Aims of Industry, the Adam Smith Institute and the Freedom Association Centre for Policy Studies emerged (Vincent 1992:66). Also in the US, in 1947, the Mont Pelerin Society⁶ (MPS) founded by classical economic liberals like Friedrich A. Hayek and Milton Friedman. The MPS is one of the pioneer association which supports deregulation and privatization with an endless attack on state growth and government control (Vincent 1992:65).

The Inherent Alliance against the Common Enemy: the State Facing the Anarchist Prohibition

Although a descriptive reading of these two ideologies is enough to give an idea about their similarities, a further critical

⁶ “The Mont Pelerin Society is composed of persons who continue to see the dangers to civilized society outlined in the statement of aims. They have seen economic and political liberalism in the ascendant for a time since World War II in some countries but also its apparent decline in more recent times. Though not necessarily sharing a common interpretation, either of causes or consequences, they see danger in the expansion of government, not least in state welfare, in the power of trade unions and business monopoly, and in the continuing threat and reality of inflation” (<https://www.montpelerin.org/montpelerin/home.html>)

analysis still can be made. However a vital point should be cleared up before moving towards the argument that anarchism and conservatism are in essence identical. The most remarkable “rivalry” between them is that while conservatism is pro-authoritarian, anarchism on the contrary is against all kinds of authority. This can be true for authoritarian conservatism which calls for a patriarchal hierarchical system for society. However this version of conservatism was set against the rising modern state power which found its expression in various constitutional movements. Even authoritarian conservatism has some common grounds with anarchism for being also against the modern state system and democratic constitutionalism with a dogmatic belief in the “natural condition”. Therefore in spite of its image as “progressive” and “modern”, anarchism can be regarded as pro-feudal and traditionalist which finds its expression in the romantic nostalgia of a pastoral life⁷. For this reason, it can easily be speculated that if modern states had never emerged, there would be no anarchist thinking. The reactionary character of anarchism is also in support of this argument. This yearning for feudal life can be read from anarchism’s social typology which goes as “[anarchism]... would be organized on the basis of small communities bound together in a loose federation, a social form which avoids the centralization and nationalism...”(Goodwin 1997:126). The same

⁷ The paradoxical merging of anarchism and conservatism was in fact not a new phenomenon; it first came along before 20th and 21st centuries. Scotch philosopher David Hume (1711-76) deserves a special attention here. The words of the Tory politician Ian Gilmour about Hume are worth note noting: “How could a man whose scepticism demolished God, the soul, miracles, causation, natural law, matter and induction be a good conservative?” (Vincent 1992:60).

words can be said by conservatism as well.

Anarchism can be viewed as the battering ram of conservatism against the rule of law and state authority. It can be argued that this is not a new and unique situation that occurred in contemporary times. Conservatism always have a pragmatic character: “...in the last two hundred years conservatism has taken its policies from other political ideologies and defended them all at one time or another. If something works and is accepted, than it is legitimate material for conservative policy” (Vincent 1992:57).

It could be asked that ‘how can a movement like conservatism whose only aim is to preserve what already exists would need a battering ram?’ The answer of this question gives an opportunity to examine the anatomy of conservatism once more. Ironically, historically and yet paradoxically (especially the liberal) conservatism became effective in times of great changes like the 1980s:

In fact, it would be no exaggeration to say that much of the really radical and disturbing social and economic change of the last decade in many industrialized societies has been fomented by liberal conservatism, particularly in Britain and America. Many find this a strange contradiction (Vincent 1992:83).

While conservatism is considered as anti-utopianist (see Goodwin 1997:147), it can be claimed that, the only utopia which is yet to become real is conservative; to be more precise, anarchist conservative. We live in the days of the perfect combination between the most utopian ideology, anarchism, and the most realistic ideology, conservatism.

Table 1: The Similarities of Anarchism and Conservatism

- Attack on Modernism
- Resistance to human progress
- Attack on Enlightenment
- Attack on Nation States
- Anti-Republicanism
- Attack on modern state
- Admiration of Feudalism
- Admiration of rural life
- Egoism
- Self improvement elitism
- Anti-Constitutionalism
- Self-Help
- Against public authority
- Norms and morality
- Laissez-Faire Capitalism
- No artificial manipulation
- Mediation
- Organic Harmony
- Natural formation
- Anti-Reformism
- Anti-Rationalism
- Privatization and Deregulation
- Pragmatism
- Libertarian
- No social service
- Nostalgia
- Negative Liberty
- Anarcho-Capitalism
- Instincts
- Conservators
- Neighbourhood Watch

The table above shows the common characteristics of anarchist and conservative thought and how they coincide extraordinarily. This uncanny unity points out a deeper situation about the current political, economic and socio-cultural life. This 'neutral' (a system which does not need any legal 'artificial' authority -the state- to preserve order) utopia of Anarchist Conservatism would need a struc-

ture which will maintain the order without any political agent. However, this does not mean that there won't be any sanctions. The market or the anarcho-capitalist market will provide the required impersonalized structural power by creating fear of unemployment in order to keep wages down or by establishing the perfect competition conditions which will provide the best justice system and the police force. But it can also be argued that the market by itself alone is inadequate to provide the required ex officio sanctions to solve the problem of maintaining the stability and order without any law system.

Before finishing, another phenomenon can be mentioned here. Contemporary culture philosopher Slavoj Zizek points out the same problem from a different perspective and asks the vital question of "how do we account for this paradox that the absence of law universalizes prohibition?" (Zizek 2008:9). The answer he finds can be accepted as alarming and thrilling since it can be regarded as Zizek indicates, as the essence of anarchist conservatism. Zizek argues that the "Enjoyment" itself will be the main force that will establish the "imposed order". According to Zizek, "when we enjoy, we never do it spontaneously we always follow a certain injunction" (Zizek 2008:9). It can be argued that this certain injunction will provide the needed order within which enjoyment will become (much more) a political factor operating within the Anarcho-capitalist free market⁸.

The general assessment of Zizek's phi-

⁸ The most vivid commonality of anarchism and conservatism is their belief in Anarcho-capitalism in which "market can satisfy all human wants" Heywood 2007:194-5). In a stateless economy, all the activity would be entirely voluntary and impersonal (Heywood 2007:195). All the property should be owned by sovereign individuals.

losophy is out of the scope of this study. However, Zizek's point of view provides clues about the drive of anarchist conservative Free Market Capitalism. The impersonality of the market will provide the so called "neutral order" in which everything that is equals everything that should be. And maybe this is the only possible "utopia" that is about to begin at the second decade of the 21st century.

Conclusion

Ideologies came into being to criticize, manipulate, shape and change the existing political systems. In this sense, although anarchism regards itself as against all kinds of authority and power, it is possible to say that such a position is impossible and no matter its arguments or beliefs are, anarchism is another expression of the "will to power". Anarchism's unconscious cry of power makes it a potential precious ally for conservative thinking.

More speculations can be made based on the framework that this study tried to

figure out. However the main point of this argument is that anarchism and conservatism are becoming one in the contemporary era. No matter their differences are at the surface, their philosophical roots are alike, their enemy is alike (the modern state) and their historical backgrounds are alike. This uniformity helps this functional alliance between conservatism and anarchism. Their attack on constitutional system and state mechanism can be regarded as a signal of coming events in which the notions of law, state and constitution could be laid aside in the name of individual and social freedoms while empowering the impersonal market forces that operate through enjoyment to impose order.

Although conservatism is considered as anti-utopian (Goodwin 1997:147), the only utopia that is yet to become real is a conservative one; to be more precise anarchist conservative one. It is the inherent combination of the most utopian ideology anarchism, on the one hand; and the most pragmatic ideology, conservatism on the other.