

**Anarchism against anarchy. The global anarchical society as a statist world and the prospects for an anarchist international relations.**

At one level the relationship between International Relations (IR) and anarchism resembles a Hollywood romantic comedy about two would-be lovers who keep almost meeting, except it seems bereft of the inevitable happy meeting that resolves and completes the story. Chance ‘almost-meetings’ abound though: we have Proudhon’s interest in international affairs, Laski’s reading of Bakunin, Mitrany’s use of Proudhon and Kropotkin, and underlying it all (the reason why they are destined to be together) a common interest in ‘an order without an orderer’ that manifests itself in IR as the international anarchy. As perhaps can be seen from my title I have my doubts about this ‘date with destiny’, mainly because the supposed chemistry between anarchism and IR is based not on a natural compatibility, but rather on an accident of language. Actually, that is not quite true. There is a strong compatibility between anarchism and IR, and indeed there is a place in both IR and anarchism for an anarchist IR. However, this possible link has nothing to do with any affinity between the idea of the international anarchy and anarchism, but rather could come about because of anarchism’s incompatibility with the idea of the international anarchy. There is also still much work to be done to bridge the gaps between IR and anarchism. So this is no love story destined to come together under fireworks in a night sky, but rather a relationship that needs to be worked at.

My main argument is that the development of the international anarchy as an idea in IR is incompatible with anarchism largely because the international anarchy is a thoroughly statist order. I demonstrate this through a discussion of the evolution of

the idea of the international anarchy in the first section of this article. Having said this, and taking into consideration criticisms of the concept of the international anarchy from within IR, the concept does have something to offer anarchism. However, rather than being a template for an ‘order without an orderer’, the idea of the international anarchy can serve as a warning for anarchists about the consequences of ignoring global politics. Put another way, anarchists need to take the issue of the relationship between societies seriously. To a certain extent this process has already begun through the work of Alex Prichard.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, IR could benefit from an anarchist analysis of the problems of global politics. This is explored in the second section which, while acknowledging the many criticisms of the anarchy problématique from within IR, argues that there is still an underlying problem with leaving relationships between societies in a structureless condition. Having made the case for the importance of an anarchist IR to anarchism, the final section looks at the possible direction that an anarchist IR might take given the earlier discussions of the idea of the international anarchy. I argue that anarchism’s opportunity to contribute to IR lies in a development that can be seen as the other side of the coin from the international anarchy. If the international anarchy is interpreted as the manifestation of the state’s security role in the international realm, then the proliferation, over the last century and a half, of many international organisations covering issues of so-called ‘low’ politics can be seen as the projection of the welfarist element of the state into the global sphere. Interestingly, this welfarist element, in contrast to its development domestically, has detached itself from the state, and thus from an

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Alex Prichard, ‘Justice, Order and Anarchy: The International Political Theory of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865),’ *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 35, no. 3 (2007): 623-45.

anarchist point of view is not as problematic as the idea of the welfare state. There is already an anarchist-inspired IR that studies these international welfarist ‘functional’ organisations in the shape of the work of David Mitrany. I suggest that elements of his work could form the basis of a new anarchist theory of global governance. Thus, the skeleton of an anarchist IR that is deeply critical of the international anarchy already exists.

### **What is the international anarchy?**

Studies of the international anarchy begin in the nineteenth century with a growing realisation that changed circumstances have made the international realm a serious and necessary object of study. This is not to say that there were not discourses of (international) anarchy prior to the nineteenth century, but that a sustained study of the international as an anarchy begins in the late nineteenth century. Perhaps one of the clearer pre-nineteenth century statements of the problem of international anarchy can be found in David Hume, where he contrasts the potentially progressive world inside the state (capable of reform and progress to better systems of government and living) with the relations of states (cyclical, caught in a heroic age struggle, and incapable of any real change). It was from this that Hume advanced his argument for the balance of power, as a way of keeping the liberties perfected inside the state from being undermined by the competition between states for power. Hume’s rather dismissive construction of international politics rested on the knowledge that the then largely agrarian state required little from other states to make it happy and prosperous.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> David Hume ‘Essay on the Balance of Power’ in *Essays Moral Political and Literary*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1985).

This situation no longer applied a century later, where social theorists had to wrestle with the problem of industrialised great powers that now relied on global flows of trade, finance and labour in order to maintain their existence, let alone to enhance their power in relation to other states. By the 1890s a cluster of theorists had argued that the peculiarities of the state system in an industrialised era meant that Hume's balance of power and benign neglect of the international was no longer valid.<sup>3</sup> One trajectory of this discourse was to accept the 'natural' anarchical structure of the world of states, and to construct a science that understood the dynamics of state rise and decline. New studies of the nature of the state and its role in a competitive system of states emerged that had their roots in physical geography and history. In Germany it was developed most fully in the new 'anthropogeography' of Friedrich Ratzel that moved effortlessly from an attempt to understand the effects of the natural environment on human societies, towards a study of how the state as a quasi-organism reacts with its environment and with other states. The laws governing the behaviour of states were seen as analogous to the laws governing the relationships between organisms in the state of nature. Although Ratzel rejected the idea that the state was an organism – or even that it necessarily behaved as though it was an organism (as an aggregate of its people it was held together by 'spiritual' forces, not biological ones)<sup>4</sup> – he did interpret relations between states as following a pattern that was not dissimilar to the conflict between species over a set natural environment. Control of space is seen as the precondition of all other necessities of life, but especially food.

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the problem of anarchy within political science see Brian Schmidt, *The Political Discourse of Anarchy. A Disciplinary History of International Relations* (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Ratzel, *Politische Geographie*. (Munich/Berlin: Oldenburg, 1897), 11-12; Friedrich Ratzel, *Anthropogeographie* (Stuttgart: J. Engelhorn, 1899), 2.

Consequently the struggles between peoples were a struggle for space (*Kampf um Raum*), and war the means of gaining space.<sup>5</sup> This *Kampf um Raum* becomes the basis of the relations of states, and imperial acquisitions (in all parts of the world) becomes the mark of a great power.<sup>6</sup>

Ratzel's student Ellen Churchill Semple took this idea of the conflict over space, bereft of Ratzel's cautionary point that the state was not really an organism, and introduced it to an American audience. History for Semple becomes repetition because of the effect of this environmental constant.<sup>7</sup> Yet, the idea of a natural social Darwinist conflict in American thought pre-dated Semple's introduction of Ratzel's political geography. Fredrick Jackson Turner's discussion of the effects of the closing of the American frontier line in 1890 was interpreted by many of his readers as a call for a new aggressive US foreign policy that would compete in global politics, and hence substitute expansion abroad for the lost rigors of the frontier.<sup>8</sup> This take on foreign policy was to be particularly attractive to the popular American writers Homer Lea and Brooks Adams. Rudolf Kjellén, a Swede much read in Germany, took this one step further, arguing that state expansion was a necessity born of the need to provide for its peoples, and great powers in particular were drawn to the imperative of expansion.<sup>9</sup> What these approaches had in common was the construction of an idea of an international as analogous to the struggle between species in the natural world. The

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<sup>5</sup> Ratzel, *Politische Geographie*, 381.

<sup>6</sup> Ratzel, *Politische Geographie*, 247, 357.

<sup>7</sup> Helen Churchill Semple, *Influences of Geographic Environment on the Basis of Ratzel's System of Anthro-Geography*. London: Constable, 1911), 2.

<sup>8</sup> See William Appleman Williams, *The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy. The Pacific Historical Review*. 24 (1955): 379-395.

<sup>9</sup> Rudolf Kjellén, *Der Staat als Lebensform*. Leipzig: Hirzel 1917) 81, 153ff.

import of this was that states inhabited a state of nature in which the law of survival was paramount. Thus, the international was a realm of anarchical struggle that obeyed laws of nature and necessity, not human laws.

To a large extent these social Darwinist arguments are not truly international theories since they were not interested in how the international worked *per se*, but rather with how their particular states could gain advantages by understanding the nature of relations between states. As a result they did not need to discuss the international anarchy: ‘Students of national security who are nationalistically inclined... have no more reason to speak of global anarchy than a fish have reason to speak of water.’<sup>10</sup> It was those who opposed this approach who were most concerned with how the international worked. The reaction against this idea of the naturalness of inter-state conflict, which was to give international thought the phrase ‘international anarchy’, can be classed as an international theory inasmuch as it tried to understand the workings of international relations as a system in its own right, rather than as a means towards the ends of specific states. While criticisms of the politics as usual in the pre-1914 balance of power can be found in the writings of Norman Angell and H. N. Brailsford, it was G. Lowes Dickinson’s 1916 work *The European Anarchy* that gave a new name to the relationship that existed between states.

At one level Dickinson’s analysis of European history supports much of the social Darwinist arguments of Ratzel, Semple, and Kjellén. States exist in a world dominated by conflict:

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<sup>10</sup> Richard K. Ashley, ‘Untying the Sovereign State: A double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique’ *Millennium*, 17 (1988): 240.

For it is as true of an aggregation of States as of an aggregation of individuals that, whatever moral sentiments may prevail, if there is no common law and no common force the best intentions will be defeated by lack of confidence and security... and there will be, what Hobbes truly asserted to be the essence of such a situation, a chronic state of war, open or veiled... and the more the States arm to prevent a conflict the more certainly will it be provoked, since to one or another it will always seem a better chance to have it now than to have it on worse conditions later.<sup>11</sup>

‘While this anarchy continues’ Dickinson goes on to argue, states ‘will endeavour to acquire supremacy over the others for motives at once of security and of domination, the others will combine to defeat it, and history will turn upon the two poles of empire and the balance of power.’<sup>12</sup> After this, though, the agreement with the social Darwinists breaks down. For Dickinson this state of anarchy is not a natural order, but rather, one that was established by states, and perpetuated by them. It was the creation of the sovereign state in the fifteenth century that saw the establishment of an international anarchy.<sup>13</sup> Not only is the international anarchy a construction of the state, it is also increasingly unstable and dangerous. Each war is becoming ‘more terrible, more destructive, and more ruthless than the last.’<sup>14</sup> Since the international

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<sup>11</sup> G. Lowes Dickinson, *The European Anarchy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1916), 9-10.

<sup>12</sup> Dickinson, *European Anarchy*, 10-11.

<sup>13</sup> Dickinson, *European Anarchy*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Dickinson, *European Anarchy*, 145.

anarchy was the creation of a particular time in history, rather than a natural phenomenon, the answer lay in developing a new system to replace it:

...so will the States of Europe and the world be unable to maintain the peace, even though all of them should wish to maintain it, unless they will construct some kind of machinery for settling their disputes and organizing their common purposes, and will back that machinery by force. If they will do that they may construct a real and effective counterpoise to aggression from any Power in the future.<sup>15</sup>

Dickinson was not alone in his view that it was the international anarchy that was the root cause of the First World War. Writing the year before in another influential text Leonard Woolf argued that ‘... society is so complex that though the majority of men and women do not want to fight, if there are no laws and rules of conduct... they will find themselves at one another’s throats before they are aware of or desire it.’<sup>16</sup> The views expressed by Woolf and Dickinson influenced most British and American commentators during the inter-war years.<sup>17</sup> Part of the attraction of the idea of the international anarchy was its hearty rejection of the pre-1914 rationalism that had assumed that if people were to fully appreciate their situations then states and statesmen could be convinced that their interests lay in preserving peace. The international anarchy argument centred around the idea that the structure of the

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<sup>15</sup> Dickinson, *European Anarchy*, 152-3.

<sup>16</sup> Leonard Woolf, *International Government* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1916), 7.

<sup>17</sup> Torbjørn Knutsen, ‘A Lost Generation? IR Scholarship before World War I’, *International Politics*, 45 (2008): 668.

system of states caused wars by the absence of a machinery to prevent it, and that this lay outside the wishes and desires of people. Norman Angell, who had by his own admission been guilty of a pre-1914 rationalism, adopted the concept of the international anarchy wholeheartedly after 1918, even using it as a title of one of his publications.<sup>18</sup>

Dickinson's analysis saw the international anarchy as a problem that could be solved by global-level institutions. In the generation of IR scholars that followed Dickinson, Angell and Woolf the concept of international anarchy would be given a different twist. While agreeing with Dickinson's criticism, they were equally critical of any possible solution, and hence interpreted international politics as tragedy. While Martin Wight agreed that the 'fundamental cause [of war] is the absence of international government; in other words, the anarchy of sovereign states', he also saw anarchy as 'the characteristic that distinguishes international politics from ordinary politics.'<sup>19</sup> Thus anarchy became something dangerous, yet also a defining feature of the current order. Butterfield saw the 'Hobbesian fear' that marked the international anarchy as 'man's universal sin.' His lamentations on the failings of this system were matched by a tragic sense that the solutions offered by people like Dickinson were unworkable: Advocates of the 'new diplomacy of the League and UN were 'specialists in wishful thinking', who failed to see that 'the kind of human predicament which we have been discussing is not merely so far without a solution, but the whole condition is a standing feature of mankind in world-history.'<sup>20</sup> For

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<sup>18</sup> Norman Angell, 'The International Anarchy', in Leonard Woolf (ed.), *The Intelligent Man's Way to Prevent War* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933).

<sup>19</sup> Martin Wight, *Power Politics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), 101-2.

<sup>20</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *History and Human Relations* (London: Collins, 1951), 31.

Nicholas Spykman ‘the character of anarchy’, which was the normal condition that defined relations between states, was only seen *within* states ‘in periods of crisis.’<sup>21</sup> This sense of tragedy was developed further by Morgenthau, who simultaneously presented the balance of power as a reality difficult to transcend, and as an arrangement that was inherently unstable.<sup>22</sup> Morgenthau’s unhappiness with this tragic juxtaposition can be gauged from his 1966 endorsement of David Mitrany’s functional approach as the best possible way out of this bind.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the international anarchy goes from being a pathology rooted in a specific historical order emerging out of the development of the modern state, to being a trans-historic<sup>24</sup> tragic human condition that has no current solution.

This turn to the tragic and natural in the generation after Dickinson was followed in the next generation by the dropping of the tragic in favour of an idea of the international anarchy as a description of a system. Arguably the most influential work in this genre is Kenneth Waltz’s 1979 *Theory of International Politics*. For Waltz, and the neo-realist school that followed him, anarchy now became a social system that could be contrasted with the hierarchical structure of domestic politics.

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<sup>21</sup> Nicholas John Spykman, *America’s Strategy in World Politics. The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1942), 16.

<sup>22</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 227.

<sup>23</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, ‘Introduction’ in David Mitrany, *A Working Peace System*. (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1966) 7-11.

<sup>24</sup> In order to help compare the different ways of seeing the international anarchy I contrast three different ways of seeing a concept’s relations with history: ‘historic’ means specific to a certain time; ‘trans-historic’ refers to the analysis that sees a phenomenon as reoccurring in different time periods, but need not be present in all eras; ‘ahistorical’ refers to the view that a phenomenon is always present regardless of historically-specific factors.

Actors in an anarchical system behave in a way that is distinct from actors in a hierarchical one. For example, the self-help nature of anarchy means that states tend to use the balance of power, but in hierarchical systems the tendency is to join the bandwagon of any powerful actor. Similarly, anarchy, through the nature of its competition leads to the sameness of the competitors, while in hierarchical systems actors become differentiated, fulfilling different roles.<sup>25</sup> Thus, anarchical societies such as the world of states are crucially different from domestic politics. This idea of anarchy as the basic description of a system against the backdrop of which all conflict and cooperation had to work came to dominate much of the analysis of IR in the United States during the 1980s and early 1990s. It was the subject of a special issue of *World Politics* in 1985,<sup>26</sup> and was subsequently criticised by Richard K. Ashley for its presuppositions and rhetorical strategies,<sup>27</sup> by Alexander Wendt for its concentration on structure at the expense of process and the nature of states,<sup>28</sup> and by Helen Milner for its fuzziness, narrowness and failure to grasp the importance of interdependence.<sup>29</sup> Although the tragic aspect had been removed, to be replaced with a scientific placid air of objectivity, the concern of those associated with this interpretation remained the same as earlier generations: the gauging of the possibilities of cooperation between international actors under a system of anarchy. This is particularly clear in the work of

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<sup>25</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 126, 93.

<sup>26</sup> *World Politics* 38, no. 1 (1985).

<sup>27</sup> Richard K. Ashley, 'Untying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 17, no. 2 (1988): 227-62.

<sup>28</sup> Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of it: the Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391-425.

<sup>29</sup> Helen Milner, 'The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations: A Critique', *Review of International Studies* 17, no. 1 (1991): 67-85.

Robert Axelrod.<sup>30</sup> This air of placidity is also found in the underlying sense that this anarchic system forms an order, different from domestic politics perhaps, but an order nonetheless. At the same time, the state is accepted as an unproblematic presence, and that the idea of the sovereign state even emerges as a solution to the problems of anarchy.<sup>31</sup> This acceptance of the state in neo-realism as both unproblematic and as a template in turn has led to various forms of the hegemonic order thesis, in which the international anarchy is able to function because a hegemonic state is able to provide leadership.<sup>32</sup>

From this historical narrative we can draw four distinct engagements with the idea of the international anarchy. First, the geopolitics of Ratzel, Semple and Kjellén, have no need to define it, as the international anarchy is interpreted as a natural environment, and therefore is a given. As Ashley has pointed out, this also explains the lack of a need to define anarchy amongst ‘nationalistic security specialists’ who employ a similar approach to the international environment.<sup>33</sup> Second, Dickinson and the group influenced by him saw the international anarchy as a product of the development of the modern state. This concept of the international anarchy is rooted in historical circumstances, and because it is seen as a relatively recent historical phenomenon it is also interpreted as being open to change through rational and deliberate action. Third, the generation after Dickinson took his concept of the

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<sup>30</sup> *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

<sup>31</sup> Ashley, ‘Untying the Sovereign State’, 229, 239-40

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984). For a more recent use of this hegemonic stability approach see Donald J. Puchala, ‘World Hegemony and the United Nations’, *International Studies Review* 7 (2005): 571-84.

<sup>33</sup> Ashley, ‘Untying the Sovereign State’, 240.

international anarchy, interpreted it as the defining feature of the world of states, saw it as a cause of war and instability, yet at the same time often saw it as a trans-historical condition that was currently beyond a solution. Fourth, the generation that followed reinterpreted the international anarchy as a description of a specific system made up of units that were egalitarian and lacked an orderer. Here the international anarchy becomes an ahistorical social scientific description of a specific society, and the sense of tragedy is lost. Instead, what becomes of interest is how states and other actors find ways of cooperating under anarchy. There is a narrative relation to these four – Dickinson was reacting to geopolitics; Wight, Spykman, Morgenthau and Butterfield were endorsing the idea of the international anarchy, but replacing Dickinson's normative argument with a trans-historical tragedy; and neo-realists endorsed Morgenthau's idea of the balance of power, but replaced this trans-historical tragedy with an ahistorical analysis of anarchy as system – although in many respects all four have also operated side-by-side within IR, as well as in a narrative sequence.

Despite differences, though, a common factor in these ideas of the international anarchy is that this particular 'order without an orderer' is intimately linked up with the idea of relations between states. What emerges in terms of the theoretical constructions of the system of states is an order that is obviously at odds with anarchist ideas, despite an initial superficial resemblance. It is presented as an order, underpinned by the threat of force, in which states project their domestic monopoly on the use of force into a realm in which no such monopoly exists. In this sense the idea of an international anarchy cannot really offer anarchism anything in terms of understanding how an anarchist society should operate. This is largely the case because what is being studied is an order based on the state and state relations as Dickinson had pointed out in 1916. Those who have made it a virtue have also been

those who are particularly supportive of the state as an institution that provides security.

### **The international anarchy and anarchism**

The concept of the international anarchy has been a problematic and contested concept in IR. At one level this might provide a reason for anarchism to ignore IR entirely. Wendt's criticism of the over-reliance on structural conditions in Waltz and the neo-realists, for example, argues that process and norms shape the anarchical order. Since identities shape interests,<sup>34</sup> this means that the particular form of the units that make up a society of societies does influence how that society will operate. Similarly, Milner is critical of analyses of the international anarchy that do not take into consideration major changes in the system, or the role of interdependence in the international anarchy. As a result, she criticises the idea of a clear-cut dichotomy between hierarchical and anarchical systems.<sup>35</sup> Ashley criticises the anarchy problematique for setting up just such a dichotomy where the idea of an anarchical domain becomes both a description and a source of order based on the template of the sovereign state.<sup>36</sup>

All these criticisms are valuable correctives to the hubris of seeing structures as ultimately determining practices. It is, for example, clear that even in the last century changes in practice have occurred without major changes to the structure of the international system. That said there is a danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. There are ways in which the application of the idea of international

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<sup>34</sup> Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of it', 398.

<sup>35</sup> Milner, 'The Assumption of Anarchy', 85.

<sup>36</sup> Ashley, 'Untying the Sovereign State', 239-40.

anarchy can be used as a corrective to the equal and opposite extreme of assuming that the structure of a society is determined by the nature of its parts only. This view is often found in anarchist thought in which, after discussing how small-scale anarchist societies are possible, it is assumed that these egalitarian and libertarian societies will take their principles with them into relations between societies, and thus they will naturally create ‘confederations of confederations’ free of conflict and oppression.<sup>37</sup>

While an anarchical society of states will be different from an anarchical society of non-state societies, they still may have some unsavoury aspects in common. In this section I look at two of these aspects. The first is the problem that an individual and a society do not behave in the same way, so that a society of individuals and a society of societies do exhibit fundamental differences. This has implications for the argument that the moral order of any society is also manifest in its relations with other societies. The second is that structurelessness is not the same thing as being egalitarian, and that in fact the absence of structure can lead to the domination of elites. I will be using two writers from different backgrounds to answer these two questions, although the way that I use the second author actually at one level contradicts the spirit of the argument of the first. That said, in their different ways, they demonstrate the problem with the international anarchy from an anarchist perspective, and in turn lead me to argue that anarchists need to develop a theory of global governance. The two writers I use are Reinhold Niebuhr and Jo Freeman. While Niebuhr’s idea that the morality of groups is of a different and lower order

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<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Herbert Read, *Anarchy and Order* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971): 121; Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (New York: Harper Row, 1974) ch. V. For the absence of theories of the international in anarchism see Alex Prichard, ‘Deepening Anarchism: International Relations and the Anarchist Ideal,’ *Anarchist Studies* forthcoming (2010).

from the morality of individuals is well known to IR, it is not well known in anarchism. Similarly, Freeman's pamphlet on the tyranny of structurelessness is a modern feminist and anarchist classic, but is little known in IR, despite what it has to say about the nature of 'order without an orderer'.

Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* is an argument against a particular trend in the early twentieth century to 'imagine that the egoism of individuals is being progressively checked by the development of rationality or the growth of a religiously inspired goodwill and that nothing but the continuance of this process is necessary to establish social harmony between all the human societies and collectives.'<sup>38</sup> Instead Niebuhr argues that there is a 'sharp distinction... between the moral and social behavior of individuals and of social groups... and that this distinction justifies and necessitates political policies which a purely individualistic ethic must always find embarrassing.'<sup>39</sup> Borrowing from the idea of reason of state found in sixteenth century authors such as Justus Lipsius and Michel de Montaigne, Niebuhr argues that the difference rests on the ability of an individual 'to consider the needs of others even when they compete with his own.'<sup>40</sup> Societies, on the other hand, are not capable of this kind of reasoning, and therefore their behaviour is morally inferior. This is because they are not in a position to contemplate self-sacrifice while individuals within the society are dependent on the society for their own survival. 'Power sacrifices justice to peace within the community and destroys peace between communities.'<sup>41</sup> To a large degree Niebuhr's reasoning is consistent with Dickinson's

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<sup>38</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study of Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1932), xxvi.

<sup>39</sup> Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, xxv.

<sup>40</sup> Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 16.

view of the international anarchy. A legal structure is required to keep states in check, not because people are intrinsically bad, but because human collectives are not capable of the same moral behaviour as individuals (in Niebuhr's analysis this also collapses the dichotomy between the sovereign state and the international anarchy, because, of course, the state is itself a collection of groups such as social classes). Thus, the international anarchy as a society of societies will not behave in the same way as a society of individuals. Individuals have the capability to form a moral community, but a society of societies does not. Thus, by the very nature of the units making it up the global international anarchy is substantially different from an anarchical society of individuals.

Niebuhr's depiction of the morality of collectives is not unproblematic. For example, he over-plays the role of coercion in human groups. Yet, his basic lesson – that groups behave differently from individuals and lack the same moral motivations – remains a major corrective to the idea that moral individuals create communities that will naturally behave morally towards other communities. From an anarchist point of view Niebuhr's argument carries important implications in terms of the possibilities of developing topless federations. The common view, found in Colin Ward's highly readable and widely-read *Anarchy in Action*, is that interlocking 'topless' confederations can be built organically from the bottom up.<sup>42</sup> Yet, if the morality of groups is inferior to the morality of individuals then it means that while the first step of fair and egalitarian anarchist societies amongst individuals is very possible, there is still the problem of charting how those societies (now collectives working under different moral rules) will confederate. Just because moral individuals succeed in creating a moral society amongst themselves it does not necessarily follow that those

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<sup>42</sup> Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 53-8.

societies will in turn have the moral backbone to develop a just community amongst themselves. The problem here is that moral behaviour and egalitarianism within a group is no guarantee that that same group will behave morally towards other groups. Indeed there is growing evidence of violent conflict between hunter-gatherer and other pre-state societies.<sup>43</sup> There have also been claims that socially cohesive, cooperative and egalitarian groups, largely because of their superiority over other forms of society, are the most likely to engage in conquest and empire-building. This argument is found in Machiavelli, but most recently has been advanced by Peter Turchin. While I have strong reservations about much of Turchin's argument, his (unconscious) reiteration of Machiavelli is an important addition to Niebuhr's view of the morality of groups. Cooperation in social groups 'is not all "sweetness and light."... No contradiction inherently exists between cooperation and cruelty.'<sup>44</sup> Thus, under Niebuhr's logic a moral community between individuals (a central feature of anarchism) is possible (and probable), but there still remains the problem of how these groups develop a working society amongst themselves. Assuming that groups possessing an internal ethical cohesiveness will behave ethically in their relations with other similar groups is just that, an unsubstantiated assumption. Thus, an anarchist society still has to deal with the question of how to construct an ethical society between anarchist groups.

If Niebuhr's book is a well-known text in IR that can benefit anarchist thought, Jo Freeman's article is well-known in anarchist activist circles, and could

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<sup>43</sup> Azar Gat, *War in Human Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), ch. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Peter Turchin, *War and Peace and War. The Rise and Fall of Empires* (New York: Plume, 2007),

45-6. Machiavelli explores a similar idea in his *Discourses* in Book 1, ch. 6.

benefit IR's analysis of the international anarchy.<sup>45</sup> At one level my use of Freeman contradicts Niebuhr's argument that individuals and societies are morally different, since Freeman was writing about individuals, and I am applying her ideas to the society of states. That said, I would argue that since in Niebuhr's schema societies have a thinned down version of individual ethics, the problem that Freeman explores in individuals is actually more acute in an ethically thinner society of societies. Freeman's article began as a presentation and pamphlet that criticised the idea that groups in the women's liberation movement did not need structures, but rather were freer and more democratic when they remained structureless.<sup>46</sup> Freeman argued that actually there was no such thing as a structureless group; rather groups were either formally or informally structured.<sup>47</sup> In a group without formal structures informal networks would take control, establishing an elite group. These informal networks would be unaccountable to the group as a whole, and would have a vested interest in maintaining the informal structure that guarantees their power. Thus, under informal structures an elite is not avoided, while at the same time that elite remains unaccountable to the rest of the group. 'If the movement continues deliberately not to select who shall exercise power, it does not thereby abolish power. All it does is abdicate the right to demand that those who do exercise power and influence be responsible for it.'<sup>48</sup> From this Freeman concludes that structurelessness 'becomes a

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<sup>45</sup> Jo Freeman, 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 17 (1972-3): 151-64. There are also numerous free downloads of the article in pamphlet form. I will be using the version found at [www.struggle.ws](http://www.struggle.ws). The page numbers will refer to this pamphlet version, not to the *BJS* article.

<sup>46</sup> Freeman was not without her critics in anarchist circles, however. See Cathy Levine, 'The Tyranny of Tyranny', <http://libcom.org/book/export/html/179>. Access on 29 April 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Freeman, 'Tyranny of Structurelessness', 1.

<sup>48</sup> Freeman, 'Tyranny of Structurelessness', 4.

way of masking power.’ And that for ‘everyone to have the opportunity to be involved in a given group and to participate in its activities the structure must be explicit, not implicit.’<sup>49</sup>

What Freeman describes here could easily be the functioning of the international anarchy from Dickinson’s point of view. Informal networks, which are unaccountable to the group as a whole, dominate. The anarchical structure and formal equality of the actors masks power relations that are unaccountable, and the lack of structures means that those outside of these informal networks are not heard. The domination of great power concerts, of hegemonic orders, and of dominant alliances are all consistent with Freeman’s idea of informal networks. Similarly, it is only through formal structures that smaller and weaker states or groups can be heard. The formal structures of the European Union or the United Nations, however much they can be criticised for also entrenching powerful states and interests, provide the only means by which other interests can be heard. Formal structuring, along the lines suggested by Dickinson in 1916, is required to make the group accountable – although formal structures, of course, are not always democratic and egalitarian. Thus activist anarchists have been all too aware of the problem of structurelessness in the workings of groups made up of individuals. I argue that the same issue comes up in groups of communities. In fact, given Niebuhr’s argument about the moral weakness of collectivities, informal structures become an even greater problem when we look at societies of societies. As a result, anarchism needs a theory of IR in order to explain how successful anarchist communities will interact with each other. It is no good assuming that ‘confederations of confederations’ will emerge, because there is no evidence that such a process is possible. Following from the argument above I argue

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<sup>49</sup> Freeman, ‘Tyranny of Structurelessness’, 1.

that it is the problem of the ‘structureless’ international anarchy that is the problem for anarchism, and that the answer is the establishment of formal global structures that are compatible with anarchist communities and ideals. These anarchist-compatible international structures need to be established while anarchist communities are developing (or even prior to them), rather than afterwards. While many international organisations are far from anarchist in their structures and outlooks, it is the possibilities and potentials of non-state international organisations that offer the best template for the development of such an anarchist IR.

### **An anarchist approach to global governance?**

There exists a strange mismatch in the story of the state as told by those in IR and those in comparative politics. The comparative politics story is of a by-and-large weak institution restricted to ‘nightwatchman’ duties until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Here, the complexities and crises of industrial society usher in a more interventionist state that slowly intervenes, and in so doing creates the welfare state in modern western democracies. Thus, the state is a weak and primarily security organisation that does not become the strong and all-pervasive institution that we know today until after the Second World War. This, in turn, leads to a backlash in the 1980s, where calls to ‘roll back the frontiers of the state’ attempt to limit state involvement and power in all aspects of domestic politics. By contrast, the story of the state in international politics is of a different order. It is dominant by the late nineteenth century, colonising the whole globe, with little to stop it acting as judge and jury in its own case. Attempts are made to clip its wings in the early twentieth century, and many of these arrangements are partially successful. Although still the dominant organisation in global politics in 1945, its actions become hedged around

with international norms, rules and organisations that control state action in specific areas such as refugees, trade policy, the rules of war and the right to declare war. While it is easy to be cynical about these arrangements, the honouring of these norms do influence and restrict state behaviour. At the same time, economic globalisation since the early nineteenth century has made all states dependent on transnational links, arrangements and sometimes private firms.

This is the other side of the international anarchy story. If the international anarchy is the manifestation of the state's security role into the international, then much of what we see in terms of the development of international organisations – but especially those involved in what is vulgarly known as the 'low' politics of social, economic and cultural issues – can be seen as a manifestation of the state's welfarist role in the international realm. This, then, solves the paradox of the mismatch between the state's trajectory in comparative politics and IR: while limited in its domestic setting by its nightwatchman role, the late nineteenth century state found its security role unfettered in the international sphere. As the state grew domestically to take in new areas outside security, this welfarist aspect detached itself in the international realm and became associated with function-specific international organisations. Thus, as the state grew internally, the agent of that growth manifested itself internationally as greater controls on the state. While the welfarist aspect of international politics is certainly weak, it is nevertheless a reality of global politics that stands in sharp contrast to the state-led security concerns of the international anarchy.

This detachment of the welfarist role from the state in the international realm to form organisations that deal separately with issues like labour (the International Labour Organization), refugees (the UN High Commission for Refugees), humanitarian relief (the Red Cross family and other non-governmental organisations),

and telecommunications (the International Telecommunications Union) presents an opportunity for anarchism. While many international organisations are clearly state-based (the World Trade Organization and UNCTAD for example), many are not. Even ones that do have state membership also possess a staff whose loyalty does not rest with individual states, nor sometimes with the idea of the state. Whether state-based or not, these organisations manage a single function on the basis of technical competence, and consequently their legitimacy is of a fundamentally different order from that of the state. The potential for these kinds of organisation to form a new kind of stateless global governance has been noticed before, and by an IR scholar influenced by the anarchism of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.<sup>50</sup> David Mitrany's functional approach offers a glimpse of what an anarchist IR might look like.<sup>51</sup>

For those familiar with IR theory, claiming Mitrany for anarchism might seem strange at first glance. He is often (unfairly) regarded as an elitist because of his support for UN technical organisations, and as apolitical because he has no theory of the state. His functional approach is often dismissed as having no theory of politics.<sup>52</sup> Yet, it is here that we get a first glimpse of Mitrany's compatibility with anarchism. His functional approach is actually a theory of government, but his critics are right to

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<sup>50</sup> For Proudhon's influence on Mitrany see Lucian M. Ashworth, 'David Mitrany and South East Europe: The Balkan Key to World Peace,' *Historical Review* 2 (2005): 203-224.

<sup>51</sup> For Mitrany's functional ideas see especially David Mitrany, D, *The Progress of International Government*. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1933); David Mitrany, D *A Working Peace System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943); David Mitrany, *The Road to Security* (London: National Peace Council, 1944); and David Mitrany, 'The Functional Approach to World Organisation', *International Affairs* 24, no. 3 (1948): 350-63.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Brent F. Nelson and Alexander C-G. Stubb, *The European Union* (Boulder Co: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 99.

an extent. The functional approach is not a theory of *state* government. Rather, it is a theory of politics and government that transcends the state. Regarding cooperation between states (and especially voluntary federalism) as problematic and even a naive aspiration, but trans-national links as permanent features of current IR, Mitrany advocated a functional system of international organisation in which function-specific organisations developed at the level at which they could have the optimal effect. Thus railways should be coordinated continentally, while aviation would have to be global. This early version of the EU's idea of subsidiarity already had a precedent in the Public International Unions, such as the Universal Postal Union and International Telegraphs Union, established before the First World War. Mitrany saw functional organisations as developing in many different fields and as fast as people felt willing to cooperate, and also added the idea of functional democracy where these organisations would be controlled by those people who worked or relied on the function in question. The rapid expansion of specialised agencies, inter-governmental organisations and non-governmental organisations since the late nineteenth century goes much of the way to validating Mitrany's view of their importance, although their frequent lack of democratic accountability is a problem that Mitrany certainly acknowledged.

Mitrany's debt to Proudhon is clear. The idea of functional organisations owes much to Proudhon's concept of economic (or industrial) organisation as a new non-statist way of organising human society.<sup>53</sup> Equally, Mitrany's idea of international functional organisations drew on Proudhon's notion of private possession as a potentially revolutionary and anti-statist force when put into a more socialised

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<sup>53</sup> Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*. (London: Pluto, 1989), 245.

context.<sup>54</sup> Following from his work on the peasant social revolution and on war government during the First World War, Mitrany argued that functional organisations allowed individuals to retain private ownership, while coordinating privately owned concerns for a wider social purpose.<sup>55</sup> This he saw as a way of providing an alternative between the extremes of capitalist individualism, and statist central planning.<sup>56</sup> He also saw international functional organisations as a way of internationalising the idea of the welfare state, and thus weakening what he interpreted as dangerous nationalising trends in twentieth century socialism.<sup>57</sup>

While there are limits to Mitrany's compatibility with anarchism – his criticism of the state, for example is not complete, and he is happy to contemplate state involvement in many functional organisations – the functional approach does offer at the very least an idea of how an anarchist IR based upon a radical reformulation of global governance might look like. In other words, rather than completely reinventing the wheel an anarchist IR could use the welfarist elements of international organisations, as interpreted by people like Mitrany, to construct a framework of global governance that would be compatible with (and even friendly too) anarchist societies. One thing is for sure, the international anarchy, with its 'order

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<sup>54</sup> Proudhon, *General Idea*, 210-3. While Mitrany acknowledged his debt to Proudhon, he may also have been influenced by the British guild socialists, who held similar ideas. See David Long, 'International Functionalism and the Politics of Forgetting', *International Journal* 48, no. 2 (1993), 355-79.

<sup>55</sup> David Mitrany, *The Land and the Peasant in Rumania* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1930); David Mitrany, *The Effects of the War in South Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930).

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Mitrany *Effects of the War*, 99.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, David Mitrany, 'International Consequences of National Planning', *Yale Review* 37, no. 1 (1947): 18-31.

without an orderer' is a fundamentally statist system, and has little to offer anarchism – except as a warning for what could happen to anarchist societies in the absence of a proper libertarian global structure.