

## The Anarchist Challenge: Some Arguments for and Against Anarchism

### Arguments from Principle

#### Argument I

- (i) governments are by their nature violent, forceful, coercive
  - (ii) violence, force and coercion are morally bad
- ∴ governments are morally bad

#### Evidence for premise (i):

- a) all governments will coerce people into obeying the law; implication of this practice: "obey the law or we will throw you in jail"
- b) all governments maintain themselves through force and violence; e.g., if you don't pay your taxes, you go to jail. Goldman claims that the government is a criminal because it steals in the form of taxes, kills in the form of war and capital punishment.

#### Argument II

- (i) governments exist to secure "the absolute subordination of the individual" (Goldman, p. 54); cf. Emerson "all government in essence is tyranny".
  - (ii) subordination of the individual is immoral because "the one thing of value in the world is an active soul" (translation: a human being freely pursuing its natural activities is the only thing of value—cf. Kant on respect for rational beings)
  - (iii) what opposes this active soul is immoral because it opposes the only thing of value in the world
- ∴ governments are immoral

### Arguments from Consequences

#### Argument I

- (i) huge inequalities of wealth, and associated class stratification, are only possible with the aid and assistance of governments
  - (ii) huge inequalities of wealth and class stratification are bad
  - (iii) without governments, people are less likely to treat each other with the kind of inequality inherent in a class-stratified society with large disparities in wealth
- ∴ societies with governments are bad, and societies without governments are more likely to be good

#### Argument II

- (i) the existence of governments leads to war (cf. WW-I and WW-II; Vietnam; Korea)
  - (ii) war is bad
- ∴ governments are bad

#### Argument III

- (i) the existence of governments hinders dialogue and cooperation among individuals (by creating a framework of law behind which people may hide, attacking each other with lawyers)
  - (ii) dialogue and cooperation, working things out face to face rather than through lawyers, is better for 'active souls' like human beings
- variant of (ii): human beings are inherently social beings that benefit from dialogue and cooperation, and thus the absence of lawyers and the law would encourage us to pursue what is natural for us
- ∴ we would be better off without governments

### Argument III

- (i) governments invariably and inevitably concentrate power in the hands of a few
  - (ii) those with power will serve their own interests, eventually at the expense of others (the majority of human beings)
  - (iii) even in a successful representative democracy, where the few who govern really do strive to serve the interests of the majority that elected them (rather than their own interests), the minority that is not represented will be subordinated to the will of the majority
  - (iv) it is immoral to subordinate anyone to the interests of someone else, either by method (ii) or method (iii) (essentially because 'the only thing of value in the world is an active soul', and every active soul has this intrinsic worth that must not be ignored [Kant again])
- ∴ a government inevitably will be immoral and unjust

### Argument IV

- (i) human beings thrive best when free to pursue their own interests, without the constraints imposed on them by government
  - (ii) government cannot avoid imposing these constraints on the human beings living under them
- ∴ governments act as an obstacle to human thriving and should be abolished

### Counter-argument I

- (i) governments steal (taxes) and physically harm (jail, capital punishment) their citizens
  - (ii) stealing from and/or physically harming human beings are immoral
  - (iii) without governments, criminals will steal more from the citizenry and physically harm it to a greater degree than is the case *with* governments
- ∴ societies with governments are preferable to societies without governments

### Kropotkin's counter-argument to Counter-argument I

- (i) most crimes occur because one person wishes to obtain another person's wealth
  - (ii) elimination of private property, or at the minimum, the elimination of huge disparities of wealth would eliminate the causal foundation that makes (i) true
  - (iii) huge disparities of wealth, and other abuses of private property, are impossible (or *less likely*) without governments (i.e., in societies without governments)
- ∴ societies without governments will have less crime than societies that have governments

## Counter-argument II

- (i) violent crimes are more likely when there is no prospect of punishment
  - (ii) societies without governments make no credible threat (or make a significantly *less credible threat*) to punish those who commit violent crimes
  - (iii) by eliminating government, *some* crimes (violent crimes like rape, murder, assault) will increase (even if others, like property crimes, will be reduced)
  - (iv) an increase in violent crimes is too high a price to pay for the few benefits (reduced property crime, reduced disparities of wealth and less class stratification) of eliminating government
- ∴ it is better to keep government

## Kropotkin's counter-argument to Counter-argument II

- (i) threat of punishment does not deter violent crime "there are few murderers who were not firmly convinced that they should escape prosecution".
  - (ii) prison is the primary punishment threat, and prison *increases* the likelihood of violent crime because it turns habitual criminals into violent ones by brutalizing them
  - (iii) eliminating government eliminates prisons
- ∴ elimination of government will reduce the amount of violent crime

## Another counter-argument to Counter-argument I

- (i) those who do *not* commit crimes do so because it is the *right thing to do* and they recognize it, not because it is unlawful
  - (ii) laws instituted by governments fail to deter criminals who do not recognize *it is wrong* to commit crime, or who recognize *it is wrong* but choose to commit crime anyway
  - (iii) governments contribute nothing to the reduction in crime, or the likelihood of morally acceptable behavior among the citizenry
  - (iv) theories to the contrary of (iii) underestimate human nature (Hobbes is wrong, Goldman is right about human beings in their natural state)
- ∴ we have no reasonable fear of increased crime if government is abolished

## Counter-argument III

- (i) social peace is only possible when a society has a government
  - (ii) social peace is good
- ∴ government is good

## Counter-argument to Counter-argument III

- (i) people have repeatedly lived peaceably without governments over them (evidence: various traditional societies)
  - (ii) counter-argument III denies this in its premise (i)
- ∴ counter-argument III is unsound, and its conclusion may be dismissed