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Derrick Broze
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May 1st, 2015

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Anarchy Without Adjectives

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Since “Anarchy” is one of the most maligned and misunderstood words in the English language, we are going to use a very simple definition that gets straight to the point for the purposes of this conversation. Simply put, Anarchy is a social arrangement in which there are no “rulers.” A ruler is defined as a person who claims unwanted authority over another life. Sadly, there cannot be a master without a slave, and by the nature of the relationship, the slave is physically and morally obligated to obey the commands of the master. Many people believe this relationship is the stitch that holds the fabric of civilized society together, while in reality, nothing has caused more pain and suffering in this world than corrupt authority and the concept of rulers and slaves.

These social relationships are the manifestations of the internal struggles that exist within us. The relationships between rulers and slaves, kings and subjects and even presidents and citizens do not exist in reality. They are mental constructs, which allow some people to harm and take advantage of others in the open while maintaining moral superiority. This is far more dangerous than the relationship of a common criminal to his victims— When some-

one attacks from a position of authority, with moral justification, his crimes will go unpunished, and his power will be amplified as a result. This is why police brutality and government corruption have been a problem since before ancient Rome. The relationship of authority breeds and encourages corruption. That being said, to achieve anarchy, or the abolition of masters and slaves, the solution is far more complicated than simply having a revolution and taking on the current establishment in physical combat, though some argue that this will be a part of the process. This has been attempted many times before and each time power has shifted hands, but the cycle of violence and slavery has continued.

This cycle has been in constant repetition throughout the generations. While power has shifted hands over time, very little has actually changed about how our species views the world, how we view one another, or how we view ourselves as individuals. This is not by mistake. Mountains of propaganda have been released over the centuries to reinforce the old ways and to keep people from thinking outside of the box.

Thankfully, there were a number of brave philosophers who recognized this dynamic and worked to construct a philosophy of anti-authoritarianism, which came to be known as “anarchism”. Later we will explore the anarchist themed writings of Lao-Tzu, from back in the 6th century. There are those who believe Christ was the first Anarchist. William Godwin, a writer in France during the 1790’s, is said to have been the first philosophical anarchist with his book *Political Justice*. The first person to publicly proclaim himself an Anarchist was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, with the publication of his seminal work *What is Property?* in 1840.

Around that time in America, anarchism was taking roots in the abolition movement. Many abolitionists recognized that slavery and government were essentially the same thing and that slavery will exist in one form or another as long as government exists. One of the main pioneers in American anarchist thought was outspoken entrepreneur and abolitionist, Lysander Spooner. Unlike

people. Even the more egalitarian democratic societies sometimes fall victim to the tyranny of the majority and citizens are forced to live at the whim of their neighbors and change their lives because a vote was held somewhere. Capitalism, communism and socialism are all loaded terms that have so many different definitions to different people that they are nearly impossible to communicate about. There is no hope in “saving” or “reclaiming” any of these words. They have been tainted by state influence for generations, searing their assumed definitions into the minds of billions of people. In advocating for an entirely new and different way of life, using the names of old social systems and old ways of doing things seems counterproductive. Of course, there is value in bringing the old terms into the conversation for the sake of comparison, but social philosophies by the names of capitalism and socialism have been around for centuries, and have been government-based economic systems.

many other anarchist philosophers in Europe, Spooner’s breed of anarchism was strictly individualistic, with a strong emphasis on markets and property rights. Spooner was also very critical of collectivist ideas like democracy and constitutionalism, so his work was heavily focused on deconstructing these concepts and showing them as deceptive forms of oppression.

Spooner thought of a way to put his philosophy into action by creating his own businesses that would directly compete with government services. One of his most groundbreaking entrepreneurial achievements was forming the “American Letter Company”, a letter and package delivery business that competed with the US Postal Service and proved that we don’t need the government to deliver mail. Hundreds of years later this strategy was identified by Samuel Edward Konkin III as “Agorism,” a philosophy of non-compliance that uses underground markets as a means of making the state obsolete. We will be exploring the potential of Agorism throughout this book.

As with many other popular schools of thought, anarchism has evolved and even splintered off over the years in various directions, creating a number of sub-sects within the philosophy. In the 1870’s, Europe saw a great divide between anarcho-communists and anarcho-collectivists. Around the same time, American anarchists were debating the pros and cons of individualist and communist-anarchist thought. As a result, anarchist philosophers in Europe and America began calling for “anarchism without adjectives”, which was essentially an acceptance of all those who believe in self-governance and a lack of coercion regardless of their particular economic solution. More recently, libertarian activist and writer Karl Hess discussed the need for what he called “Anarchism Without Hyphens.” Hess was well-known for working in and out of political circles, with Anarchists on the left and the right. In 1980 he outlined his argument for Anarchy Without Hyphens.

“There is only one kind of anarchist. Not two. Just one. An anarchist, the only kind, as defined by the long tradition and literature of the position itself, is a person in opposition to authority imposed through the hierarchical power of the state. The only expansion of this that seems to me to be reasonable is to say that an anarchist stands in opposition to any imposed authority.

An anarchist is a voluntarist.

Now, beyond that, anarchists also are people and, as such, contain the billion-faceted varieties of human reference. Some are anarchists who march, voluntarily, to the Cross of Christ. Some are anarchists who flock, voluntarily, to the communities of beloved, inspirational father

figures. Some are anarchists who seek to establish the syndics of voluntary industrial production. Some are anarchists who voluntarily

seek to establish the rural production of the kibbutzim. Some are anarchists who, voluntarily, seek to disestablish everything including

their own association with other people, the hermits. Some are anarchists who deal, voluntarily, only in gold, will never co-operate, and

swirl their capes. Some are anarchists who, voluntarily, worship the sun

and its energy, build domes, eat only vegetables, and play the dulcimer.

Some are anarchists who worship the power of algorithms, play strange

games, and infiltrate strange temples. Some are anarchists who only see

the stars. Some are anarchists who only see the mud.

They spring from a single seed, no matter the flowering of their ideas.

The seed is liberty. And that is all it is. It is not a socialist seed. It is not a

capitalist seed. It is not a mystical seed. It is not a determinist seed. It is

simply a statement. We can be free. After that it's all choice and chance.

Anarchism, liberty, does not tell you a thing about how free people will

behave or what arrangements they will make. It simply says that people

have the capacity to make arrangements.

Anarchism is not normative. It does not say how to be free. It says only that freedom, liberty, can exist.”

We understand that because of its anti-capitalist roots, many Anarchist thinkers on the left might say that Anarchism without Adjectives or Hyphens remains anti-capitalist and thus schools of thought like anarchocapitalism should be excluded. On the other hand, there are many market anarchists and anarcho-capitalists that point to the coercion that is inherent in democracy and socialism, showing that these ideas are essentially nothing more than government. In short, there is a great deal of debate about who is a “real anarchist” and who isn’t among anarcho-capitalists and anarcho-communists.

There is truth to both of these viewpoints. Although market activity is peaceful and voluntary, the social system that has traditionally been called “capitalism” is far from a free and voluntary market. Capitalism has used state power as its primary mechanism of operation, so it is not fair to associate this term with a free and open market. Likewise, most traditional democratic and socialist societies have been ruled by a very few rich people, despite the notion that these philosophies are exercised for and by the common