

The End Is the Beginning

Anarchist Abolitionism as Communicative Creation

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Thomas Malthus, in his infamous work *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, takes several sections to critique the ideas of arguably the first modern anarchist thinker William Godwin. In one, Malthus writes,

The great error under which [Mr.] Godwin labours throughout his whole work [*Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*] is the attributing almost all the vices and misery that are seen in civil society to human institutions. Political regulations and the established administration of property are with him the fruitful sources of all evil, the hotbeds of all the crimes that degrade mankind. Were this really a true state of the case, it would not seem a hopeless task to remove evil completely from the world, and reason seems to be the proper and adequate instrument for effecting so great a purpose.¹

There is much to be said about Malthus's ultimately flawed critique of Godwin's work, but, in some sense, he manages to elucidate a grain of truth in his accusations. That is: if anarchism—even beyond the philosophical anarchism of Godwin—is guilty of a tendency to blame institutions for the wrongdoings of humanity, it is because the institutions of state capitalism—being as they are directly violent and/or maintained by violence—are 'corrupting' society.

Consider the horrifying social-psychological insights that have emerged from analyses of Nazi Germany. For example, Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* uses the trial of Adolf Eichmann—an Obersturmbannführer in Nazi Germany and one of the pivotal actors in the enactment of the "Final Solution"—to demonstrate that those who participated in the administrative mechanisms that brought about the Holocaust "were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal" and that this represents the "banality of evil" (a phrase she uses in the subtitle of her book), whereby 'normal' people, self-describing as good and ultimately not feeling significant personal hatred or, after the matter, guilt, will participate

¹ Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers.*, electronic ed., Electronic Scholarly Publishing Project 1998 (London, UK: J. Johnson, 1798), 56, accessed December 22, 2020, <http://www.esp.org/books/malthus/population/malthus.pdf>.

in horrific behavior when acting obediently and unquestioningly within institutions.² One need only think of the Nuremberg defense of ‘I was just following orders’—demonstrated through the German phrase *Befehl ist Befehl* (‘an order is an order’)—made infamous by Nazi war criminals but still used today by the police officers, border enforcers, and soldiers of governments across the globe to justify the appalling threats and acts of theft, suppression, torture, and murder necessary to maintain everything from corporate access to resources in the Global South to monopolistic monetary and banking systems to a resource-deprived population of wage laborers.

Philip Zimbardo, the man behind the scandalous Stanford prison experiment, explores this social-psychological phenomenon in his 2008 book *The Lucifer Effect*. According to Zimbardo, violent institutions like prisons and militaries “typically become crucibles, in which authority, power, and dominance are blended and, when covered over by secrecy, suspend our humanity, and rob us of the qualities we humans value most: caring, kindness, cooperation, and love.”³ The logic is that it is especially forceful and hierarchical institutional contexts that are major determinants of whether someone will commit acts that are harmful or even outrightly cruel—even if they do not have a significant pre-existing disposition toward such actions before they entered such an environment. Essentially, as Zimbardo puts it in response to a question posed about photographs from Abu Ghraib in an interview for *The New York Times*, “[i]f you put good apples into a bad situation, you’ll get bad apples.”⁴ And perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in the aforementioned Stanford prison experiment itself—a major experimental basis from which he draws out the ideas in his book—which showed just how quickly institutionalized power turns ‘normal’ people into torturers and perpetrators of suffering.

A full inquiry into the spectrum of nature and nurture regarding extreme wrongdoings (and consequently the definitions of moral wrongness itself) would be incredibly tangential, but it seems pertinent to clarify that the points made so far are not meant to bolster absolutist arguments against the autonomy of individuals in their choice of whether or not to perform acts of harm and cruelty. Nor is this to say that by eliminating institutions based around violence the world will instantly become a violence-free utopia—as Malthus seems to accuse Godwin of—because human beings are *tabula rasas* or ‘good’ in an essentialist sense and are only made ‘bad’ by institutional influences.⁵ This is a central critique with which William Gillis charges the po-

² Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, revised and enlarged ed. (New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1964), 279, accessed December 22, 2020, https://platypus1917.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/arendt_eichmanninjerusalem.pdf.

³ Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*, illustrated ed. (Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2008), 444.

⁴ Claudia Dreifus and Philip Zimbardo, “Finding Hope in Knowing the Universal Capacity for Evil,” *The New York Times*, last modified April 3, 2007, accessed December 22, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/03/science/03conv.html>.

⁵ Todd May, in his book *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), argues that classical anarchism does suffer from a humanist notion that “the human essence is a good essence, which relations of power suppress and deny” and that it lacks a positive theory of power (p. 62). But Allan Antliff counters May’s view in his piece “Anarchy, Power, and Poststructuralism” <<http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/allan-antliff-anarchy-power-and-poststructuralism.pdf>>, wherein he argues that classical anarchism does have such a theory, and “[n]ot only that, it offers an alternative ground for theorizing the social conditions of freedom and a critical understanding of power and liberation as perpetually co-mingling with and inscribed by a process of self-interrogation and self-overcoming that is pluralistic, individualist, materialist, and social” (p. 10). Regardless of who is correct in this particular debate, the consensus of both seems to be that anarchism—whether it traditionally has one already or not—requires a positive theory of power.

litical left in general: that it is “repeatedly marred by the mistake of assuming that individual monsters are purely a *product* of social structures.”⁶ Rather, the point is that anarchists *do* emphasize the influence of violent and unjust institutions/structures—borders, militaries, prisons, police, etc.—and the necessity of their abolition because of a keen insight that they are not just themselves violent and unjust but that they *breed* violence and injustice; and, taking into account Gillis’s insight using the specific example of law enforcement, “[t]he police are rotten because policing *attracts* rot.”⁷ As Pyotr Kropotkin succinctly puts it,

When we ask for the abolition of the State and its organs we are always told that we dream of a society composed of men better than they are in reality. But no; a thousand times, no. All we ask is that men should not be made worse than they are, by such institutions!⁸

Or, following up with Gillis again,

A core anarchist realization is that we cannot guard against bad people by creating institutions of power because the same bad people will inevitably seize and wield those institutions. The only long term answer is to remove all positions of power, to make it, in a million ways, impossible for anyone to seize or maintain control over other people.⁹

And so, this abolitionist struggle is central to the very essence of anarchism.

George Woodcock, in his history of anarchism, is sympathetic but still somewhat critical of this emphasis on institutional abolitionism. He admits,

[T]here is the tendency to identify anarchism with nihilism, and to regard it as a negative philosophy, a philosophy of destruction simply. The anarchists themselves are partly responsible for the misunderstanding, since many of them have tended to stress the destructive aspects of their doctrine. The very idea of abolishing authority implies a clean sweep of most of the prominent institutions of a typical modern society, and the strong point in anarchist writings has always been their incisive criticism of such institutions; in comparison their plans of reconstruction have been oversimplified and unconvincing.

But Woodcock defends anarchism as never having been an ideology of pure destruction, but rather one that “may accept destruction, but only as part of the same eternal process that brings death and renewed life to the world of nature, and . . . has faith in the power of free men to build again and build better in the rubble of the destroyed past.”¹⁰ And anarchists tend to be

⁶ William Gillis, “Bad People: Irredeemable Individuals & Structural Incentives,” Center for a Stateless Society, last modified August 14, 2020, accessed January 5, 2021, <https://c4ss.org/content/53289>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Peter Kropotkin, *Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings* (North Chelmsford, MA: Courier Corporation, 2012), 134.

⁹ Gillis, “Bad People,” Center for a Stateless Society.

¹⁰ George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History Of Libertarian Ideas And Movements* (Cleveland, OH: Meridian Books, 1962), 12-13, accessed December 22, 2020, <https://libcom.org/files/Woodcock,%20George%20-%20Anarchism,%20A%20History%20Of%20Libertarian%20Ideas%20And%20Movements.PDF>.

purposefully ‘open’ or ‘not-fully-mappable’ with their visions of the future. As David Graeber (Rest In Power) writes, “I am less interested in deciding what sort of economic system we should have in a free society than in creating the means by which people can make such decisions for themselves.”¹¹ But this emphasis on critique, abolition, and a non-deterministic and spontaneous future is not, as a proper interpretation of Graeber’s quote should make obvious, just a dualistic preference for praxis over theory or the present over the future. Rather it is demonstrative of the anarchist approach to the abolition of the violent institutions of present society as being a dialectically united process with the formation of a new and freer social order.

Consider, for example, the quote by Mikhail Bakunin, representing well his negative dialectical philosophy, that “[t]he passion for destruction is a creative passion, too” or, earlier (and less aggressive), Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s proclamation that “it is . . . liberty that is the MOTHER, not the daughter, of order.”¹²¹³ This type of thinking, that the absence of a governing institution or other power structure is conducive of creation and order, can even be found in anarchistic interpretations of Lao Tze—who numerous historians of libertarian thought such as Woodcock have traced as a progenitor of anarchism—and his spiritual and philosophical tradition of Taoism.¹⁴ As the writer known only as Josh elaborates in their piece “Anarchism and Taoism,” a central aspect of...

Taoist teaching is the concept of wu-wei. It is often translated as merely non-action. In fact there are striking philological similarities between ‘anarchism’ and ‘wu-wei’. Just as ‘an-archos’ in Greek means absence of a ruler, *wu-wei* means lack of *wei*, where *wei* refers to ‘artificial, contrived activity that interferes with natural and spontaneous development’. From a political point of view, *wei* refers to the imposition of authority. To do something in accordance with *wu-wei* is therefore considered natural; it leads to natural and spontaneous order. It has nothing to do with all forms of imposed authority.¹⁵

In this way, anarchist—as well as proto-anarchist—thought sees the abolition of existing institutions itself as the process by which the new social order emerges in a spontaneous manner. And as such, for Marquis Bey, “[a]bolitionism . . . is fundamentally anarchic, not because avowed anarchists argue for abolition in name but because abolitionism, with its complete extrication from the State, from racial and gender capitalism, and from carcerality, mobilizes the anarcho- . . . [that] describes a world-making, a creative imaginative praxis reliant upon a pervasive *un-* that erects as much, even more, than it destroys.”¹⁶

And as Bey identifies, these anarchic sentiments are not absent in non-anarchist abolitionism. As famed Marxist feminist thinker and prison abolitionist Angela Davis explains, “Abolition is

¹¹ David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement* (Random House, 2013), 193.

¹² Michail Bakunin, “The Reaction in Germany: A Fragment of a Frenchman” (1842), The Anarchist Library, last modified July 15, 2020, accessed December 30, 2020, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/mikhail-bakunin-the-reaction-in-germany>.

¹³ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, “Solution of the Social Problem,” trans. Nathalie Colibert and Ian Harvey, 1848, in *Property Is Theft!: A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology*, ed. Iain McKay (AK Press, 2011), 280.

¹⁴ George Woodcock, *Anarchy or Chaos* (London, UK: Freedom Press, 1944), 20-21.

¹⁵ Josh, “Anarchism and Taoism,” The Anarchist Library, last modified January 1, 2005, accessed December 23, 2020, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/josh-anarchism-and-taoism>.

¹⁶ Marquis Bey, “Anarcho-Blackness: Notes Toward a Black Anarchism,” The Anarchist Library, last modified 2020, accessed March 3, 2021, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/marquis-bey-anarcho-blackness>.

not primarily a negative strategy. It's not primarily about dismantling, getting rid of. It's about reenvisioning. It's about building anew."¹⁷ And a social media infographic by Forgive Everyone Collective states that "abolition is creative" because it...

is not simply a process of tearing down; rather it is a process of building new. One of our key goals as abolitionists is to build strong communities that are healthy and whole and whose material needs are met. [Abolitionists] fight to create a world where cages and cop cars are rendered obsolete, and are replaced by flourishing and vibrant communities.¹⁸

These powerful statements and others like them—or perhaps, more accurately, their use as popular slogans or talking points—do not deny the insights of the anarchist perspective on abolition but rather render them somewhat implicit. For anarchists, the creative and affirmative power of abolition is explicitly not just about how the creation of new institutions or the shifting of funding to non-carceral programs and practices must be done in tandem with abolition, but that the abolition of institutions of violence/force is an opening of space in the existing social order that can be filled by a spontaneous multiplicity of orders through everything from voluntary exchanges to non-hierarchical social obligations—none of which requiring hegemonic and monopolistic mechanisms of enforcement. Errico Malatesta puts it in a very straightforward manner, writing that "if no one has the possibility of obliging others to act against their will then, always assuming that it is not possible or considered convenient to adopt more than one solution, one must arrive by mutual concessions at an agreement which best suits everyone and least offends individual interests, tastes and wishes."¹⁹ But in a more complex sense, violence as an organizing principle restrains and sometimes destroys the possibility of creating and maintaining communicative, understanding relationships/interactions and furthermore hinders one's cognitive abilities (particularly rational self-awareness), which are a prerequisite for such communicative action.

In *The Utopia of Rules*, Graeber writes,

It strikes me that what is really important about violence is that it is perhaps the only form of human action that holds out even the possibility of having social effects without being communicative. To be more precise: violence may well be the only way it is possible for one human being to do something which will have relatively predictable effects on the actions of a person about whom they understand nothing. In pretty much any other way in which you might try to influence another's actions, you must at least have some idea about who you think they are, who they think you are, what they might want out of the situation, their aversions and proclivities, and so forth. Hit them over the head hard enough, and all of this becomes irrelevant.

¹⁷ "Uprising & Abolition: Angela Davis on Movement Building, 'Defund the Police' & Where We Go from Here," video, 13:12, YouTube, posted by Democracy Now!, June 12, 2020, accessed December 31, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NL4yxg3vI_o.

¹⁸ Forgive Everyone Collective (forgiveeveryoneco), "Abolition is a process of building new. It is a creative process, not simply a destructive process. It is something that we do every day in our own communities..." Instagram, November 1, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CHDnFVhAdKx/>.

¹⁹ Errico Malatesta, "Mutual Aid: An Essay" (1909), The Anarchist Library, last modified March 3, 2009, accessed December 31, 2020, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/errico-malatesta-mutual-aid-an-essay>.

And therefore violence has a distinct “capacity to allow arbitrary decisions, and thus avoid the kind of debate, clarification, and renegotiation typical of more egalitarian social relations.”²⁰ And further, Chris Matthew Sciabarra—through his dialectical interpretation of Ayn Rand—assesses that...

[b]y nullifying a person’s material efforts and threatening his or her body, the initiation of force achieves a corresponding nullification of the mind. It ruptures the connection between thought and action, ends and means, action and beneficiary, life and value. If our actions are not based on the judgments of our own minds, our survival is in jeopardy. And if, under the threat of force, we choose to act independently, we have also placed our survival at risk. . . . Force creates a lethal *cognitive* contradiction.[21]

And as such, “[f]orce is irrational; it subverts the very capacity to be rational. . . . It fragments the requirements of human life, and is a crucial foundation for the proliferation of social dualism.”²¹ The central conclusion to be drawn from these observations is that violence/force ultimately fragments both the external relationships based on communication as well as internal self-awareness and independent decision-making that is itself a prerequisite for effective communication with others. Force therefore renders impotent the ability for communicative understanding and dialectical interconnection with one other. So, by removing institutions created by, maintained by, and/or enacting violence, individuals broaden their ability to communicate and rationally interact in expression of needs and desires and feel uncoerced connection with one another. This is not a totalizing account of the internal and relational effects of violent institutions (if anything it is a loose hypothesis) but it does lead to the potential conclusion that under these new self-aware and communicative conditions, certain strategies and practices become more viable.

For example, there are the extensive and widely varied anti-carceral practices and philosophies that fall under the umbrella terms restorative and transformative justice. CrimethInc. describes these “in the loosest sense” as sometimes being simply...

a few friends sticking up for someone who’s been hurt: asking them what they need, and trying to negotiate for those needs with the person who hurt them and among the community they share. Some processes involve a group that mediates between an individual and the person calling them out, or separate groups supporting each person and facilitating communication between them. These processes usually involve setting out conditions or “demands” for the person who’s been called out as a means of restoring safety or trust and preventing the harm from happening again,

²⁰ David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing, 2015), 76-78.

²¹ Chris Matthew Sciabarra, *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*, 2nd ed. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 277. A personal note: I do not much like Ayn Rand except in the manner that Karl Hess appreciated her—that is, inasmuch as she is comparable to Emma Goldman but with some unflattering solipsism (see “Karl Hess compares Emma Goldman and Ayn Rand” <<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=2vKdh2-K-bA>>)—or through the interpretations of her ideas forwarded by Roderick Long and Chris Matthew Sciabarra, which are anti-state-capitalist in their ultimate conclusions (see “Ayn Rand and the Capitalist Class” <<https://aeblog.com/2007/02/02/ayn-rand-and-the-capitalist-class/>>, “Ayn Rand’s Left-Libertarian Legacy” <<https://praxeology.net/unblog02-06.htm#01>>, and “‘Capitalism’: The Known Reality” <<https://c4ss.org/content/15558>>).

and some method for following up to ensure that these demands are met. All of these different approaches share an intention to address the harm done directly without relying on the state.²²

This is very obviously fundamentally centered on communication as opposed to violence as a means to address both individual and community harm and arguably presents itself as a *fully* viable strategy when in the absence of recourse to a centralized authority.

Another example of a strategy that becomes much more viable with an increased ability for voluntary interaction and communication—and can be expanded upon more broadly—is the effective implementation of Ostrom’s principles for managing common pool resources (CPRs)—aka the ‘commons.’ These include:

1. **Clearly defined boundaries:** Individuals or households who have rights to withdraw resource units from the CPR must be clearly defined, as must the boundaries of the CPR itself.
2. **Congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local conditions:** Appropriation rules restricting time, place, technology, and/or quantity of resource units are related to local conditions and to provision rules requiring labour, material, and/or money.
3. **Collective-choice arrangements:** Most individuals affected by the operational rules can participate in modifying the operational rules.
4. **Monitoring:** Monitors, who actively audit CPR conditions and appropriator behaviour, are accountable to the appropriators or are the appropriators.
5. **Graduated sanctions:** Appropriators who violate operational rules are likely to be assessed graduated sanctions (depending on the seriousness and context of the offence) by other appropriators, by officials accountable to these appropriators, or by both.
6. **Conflict-resolution mechanisms:** Appropriators and their officials have rapid access to low-cost local arenas to resolve conflicts among appropriators or between appropriators and officials.
7. **Minimal recognition of rights to organize:** The rights of appropriators to devise their own institutions are not challenged by external governmental authorities.

For CPRs that are part of larger systems:

²² Ibid., 255. The term ‘rational’ (and the corresponding ‘irrational’) is a highly controversial term particularly in the realm of philosophy, both in view of its virtue and its basic definitions—in part due to its squandered usage as an essentially meaningless buzzword along with ‘logic’ and ‘reason’ by the descendants of the New Right. To clarify the quote: Sciabarra admits that it appears as if Rand is asymmetrically favorable toward a rationality that is opposed to notions like instinct, subconscious, emotion, and other “constituent factors of consciousness” as the most fundamental of virtues. However, he argues that her understanding of rationality is actually an “essentially expanded” dialectical concept—with “some parallels between Rand and [Georg Wilhelm Friedrich] Hegel concerning the relationship between reason and freedom”—whose interpretation as a virtue “does not mean that one rationalizes one’s actions, values, goals, and desires. Rather it entails the conscious awareness and articulation of rationally derived goals, the articulation—and long term, therapeutic alteration, if necessary—of one’s emotions and desires” (pp. 254, 228-29).

8. **Nested enterprises:** Appropriation, provision, monitoring, enforcement, conflict resolution, and governance activities are organized in multiple layers of nested enterprises.²³

From “[c]ollective-choice arrangements” to “[c]onflict-resolution mechanisms” to “[m]inimal recognition of rights to organize,” these principles clearly demonstrate an important role for, if not the necessity of, communication and understanding that can be engendered by the lack of incursions of violence—particularly state violence. And Kevin Carson, in his essay “Governance, Agency, and Autonomy,” takes a specifically anarchist approach to Ostrom’s CPR management that further elucidates this. He writes that “many commons governance systems have failed as a result of outside interference . . . by states and landed elites.” For example, two major CPR-based projects initiated forcibly by states—the Imperial Russian agrarian reforms of Pyotr Stolypin and the Soviet collectivization of Joseph Stalin—both denied the ability for “internal rights of self-governance,” and Stolypin’s reforms in particular violated Ostrom’s first principle as it allowed “households to withdraw aliquot shares of land from the village’s common fields (in English terms) without the consent” of the body of appropriators. This demonstrates how “No. 3, the right of those affected by the rules to have a say in devising them, is—normative theories of participatory democracy aside—a prerequisite for an efficiently functioning [CPR] institution.”²⁴ This clearly requires a deeply ingrained practice of internal communication, but Carson goes further to point out how “the focus of [Ostrom’s] work is almost entirely on the factors that foster horizontal legibility in forming trust networks” and “[c]ommunication is central to Ostrom’s model for formulating viable [CPR] governance systems.”²⁵

The point is: really anything based on voluntary interaction and underpinned by self-aware and mutual understanding through communication is strengthened by the abolition of violent institutions. And furthermore, the expanded networks of understanding and interdependence that ultimately emerge from abolition create those strong and interdependent communities most conducive to the ultimate abolition of the state and capitalism and all the forms of oppression with which they intersect and align. Each abolition itself creates a greater capacity for abolition.

The breakdown of this desired effect can be demonstrated by Graeber’s analysis, from *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, of the incursion of violence into townships and lower-wealth city neighborhoods in 16th and 17th century England. He describes the economic situation in these places during this period with great detail, explaining that sometimes businessmen, artisans, and even widows would produce their own currencies that could simply be agreed upon for use. Other times, those living in the same communities, frequenting the same “local butcher, baker or shoemaker,” would simply use a tab system. He further outlines how...

[s]ince everyone was involved in selling something . . . just about everyone was both a creditor and a debtor; most family income took the form of promises from other

²³ CrimethInc., “Accounting for Ourselves: Breaking the Impasse Around Assault and Abuse in Anarchist Scenes,” CrimethInc., last modified April 4, 2017, accessed December 25, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190802071258/https://crimethinc.com/2013/04/17/accounting-for-ourselves-breaking-the-impasse-around-assault-and-abuse-in-anarchist-scenes>.

²⁴ Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 90. Slightly altered for formatting purposes.

²⁵ Kevin Carson, “Governance, Agency and Autonomy: Anarchist Themes in the Work of Elinor Ostrom,” 2014, in *The Anatomy of Escape: A Defense of the Commons*, ed. James Tuttle (Center for a Stateless Society & Kindle Direct Publishing, 2019), 133-34.

families; everyone knew and kept count of what their neighbors owed one another; and every six months or year or so, communities would hold a general “reckoning,” canceling debts out against each other in a great circle, with only those differences then remaining when all was done being settled by use of coin or good.²⁶

And this relationship of mutual indebtedness was made possible in large part due to the fact that “English villagers in Elizabethan or Stuart times did not like to appeal to the justice system, even when the law was in their favor—partly on the principle that neighbors should work things out with one another, but mainly because the law was so extraordinarily harsh.” But as Graeber accounts, the origins of capitalism “is not the story of the gradual destruction of traditional communities by the impersonal power of the market. It is, rather, the story of how an economy of credit was converted into an economy of interest; of the gradual transformation of moral networks by the intrusion of the impersonal—and often vindictive—power of the state.” Specifically, this took the form of the “criminalization of debt” which was in essence “the criminalization of the very basis of society” as “[t]he sudden accessibility of violence really did threaten to transform what had been the essence of sociality into a war of all against all.”²⁷ The beauty of abolitionism therefore is that it offers this sort of process in the opposite direction—the creation of order through voluntary exchange, social obligation, and rational communication by and through the abolition of institutions based around violence.

For a final, contemporary, and positive example of this phenomena, consider the justice system of the Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities. Having effectively challenged and displaced major elements of (carceral) state power for nearly thirty years, the Zapatistas, through extensive communication-based experimentation (largely via direct democracy and consensus decision making), have established a justice system that is, as Anya Briy describes, decentralized, “free of charge, conducted in indigenous languages and is known to be less corrupt or partial compared to governmental institutions of justice. But more importantly, it adopts a restorative rather than punitive approach and places an emphasis on the need to find a compromise that satisfies all parties.” Penalties usually “involve community service or a fine; jail sentences normally do not exceed several days” and the “community jail is usually just a locked room with a partially open door so that people can stop by to chat and pass food. Since the perpetrator often has to borrow money for a fine from his or her family members, the latter are also involved and their pressure helps prevent further transgression. Women-related and domestic issues are addressed by women on the [Honor and Justice Commission].” Even the ‘enforcers’ of this system “are neither armed, uniformed, nor professional.” They “are elected by their community; they are not remunerated and do not serve in this function permanently,” and they ultimately “serve and are under control of the community that elects them.”²⁸ If openings of anti-statist autonomy such as these can be widened and strengthened, the future possibilities of statelessness are limitless.

And therefore, it is for the love of this communicative and creative power of abolition that I am proud to introduce—alongside some fellow authors—this anthology of works on the abolition of police, prisons, borders, and empire paired with some essential texts by anti-authoritarian thinkers on the abolition of slavery in the United States. I hope that this volume can serve as a guide and a weapon in the fight for a truly free society. And to those who continue to say—as

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 145-46.

²⁷ David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, revised ed. (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2014), 327.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 333-35.

Malthus once essentially did—that our vision of an abolitionist society based on mutuality, free exchange, cooperation, and, of course, communication is a pipe-dream or a fairytale, I quote Neil Gaiman’s (likely purposeful) *misquotation* of G.K. Chesterson: “Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.”²⁹ Now, read on! We have dragons to slay!

²⁹ Anya Briy, “Zapatistas: Lessons in community self-organisation in Mexico,” openDemocracy, last modified June 25, 2020, accessed August 4, 2021, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/zapatistas-lecciones-de-auto-organización-comunitaria-en/>.

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