

The Figure of the Anarchist in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the Anime *Psycho-Pass*: From Traditional Anarchism to Modern-day Terrorism

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Abstract: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Psycho-Pass* depict two dystopian settings from which two trapped dystopian protagonists struggle to escape, each in his own respective method. Winston Smith may be seen as a traditional anarchist, someone who identifies his target well and rebels against this established order on mature consideration of action and consequences. Shogo Makishima, the protagonist of the Anime *Psycho-Pass*, on the other hand, adopts a different tactic. Like modern terrorists, his immediate and short-term attacks aim at establishing a climate of fear and horror rather than a change of the established regime. Through his acts, he shows us that he is our contemporary, insofar as he acts as a 21st century terrorist rather than a literary figure. He may be read in a Leninian-Trotskyan fashion as well. He believes that violence and crime may be ethical if they “serve the revolution.” This paper will attempt at providing a more in depth reading of the two characters as anarchists.

Keywords: Anarchism, dystopia, target of attention, target of violence, terrorism.

Concepts of political discourse are most of the time far from being precise. When they are charged with ideological connotations, they are even more evasive and difficult to define. It is a hard task nowadays for example to pin down a definition of concepts such as anarchism and especially terrorism. In September 2005, 150 world leaders in the United Nations met to define terrorism. The summit ended after two days without any agreement on the definition. In the academic community, on the other hand, there is a more or less general consensus on the meaning of such concepts.

Since its beginning, the turn-of-the-century movement of anarchism has been defined as a battle against political hierarchies. The state, which by definition is coercive according to Bakunin and his followers, must be totally superseded by

personal rights.¹ Bakunin thus labels anarchists as “anti-state socialists (Ryley 2019: 228). They believe in the human capacity for mutual aid, cooperation, respect and communal relationship under non-authoritarian and decentralized alternatives for the state.

In a similar respect, Noam Chomsky refers to anarchism as a tendency in human thought and action to detect and find systems that cannot justify their legitimacy, recognizing that they are not just self-justifying, and to dismantle them.² These systems are usually structures of authority, domination and hierarchy that must be challenged. If they cannot justify their legitimacy or if they prove to be self-justifying then they must be targeted and dismantled. Anarchism is in this sense anti-statism and “extreme individualism” (ibid. 6).

For John P. Clark principles of anarchism include “1) a view of an ideal, non-coercive, non-authoritarian society. 2) A criticism of existing society and its institutions, based on this anti-authoritarian ideal. 3) A view of human nature that justifies the hope for significant progress towards the ideal” (qtd. in Mclaughlin 2016: 25). Rex Martin adds to this list a moral critique of political authority. A traditional anarchist shows the moral undesirability of authorities questioning in the process its moral foundation and legitimacy (ibid. 29).

These characteristic features of anarchism can be used to study the protagonist of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Winston Smith. I will try to argue that his thought and action tendencies conform to a traditional anarchist profile. Having witnessed and experienced a real revolution, the one that installed the Party in power, Winston Smith grew up in such a totalitarian regime where two plus two equals and must equal five. It is a regime that not only controls every aspect of his present daily life, but which also controls his past and his memories. He grew up living with this reality and every day helps him identify the corrupt and coercive system which has no legitimacy at all. The only legitimacy it has was created by its members. It is a self-justifying system.

Like any traditional anarchist, Winston Smith also holds a view of an ideal non-coercive alternative to this total oppression. The alternative to this nightmare is symbolically given in the novel in the form of a dream Winston Smith had about “the place where there is no darkness (Orwell 2021: 189)” where he was supposed to meet O'Brian. It may be interpreted as a paradise-like and utopian society that he wishes to see instead of Big Brother. He keeps pondering over this dream throughout the novel only to discover by the end that this place is in fact a prison cell with the lights turned on all the time.

¹ <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095410908>

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oB9rp_SAp2U&t=798s

The protagonist also reflects on the moral corruption of the totalitarian Big Brother and the Party. The Junior League for example, an organization that brainwashes children and inducts them to spy on their parents and report any disloyal acts, undermines family structure. The hate week and the display of physical torture, the Ministry of truth which produces lies, the Ministry of peace which is responsible for waging wars, and the ministry of Love where political prisoners are physically and psychologically tortured add to the list of moral corruption as well.

Winston Smith then identifies and knows his target very well. He commits minor acts of rebellion and disobedience after thought and mature consideration of the consequences. These acts are manifested mostly in keeping a diary and writing his thoughts in it. He builds up on these individual acts and his rebellion starts to escalate at the point of his sexual relationship with Julia. "The sexual act, successfully performed, was rebellion. Desire was thoughtcrime" (2021: 54). This relationship is then a double rebellion since it also includes a thoughtcrime. Well aware of the outcomes, Winston Smith keeps rebelling. He knows that his efforts are bound to fail and that he eventually will get caught, but he still keeps on rebelling. He says to Julia "In this game that we're playing, we can't win. Some kinds of failure are better than other kinds, that's all" (2021: 106).

He believes that the only possibility of an anarchist success lays with the collective work of the social underclass of Oceania called the proles. Winston Smith says "everywhere, all over the world, hundreds or thousands or millions of people just like this . . . people who had never learned to think but were storing up in their hearts and bellies and muscles the power that would one day overturn the world. If there was hope, it lay in the proles!" (2021: 55). They may be read as Bakunin's anti-state socialists needed for a successful anarchist movement. Only with their collaboration, cooperation and respect can a new revolution against the party may happen.

Winston Smith may be read then as a traditional anarchist. He identifies and knows his target of political and moral corruption very well and he is well aware that it must be dismantled. Although he knows that his individual efforts will eventually fail, he keeps dreaming of an ideal utopian darkness-free place which he believes may only happen with collective revolutionary work. As an anarchist he keeps acting steadily on mature consideration of action and consequences.

The Profile of a terrorist on the other hand is different in their course of action. Although like an anarchist their objective is to identify and dismantle a political target the methods they adapt are different. The Oxford online dictionary defines a terrorist as a person who uses unlawful violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aim. By political aim it is meant the intention to get these civilians to change their political behavior, like changing

the form of their government. For Walter Laqueur terrorism aims to induce a state of fear and terror in the victim, that is ruthless and does not conform with humanitarian rules (Laqueur 1987: 143).

For Alex P. Schmid terrorism can be defined in two respects. On the one hand it is a form or tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence. And on the other hand, it is a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, and performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflicting parties. These acts of terrorism for him rarely stand alone. They usually form part of a violence campaign which create a pervasive climate of fear because of their serial character (Schmid et. al. 1988: 28).

Shogo Makishima, the antagonist of the anime *Psycho-pass*³, is a cultured and sophisticated character. He is often quoting big philosophical thinkers and literary references and, when not planning or committing a crime, he is seen reading a book. He shares some ideals identifiable with the movement of anarchism, but he loves and uses violence too much to be just an anarchist. In the dystopian anime his rebellion against the totalitarian and autocratic Sybil System, the counterpart of the Orwellian Big Brother, is characterized by a lot of lethal violence and aggression on the detriment of innocent civilians.

In addition to his skillful hand to hand combat and his mastery of an old fashion razor with which he killed a number of his victims Makishima is very skilled at the manufacture and use of explosives. He often sets up explosive traps for police and deploys pipe bombs and trip mines in his confrontations. In episode 5 members of the police investigating one of his murders were blown away by an explosion of the whole crime scene. In episode 21 he uses a pipe bomb manufactured by himself to target and kill one unarmed police officer in front of his novice police son who was also seriously injured in the act.

His campaign of crimes includes not only personally committing a series of homicides and acts of terrorism but manipulating other evil doers to do the same. In the Helmet riot episode 15, through a video recording he managed to brainwash a number of civilians, make them his followers and push them to commit a series of murders, vandalism and destruction all around the city. In one of his conversations before the helmet riot starts he says to one of his accomplices:

³ *Psycho-Pass* is a dystopian anime that presents a society managed and controlled by an Artificial Intelligence system called Sibyl. Through a vast network of cameras, scanners, and sensors the Sibyl works to maintain order, prevent crime before it happens and maximize collective wellness and satisfaction, but on the detriment of other important political and ethical values such as liberty and democracy.

In order to measure a person's worth, you must do more than push them. The real way to test their worth is to give them power. When they gain the freedom to act outside the boundaries of law and ethics, you can sometimes see their souls. When the weak become strong... When good citizens become free to engage in violence... I'm interested to see what is the outcome of that.

In trying to rationalize his behavior he believes that in the face of such an unjust, totalitarian and controlling system if you do not join me in the fight against it than you are my enemy. He believes that by pushing people to see beyond the coercive and restrictive system that controls every aspect of their lives, they will eventually use whatever means necessary to liberate themselves including excessive brutality and killing of innocents. Anyone would use the extreme methods he adopts if they serve the revolution for their liberation and freedom.

Shogo Makishima is in a sense similar to Winston Smith in their anarchist endeavors. They both identify their target of attention well, Sibyl in the case of Makishima and Big Brother in the case of Smith: two unreasonably totalitarian and controlling systems. Both of them also share an ideal alternative for these systems where people are free to make individual choices under non-coercive and non-authoritarian environments. What is different as I tried to demonstrate is their respective course of action. Winston Smith operates more surreptitiously. He plans his rebellions well and acts after a lot of thought and on mature consideration of consequences. He is always expecting all results, although most of them are fatalistic.

This point may qualify the dystopia of Orwell as an anarchist one in comparison to other types of dystopias in literature. What makes *Nineteen Eighty-Four* stand out from other literary dystopias is this fatalistic side. The world of the novel is so dark that there is literally no hope nor any venue for rescue nor escape. Everyone is trapped forever and ever and the only possible way out is conformity to the system and total voluntary submission and brainwash. Except zombie narratives maybe, no other dystopian formula is characterized by such a total absence of hopeful endings and optimistic alternatives. In my opinion, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* rebels against the other dystopian narratives in this respect.

Shogo Makishima in the anime adopts a different and extreme approach to express his acts of rebellion. His short term and sudden attacks are not only directed towards the corrupt system as a "target of attention", but it also has a "target of violence" (1988: 28-29) which are the innocent civilians. The defenseless, unarmed and innocent civilian are not the ultimate target of his acts but serve as a "message generator" (1988: 29) for the aforementioned target of attention. His actions are in this respect intended to instill a climate of fear and shock the purpose of which is to push people and force them to rebel against the system. A lot of casualties and innocent people are killed in the process. His methods are

therefore similar to modern day terrorists who drive vans in the middle of crowds, shoot masses of people and inside schools randomly, explode themselves or other targets, etc. All their excessive and shocking brutality is designed to create an atmosphere of fear, horror and panic.

It can be said about the anime *Psycho Pass* that it is anarchistic in its own way as well. It stands out from other animes by its philosophical, psychological and literary depth. Many characters are often quoting philosophers in their conversations and even in their confrontations. For example, before engaging in a violent physical combat in episode 16 of the anime the antagonist Shogo Makishima and the protagonist Shynia Kogami start by a philosophical one. The former starts by quoting Pascal "Justice is subject to dispute. Might is easily recognized and is not subject to dispute. So, we cannot give might to justice." The latter retaliates by quoting Ortega saying: "I have long since learned, as a matter of elementary hygiene to be on guard when anyone quotes Pascal."⁴ Throughout the whole season such philosophical debates are often used. Around fifty books are mentioned, partly discussed or referred to in the anime ranging from Plato's *Republic*, Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Foucault's *The Birth of the Prison*, Shakespeare, Orwell, etc. making the anime a mini encyclopedia on many philosophical subjects including the dark side of the human being and their capacity for violence.

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