

Anarchic Justice at the End of History

Anarchy and the Law of Nature

John Clark

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It has been said that self-preservation is the first law of nature, and that the basis of justice lies in protecting ourselves from one another. This is a perennial lie of the system of domination.

In reality, the flourishing of the community is the primary aim of nature, and mutual aid and solidarity in pursuit of this aim is the primal, originating law of nature. Nurture is the first law of nature. All justice flows from this source.

In ancient China, the spontaneous order of nature was called the Dao, or Way. It was seen as the model for “ruling without ruling.” The Daoist sage Laozi remarked that “the Way of Nature is to take from where there is excess and give to where there is deficiency,” whereas “the Way of Man is to take from where there is deficiency and to give to where there is excess.” Already, there was a clear distinction between natural justice as anarchic order and patriarchal, statist, and exploitative justice as the mystification of domination.

This truth of natural justice has also been known by indigenous peoples everywhere. As writer and activist Dylan Fitzwater explains in his 2019 *Autonomy is in Our Hearts*, such solidarity is expressed in the indigenous Tsotsil language of Chiapas as *ichbail to muk*, or “bringing one another to greatness.” This greatness of communal flourishing is the primordial form of freedom, and the solidarity that brings us to it is at the heart of primordial justice.

The so-called Western tradition of justice goes back to the ancient Greek concept of *Dikē*, which signifies acting in accord with both cosmic nature and one’s own nature. The early philosopher Heraclitus described *Dikē* as a dynamic balance of order and chaos. Divine Justice, personified as the Goddess *Dikē*, is dependent on Divine Chaos, personified as the goddess *Eris*. “All things come into being through strife (*Eris*).” Thus, order as a kind of discordant harmony arises out of negation and contradiction. It cannot exist without chaos (natural spontaneity).

These primordial senses of justice are all expressed in the anarchist symbol @, consisting of an “A” within an “O.” At the core of Order is Anarchy. Justice, the result of the two, is thus an Ordered Anarchy or Anarchic Order.

Another way of expressing this is that universal freedom is the standard of justice. For the Earth and its inhabitants, justice as anarchic order means the maximization of freedom for the biosphere—and all of its forms of life and mind—to flourish.

Domination and the Law of Empire

This natural justice as flourishing and fulfillment through anarchic order was overthrown by the rise of Empire and forms of social domination. If we look back to the history of the earliest empires of the ancient Near East, we see the Empire had already subordinated everything to its obsessive drive toward unlimited power and domination. At this early stage, it was already producing human and ecological catastrophe resulting in the literal collapse of societies.

While Empire has always legitimated itself through an appeal to its self-defined laws of nature (from ancient myths of divine right to today's illusory laws of economics), its power has in reality depended on carefully contrived social policies, all enforced through an effective monopoly on force and coercion. Imperial justice has always been a hierarchically imposed system that wreaks havoc with all the forces of natural justice.

Fascist legal theorist Carl Schmitt, in his 1922 work, *Political Theology*, defined sovereignty as 'the power to declare the exception,' a condition in which the state can overturn legal conventions and abolish supposed constitutional rights.

Today, we see the state moving more overtly in this fascistic direction, through the proliferation of technobureaucratic control, through secret operations based on appeals to national security, through the growth of surveillance mechanisms, through increasingly punitive regulation of dissent in nominally liberal democracies, through extra-judicial killings with relative impunity by the police, through the now-eternalized War on Terror, through the emergence of more authoritarian leader-figures.

Many explain such developments as a deterioration of the global system of justice, a forsaking of civilized norms. However, what is occurring in reality, beyond such illusions, is that the State's fundamental nature as a system of organized violence and injustice is becoming more overt. Whenever necessary, the State reverts from a practice of "war by other means" to war by means of war. It inevitably does so when crisis intensifies.

Justice at the End of History

And, crisis has never before been as intense as it is at the present moment. The greatest global justice issue of our age is the global ecological crisis that is leading to a collapse of the biosphere. Many call our era the Anthropocene and find the roots of crisis in anthropocentrism. Human centeredness is, indeed, an enormous problem. However, in reality, our social world today is more deeply egocentric than anthropocentric. The prevailing system of social injustice and voracious exploitation, capitalism, has made it that way. The late capitalist consuming subject may suffer from a human-superiority complex, but that subject believes much more fervently in the ego than in humanity.

The mass egoism of the late capitalist society of consumption is merely the universalization, at the end of Empire, of the patriarchal domineering self that was once, at the beginning of Empire, the prerogative of Pharaohs, Lugals, and Sargon (as Fredy Perlman so eloquently depicts it in *Against His-story, Against Leviathan*). It is, in a sense, the democratization or self-management of domination. It generates a multitude of forms of micro-domination, while at the same time producing nihilism, the crisis and collapse of meaning and value.

Marx once observed that in the modern age "all that is solid melts into air" as everything substantial is dissolved in the "icy water of egotistical calculation." And, indeed, this seems to be our road to oblivion. Universal egoism yields universal nihilism—and, ultimately, universal annihilation. No system has surpassed capitalism (in alliance with the state) in producing all of the above. By radically atomizing society and relativizing all natural, objective values, it creates the conditions for regression to fascism as a desperate and ill-fated effort to regain social order and collective meaning through the reign of a brutal, authoritarian justice.

Nightmare of World History

We have reached a point at which not only the flourishing of life on Earth, but its very survival, is only possible if the system of domination is destroyed and natural justice is restored. The first step is to realize (in the words of Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses*) that "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake." Tragically, now, at the end of history, in the totalitarian society of mass consumption, we have been absorbed ever more completely into the nightmare world than ever before.

We need to consider very carefully the question of what the barriers are both to awakening from the nightmare and to undertaking effective action to create a post-nightmare world (social-ecological revolution and regenera-

tion). These barriers include the psychological process of denial, which says, “I refuse to recognize the truth,” and that of disavowal, which says, “I recognize the truth, but I choose to act as if I did not.”

Beyond these, we must take on the barriers that are embedded in the dominant social institutions, the dominant social ideology, the dominant social imaginary and the dominant social ethos. All of these must be combated and overcome simultaneously, through the creation of a different kind of world, here and now, or else none will be overcome.

Returning to the Earth

Just as Laozi said, our choice is between two paths. One is the reigning path of corporate capitalism, the centralized nation-state, and other forms of domination. It is based on concentration of economic and political power in hierarchically structured institutions, control by corporate and state bureaucracies, increased mechanization of society, reliance on manipulative technologies, and ever-expanding social and ecological exploitation. It defines as justice whatever serves the system of domination and exploitation, and thereby leads to the ultimate injustice, the coming of the era of death on Earth (the Necrocene).

The alternative path is one of communitarianism, voluntary cooperation, decentralization of power, democratic, participatory decision-making, free federation for common goals, utilization of humane and ecologically-sound technologies, egalitarian relationships, and, above all, an ethos (an actual, all-embracing practice) of respect for and complete dedication to the flourishing of the Earth and all its beings.

Justice is what serves this flourishing and makes it a present reality. Justice is what helps it grow into an effective power that can, ultimately, challenge and destroy the system of domination and its culture of nihilism and death.

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His latest book is *Between Earth and Empire: From the Necrocene to the Beloved Community* from PM Press.



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