

Chapter 1

On becoming a personal anarchist

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The term 'anarchy' is typically used in the political context, in relation to a philosophy espousing the abolition of all established governments. The word elicits images of bombs, violence, disorder and chaos, but etymologically it simply means 'without ruler.' Thus 'anarchy' may refer to a system which functions without reliance on established rules or patterns.

The anarchist insight

Anarchist philosophy (Read, 1971) is based on the role of freedom and equality as factors which facilitate human progress, measured by the degree of articulation and differentiation among the individuals within a society. This notion of progress is similar to Kelly's (1979a) proposition that human evolution continues to accelerate and that humans participate in it through elaboration of construction systems for understanding the universe. Elaboration and differentiation of constructs enables a person to more greatly appreciate the significance of human life and be a productive participant in human progress. The social group may function as an aid to this evolution, but progress only comes through individual differentiation from the group.

As personal consciousness evolves, a natural tendency of the person is to attempt to discover the patterns of nature and live in harmony with them. Anarchist philosophy suggests that when this principle is followed, and constructs are revised to correspond

more closely to events, human social conduct will naturally be 'moral' and cooperative. In contrast, when construing fails to adapt to the nature of events, conflict and 'immoral' behavior toward others, such as hostility (Kelly, 1979b), occurs.

The natural sense of proper conduct becomes distorted when it is codified into moral laws which become institutionalized into religious, legal, and political organizations. The natural tendency is deformed when it is rigidly defined, and it is ultimately inhibited by the weight of the structure. Sarason (1976) summarized the central insight of anarchism. First, once an institution is developed it inevitably becomes a power hostile to the interests of its members by reducing their sense of personal independence and autonomy. Second, as the institution becomes more powerful its members tend to see it as a major source of assistance and initiative, which reduces their sense of responsibility and community. An implication of this insight is that any form which evolves to serve a human need must be entirely *ad hoc* in nature and must never be allowed to develop into an 'institution.' This notion is reflected in the position of those personal construct psychologists who have resisted the formation of a formal PCP organization, suggesting that it would come to have institutional qualities that would impede the natural evolution of the theory.

Science and anarchy

Although the concept of anarchy has most frequently been applied to political settings, its central insight that human progress is impeded by reliance on rules or forms may be extended more broadly to the context of science. Several philosophers and historians of science have criticized emphasis on adherence to strict rules regarding how scientific knowledge is to be accepted as valid. Kuhn (1970) described the nature of change in scientific disciplines and proposed the concept of a 'paradigm' as representing the global world view which characterized a scientific discipline, including rules by which the science is to be conducted and examples of 'appropriate' problems and methodology. Polanyi (1958), however, proposed that there is no way to specify beforehand rules by which knowledge might be discovered. Discovery is rooted in the scientist's personal awareness of coherence among

what have previously been seen as unrelated events. It is the scientist's deeply held belief of being in personal contact with a yet unknown but potentially real entity which drives scientific discovery, and there is no way to anticipate the evidence which will eventually justify and support a new idea. Feyerabend (1978) suggested that the scientific practice of relying on rules of methodology and proof often hinders scientific progress and does not reflect the way it has actually proceeded throughout history. His research found no support for the idea that science proceeds according to 'a method that contains firm, unchanging, and absolutely binding principles (p. 23).' Any such rules that have been proposed have been violated at one time or another, often in ways which were responsible for the growth of knowledge. He proposed a philosophy of knowledge, called 'epistemological anarchy,' which argues that since it is impossible to determine any rules by which scientific conduct can be guided, 'the only rule that does not inhibit progress is *anything goes*' (p. 23).

The tendency to follow rules for scientific research has been a particularly acute problem for psychology. Kelly (1970) discussed psychology's self-conscious concern with scientific respectability and the emphasis on appearing scientifically rigorous. He proposed that psychologists would be more effective if they abandoned *a priori* rules of methodology which emulate the procedures of the physical sciences, and use whatever methods they might invent to pursue their inquiry. He suggested that if psychologists were successful in this endeavor, the scientific community would be most prompt in acknowledging their findings as scientific.

Bakan (1973) developed this theme more fully. He likened the relationship between 'real science' and psychological investigation to that between 'real cowboys' and children playing at being cowboys. By concentrating on following particular rules and models of scientific methodology, psychologists imitate the behavior of scientists without doing the most important thing that real scientists do, which is to confront their subject directly and creatively. Bakan characterized psychology's approach to research as 'methodolatry,' a practice akin to idolatry in religion. For Bakan, idolatry occurs when a particular form which evolves in the human quest for deeper understanding of the universe comes to be seen as an end in itself. It is this sense of idolatry that the anarchist position seeks to abolish by refusing to worship any particular form.

Personal anarchy

The preceding discussion has touched briefly on ways in which the construct of anarchy may be applied in political and scientific arenas, but this discussion has been intended primarily to set the ground for drawing a metaphor from the social to the personal. Kelly (1955) used the 'personal scientist' metaphor, which suggests that people in general may be usefully understood as behaving similarly to scientists, as the basis for the psychology of personal constructs. In analogous fashion, the 'personal anarchist' metaphor proposes that 'institutionalization' of our personal constructs may come to impede, rather than enhance, ability to differentiate and elaborate the perceptual field. Relying on personal constructs as 'rules' or 'codes' may lead to personal difficulties, distortions, and rigidities analogous to those discussed in political and scientific settings.

Development of 'self'

The process through which constructs become an institution is rooted in the sense of self that evolves with the construing process. The initial purpose of construing is to make the world more understandable and to anticipate events effectively. Kelly (1955) emphasized that the construing process was a practical one that exists for this applied purpose. Central to this process is Kelly's philosophical and epistemological assumption, *constructive alternativism*, which proposes that ideas are never to be 'institutionalized' but always open to revision or replacement, easily abandoned to make way for a new order. This tentative, *ad hoc* nature of constructs clearly parallels the similar anarchist conception.

In order to anticipate future events, the person must have the ability to imagine that future and a possible personal role in it. This requires a concept, or construct, of the self who will experience this future. Kelly (1955) described the self as the core structure, a set of constructs which exist for the purpose of anticipating personal maintenance processes. There are two central elements to this conception of the self: (1) the self is a portion of the person's processes but not their totality, and (2) the 'self' requires personal awareness; to have a self construct is to be conscious of the self as the subject of experience.

Jaynes (1976) proposed that awareness of the self, as a conscious agent responsible for making choices and guiding actions, appeared rather recently in human evolution, perhaps no more than 3,000 years ago. One of the central points to Jaynes's theory of the origin of consciousness is that it developed subsequent to the use of language. He presented a persuasive argument that human beings could have existed with language, thought, reason, and learning, yet with no sense of self-consciousness or awareness of an 'I' which was responsible for the actions. Wilber (1980, 1981) also suggested that the self is a social artifact that evolves in parallel with language. As a child develops the ability to use verbal symbols, particularly those relating to the self, an exclusive identification with the socially determined mental ego also develops, serving as a constant reminder of identity.

This emerging identity as a mental self enhances ability to anticipate the future, since it creates a fixed, permanent entity which will experience future events. Without this sense of self humans would be unable to transcend immediate needs to make choices or anticipate events in the distant future. The development of this self-consciousness was a major evolutionary step in increasing human ability to survive effectively in a wide range of environmental circumstances.

Self as 'institution'

This sense of self consciousness, however, is a double-edged sword. In addition to its utility, there are potential hazards to *exclusive* identification with the self that can impede, rather than enhance, ability to deal effectively with the ever-changing universe. Angyal (1982) described the tendency of the self to attempt to control and manage the total personality organization:

The conscious self which is only a part, namely the conscious or symbolized part of the biological subject, tends to establish its own autonomous government. What we call 'will' represents autonomous determination, the self-government of this narrow conscious or symbolic self. The symbolic self becomes a state within a state. Thus a split is created within the subject organization. This split is greatly aggravated by the fact that the symbolic self tends toward hegemony, tends to take over the

government of the total personality, a task for which it is not equipped. (pp. 35-6)

Up to this point, the self structure has been described as the conscious, verbally labelled portion of the person. Much of this self structure, however, is not accessible to awareness. Kelly (1955) described a number of ways in which 'covert construction' can occur. Pre-verbal constructs are those associated with experiences that occurred prior to the development of language and continue to be used in spite of the lack of consistent word symbols. Suspended constructs developed overtly at one point in the person's life but are incompatible with the current self organization. Although the person may not have awareness of these experiences, they continue to exert an influence on psychological processes and may represent unconscious 'rules' that are followed automatically. Another type of covert construction is the 'embedded unconscious' (Wilber, 1983), the 'rules' that govern the operation of the core structure but are not available to self-awareness because of the complete identification of the self with those structures.

The self [cannot] see those structures because the self [*is*] those structures. . . . One uses the structures of that level as something with which to perceive and translate the world - but one cannot perceive and translate those structures *themselves*. (Wilber, 1983, p. 112)

Thus, in both conscious and unconscious ways, the self, originally a servant of the person, becomes an 'institution', that has lost its natural tendencies and now consists of a set of rules or models that are followed regardless of whether they are an appropriate match to the events with which the person is confronted. The task of personal anarchy is to destroy this institution so that the person may continue the process of evolution.

Fomenting personal insurrection

Anarchist philosophy draws a distinction between revolution and insurrection (Read, 1971). Revolution refers to the replacement of one form of governmental structure with another, while insurrec-

tion is an action against *all* forms of state structure. In discussing various methods through which human consciousness evolves to higher forms, Wilber (1983) drew a similar distinction between changes of form within the same level of consciousness ('translation') and evolution to a higher level ('transformation'). For genuine transformation to occur, there must be a 'personal insurrection' in which all forms of self structure at that level of organization are 'overthrown' in order to be transcended.

Before a self structure can be transcended, however, a functioning self organization must exist, just as political insurrection would not occur in the absence of an existing state structure. The self structure can thus be seen as a universal stage in personal evolution, developing to serve useful and necessary purposes, but eventually becoming an empty form that hinders the evolutionary function. This stage or level of evolution cannot be avoided, and personal insurrection must follow the development of an effective, functioning self organization.

Given the existence of a functional self structure, the concept of personal insurrection may be applied to the weakening or dissolution of exclusive identification with the symbolized core structure, and its covert components. In a sense, personal insurrection is a personal application of constructive alternativism, for it represents an intentionally aggressive approach to following Kelly's assumption that constructs are revisable and replaceable. The goal is not to destroy the ability to deal effectively with the real world, but to facilitate continuing differentiation and elaboration of personal functioning, to remain fresh and open, perennially ready to deal with moment-to-moment reality in new and effective ways without rigid reliance on pre-existing rules.

There are many possible approaches to this process. Their common core is an emphasis on self-knowledge for the purpose of self-transcendence. This goal may be differentiated from that of personal improvement. Although many techniques and practices may be used for both purposes, the goal of self-improvement is to make the self 'better', while the goal of self-transcendence is to study the self, to see its basic structure so that it ceases to have the governing role in life. Personal anarchy may be approached through the vehicle of psychotherapy. Although it is typically used to assist a person in developing a strong, effective self structure and to overcome maladaptive patterns which inhibit healthy functioning, psychotherapy may also be used to assist the personal

anarchist to develop self-knowledge that can weaken the hold that the self structure has on the entire personality. Meditation practices, derived from Eastern perspectives on psychology, represent another tool for gaining the self-knowledge necessary to personal anarchy. Zen meditation, for example, is a study of the 'self' to observe its ever-changing nature and the transparent quality of dualistic construing. Through this process, the 'self' is 'forgotten,' allowing expression of a more basic nature through living in harmony with ordinary daily life (Aitken, 1982).

From the perspective of personal construct psychology, anarchist self-knowledge may be approached through the use of techniques oriented toward making covert construction overt. Many repertory grid techniques (Fransella and Bannister, 1977) may be applied to the anarchist end. Construct-elicitation, laddering of superordinate constructs, and grid-analysis methods, that display the 'meta-structure' of the construct system, may be used to assist greater awareness of the covert 'rules' and 'organization' that control the construction of events. Boxer's (1979, 1980) approach to 'reflexive learning' represents one method by which repertory grid techniques can be directed toward studying the *process*, rather than the *content*, of construing.

A closing comment

To be used to its best advantage, a metaphor should be taken lightly and quickly, for it is at best an incomplete and only suggestive construction. The personal-anarchist metaphor proposes some alternative ways of construing the human situation. A few specific techniques have been briefly mentioned, but in keeping with the anarchist insight it must be remembered that there can be no rules governing how to be a personal anarchist.

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