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Letter to a Friend

Federico Arcos

Fall 2002

Like the stars, the night
Like the sun, the day
The dawn, the morning
The flower, the petal
The bee, the nectar
The beehive, the honey
The lover, the beloved
So one carries the Ideal
In one's thoughts

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Watson

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You ask me if I can define anarchism. It's very difficult for me to do concretely. Personally, I don't consider myself good enough to call myself an anarchist because I have always believed that to be one it would be necessary to reach the extreme point of sacrifice and to devote oneself without reservation to doing good, without limit and without cease. I can say that I still find myself tied to those endless commodities that contemporary society has created, and even though I try to limit them as much as I can, it will never be enough. The Tolstoyan spirit that commends the freedom of the isolated individual, I will never be able to attain.

As you know, I grew up in the environment of a working class family with very limited means when libertarian ideas were spreading and increasing the hopes of being able to create a better world. So, at home I would read *Solidaridad Obrera* and *Revista Blanca* or *Estudios*, the libertarian press. When my father was dismissed from his job because of his advanced age, I would read the newspaper to him and to some of our neighbors who would gather at the door of our house to enjoy the fresh air as was the custom in those days. As much from what I read as from the conversations that frequently took place at home at supper on workdays or at Sunday dinners, the spirit of those days flowed into me. I felt, along with my family, the same disquiet, the sentiment, the selflessness the workers felt, those who gave of themselves completely in unions and educational programs, all at the cost of firings, persecution, imprisonment, torture, and even assassination. It was a unique environment that came to shape thousands of *compañeros*. Brotherhood and sacrifice characterized the men and women who wrote those beautiful pages full of exploits that today they want to erase from history, but that still remain alive in the hearts and minds of the few of us who learned how to understand those exploits and to relive them intensely.

After all this, I have not answered your desire to know what I think of anarchism. Anarchism should be the ultimate expression of freedom in all its meanings, a freedom that does not interfere with and that always respects the freedom of others. I could also say that for me anarchism is something more than the economic organization of society based on the free association of individuals which existed in many collectives and villages in Spain during the revolutionary period of 1936–39, especially in Aragon, the Levant and Catalonia, and in other anti-fascist regions of Spain. It should embody an implicit respect for life. It is a reaffirmation of the human being based on feelings and affection that make one perceive the yearnings,

hopes, sorrows, and pains that present themselves in the course of our existence.

Perhaps I could say that I feel anarchism more in my heart than in my mind, the way hopeful lovers idealize their beloved. And, on this path, to love and to value all of humanity and nature for their own sake.

Again, it is difficult for me to define it, and I'm sorry to disappoint you if I'm not clear enough to satisfy your request.

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Federico Arcos, born in 1920, fought in the Spanish revolution and civil war and participated in clandestine activities in France and Spain against the Franco regime after the defeat of the Spanish republic. He has been a life-long participant in the libertarian movement, including being a collaborator on the Black & Red and *Fifth Estate* projects.

He wrote this to a young anarchist who had asked him his definition of anarchism.