

Is The State Based On Mere Dogma?

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David Miller, *Anarchism* (London: Everyman Books, Dent, 1984) £4.95.

Catherine Hills, a professor at the University of York, told us recently in Channel Four's *Blood of the British* (6 September 1984) how historians and archaeologists alike dismissed the evidence of widespread prehistoric agriculture in Britain despite the presence of Stonehenge and other signs of civilisation. But when they found walls in County Mayo, Ireland that were clearly older than the bogs that covered them they were forced to look at things afresh. The pure dogma that led to the many successful dismissals now gave way to debate. The evidence that prehistorians had been telling mediaevalists to deal with was now at last made welcome: the ugly duckling finally came home as a swan. Could dogma also be responsible for the usual dismissal of anarchy? This is the question David Miller of Oxford University ought to have asked himself.

Nevertheless David Miller has still produced a very readable book in what is a first rate series by Dent. Begun in the 1970s they have always been worthwhile on topics such as *Liberalism*, *Socialism* and *Fascism*. Noel O'Sullivan wrote the last which came out in 1983. David Miller adopts the scheme of reviewing the literature with only the odd critical note. He saves his attack on the various theories for his final chapter. I will follow his scheme in this review, but my discussion is likely to be longer than my summary of his book and will relate to the question: Is the state based on mere dogma?

Miller takes on the full range of thought under the label of anarchism, but inside the book he abandons the promise on the cover to find a cogent ideology. He settles for two main streams, the Individualist and the Collectivist. He does not call them Liberal and Tory but that is what he seems to be getting at. Miller is not quite sure whether or not the two groups are totally separate and

holds that they seemed to get on well in the 19th century, though lately he says they have not got on at all. They seem to argue past each other (p 58) instead of listening and learning. They now seem to be separate groups with different views of human nature.

Miller himself has never believed in anarchy. He feels he is a democratic market socialist. Some have told him that therefore he cannot really understand anarchism. This criticism would seem to come from Tom Kuhn's notion of incommensurable paradigms. Miller feels that this objection is not worthwhile and holds that he is in a good enough position to make sense and find nonsense in various anarchist theories despite his scepticism. But here he does bypass the chance to nail the Kuhnians with an argument. Perhaps he takes their dogma, that they do not regard arguments highly, at its face value. This, despite the irony that, to a man, Kuhnians flout it by entering into debate.

The book

After sorting out the various anarchist thinkers he takes us on an interesting tour of the recent events relating to the Situationists and the Baader-Meinhoff group. He finds it difficult to relate any comparable Individualist adventures, as such exploits are not germane to their ends. Confusion and terror merely sow the seeds for confusion and terror and not the seeds for freedom.

He then goes on to question the anarcho-liberals. Reviewing the two most influential books on liberal anarchy theorists, Murray Rothbard's *For A New Liberty* and David Friedman's *Machinery of Freedom*, he argues that the state is needed as a basis for the market. It is the source of law and law provides the indispensable framework for the market; it is a prerequisite. Here we get a broad hint that it is the state that is noble and the market that is highly likely to be corrupt, somehow representing the dark side of human nature. Miller is a Hobbesian.

Hobbes felt that only the strong state could bring peace to an anarchy that was a war of all against all. Life was "nasty, brutish and

short" and this was the permanent state of nature. Only the state could bring harmony. The price would be complete loyalty. This loyalty could only be broken when the state forced the individual to defend himself. Miller seems to accept all this. Freud is somewhat similar to Hobbes and, for Miller, it often seems as though the market is the irrational dangerous world of the unconscious, posing an ever present threat to the conscious order created by the state.

Miller thinks that only the state can ensure uniform and acceptable property rights; the rules of contract; a common currency; and many other public goods. If these necessities are not provided, a Hobbesian state of nature will soon emerge (p 170). He can apparently see in history that all those institutions arose with reference to the state. Therefore Miller thinks that only the state can provide the necessary framework. So much for the anarcho-liberals.

Similar questions are posed for the anarcho-communists. Societies (tightly) controlled by customs are only workable in villages and small towns according to Miller and do not work in big cities. He thinks this is a special problem for anarcho-communists as they depend on these non-state pressures to get production underway. Both schools are said to lack a grounding in economic theory. You can only have either a market economy or a command economy, and, for Miller, both require the state (p 172). Oddly, he then goes on to say that the trouble with the two extremes is just that they are so extreme. He thinks it is the Proudbonists that stand the best chance as they stand for a middle way.

Miller then comes back to attack the market anarchists specifically. They tend to neglect the need for equality. Confusingly however, he feels that even the most hard-hearted of people must have great respect for equality. If this noble ideal is neglected, as Miller believes is bound to happen without the state, instability will surely follow. Some liberals have tried to answer Miller by claiming that the market is only unequal in the short run. It tends to bring about rough equality in the long run as it makes the luxuries of last year the commonplace items of today. Charities may also offset inequality

somewhat. But Miller finds such evidence flimsy.

Miller holds that moral rules make social life possible. The egotistical notion of enlightened self-interest where all our actions are in harmony is said to be so fantastic as to be not worth discussing. It is apparently obvious to Miller that we only act morally at all because of pressure from our neighbours. Morals are a social product and somehow they are held by society. This is why goodwill is said to function better in villages than in cities.

Although he can see today that commercial arbitration may work well, he claims it does not dispose of his notion that in the completely free market such arbitration, would favour the rich. They are only decent today, he claims, because the state is there to keep them in order (p 177).

All the anarchists are supposed to overlook the one great good that the state alone can bestow on people; nationality. Miller sees that it would be an error to say that nationality is somehow identical with the state as there can be multi-national states and nationalities that have no state of their own. Yet states can express the national will and most nations desire their own state. Some anarchists argue as if society after the change will look roughly like a state anyway. If so, nationality may still find expression, but the effort and disruption that brought change may seem to have been for nothing. What is more likely is that the stateless society will not be able to express national will. Miller holds this as a problem as many people feel nationality to be important, especially for their identity (p 179).

The state can ensure that foreign influences do not swamp the nation, says Miller, and people value its services very much. This is why we can see the worldwide urge to national self-determination. There seems to be no resisting the fact that a deep human need is satisfied by nationality and that the state can best serve this need. If the state were to be abolished this need would very likely be neglected. Anarchy, it is claimed, would leave people adrift as it would lack "features which might serve as a focus of

identity" (p 180). It is probably because of this blindness to nationality that anarchism remains so unsuccessful. In this oversight anarchists are said to merely recognise a narrow view of human nature. They see only the negative side of the state. They are said to have been surprised to see national loyalties emerge as even stronger than class loyalties in time of war (p 181). Some put it down to the success of state propaganda - but that is only successful because of the welcome it gets.

Miller concludes that anarchy has had a good run. It is, however, unlikely to do better in the future than it did in the past. It has theoretical flaws as well as being a practical non-starter. Its real home was in the self-sufficient village which now seems to be a thing of the past. He does admit that anarchism has the merit of reminding us that power can be corrupt and that coercion is not really desirable in human relationships. As anarchist literature makes these two points Miller feels his study was worthwhile.

Are all anarchists the same?

The book is worthwhile as an opening to a debate. It is clearly not the last word on the matter. We will have to wait for the second edition to see whether the debate will force revision. Thinkers are like entrepreneurs. While the latter must more or less face the test of the market, some thinkers like Tom Kuhn construct whole theories to avoid the debate. As a result they tend to function more like the managers of nationalised companies, with the corollary that they become quasi-thinkers like Heidegger or Hegel. Only debate will restore their health. Miller thinks that he has many fine ideas and it's good he has presented them to the public.

How do they fare?

Miller makes one fairly common error. He takes an abstract set theory distinction and thinks that it should have some sociological significance. In this case we have the set of people with beliefs about the state. There is also the subset of non-believers in the state which Miller feels should somehow be more homogenous than merely being united by an opposition to the state.

We can take the analogy with religion. We have the primitive set of theism and the complement of non-theism or atheism to make up the universal set. The complement is a rag, tag and bobtail category though we can call it a set if we like. But it is not at all likely that it will ever form a distinct sociological group. Theism is also a belief in a personal god. Joseph Butler and the Jesuits were quite right to hold deism to be atheistic; Voltaire and others were quite wrong to protest that they were not atheists. *Strictly* atheism rejected only a *type* of god but anarchism rejects *all* states. (There is a belief that anarchism rejects all laws and rules too. This interpretation does have followers who speak at Hyde Park Corner. But they cannot be consistent. Rules of some sort are necessary. All people tacitly adopt rules of some sort and the speakers at Hyde Park adopt plenty, especially in speaking.)

Archy means statist and anarchy means non-statist. The "n" in "anarchy" merely separates the "a" in the prefix that means "non" in Greek. As there are different types of statistes so there are different types of anarchists. This Miller has correctly discovered. But there does seem to be a psychological link between an anarchist and an atheist. Both reject central authority. The anarchist believes the state exists and that it does a bad job by leading people to mess up aspects of the world if not the whole world. The atheist feels that evolutionism is fundamentally correct leaving no room for the creationism of theists. Religious thought and belief in state magic have lots in common but they do not have to go together.

Miller is surely right when he says that he does not have to believe in a notion in order to comprehend it. Belief is a good heuristic but it is not the only one. Debate is a better one. Mystics like Tom Kuhn generally use the lack of belief of an opponent as an excuse not to debate, but Kuhn himself often argues despite himself. If he did not he would be dogmatic. I want to suggest that the major reason anarchy has so far not been successful is because it has met dismissals more consistent than Kuhn's notions. However, there are many dogmas against anarchy and Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974) could be like the wall

under the Irish bog in breaking down these sorts of dismissal.

Dogmatism

In the long run I would agree with Sir Karl Popper that not much hangs on the use of words, yet I feel something does. Before discussing more of what Miller has to say we should get clear the essence of dogmatism. Since I am so very unpopperian here, I will consider the way he uses, or abuses, the term. Words can often be abused. It is no great crime when this happens. A co-operative listener or reader usually still gets the drift of what the speaker or writer has to say. It would have been yet easier if words were used in a way people found to be familiar.

Popper has been very fond of saying how useful dogmatism can be. If you do not stick to your guns, he would say, you may not find out if they are loaded. But is this dogmatism?

As with all words that have a long history "dogma" has had more than one meaning. The two main senses have been "opinion" and "decree". The Greek word "doxa" was initially more successful in holding the former. "Doxa" is nowadays rarely used except within other terms such as orthodoxy or heterodoxy. Dogma can mean the former though usually it takes the meaning in the latter sense of decree or an order having the force of law. A dogmatist is most often a person who brings a discussion to an end on some axiom or other that is treated as too sacred or too obvious to question in debate. The whole motivation of the dogmatist runs contrary to the advice of Socrates - to follow the argument wherever it leads.

A common form of dogma is Church dogma. It fights shy of discussion due to the "danger" that heresy can do to the soul. Church dogma was meant to be sorted out once and for all in the period leading up to Pope Gregory I at the end of the sixth century. This dogma has not been entirely successful in reifying the creed as the dogma has greatly evolved since that time; with all the accompanying danger to the souls of conservatives and revisionists alike. But in the short run the supposed solidity of the dogma has no doubt often been successful in

either ending debate or in delaying a debate's progress.

Let us be clear; dogmatism is not so much the refusal to debate through lack of interest or time, or even in fear of defeat. It is the spreading of the word by fiat and by not taking up the challenge of debate when it is offered. It is the denial of Socrates' dictum to follow the argument wherever it leads.

But, it may be protested, the argument has to end somewhere. Euclid designed axioms as a natural resting place for geometry. It did not take the infant Bertrand Russell long to see that they were no such thing. Axioms cannot stump a logical regress. So must all debates go on forever? Karl Popper's answer is that we use guesswork as to when we should stop. Just as good is mutual agreement. But logically there is no ending point - that's why we can never have a full proof. We limit our proofs by hypothesis, as Popper says. Or we can make use of conventional axioms as did Euclid. An axiom is never a dogma in itself for dogmatism is the one-sided making of an axiom by decree. It is an act rather than a theorem. It is the act of cutting off debate. So Popper would seem to be wrong in his eulogy of dogmatism though right in his eulogy of debate.

To avoid dogmatism Popper has often said that we should try to refute our own theories. Michael Polanyi (in *Personal Knowledge*) held this to be quite perverse of him. He held that scientists would never bring themselves to do it. The reception that Popper's ideas has had among scientists makes one think that Polanyi was exaggerating. Yet it is easier to do what Popper recommends in his eulogy of dogmatism, namely to get others to criticise and do the defending ourselves. This is debate not dogmatism. It opens up a division of labour and stimulates the criticism which is the lifeblood of thought. On this interpretation another David Miller, of Warwick University, once agreed with the writer that this was more likely to be the practice of science. Polanyi may have even agreed on that.

Dogmatism is very common. We see it on issues like; for or against the NUM, the USSR, that God exists and so on. It can hold things back. And it can do so for many

decades as it did in prehistoric studies of Britain. Is it the reason anarchy remains unknown? Is Miller only discussing what he feels he can cope with and merely dismissing other points by fiat?

Miller asks why people support the state if it is as dysfunctional as anarchists believe it to be? Are people mistaken as to their best interests? Miller poses this good question as it is not an easy matter to know the interests of others better than they do themselves. None other than Bernard Shaw makes this clear in his *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism and Fascism* (1937) where he tells us that only money "enables us to get what we want instead of what other people think we need" (p 53). Oddly, he goes on to eulogise both Hitler and Stalin. But Shaw is surely right that we do need money to get what we want freely; we do know what we want better than others. But we are still prone to error despite this fact. So, has anarchy been dismissed because of the outcome of free debate or through being considered unworthy of fair consideration?

Obstacles to change

It must be admitted that if a man or woman wants to achieve power then the state may well be in their true best interests. However, presumably few supporters of the state are ambitious politicians. Anarchic institutions would render their aims obsolete, just as a republic prevents the rise of a king. Their ambitions will remain pipedreams.

Miller considers the case of the anarchic society which tends to look like a state after a time. Will not all the effort and disruption put into producing the new structure then be wasted? This is a bit like saying that marriages that end in divorce are thereby not worthwhile, or that as we are all doomed to die, life is useless. Sometimes things of great value are ephemeral. Moreover, it is not altogether clear what Miller means when he says anarchy may look like a state. Perhaps it may, but if it is not dysfunctional then that does not matter. Miller feels that we will be due for great disruption if the state fades away. It is not at all obvious that any such thing would occur. There is no reason why the state could not ebb away in peace. All

change is not at great cost. Lots of changes have more than paid for themselves.

Miller brings up the free rider problem. This is where people are able to share in goods that they have not paid for. It is supposed to inhibit the production of services that are useful to many, but where it's difficult to prevent the many getting the benefits without paying. It is a true problem. Neither the state nor the market fully solves the problem but Miller and other statist fondly imagine that it does. However, the market does manage. Either, through cutting the cost of collection, or, through the benefits from provision to the few becoming so great as to outweigh the fact that many others will benefit for free, the problem has been surmounted - without the need for state intervention. It was long called the "lighthouse" problem, in reference to the difficulty of getting ships to pay for the benefits of a lighthouse. It was a problem until a bright economist looked into the history of lighthouse provision and found there was no problem in raising the money in the market place for such schemes.

It is probably an exaggeration when Miller claims that anarcho-liberals and anarcho-communists argue past each other. Perhaps it is the ruling dogma of today that argument is a waste of time. The speed with which people pretend to put a thesis to the test or "see" evidence for it seems to indicate that they only tolerate quasi-tests for the show of it. In fact they are dogmatic.

Mistakes are almost bound to be rampant. Given patience, both sides should come to grips with each other's ideas. But reason does take time. All is grist to the mill of debate; even abuse should be dealt with in a factual manner. It is up to the debater not to let the dogmatist off the book. Differences are fuel for debate - not despair.

Miller suggest that the state is needed to hold off a Hobbesian state of nature. But why pick on Hobbes' state of nature? His contemporary, John Locke, created a more realistic picture of a more social and peaceful world. Lockean anarchy does not exaggerate the gains from the introduction of the state. (But even these gains Locke divined should be fully debated.)

Miller falls for a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* in his notion that law evolved with reference to the state. Most historians may well agree with Miller when he argues that nationalisation of the law under Henry II in the twelfth century was beneficial. This has yet to be tested by debate. We do have plenty of examples of the market standardising sizes and setting uniformities free of state fiat - the size of pop records or cassettes. It is not clear that the state contributed by its mere existence to the development of private property.

The market or else

Does the state provide the grounds for the market or is it the market that has allowed the state to develop? We can see which is the more productive and it is clearly not the state. The state only continues as a parasite on the market - yet it bites the hand that feeds it. Indeed the only skill the state has lies in biting the hidden hand that makes the market work. The phenomenon of the black market would seem to show that Miller may be mistaken about the essential framework the state is meant to provide. This notion of Miller's is - of course - an old Tory one. Miller is an epigone of the Fabian Society writers like Shaw who presented old Tory wine in bottles with a socialist label. If something gets beaten in debate, find a new name for it, and try again.

Miller accepts the textbook stuff that puts the USSR as a command economy, the USA as a free market, with the UK a bit of both. He has no good reasons for doing so. In fact Michael Polanyi has shown the error in this view (see his *USSR Economics*, 1933). The USSR does not have a rival to the market. It merely has sharper teeth with which to bite the hidden hand. The black market is alive and well. Indeed, since the New Economic Policy reforms in March 1921 they have been painting the black market white.

With economic institutions there is a set-up similar to Henry Ford and his Model T cars: you can have any system you like as long as it's a market system. The mixed economy is a myth, unless you can accept that we can have a mixture of black and black in car colour. The state abuses the market and introduces poor attempts to copy it but has no real rival

to it, not even in the USSR. The evidence for the market in the USSR is plentiful. The rouble - that is money - alone allows us to see the market in operation. They trade on the world market. From the huge loan in US Dollars to China in 1949 to the Russian watches imported to the UK the market is seen everywhere. The dogma of a command economy does not stand the test of reason.

Miller feels that equality is very important. Others, like Peter Singer, believe all animals should be equal. Has Singer thought about this notion? Does he think I am guilty of murder every time I swat a fly? Who does really hold themselves equal to others? Many respect others as being their superiors in this or that, but does anyone feel the exact equal of another? I think not. The ideal does not seem important except to some state schoolteachers and university lecturers (and their pupils). I have yet to meet a non-student or non-teacher who found the ideal worth mentioning. After all we have never had complete equality in practice. Yet we have often had peace.

Sweet charity

Miller argues that the state is much more powerful than charity. But is this notion true? The *de jure* definition of charity excludes politics, but is that the case *de facto*? If we include all the local councillors that help to run the UK state we will see the truth. Even the state depends on charity to some degree. In times of emergency people have even gone out to queue up to pay their taxes early (see *The Times* Jan 5th 1932). We also have all the rival sects in politics and religion that freely give up their time to a cause.

Added to this line of help there is an even larger area of voluntarily given social services. These range from freely given street directions and the changing of £10 notes to lives being devoted to friends or family. Charity is not at all a small domain. Indeed it could be that no society could exist without it. Despite Miller's book, I would not say the same of the state. We can all see the vastness of the domain of charity, it is certainly more than the "flimsy" matter Miller holds it to be.

Morality or markets

By claiming that it is morality that holds society together Miller finally shows his true colours. This is pristine Tory dogma. The liberal answer is that it is the market that does this job. But Miller holds that such doctrines of enlightened self-interest, letting the market alone, are not worthy of discussion. Perhaps if he gave this liberal view a chance he would change his mind or at the least develop some reasons to oppose it, instead of his flat dismissal.

However, the market is not based on self-interest and neither David Hume or Adam Smith argued it was. Both men wrote books on ethics. Both have had their ideas reiterated by epigones such as Alfred Marshall and Philip Wicksteed in recent times. Hume's *Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1752) drew on his earlier work and *Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) both developed Joseph Butler's ideas. These are found in his *Sermons Delivered at the Rolls Chapel* (1726). They were mainly an attack on self interest as a motivator of human action.

Butler's idea was that Hobbes and Descartes made out too great a difference between men and other animals. (This was the genesis of the theory of evolution. Butler influenced Smith and Hume, they influenced Malthus who in turn influenced first Darwin and then Wallace). Hobbes thought that self interest was a guide to human behaviour. Part of this entailed the idea that we were supposed to calculate our actions to see that they were in our best interest. But Butler held that we only think like this on reflection or when we are planning. In practice we tend to lose ourselves in the task in hand. We often simply do not have the discipline to recall and act on our plans. Usually we only recall them at the end of the day. In the meantime we usually forget ourselves while we are involved in some practical task. Self-interest tends to get crowded out as we go about our daily duties. We usually forget about it!

Alfred Marshall repeats Butler's influence in his first chapter of *The Principles of Economics* (1890). He argues correctly that the task in hand is more likely to be a job created by the *division of labour* than by

moral agreement. It is the market through trade and the division of labour that joins society together. The glue provided by the moral agreement of Tory dogmatists turns out to be no more than a very thin paste. Far from anarchistic ideas only fitting small villages and not big cities as Miller makes out, it is the opposite. Liberal ideas of trade knitting together large groups of strangers in co-operation contrast strongly with continual moral discussion and moral pressure being most relevant to small villages and towns.

Miller takes quite an odd view of morality. He claims we only act morally if our neighbours are around. This would seem to imply that we are not really moral at all but merely hypocrites. This from a man who says that anarchists take a narrow view of human nature!

Hume in 1752 set out to refute moral scepticism - and he did so brilliantly. Moralising is a part of human nature. Even Miller sincerely moralises if Hume is right. And he continues to do so even if, like Defoe's Crusoe, he found himself shipwrecked on a desert island. There is a moral tradition, but it is fed by individual inputs along the way just like any other tradition. There is no great personified "Society" that somehow makes moral rules that everyone tries to break, as Miller seems to suggest. The tradition grows out of the living approval and disapproval of individual men and women.

Throughout Miller holds that the state supplies that bit of magic that we will not get by "self regulation". But the state does not come God-like from the outside in this way. It is the product of the folly of the people. Though, as the philosopher Nietzsche said, the state is not the people and the Hegelians were wrong to say it was. Yet it is the people who are to blame for the state. Of course we should debate the dysfunctional nature of the state on factual grounds. but it is still their fault. The notion that the state can somehow come from outside is used in the Keynesian system of injections and leaks, It seems Miller thinks that somehow the common law would disappear if the state went. But this is not at all likely, for the common law has beneficial functions. It existed before the state and will in all probability exist after it.

Nationalism as an obstacle

Finally we come to nationality. Miller seems to be right to say that this is a product that the state can supply better than can the market. Liberalism in the 19th century underestimated its power. Marxists, as in so many other ways, merely followed suit. The jingoism of the 1880s surprised many people and that of 1914 surprised yet more. Miller says that the nation can be more substantial than class. This is correct. Class is vastly overrated by the sociologists and school-teachers, as it was by Cobden and Bright who did so much to promote it.

Miller thinks the unions are class institutions. However, as Robert Owen pointed out in the last century, trade unions split up the "working class" and do not unify it. But what does serve this "working class" that Owen, Cobden and Bright, Marx and many others feel to be so important? One may well ask who feeds the unicorns?

The nation is indeed more substantial than class. Many people do like it, as Miller rightly says. But the deep need that it meets has many alternatives or rivals, just because it is so deep. In-groups and out-groups seem to be here to stay. But it is false to say that only the nation satisfies them. When the nation dies there will be many substitutes to replace it. Many rival it today. Whether we like modern art or not, whether we like religious groups or science. Those and many other things give satisfaction to the need for in-groups and out-groups, for identity and to other psychological needs Miller brings up. He is right to say that nationality has been a boon to many people. But he is wrong to feel it cannot be replaced.

Miller's book is fine if it is merely meant to begin the debate. But while reading it one feels that the author sets out to have the last word by fiat. Anarchy or non-anarchy has often been dismissed with pure dogma. It remains to be seen if that is what Miller is up to. I look forward to his second edition.

Free Life