

Reply to O'Neil – Another Argument for Anarchy

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Patrick M. O'Neil has done a splendid job of refuting Wolff's antinomy and thus of defending the proper authority of government. Wolff has abandoned Hobbes' notion of authority, which carries with it the tacit will of the people (and so solves the problem of what it is to have authority rather than merely to claim it). For Hobbes, we do what the state says because we have agreed to, for the sake of civilised living. Perhaps most anarchists would protest at Hobbes' justification of the state, but, given the *status quo*, my guess is that O'Neil could probably refute them as he has done with Wolff. However, the question remains, should we go on with the *status quo*? Is government better than anarchy?

This is the sort of argument we can have within the L.A., for the Libertarian Alliance is an alliance between classical free-trade liberals and anarcho-liberals. So O'Neil and I can agree on the basic values, and ask whether the state is likely to do a better job of providing and husbanding civilization than we could manage if we had no state. If Hobbes is right on human nature, then anarchy would be obviously a state of affairs to be avoided; but this is less obviously the case if Locke's idea of anarchy is nearer to being right, as I feel it certainly is.

In any case, there can be no going back, for, despite setbacks, capital accumulation has continued and conditions seem set to get better and better economically for most, if not for all. Life is never likely to be, 'nasty, brutish, and short' again, thanks to the positive-sum laws of trade replacing the negative - or zero-sum laws of the jungle. However, politics is not positive sum but negative sum and thus is relatively primitive. Politics exists at the expense of free trade. And while most liberals have felt politics to be necessary, all have lamented the loss of freedom involved in setting up the coercive power of the state. In the short term, of course, politics will remain necessary, for we

must start from here. But for the future it may well be that anarchy is better than government. It does not have the intrinsically illiberal aspect that government has.

The market is a marvellously liberal institution. The liberal can say to the democrat: 'Everything the state can do, the market can do better, except for the arts of war, but those are not desirable.' The democrat, with his lust for more social control, will be at a loss to reply, for the market even gives better social control, but it does so polycentrically. It does not solve the problem the central planners, with their grand plan for all, failed to cope with, but eliminates the centre. Since the mid-1970s, the fashion for nationalisation has been replaced by one for privatisation, but the new fashion can go all the way.

Hobbes felt the need for a state because he saw that people of his day remained, to some extent, barbaric. Sadly, we are not yet as civilised as we should be. But is the state the best solution to this problem? The problem falls into two parts: the problem of defence and the problem of crime. It seems possible that both problems could be solved by more privatisation. But liberals should also give consideration to the Utopian aspect of an ebbing of those two problems by a further flourishing of civilised standards. Most of the time most of the nations are not at war, and most of the time most people are not indulging in criminal acts. Although anarchy does not have to wait till the day when barbaric behaviour ceases entirely, surely that day will eventually arrive. No doubt that day is a long way off, but that is not to say that it is not due.

O'Neil, like J.S. Mill, seems to hold against Wolff that we need a state while people remain barbaric. The state is like a boy's father, who merely needs to command a boy to do what he will see that he ought to do in any case if he should grow up to be a fully civilized adult. The state thus takes on a paternalistic role. This is not intrinsically illiberal, as Mill made clear, but it is a transitional state of affairs. Sooner or later, the role of the state will come to an end if it is merely paternal.

O'Neil feels that anarchy is bound to be opposed to authority. This is so as Wolff understands authority, but not so as Hobbes or Locke understand it, for they hold that authority comes from the patronage of the public. Thus power and authority are not quite the same thing, and power is based on authority rather than *vice versa*. As Hume said, we get the government we deserve. The state rests on the tacit consent of the people. But that does not mean we cannot do better. We can and we should. O'Neil seems to overlook that as Wolff fails to contradict his paradigm, so he, in turn, fails to utterly contradict Wolff's. The anarchist opposes political power, not authority as such. Authors, cooks, doctors, trainers, and even charlatans may have authority. There is nothing coercive about mere influence. It is government that is never fully liberal: it is coercive.

Given barbarism, and prior to proper privatisation, it seems to be fair to say that the state may be just, for the likely alternative is going to be more illiberal than is the state. The liberal outlook is not all-or-nothing, but a matter of degree: the freer the better. Barbarians might not want to tolerate freedom, and so there might be a need for a paternalistic state. But that is not a permanent *status quo*. Moreover, it may well be that privatisation could do a better job. Taxation is at the expense of free trade, and the less taxation we have the better. It is a hallmark of barbarism. In the long term it should cease to be needed.

Free Life