

Love & Anarchy

How love shapes the anarchist vision

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1993

“Side by side with the exigencies of life, love is the great educator.”

—Sigmund Freud

“Some day, men and women will rise, they will reach the mountain peak, ready to receive, to partake and to bask in the golden rays of love. What fancy, what imagination, what poetic genius can foresee even approximately the potentialities of such a force in the lives of men and women.”

—Emma Goldman

If “love is the great educator,” as Freud contends, then what is it love teaches us? Certainly, Freud’s understanding of love shared little in common with Emma Goldman’s even though they were roughly contemporaries who witnessed the massive political and cultural upheavals of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Now, from our vantage point near the end of the twentieth century, what lessons can we learn from Goldman’s sense of the intersection of love and anarchy and where it leads us?

Beyond reviewing the early 20th century insights of Emma Goldman on love and anarchy, we need to take the long view of where we have come from and where we are headed in order to ask the following questions: What can we learn about love and how it is constituted that aids us in dismantling the coercive, authoritarian, and centralist structures embedded in both modern states and social relationships?

What is it we need to know about love, especially the parental, erotic, and spiritual forms, which can implement the calls for freedom and self-determination central to any vision of anarchy? Finally, how can an understanding of love and anarchy open up new vistas to renew our commitment to challenge the dominant social order, change ourselves, and heal our planet?

Love and the Anarchist Vision of Emma Goldman

For Emma Goldman, anarchism was rooted in passion. Even though she did more to promote anarchism through her speeches and writings than any other single radical of her day, she recognized that the animating force behind her own anarchist conversion and convictions lay beyond grasping “our ideas,” and rather in feeling those convictions “in every fiber, like a flame, a consuming fever, an elemental passion.”

As she argued in one of her definitive statements on anarchism: “It stands for the spirit of revolt in whatever form, against everything that hinders human growth.” Integral to the “spirit of revolt” was a recognition that the social-psychological and ethical dimensions of anarchism were essential to the realization of free and autonomous individuals and to the future such individuals could usher in a future that would of necessity be illuminated and fired by the “golden rays of love.” For Goldman, the love implied by anarchism would “do away with the wrong and foolish” and help to “(build) and (sustain) new life.”

The birth of that “new life” was the prime political task Emma Goldman saw for anarchism and for herself. As midwife to the new individual, Emma Goldman participated in the struggle against the shibboleths and dying traditions of a patriarchal and repressive past and for the new assertiveness and independence of a liberated future. It was the call for anarchy, as articulated by Goldman, that rallied many who sought release from class conventions and psychological traps which were part of Victorian culture.

Goldman’s anarchist message became the catalyst for self-expression and self-determination. When she talked and wrote about “human nature caged in a narrow space, whipped daily into submission,” she not only captured Max Weber’s insight about the “iron cage” of modern bureaucratic life and Freud’s sense of civilization’s inexorable instinctual repression, but she also awakened those who felt trapped in a sterile and emotionally degrading world.

Among Goldman’s most important contributions to anarchism and the radicalism of her day (with lessons for our own time) was her emphasis on sexual liberation as a form of self-determination and self-expression both in the erotic and aesthetic sense. Her essays about and agitation around the right of women to control their own bodies linked the anarchist commitment to “free love” (a much misunderstood concept that had nothing to do with promiscuity) to the early feminist commitment to birth control.

Because of her constant agitation on these “women’s” issues, Goldman found herself in continuous confrontation with the repressive apparatus of the state, from the Comstock Commission (the agency that prohibited any distribution of material on birth control or other so-called salacious writings through the mails) to various police and vigilante forces. However, in order to realize her anarchist vision and women’s emancipation, more was required than the important direct action campaigns she and others waged in the public arena.

For Goldman, the transfiguring power of free love went beyond the legal and cultural constraints embedded in statutes and customs. Sexual liberation meant not only extending freedom to women, but also eliminating the repressive bonds that shackled both the body and the mind. Her efforts in the area of sexual liberation were the opening rounds in the fight of the “party of eros” that was to find its mature theoretical development in the work of later critics of repressive civilization such as Wilhelm Reich, Herbert Marcuse, and Norman O. Brown.

While Goldman courageously attacked those structures of power and authority that oppressed women and impeded the development of autonomous and erotically-alive individuals, she herself experienced bouts of jealousy and self-doubt in her tempestuous relationship with Ben Reitman. As her dedicated and controversial manager of public lectures and erratic lover, Reitman brought even more dramatic flair to her public and private life; yet, she was tortured by her inability to satisfy the promiscuous Reitman.

To Reitman she wrote: “You are like Anarchism to me. The more I struggle for it the further it grows away from me.

“The more I struggle for your love, your devotion, the further it seems from me. Yet struggle I must. For like liberty, you are the highest Goal to me, the most precious treasure.”

Goldman’s torment over her elusive attempt to capture Reitman’s love and full devotion mirrored the difficulties of realizing a fulfilling erotic and intimate relationship in an era and with individuals still suffering from the abuses of patriarchy. Rising above the demons of jealousy proved difficult even for as dedicated and consistent a fighter for anarchism and human liberation as Emma Goldman was. Moreover, while struggling to rally women for emancipation around an “inner regeneration” that could lead to the rebirth of a self-determining individual, Goldman’s own private search for regenerative love was a further testament to the harsh lessons love extracts from those damaged by exploitative intimate relationships.

Like many radicals in her generation, Goldman’s desire for “inner regeneration” was more than just a physical or erotic love; it embodied what one interpreter of Goldman and her times called a “spiritual hunger and unrest.” Seeking a “reborn social soul,” Goldman’s anarchist vision was aimed at destroying “government and statutory laws” in order “to rescue the self-respect and independence of the individual from all restraint and invasion of authority.” While Goldman reviled religion as one component of the unholy trinity of modern “enslavement”—“Religion, the dominion of the human mind; Property, the dominion of human needs; and Government, the dominion of human conduct”—her anarchist vision incorporated a form of spiritual love, a love that affirms the immanent power of the “courage-to-be.”

Emma Goldman's life and writings helped to illuminate the difficulties in realizing love and anarchy. Although we can take inspiration from her struggles and insights, we also need to grapple with the oppressive impediments and libertarian possibilities inherent in parental, erotic, and spiritual love.

Parental Love: Anarchy and the Infantile Disorder

Although we are rapidly approaching the time in our evolution when human life can be manufactured in a test tube, human beings are still the product of a female and male member of the species. Unlike most other animals, including those of the primate family, we are especially vulnerable and weak in our infancy. While that vulnerability and weakness are particularly evident in terms of our physical needs, they are also apparent in our need for emotional nurturing.

The capacity for caring for and nurturing an infant is the basis both for parental love and the earliest training for the individual in what it means to be loved in an intimate relationship. While the care and nurture of the infant has been the primary task of the mother, various evolutionary developments and social-cultural arrangements have resulted in a variety of family networks surrounding the mother and child.

Tribal societies and cultures evolved a range of either matrilineal or patrilineal systems that resulted in essentially non-authoritarian child-rearing patterns. However, the over-arching evolutionary development for child-rearing in civilization has been the patriarchal family. Within the rule of civilization, the patriarchal family established both external and internal systems of authority which stultified human growth and reinforced gender roles, impeding, in turn, the self-determination of the individual.

These systems of authority, particularly as administered by the patriarchal ruler, whether in the guise of parent, priest, politician, or police, exercised power-over in a manner that demanded obedience as opposed to commanding respect.

While tribal peoples and pre-state social arrangements produced individuals who could be both self-determining and socially connected without the imposition of rulership, the reign of hierarchy embedded in the state and the authoritarian rule of the patriarchal family diminished the capacity for self-determining individuals.

Although extended family networks survived within patriarchal arrangements, the coming of industrial and consumer capitalism began to shrink that extended network and create a restricted or nuclear family. The restricted or nuclear family imposed additional burdens on its members to satisfy the myriad demands for love and respect which were denied in the culture at large. Furthermore, to the extent that the patriarchal order has been enforced in the modern era, parental love has stifled not only the emancipation of women, but also debilitated the emotional capacity of men.

Critics of female and family socialization have pointed to the oppression and rigid domestication of women by the patriarchal order. While not denying the oppressive context of the patriarchal order or the complicit role that mothers have performed within that order, feminist social psychologists like Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan have clearly demonstrated the positive capacity for emotional and intimate matters in women that emerge out of the bonding between mother and child. For Chodorow in her study of *The Reproduction of Mothering* the very nature of nursing can make a mother and child attuned to each other in a bond of love that develops a kind of synchronicity necessary to all later intimate relationships.

From this feminist perspective, a woman's act of nursing and nurturing is a fundamental testament to what could be considered a non-reciprocal form of altruism. In turn, receiving and giving such non-reciprocal altruism is the basis for the necessary bond of trust that produces a loving and emancipated individual. Furthermore, without a sense of non-reciprocal altruism and trust, anarchy, as the positive social enactment of freedom, may degenerate into self-destructive and aggrandizing narcissism. In other words, lacking the practice of non-reciprocal altruism, an adult may never rise above an insecure and vain pursuit of elusive infantile pleasure.

In addition to the early bonding between mother and child, demands made by parents on a child, especially in bodily functions and punishment/reward, can exact a horrible psychological price. It has been especially true in Western and Protestant cultures that the need to control excremental functions at an unnaturally early age can

result in the sorts of anal obsessions with order and cleanliness that later may become the basis for repressive political and social arrangements and an economic order that fetishizes “filthy lucre.”

The physical abuse of the child can also create the kind of stunted, fearful individuals Wilhelm Reich wrote about in his classic attacks on fascism, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* and *Listen, Little Man*. Finally, the psychological withdrawal of love and exploitation of conditional love can lead to a family that is little more than what radical psychotherapist R.D. Laing describes in revealing terms as a “protection racket.”

The conditional nature of parental love within most nuclear families, especially those radiating with patriarchal values, can have a debilitating impact on the emotional life of growing boys and girls. Insecurity and self-doubt often produce individuals who too quickly conform to stereotypical gender roles and submit readily to externally imposed authority. While girls and boys at some point are required to wean themselves away from the dependency inherent in parental relationships, boys engage in a process of separation that fetishizes the mother but devalues women in general.

In a male chauvinist culture, our natural weakness and vulnerability are denied to men and attached to the figure of the mother. The denial of the weakness and vulnerability of our species sets up an even more aggressive agenda for men to prove their manhood and to downgrade the feminine part of their personality. Such a sacrifice of the mother and the feminine, in turn, suppresses emotional life and the capacity for self-disclosure and intimacy.

Instead of seeking solace in an essentialist male or female role as certain proponents of the men and women’s movement do, we should be exploring ways to get beyond patriarchy and into a form of parental love that is emotionally expressive without the sex stereotyping that undermines the ability to be self-determining individuals.

Erotic Love: Anarchy and Intimate Relationships

Because we first learn how to love in the family context and in a dependent relationship, our sense of self-worth and body pleasure/pain are fundamentally inscribed with the social and psychological codes of specific cultural systems. If we learn to be ashamed of our bodies and fear sexual expression, our capability to experience bodily pleasure and psychological gratification through erotic love will be damaged. However, erotic love requires a level of intimacy consonant with self-determining individuals.

For social theorist Anthony Giddens, “Intimacy is above all a matter of emotional communication, with others and with the self, in a context of interpersonal equality.” Thus, even though one can experience bodily pleasure without an intimate relationship, full psychological gratification necessitates a kind of negotiated reciprocity based on interpersonal equality, a form of mutual satisfaction. “If the psychological ‘giving’ to the other is not mutual, and reasonably well balanced,” Giddens contends, “one individual is likely to define her or his needs without regard to the other, expecting her or him to go along with them.”

The struggle for interpersonal equality has been part of the feminist and anarchist agendas since Emma Goldman’s valiant direct action campaigns of the early twentieth century. Yet, for all the advances by feminism and for individual rights, we are still in the thralls of a phallogocentric power that diminishes both interpersonal equality and erotic love. While patriarchy has been eroded and challenged by transformations in the family and radical projects, “genital tyranny” continues to exact a price from the full value of erotic love.

The concept of “genital tyranny” and the elaboration of continuing repressive restrictions on a complete eroticism can be found in Herbert Marcuse’s writings on the psychological burdens and illusions of late capitalism, especially in *Eros and Civilization*. Giddens’s analysis builds on Marcuse’s work on genital tyranny, proposing the following formulation: “Genital tyranny’ results from the fact that libido has been stripped away from the parts of the body needed to participate in industrial labour. A re-sexualising of the body, together with a renewal of the original meaning of eroticism, which is linked to aesthetic appreciation, is called for as part of future revolutionary change.”

In order to achieve any transformation in the politicized body and body politic, this channeling of libido that results both in genital tyranny and truncated erotic love must be overcome. Moreover, it is not enough to resexualize the body as long as the institutional order and cultural codes prevent the coming of a true polymorphous sexuality rid of gender privileging and the commodification of desire. Thus, bodily pleasure and psychological gratification

must recover in daily practice the kind of passionate and communicative love first envisioned by utopian socialists like Fourier whose prescription for work as play challenged the desexualizing of the body.

A marvelous instance of this passionate and erotic play can be found in the chapter of Melville's *Moby Dick* entitled "All Hands Round" where the men on board the Pequod are harvesting whale sperm in a homoerotic way that could be crudely called a circle jerk. Beyond the fleeting gratification of this kind of hand job (and the glaring contradiction of avaricious murdering of whales), sustaining work as play and erotic love too often comes up against the wounded phallogocentric pride of authoritarian Captain Ahab who wish to channel, commodify, or control all passionate and communicative love.

In order to combat the Ahab's of this world and overthrow those coercive institutional orders that stifle erotic love and play, some commitment to altruism, interpersonal equality, or a simple sense of respect is required. The anarchist or libertarian struggle to throw off invasive social controls over the body is central to overcoming coercion and generating interpersonal equality. From the perspective of gay rights advocate Steven Seidman: "Libertarians intend to free individuals of the excessive social controls that inhibit sexual expression and stigmatize transgressive desires and acts. Seidman goes on, however, to temper his endorsement of the libertarian agenda because of the need to consider the consequences of our actions in an era plagued by AIDS. When we all can become vulnerable to the deadly unintended consequences of one of our most intimate acts, erotic love, we can no longer forego a self-conscious concern for the welfare of the other in our moments of passionate letting-go. Thus, the spontaneity that had been the hallmark of the romantic impulse behind anarchist free love can no longer be valued over all else.

Nevertheless, opening oneself fully to the other is consonant to what Giddens calls the liberatory erotic ideal of contemporary life—"confluent love," which he says "presumes equality in emotional give and take. "Love here," according to Giddens, "only develops to the degree to which intimacy does, to the degree to which each partner is prepared to reveal concerns and needs to the other and to be vulnerable to that other."

Giddens further contends that "confluent love is not necessarily monogamous, in the sense of sexual exclusiveness...Sexual exclusiveness here has a role in the relationship to the degree to which the partners mutually deem it desirable or essential." Thus, Giddens provides the concept of erotic love with a social bonding that connects bodily pleasure, psychological gratification, and interpersonal equality to an intimate relationship free from coercion but not from concern. In turn, we can see such erotic love tied to ethical anarchism not repressive authority.

Spiritual Love: Anarchy and the Quest for Communion

For many in quest of communion, spiritual love, like erotic love, radiates out from the body. In recognizing communion with the other and the environment around us, one may discover inter-subjectivity in the world. Such intersubjectivity, or capacity to acknowledge the other as an intimate part of one's own connection to the world, affords the opportunity to realize a sacred trust. In refusing domination over the other or dominion over nature, one may recapture the sacred relationship with all species and the earth. Thus, to understand how spiritual love is even more fundamental to anarchism today than it was in Emma Goldman's day may allow us to find an authentic communion with others and the world around us.

We are definitely in need of spiritual love as a response to the desacralization of the world caused by technological domination. In the long march of the Megamachine to grind the natural world into commodities, we have lost touch with the sacred and mysterious that bonded our ancient ancestors to the natural world. Jerry Mander, in his brilliant book, *In the Absence of the Sacred*, persuasively posits an inverse relationship between the dominance of technological objectification and the disappearance of the continent-wide spiritual life of indigenous peoples of the North American continent.

In understanding how nature has been denuded of its vital subjectivity through the construction of the hierarchies of power-over, we must try to recapture the ways in which our ancestors located the intersubjectivity of their environment. By acknowledging how life inhered in all of the natural world, from trees to bodies of water, many so-called primitive people were amazingly in tune with their environment and well-equipped to treat it and each other with respect.

According to Bruce Chatwin's *Song-lines*, Australian aborigines established a spirit of communion with their world by the musical mapping of significant points in the Australian outback. Alongside this musical mapping, Australian aborigines located the very real points of nurturance for physical and psychic survival. Thus, the intersubjectivity of the Australian aborigines with their world had a practical, as well as aesthetic, connection.

Our own practical and aesthetic connection to the natural world means, for example, saving the rainforest is not only politically and practically important, but fundamental to an inclusive intersubjectivity with the diverse species that inhabit the planet. The continuing obliteration of this diversity not only imperils the survival of such vital ecosystems, but also reinforces anthropocentric arrogance and insensitivity.

Spiritual love also inheres in the struggles of those who, because of the persistence of oppressive hierarchies, are either dishonored or treated with disrespect because of their color or gender or class. We can learn from their efforts of communion and the rootedness of spiritual love in their social projects, especially as testimony to how such projects offer a form of social redemption both to the oppressed and the oppressor. One example of how spiritual love empowered the disenfranchised and dishonored was in the civil rights movement when participants alluded to the "beloved community," in effect fusing spiritual love with social and non-violent confrontation.

Another magnificent effort to overturn social hierarchies and to realize authentic communion can be found in the *Mujeres Libres*, or anarchist Free Women of Spain, who in the 1930s strove to enact their anthem calling for "affirming the promise of life."

Thus, a focus on spiritual love helps us to learn from the quest for communion found in anarchists from Emma Goldman to the *Mujeres Libres*; from the civil rights and anti-authoritarian struggles of the 1960's to the ecofeminists of today. In all these struggles, the desire to nurture the "reborn social soul" helps us understand the link between spiritual love and anarchy. From the nurturing and non-reciprocal altruism of parental love, to the expressiveness and mutual altruism of erotic love, to the intersubjectivity and communion of spiritual love, anarchy represents a path from our ancient past through our present dilemmas and into an emancipatory future.

And who knows, as Goldman once speculated, what potentialities will be realized in the lives of men and women when love and anarchy combine.

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1993

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/341-spring-1993/love-anarchy>
Fifth Estate #341, Spring 1993

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