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Five Capitalist Realizations Leading To Mutualism

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April 26th, 2012

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Contents

1. Loss of Moral Absolutism	5
2. Property is a Social Construct	6
3. Adopting a More Cooperative Cultural Ethos	7
4. The State Is Used as a Tool	7
5. Anarcho-Capitalism Relies on Socialism, IF...	9
Conclusion.	11

3. Advocacy for communal systems of mutual credit and mutual exchange for trade.
4. Emphasis on self-employment, co-ops, or other labour-owned collectives which focus on the idea that “the natural wage of labor is its product”.
5. Abolition of Tucker’s Four Monopolies: land, money, tariff, patent (and fifth: transportation subsidies)
6. Roughly equal bargaining power for contract and federation.
7. Gradualism in transition to a stateless society

For more on mutualism in comparison with anarcho-capitalism or Marxism, I would recommend a reading of Kevin Carson’s “Studies in Mutualist Political Economy”.

He does a brilliant job of looking at Rothbard and the marginalist Austrians [especially Bohm-Bawerk’s critiques of the LTV, for instance], contrasting them with Marx, Smith, Ricardo, Mill, etc. and showing how they may be reconciled, or at times how they are essentially demonstrating the same exact idea. I can definitively say that his insight was the one which compelled this shift to anti-capitalism.

And so we say goodbye to the black and yellow, and hello to the black and orange.

Thank you for your time.

Best wishes,

D

This is a followup to my post “Taking the Moral High Ground”, in which I indicated that my shift away from objective morality towards a more consequentially minded approach would have some effects on my political beliefs. As such, I would like to outline five realizations that led me to mutualism, namely:

1. Loss of Moral Absolutism
2. Property is a Social Construct,
3. Adopting a More Cooperative Cultural Ethos,
4. The State Is Used As a Tool, and
5. Anarcho-Capitalism Relies on Socialism, IF...

My hope is that in describing what it was like for a previously pro-capitalist thinker to lose belief in capitalism, that this article may incite others to notice or consider the weaknesses of Lockeanism in particular.

This article is thus written from the perspective of mutualism, which is in four words: free market anti-capitalism.

1. Loss of Moral Absolutism

There are, through my experiences and conversations with others, several necessary components to such a transition. Moreover, the order in which these are realized seems important, as one realization seems to give way to another. First, one must depart from Rothbard’s deontological “anarcho”-capitalism (moralizing through the NAP) and favor instead a consequentialist justification in the same vein as David Friedman.

I again feel this step is necessary because it removes a lot of the traditional vulgar libertarian arguments from your arsenal. As such, the dogma likewise diminishes significantly, opening up an

avenue for tolerance. I am speaking of the abandonment of moral arguments which come in the rudimentary form of “taxation is immoral” and depend upon terms such as “initiation of force”.

Dropping these rehearsed moral arguments entirely, I now lean towards preference utilitarianism (such as that of Peter Singer) in action. You may see my latest thoughts on morality here.

2. Property is a Social Construct

Once there, I realized that it is largely a matter of social norm and convention which system of property emerges. For instance, the no-Proviso Lockean stance is not self-evidently true. Try hard as Rothbard might, it cannot be done. Property norms cannot be determined *a priori* from axioms of argumentation (sorry Hoppe) or otherwise.

As Bill Orton, himself a Lockean, writes:

Neither property system can be proved to be correct. Proof requires agreement on a set of axioms. Capitalists and syndicalists don't agree on the axioms concerning property, so proof is impossible. So it's force or arbitration, and we all know which is better in the long run.

There is likewise a concern for efficiency and stability. On a freed market, I now believe that no-Proviso Lockean would lose out to Mutualists, Georgists, and Collectives for a variety of reasons.

Namely these include absentee ownership and other rent-seeking behaviors which prematurely dissipate the economic value of the frontier (consider the arguments presented in *The Not So Wild, Wild West*) and are inherently wasteful designs.

“the natural wage of labour is its product,” thereby eliminating profits entirely in favor of worker ownership of the means of production.

Of course most, if not all, anarcho-capitalists do not define coercion as I do. Instead, they choose to define it otherwise — That's fine too. However, might I then suggest that even though their definition is likewise as arbitrary as mine, and the phenomenon of influence (described by my definition of coercion) is *still* creating outcomes where bargaining power is vastly different and the state of affairs is not stable.

Are there any good reasons for preferring the anarchist definition over the anarcho-capitalist one? I'll leave that to you for now. For me, it was mostly in good spirit. Perhaps you may say that I am and have been somewhat of a bleeding heart.

The key paradigm shift is the one which results in a description of free market transactions in Adam Smith's language of “rough equity” of bargaining power instead of the usual anarcho-capitalist concept of “voluntary exchange,” with voluntarily defined in such a loose way that indicates that the trade never would have occurred unless all parties freely agreed to it.

When capital becomes accumulated, trade between proprietarian landlord and hungry worker becomes anything but free.

Conclusion.

In short, I changed my mind 180 degrees on capitalism. I will now self-identify as a free market anti-capitalist, or mutualist more in the tradition of Proudhon and Tucker.

Finally, mutualist anarchism includes:

1. Property on the basis of Proudhonian possession; that is, occupancy and use
2. Removal of absentee landlordism and all other rent-seeking practices.

etor and his friends; which can benefit nobody, save the proprietor and his servants. Let these multiply, and soon the people ... will have nowhere to rest, no place of shelter, no ground to till. They will die of hunger at the proprietor's door, on the edge of that property which was their birth-right; and the proprietor, watching them die, will exclaim, 'So perish idlers and vagrants.'"

Provided that no limit is present which curtails coercive rent-seeking (should it be the case that the anarcho-capitalist accepts the existence of laborers whose wages are not completely but rather partially value-added), then it follows that market forces are not strong enough to limit of capitalist expanse of power.

This state of affairs is inefficient to this consequentialist thinker. In fact, Marx describes this infinite desire for profits through exploitation quite nicely, as does G.A. Cohen with his discussion on the Shmoo in his video Against Capitalism.

In reply, here the **deontological** anarcho-capitalist has two responses **IF** they agree with my definition of coercion, with both horns being problematic:

1. S/he either bites the bullet and admits that this coercion (e.g. rent, wage slavery) by capitalist is a necessary evil of any society predicated fundamentally upon Lockean private property; or,
2. S/he must concede that an anarcho-capitalist society is fundamentally dependent upon the continual existence of alternative forms of property (e.g. Proviso-Lockeanism, Mutualism, Georgism, Collectivism) which omit rent-seeking and absentee landlordism.

With the only other alternative being a self-defeating one: that the anarcho-capitalist agrees with Benjamin Tucker in saying that

3. Adopting a More Cooperative Cultural Ethos

Internal critiques of the efficacy of absolute property aside, I also realized that I wouldn't *personally* want to live in a strictly capitalist society. This third realization hit me more than the consequentialist critiques themselves, and reinforced them in action. Personality-wise, perhaps I am too much like Henry David Thoreau in that I try to be as minimalist in my daily life as possible. I do not care in my daily affairs for "having things". I'm relatively quick to share things with others. This indicated a predominately emotional — as opposed to a syllogistic or logical — change away from holding property as tantamount to life.

Moreover, I don't *personally* like the ethos of brutal competition and dog-eat-dog economy — even though I do feel I am capable of rising to the top. I would recommend Bertrand Russell's *The Conquest of Happiness* on more of what I mean by this sentiment of "byronic" unhappiness and laziness which is characteristic of capitalism. I also feel Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* was similarly very compelling, even if it was a bit more literary. That most certainly helped. Whether or not this step is necessary and to what extent remains quite questionable, as many mutualists are likewise Egoists in the Max Stirner tradition.

4. The State Is Used as a Tool

It appears that taking an actual Political Philosophy class allowed me to gather a more diversified understanding of political liberalism through reading the works of so-called "real" philosophers like Rawls, Dworkin, Nozick, Sen (pictured right), Nussbaum, Kymlicka, Okin, etc.

They helped me to realize, among other things, that the State is not *inherently* evil, and is instead used as a *tool*. That said, it is a

platform of power acting in the interests of the capitalists. Accordingly, my focus shifted away from the State and towards those who control the State — and it's not politicians.

However, is everything the State does contra the interests of anarchists? I'm not sure. It's a matter of who controls the strings on any given issue. In realizing that the State is not inherently evil, but instead a tool of capitalist, perhaps it is possible to use it against them — like the Japanese martial arts of aikido. I am talking in particular about more decentralized and local government reforms, and not wide-sweeping hand-waves of federal power.

The most important consideration to me is education, and in particular education about history, government, and economics. For example, the local IB program used Howard Zinn's (a socialist and anarchist) *A People's History of the United States* as a supplement. While it didn't mean much to me in high school, it stayed in the back of my mind and is now very significant in the present day. Locally, I wouldn't be as opposed to funding the IB program as I am to most federal legislation.

If placed in a position of power, my public policy now consists solely of "Let's take all the money from warfare, and maybe dump it all in education" — even though ideally the State should not be involved. The question of money is a difficult one, and I will be looking into it next.

That said, if you're reading this and you are an anarcho-capitalist or run of the mill libertarian of sorts, I'd strongly urge you to take the opportunity attending lectures in political philosophy if you are able. It allowed my mindset to shift from a base-level "*Privatize all the things!*" to one in which I was more willing and open to compromise on the means, without forgoing my ends.

It hit me that these problems are not as easy as they may seem in practice, *provided* the behemoth of a system which exists today. If there is a way of using the State against the capitalists, then I'll be listening and am not opposed to working from within the system

should it be effective. As far as a transition goes, I still at this point in time favor gradualism.

This leads me to a brief word of advice: If you are not going through a personal struggle at all times when it comes to philosophy and politics, you are just not doing it right. I'd recommend Simone de Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* for more on this idea.

5. Anarcho-Capitalism Relies on Socialism, IF...

...one defines coercion in the 'broad' sense of the word.

Allow me to explain:

The final shift came with the realization that if one is to avoid coercion, that an anarcho-capitalist society properly realized necessarily relies upon, and must in turn become fundamentally some form of market socialism. This required a significant change in one's definition of what constitutes coercion.

Coercion need not be the result of another individual. Coercion takes the form of any dominant influence which impedes on an individual's context of choice — whether direct or indirect. This includes not only Mother Nature and biological impulses, but the unintended effects of the actions of others. That is not to say that coercion is wrong.

I speak mainly of indirect coercion from capitalists. Again, coercion is a label, just as is exploitation a label for the observation that "...this worker is not receiving the full value of his or her labour". With respect to land, Proudhon summarized this idea of indirect coercion nicely:

"The purchaser draws boundaries, fences himself in, and says, 'This is mine; each one by himself, each one for himself.' Here, then, is a piece of land upon which, henceforth, no one has right to step, save the propri-