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# What is Anarchism?

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bellious to be predictable and controllable. How absurd it is that the most conceited among us get on top and convince everyone else they are somehow special, that they can plan and direct, police and kill, bomb and drone, invade and occupy, kidnap and imprison, spy and torture, tax and counterfeit, prohibit some drugs and not others, decide who can marry and can't, and so on, when they are actually just as fallible and ignorant as everyone else and that these arbitrary powers are what cause chaos. How absurd it is that the way to the good life isn't deference to authority like many may claim, but refusal to submit and self-determination.

Accepting this absurdity leads one to reject politics and all attempts at government as a well intentioned, but meaningless attempt at manipulating the social order by the permanent suppression of revolution – of society itself. This is why freedom, nothing if not the chance to be better, according to Albert Camus, must be the inherently respected value of any harmonious social order and any happy life. If Sisyphus is to be happy in order to control his own fate, he must have the freedom, in thought and action, to find that happiness. The process of realizing one's happiness necessitates the blissful exercise of one's liberty, to spit in the face of authoritarian governments, murderous tyrants, and the cruel, infinite despair that a world only capable of giving birth to an equally infinite, non-contradictory joy could impart. Happiness and freedom are the easiest things to lose but they are always there for our taking when we're ready.

and progress brought about by forces completely out of our control and, above all, humility – the recognition of one’s own mistakes, flaws, ignorance, and inability to know the unknown. Anarchism means, “I don’t know.”

Anarchism is the recognition of our ultimately unprivileged position in the world, the acknowledgement of the fact that we are systematically ignorant of the crucial forces that the fabric of social life depends on, and to embrace this dynamism of life is to live happily and freely. To reject the conservatism of coercion, hierarchy, and planning in favor of a permanent intellectual revolution, to see that only a virtuous, impassioned people are capable of developing and maintaining the peaceful emergent orders that allow humanity to flourish requires the humility only honest and everlasting introspective analysis can provide. Only constant self-questioning accompanied with self-improvement will reveal what our lives and our happiness ultimately count on. And this means the acceptance of the absurdity of life, which makes way for not only joy, but despair, confusion, pain, and everything else that makes joy worth striving towards.

The dominant trend of human history is people’s continuous denial of the absurd, especially in regards to the social order: we seem to be naturally inclined towards the deification of our own reason and to glorify efforts to consciously plan and control others in order to mold society to our liking. But when we realize that philosophy, psychology, economics, political theory, and history all says otherwise – that our capacity to reason is not the work of God, that the boundless possibilities of humanity are not owed to the conscious human mind, and that it is rather freedom and the rejection of this innate urge to plan and direct as a futile one, that drives progress.

How absurd it is that people’s egos are naturally conducive to a confidence and value in one’s decision-making and reasons, yet society, the aggregate of all those very people, is simply too varied, too specialized, too persistent, dogged, and re-

Anarchism is a broad tradition of historical ideas that contain common elements that are nevertheless, sometimes, conflicting. There is no set of positions that you must hold in order to count as a real anarchist. Rather, in my view, anarchism involves three main points of conceptual analysis. That is the view of anarchism as a kind of political philosophy; the use of anarchism as a basis for empirical study, scientific research and the attitude of anarchism.

## **Anarchism as Political Philosophy**

Anarchism questions the very foundations that political theory, and by extension, the state, supposedly rests upon. Rather than seeing the state as a given and required for the further development of society, anarchists see the state as it truly is: the institution that has a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. That is, a group of people who, for some reason or another, have the ability to use the initiation of force in a way that is deemed acceptable, worthy of respect, obligatory, and even required by the mass of people inside the institution’s claimed territory. In this way, the state relies on false or misguided views about authority and power shared by most people and these widely shared beliefs are what give power to the state.

In not taking the state as a given for human organization and progress, anarchism must question what undergirds the state. While political theorists have long hypothesized about ways that states supposedly rely on the “consent of the governed,” the logic behind “governance” implies the conceptual impossibility of genuine consent. The state, in denying alternatives to its decrees and the ability for its subjects to opt out, rules out the possibility of genuine consent on behalf of anyone who “accepts” the terms of the state. Since the background condition of the choice to consent or not consent is one of duress imposed by the state, any choice to consent to the state can’t be reason-

ably treated as genuine since that would require the ability to refuse. The lack of alternatives inherent in statism makes the expression of real consent impossible. Not to be confused with acceptance or desire for the state, which we all see every day, genuine consent is concerned with a transaction between two or more parties, and if one of those parties doesn't give you the choice of opting out, how could it be said that you ever opted in? In truth, there is no choice to opt out or opt in with the state. Since the state can never logically attain the consent of the governed, the "just powers" that they supposedly receive from that consent are non-existent. Hence, political "authority" is a scam and political "philosophy" is a farce.

Anarchism rejects political philosophy along with political authority. It says the conventional wisdom is turned on its head — that the entire notion of political philosophy, of politics requiring or creating a philosophy is asinine. Politics and philosophy are contradictory concepts and tying them together has resulted in justifications for some of the worst atrocities the human race has endured. Where politics relies on a gun, philosophy relies on the mind. Where politics utilizes coercion and hierarchy, philosophy utilizes reason and the human intellect. Where politics brings out the worst in people by creating relationships of power and exploitation, philosophy realizes the best in people by creating relationships of mutual respect in a joint effort to discover truth. Politics relies on just as much philosophy as the mugger in the alley relies on reason and cooperation. The state views philosophy as the enemy — as it represents reason, autonomy, and self-determination. After all, the philosophical way of thinking requires a hunger for truth and certainty that only a self-directive, passionate person will be able to feed. The philosophical way of thinking requires an independent mind, not one enslaved by the chains of authority and hierarchy. It requires a mind that answers to oneself and no other, whether it be king, general, or president.

to statism) such as cooperation, community, voluntarism, freedom, respect, tolerance, and recognizing the vast, unknowable, reaches that human reason is capable of achieving, leading the way for innovation, creation, and progress, but also the humility-driven recognition of the plain, known limits of human reason, leading the way for custom, tradition, and emergent order.

Simply put, the state only exists because people believe in it. The essence of the state, the part of it that makes it what it is and distinct from other forms of human organization, is that people have faith in its claim to a monopoly on force. It follows, then, that the anarchist project, in trying to rid society of states once and for all, is intimately related to, and even requires, convincing people to stop putting their faith in states. The anarchist project necessarily involves persuading people to put their faith in themselves, their communities, and their capacity for freedom and happiness in their own lives, and no longer in the state.

Social change doesn't start with mammoth political institutions. It starts with us. Live out the ideals we like to hypothesize about all day. Change only begins when we introduce autonomy and liberty into our own lives, decisions, and personal spheres. If we don't live out our ideals, then our ideals are doomed.

We are not slaves. We are the agents of change. If not us, then who?

Anarchism is a fearless trek into the unknown. Since it throws out the imposed normative ideals of other political philosophies, anarchism is the complete sacrifice of the ego of a politically driven mind. It forebodes the usual prescriptions and solutions for society's ills and trusts the forces of cooperative effort, mutual respect, and voluntarism will do better. It's the respect for the limits of human reason, the fallibility of human power, the unlikely, but unsurpassed, power of unconscious design, the appreciation of innovation

bill (although these things may potentially be tangentially useful in the future for some minor, reformist change, never revolution). Real change is found in living our values and building relationships predicated on the principles of equal authority. It's communicating with one and other on an equal basis of mutual respect. In this sense, anarchism is fundamentally a cultural project.

Rather than focusing our efforts on how *society* can be free, we need to focus on how *we* can be free. Society changes when we change. We can only affect our own sphere of influence: our family, friends, schools, colleagues and communities. Giant nation states? Multinational corporations? Those are barely in our sphere of influence, if at all. Nation states won't go away because of efforts directed at changing or abolishing them. They will go away when people don't care about them. When society, which is fundamentally constant revolution through innovation towards progress, finally, once and for all, outruns authority. A cultural shift towards valuing voluntarism and equality, the antitheses to the state, is the only method by which the state will lose power and influence. It requires a shift in thought, not control over the dangerous wheel of political power that is only bound to make matters worse.

If the state is a monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a given territory, once the mass of people stop viewing the state's authority as legitimate, the state's power will vanish. Once people see the state plainly and for what it really is, the state's claim to authority instantly disappears. Once the state's evils are exposed as the very forces that create chaos, destruction, and conflict in society, society will realize it can do without it. In the process of recognizing statism as the disease and not the cure, the values that underpin statism, such as violence, power, authority, domination, bureaucracy, hierarchy, conservatism, faith, and planning, will be rightly thrown away in favor of the values that naturally underpin societal progress (and are, by extension, conceptually contrary

The state relies on guns to do its reasoning, bureaucracy and hierarchy to take the place of autonomy, and propaganda to take care of self-determination. It is ignorant of the organizing forces of society because it sees society as a Lego set such that with just enough tampering and tinkering, the right formation can be achieved. But this is conservatism. And if society is a constant process of progress, evolution, and adaptation to forever-changing human wants and the world around us, conservatism means the death of society. The essence of the state is conservatism. It seeks to conserve its power at whatever cost. To conserve the order it deems worthy. Progress is only brought about through innovation. The entrepreneur that sees things not as they are, but as they could be. The entrepreneurial attitude permeates through us all and through society despite the forces of conservatism. While Learned Hand said, "Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women," it actually lies in our minds; in our seemingly unexplainable innate desire to *create*. Every instance of creation, of lighting the spark of the human mind, is the realization of our liberty. There is where we see anarchism: original, individual, intellectual revolution. History is a constant struggle between the spirit of innovation and the spirit of conservatism, dynamism and stagnation, civilization and barbarism, society and statism, life and death.

The anarchist sees society not as Legos to be arranged by an exogenous, higher level organization but instead as what it really is: individual beings with their own volition, arranging themselves in a dynamic and adaptive order that is the, "result of human action, but not the execution of any human design," according to enlightenment sociologist and historian, Adam Ferguson. Unlike Legos that come with instructions, there is no single, "right" formation of people. The state attempts to create instructions for the organization of society, but that involves merely imposing subjective preferences on people who would otherwise arrange themselves according to their own, varying views on what is right and wrong and on what arrange-

ment their life should take. People have different goals and aims. There is no single version of the “good life.” Anarchism embraces the pluralism of humanity and allows for peaceful, spontaneous order that develops among the vast array of different people.

To be clear, anarchism does not defend or advocate *any* spontaneous order. Charles Johnson, in arguing that rape culture is an example of a spontaneous order, explains that, “not all spontaneous orders are necessarily benign.” Indeed, humanity is not perfect. Some spontaneous orders are built upon systems of violence and force, like rape culture. The same reason that planned orders are flawed is the same reason that unplanned orders will also be flawed: the fallibility of the human intellect. This doesn’t mean coercive planning is the answer. Coercive planning does worse (*much* worse, just look at the results of the total State wherever it gets introduced) than letting society remain free and spontaneous. While the latter, too, has imperfections; Utopia is just not for this world.

However, we are still participants in the social order. We have *some* say in the results of spontaneous orders. Part of what affects that order is the discussion and intellectual climate in society. Those things are simultaneously affected by the prevailing order, but that’s what the role of innovation is. Innovation disrupts order, while also progressing towards a newer better one. It goes against the prevailing norms and rules. It’s an original creation that the old orders totally overlooked. That’s what makes innovation good. It ends stagnation and creates progress. Just as there is innovation in the product market, there is innovation in the intellectual climate and atmosphere of a culture. Rape culture exists because the majority of people go along with the prevailing wisdom. It changes when a new spontaneous order outdoes that one: when enough people reject the prevailing wisdom with facts and reason and the new prevailing wisdom is simply not a rape culture. As members of

data. A school of thought that has basic scientific premises, which influences the way it analyzes all social situations. The positive analytic anarchist will see the influence of anarchy in everything. They will see the role of emergent orders in our day-to-day activities that so often go unnoticed and unappreciated. This anarchist acknowledges the ways in which anarchism, in the sense of “no rulers,” is fundamental to human life and progress and examines this phenomenon from a scientific perspective.

Much of the research in this area is in the field of economics, as positive analytical anarchists have recently been studying the ways in which the economic system and economic institutions affect emergent order. However, it seems plausible that other social scientists can examine emergent orders from their perspective with their knowledge and training. History, psychology, sociology, political science, law, anthropology, ethics, linguistics, and more all have something to contribute to the growing field of positive analytical anarchism.

## **Anarchism as Attitude**

Thanks to our ignorance, life is a process of constant change — adaptation towards a perceived good but never fully reaching it, only tending towards it... as long humanity is free enough. The aim of change must be tempered by acknowledging our own ignorance but some things are extensions of anarchist views of the social order. What does tangible, progressive, anarchist change require? Building a community. Caring for one and other. Fostering a culture of cooperation, mutual aid, innovation, and autonomy. That is, creating a culture of anarchism.

Social change isn’t going to the voting booths and choosing a new face to murder Muslims overseas. Social change isn’t engaging in party politics. Social change isn’t watching the state of the Union or analyzing public policy or lobbying for a new

cally, endogenous rule creation. The state is fundamentally a top-down, hierarchical agency that intervenes in already existing arrangements and exchanges. The rules it makes are *imposed* on the rest of society. Endogenous rules, on the other hand, are bottom-up, naturally occurring rule creation. When norms and traditions develop along with society as adaptable, pragmatic orders, they eventually become institutionalized by the mere fact that most people practice them. For one reason or another, the majority of people liked these norms and traditions and decided to copy what they saw, eventually making it regular and predictable.

“Positive Analytical Anarchism” is that approach which, as characterized by economist Peter Boettke, “Instead of designing ideal institutional settings that we can exogenously impose on the system and thus provide the “correct” institutional environment within which commerce and manufacturing can flourish, we have to examine the *endogenous* creation of the rules by the social participants themselves.” The ideal institutional settings he has in mind are the notions of perfect knowledge and incentives on behalf of the state. Upon closer inspection, the state has less knowledge and worse incentives than private actors, which is to be expected by organizations that replace spontaneous orders with designed ones and voluntary exchange with violent coercion. He goes on, “The science and art of association is one of self-governance and not necessarily one of constitutional craftsmanship. And herein lies the contribution that contemporary research on anarchism can make to modern political economy.”

The academic mindset that’s skeptical of centralized institutions and appreciative of unconscious orders in regards to problems of governance and organization views the ideas of “positive analytical anarchism” as, “a progressive research program in political economy in the contemporary setting of social science,” according to Boettke. That is, anarchism isn’t some normative ideal at all. It’s merely a way of looking at

society, we can try to change certain emergent rules and norms from the inside by changing culture.

Anarchism is about *voluntary spontaneous* orders, not cultures that are predicated on instances of coercion, such as the norms and beliefs that underline statism and rape culture. Letting people be free to develop their own goals and plans, their own values and philosophies, means a principle of *equality of authority*. Of course orders emerge from coercive arrangements, but these are not valuable for the same reason that *voluntary orders* are. The latter are the essence of civilization and progress. They are the cement that holds society together. They lead to peace, mutual respect, and trade and away from war, hierarchy, and violence. Any effort to use coercion to direct others according to your own values and goals displays a fundamental ignorance of the forces that achieve progress and flourishing and a flagrant disrespect for the humanity of both the coercer and the victim. Anarchism is an institutional arrangement that puts into practice what we all already know: that, as Gary Chartier puts it, “People are equal in essential dignity and worth,” and, “There is no natural right to rule.” This respect for persons and their individual authority is what must be the ultimate foundation for spontaneous order to develop. To the extent that coercion is used to direct others, the result fails to be based on a spontaneous arrangement. It fails to be anarchistic.

The anarchist sees the state for what it truly is: mere people. The order that society develops spontaneously is not even comprehensible to a single mind or group of minds, let alone the state. The notion of an impartial or objective state, of an exogenous, guaranteed force that imposes order on an otherwise disorderly and chaotic society is nothing but a baseless myth created by the murderers and looters that depend on the state for their power. The state is simply individuals, just like you and I and everyone else. However, the people known as the state embrace the organizing principle of coercion instead

of voluntarism, of violence instead of love. Because the state is merely a group of people coercively and ignorantly interfering with the emergent orders that free people develop but never design based on need and custom, its organizing principle is not one of objective, exogenous order, but of subjective, endogenous chaos.

So in what way is Anarchism a political philosophy? Like other political philosophies, Anarchism has a prescription — it, in most cases, conveys some kind of normative ideal for society. Anarchism says that trying to impose normative ideals on society is wrong. That trying to order and coerce an otherwise free order only disrupts that order. That violating the natural equality of authority of humanity promotes warfare and not welfare.

The state, by its very nature, must bring chaos. As soon as the state exists, it imposes a normative ideal on the society it claims to rule. Even the most minimal state is what happens when a small group of people institutionalizes the principle of conservatism in the legal and defense industries. Instead of allowing the principles of free exchange, innovation, and contract govern the legal and defense markets, any and all adaptation and dynamism, which always comes from the depths of society and the unexpected, unpredictable, and most importantly, un-reproducible combinations of previously thrown out attempts at innovation and change, is crushed by the state because it employs the principles of violence and monopoly. It suppresses competition and halts all progress. Instead of allowing free people to utilize their local knowledge, and all the facts of their life and surroundings, the state says only its knowledge is relevant. Instead of a free market in innovation, the state says only it is allowed to innovate. The state says only it is capable of creating law and order, of defending us, and creating change for us. Anarchism says it can't, it won't, and we should take back the order, safety, and progress the state has so viciously stolen from us.

We don't need more evidence of order without the state. The evidence is all around us. All order and progress proceeds from anarchic forces; those spontaneously developed rules that limit the power and influence of violence and instead promote cooperative efforts, mutual respect, and voluntarism. We can see what a poor job the state does at emulating the effects of actual spontaneous orders. No matter how hard you try you can't create value or progress with violence and planning. Those are the values of destruction and stagnation, and the state is their primary agent.

“Anarchy” comes from the Greek for, “without rulers.” Anarchism, then, is the view that society ought to have no rulers, or more accurately, everyone should be their own ruler. It says the only rule that should “govern” society is equality of authority, which is really no government at all. Anarchism says the principles of liberty and cooperation are more conducive to human flourishing. Anarchism is a political philosophy whose principle is to reject coercive planning, the basis of all other political philosophies, in favor of letting voluntary spontaneous orders be the organizing force behind society and letting the norms and rules that people settle on in a free environment create order. In essence, anarchism is saying that whatever free people develop on their own, natural accord is likely to be best and violently interfering with that order will cause disorder. It's a paradoxical philosophical rejection of normative ideals packaged into a normative ideal that calls for the all too radical notion of full and equal freedom.

## **Positive Analytical Anarchism**

It's no surprise that if anarchism in the realm of political philosophy is the appreciation and respect for spontaneous orders, then anarchism in the realm of science is the scientific research and analysis of spontaneous orders, or more specifi-