

Anarchism isn't a fantasy and it's not a political theory

It's a collective name for whatever forms of society can exist without murder as a political tool

Adrian Riskin

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When people say anarchism is a fantasy I believe they're thinking of the apparent impossibility of setting up an anarchist government, imposing it on people, voting it into place, getting everyone to agree to its terms. They're thinking of what would have to precede the first day of anarchism if anarchism were to be somehow instituted somewhere. And of the difficulty of keeping anarchism in place, protecting it against threats, maintaining it. This is a mistake.

Anarchism begins when people stop being coerced whereas political systems rely on coercion both at their beginnings and for their maintenance. Forcing people to stop being coerced is a contradiction in terms. Anarchism can't be instituted or put in place, it can only coalesce. Anarchism starts when people stop obeying authority. So how do we get to a society without coercion? What's the path to the anarchist utopia?

With political philosophies this question always makes sense. To get to monarchy you put a king in power. To get to democracy you provide means of electing some officials. In all such cases laws are necessary to enshrine and protect the regime. But laws are enforced by violence, otherwise they're not laws but rather rules, suggestions, happy horseshit, whatever, but not mandatory and therefore not laws.

Anarchism isn't a normative philosophy. It doesn't call for the establishment of no authority. How would it get established, by whom, in what form? Anarchism is what's left when the coercion ends, and this happens when enough people stop obeying the police. This could happen in a few weeks, a few years, or a few decades, no one can tell. And no one now can tell how things will look.

The question of how to have X, Y, or Z, be they public schools, roads, cell phones, dispute resolution, public safety, or what have you, in an anarchist world is a distraction. We have them now because some people are forced at gunpoint to provide them. And maybe they can't be had otherwise, and maybe enough people will decide that they're not worth having at the cost. This is how anarchism begins.

And X, Y, or Z might be possible with anarchism. There are infinitely many now-unimaginable ways people might find of organizing themselves to meet their needs. Some of these future com-

munities might care enough about X to find a way to have it, but not Y or Z. Other communities may have different priorities. There's no one answer to the question of how we'll have X, Y, or Z because there's no one answer to the question of whether we need them.

Anarchists don't have to agree on a best way of doing things or to find single answers to questions about the future. Anarchism won't come to pass when enough people agree on how to live anarchically but rather when enough people feel the price for any other way of life is too high, too bloody. It's not a single best way of doing things, it's what's left when the cops are gone. It's what free people can build on that foundation.

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