

# 15 Ways to Practice Anarchism

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In his book **Practical Anarchism: A Guide for Daily Life**, Scott Branson argues that “anarchism is a name for something most of us already do. The name itself matters less than the doing.” Anarchists are doers who refuse to wait for a perfect moment or a political revolution to begin the work of making a better world. Anarchists are also social critics who challenge the status quo with facts and will not simply accept the undemocratic rule of experts. The economists have not been able to—although, in their defense, they don’t seem to care to try—explain how it is that their robust, dynamic, hyper-competitive global marketplace should be dominated by so few firms with so much money and market power. There are so few firms in part because the global capitalist environment in which firms operate has become extraordinarily large and complex. We have made it that way, according to class interests, consciously or otherwise. Navigating this complex system requires close and very expensive relationships with state actors, and there are many powerful state proxies in for example, defense and aerospace, energy and oil, telecommunications, among others. Access to the complexities is guarded and heavily curated. a system of beliefs is required, but it is by no means a religious code—indeed, if it includes the choreography of religious practice, it nevertheless disdains the truly devout as unsophisticated, if we may, deplorables. The code of the coastal elite is monopoly capitalism and American hegemony.

Who knows what to call them really? They aren’t merely college educated these days; they have often attended the best schools and they have fancy graduate degrees, but much more importantly, they share a deep cultural outlook about America’s role in the world. They may be conservative or progressive, religious or not, black or white, gay or straight, cisgender or transgender. The litmus test is one’s understanding of what kind of thing the United States of America really is, its history, its uniqueness, its moral character, its destiny. The story of contemporary American elites is not a new one. It’s the story of how sophisticated people who see themselves as above chauvinistic prejudices can, nevertheless absorb the values of imperialism and actively recreate that system.

Education plays the decisive role in creating and re-creating generations of well healed elites who see it as America’s unquestioned right to dominate the globe. To accomplish this distorted reality in such sophisticated minds requires that they see it all as a matter of **progress** and **choice**, much as the conquistadors saw their entrance into the western hemisphere. Progress because the United States particular corporate system is bringing us cheap new gadgets. In choice, because of course, there is no country in the world that doesn’t want to be a US vassal state, stripped

and looted by western corporations, with little or no real sovereignty where it matters. That the United States plays this destructive global role seems clear to most non-Americans with little more than a moment's thought, and even many Americans have steadfastly opposed the war crimes of the American Empire in both the land theft from the global south. This is to underscore the fact that an extraordinarily tiny group of elite Americans creates and implements a destructive agenda that serves their class interests. This extreme stratification is a feature of empire: the distance of the plebes from power; democracy as a shared faith and a show rather than a functioning practice; wealth distributed upwards to those few in power; eventual breakdown from these contradictions—from the fundamental mistake of making human institutions, too large, hierarchical, and bureaucratic to sustain themselves. More importantly, they are inhumane systems, and eventually humans join together to change their environments. Anarchists suggest that there is no time like the present to transform our environments, in millions of constructive revolutions. For those interested in participating in such positive social interventions, there are countless ways to engage in your own anarchist practice, the one that serves with your values and makes you feel great. Here are some suggestions:

1. **Really Really Free Markets.** Really Really Free Markets has been around for around twenty years, and it has been tremendously successful as a real-world alternative to the toxicity of artificial scarcity, runaway commodity fetishism, and lack of genuine community that we find today. People new to anarchism often ask if it can work. It is certainly working within and through the countless volunteers, spread across thousands of miles, who have made Really Really Free Markets the radical stronghold it is today. The hopeful anarchist would suggest that this model is scalable to many parts of the world. It both enriches the lives of the people who participate and offers a proof of concept for a vibrant alternative to capitalism's bankrupt notion of economic freedom.
2. **Help your neighbors without homes.** With a growing housing crisis in our country, we all have neighbors and members of our communities who have no consistent place to live right now. Whatever we can do, these folks need help and a little love and connection if you can muster it. Anarchists believe that we are a human family and that those who've fallen on hard times are our comrades. State governments and municipalities have traditionally regarded people without homes as less than human, as pests you want out of your city. As government bodies have adopted programs, they are either underfunded or shot through with old hatreds and prejudices. The anarchist movement has long been a center of help for people without homes who need places to stay. The anarchist's ethical sensibility says that, particularly in a country with so much vacant and unused space, no one should be sleeping on the streets, exposed to the elements. And the anarchist's characteristic DIY sensibility says that people should help other people survive if they can. As stated similarly below, in the section on land, anarchists do not accept the dominion of a small minority of people over the land. Anarchism is an explicit challenge to the legitimacy and authority of the state and to the reign of capital. Anarchists will always prioritize people—and helping people—over people-created abstractions. Thus have anarchists historically positioned themselves at the forefront of efforts to assist squatters; as Ruth Kinna observes, squatting is not only “a logical solution to the insanities of the housing market,” but it is “also a consciously politicized practice,” with a unique cultural identity and a special place within the anarchist movement.

3. **Support prisoners.** Prisoners are subject to some of the world's worst injustices, with thousands here in the "land of the free" alone living in squalor without basic necessities. The United States has long been infamous for imprisoning more of its population than any other country; and when we give even a cursory look at the demographic composition of the group we've decided in our wisdom to cage, we see a direct continuity to the country's frightening, shameful past of race-based slavery and the train of horrors associated with it. We can support prisoners by writing to them, and it is often possible to arrange for gifts for inmates (but of course check with the relevant overlords). Prisoners want and need to know that they have not been forgotten, and many are interested to learn that there is a prison abolition movement many of us have been fighting for. *For over one-hundred years*, anarchist organizations dedicated to supporting prisoners have operated as chapters of the Anarchist Black Cross. The ABC organizes for the freedom of prisoners and supports their wellbeing. There are several important reasons that the prison question has long been a focal point of anarchists. Prisons enforce with violence the oppressive class and social hierarchies that dominate our lives; more specifically, they have played and continue to play a key role in shaping and sustaining America's brutal racial hierarchies and relative social positions. Slavery remains in practice on American soil today, with the permission and protection of prisons around the country, who have no qualms with stealing labor from people locked in cages. *Hundreds of thousands* of American prisoners are being forced to work, and they're often doing so for mere cents every hour.
4. **Local currencies and credit systems.** Just as we challenge global monopoly capitalism by keeping our wealth in our communities and helping provide for each other's needs, so do we need to divest from the dollar; indeed, we could be a crisis or two away for this divestment to become a matter of survival. The good news is that we have workable models of local currencies that thrive at this moment, as they have in the past. Keeping the management and manipulation of the currency close to the community that uses the currency is a powerful, if under-appreciated, policy tool. At the current scale, these important questions of money and credit have become almost completely opaque to all but a small group of initiates, led by witch doctors in the form of central bank chairpersons, whom we somehow continue to take seriously. Given the role that currencies now play in our lives, anarchists humbly suggest that (if we cannot abolish them altogether) we make them democratic, transparent, and available through a credit system designed with the goal of building community and funding projects that enrich local culture and agriculture (rather than the goal of enriching faraway banks).
5. **Land repatriation.** Any future society that approximates the values of freedom and fairness will find a radically different pattern of land ownership. As successive generations of anarchists (and others) have pointed out, the land titles we have inherited from history were won with methods much less staid and scrupulous than the scrolls and seals we were taught to picture; to the extent that those existed, they were often the symbols of murder, expulsion, and deprivation. Many anarchists and decentralists today argue that functioning, sustainable community for human beings means access to and connection with the land. Perhaps no one has put it as well as Henry George did in **Progress and Poverty**, "For the ownership of the land on which and from which a man must live is virtually the

ownership of the man himself...” Just insofar as we’re human beings, *we are people of the land*, and it doesn’t belong to a tiny minority of thieves. To take a bit of liberty with the Lockean Proviso, if you take much, much more than you need when others are in deep need, **you are a thief**.

6. **Protect each other.** Even the Supreme Court has given us fair warning that the cops have absolutely no obligation to us. So then what are they there for? We know what they’re there for because we believe our eyes and ears and friends more than government officials assuring us that the cops are just like us, that they’re patrolling our streets with military hand-me-downs because we need protecting. When I see tanks and extended clips rolling around my community, I know exactly who I’m supposed to be afraid of and intimidated by. The United States has a hyper-militarized police culture, and our unwillingness as a society to confront the problems with unchecked power of this kind has led to a crisis that also has deep roots in the country’s history of racism and sanctioned violence against Black people. Having seen that the police are predatory rather than protective, we nonetheless have to protect ourselves and our neighbors. An anarchist who is trained in self-defense, for example, could pass some of that knowledge on to members of her community, particularly the vulnerable. Recognition of the fact that we are on our own comes with a tremendous responsibility, as we can no longer allow our fears to turn us away from the kinds of training we and our friends may need in order to protect ourselves. Accepting that safety is an illusion and that our would-be protector, the state, is actually our captor and abuser, anarchists suggest that we protect ourselves and each other. Protecting each other means that we are in active solidarity with each other, particularly those who face risks and dangers others of us don’t. Coming together in community to defend one another demonstrates to police and other agents of state power, as well as to dangerous authoritarians, that our communities are not places of occupation and fear, that we will not tolerate bullies’ intimidation tactics. Left-wing gun clubs have been *proliferating over the past several years*, educating members on how to safely use firearms, but also educating members in how to deescalate potentially violent conflicts.
7. **Mutual aid.** Peter Kropotkin deserves the credit for positioning this concept as central in the group of ideas most closely associated with anarchism.<sup>1</sup> Mutual aid is not the same as charity, nor is how we’d traditionally think about insurance. It isn’t charity because it is predicated on the idea of solidarity, the principle of togetherness and a recognition of the fact that we all need others at points throughout our lives. For Kropotkin, mutual aid is, in a real sense, what defines us as a species. He saw it as self-evident that mutual aid “is the real foundation of our ethical concepts.” It is unlike insurance as we know it in that it need not be formalized, reduced to writing, or even ongoing. It is also very different in that it is not a capitalist insurance contract; such agreements, so called, do not originate from a space of mutual understanding and equality of bargaining power. Further, mutual aid is help when and where help is needed, without the permission or control of the state or of capitalist charity. There are no representatives, no administrators, no strings attached; mu-

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<sup>1</sup> In the Introduction to the Second Edition of his own classic *Anarchy in Action* (which he shares that he would’ve preferred to be called “Anarchism as a theory of organization”), Colin Ward remarks, “In a sense the book is simply an extended updated footnote to Kropotkin’s **Mutual Aid**.”

tual aid is accomplished through **direct action**, and there are only the bonds of mutuality and reciprocity that connect us to each other. This follows a leitmotif in anarchism: the responsibility is with us, and the action emerges from us. This lack of imposed hierarchy and centralization distinguishes mutual aid as a human response to shared struggles rather than a system of control imposed from above or without by a dominant class.

8. **Food Not Bombs.** Food Not Bombs has been feeding people and activating our friends and neighbors against war and empire for more than four decades; they also regularly provide meals to hungry strikers and protesters. If you're interested in the idea that all human beings deserve food, and you also want to raise the profile of opposition to war and nuclear arms, get involved with Food Not Bombs.
9. **Civil disobedience.** Henry David Thoreau said that a person couldn't be associated with their government without shame; perhaps unsurprisingly, he didn't see government's laws as having moral force or authority in and of themselves, independent of a human's judgment. Thoreau believed that all people have the right and the capacity to exercise their consciences and govern themselves. Civil disobedience extends from these ideas and has taught us that we can nonviolently refuse participation in and actively disobey laws that our consciences tell us are unjust. Like Thoreau, anarchists do not abdicate our mental faculties or moral capacities to presidents, kings, senators, or bosses. We observe society and act together to ensure that, as Thoreau recommended, we have a government and social order that deserves our respect. Until we live in a world that is free, civil disobedience is a muscle we must exercise, much as James C. Scott counsels the practice of "*anarchist calisthenics*." Massive-scale oppression is possible only because people have never been raised to cultivate their inner anarchists. Instead, we have been raised to obey unquestioningly. Without practicing, Scott asks, "How are you going to prepare for that day when it really matters?" It is common to treat particularly horrible historical events with a level of surprise: how could it have happened? Why did people go along with it? It's simpler than we think. People were not ready when the time came because all of their training had been in obedience, not moral courage.
10. **Take to the streets.** A tested and empirically-proven program that gets the state to respond is mass action—the retaking of public spaces that belong to us, marches and protests, and (also related to civil disobedience). Even as we are peaceful, we must be disruptive to the systems of power that are eating us alive and to the representatives of those systems. When enough people are organized, we can demand freedom, justice, and equality, but it takes getting outside in the streets and **showing that we are ungovernable**, because the ballot box isn't working for us.
11. **Jury nullification.** Jury nullification is simply the idea that jurors have it in their power and discretion to return a not guilty verdict even if they believe the defendant committed the crime. Jurors have an obligation to take this role seriously and use their power wisely. They have a much better track record of fairness than either prosecutors and judges. For example, jurors might nullify if, consulting with their consciences and looking to their personal values, they do not believe a criminal conviction is the just or appropriate response to whatever the individual may have done. In many other instances, jurors may

believe that the laws at issue in the case should not exist anyway, and therefore carry no moral force or obligation. Many jurors are not aware of the extraordinary, potentially life-changing power they hold—not through fault of theirs, but because judges and prosecutors naturally want to hide the jury’s power to nullify from both jurors and all future jurors, meaning the people. Jury nullification nonetheless has a long history. It has been used to save the lives of many caught in a broken, racist criminal justice system, as well as to free activists given bogus charges on account of their political views.

12. **Cooperative businesses.** One of the best ways to realize a world without hierarchy, domination, and the exploitation and absentee-ownership of capitalism is to create that world in our workplaces. When workers in the business own the business, there is a level of responsibility, community, and personal investment that is absent in the bureaucratic modern corporation. People working together in coops relate to one another horizontally. They don’t see bossism as necessary to productivity, quality, or any other measure—in fact, hierarchical relationships produce stress, poor performance, and a toxic workplace culture.
13. **Clean up your community.** A growing body of research demonstrates that when we live in clean and beautiful environments, filled with walkable green spaces, we are happier and more productive, which makes our communities safer and healthier places to live. Organizing clean-ups can turn to picnics in the park and opportunities to exchange ideas about local, permissionless work and play.
14. **Community workshops and skill-sharing.** Combining a park clean-up with a skill-share is a great way to build camaraderie and demonstrate again the benefits of openness and cooperation. This is also an opportunity to impart important survival skills such as self-defense, mentioned above. Vital to anarchism, for Herbert Read, was an active effort to “secure a revolution in the mental and emotional attitudes of [people].” Read was wise beyond his years in recognizing that lasting social change must have roots in mental and emotional transformation. When we share our skills and our experiences, we not only change attitudes, but create genuine solidarity and connection.
15. **Try a little kindness.** Anarchism is a philosophy of respect for the dignity and autonomy of every other person; it is the active, living recognition of the fact that the human species is a single family with a single shared home. This recognition rationally demands kindness to one another, and an anarchist’s society’s rejection of domination and rulership is a reflection of kindness and respect. Christian radicals like Henry C. Wright based an anarchist-like non-resistance politics on their pacifism and submission. On principle, he would not defend himself after being assaulted, mistaken for someone else. Wright said, “The moment a man claims a right to control the will of a fellow being by physical force, he is at heart a slaveholder.”

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