Anarchism as Metaphilosophy

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Near the end of the prologue of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates says to his opponent Thrasymachus that what they are discussing is "no ordinary/insignificant matter, but how we ought to live" (1.352d). As in many of Plato's writings, Socrates here played the role of his mouthpiece: "How we ought to live" was indeed no insignificant matter for Plato, but the starting point and ultimate purpose of his philosophical investigations.

Relegating the pre-Socratic philosophers to the discipline's prehistory, it is sometimes suggested that Western philosophy started with Plato. Alfred North Whitehead even claimed that the history of Western philosophy "consists of a series of footnotes to Plato" (1929: 39). This is probably a slight overstatement, but it is certainly true that Plato played a central role—perhaps even *the* central role—in the birth of Western philosophy. And as Plato's philosophy was born from a relatively practical and ordinary problem (*i.e.* how we ought to live), in extension, so was Western philosophy.

There is something obviously wrong with this story, however. (But there is something right about it as well.) Excluding the pre-Socratics from the history of philosophy does not seem to sketch a fair picture of the discipline's origin, but even more problematic is that Plato's most famous student, Aristotle, doesn't fit well in this picture either. In the introduction of what came to be known as his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle wrote that it is because of wonder that men first began to philosophize, and the kind of wonders he mentions are wonders about the natural world surrounding us (982b12*ff*). Aristotle's concern was the same as that of most of the pre-Socratics: figuring out how things

work and explaining reality. It is for that reason that Aristotle wrote about physics and geography as well as ethics, for example, and about many other topics that we wouldn't classify as philosophy today.

It seems important to me, however, that much of what grew out of the pre-Socratic/Aristotelian concern has since branched off into various disciplines of science, leaving only a small core of questions unanswerable by empirical means, while Plato's concern is still *fully* the domain of philosophy. Perhaps, it is fair to say that science/philosophy originated with the pre-Socratic/ Aristotelian concern and ethics/philosophy with Plato's, and that throughout the following millennia proto- and sub-disciplines continuously changed their affiliations and configurations.

The origin and original purpose of philosophy is critical reflection on relatively ordinary human concerns. This seems equally true of the pre-Socratic/ Aristotelian concern as of Plato's. Note that I omitted the qualification "Western" here, because Chinese and Indian philosophy are not significantly different in this respect, although the historical core concerns differ. For Chinese philosophy that core concern was social-philosophical as well as moral: What is the right set of social conventions (*dao* 道; literally "way") to enable and guide people's virtue (*de* 德)? And the historical core concern of Indian philosophy was soteriological: How to achieve liberation (*mokṣa*) from the cycle of death and rebirth (*saṃsāra*) and related suffering.[1]

In all three major philosophical traditions (*i.e.* Greek, Indian, Chinese) debates about these core concerns led to more fundamental questions: to questions about the meaning of key terms in the debate and about the origin of meaning(s), to questions about the nature and origins of knowledge, about the

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1   The pre-Socratic/Aristotelian concern was also a concern in India and China. In Buddhist philosophy, for example, understanding reality—that is, the world of *saṃsāra*—is necessary for escaping it (and this thus more or less follows from the above-mentioned core concern). In China, the two concerns seem to have been separate more, although it is not difficult to find exceptions. Wang Chong 王充 (see below) may be a good example.

nature of reality, and so forth.[2] Where and when philosophy found fertile soil and philosophical debate wasn't suppressed by crippling orthodoxies, these "more fundamental" questions developed into philosophy of language, epistemology, metaphysics, and so forth, but these were not yet separate fields. (And many fields split off from philosophy when their research methods became empirical more than purely logical and/or speculative.) However, with increasing specialization, the distance to (at least some of) the original questions gradually increased, leading ultimately to a near complete separation in 20th century academic philosophy. Some of Aristotle's curiosity about how things work remains, but the connection between esoteric discussions in metaphysics, for example, and how to live—and there *are* such connections, even if they are indirect—has been lost in the mist of time. (These "esoteric discussions", by the way, are immensely fascinating, which explains why it is so easy to get lost in them.)

Specialization is an unavoidable consequence of the growth of knowledge. A few centuries ago it was still possible to be reasonably well-acquainted with most fields of scientific inquiry, but nowadays a physicist, for example, cannot even be expected to have more than superficial knowledge of the parts of physics that lie beyond her own narrow area of specialization, and the same is true in philosophy.[3] The consequence thereof, however, is that much of contemporary academic philosophy has (almost?) completely lost sight of the much more ordinary questions and concerns that once gave birth to the discipline. Reinforcing this trend, the kind of broad and integrative philosophy that connects the various branches in an attempt to systematically answer those

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2 There is another similarity between the three traditions: their quests for absolute certainty (*i.e.* the unchanging *dao*, ultimate truth, *etc.*) and its counterpart, the critical realization of the certain failure of that quest (in Skepticism, Daoism, and Madhyamaka, *etc.*) (therein finding certainty, after all).

3 Specialization has been further promoted by the need for young scientists and philosophers to find a manageable and clearly delimited topic that they can master quickly enough to publish a few papers.

questions has been discredited in some schools of philosophy, and went out of fashion in others.

The result of these developments is a near complete separation of academic philosophy from the relatively ordinary human concerns at its roots, which has made philosophy increasingly irrelevant outside the narrow confines of the academy.[4] One may even wonder what justifies philosophy if it can no longer fulfill its original purposes. That is a rather reactionary sentiment, however, based on the idea that philosophy—or any discipline for that matter—is not allowed to change its purpose and fundamental concerns. Perhaps, Richard Rorty (1979) is right in claiming that

> "philosophy" is not a name for a discipline which confronts permanent issues, and unfortunately keeps misstating them, or attacking them with clumsy dialectical instruments. Rather, it is a cultural genre, a "voice in the conversation of mankind" (…), which centers on one topic rather than another at some given time not by dialectical necessity but as a result of various things happening elsewhere in the conversation (...) or of individual men of genius who think of something new (...), or perhaps of the resultant of several such forces. (p. 264)

Perhaps, being a "cultural genre" could be all the justification that academic philosophy needs, if it would be one. But it isn't. Even if Western philosophy was *one* cultural genre in the past, it now consists of two major schools, analytic and continental philosophy, that hardly communicate with, or even understand each other, supplemented with a number of smaller schools such as Marxist, pragmatist, feminist, and Africana philosophy. In addition to these, there are the various schools and traditions of non-Western philosophy: Buddhist philosophy, African philosophy, Confucianism, Mohism, Daoism, and so forth. Philosophy is not a "voice in the conversation of mankind", but a

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4   In case of analytic philosophy social irrelevance was more or less enforced during the Cold War (see Reisch 2005). It never recovered. Continental philosophy on the other hand undermined its own relevance through anti-realism (see footnote 14) and intractability.

cacophony of voices. And new voices keep being added through academic hyper-specialization, splitting up schools into topical units with as little mutual communication and understanding as the schools themselves.

What binds these various schools and specializations together is the "philosophy" label and the "big" questions in their past: questions of life, death, truth, and suffering, questions that once gave rise to the three main philosophical traditions. It is these questions and the history of thought about them that *could* make philosophy a cultural genre (and that used to make it a cultural genre), but specialization slowly undermines all shared knowledge and all common ground, leaving nothing but small, relatively isolated, esoteric sects that have nothing in common but a mostly forgotten history.[5]

To become a "voice in the conversation of mankind" (again), the various voices *within* philosophy would first have to start listening to each other, but even then, becoming a "cultural genre" or a "voice in the conversation of mankind" may be insufficient for some of us (or its sufficiency may depend on *what* that voice is contributing to the conversation). It certainly is not why I think that philosophy matters, or *should* matter, or why philosophy matters *to me*. Surely, "I'm trying to contribute to a voice in the conversation of mankind" isn't the kind of answer I would want to give to my daughter when she is old enough to ask me (and understand the answer) why I study philosophy, or to my students, or to others whose opinions I care about. The questions and concerns that gave birth to philosophy are questions that matter, not just to philosophers, but to anyone. They are simultaneously very big and very ordinary questions. In the attempt to answer them, philosophers cut them up in very many smaller (and less ordinary) questions, and somehow lost sight of the big (and ordinary) questions in the process, but it is the big questions that matter outside the academy. It is the big questions that matter to me.

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5   Most (but not all) of the points in the last two pages were made before by Samuel Wheeler in an unpublished paper titled "Specialization and the Future of Analytic Philosophy". Wheeler especially emphasizes the detrimental effects of the problem mentioned in footnote 3.

Specialization and the consequent fragmentation created two problems: one for philosophy as an (academic) discipline (or cultural genre) by undermining what binds it together into a (single) discipline (or cultural genre), and one for those among us whose philosophical temperament pushes us towards the unfashionable, big questions that once gave birth to the discipline, but that clash with the esoteric concerns of (most of) academic philosophy. These two problems have a common solution: *anarchism*. Not anarchism in the traditional, political sense, but anarchism as philosophical approach or methodology, as metaphilosophy. Obviously, this "answer" is an *answer* only if it is reasonably clear what it means for a method to be "anarchist". It isn't. Or not yet at least, but I hope it will be after a few more pages.

The notion of an anarchist method is generally associated with Paul Feyerabend's argument in *Against Method* (1975) against (strict) methodological rules on the grounds that a lack of rigid rules best serves the progress of science, and has done so in the past. Feyerabend labeled this lack of methodological rules "anarchism" (usually preceded with a qualification like "epistemological" or "methodological"), but the labeling followed the theory: he did not set out to devise some kind of anarchist methodology, and whether his proposed method really *is* anarchist (rather than merely sharing a superficial similarity with a popular conception of anarchism) is debatable.

More recently, Jeff Ferrel and others[6] have argued that *the* anarchist method is fieldwork or participatory observation based on Max Weber's notion of *Verstehen*. Aside from the fact that participatory observation is of limited use in philosophy, there are reasons to doubt the appropriateness of the "anarchist" qualification in this case as well. What is anarchist about the proposed method is that it is the method that best matches the anarchist scientist's pre-existing social and political engagement. It is not anarchist in the sense that it is based on an analysis of what anarchism is and how that translates to methodology.

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6   See Ferrel (2009) and most of the other papers in the section "Methodologies" in the anthology *Contemporary Anarchist Studies* (Amster *et al.* 2009).

Hence, it is a method an anarchist should *use* more than a method that *is* anarchist itself. Similarly, Peter Kropotkin wrote his *Modern Science and Anarchism* (1908) to answer the question "what method [anarchism] employs in its researches" (p. 11); that is, what method an anarchist should *use*. His answer, however, is diametrically opposed to Ferrel's. Instead of the anti-positivism of *Verstehen*-based fieldwork or participatory observation, Kropotkin argues for the positivism embodied in the common methods of the natural sciences: "Anarchism does not recognize any method other than the natural-scientific" (p. 92; "natural-scientific-inductive" on p. 91).

Contrary to Ferrel and Kropotkin, I am not suggesting a method that anarchists should use here, not a method-for-anarchists, but an anarchist method, and I haven't said anything yet about what makes a method anarchist. Answering that question, of course, depends at least in part on the meaning of the two constituting concepts "anarchist" (or -ism) and "method". I'll assume the latter concept to be unproblematic: a scientific method is a set of rules for choosing between alternative theories, explanations, hypotheses, tests, procedures, and so forth within the context of scientific practice. Such a set can in principle be empty, as in Feyerabend's proposal.[7] "Anarchism", on the other hand, is considerably more ambiguous. There is no universally accepted definition of "anarchism", but perhaps the term itself can be used as a guide. In his contribution to the 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Peter Kropotkin (1910) translated (but not defined) "anarchism" as "contrary to authority" (p. 914). A longer translation could be that *an-arch-ism* opposes or rejects (ἀν-) (coercive) power/authority (ἀρχή) and the institutionalization thereof in the form of some power-wielder (ἀρχός). The *term* does not imply a

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7   Or perhaps in a caricature thereof if it is assumed that Feyerabend's rejection of rules is not as radical and complete as it may seem to be. It should be noted that Feyerabend suggests that the empty set is not a method, as his title, *Against Method*, indicates. I will, however, ignore that suggestion to avoid having to introduce a term that comprises both ruled methods and Feyerabendian rule-less-ness.

rejection of rules (νόμος or θεσμός);[8] that would be "*anomism*" or "*athesmism*". Hence, if the term does not misguide us, anarchism is not *necessarily* opposed to (all) rules, which would imply that "anarchism" is a misnomer for Feyerabend's position.

In the final chapter of his book *Der Anarchismus* (1900), comparing seven famous anarchists from the 19th and late 18th century, Paul Eltzbacher concluded that they had nothing in common, except "that they deny the state for our future" (p. 249). As a definition of anarchism, rejection of the state is too narrow, however: it only applies to political anarchism, and it makes little sense to say that an anarchist method for philosophy (or science) is based on a rejection of the state. What different kinds of anarchism—methodological, political, and so forth—have in common (and what makes them anarchist) is not a rejection of the state, but—as the above brief analysis of the term "anarchism" suggests—a rejection of what the state embodies in the political sphere: power, authority, coercion. Unfortunately, this doesn't make it much clearer what exactly anarchism is, as the notions of power and authority are notoriously ambiguous, perhaps even essentially contested (Gallie 1956, Lukes 1974).[9] (Even the concept of the "state" is not entirely unambiguous, by the way,[10] but that is of no concern here.)

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8   There is no single unambiguous translation equivalent of the modern concept of (methodological) rule in ancient Greek, but closest seem "νόμος", meaning a.o. *custom, law, ordinance made by authority*; and/or the much more uncommon "θεσμός", meaning *that which is laid down, law, rule, precept, rite, institution*, etc.

9   The contestation of "essentially contested concepts" is essential to the debates they are used in. Each party in the debate claims that their definition is correct, and by implication, there are no neutral definitions. Rather, any definition of an essentially contested concept is normative (and political) because it captures the interpretation of only one party in the debate. The notion was introduced in Gallie (1956).

10 There has been a considerable change in meaning of the concept of the "state" throughout the last few centuries (at least). See, for example, Boldt (1990). By implication, the rejection of the state may have meant (subtly, but significantly) different things for different anarchists, and probably did not mean exactly the same in the 19th century as it is generally taken to mean now.

Authority and power are often contrasted in terms of rights and abilities: authority is a *right* to get some desired effect, while power is an *ability* to get it, regardless of opposition. As a right, authority depends on acceptance (or recognition, acknowledgment, consent, *etc*.) of that right: authority is *created* by acceptance (and thus existentially dependent thereon). Power, on the other hand, is objective fact. Power may seem to be dependent on compliance (or obedience), but compliance does not create power. Rather, power conceptually implies compliance, and the other way around; they are different sides of the same coin. Acceptance and compliance stand in different relations to authority and power, respectively, but also point at a further difference: authority is a right to have something *accepted*; power is an ability to have something *done*. To have power over someone means to be able to make that person *do* something. (Where "doing" is understood broadly, and thus includes saying, giving, and so forth.) To have authority over someone means having one's judgment that something is true, right, or desirable accepted. (Note that this includes the judgment that some action by the authority holder is right.) Power can be coercive, but one cannot be coerced to think something, only to do something; not to accept some claim, but only to say or pretend that one accepts it. By implication, authority cannot be coercive.

Power and authority overlap, both conceptually and phenomenally. For example, Aghion and Tirole (1997) distinguish *formal authority* as "the right to decide" from *real authority* as "the effective control over decisions" (p. 1), but such real authority—as effective control—seems power more than authority. French and Raven's (1959) influentially distinguished six kinds of power. Of these six, *referent* power, which is based on the charisma and interpersonal skills of the power holder, and *expert power*, which is based on skills or expertise, seem kinds of authority more than power. Authority and power also overlap in Antonio Gramsci's notion of *cultural hegemony* and Steven Lukes's (1974) *ideological power*, in which power/authority works by influencing values, preferences, thoughts, and ideas.

The notion of expert power/authority suggests that power/authority is not always objectionable. At least, there doesn't seem to be anything inherently wrong in relying on the expert judgment of someone who has much more knowledge in some relevant field. For example, if I want to know something about particle physics, I will rely on expert authority. I will *have* to rely on expert authority, as I don't want to study physics and (cannot) do the necessary experiments myself. However, if power/authority is not always and necessarily objectionable, then when is it? Richard Sylvan's (1993) answer to that question is *opacity*. Expert authority is transparent. If I'd want to, I can study physics and check all the experimental data myself (and even do some experiments myself). In case of opaque power/authority, on the other hand, it is impossible to similarly "see through" the authority. Transparency means that I can check the reasoning all the way down to observations and fundamental assumptions. Opacity means that whatever lays behind the opaque authority's decree is out of my reach and thus effectively irrelevant to me. Transparent authority is open to verification and revision; opaque authority is closed, dogmatic.

Anarchism then, opposes *opaque* power/authority. (Note that coercion is a kind of opacity as whatever reasons lie beyond the coercion are out of reach for the person being coerced.) And if this is right, then an anarchist method is a method that avoids opaque power/authority and demands transparency. That doesn't sound very revolutionary. Rather, it seems to be part of what any widely accepted scientific method promotes. Perhaps then, Kropotkin was right when he wrote that the anarchist method is the method of the natural sciences. Science, however, is not nearly as transparent as it is supposed to be, and philosophy probably even less.

The most common opaque power structures in science and philosophy are conventions: paradigms or examples of "good" science, disciplinary boundaries and divisions between schools and traditions, ingrained ways of doing things, and so forth. Anarchism as method does not necessarily imply their rejection, however, but rejects their opacity. Paradigms, boundaries, rules,

and so forth must be transparent (like anything else). That is, they must be justified by transparent arguments and they must be open to inspection, revision, or rejection. Many conventions in science and philosophy are perfectly justifiable and many are perfectly transparent. This includes many methodological principles, but also the procedure of peer review, for example. Those, therefore, are perfectly acceptable. But there are also many conventions that are *mere* conventions and that lack sufficient justification. Disciplinary boundaries are an example thereof. Disciplinary boundaries are useful to organize libraries and universities, but reality isn't inherently separated into sociological and economic spheres, or physical and biological ones. Of course, almost everyone knows this, but in practice the boundaries between disciplines (and schools) are very hard.

Transparency means and requires that an argument, a line of reasoning, can be easily seen through, can be easily checked and confirmed, rejected, or revised. Transparency, therefore, requires that arguments are well-structured, explicit, and logical, and that all its premises and assumptions are open to inspection. Intuition, or gut-feeling, therefore, can never be an acceptable ground for a premise. And secondly, transparency means avoiding ambiguity and rhetorical trickery. Not all philosophy satisfies these simple requirements.

On a side note, much of the above considerations do not just apply to anarchism as method, but to anarchism *simpliciter*. Anarchism—in my opinion—only rejects *opaque* power/authority and because reason is always and necessarily transparent and no unreasonable argument, decision, or action is transparent, we can summarize the above in a new slogan for anarchism: "*no authority but reason*". This, of course, conflicts with popular views of anarchism (or a caricature thereof) as rejecting all limits to individual freedom, but that is the freedom of the rapist, the tyranny of whim. *Even if* the abolition of limits to my freedom to do what I want when I want it would set me free, it would enslave others, make them subject to my whim, to my opaque power, but the tyranny of whim does not just enslave others, but myself as well, as

Spinoza (1674) pointed out in a letter to an anonymous critic:

> This is that human freedom, which all boast that they possess, and which consists solely in the fact, that men are conscious of their own desire, but are ignorant of the causes whereby that desire has been determined. Thus an infant believes that it desires milk freely; an angry child thinks he wishes freely for vengeance, a timid child thinks he wishes freely to run away. Again a drunken man thinks, that from the free decision of his mind he speaks words, which afterwards, when sober, he would like to have left unsaid. So the delirious, the garrulous and others of the same sort think that they act from the free decision of their mind, not that they are carried away by impulse. As this misconception is innate in all men, it is not easily conquered. (pp. 390-1)

The kind of transparency in argument that methodological anarchism requires is often associated with analytic philosophy or with (modern) Western philosophy in general, but this is Western presumptuousness, of course, and it can be found in other traditions and periods as well. A particularly interesting example is the first century Chinese philosopher Wang Chong 王充: an outsider and relatively poor, mostly autodidact but with an encyclopedic knowledge, and driven by a strong aversion to fashionable nonsense and the "flowery and artificial writing" (華偽之文) that he perceived to be customary in his day. In contrast to the latter, his book *Lunheng* 論衡, was intended to promote truth and dispel falsehoods by means of a two-faced philosophical method of questioning (*wen* 問) what is unclear and challenging (*nan* 難) what is false or invalid.[11] The latter he generally did by means of clear, unadorned, and direct arguments, often in *modus tollens*.[12] Wang Chong particularly

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11 On Wang Chong's philosophical method, see McLeod (2007).

12 Wang Chong's use of *modus tollens* is not remarkable in itself—rather, it was a very common argument form in ancient China (Harbsmeier 1998)—but his application stands out for its transparency and explicitness. For a nice example of Wang Chong's style of reasoning, see his arguments against the belief in ghosts in the chapter *Lunsi* 論死.

disliked flowery writing for its beguiling effect. The "common people" are all too easily bewitched by exciting ideas in an attractive package:

> 世俗之性，好奇怪之語，說虛妄之文。何則？實事不能快意，而華虛驚耳動心也。 It is the nature of common people to enjoy strange sayings and uphold false and absurd writings. Why is this? [Because] the truth cannot be grasped quickly/easily, while flowery falsehoods astound the hearers and move their minds. (*Duizuo* 對作 §2—my translation)

And consequently:

> 起眾書並失實，虛妄之言勝真美也。 In the writings of the people all truth is lost, and false and absurd doctrines subvert what is real and virtuous/beautiful. (*id.*)

There is an obvious anti-populist or even elitist sentiment in these claims, but Wang Chong has a point that "flowery and artificial writing" has an advantage in the marketplace of ideas. The relative obscurity of Wang Chong may even confirm this point: he responded to the proliferation of "empty falsehoods" (虛) with relatively dry and unexciting arguments, which probably did not contribute much to his popularity. Nevertheless, it is an example worth following. Excitement is not a proxy for truth. In the contrary, the more exotic and exciting an idea, the more likely it is false. A metaphilosophical anarchist prefers sobriety to flowery falsehoods. Anarchism is boring.

Language does not just beguile us through "flowery and artificial writing", but also through a naive but common belief in its (political *and* metaphysical) neutrality and objectivity. According to Nietzsche,

> in language, man posited an own world next to the other [world], a place that man held to be so solid to, from it, lift the other world from its hinges and make himself its lord. In so far as man throughout long periods of time believed in the

concepts and names of things as *eternal truths*, did he develop the pride with which he lifted himself above the animals: he really thought to have knowledge of the world in language. (1878: §I.11 — my translation)

One of the key differences between the two main schools of Western philosophy, continental and analytic philosophy, is the linguistic beguilement they are most susceptible to. At its worst, continental philosophy is an elaborate attempt to beat the reader into submission (to "astound the hearers and move their minds") with a barrage of metaphors, deepisms, intentional (?) ambiguities and equivocations, and under-cooked pseudo-arguments that sound right on a superficial reading, but that are impossible to spell out in detail, but even at its best, the claims of continental philosophers tends to be obscured by "flowery and artificial writing".[13,14] Much of analytic philosophy, on the other hand, falls prey to the second beguilement, put down unsurpassably by Nietzsche in the above quote, and fails to take (sufficiently) seriously Ludwig Wittgenstein's assertion that "philosophical problems arise

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13   In Brons (2013), I argued that there may be a good, philosophical excuse for apparent obscurity in continental philosophy in some cases (Derrida's theory of *différance*, specifically), but that excuse does not apply universally.

14   There is a second reason to be cautious about continental philosophy: its widespread anti-realism. The anti-realist rejection of an external/independent reality implies a rejection of objectivity, but without objectivity, there are no objective grounds for critique. Without objectivity (or objective truth), claims cannot be judged by the extent to which they represent the way things are, but only by the interests they serve and by their rhetorical success. "Truth" then, effectively becomes a euphemism for rhetorical success. Without objectivity, a liar is not misrepresenting reality (because there is no such thing as representing reality) but just an unsuccessful rhetor: lying is failing to convince. Conversely, telling the truth is succeeding; truth is rhetorical success; *truth is power*. Hence, rejecting objectivity and (some form of) realism is opening the door to tyranny in its most opaque form. Of course, this argument does not establish the truth of realism—it merely makes its opposite unacceptable to an anarchist —but there are independent grounds to assume that there must be an external/independent reality: without it, language and communication would be impossible (*e.g.* Brons 2012, 2013). Nevertheless, the rejection of anti-realism should not be taken to be an argument for acceptance of the naive forms of realism common in analytic philosophy. There are other alternatives (or intermediates), but that is a topic for another paper.

when language goes on holiday" (1953: §38). Philosophical problems don't exist without us: we create them, and we create them through language. Much earlier, Wittgenstein wrote that "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (1921: §5.6). But that doesn't mean that the limits of *my* language are the limits of *the* world, just that they are the limits of my experience thereof, of the world of my experience. We create philosophical problems by assuming that the limits of *my or our* language are the limits of *the* world. There is a saying in the *Quran* that

> a good word is like a good tree whose root is firm, and whose branches are in the sky; it gives its fruit at every season by the permission of its Lord. (…) And the likeness of a bad word is as a bad tree, which is felled from above the earth, and has no staying place. (14:24-26)

The "bad words" are the source of philosophical problems, the cases of "language going on holiday" (Wittgenstein), and the subject of Wang Chong's "questioning" (*wen* 問); that is, critical analysis and clarification or reconceptualization. And obviously, such "questioning" cannot be successful if it reduces one "bad word" to another. In "Ontological relativity" (1968), W.V.O. Quine pointed out that "a question of the form 'What is an F?' can be answered only by recourse to a further term: 'An F is a G'. The answer makes only relative sense: sense relative to an uncritical acceptance of 'G'" (p. 204). This is as fundamental a principle of transparency as it is obvious: reductive explanation must improve intelligibility, not deteriorate it.

In addition to be being boring and cautious of language, a metaphilosophical anarchist is also homeless (or at home everywhere, but that is really the same). To make one's home in a school of philosophy is to (implicitly and sub-consciously) submit to its conventions, *however opaque those are*; and not just to submit to them, but to accept and internalize them. Schools are orthodoxies, and as Nathan Salmon aptly remarked, "orthodoxy is supported less by reason

than by inertia" (2005: xvii). Membership of a school is (sub-consciously) allowing orthodoxy and convention to trump transparency and reason. For a metaphilosophical anarchist the priority is always the other way around, and for that reason, she cannot make a permanent home in any school. She can be a visitor, however (although she might not be a very welcome one if she all too explicitly questions the school's conventions).

To avoid misunderstanding it is worth emphasizing that schools in the sense intended here are *not* institutes, and that metaphilosophical anarchism neither entails nor follows from "institutional anarchism". Institutes, like any social object, are *constituted* by conventions (*e.g.* Searle 1995), and most of those conventions are harmless from a (meta-) philosophical point of view. Consequently, a blanket rejection of the conventions and other power structures of institutes is ill-advised (and silly, actually) for three reasons: they are unavoidable, they are (or should be!) mostly harmless (in the sense that they do not *necessarily* affect the content of her research), and rejecting them would almost certainly lead to unemployment.

Homelessness comes with advantages and disadvantages. A homeless philosopher is free to take what she needs from one school before moving on to another. (Provided, of course, that the result is not some kind of incoherent eclecticism.) More importantly, *only* a homeless/anarchist philosopher is free to follow a research interest that does not fit, or cannot satisfactorily fit, in any school. And consequently, *only* a homeless/anarchist philosopher is free to focus her attention on the big and ordinary questions that matter outside the academy, but that are considered too broad, too ordinary, too vague, too ambitious, too practical, too systematic, too controversial, too *whatever*, on the inside. Furthermore, *only* a homeless/anarchist philosopher is free to pursue these interests with a focus undistracted by orthodoxies and conventions, and unlimited by boundaries of schools or disciplines.

The disadvantages of homelessness should be obvious. Firstly, the rejection of boundaries between schools and academic disciplines brings the whole of

human knowledge into the anarchist's scope, but that is impossible to cover. Specialization cuts up knowledge and research into manageable chunks, and rejecting the boundaries between those "chunks" means giving up manageability. One could, of course, accept the chaos and hope for serendipity, but "serendipity" is just another word for "luck", and relying on luck hardly satisfies requirements of transparency. To some extent, manageability can be regained by acquiring a basic knowledge of as many fields as possible, in that way producing a "map" of the full terrain of human knowledge, which can be used for subsequent navigation. Obviously, this would require considerable effort, and even then, the map would always remain flawed and send its owner/creator astray occasionally. Secondly, because a metaphilosophical anarchist is not affiliated to any school and not a specialist in any branch, she is not likely to make a significant contribution to any established research program, effectively denying her the chance of academic prestige and any related academic reward (at least in current academic philosophy). Thirdly, because a metaphilosophical anarchist is not affiliated to any school, she is an "enemy" of all of them, and not likely to be very welcome. This may force the anarchist to the fringes of academic life; that is, to the precarious status of *para-academic* (Waldrop & Withers 2014).[15]

These are significant disadvantages, especially in conjunction: the first requires extraordinary effort, the second and third deny academic reward for that effort. From the perspective of the individual philosopher, therefore, metaphilosophical anarchism is a *very* bad career choice; so bad in fact, that no-one should (aspire to) become an anarchist.[16] From the perspective of philosophy as a discipline, on the other hand, things look a little bit differently:

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15 Perhaps this is reality already. Of the authors of the stack of more engaged and less rigidly scholastic papers on one of my shelves, more than half have adjunct positions teaching subjects like creative writing. Probably this isn't a representative sample, however, so I won't draw any conclusions from it.

16 This assumes, of course, that it is a choice rather than a disposition.

philosophy might need its anarchists.[17] If indeed only metaphilosophical anarchists are free to move from school to school and from branch to branch (and even from discipline to discipline), then only they can be the intermediaries and translators needed to facilitate the communication necessary to forge philosophy into a cultural genre. And if only metaphilosophical anarchists are free to research the big questions that matter to people outside the academy, then only they are able to make that cultural genre relevant; that is, to make it a "voice in the conversation of mankind" *that actually matters*. However, the third disadvantage precludes this: as an outsider (or para-academic) an anarchist cannot play any significant part in facilitating communication on the inside (*i.e.* between schools). Furthermore, even if philosophy needs its anarchists, philosophical institutes don't. Institutes tend to be (relatively) safeguarded by the inertia of the larger institutional settings they are part of, and even if they are not, the second disadvantage of metaphilosophical anarchism makes it very unlikely that an anarchist would make them any safer. Moreover, the problematic implications of specialization signalized in the first pages of this essay are much less visible within institutes where *personal* communication masks the lack of *substantial* communication between specialists.

So does this mean that metaphilosophical anarchism is a bad idea? The answer to that question depends on one's expectations. Anarchism is not a panacea. It *could* contribute to the re-integration of philosophy (both internally and externally), but only if certain preconditions would be met—acceptance of metaphilosophical anarchism as a genuine option being the most basic—and inertia makes this unlikely. Anarchism may very well be the solution to the other problem mentioned above—that of the individual philosopher with

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17 Conversely, a metaphilosophical anarchist needs the sects and specializations of academic philosophy (and other sciences) for their perspectival variety, and especially as sources of theories, arguments, and ideas. "Esoteric discussions" by specialists matter, albeit usually (very) indirectly. Theories of truth, metaphysics, epistemology, and so forth, have wider implications. See footnote 14 for a sketchy illustration.

unfashionably broad and ordinary concerns—but the costs may be higher than most are willing to pay. Perhaps, this leads to the conclusion that anarchism is a bad idea indeed. I have one final argument for metaphilosophical anarchism, however. Recall that anarchism always prioritizes transparency and reason above convention, dogma and the authority of school and orthodoxy. But isn't that what *all* philosophy is supposed to do? If so, then metaphilosophical anarchism is an empty "-ism": it is what philosophy is supposed to be.[18]

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18 I leave the reader to contemplate the implications of this "final argument".

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