Anarchy/ism and Democracy: A Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract
This article is a conceptual analysis of anarchy/ism and democracy, the aim of which is to assess the compatibility between the two concepts. By conceptually outlining anarchism and the history of the term ‘‘democracy’’, the article shows that both anarchism and democracy, in its radical form, attempt to achieve self-government. It submits “radical democracy” as a nuanced, reconciling bridge between the two concepts as a category of passage, a path. Radical democracy is seen as a mix of the “best” features of the participatory and deliberative models. The anarchist scholarship is divided regarding the compatibility between anarchy/ism and democracy. The pro-democracy arguments are often reduced to viewing anarchism as democracy without the state, as in David Graeber (2013) or Wayne Price (2020a, 2020b). The anti-democratic position, by contrasts, portrays democracy as simply another form of rule that must be abolished (Markus Lundström, 2023; William Gillis, 2020).

Inspired by the perspective of Amedeo Bertolo (1999) and Laurence Davis (2020), this article takes the position that anarchism is the most radical form of democracy while anarchy, anarchism’s aim, goes beyond it. In outlining radical democracy’s three main characteristics—(i) maintaining political power among the people; (ii) radical extension of equality and liberty; (iii) challenging oppressive power relationships—the article also reviews some anarchist, anti-democratic arguments presented in the written Mutual Exchange Symposium, titled ‘Anarchy & Democracy’ and organised by the Centre for a Stateless Society in 2017 (republished in 2020). In doing so, the article offers three main, novel and a priori arguments in favour of the pro-democracy camp on the level of theory by elaborating on the aforementioned characteristics.

Keywords: anarchism, democracy, anarchist studies, democratic theory, radical democracy

Introduction

The histories of democracy as a concept and of anarchism as both an ideology and a movement have an interesting relationship. While democratic ways of being have existed since time immemorial (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021; Graeber, 2013; Scott, 2009; Isakhan, 2007; Clastres, 2020 [1974]), democracy is classically associated with the ancient city-state of Athens, at least from the Western perspective. Much contemporary

research on democracy, whether theoretical or empirical, has recently turned to non-Western perspectives, using comparative political theory to incorporate different meanings into scholarship whilst avoiding conceptual stretching and abstract universalism (Weiss, 2020; Gagnon and Beausoleil, 2023; Osterberg-Kaufmann and Stadelmaier, 2020). It is acknowledged that there exists ontological pluralism regarding democracy and that Athenian democracy had its limitations. However, in the spirit of the revolutionary romantics, a more radical notion of democracy, within a left-libertarian framework, may be normatively more suitable for framing democracy in terms of self-government or self-management. In other words, a radical notion of democracy would be better suited for capturing the democratic ideal and promise that served as inspiration for many democratic revolutionaries. Contemporarily, Rojava and the Zapatistas[1] can be viewed as suggestive examples of this radical democracy (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2012; Esteva, 1999).

In a similar vein, anarchism, which fundamentally seeks to oppose all forms of hierarchies and domination (Davis, 2014, p. 219; Gordon, 2008, p. 49), and ultimately to achieve self-government or self-management, can superficially be seen as converging with democracy in this respect. But there are important nuances, objections and caveats that need to be addressed, which is one of the aims of this article. Historically, anarchism as a coherent political ideology and movement arose in the late eighteenth century, primarily in opposition to centralised states and industrial capitalism (Davis, 2014, p. 219), yet it also contained strains of critique against democracy in the nineteenth century. Anarchists opposed the emerging understanding of democracy as a system in which the populaces elect representatives following the American (1776) and French (1789) revolutions, on the grounds that any institution of top-down representation was unjustifiable. Their critique extended beyond universal suffrage. Errico Malatesta (1995 [1926]; 1995 [1924]; 1965) opposed all forms of rule, from constitutional monarchies to direct popular governance. Historical

[1] Rojava (or 'West Kurdistan' in Kurdish) is situated in North-Eastern Syria, and since the 2011 Syrian Civil War it has been a region of deep, grassroot democratic experimentation that follows an anti-state philosophy. The Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, declared its uprising against the Mexican government in 1994, and similarly practices a more profound form of democracy on the ground in opposition to the Mexican state.

anarchists have, however, used majority decision-making within organisations such as the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) and consistently argued that collective decisions should be made in general assemblies (Baker, 2022).

Malatesta (1995 [1924], 1965) contradictorily stressed that authentic 'government of the people' cannot exist because he simultaneously asserted that for "[…] those who really want 'government of the people' […]" majorities and minorities need to live in mutual agreement and compromise. So, he uses "authentic government of the people" to describe his desired anarchist society, whilst arguing that such a government cannot exist. Emma Goldman (2020 [1940]; 2009 [1910]) also emphasised individual freedom over the tyranny of social and state institutions, even though she was arguably in the *social* anarchist camp, since she maintained that advancing social change comes from conscious minorities rather than isolated individuals. The individualist iterations of these, arguably *social*, anarchists, presents a historical creative tension between the individual and community, what Laurence Davis (2019, p. 4) calls the ideal of communal individuality, coming from Alan Ritter's (1980) *Anarchism: A Theoretical Analysis*, where this value is identified. Ritter's argument is that anarchists regard individual and community as mutually dependent values (Davis, 2019, p. 4). Studying other classical anarchists like Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin, Ritter (in Davis, 2019, p. 4) finds that all four share an "[…] understanding of individuality as self-development, and of community as reciprocal awareness". This understanding tries to achieve "[…] the greatest individual development with the greatest communal unity" (Davis, 2019, p. 4). It is asserted, however, that:

> individual and community can never be perfectly reconciled, but only balanced in a dynamic and creative tension, [thus] the revolutionary process is necessarily a never-ending one. (Davis, 2019, p. 19)

It will be seen how the understanding of radical democracy advanced in this article is related to this deeper conception of revolution as process. Moreover, from the perspective of democracy, the same creative tension between individual and community can be seen in Alexander Reid Ross's (2020, p. 196) reading of Malatesta, Goldman, Parsons and Russell,

described as "[…] continued efforts at redeeming democracy in principle while providing a scathing critique of its institutionalisation". What this shows is that the classical anarchists' attitude towards democracy up to World War II was largely critical, even though democratic decision-making mechanisms were practised in organisations like the CNT and necessary collective action was emphasised by key classical anarchist figures, rather than being undermined as is commonly misconstrued.

Reformulations of post-World War II anarchism made it more accepting of the term democracy, inasmuch as the latter was understood as a bottom-up, participatory framework. Evidence of this can be seen in the work of Murray Bookchin (1982) on libertarian municipalism and social ecology, Graeber's (2013) associations of anarchism with democracy, and Noam Chomsky's (1989) juxtaposition of 'a really meaningful democracy' with a capitalist democracy. Practical experiments of a libertarian-socialist nature, such as Rojava and the Zapatistas, also illustrate this trend. These are not strictly anarchist projects but contain significant anarchistic elements. Similar patterns are visible in anarchist elements within the global Occupy and Indignado[2] movements, alter-globalisation mobilisations and numerous prefigurative projects that are normally pushed to the margins of public attention. These projects display libertarian and egalitarian forms of living, where consensual decision-making can take place. Given the recent focus of academic democratic theory on deliberative and participatory models, it seems only natural that similarities, if not identicalities, can be identified between the concepts of anarchy/ism and democracy, both in theory and in practice.

This anarchist reclamation of democracy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, however, has been met with a recent anarchist critique. Today, some anarchists, such as Markus Lundström (2023) and William Gillis (2020), present a fundamental opposition to democracy. Being alert to the potential for majority rule, even within the most direct decision-making frameworks, these anarchists argue that anarchism and its ultimate goal, anarchy, cannot accept any form of rule. Their position is

[2] The Occupy and Indignado movements were anti-austerity protest camps that were partially inspired to action by the Arab Spring developments (2010-2012). The Occupy camps are referenced by anarchist scholars Ruth Kinna and Alex Prichard indicating anarchist ways of organising (Anarchism Research Group Loughborough, 2019). The Indignados are referenced by Laurence Davis (2014) as an example of the same.

that anarchists oppose not only domination itself but also any tendencies towards it. In other words, no arrangement is acceptable if even the slightest amount of domination can 'slip back in'. This argument, among others, is countered here.

This article can be viewed as a second reclamation of democracy within anarchist scholarship, offering novel *a priori* arguments in favour of the pro-democracy perspective. By conceiving radical democracy as a category of passage, which dissolves negative aspects of democracy as it tries to reach anarchy, the author develops four arguments, the first three of which are original[3]: i) Radical democracy is about radically extending equality and liberty, which means that, to stay a radical democracy, the decisions that are collectively made should be self-reinforcing of liberty and equality and not diminutive of them in any way as that would be reactionary and, therefore, counterintuitive; (ii) One of the definitions of radical democracy mentions challenging oppressive power relationships, which should make majoritarianism, or tyranny of the majority, also counterintuitive to radical democracy; (iii) Stemming from the two, radical democracy entails radical inclusion, giving priority to those most affected by collective decisions; and (iv) Any envisioned anarchist society described by anti-democratic anarchists can fit the ideal imagined by pro-democrats. This last contention is rephrased from Leonard Williams (2020, p. 131).

Anarchism

Anarchism is both a political ideology and movement that focuses on achieving anarchy. Anarchists have historically viewed anarchy positively, as a condition of being unruled, because they believe that order does not require rule (Woodcock, 1962, p. 10). That is, order can be achieved without rulers. The word "Anarchy" comes from the ancient Greek word αναρχία ("anarkhia"), which is broken down to "an-'' and "arkhia", with "an" meaning "without" and "arkhia" meaning "ruler" (Dupui-Déri, 2010, p. 13; Marshall, 2010, p. 3). Although its traces and precursors can be stretched back thousands of years, as already mentioned anarchism emerged as a coherent ideology in the late eighteenth century along with

[3] "Radical extension of equality and liberty" actually comes from Dahlberg (2012) but its elaboration to the anarchist debate here is in this sense original. Same goes for the second argument which comes from Philosophy Talk (2019).

the other prominent ideologies of the time—liberalism, socialism, conservatism and nationalism (Davis, 2014, p. 219). Its aim being anarchy, this ideal is often characterised by statelessness, classlessness, free association, non-capitalism, libertarianism and egalitarianism. This definition excludes ideological hybrids, such as anarcho-capitalism and national anarchism, which are arguably outside the anarchist tradition. In political terms, anarchy is more generally portrayed as self-government (Davis, 2020, p. 77; Kropotkin in Kinna, 2005, p. 68). Related terms, including 'self-administration', 'self-management' are used synonymously (Davis, 2020, pp. 75; Davis, 2014, p. 214; Kinna, 2005, p. 68).

Anarchists are against all types of government, except self-government. This is because governments, portrayed in a statist manner, lead to hierarchy and domination—two features that anarchists are centrally opposed to. Governments are often understood as existing externally and above societies that they oversee. For anarchists, this is unacceptable. The condition of being 'overseen' is the same as being 'managed', 'regulated', 'monitored', 'ordered', or 'supervised'. This is a hierarchical arrangement understood as a pyramid that leads to domination. As anarchists reject the state and formal government, an anarchist community must find other ways to manage its affairs without hierarchy and domination. The ethical ideal of self-rule within anarchism stands as the diametric opposite of these through horizontality and consensus. This raises important questions about how political power should be dispersed within society.

Starhawk (in Gordon, 2008, pp. 49–50) distinguishes between three types of power: "power-to", "power-over", and "power-with". "Power-to" refers to the basic capacity to do things and affect reality, for example creating, planting, building and writing. "Power-over" is achieved through domination, whether by physical force or resource-control, and can be found in contexts like the workplace, courts and schools. "Power-with" refers to a non-coercive influence and initiative exercised among equals. Thus, it is "the power not to command, but to suggest and be listened to, to begin something and see it happen" (Gordon, 2008, p. 50). Self-government, desired by anarchists, is arguably characterised as "power-with". While it is often claimed that anarchists are against power altogether and wish to abolish it this is a misconception.

> Anarchists want to 'fight the power', or at least 'the powers that be', and resist all systems of domination […]. (Gordon, 2008, p. 49).

At the same time, they want to empower ordinary people, especially the dispossessed and powerless.

Democracy

Democracy is possibly the most contested concept in political theory. It is commonly understood as "rule by the people" (Lummis, 1996, p. 15; Cammack, 2019, p. 42). Like anarchy, it comes from ancient Greek and is derived from the term δημοκρατία ("dēmokratia"). This is broken down to "dēmos" and "kratia/kratos", where the former means "[…] 'assembly', defined as the collective political agent constituted by the common people" and the latter means "superior physical strength" (Cammack, 2018, p. 2; 2019, p. 45). In ancient Greece, all cities had assemblies (Cammack, 2019, p. 44). However, a "polis" (city-state) was considered a "democracy" when its assembly tipped the balance of power away from the usual ruling elite, (Cammack, 2019, pp. 42, 60). In fact, "[…] *dēmos* and *polis* became used interchangeably when the *dēmos* gained the upper hand over the political elite" (Cammack, 2019, p. 59). In this context, their "kratos" was their physical superiority inasmuch as "[…] *dēmos* was an oppositional term, defined by contrast with the political elite" and this understanding was typical "from Homer to Aeschylus […]", notes Cammack (2019, p. 45). Using *Athênaiôn Politeia*, Cammack (2018, p. 2) indicates that "kratos" became "kurios" when it gained general acceptance. She translates "kurios" as "juridical power or jurisdiction" and infers that:

> […] *dêmokratia* implied the capacity, in the first instance physical but soon enshrined in accepted political processes, of the collective common people to dominate its rivals […]. Who were these rivals? The term *archê* suggests one answer: those who held political office. (Cammack, 2018, p. 2)

Landauer's piece (2023, pp. 376–378) translates "kurios" as "in control" and he connects it with "democratic control" in ancient Greece to mean something like "agenda-setting and initiative". Moreover, analysing

Pericles' *Funeral Oration*, Papanikos argues that if one reads it carefully, they will conclude that:

> Democracy exists when **all** participate to direct (*oἰκεῖν*) the politeia. The word *oἰκεῖν* means that all directly (not through representatives) manage their *politeia*, e.g., its economy, its military, its erection of monuments of arts and worship, and its organization of religious, athletic, and educational festivities. In other words, all people govern and there is no need for anybody to govern **for** the people. Without the all, the many does not define democracy. (Papanikos, 2022, pp. 107–108; original emphases)

Through practice in different contexts, "democracy", as a word, evolved over time. Academically it entails an ontological pluralism regarding its meaning. Jean-Paul Gagnon (2018, p. 95) identified at least 2,234 descriptors (adjectives) for democracy, highlighting its status as an essentially contested concept. In ancient Athens, democracy unfolded in three distinct stages, where each meant an increase in popular power and a corresponding decrease in aristocratic power: 594–508 BC, 508–461 BC, 461–322 BC. After 322BC, aristocratic rule was reestablished (Arblaster, 2002, pp. 16–17, 24). Although limited with regards to slaves, women, and 'metics', Athenian democracy was seen as self-government, or at least a rule by multitude, according to Aristotle (Dunn, 2019, p. 24). In this respect, it was similar to 'politeia', though Aristotle saw the latter as capable of achieving the common good and justice in practice (Dunn, 2019, pp. 24–27). That is, both concepts refer to participatory self-government, but as Dunn articulates, dēmokratia:

> […] was a regime of naked group interest, unapologetically devoted to serving the many at the expense of the wealthier, the better, the more elevated […] democracy is violent, unstable, and menacing to those who already held wealth, power […]. (Dunn, 2019, p. 27)

This was the understanding of dēmokratia that Aristotle transmitted to later European thinkers.

With the likes of D'Argenson (1694–1757), James Madison (1751–1836), Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836) and Maximilien Robespierre

(1758–1794) among others, Dunn (2019) points out how democracy became intertwined with the word republic ("Res publicae" = "the public things") over the years, and that this resulted in democracy being contemporarily understood no longer as self-government, but as a system where ordinary people elect others to govern on their behalf. James Madison (quoted in Dunn, 2019, p. 54), one of the founding fathers of the United States of America, drew a distinction between Democracy and Republic by pointing out how pure democracy was "a Society, consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the Government in person […]" and that:

> the true distinction between these [Greek] communities and the American Government was *the total exclusion of the people in their collective capacity* from any share in it […]. (Dunn, 2019, p. 72)

Thomas Paine (1737–1806) called America's new government at the time as "representation ingrafted upon Democracy […]. What Athens was in miniature, America will be in magnitude" (Dunn, 2019, p. 89). Robespierre wanted Revolutionary France to "eclipse the glory of all previous free people, and become a model for all nations […]", and he declared that the sole form of government which could realise this was:

> democratic or republican: these two words are synonymous, despite the vulgar abuse of language, for aristocracy is no more the republic than monarchy is. Democracy is not a state in which the people, continuously assembled, regulates by itself all public affairs […] Democracy is a state in which the sovereign people, guided by laws which are its own work, does by itself all it can do well, and by delegates all that it could not. (Dunn, 2019, p. 92)

Thus, representative democracy became synonymous with the simple term 'democracy' itself via 'republic'. C.B. Macpherson (2006 [1965]) also points out how the 'liberal' aspect of societies at the time contributed to this synonymity, which is unsurprising considering that contemporary representative democracies are often called 'liberal democracies'.

There has been, however, a revival in understanding democracy in terms of more "participatory self-government" such as seen in the works of Carole Pateman (1970), Charles D. Lummis (1996) and Dimitrios

Roussopoulos and C. George Benello (2005). Contemporary scholarly work on 'models' of democracy, as accounted by David Held (2006, pp. 208–216, 230–254), has in recent decades focused mainly on the participatory and deliberative models, arguably with greater emphasis on the latter.

Radical Democracy

The scholarship of radical democracy has been centred on the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001) and those that came after, but even Mouffe herself pointed out that:

> Our understanding of radical and plural democracy is to be distinguished from many other forms of radical or participatory democracy. What we advocate is a type of "radical liberal democracy" – we do not present it as a rejection of the liberal democratic regime or as the institution of a new political form of society. (Mouffe, 1996, p. 20)

Elsewhere, she described the areas of the liberal tradition that need to be reformulated for the Left to accept that deepening democracy must occur within the liberal-democratic framework and its institutions (Mouffe, 1992, pp. 2–3). As such, the radicality surrounding the Mouffean model is arguably lost. As Karl Marx (1843) put it, to be radical is "to grasp the root of the matter". In other words, radicality involves challenging something at its foundation, and if that foundation cannot be justified then it must be either significantly reformed or overturned altogether.

Lummis (1996, p. 25) described radical democracy as "quite precisely the thing itself". As such, radical democracy will always call for a root meaning of democracy, regardless of any additional descriptors to it. The democratic process is often seen here as open-ended, unfinished, ongoing and reflexive. Scattered in different works, the features of radical democracy brought together can be outlined as the following: (i) maintaining political power among the people; (ii) radical extension of liberty and equality; and (iii) challenging oppressive power relationships (Dahlberg, 2012, p. 491; Lummis, 1996, pp. 22, 25–26; Philosophy Talk, 2019). This conception keeps radical democracy within the left-libertarian camp and rejects any qualifiers that attempt to justify removing political power from the people and placing it in frameworks that are, in effect, top-

down and ‘unradical’. By contrast, radical democracy is ‘bottom-up’, a form of democracy ‘from-below’ (Cairns and Sears, 2012, pp. 12–19). Although overlaps can exist, radical democracy is quite different from Mouffe for it rejects the liberal-democratic regime *in toto* and heavily embraces participation to render a completely alternative society.[4]

Within the paradigm of the ‘models of democracy’, radical democracy can potentially be seen as combining the most valuable attributes of the participatory and deliberative models where those are ones that extend liberty and equality (Figure 1). For the deliberative model, these attributes might include institutions like networking and online forums, a commitment to politics as an open-ended learning process and deliberation intended to instigate reflection among participants (Held, 2006, pp. 246–252). For the participatory model, they could include the democratisation of various spheres of life, critiquing asymmetries of power and a conception of society as experimental (Held, 2006, p. 213). The journey of democracy to radical democracy is reflected in Figure 2.

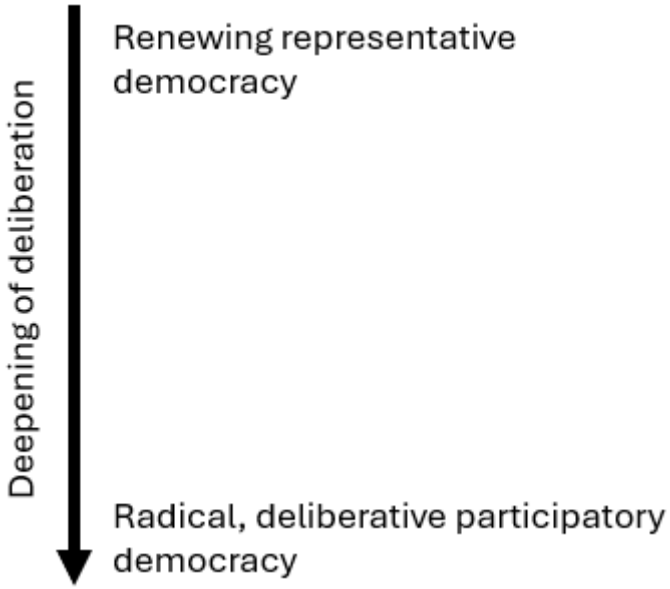

Figure 1: Deepening Democracy
Democracy radicalises as it moves away from representation to deliberation and participation. Source: Held, 2006, p. 253.

[4] John Dewey (1935) supported more participatory forms of democracy, and his input is recognised in viewing democracy as process in different social spheres, but his theories contain finitude to the liberal paradigm and its institutions, similarly to Mouffe despite both of their critique of liberal democracy.

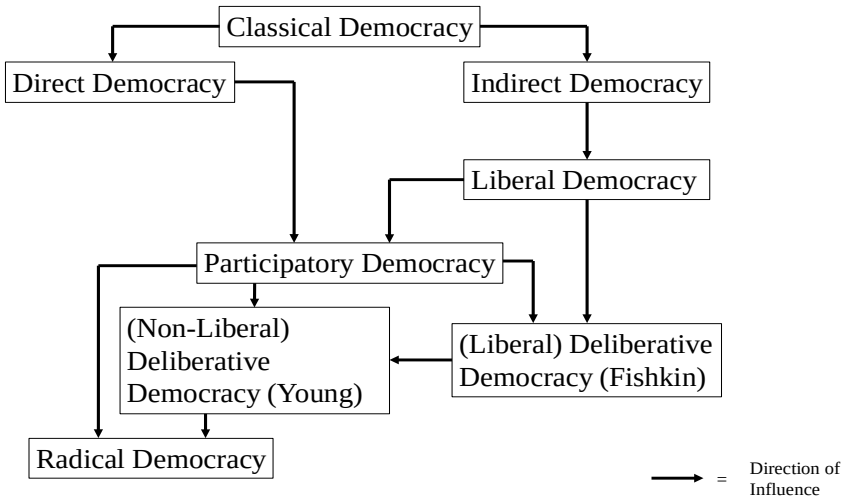

Figure 2: From Democracy to Radical Democracy
Source: Michał Biedowicz.

Anarchism and Radical Democracy

Radical democrats are often inspired by Jacque Rancière whose picture of democratic politics is one of "an emancipatory struggle through which social inequality is made visible and contested" (Schaap, 2021, p. 30). In 2008, Rancière gave an interview to the Anarchist Studies Network where he stated that:

> an-archy in general is the doctrine of the illegitimacy of domination and the practice of bringing into play the capacity of the greatest number. (May, Noys and Newman, 2008, pp. 174–175)

This response was prompted by a question about a statement he had made previously, in which he said:

> democracy is anarchic, in the specific sense that it is based on nothing other than the absence of every title to govern. (May, Noys and Newman, 2008, p. 174)

The relationship between anarchism and democracy is largely twofold. Some view them as incompatible opposites (incompatibilists/anti-

democrats), while others see them as compatible (compatibilists/pro-democrats). Those who are not anarchists often base their opinion on incompatibility through the negative connotations of the term 'anarchy'. This discussion is usually brief and commonplace, often concluding that people simply need to be governed; otherwise, there will be chaos. Anarchists, on the other hand, who view democracy and anarchy as incompatible, hold this belief for three reasons: (i) the idea of anarchy, meaning 'rule by no one', logically refers to the rule by *nobody* literally, not even by the people themselves—it is to abolish *all* forms of government, domination "and encumber […] that very tendency" (Lundström, 2023, pp. 56–57; Gillis, 2020, pp. 153–169); (ii) majoritarianism, where rule by the peoples effectively becomes rule by the majority, which can result in a majority coercing, or dominating a minority in decision-making processes (Malatesta, 1995 [1926, 1924]; 1965; Goldman, 2020 [1940]; 2009 [1910]). This argument is most often advanced by individualist anarchists; (iii) collective decision-making versus voluntarism, wherein democratic decisions are typically voted on and collectively binding, whereas most anarchists prefer consensual decision-making with a right to veto, so that decisions are not imposed, following the principle of voluntarism (Gordon, 2008, pp. 69–70). There are other arguments, but these three are the most predominant in anarchist thought and have been elaborated upon by Malatesta (1995 [1926, 1924]; 1965), Goldman (2020 [1940]; 2009 [1910]), Gordon (2008), Gillis (2020) and Wilbur (2020).

The anarchist compatibilists justify their position in this debate through the following viewpoints, with the first developed here as underlying the others: (i) anarchy means 'absence of a ruler' not rulers*hip* per se. Rule by no one, politically speaking, refers to the condition of no pyramidic power relations, that is no overlords, kings or elites—a condition of no "power/rule-over"; (ii) From this stems the idea that the positive condition of anarchy holds horizontal power relations to be in effect as the pyramid diffuses. Since there is no one 'ruling over', all that is left to do is to manage the society with others on a radically equal basis. The lack of top-down government necessitates bottom-up, collective self-government. Democracy means 'rule by the people'— when people (i.e. everyone, nowadays) participate in government then that is collective self-

government. This causes anarchism to be simply understood as ‘democracy without the state/government’ (Price, 2020a, pp. 173–178); (iii) Both anarchism and democracy, in its radical notion, purvey self-government/self-rule/self-administration as their political goal through radical participation and deliberation (Price, 2020a, p. 176; Wilbur, 2020, pp. 250–252).[5] As with incompatibilists, there exist other reasons, but the ones that follow are the main three. The ideas behind these arguments have been and continue to be held, although perhaps worded somewhat differently in their respective works, by Wayne Price (2020a; 2020b; 2007; 2000), Graeber (2013), Ruth Kinna and Alex Prichard (2019), Paul Goodman (2011), the Anarchism Research Group Loughborough (2019) and others.

The recurring viewpoint is that democracy in its radical notion, that is, radical democracy, and anarchism share a fundamental kinship, save for certain nuances, and in practice can be almost identical. At its core, anarchism opposes hierarchy and domination. This opposition to institutions that maintain hierarchal power relations is a convergence point between anarchists and radical democrats. Hierarchy produces domination and power imbalances, which both resist. Lummis says that radical democracy,

> Is not a kind of government, but an end of government; not a historically existing institution, but a historical project. (Lummis, 1996, p. 22)

While he is not an anarchist himself, his description intuitively connects with anarchist incompatibilists, whose conception of anarchy is to end *all* forms of government. Both anarchism and radical democracy are struggles against top-down power relations, which further supports their compatibility. This connection is complemented by Proudhon’s categorisation of “Regimes”, as presented by Jesse Baldwin (2020, pp. 219–220):

[5] This is because ‘representative democracies’ are opposed by all anarchists, pro- and anti-democratic (Lundström, 2023, pp. 43–44). Therefore, not being a point of contention. Hence also, the phrase ‘reclamation of democracy’ by anarchist pro-democrats, i.e. reclaiming it from the claws of the ‘representative’ state apparatus.

Regime of Authority:
A) Government of all by one — monarchy or patriarchy;
B) Government of all by all — panarchy or communism.
The essential feature of this regime, in both its varieties, is the non-division of power.
Regime of Liberty:
A) Government of all by each — democracy;
B) Government of each by each — an-archy or self-government.

Baldwin (2020, p. 219) points out how Proudhon related anarchy as an evolutionary successor to democracy, even though they both rejected the latter. This article argues that radical democracy can be used as a category of passage to make the succession occur (that is a point '(A/B)' in the above categorisation of Liberty). Knowing that radical democracy is a left-libertarian idea (and so is anarchism); an attempt at radically extending liberty and equality (Dahlberg, 2012, p. 491) (and so is anarchism); and maintaining political power among the people and not delegating it (through force or otherwise) to an external 'overlord', it can therefore be understood as method for achieving anarchy. While the third aspect can be easily criticised by incompatibilists to point out how power among the people can lead to majoritarianism, it is necessary to see that such majoritarianism would go against the second aspect of having *everyone's* liberty and equality radically extended. It is therefore normatively important that the radical-democratic practice in its decision-making process is self-reinforcing of liberty and equality. This makes majoritarianism, or tyranny of the majority, contradictory to radical democracy.

The question of popular sovereignty can arise here, as majoritarianism is arguably one of its instantiations. Sovereignty is understood as "[…] supreme authority within a territory", and most democratic theorists by 'popular sovereignty' would mean "[…] people ruling through a constitution" (Philpott, 2011, pp. 562–563). This notion has been rejected by some anarchists in, for instance, their divergence from Rousseau's notion of the general will (Read, 1941). Yet other anarchists, like in the CNT, have, in recognising individual sovereignty of their members, emphasised also the obligation to comply with majority decisions as per the

CNT constitution, and effectively prioritised the latter (Baker, 2022). Bakunin's words of "pseudo-sovereignty" in relation to representative democracy also presents an indirect positive viewpoint for the concept (Baker, 2022). Therefore, the attitude towards popular sovereignty, as much as toward democracy, is not unison and tensions exist, insofar as anarchism is a diverse tradition containing individualist and collectivist strands. Similarly with radical democracy as outlined here. Its emphasis on reminding the people that they are the source of political power is conjoined by the other two characteristics which stress the respect for individual sovereignty, echoing Gordon's "fighting the powers that be" in anarchism whilst empowering ordinary individuals. It is the same tension as redeeming democracy in principle by classical anarchists with a simultaneous critique of its institutionalisation.

Presenting radical democracy as a category of passage that leads to fully realised anarchy is also an acknowledgment that the two should not be simplistically reduced to one another. Rather, the nuance is that anarchism is the most radical form of democracy while anarchy goes beyond it[6] (Davis, 2020, pp. 70–71, 75). This makes sense for compatibility does not necessarily mean 'sameness'. This is also inspired by Amedeo Bertolo (1999) whose discussion of anarchism as libertarian democracy appears to be no different to radical democracy understood here, at least on the principal level. Such understanding of anarchism *vis-à-vis* democracy opens up the possibility of making the relationship more dialectical, wherein radical democracy is the sublation process in overcoming democracy's usual negative characteristics.

Anarchy-Democracy Symposium

The Centre for a Stateless Society organised a written Mutual Exchange Symposium in 2017 to gather arguments prevalent to the topic on the anarchism-democracy compatibility through discussions among activists and scholars—the most recently organised symposium. The proceedings of

[6] This understanding of (radical) democracy as an ideal *and* a process resonates with existing currents in utopian studies which see utopias not as static blueprints but as ongoing, transformative processes (see Levitas, 2013; York, 2023). In this framework, anarchism is the *political project* and *theory* of achieving anarchy, radical democracy is the *method*, and anarchy is the *horizon* (the goal not as a final blueprint, but as a continually unfolding and deepening condition).

the symposium were published the same year, with a second edition, edited by James Tuttle, following in 2020. While Baldwin, Price, Wilbur and Gillis, who are already cited above, all presented at this Symposium, what follows only provides a review of Gillis's entries, with some attention also paid to Wilbur's. These two have been chosen for consideration as their points largely encompass those of the others. In reviewing the arguments of other anti-democrats present at the Mutual Exchange Symposium, while from a different angle, the same points would be largely repeated if engaged here. The review proposes small counterpoints, which should be treated as elaborations of the first three arguments presented underneath (Figure 3).

PRO-DEMOCRACY	ANTI-DEMOCRACY
Kevin Carson	Jesse Baldwin
Nathan Goodman	Peter Jefferson
Robert Kirchner	William Gillis
Wayne Price	Shawn P. Wilbur
	Derek Wittorff
Alexander Reid Ross (undefined) Jessica Flanagan (non-democrat)	

Figure 3: Category of Anarchists in the C4SS Symposium

The main arguments in favour of the 'pro-democracy' camp are as follows.[7] (i) Radical democracy is about radically extending equality and liberty, which means that, to stay a radical democracy, the decisions that are collectively made should be self-reinforcive of liberty and equality and not diminutive of them in any way as that would be reactionary and, therefore, contradictory. (ii) One of the definitions of radical democracy mentions challenging oppressive power relationships, which should make

[7] (ii) and (iii) implicitly address the discord caused by the major pro-democracy argument that collective decisions must be somehow made, an argument to which anarchists usually counter precisely with concerns about majoritarianism and collective coercion of minorities.

majoritarianism, or tyranny of the majority, also counterintuitive to radical democracy. (iii) Stemming from the two, radical democracy is about radical inclusion and giving priority to those most affected by the collective decisions made. (iv) Any envisioned anarchist society described by the anti-democratic anarchists can fit the desired imaginary held by the pro-democrats. This is rephrased from Leonard Williams (2020, p. 131), and while it is not novel, it pertains to Wilbur (2020), who will be further examined below.

William Gillis

William Gillis makes many points about the meaning of democracy interpreted in many ways such as "having a say in the things that affect you", or as a "transitory state", etc. For the former he proclaims an example

> if everyone in your generation starts using Snapchat – which you dislike – that puts you at a disadvantage: such an emergent norm clearly affects you in a negative way. But this doesn't and shouldn't give you cause to bring your peers before the city council and demand that Snapchat be outlawed. The norms of freedom of association, freedom of information, and bodily autonomy cleave out distinct realms of action that can affect third parties immensely yet should not […] be dictated or constrained by them. (Gillis, 2020, p. 165)

However, this example is more of an instance of tyranny of the minority than it is of the majority, which for anarchists is intuitively worse. This is because, trying to dictate to your peers to stop using Snapchat by going to the council and outlawing it because 'you don't like it' and you feel 'affected', is rather bringing out a private preference to capriciously dominate over a given group, which prohibits their freedom of association. It is easy to agree with Gillis in principle regarding this freedom of association, but this is not an argument against democracy for, by presenting this point as it is, he seems to say that democracy privileges the individual when in the rest of his work he argued the opposite, that it is a tyranny of the majority. In a radical democracy, where those who are most affected by the collective decisions made are given priority of voice, this relates to instances where, for example, there is an important road that needs to be built, but according to construction plans it has to go through houses belonging to someone, who therefore will be affected by the

construction plans. This situation is indeed about prioritising the individuals living in those houses as they are clearly the most affected and vulnerable. It is an instance of considering that they could be substantially worse off, and the decision made could make them dispossessed and powerless. But their priority of voice on this matter is not viewed as their individual preference dictating the collective decision made. The difference between the Snapchat scenario and this one is that the former is not about empowering a seriously deprived individual through a fair lens. There needs to be an important distinction between 'prioritising' and 'privileging'.

It is true that the masses can be horrifically wrong, which is the penultimate area of consideration for Gillis. It regards situations where a thing could be popularly desired and unethical at the same time (Gillis, 2020, pp. 168–169). Indeed, regarding the hypothetical example above such a situation would manifest if the decision to build a road through these houses would take place without a serious and fair regard for the people living in them. But once that happens, it should be noted that it means this radical democracy has been compromised by its own authors. It stopped being a radical democracy the moment it decided to oppress the people living in those houses, because it is a situation of oppressive power relationships being reinstated. The radical equality and freedom of the people living in those houses has been curtailed. It is no longer a 'rule by all' if part of 'all' is being oppressed. If 'challenging oppressive power relationships' is taken seriously, then this hypothetical situation cannot be regarded as 'democratic' via radical lens.

With respect to the last area of concern in this entry for Gillis (2020, p. 168), "democracy as a transitory state", he attempts to make a point that:

> democracy is in almost every definition a kind of centralisation […] [and] even those with sharp anarchist ideals start feeling the pressure to go to the General Assembly rather than doing things outside of it as actual agents.

It seems that Gillis does not recognise the fact that democracy is the most decentralised of 'archies' in existence. The people are the source of political power. In a radical democracy they would use it to manage their own affairs in their own neighbourhoods. And yes, the aim should be to asymptotically

approach the most anarchist of ideals and not their half measures, but even in the most ideal anarchy, that does not use the language of democracy, going to a more-than-two-person gathering of a kind will still occur if requisite to feasibly consider matters pertaining outside of one's neighbourhood but still concerning one's greater community.

Approaching the end, Gillis conflates his previous areas of concern to one point—that the pro-democrats are concerned about immediacy in the term "direct" democracy. That this stems from a philosophical confusion regarding freedom is Gillis's (2020, p. 169) argument here, because immediacy diminishes needed reflection and constrains the panel of available choices; it "smothers one's internal complexity, reducing an agent to a mere billiard ball". This is regarded by Gillis (2020, p. 169) as the opposite of what he calls "a more organic network of reflective individuals […]". But radical democracy is mostly concerned about being a reflexive, unfinished, and ongoing process. This process would not have those characteristics if it did not require of its participants proper agency and reflection. By having these features, the considered radical democracy is as organic as it possibly can be in the existing social reality. On the side, it seems counterintuitive for an anarchist to accuse another of 'immediacy'. If anything, this is what the anarchist framework is all about, regarding taking matters into one's own hands due to circumstances presenting a point of urgency.

Gillis's ending remarks are about demolishing rulership altogether. In his words:

> Anarchism's uniqueness is that it doesn't seek to equalise rulership but to demolish it, a radical aspiration that cuts through assumptions of our dystopian world. Anarchism isn't about achieving a *balance* of domination – assuring that each person gets 5.2 milliHitlers of oppression each – but about *abolishing* it altogether. (Gillis, 2020, p. 171)

The perception of authentic anarchist pro-democrats is not that by equalising rulership each person gets a certain amount of oppression or domination. Rather, by equalising rulership, it is ensured that oppression and domination become neutralised. By "cutting through the assumptions of our dystopian world" Gillis possibly means the fact that political power is generated through our social relations and that anarchism, in his eyes,

attempts to go beyond this sociological fact. But this political power is entangled with people's ability to do other things and these cannot be separated. As much as a person uses their hands to cook a meal for their family and neighbours, those same hands could be used to kill someone. This does not mean that one should cut their hands off in the name of anarchy. Indeed, anarchism should strive for a society where the tendency to rule has been encumbered, but it needs to be recognised that it will not bring the end of ruler*ship*. The political power that is generated by social relations, even if unintentionally, should rather be redirected in such a way that any *ex-post* oppression and domination is overcome. Political power cannot be eradicated *ex-ante*; we can only sublimate its current so that its effects are not oppressive and thus non-dominative. This fits the anarchist framework as it alludes back to Gordon's paradigm above regarding 'fighting the powers that be' and empowering ordinary individuals. This is also in response to Lundström's (2023, pp. 56–57) account which argues for not only needing to oppose domination but also encumbering that very tendency.

Shawn P. Wilbur

Shawn P. Wilbur in his second entry presents conditions for building a road towards a society which is grounded in the principle of federation and sociology of collective force, understood in Proudhonian fashion, outlining it as a possibility for how anarchic self-government might function in practice. The said 'conditions' are rather four basic observations Wilbur makes about social organisation. The first observation relates to the ongoing overestimation of the importance of specific decision-making mechanisms:

> We need to make sure that the plans which seem to serve specific local needs can be met with local resources, which will further narrow the possibilities [regarding options in terms of procedures for collective decision-making]. (Wilbur, 2020, p. 253)

Wilbur connects this with a point where a hypothetical assembly might not reach unanimity and resort to a majority vote as it might seem useful circumstantially. And that this *government* is called *self-government* is what Wilbur finds irreconcilable.

Moving to the second observation, Wilbur (2020, p. 253) points out how, due to the above, the notion of self-government revolves around a wrong sort of *self*:

> The "self" in anarchic self-government is neither simply the human individual, nor "the People," understood abstractly, but some real social collectivity.

Individuals may find themselves in conflict regarding their own desires in contrast to those of the collectivity. Negotiations can be structured quite explicitly around the likely trade-offs. In this light, Wilbur (2020, pp. 253–254) says:

> To the extent that the health and success of the collectivity depends on lively forms of conflict among the members (and Proudhon made complexity and intensity of internal relations one of the markers of the health – and the *freedom* – of these entities), then the more conscious all members must be of the need to maintain balance without resorting to some winner-take-all scenario.

Wilbur admits that there will be conflicts which cannot be resolved in some one grand collectivity and that smaller-scale ones would need to be established pertaining to interested parties and that this should come from below, addressing shared interests in existing smaller groups, and then on a larger scale concerning not just one small group but others as well. This unfolds federalism, Wilbur (2020, p. 254) notes and argues with his third observation that "the 'nucleus' of every unity-collectivity is likely to be a conflict, problem or convergence of interests". Regarding the last observation Wilbur says (2020, p. 254):

> Organisation, according to the federative principle, is a process by which we identify – or extricate – specific social "selves", on the one hand, or establish their involvement in larger scale collectivities, on the other, and establish the narrow confines within which various "democratic" practices might come into play.

With this, Wilbur admits that sometimes we would be ‘falling back’ on some familiar democratic practices but that this would, in his eyes, constitute a failure within an anarchist society.

Apart from this last note on ‘falling back’, it seems difficult to not argue that the process which Wilbur describes is in fact one of radical democratic practice, ongoing, unfinished, reflexive, and open-ended. However possibly unaware Wilbur might be of this radical-democratic framework, there really seems to be no other way than to say that the anarchist society which the anti-democratic anarchists want to unfold is one which can be achieved via radical democracy as a category of passage, a path. This has been denoted by another anarchist scholar Leonard Williams (2020, p. 131) who said, “In presenting an anarchist alternative to democracy […] we often finish by describing something very much like it”. What this invokes, in a sense, is radical democracy as the self-overcoming of democracy into anarchy. It is understood as the bridge between democracy and anarchy where each metaphorical wooden plank towards anarchy is a step away from those negative aspects of democracy, such as unreflective popular sovereignty, which anarchism critiques and overcomes as it progresses. Figure 4 is a rough visualisation of this. Lundström (2023, p. 46) called this ‘democracy-as-trajectory’, so the viewpoint is not novel, but its defence here is, with relation to what gradually happens to *ex-post* power as the endeavour toward anarchy unravels. Lundström (2023, pp. 47–48) cites Third World anarchists and Malatesta himself who argue this way, to build his final anarchist critique of democracy centred on the encumbering of the tendency to rule. What is possibly underestimated, however, is the fact that this will be a long *process*, which is how radical democracy is above all defined.

To conclude this section, both Gillis and Wilbur attempted to advance their anti-democratic arguments by referring to the usual critique—majoritarianism, democracy as still a form of rule, etc. Radical democracy, however, is presented here as a dialectical remedy. Knowing that anarchy goes beyond democracy, the radical democracy conceived here is a process of letting go of the usual features of democracy that anarchists find troublesome. This includes, for example, a progressing change of attitude and treatment of political power when it is being diffused, greater emphasis for consensual decision-making, eventual non-bindingness of collective

decisions, and, if discord arises, the freedom to leave the community and form a separate association if some wish so. Radical democracy which is defined as an open-ended, unfinished, and a reflexive process, characterised by the main three features described above, is seen as the practice of this.

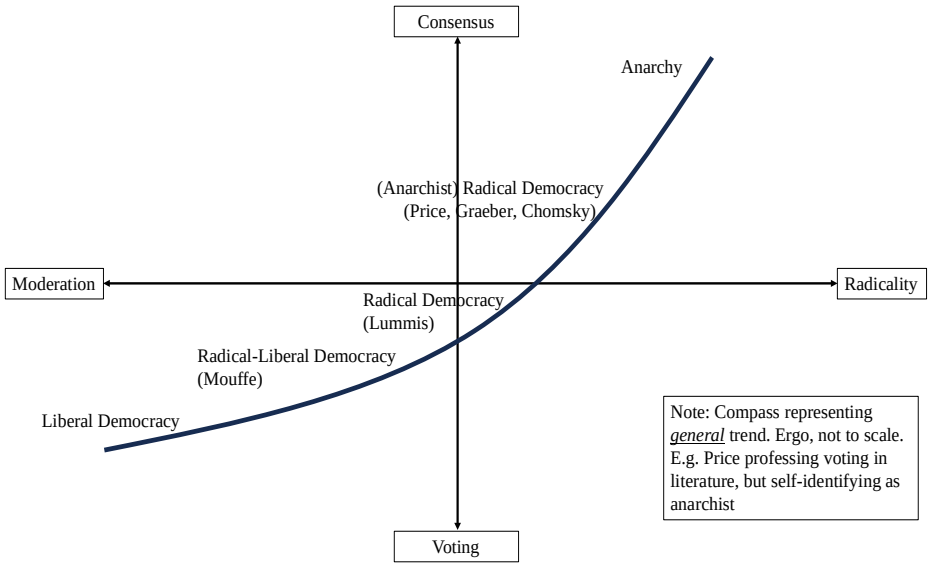

Figure 4: Scholarly Path of Radical Democracy
Source: Michał Biedowicz.

Conclusion

It was attempted to convince the reader that when it comes to the debate regarding the compatibility between anarchy/ism and democracy, it seems appropriate to take on a more nuanced approach and understand that while anarchism and democracy may be compatible, they are distinct, and that anarchy is a more far-reaching goal, with its attainment pertaining to none other framework but that of radical democracy, outlined here, as a category of passage, a practice of an open-ended nature, reflexive in its decision-making format, and, arguably, the only model of democracy that is most sensitive to the concerns that anarchists hold.

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