Anarchism and the Reactions against Modernity

The concept itself - 'anarchism' - has become obsolete mainly because of a sea-change in human behaviour that anarchists are seemingly among the least aware of: the emergence of a multitude of reactions against modernity that have been breaking out all over the world. This phenomenon, which apparently only staunch modernists can't see, has taken on numerous different forms ranging from millenarianism and medievalism in the Islamic world, through Orthodox Christian and Aryan nationalism in Russia and the Balkans, to multiethnic eco-socialism, principally in Latin America. One could even argue that certain strands of populist nationalism overlap with this reactionary tendency.

This reaction is comprised of people, the world over, who are seemingly realising (albeit slowly and in a minimalistic way) that it is the lies of modernity and progress - not just the ruthless globalist financial capitalism and political consolidation that has been driving them – that are not working. These people are therefore consciously or subconsciously looking for alternatives, all of which are at least partly informed by a glimpse into the past at pre-modern ways of life.

But 'anarchists' are taking what is arguably an even more minimalistic approach by questioning only dependent features like statism and globalisation, not the overarching principles of modernity. In assuming the continuation of the Enlightenment project to the degree that they want to rope everyone in society into their utopian project, they show that their main antagonism is with anyone that wants to really challenge the underlying assumptions of civilisation. Since the people trying to get at the substrate of civilised thinking are by definition the greater radicals, this shows anarchists to be among the staunchest modern conservatives. How would an individual anarchist feel if confronted with the realisation that they are more conservative than Sergei Lavrov or Khaled Mashal, for example?

So any meaning that the term 'anarchist' may have had for 19th century opponents of capitalist industrial production - *almost all* of whom were still in favour of industrial production per se, merely with different people at the helm - has been lost amongst a sea of arguments about the nature of the present and the future. No longer does anarchism represent a significant departure from the status quo: in fact, it never did, it's just that the classical anarchists did not have the benefit of observing the peaking and decay of modernity, or the liberal horrorshow of the 20th century, or the emergence of anti-modern tendencies that sprung from them, in order to flesh out their theories and positions. One wonders whether, if Bakunin or Godwin had been alive now, they would have the

sense to see Leviathan for what it is, or whether anarchism might in some ways represent a kind of ideological finger-trap, in any time period.

But by now, almost everywhere one cares to look, the devastating consequences of modernity and civilisation can be readily seen. Anarchists want to blame all of this on capitalists and statesmen, and only in one narrow sense are they correct: without the prerequisite concepts of property, money, representation and civil society, the current system could not have come about. In fact, modern industrial civilisation is nothing more really than the Enlightening of pre-existing systems of heteronomy. The Romans had already built infrastructure that brought far-flung places under the same yoke, and provided spectacle to the masses, and crushed indigenous cultures, all to the best of their ability, 2000 years ago; the Persians had set up imperial satrapies 500 years before that; and the Sumerians had inculcated symbolic culture, debt and money even 2000-5000 years before that. Industrial civilisation is therefore not a completely new development but just the combination of age-old heteronomous urges with modern technologies and justifications that enable it.

But where the anarchists err is to suppose that there is any significantly radical liberation in merely turfing the satraps out onto the street and 'occupying' their courts, but leaving the surrounding environment otherwise intact. Or in other words, deposing the 'factory owners' and 'taking back' (although they were never theirs to begin with) the factories; what is liberating about operating a factory anyway?

Most anarchists then cannot see any need to react to modernity in a maximalist way, and in that sense they are ignorant, and have not thought their prescriptions through. They think that telecommunications can continue without governments and property rights but have been unable to provide an answer to the question of who is going to get down in the mines and dig out the rare earth metals, without making a slave of that unfortunate soul.