Pure Freedom

The Idea of Anarchy, History and Future

Horst Stowasser

2007

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Foreword

Paradoxically, the collapse of the communist dictatorships seems to have signaled the end of social utopias — even though state socialism was never truly a real alternative. The short-winded triumph of the Western market economy cannot obscure the fact that no current system is capable of offering a way out of the ecological and economic madness in which we live. Therefore, the coming decades are likely to bring a turning point that will force all of us into a serious search for new models.

This development is reviving interest in social visions that have so far remained in the shadows. In his new book, Horst Stowasser presents the most compelling of these "forgotten utopias": anarchism.

Anarchy — a word that has always evoked fear and horror — reveals itself, upon closer examination, as a fascinating grab bag of wonders. Its essentially simple structure claims nothing less than to be a new grammar of human organization. It seeks to replace the "brutal chaos" of our society with the "gentle chaos" of interconnected, horizontal societies, in which the domination of human beings over one another and over nature becomes meaningless.

Vividly narrated, clearly written, and broadly conceived, this book has every prospect of becoming a political standard work. Alongside a critical introduction to the world of libertarian ideas and a journey through the surprisingly rich history of anarchist experiments, the author also explores future scenarios — culminating in the thesis:
"The social form of the coming millennium will be an anarchic one."

Horst Stowasser, born in 1951, lives as a freelance author in a libertarian project in southwestern Germany. He earned his high school diploma in both Argentina and Germany and studied agriculture and Romance studies. He has traveled the world. Since 1969 he has been active in the anarchist movement, participating in major international meetings and congresses and holding membership in various organizations. He was politically persecuted into the 1980s and imprisoned multiple times.

In 1971 he founded the anarchist documentation center "Das AnArchiv", an extensive collection of documents, magazines, and literature on international libertarian themes, with a focus on German-language anarchism. He is the editor of various magazines and journals and the author of numerous books, essays, and studies on social and political topics.

Frontmatter

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For Till

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Alternative Movement (38)
Anarchy in Classical Antiquity (20)
APO (Extra-Parliamentary Opposition) (37)
Asia (Anarchism) (33)
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Socialist League (33)
Spontis (Spontaneous Leftists) (37)
Taoism (20)
Yippies (38)

Terms that are already part of chapter titles are not listed here.

Notes on the Book

This book aims to both inform and entertain its readers. It is designed to be easily understandable and accessible without prior knowledge. For that reason, I have avoided lengthy footnotes and academic citations. Instead, all uncommon or foreign words are marked with an asterisk (*) at their first appearance, and listed and explained alphabetically in the appendix. At the end of most chapters, there are reading suggestions meant to encourage further exploration. The book also contains an address section in the appendix. In this way, practical usefulness is given priority over academic formality.

The first part addresses the question: What exactly is anarchy?
The second part recounts the diverse history of anarchisms in chronological order.
The third part explores the future perspectives of anarchic scenarios.

The chapters and parts are structured so that they are mostly self-contained and comprehensible on their own. Therefore, the book can be read as a whole, in parts, forward, backward—or anarchically.

The idea and basic structure of this book are built upon my 1972 publication "What Is Anarchism, Actually?"
— H. St.

Preface: Why This Document Exists

I FIND IT HARD TO REMEMBER where and when exactly I first became aware of this book, which actually only appeared ten years ago (1995) and very soon thereafter was marked as "out of print and no longer available." Around 1996/97, Freiheit pur ("Pure Freedom") circulated among a part of my circle of friends, and I probably borrowed it at that time—perhaps even from the Munich City Library, where there was a copy (which eventually got stolen…).

I'm not a materialist, but I always believed—probably like the thief—that you simply have to own the truly great books. Either to be able to lend them to others, or to have immediate access to the information yourself. (And then there are books whose content stands in such sharp contrast to the present that it's better to buy them while they're still legal.)

Already during my first reading, it was clear to me that Freiheit pur belonged in the category of books one absolutely must own.

So how was I supposed to get my hands on a copy of this fascinating work?
I called Eichborn Verlag: no luck! — of course, all stock had long since been depleted. And although Freiheit pur had sold well, a new edition was not being considered there — for reasons that remain unclear.

I visited antiquarian bookshops and political bookstores, spent hours on the phone, and somehow even managed to find Horst Stowasser's phone number. He was very kind but immediately said that if I managed to track down any leftover copies, I should call him again — he himself only had one single copy of his book left.

But there was also good news: the publishing rights had by then passed to the anarchist Karin Kramer Verlag in Berlin, and in the meantime, Stowasser had begun working on a revised edition with a photo section, which was to be published there.

The people at Karin Kramer Verlag also agreed that this was a good book — only, unfortunately (and as is often the case), they lacked the funds to pre-finance new books or reprints. When I tried again a year later, I received more or less the same answer:
"We can only publish a very small number of books each year."
The disappointment wasn't quite as great this time, though, because in the meantime, I had — for the first time — made practical use of the internet and managed to buy a copy of Freiheit pur through an online antiquarian bookshop. At last!

You'd think I'd be satisfied.

But after reading it again — as exciting and enlightening as ever — I increasingly found myself in situations where, after a great conversation, I really wanted to recommend this book to someone… if only it would've made any sense. And of course, I couldn't lend out my sacred copy to everyone at once — especially since many borrowers tend to eagerly borrow something at first, only to be put off soon after by the length of what seems like a "dry" nonfiction book.
And so it often ends up that, after months or even half a year, you finally recover a dusty, unread book…

It was too sad, because by then I was more convinced than ever of the relevance and potential of Stowasser's book.

I once gave my copy to my mother (who, like most mothers, is not easily persuaded to adopt unconventional ideas) as reading material for a trip. I hoped that the wise words of the author might help her better understand my own worldview and way of thinking. And indeed, when she returned, she seemed genuinely impressed; she even admitted to me that after finishing it, she had started reading it again…

Around that time, I was attending — as an unofficial guest student — a political science seminar on "Anarchism" at the university. Apart from a peace-loving punk, I seemed to be the only person in the room with any prior knowledge of the subject. Most of the actual enrolled students were quietly disinterested, and especially the elderly professor — who did approach the topic in a well-meaning way, but with a rather naïve attitude — clearly had no real understanding of the subject he was teaching.

I don't remember exactly why I kept showing up every week — probably out of solidarity with the battered idea of anarchism — but I do remember one thing very clearly:
How much I would've loved to recommend a good bibliography to the lecturer — something that could have brought him a bit closer to the libertarian spirit: this very book, Freiheit pur!

In 1998, I finally moved from Munich to a small intentional community in a tiny village on the Baltic Sea near Poland. Although the people in Klein Jasedow didn't explicitly refer to anarchist ideas, life there was — quite naturally — permeated by principles, an ethic, a structure, and not least a spirit that felt deeply familiar to me from reading Freiheit pur.
In my own life, dreams and utopian theory had become, at least in part, a bit of practice.

But I am becoming increasingly aware of how privileged a little island I find myself on — while the vast majority of the world seems more and more to be going up in flames.
Since September 11, 2001, and the rise of the anti-globalization movement, the prevailing conditions have at least occasionally been called into question in public, and more and more people are beginning to look for viable ways out of the planetary catastrophe.

I, too, have felt renewed energy for political engagement since then. At one point, I was even determined to somehow produce a new edition of my favorite book, even if it meant self-exploitation and dipping into my modest personal savings.

After all, isn't the world practically crying out for signs of a new societal path?
Everywhere, the system's crises are plainly visible — and yet, no compelling political vision or even a seriously developed alternative can be heard of. In this context, a good book about the never-disproven idea of anarchism might just offer one or another valuable inspiration for a general discussion — which hopefully will emerge on a broader level soon!

I dare to hope for nothing more, but also nothing less…

After I had already begun forming concrete plans to champion Stowasser's book on my own, a surprising turn occurred on July 5, 2002: during one of my sporadic online searches for Freiheit pur copies in antiquarian bookstores, I stumbled upon the website of Olf Dorlach from Zwickau, who, at www.utopie1.de, offers dozens of full online editions of important books on the topic of "social utopias."

It was unbelievable: the search engine had automatically directed me to the homepage of my long-sought favorite book, and at first, I couldn't believe it was really there — in its entirety,

down to the last letter, freely accessible and completely free of charge!
I immediately wrote a letter to Olf Dorlach, thanking him for his good idea and the clever implementation.

Still, it has to be said: despite the eye-friendly font on utopie1.de, no reasonable person will read a 400-page book on a computer screen. The printed version also turned out to be unfortunately unreadable, so I took the time and effort to reformat the text into a version that prints and reads well.

On a website of my own, I now make the PDF file available to the interested public.

I wish all living beings on Earth a life free from unnatural constraints!

— Jochen Schilk,
Klein Jasedow, October 2005
(Contact via Mama-Anarchija.net)

Addendum, March 2006:
Since the beginning of the month, the long-awaited revised edition, now with an extensive photo section, has finally been published by Nautilus Verlag. The book is now titled "Anarchie! – Idee, Geschichte, Perspektiven", and this new print edition is in fact based on the digital version that has been available for download from Mama-Anarchija.net since November 2005.

For about a year, I've been in active correspondence with Horst Stowasser on the topics of anarchism and matriarchal research. The fruits of this exchange can be found both in relevant Kurskontakte articles (also available on the website), and in the Anarchie! chapters 9 ("The Patriarchy") and 20 ("Mama Anarchija – On the Feminine Origin of Freedom").

I've come to an agreement with Horst Stowasser and Nautilus Verlag that I may continue to offer the older version of the book — expanded to include the matriarchal chapters — as a free download on this website. We assume that any enthusiastic reader will want to own the beautifully bound print edition of the book once their appetite has been whetted by this online version.

So do yourself and all of us a favor — and honor the wonderful new printed edition as well: Ask for Anarchie! at the bookstore of your choice!

A Kind of Introduction: On Rage and Freedom

> "Anarchy is not a matter of demands, but of life itself."
> — Gustav Landauer

IN THE BEGINNING WAS RAGE.
The unspeakable, unrestrained, and unpredictable rage that sometimes overtakes the slave and drives him to either smash his master's skull or run away.
Rage that one human being is allowed to command another.
Fury at servitude and oppression.
Hatred for the arrogance of power that humans wield over one another.

Rage, rebellion, escape — an ancient driving force in human history, a vicious cycle whose boundaries even a rebellious slave five thousand years ago may have come to know. In this dead-end street with no destination moved a Spartacus*, just as much as Michael Kohlhaas or "Che" Guevara*, for all of them sooner or later had to face the question:
What is the goal of rebellion?

Freedom, of course!
But what exactly is that? Where could it be found? Could one go somewhere and find it?
Did escaping authority — the mere absence of the oppressor — automatically mean the presence of freedom?
And doesn't all experience show that freedom is a deceptive hope? Isn't one form of domination always just replaced by another?
Above all: Is the human being even capable of freedom?

Outrage, fury, rebellion — these are negative values. They only tell us what should not be, but not how it could be otherwise, or better.
Hatred is not constructive*; it is destructive — how could it be otherwise?
Of course, it would be absurd to expect a slave, who rebels in his moment of greatest torment, to already have a fully formed plan for a free society.
Liberation has always been, and still is, primarily a reaction to unfreedom. But if it stops there, it can never become constructive. And that means: Liberation, ultimately, does not lead to freedom.

It is within this tension between rage and freedom that humanity gave birth to an idea as old as the history of domination itself: the dream of anarchy — or to put it plainly, freedom from rule.

At the heart of this idea lies the question: How can rage overcome itself and give rise to freedom?

Undoubtedly, hatred and fury are poor guides. And it is equally clear that freedom cannot be created through means of unfreedom.
But it is also true that it was often rage that first sparked the thought of a "society of freedom,"

and more importantly, the will to act on it.
Theorists of modern anarchism have called this the “creative power of indignation”, while tirelessly insisting that freedom can never be achieved if we stop at that point.

Thus, anarchism — as a liberating struggle and as the doctrine of a society without domination — was born into this contradiction from the very beginning and remains entangled in it to this day:
How can destructive rage be transformed into constructive liberation?
For what would be the use of every uprising against unfreedom, if it did not lead to freedom in the end?
It would bring only new oppression — unless our thoughts move beyond this spontaneous outrage, beyond feelings like revenge and fury.

Indignation, then, needs an idea — one that leads toward a positive utopia; in a word: a goal.

This goal is what defines the nature of that movement known as “anarchism”, which has always provoked both enthusiasm and fear.
As colorful, bizarre, and contradictory as freedom itself can be — enticing to some, the embodiment of evil to others — it has run like a bright thread through the history of humanity for centuries.
Between the most radical peacefulness and desperate violence, this idea of hope unfolds, still capable of inspiring people today, and perhaps still with its true future ahead of it.

That is what this book is about.

It asks whether anarchy is an unrealistic dream or a blueprint yet to be realized.
It attempts to untangle the knot of ideas that make up this radical philosophy of freedom, and to trace some of its threads.
It tells of failed and successful attempts to make that dream real.
Above all, it tries to look ahead — to sketch out a scenario and examine the thesis put forward by some contemporary thinkers, namely:
The social form of the coming millennium will be an anarchic one — or humanity will perish.

The roots of modern anarchism are very old.
Its origins are lost in the mists of human history — if only because two or three thousand years ago, hardly any chronicler* considered the “history of uprisings” worth recording.
What we now call “modern anarchism,” on the other hand, is only about 150 years old.
Paradoxically, though well documented, it remains almost completely unknown.

Its search for a future society has given rise to an almost endless series of revolts, ideas, and practical experiments. All of them are full of tension and relevance, and in nearly every case, rebellion preceded philosophy.

Even in personal development, rage usually comes before utopia for most anarchists.
Very few people come to the desire for a society without domination through analytical reasoning or philosophical exercises.
Experiencing oppression, domination, and injustice firsthand has been — and still is — the most common and powerful motive for committing to such an idea.

Seen this way, the potential for rebellion is endless.
Almost every self-aware person knows this kind of rage.
Maybe you have asked yourself at some point why there are people above you, people who get to give you orders and decide your life and your future — a whole system of hierarchy, which we all know doesn’t work very well.

But that doesn't mean that everyone who suffers under authority is automatically an anarchist.
Anarchism always involves a search for alternatives and visions of the future.
And today, new ideas for the future seem more urgent than ever.
The global chain of crises on our planet forces us to find new solutions — ones capable of replacing outdated notions of centralism, hierarchy, concentration, and the obsession with growth.

In that search, the rich trove of anarchist experience can offer intriguing suggestions — both good and bad.
But it is good for only one thing not: blind imitation.
Ideology*, dogmatism*, and fanaticism* contradict the very essence of anarchy.

Because that essence — put simply — is: pure freedom.

PART 1 THE IDEA

Chapter 1: Some Notes on Confusion

> "The word 'utopia' alone suffices to condemn an idea."
> — Jack London —

WHAT AN ANARCHIST IS, everyone knows: a violent person, usually a terrorist, also filthy, loving disorder, spreading chaos wherever he goes.
His favorite activity consists of throwing bombs, which he typically hides beneath a flowing black cloak, his face covered by an outdated floppy hat. If necessary, he also resorts to dagger or revolver — the main thing is that he can satisfy his thirst for blood.

Or else he is sick, even hereditary.
A standard scientific work from the 19th century simply defines anarchists as "idiots or born criminals, who also generally limp, are disabled, and have asymmetrical facial features."*
Anarchy as mental illness — that explains and excuses everything.

Then there is the variant of delusion: anarchists are "petty-bourgeois chaos-makers" who have not yet recognized the "objective course of history"; loud in their intentions but ultimately "voluntarist* helpers of the counterrevolution."
Therefore, as "left-wing deviants," they are best "liquidated."
This tone was favored in the past by Marxists of all stripes, who have since fallen silent in the face of the failure of their "objective historical truths."

Finally, the modern definition — a mixture of psychoanalysis and gloom:
Anarchists are said to be early childhood-damaged psychotics* who transform their personal problems into a bottomless hatred of society and forge a "philosophy of nothingness" to justify themselves.
They are as much to be pitied as they are to be fought.

Tragic — nobody seems to love the anarchists.

You probably already suspect it — all this is nonsense, and you're right.
That, however, doesn't make things any easier, because a correct definition is difficult precisely because anarchism is not a unified movement, but a diverse and therefore contradictory one.
That is inherent in its nature, for its nature is freedom, and freedom is not uniform.

Thus, among anarchists there are all sorts of beliefs and strategies for change. From ecologists* to trade unionists, educators*, settlers, and alternative entrepreneurs, all the way to advocates of revolutionary violence and followers of strict nonviolence, everything is represented.
Among them are atheists* and religious people, ascetics* and bon vivants, materialists* and esotericists*.
For some, the decisive lever to overcome domination is education; for others, civil disobedience or direct action; some want to build counterstructures with the same goal, others aim to win over the working class. Self-management is the credo* of some, while many support infiltration, and still others swear by propaganda, enlightenment, or leading by example.
Finally, there are individualists who couldn't care less about the rest of humanity, and last but

not least, there are still some who dream of imposing their ideas on the rest of humanity by force — more or less gently.
The species of bloodthirsty bomb throwers, however, who so strongly shaped the image of anarchism and so vividly fueled the fearful fantasies of citizens, as we will see, have long been extinct.

Now, anarchists by no means see this diversity as a flaw; on the contrary, they see it as an opportunity and enrichment — a foreshadowing of the diversity they seek in a future society. Indeed, anarchism claims to be the only social structure that takes into account the fact that people are very different.

But what then do anarchists actually have in common? Is there even any justification for speaking of "anarchism" and "anarchists" if everything is so wonderfully arbitrary?
For simplicity's sake, let us try a preliminary brief definition that limits itself to the commonalities:

Anarchists strive for a free society of equality in which there is no longer any domination of people over people. The members of such a society are to be empowered and encouraged to take their private and social needs into their own hands without hierarchy and paternalism, with a minimum of alienation*. This is meant to create a different order in which principles such as "free agreement," "mutual aid," and "solidarity" could replace today's realities like laws, competition, and selfishness. Authoritarian centralism would be replaced by federalism: the decentralized networking of small and manageable social units. Misanthropic and environmentally destructive gigantomania* would then be absurd; in its place would arise free associations of purpose, in which people enter into direct relationships on the basis of equal rights and duties. Particularly original about these ideas is the notion that in a geographic area there would no longer be only one society, one state equally binding for all, but a variety of parallel* existing social formations. "Anarchy is a society of societies of societies," as the anarchist philosopher Gustav Landauer once put it.
In short, and put a bit more simply: Anarchy is not chaos*, but order without domination.

In the practical implementation of these rather abstract ideas, most anarchists probably agree that certain institutions of such a libertarian social form are hindrances, to put it kindly. First, the state as an institution and authoritarian principle of order, but also the "state in the head": ideology of domination and belief in authority. Furthermore, its supporting pillars such as capital, police, church, judiciary, patriarchy, the compliant mass media, traditional education, the classic nuclear family, and the like — which brings us to the "favorite opponents" anarchists have traditionally and preferably dealt with.

But all this does not go much beyond the symbolic image of that rebellious slave we invoked at the beginning. Anarchists would indeed act irresponsibly if they limited themselves to smashing negatives without being able to put something positive in their place. Thus, real anarchists are also always characterized by working on models for a new, free society and attempting to exemplarily realize these in practical experiments — even if, within the framework of the existing authoritarian reality, this only succeeds imperfectly.

"Nice, but naive," this could sum up the tenor of all well-meaning critics.
"That may be a beautiful pipe dream, but it's not achievable. Human beings aren't made for that; they are selfish, they need authority and the strict hand of morality, law, and order. And even if they could live like that — the rulers would never allow such a system, and since they cannot be defeated, it will remain a dream."

Anarchists naturally claim the opposite: for them, such a society is not only desirable but also possible. And they explain why: precisely because humans are selfish, one of their theses goes, anarchy is an adequate way of life. Or that domination and authority are not the same thing, and the former actually prevents the emergence of a well-understood and positive, namely voluntary "authority." And, of course, humans need something like "morality" and "order," but not necessarily the kind we have today. Our laws are quite the opposite of morality — anarchy, by contrast, is the morally highest form of order because it sets its rules and limits voluntarily. Above all, there need not be just one kind of order and one ethics* — there could well be several existing side by side and together.

Such things sound paradoxical* to the ears of people shaped by the state—and that is all of us. These supposed paradoxes are only of marginal interest to us now, because they are theoretical, at best plausible, and ultimately lack evidential power. What does have evidential power is example, experiment. Did you know that in this century there have already been large, functioning anarchist communities, covering entire countries, with big cities, villages, and industry, in which a modern mass society functioned along anarchic lines—from the subway to dairy farming to the school system?

Or were you aware that anarchist guerrilla armies in the 1920s succeeded in liberating vast territories in order to attempt the construction of a society based on free self-administration? No one today suspects that the method of "civil disobedience," which brought colonial powers to their knees and toppled governments, is fully in the tradition of nonviolent anarchism. And who knows that anarchists fought for an eight-hour workday in heavy industry over seventy years ago? On our journeys through the complex paths of anarchist experiments, we will encounter such examples in very different countries such as Argentina and India, Germany, Ukraine, Spain, and Manchuria.

Of course, none of this exists anymore, and many of these large and small experiments fell far short of anarchism's high ideals in practice. But it is also true that not a single one of them collapsed because of its own contradictions—they were all crushed militarily. Truly a "striking" proof; however, not one that could prove the impossibility of an anarchist society.

Today anarchism exists only as a concept*, as a social movement, and in modest practical approaches. The final proof of whether anarchy is a functional structure is therefore still pending; likewise, whether it is a desirable way of life. Ultimately, only those people living in it could answer that.

Part 2: The Past

Chapter 20: Mama Anarchija: On the Feminine Origins of Freedom

> "Dominion is a relatively late invention in history and is typically linked with the rise of patriarchy."
>
> — Heide Göttner-Abendroth

Let's be honest—what comes to mind when you hear the word "Stone Age"? Perhaps Fred Flintstone, half-naked in a bearskin, dragging his Wilma by the hair into a cave, or clubbing bison? A cliché, no doubt—but a deeply rooted one. "Stone Age" has become synonymous with primitiveness and scarcity, brutality, and a harsh struggle for survival. Culture, technology, prosperity, even refined manners—these are probably the last things we would associate with the Neolithic. An era when, around 11,000 BCE, people were still painting cave walls in the Pyrenees, and which only around 9,700 BCE saw the end of the Ice Age—yet by 10,200 BCE, had already produced the oldest known Stone Age city: Hallan Çemi.

The Stone Age—about 6,000 years long—was when the "Neolithic Revolution" brought humans not just sedentism, agriculture, and animal domestication, but also highly developed and profoundly humane social systems. A time that was the complete opposite of Fred Flintstone's brutal comic world. It was only toward the end of this period, between 4000 and 3000 BCE, that another system slowly emerged—one shaped by dominion, exploitation, and suppression. The new "bearers of culture" were interested in power; they used metalworking to make weapons and writing to codify laws, property, and punishment. Thus began what we now call the modern state.

But can all this really still matter to us in the computer age? After all, "Stone Age communism" is a synonym for dumb, brutal backwardness—and "Stone Age anarchism"? That sounds downright laughable. Still, even if the usual clever critics accuse us of wanting to drag humanity "back to the Stone Age," we should dare to look at that distant, unknown time with an open mind. Because it is not only instructive, but also inspiring for anyone exploring utopian visions of society.

Of course, no one wants to return to the Neolithic, and certainly not slap ideological labels onto Stone Age people. They weren't communists, feminists, and they didn't called themselves anarchists. But: they organized life very differently from us, very anarchic—and apparently did quite well.

Were Stone Age people wiser than we are?

When U.S. General Westmoreland, during the height of the Vietnam War, threatened to bomb the Viet Cong "back into the Stone Age," everyone understood what he meant. What wasn't known then—and still sounds paradoxical today—is that, had he actually succeeded, he might've

done humanity a favor. Because it was precisely in that long-maligned era that thriving societies existed—societies that knew neither war nor hunger, no rich or poor, no clergy or kings. Societies organized far more sensibly than modern nation-states, offering their people security and a good life for millennia.

These Neolithic civilizations weren't vast "empires," but manageable societies in which hierarchy, as we understand it, was essentially unknown: no ruling caste stood above the rest, no generals gave orders, no queens dictated the fate of the community, no chiefs demanded tribute, no high priests instilled fear and dependency. Instead, people organized themselves in networks of mutual aid and equality, which extended beyond tribal boundaries.

And the simple reason? In these societies, it was women who set the tone—and they did so in gentler, more humane, and more effective ways than patriarchal societies ever managed. The authoritarian male-dominated world that still controls us today only replaced this earlier, successful model—a system called matriarchy—relatively recently.

Matriarchy – A Principle of Life

Women shaped the fundamental consensus of communal life—but without actually ruling.

From their values emerged a kind of "social grammar" that didn't need to be enforced through violence because it was universally accepted and naturally structured daily life. And it was exactly these values that made the difference.

At the heart of this female-centered ethics were not domination, oppression, or violence, but life itself.

The woman was seen as the giver of all life and at the same time its protector. The entire mythology of matriarchal societies—documented among other things in more than 30,000 goddess figurines from over 3,000 archaeological sites worldwide—centered on this one essential theme: birth, the protection of life and its foundations, and the natural end within the inevitable cycle of death and regeneration.

The young goddess appeared as a protector of forests and wildlife; the mature woman as the bearer and sustainer of the life she had given; the old woman as the goddess of death. These mystical images reflected nature in all its aspects: from gentle to fearsome. But none of these goddesses represented a punishing, hierarchical "religion"—they embodied the "creative principle". And this principle was generative, leaving no room for arbitrary destruction.

However, there was certainly space for the specifically masculine: the spontaneous and life-stimulating aspects—symbolized by the son, the man, or (positively!) the animal. So, in matriarchal societies, "man" was by no means excluded, but included: he was part of the overarching social principle—the preservation of all life.

The practical application of such a principle in real life aligned almost naturally with a culture of settlement, agriculture, and highly developed craftsmanship.

Matriarchal societies were egalitarian, peaceful, and remarkably productive for their time.

They provided Stone Age people with an exceptionally beneficial era that lasted many thousands of years—and archaeologists have found no evidence of war or famine during this time.

Within this culture, the woman remained the active agent of history—as creator and central figure. These societies were thus matrifocal and matrilinear—the mother stood at the center of society, and inheritance followed the maternal line.

But the concept of domination, as we understand it today, did not fit the "creative foundational principle" of matriarchy—nor did violence, privileged classes, or private land ownership. These ideas were simply unknown—and had they been proposed, they likely would have been rejected as profoundly foolish.

It was clear: collective cohesion in a solidarity-based community was the best way to ensure both the physical preservation of life and material survival.

But Why Do We Still Call These Forms of Life "Matriarchal", When That Implies "Rule by Mothers"?

Quite simply, because we don't have a better word for it. We lack the vocabulary to describe something we no longer know.

The pioneering cultural historian Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–1887) coined the somewhat clumsy term "mother right" (Mutterrecht) for the exciting and surprising insights he gradually unearthed. This was later (somewhat inaccurately) translated into English as matriarchy, but the term nevertheless became widely accepted.

However, the word may not be entirely inappropriate. Matriarchal researcher Heide Göttner-Abendroth points out that the Greek root arché in the word matriarchy does not just mean "rule", but also "origin" and even "womb":

> "In the beginning was the mother, the female principle. And that gets to the heart of it."

In any case, women in those societies didn't rule over men the way men later ruled over women. Instead, they developed common standards for human life.

Gender differences were certainly recognized and appreciated, but not from the perspective of dominance—not about who should stand above whom. That way of thinking only came about within the reality of patriarchy, and that's why it feels so important to us today.

Naomi Hamilton, the archaeologist responsible for examining the graves at the Neolithic site Çatalhöyük, eventually came to the conclusion that Neolithic people had no concept of a "social gender" distinct from biological sex, and thus didn't perceive woman and man as social opposites.

For that very reason, it's inappropriate to project today's modern gender discourse—shaped by our patriarchal industrial society—onto a Stone Age tribal culture from the 6th millennium BCE.

And Yet—What Matters Are the Facts

So are we to believe that humans, whom we often imagine as dim-witted primitives teetering on the edge of starvation, actually created—eight to ten thousand years ago—a society of equality, prosperity, and peace?

A society built on values we long for today, yet one we can't seem to achieve despite all our technology, intelligence, and economic power?

—Yes, that's exactly what the evidence suggests.

But how can we know all this with such certainty? After all, the wise women of the Neolithic didn't exactly leave behind a neatly organized archive of their deeds and accomplishments…

Can you really extract such detailed knowledge from a heap of rubble and ashes, from bones and remnants of walls?

Yes, we can.

And how this has become possible—thanks to modern scientific and technical methods—is without a doubt one of the most fascinating chapters in the adventure of prehistorical research.

Archaeological Detective Work: The Case of Çatalhöyük

In the highlands of southern Anatolia, a striking mound called Çatalhöyük attracted the attention of British archaeologist James Mellaart in 1958. He soon began excavations that, with interruptions, continue to this day. What specialists uncovered here was like a revelation: twelve superimposed layers of a Stone Age city, continuously inhabited from 7,300 to 6,100 BCE, could be read like an open book.

This site, which at times housed up to 10,000 people—an enormous number for that era—was never destroyed or plundered. Though archaeologists have made significant discoveries elsewhere in Anatolia, including cities even thousands of years older—where they've found things like the arrival of the first sheep herds or the import of seeds from unknown locations—nowhere else were the conditions for findings as favorable or the artifacts as revealing as in Çatalhöyük.

For example, a fire had sterilized and carbonized organic material up to a depth of one meter, preserving things almost never found at comparable sites. Thanks to this, we now know the weaving patterns of fabrics, as well as the types of clothing, furs, and leather goods. We know what the people ate, what their woven food baskets and sleeping mats looked like.

From bones, grave goods, and the murals found in almost every home, researchers have reconstructed much about daily life and the economy: age at death, sex, number of births, illnesses, injuries, even child mortality and life expectancy. Trace elements in teeth and collagen analysis of bones tell us about diet in the final years of life; wear patterns on skeletons reveal types of work performed or even how intensively the people of Çatalhöyük danced.

The findings are staggering: child mortality during the Stone Age in Çatalhöyük was 30% lower than in the much more "advanced" Bronze Age 3,000 years later. While Bronze Age elders reached 55–60 years, people here lived to be 60 to 70. The average age was 32 years—not impressive by today's standards, but for the time, exceptionally high. Let's not forget: this average wasn't achieved again in Europe's working classes until 1750. A serf in 18th-century Germany had a shorter life expectancy than a Stone Age person from 9,000 years ago.

But How Can We Know They Lived Without Hierarchies, in Equality and Social Harmony?

Can bones and ashes really tell us about men and women, peace, and freedom?

Admittedly, such insights don't lie openly in the rubble. And even modern archaeology took decades to piece together a coherent picture from puzzling finds and seemingly absurd facts—a picture that defied conventional assumptions, yet clearly showed that Neolithic life was not primitive, but socially and ethically advanced. Coming to this realization wasn't easy.

Even Mellaart—an enlightened archaeologist, but a child of his time—couldn't imagine that the prosperity he unearthed was communal. He assumed the site must have been the "priestly quarter". Only decades later, when it became clear that all of Çatalhöyük looked the same—with no temples, elite buildings, priests, or altars—did scholars realize: they had uncovered the remains of a classless society.

Even in 2003, Mellaart's colleague Ian Hodder followed the trail of several mysterious concentric patterns, hoping to find the long-lost temples or monumental structures—and instead found the city's central garbage dump.

Once it was accepted that Çatalhöyük represented a completely different kind of society, one free from power and dominance, everything suddenly fell into place—a coherent mosaic.

A Society Without a State, with Prosperity for All

Çatalhöyük was a wealthy community without a government, where equality was the core social principle. The city had basically one type of house, but repeated over 1,500 times: functional, spacious, and socially inclusive, like the homes of the rich elsewhere. Each person had 10–12 square meters of living space, and each house included workshops, storage, and a spiritual area—where the dead were buried. Spirituality wasn't reserved for a priestly elite but was an individual act.

These "living houses" hosted much of the social life on their rooftops, and the equality principle was so thorough that unused rooms were sealed off and reopened only when needed—for instance, when a child grew old enough to need a private space. Each house was also a production site, every person worked according to their ability, and no one owned means of production beyond their personal use. All homes contained stored seeds, and skeletal wear suggests everyone worked hard—and celebrated wildly.

What was completely absent were signs of diseases of affluence, which are common in ruling classes of exploitative societies.

But don't imagine this egalitarian city as drab or uniform, like socialist block housing. Life in Çatalhöyük was colorful, diverse, and joyful. According to serious social science estimates, people had about half of their waking hours available for leisure—more than we do in our so-called leisure society.

People gathered frequently, helped each other, created expressive art, and loved to dance: Nearly half the population showed anatomical changes in the femur that could only come from excessive dancing. Remains of such a Stone Age party were even excavated. According to chemist Bernhard Brosius, they show that "the rooftop celebrations of the city left nothing to be desired."

Equality Without Erasing Difference

Equality here did not mean suppressing differences or diminishing exceptional individuals. It meant no privileges at the expense of the community. People weren't made equal—they were treated equally. As archaeologist Naomi Hamilton puts it:

> "Differences do not mean structural inequality.

> Respected age, earned recognition, and social influence based on knowledge or experience do not contradict egalitarian values."

In fact, many touching individual stories uncovered by archaeologists reveal deep individual appreciation, regardless of social status:

- A 17-year-old girl who became disabled from a broken femur received an extraordinarily elaborate burial.
- A hunter gored by an aurochs was lovingly cared for until he died of infection—his family was then cared for by the community.
- A mother and child who died together were sprinkled with red ochre to ensure their rebirth.

Some structures have even been interpreted by medical experts as early hospitals, reflecting a level of institutionalized care that Europe didn't see until Bismarck's welfare laws—and certainly not what we'd expect from "Stone Age people".

What Wasn't Found Tells the Most

The most revealing clues to their social ethics come from what wasn't found in Çatalhöyük:

- No depictions of aggression, conflict, combat, abuse, or torture—motifs that are otherwise classic in ancient art.
- No imagery of justice systems, punishment, human or animal sacrifice, skull deformations, or ritual mutilations, all common elsewhere.
- No signs of violent death caused by other humans in any of the skeletons.
- No evidence of theft or possessions with trade value.
- No weapons of war found in any of the twelve layers.

This strongly suggests a repression-free, fear-free society.

And Yes—In Over 1,200 Years, They Never Went to War

Indeed, there's no trace that this human community was ever involved in war—in over twelve centuries of existence.

Çatalhöyük as an Example

Çatalhöyük is just one example and serves here as a representative of early matriarchal culture, primarily because it is so thoroughly documented. But matriarchy was neither limited to Anatolia nor to the Stone Age. Much evidence suggests that the social systems found here were

generally characteristic of matriarchy—since female-centered societies have been documented on all five continents.

Nor did they all end with the Bronze Age, and they were by no means always replaced by patriarchy. In fact, matriarchal societies still exist today—almost everywhere in the world except Europe, and some have populations in the millions.

Learning from the Stone Age?

So, up to this chapter, we've spent over 150 pages grappling with utopias and social models, forming complex analogies, making use of sophisticated arguments, calling on behavioral science, psychology, neurobiology, and sociology to make the case, and appealing to common sense—all just to make the idea of a non-hierarchical, egalitarian society seem plausible and maybe a little less absurd.

An idea that to most people still seems as "unnatural" as it is unrealistic: a nice thought, perhaps—but clearly just another piece of utopian fantasy…

But what if we had to recognize that this vision isn't so unnatural after all—and not utopian either? What if it was, in fact, a kind of "normal state"—in which humanity lived far longer and far better than in the relatively short era of patriarchal, hierarchical, and exploitative statism?

That would certainly be something worth thinking about.

As Heide Göttner-Abendroth puts it:

> "It's important to realize that many things we take for granted today—simply because we're used to them—were not at all primary or natural in the history of human development.
>
> And whether they are the best just because they're the latest is a completely different question."

In truth, we still know far too little about early social structures to be smugly triumphant about any modern "-ism"—including feminism and anarchism.

The people of Çatalhöyük and elsewhere didn't live as they did to confirm our ideologies, and why they lived this way—we still don't really know. The academic debate over this topic has only just begun.

For instance, opinions differ greatly—often depending on ideological background—about where matriarchy came from and why it disappeared. Some argue it was the original form of human organization, always present until 5,000–6,000 years ago, when it was violently replaced by patriarchy. Others insist that male dominance and oppression existed earlier, and that matriarchal-egalitarian societies only briefly and locally prevailed over male-driven systems of exploitation.

Supporters of a more class-struggle-oriented view even present a compelling archaeological case for a social revolution in the Neolithic city of Çayönü, involving the storming of temples, the expulsion of elites, the demolition of slums, and the construction of social housing. They date this "first social revolution in human history" to "some day over 9,200 years ago."

Yet even such compelling narratives raise more questions than they answer:

- How did people transition from violent liberation to peaceful society?

- Why didn't new classes emerge?
- Why didn't a greedy neighbor simply conquer the rich city?
- When, where, and how did women suddenly gain power?
- And most crucially: Were these egalitarian communities connected with one another—or were they isolated islands in an otherwise hierarchical world?

It would be unfair to expect a relatively young interdisciplinary field like matriarchal studies—which has only existed for a few decades—to already provide clear answers to all this.

Far more important, in my view, is that future interpretations of archaeological evidence proceed without ideological blinkers or fear of controversial insights.

A great example of this open approach is the creative, undogmatic online platform Mama-Anarchija.net, founded by journalist and commune member Jochen Schilk, which explores matriarchal studies and anarchism in a remarkably inclusive forum—and from which I've borrowed the title for this chapter.

If such an ideology-free reappropriation of this exciting topic were to succeed, it could lead to a mutual enrichment of two of humanity's great traditions of freedom: the ancient matriarchy and the modern libertarian discourse. Such an encounter could release tremendous social-transformative energy.

A hopeful sign: a growing part of matriarchal studies has moved beyond archaeology and ethnology, and is now beginning to develop and advocate for a modern matriarchal culture—relevant to our lives today.

And the cornerstones of this proposed culture?

—Not taken from Kropotkin, mind you—

But: solidarity and freedom from domination.

As stated: we still don't know why there were domination-free societies for thousands of years.

But we do know that they existed.

And that is a fact— A fact that can still give us courage today:

Courage to believe in utopia.

Chapter 21: Early Forms of Anarchy

> "The more laws and restrictions there are, the poorer the people become.
> The sharper the weapons, the more unrest in the land.
> The more clever and cunning the people, the stranger the events that occur.
> The more rules and laws, the more thieves and robbers."
> — Lao Ma (13th century BCE) aka Lao Tzu (5th century BCE)

> "A people ruled by a king lacks many things—but above all, freedom,
> which does not mean having a just master,
> but having no master at all."
> — Cicero

Before the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, there was no anarchism—but there were "anarchisms."

TO SPEAK OF ANARCHISM IN ANTIQUITY is a bit like talking about "pre-Christian Christianity." A bit paradoxical, in other words. "Anarchism" as a coherent system of thought—or even as a social movement—has only existed since the mid-19th century.

So is it even legitimate to search for traces of "anarchism" in antiquity, the Middle Ages, or the early modern period?

We would do well not to understand anarchism as an ideology. What interests us is a tendency, marked by very specific cornerstones: freedom, opposition to domination, solidarity, mutual aid, individual autonomy, networking of small units, self-determination, and rebellion against external control.

The historical expressions of such a tendency—some of which we will encounter on the following pages—are products of their time, their respective cultures, and the social problems they faced.

Modern anarchism as a movement arose in Europe and was shaped accordingly: it is a child of its time and responded to the social issues of the 19th century—industrialization, patriotism, militarism, the Church, the bourgeoisie, and the divide between rich and poor.

Therefore, our examination can never be about anarchism as such, but only about a snapshot of it. It would be a foolish mistake to measure, evaluate, or dismiss everything we encounter in our search for traces of anarchism against today's specific form of "anarchism." Such an omission would distort the picture in favor of a dogmatic and formalistic perspective—the kind often embraced by uncritical ideological histories. That, however, is not the intention of this book.

This is why the search for "anarchisms before anarchism" is both legitimate and necessary.

Like a "black thread", the longing for free forms of social life runs through the history of humankind. This thread is not always equally thick—rebellion rarely found its way into official historical accounts—but it was always there.

In the individual fibers of this thread, we can recognize the primary anarchist virtues as substance, not as labels—often hidden behind bizarre masks and usually appearing in contexts where the word "anarchy" was never used. A global vision of a libertarian world is also rarely discernible.

So this is a search for traces—not in the spirit of a formal and therefore ridiculous appropriation, but to show that the impulse toward freedom is an ancient component of humanity, and that modern anarchism was by no means an unexpected, spontaneous birth.

Before the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, there was no anarchism—but there were "anarchisms."

If we keep this distinction in mind, we can embark on this journey with an open heart…

Tao

In the thirteenth century BCE, we find—in the completely unfamiliar cultural world of feudal China—the first witnesses of anarchic thought, whose traces reach into our own time: Taoism, a tradition that continues to shape and influence Chinese society today—a blend of philosophy, social movement, life wisdom, practical science, and non-institutional folk religion. It is often regarded as a kind of primordial anarchist wisdom. Historian Peter Marshall calls it "the first clear expression of anarchist sensibility," and considers its main text, the Tao Te Ching, "one of the greatest anarchist classics."

Almost like a laboratory model, early Chinese high culture saw the confrontation of two "philosophical schools": Confucianism and Taoism. The former promoted a rigid, hierarchical order with virtues like duty, discipline, and obedience in a society where each individual was assigned an unchangeable place. It's not hard to see why Confucianism, in the expanding state system of sixth-century BCE China, quickly became the official state ideology—centralization and bureaucracy followed.

Taoists, by contrast, rejected governments and believed in a life of natural and spontaneous harmony, with a major focus on the human being in balance with nature. In the Taoist worldview, everything is in flux—nothing is fixed or permanent. Not coincidentally, Tao means "the Way." For Taoists, "reality" arises from the interplay of opposing forces—which, though contradictory, depend on each other and are capable of harmony: yin and yang. Much like modern social ecology, Taoism seeks balance within a colorful diversity.

Taoism, however, never degenerates into a mere religion. It doesn't force its worldview on anyone, nor does it develop cults, churches, or clergy. Instead, it evolves clear social and political insights: over time, Taoism articulates a coherent system of political ethics, with parallels to contemporary social movements. Its central principle, wu wei, often mistakenly translated as "non-intervention," is actually a synthesis of what we might call civil disobedience, anti-authoritarianism, or gentle technology.

Wu wei means the absence of wei—and wei refers to imposed, artificial, frenetic, authoritarian action that runs counter to natural and harmonious development. Politically speaking, wei represents the principle of authority. Put simply, Taoists believe: the more humans interfere, the more they try to control, the worse everything becomes—a perspective that aligns strikingly with the insights of modern ecology.

Accordingly, the Taoist school posits that the best government is the one that governs least—a view we find echoed in early libertarians like Wilhelm von Humboldt, John Stuart Mill, or Henry David Thoreau. And when the Taoist Lao Tzu rails against the bureaucratic, warlike, and commercial nature of his time, and portrays property as a form of theft, it sounds remarkably like Proudhon—though rendered in gentle, metaphorical poetry, the typical medium of Taoist wisdom.

Even clearer anarchic tendencies emerge in the writings of philosopher Chuang Tzu (569–286 BCE), who rejected all forms of government, advocating instead for the free existence of self-determined individuals. The core idea of this Taoist ideal society is that people should be left to regulate themselves. This early Chinese version of laissez-faire assumes a high degree of trust in human social capacity—an issue still debated in modern anarchism.

In the Huai Nan Tzu, this question is resolved in a way that could almost be called "Kropotkinian": the well-being of each individual increases as the community prospers. Humans are both individuals and social beings—so whoever acts for the community also acts for themselves. This strongly echoes the "social egoism" of anarchists we've encountered before.

The parallel comes full circle with the claim that such a society would not be conflict-free, but would offer every opportunity to find new balances through the free interplay of opposing forces and interests—in other words, to form new coalitions based on shared interests. This sounds almost like bolo'bolo with yin and yang…

Taoist tendencies have gone through many historical developments and continue to exert influence to this day. It's hardly possible to draw strict lines between wisdom and rebellion, mysticism and pragmatism, religion and social tendency—and that's probably how it must be, for this reflects the Taoist essence.

The practical applications of this philosophy go far beyond the social realm and are accordingly diverse: from meditation and mental focus, nutrition, physical training, psychological techniques, sexuality, talk therapy, all the way to medicine, Taoism offers practical guidance for many aspects of life.

So—just a serene philosophy of life for individuals, without social mobilization?

What's clear is that Taoism, relying with disarming gentleness on humanity's capacity for harmony, has never produced a "social movement" in the modern sense over the past 2,500 years. It differs from classical anarchism less in the radicalism of thought than in the role of action. Where anarchism emphasizes direct action, Tao tends to advocate for enlightened passivity.

Thus, Taoism will likely remain what it has always been: a source of practical wisdom for those who seek full harmony within their own being.

Buddhism

Less obvious is the libertarian spirit that experts identify in Buddhism—which is not surprising when one realizes that, unlike Taoism, Buddhism did give rise to a church and a state-supporting clergy.

Buddhism originally emerged as an Indian religion, founded in the 6th century BCE by Siddhartha Gautama, who called himself Buddha, "the Enlightened One." His rather complex teaching of human perfection revolves around the contradiction between material possession—viewed

as a negative bond—and self-discovery, which culminates in the highest stage of enlightenment, Nirvana. Nirvana is the "nothingness" or "complete liberation."

Initially, Buddhism was purely an ethical and meditative movement that was quickly suppressed in India but managed to establish itself in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Tibet. Early on, it split into a power-politically interested, institutionalized branch called Theravada, and the Mahayana direction, which continued to pursue exclusively the self-liberation of the individual through the quest for perfection.

From the 6th century onward, a development began in China under the name Ch'an, which interprets Buddha differently: as the first rebel, the "breaker of chains" that bind humans in ignorance and unfreedom. This represents a genuine heresy, similar to those we know from the history of the church in medieval Europe. Ch'an reached Japan in the 12th century, where it developed into an independent tradition called Zen.

Zen is neither a church nor a state-supporting religion. Unlike the powerful medieval abbeys in Europe, a Zen monastery is not a center of power, wealth, and knowledge, but a place of equality and poverty. A Zen monk does not see himself as a mediator between "God" and humans but as a kind of teacher, a role model who can help on the path to self-knowledge. Zen recognizes no higher authority of truth than the intuition of the individual, above which not even Buddha stands. More than a sect, it is an experiment through experience, and decidedly egalitarian: Zen knows no elites, mocks authority figures, and promotes an autonomous, self-determined life. Its goal is the liberation of the individual from imposed morality, legality, and authority, in harmony with the environment. In the natural order, Zen finds no justification for rule and hierarchy.

For this reason, Zen Buddhism can be credited with a certain libertarian spirit, just as Taoism can. Both reject hierarchy and domination, both seek individual liberation through self-knowledge in full harmony with oneself. However, both remain silent on the question of whether such ideals are possible in the societies of the twentieth century outside one's own mind. How a society shaped by such ideals might arise is not their concern. Herein lies a fundamental difference from classical anarchism, for which freedom is not only an individual but also a social phenomenon.

Undoubtedly, the ethics of Tao or Zen would provide a more fertile ground for an anarchic society than, say, Catholicism or Islam. Yet, just as certainly, religious concepts such as Buddhism—based on belief in reincarnation and in which fateful karma weighs like a mortgage from the past on the present—introduce new chains. Social and spiritual freedom also find limits here. Either the world and thus humans are determined, in which case true freedom does not exist; or they are not, in which case karma does not exist.

The Ancient Greeks

Ancient Greece, always a favorite place* especially for the German educated middle class, is primarily known to us as the "cradle of democracy." And that is true: In the city-state of Athens, about 500 years before the Common Era, there were 30,000 citizens, of whom up to 6,000 regularly participated in parliamentary assemblies. Such a density of political participation is something modern democrats can only dream of. Administrative and governmental tasks were in the hands of the "Council of 500," whose membership was subject to a rotation principle. Judges were elected, disputes were publicly heard, and bureaucracy existed only in rudimentary forms

that must seem quaint to us today. So, all around there were elements of direct democracy in small, manageable units. Political structures whose key elements were autarky and autonomy, in which the right to free opinion, free speech, and free action were concepts people dealt with both theoretically and practically. All this at a time when in our regions hardly anything else was known than the unchecked despotism of the powerful, and when an individual person did not even really have the right to their own life—let alone their own opinion. Well two thousand years before things like the Magna Carta, the Habeas Corpus Act, human rights, or even general elections came onto the agenda here. [Editor's note: Habeas Corpus Act, English law from 1679, according to which no prisoner may be held in custody without judicial examination.]

So, an island of humanitarian hope in the midst of a dark, barbaric world? One is easily tempted to attach a libertarian label to ancient Greek democracy, but social reality looked different.

First of all, ancient Greece was not only made up of democratic city republics like Athens but also many mini-dictatorships and petty tyrannies; there were the Spartans with their proverbial military toughness as well as the Macedonian Alexander, who set out to conquer a world empire and had nothing to do with democracy.

But even in places where classical democracy à la Athens was in effect, it was anything but libertarian ideals. It applied only to men; women had no rights. Slaves of course also had none. Nor did the majority of immigrant residents who lived in the polis* but were not citizens of the city. All of these made up the large majority but had no say. And political participation was not all that widespread: assemblies often resembled more a show than a place of serious political decision-making. Beautiful rhetoric in itself was an aesthetic value that made visiting the parliament an enjoyment at a time when there was comparatively little mass entertainment available. But real decisions were usually made within political elites, who kept the masses well on a long leash. It was no coincidence that democratic Athens was never free of expansionist and power ambitions and repeatedly threw itself into new military adventures, for example under the skillful leadership of Perikles.

All of this does not seem unfamiliar to us today: discrimination, manipulation, parliamentary show performances, and the illusion of one's own decision-making among the electorate quite correspond to the appearance of our "modern democracies" over the last 150 years. That foreigners are not allowed to vote here is just as taken for granted as the fact that women were excluded from voting at the beginning of the last century.

No matter how democratic we may consider ancient Athens to have been — all this has little to do with "anarchy." Thus, the value of ancient Greece for anarchism lies less in its social reality and more in its philosophical significance. Undoubtedly, the relatively large freedoms offered by a democratic polis provided a good framework for the development of free thinking and unusual utopias, which can rightly be seen as precursors of modern anarchism. The magnificent ideas of some Greek philosophers were indeed embedded in a less magnificent social reality, but they were meant to serve as a source of inspiration repeatedly during the following long, dark periods of ignorance and despotism. Thinkers and philosophers, revolutionaries and reformers have drawn from them up to our days. Max Nettlau, the great and tireless historian of anarchism, somewhat pathetically* but fittingly compares them to the "veins of freedom," through which the often weak pulse of anarchist thinking survived even the worst centuries.

Not that the term "anarchy" had a good ring among the ancient Greeks. Homeros and Herodotos (ca. 490–430 BCE) used it to describe the unfortunate condition of the absence of a

leader or general. For Aischylos (ca. 525–465 BCE), anarchy always leads to the dissolution of the community. Socrates (470–399 BCE), who with his demand to think for oneself and always question authority leaves such a sympathetically anti-authoritarian impression, remains elitist* despite it all. He simply cannot imagine a community without rule. At least he paves the way for the insight that there are no absolute truths and that relative truth is best gained through controversial discussion. Undoubtedly, progress. For Heraklitos (ca. 550–480 BCE), similarly to the Taoists, reality is subject to constant change arising from antagonisms*. Of course, all within a "natural order" where there is no room for anarchy. Nor was Heraklitos a democrat: it would be best to force people to their happiness.

Things really get colorful only after Socrates' death in 399 BCE, when his numerous students begin to stir up philosophical thought vigorously.

On one hand, Plato, a brilliant mind who, however, seems to have received nothing of the anti-authoritarian essence of his master. With his bestseller "The Republic," he becomes for all time virtually the designer of the authoritarian, centralistic, all-controlling state. He is one of the first to give the term "anarchy" a political definition and places it on an equal footing with "democracy." However, for Plato, both are equally reprehensible. He describes anarchy as colorful, unbound, and undisciplined — thus harmful. Platon's famous student Aristoteles places anarchists outside the state and accordingly condemns them as lawless, dangerous beasts. Such definitions were to become influential and remain valid for a long time.

On the other hand, various philosophical schools emerge from the intellectual legacy of Socrates, which in the following centuries would become some of the most important currents of nonconformist thought: the Epicureans, the Cynics, and the Stoics. All of them are individualistic in one way or another, without slipping into crude egoism. And all of them more or less disregard the state, authority, and laws. The autonomous individual moves to the center of their thinking.

The school of Hedonism, founded by Aristippos in the third century BCE and later given the adjective "Epicurean" after the philosopher Epicurus, was the first to bring the legitimacy of pleasure into the focus of philosophy and loosen the slavish dependence of the individual on the terror of the gods. Epicurus, who in his "Garden," where he taught, welcomed women and men of all social classes for free, quickly became unpopular even as his following grew throughout the Mediterranean. His credo stated that societies founded on affection and friendship were more humane than those based on theoretical equality and justice. The Epicureans, far removed from the prejudice of blind pleasure-seeking and lust often attached to them, most closely correspond to the part of modern anarchism that is situated between conscious living, the right to one's own lifestyle, the legitimacy of earthly pleasure, and a combative individualism. Their predecessor Aristippos, who must have been a real snob in contrast to the "ascetic pleasure-seeker" Epicurus, is credited with the saying that the wise man should not sacrifice his freedom to the state.

The Cynics, too, were not necessarily what we today call cynics—that is, people who mock the feelings of others with clever but biting sarcasm. Sharp-tongued indeed, and notorious for their revealing paradoxes*, we can most appropriately see this philosophical school as the spearhead of an anarchoid guerrilla of fun in antiquity that recognized no established authorities. One of their most prominent students, Diogenes of Sinope, was the eccentric scoffer of civilization par excellence. He denounced slavery, proclaimed his brotherhood with all living beings, and declared himself the first "world citizen" in history. He did not want to live better than a dog. His dog-like—Greek "cynic"—way of life earned him a "barrel" as a dwelling, in front of which one day the

mighty general Alexander appeared, offering the famous philosopher whatever he wished. Diogenes' request, that Alexander please step out of his light, was worthy of the authority-defying philosophy of a Kynic and became correspondingly famous.

The ideas of the Cynics focus on the concepts of physis (nature) and nomos (convention), which philosophy had so far tried to reconcile. The Cynic school, however, rejected human conventions, which they regarded as artificial, arbitrary, and imposed. Instead, they sought "natural laws"—physis triumphs over nomos. For example, the founding father Antisthenes, who had turned his back on his aristocratic class, preached to the working population at mass meetings in the open air a path "back to nature," where government, private property, established religion, or marriage would no longer have a place, because in a "natural order" they would be superfluous.

For a Cynic, conventional rules are just as "unnatural" as they are annoying. Law, hierarchy, and customs differ among various peoples and times; therefore, they have no universality and consequently no moral authority. This anarchic element of the Kynic school is especially evident in the person of Diogenes, who despised money, practiced passive resistance, and lived a subversive everyday life.

The Stoics are positioned even closer to anarchism. For Kropotkin, Zenon of Kition (4th and 3rd centuries BCE) was **"the best exponent of anarchist philosophy in ancient Greece."** No wonder, since he opposed Platon's state communism with the ideal of a free commune without government. Zenon recognized—just like his Russian admirer—that humanity has both the instinct of self-preservation, which manifests as egoism, and the social instinct, which leads to cooperation. Both tendencies are in free play, with social cooperation increasing as humans align themselves with their "natural needs." Coercive institutions would then become unnecessary.

Thus, the Stoics build on the Cynics' concept of "natural principle," but unlike them, they do not reject the benefits of civilization. They are more realists than provocateurs, and from the Epicureans, they adopt the capacity for enjoyment. A pleasant mixture that contains strong elements of what we today would call individualism, rationalism, equality, and openness to the world.

The idea of "natural principle" equates "God" with "Nature" and "Nature" with "Reason." A philosophical trick with far-reaching consequences for a long time: divine law thus corresponds to natural law; the limits of humans compared to the gods are exactly those set by nature. To rebel against nature (= God) is irrational. Therefore, it is rational to respect natural law (= divine order). Natural science would consequently be the study of this order. It is clear that such a concept of God increasingly distances itself from mystical religion. Rationality acquires a divine character, while the religious element withers. In all this, Stoicism strongly resembles the ideals of the Enlightenment, just as it shares the nearly boundless belief in the goodness of man, provided he can develop "naturally" — a belief, by the way, that has lost much of its persuasiveness since Rousseau and is now seen more critically in anarchism. However, 2200 years ago, this way of thinking was groundbreaking, as it was the first counterweight against the local, authoritarian, god-fearing power mentality in mainstream Greek philosophy with its personified deities. This allowed a coherent political worldview to emerge:

A wise person, according to the Stoics, participates in political life if not prevented from doing so, but the state by its nature prevents such engagement. Therefore, all states are equally evil. Stoics also prove to be true cosmopolitans. Unlike Plato and Aristotle, they consider all people to be of equal worth and consequently oppose slavery in the polis. In Zenon's "Republic," there are no racial or social distinctions, no courts, police, armies, temples, money, marriage, or schools.

In such a "natural order," "everyone works according to their abilities and consumes according to their needs." It would be more than 2000 years later before the tradition of such radical ideas was timidly revived: by Lessing and Fichte, and more vehemently by Godwin, Kropotkin, and Landauer.

But let us not forget one thing: Zenon's Republic was not a real existing territory, but philosophy. Ideas that have come down to us as written fragments or reports. Epicureans, Cynics, and Stoics were fringe groups of society, standing in opposition to the prevailing morals and philosophy. Probably considered "cranks" by most people who even knew of them. Little is known about concrete attempts to put such ideas into practice. If there were approaches extending beyond the private homes of philosophers, they were unsuccessful—otherwise, we would likely have heard about them. Philosophy was a hobby of privileged people in ancient Greece.

Nevertheless, the impact of these philosophical schools should not be underestimated. On the one hand, they were trendsetters. Undoubtedly, they influenced the spirit of the age and affected the social life of an era. For example, Stoicism found followers throughout the Mediterranean, especially in Asia Minor and Rome, where it had a lasting influence on jurisprudence—the idea of natural principle (or sometimes natural law) replaced formal law. On the other hand, they became part of human cultural history and acted like seeds of freedom that survived for centuries until one day falling on fertile ground and sprouting in social reality. The few enlightened thinkers of the Middle Ages drew from this seedbed as did Renaissance philosophers, Enlightenment thinkers, and early anarchists.

Dark Times in the Shadow of the Church

The following centuries are poor in such freedom-giving "seeds," and the "veins of freedom" pulse very weakly for a long time. The Roman Empire was not only the political triumph of the state itself but culminated in an unprecedented imperialism. Almost the entire Western world was subject to a single, powerful, centralized state doctrine serving Rome. Bad times for the love of freedom.

Then came the so-called "Dark Ages," which, although not as dark in many respects as commonly believed, were so regarding global freedom. In the wake of the new Christian religion and its singular, strict, neurotic-authoritarian God, a new religious imperialism followed—with some delay: the church, clergy, and monasteries spread across Europe an equally dull and intolerant unified doctrine. It was built on fear and entwined excellently with secular state power. Thinking outside religious categories became nearly impossible for one and a half millennia.

Therefore, most of what has been preserved from these times in terms of freedom impulses is either direct rebellion against oppression or deviation from church doctrine. Slaves and heretics, peasants and dissenters are the protagonists of this resistance. The sources from today's perspective are almost maddening. Pure rebellion movements produced hardly any writings or theories; they are known to us only through the reports of the victors and fare correspondingly poorly. For heretics, there are more written documents since their thinkers mostly originated from the church itself and were diligent scribes. Much was destroyed, and the rest must be painstakingly pieced together from inquisitors' records. This is about as authentic as trying to reconstruct the worldviews of anti-Hitler resistors from Gestapo interrogation protocols.

Since the turn of the era, there has not been a century without uprisings and heresy. An unbroken chain of defiance accompanies the "official" development of society. Plebeians, Gracchi, Spartacus-led slaves, Cimbri, Teutons, and Donatists rose against the Roman Empire. In our immediate vicinity, Batavians, Saxons, Slavs, Frisians, Lutizens, and repeatedly the oppressed peasants resisted oppression and disenfranchisement. Cologne, Magdeburg, Strasbourg, Mainz, Würzburg, or Brunswick experienced uprisings against authority just as Bavaria, Alsace, Thuringia, Pomerania, Dithmarschen, or Sundgau did. They all cannot be enumerated or investigated here.

Did such rebellions have anarchistic traits? In a strict sense, certainly not, since they generally lacked the totality of a vision free of domination. Thus, Max Nettlau in his History of Anarchy concludes that the uprisings in ancient Rome exhibited authoritarian forms just as the early Christian communities did, which, despite their communist-democratic beginnings, were quickly absorbed into the new state religion. For the cause of freedom, Nettlau states, "none of these were relevant," allowing only a few exceptions. However, in the spirit of our impartial search for essentials beyond the modern concept of anarchism, a closer look is worthwhile.

"Oh, you fools! Anyone can write whatever they want in a book; and the one who wrote the Gospel could also write whatever he wanted." Such disrespectful sentences coming from the mouths of convinced Christians sound unusual. And yet they are typical of that egalitarian and anti-authoritarian thread that runs as opposition throughout the history of Christianity and has never been silenced to this day.

The quote comes from the final phase of the Cathars, an immensely popular Christian protest movement that spread over large parts of southern Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries. These people understood themselves, following the Greek kátharos, as "the pure ones" — a word from which the German word Ketzer ("heretic") developed. They opposed widespread poverty and the privileges of the nobility, mocked the institutional church along with its dogmas and pomp, preached a simple life, and regarded all people as equal. This also applied to women, which in the patriarchal world of the Middle Ages was an incredible provocation.

Apparently, such ideas met the needs and tastes of broad segments of society and became a serious threat to the church. Since heretics also lacked the necessary respect for the Holy Scripture and the Holy Roman Church, Pope Gregory IX found himself in such a tight spot that in 1232 he invented the "Holy Inquisition," a tribunal that was supposed to combat all kinds of "heresy" by means of court proceedings, torture, and the death penalty. This was followed, hand in hand with state power, by outright extermination wars — for example, against the Albigensians in Provence or the Waldensians in France and Northern Italy. Despite all the brutality, it took more than seventy years before the Cathars were finally destroyed — only to make room for new protest movements that were also persecuted. The Inquisition — which still exists today but is no longer allowed to impose secular punishments — has never been idle in its almost 800-year history.

Church rebels — whether in word, writing, or deed — have been generally called "heretics" since the days of the Cathars. And heretics, unless they were repentant and pardoned by the mother church, were burned, hanged, quartered, or broken on the wheel well into the 18th century. Often it was enough just to deviate from the official opinion and to think independently. More accurately, the word heretic (from the Greek hairesis, meaning "choice") designates people who "adhere to self-chosen views or ways of life." Already in the second century AD, the church used the word for the crime of "arbitrary human opinion" and henceforth denoted a "deviant" from

the divine truth, which, naturally, was defined by the church. And deviation was considered a grievous sin worthy of death.

Yet "heresy" existed before the church — strictly speaking, even before the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth. He was only one of many "utopian cranks" who, at the time, wandered around the Jewish homeland with their provocations and prophetic visions and presumably got on the nerves of the respectable citizens. Much like during our own hippie era, in Palestine at that time, difference, universal love, challenges to authority, new ways of life, visions of equality, and of course resistance to state power were very much in vogue. And before that ridiculed provocative prophet Jesus was crucified, became a myth, and under the nickname "the Anointed One" (Christ) became the founder of a new religion, he had most likely been connected with a radical religious sect, the Essenes. They lived in a kind of village commune on the shores of the Dead Sea and practiced a "pre-Christian" love communism in equality, poverty, leaderlessness, and religious searching in harmony with nature and its laws. Without doubt, much of what the wandering prophet Jesus said and did was borrowed from here.

Only decades and centuries later did some people who were not there write down all the anecdotes and legends about Jesus that circulated by word of mouth. Thus the "Gospels" came into being — part of that dubious collection of texts called the Bible, which as the "Book of Books" still must not be questioned today. From this quickly grew a package of "truths" that served a power-obsessed, dogmatic, and intolerant church calling itself Christian. Presumably, the historical Jesus of Nazareth would have been the church's first rebel.

This means nothing less than that heresy, in its true sense, is not a deviation but rather something typical of Christianity itself — quite simply because Jesus of Nazareth, as a free seeker of divergent views and ways of life, was himself a typical heretic. In this respect, the Christian church would be the real degeneration* of Jesus' ethics. At least that is how more or less all heretical movements see it: they always strive for a "true" Christianity, wanting to return to the unadulterated origins. In doing so, they seek the meaning of the message less in the meticulous interpretation of church texts and more in the spirit they believe they have found exemplified in the life of Jesus. This tendency is not limited to the Middle Ages. It runs uninterrupted from the Essenes to Tolstoy. Jesus as a rebel — that inspires to this day!

For example, the "Liberation Theology" of Latin America, the Catholic worker-priesthood, or the work of the religious-pacifist socialist Leonhard Ragaz. Groups like the "Catholic Workers" from the USA go even further. They apparently have no difficulty reconciling Christ and anarchy. Their activists Dorothy Day, Ammon Hennacy, and Peter Maurin represented a kind of religious anarchism, similar to what the Russian thinker Nikolai Berdyaev did on a philosophical level.

Religious, and indeed explicitly "Christian anarchism," has long formed a small but interesting side thread in the "black thread" of the libertarian movement. Religious views are not forbidden in anarchism, and atheism is by no means an automatic requirement. Nevertheless, most anarchists cannot follow here. In our age, they argue, "religion" and "nature-harmonious worldview" are clearly separated, making the "philosophical trick" with natural law unnecessary. It is all the more incomprehensible how anyone wants to reconcile freedom from domination with submission to divine authority and omnipotence.

"Nothing is more foreign to us than the state" — this statement by Tertullian, one of the oldest Latin church fathers, shows how strongly and naturally Christian-anti-authoritarian virtue was still represented in the 2nd century. That was soon to change. The sect of Christians built its own hierarchical apparatus even while persecuted by the Roman Empire and eventually became the

state religion. Christianity made a radical turn from its communal roots toward the persecution of utopian-Christian visions. From then on, all those who rejected collusion with power and wealth and instead saw the true message of Jesus in the egalitarian example of love became persecuted. Even Tertullian broke with the bishop's church during his lifetime.

The Gnostic* Carpocrates of Alexandria demanded in his book On Justice in the mid-2nd century a communism that he considered willed by God and observable everywhere in nature: Everyone should equally share all goods; no one should possess more than another. Lust and desire should not be suppressed since they are also natural and therefore pleasing to God. Bishop Ambrose of Milan (340–397) also appealed to this equation of natural law and divine will, proclaiming: "Nature has produced the law of community. Arrogance created private property." In Syrian Antioch, John Chrysostom (354–407) expressed similar views and later, as bishop in Constantinople, preached a communal social system with common ownership to subjects groaning under Roman tax servitude. He died in exile. Augustine, a student of Ambrose, gave away all his possessions to work in Africa. A sharp opponent of the entanglement of church and state, he created with his book De civitate Dei ("The City of God") the first Christian-inspired political utopia, in which the Golden Age of humanity was not in the lost paradise but in the earthly future. This vision of God's kingdom culminates in the sentence "Love and do what you want," which almost literally reappears in 1534 in the utopian writings of the French "early libertarian" Rabelais. Augustine thus becomes the founder of millenarianism, the hope for a thousand-year reign of God on earth, characterized by equality, justice, brotherhood, and love. Many later church rebel movements would draw from this source.

Yet ideas like those of Carpocrates, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Augustine, and others almost always remained without practical consequences. The early Christian communities initially lived in a kind of primitive communism anyway, and the bulk of the population barely reached these teachings. At best, smaller groups took such sermons to heart and followed men like Basil, who around 370 propagated the vision of a city of charity and care. The result was a number of monasteries. Furthermore, the early critical thinkers of the church were usually either stripped of power or corrupted.

An exception is the state- and church-critical Donatist movement, which in the 4th and 5th centuries in the North African province of Numidia inspired the social rebellion of impoverished tenant farmers against large landowners and appears in many ways as a precursor to the German Peasants' Wars. There were tax strikes, land occupations, and finally armed conflicts with the Roman Empire. Bishop Donatus, elected in 314 as a "grassroots candidate" against Rome's favorite, supplied the rebels in their fight for rights with biblical ammunition. For him, who is credited with the phrase "What has the emperor to do with the church?" natural law of man mattered more than the interest of the state. When the Donatist uprising and its militant wing, the Circumcellions, threatened to spread to other Roman provinces, Rome cracked down hard. Donatus was exiled to Gaul and the movement outlawed, persecuted, starved, and slandered.

In the 9th century, rebellious ideas broke out again and grew into a broad social movement: In the Balkans, the Bogomils taught disobedience to authority, mocked the church, and refused to serve the nobility. Extremely popular among the peasant population, the movement sent missionaries to Western Europe, where their example fell on fertile ground. Over the centuries, from these roots arose the Cathar movement, which we have already encountered. They too followed the ideal of voluntary poverty and rejected rule. They understood their life as a radical break from usual norms and order: state, marriage, secular courts, military service, and oaths were equally

taboo, as was the killing of humans and animals. Many Cathars chose a wandering life, and so the idea spread epidemically: in Belgium, Italy, Germany, and especially France, the movement predominantly seized the urban population.

Persecuted, suppressed, and beaten, however, "heresy" never came to an end. It merged with new movements, changed, and soon it became difficult to clearly distinguish between the different heresies. Despite all persecution, they survived—such as the Waldensians, who arose in the 12th century—and endured underground, in exile, and in guerrilla warfare until the German and Swiss Reformations, thus lasting until our days.

At the end of the 12th century, Joachim of Fiore announced the dawn of the "third age of the Holy Spirit," in which all lords would disappear, and life would be pure joy and pleasure. Tens of thousands of ecstatic people danced through the lands, unsettling both upright citizens and church authorities alike. Similar upheavals to this millenarian wave were caused by the uncompromising pacifist Francis of Assisi, whose radicalism the church, however, was able to channel into a monastic order.

In the 13th century, the Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit appeared, who adhered to a radical pantheism* and placed the unity of God and nature above secular law. They based this on Paul's words in the Letter to the Galatians: "But if the Spirit governs you, you are not under the law." With their free communism, they consciously positioned themselves outside society, its morals, and customs. They were closely intertwined with and hard to distinguish from the Beguines and Beghards, who also practically organized themselves in residential and work communities.

With the Beguines, we encounter a very early and extraordinarily active women's movement of the Middle Ages. They increasingly succeeded in fighting for free spaces for their feminine, pantheistic, and mystical religiosity in their own convents. The practical goals of these mostly upper-class women aimed at economic independence through work in a domain free from domination—the women's monastery. The wandering Beguines, in contrast, were not tied to monasteries and roamed freely through the land. It is reported that they occasionally chased the satiated* monks out of their monasteries with slogans like "Death to the Church." The Beguines violated the church's views on property, work, chastity, and the sacraments. Women like Hildegard of Bingen, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, or Sister Katrei, who was close to the heretical mystic Meister Eckhart, were increasingly perceived as threats by the church hierarchy. After the wandering Beguines were eliminated, Rome forced the women's monasteries into obedience or destroyed their movement by fire and sword. Marguerite Porete was publicly burned in Paris in 1310.

In England, in 1381, the peasants rose in revolt against the nobility and oppressive taxes, led by the priest John Ball. He gave voice to the protest in a now-famous couplet: "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?" Although the movement, after initial successes, marched with 100,000 armed men into London, it was stalled by the king's promises and finally outwitted. Nevertheless, John Ball's radical sermons, calling for the abolition of nobility, judges, lawyers, and all the powerful to secure the communal equality of the coming society, remained unforgettable for centuries.

In 1419, the execution of the moderate church critic Jan Hus in Bohemia triggered an uprising. While the Hussites were more authoritarian-nationalist in outlook, the Taborites, arising from this movement, attempted to found a community later classified by historians as an "anarcho-communist experiment": In a small town on a mountain near Prague, baptized Tabor after the

biblical model, they founded a commune without property and taxes, where no authority applied except the Bible. They shared possessions and production and believed, in typical millenarian idealism, that the promised kingdom, in which all laws were abolished and the elect immortal, had now begun. Singing, dancing, and often unclothed, they roamed through the forests. Given such ecstasy, they paid little attention to worldly things like effective production and distribution of goods, so the experiment economically collapsed after a few years. Some Taborites then turned to begging and theft, while others enjoyed their role as the armed arm against the Antichrist and called for the slaughter of all nobles.

A portion of the Taborites distanced themselves from this turn to violence and moved under Peter Chelčický to rural Bohemia, where they founded a pacifist community from which later the "Moravian Brethren" emerged. In his book Net of Faith, Chelčický interprets state and political power as punishment for original sin, which, although currently a necessary evil, would be superfluous in the community of true Christians. For this reason, Kropotkin counts him among the precursors of anarchism, and Rudolf Rocker even regards him as an early Tolstoy.

Against the backdrop of such turbulent heretical ideas, Martin Luther's reform approach seems rather tame. In fact, Luther's criticism of the Catholic Church and the conditions in the German Empire was anything but radical. Primarily, it was intended as a proposal for reforming entrenched institutions, and at first, Luther was no more than one heretic among many, just somewhat luckier than others. That his theses nevertheless caused such a stir and eventually led—through devastating wars—to the birth of a new church was due less to Dr. Luther's originality than to papal stubbornness and the power-political constellations of the time: the collapse of feudalism was becoming increasingly apparent. New social classes had risen, old ones fought against their downfall, and the eternally disenfranchised demanded their rights. But the social structures were ancient and no longer suited for the new era. The call for an "imperial reform" grew louder but was not realized. For over 100 years, peasants throughout the German-speaking area had been rising up against poverty and lack of rights and increasingly took up arms. Emperors, merchants, the church, patricians, imperial knights, and humanists mixed their respective interests into the ferment of this turbulent 16th century. The Reformation unleashed forces within these contradictory interests that could no longer be controlled and also drew foreign powers into play. However, wherever the desire for true liberation and radical change of conditions shone through, the "great reformers" like Luther, Calvin, or Zwingli became determined defenders of peace and order. They never questioned rule, submission, or hierarchy.
But the turbulent century of the Reformation and Peasants' Wars also brought forth other names typical of that bizarre, fractured world.

At the beginning of the 16th century, almost the entire southern German region was in upheaval. The peasants formed actual armies and pressured the authorities with a mix of demands, combat, and negotiation tactics. One of these legendary peasant leagues was the Bundschuh; its structure would today be called "grassroots democratic." The twelve articles of their statutes denounce injustice and demand rights, assert equality and communal ownership, and denounce the privileges of the nobility and clergy—all founded on the spirit of the Gospel. The intellectual, spiritual, and military leaders of these various "peasant mobs," such as Florian Geyer, Ulrich von Hütten, Götz von Berlichingen, Wendel, Hipler, Thomas Müntzer, or Joß Fritz, were not peasants themselves, but pastors, imperial knights, or notaries who joined the movement for quite different reasons: from deeply felt humanism to a sense of justice, religious conviction, political

reform visions, and even calculating self-interest.
Some—though few—names from among the peasants are also known, but the sources usually portray them as shady figures. Desperados, as we would call them today, who often aimed for loot and personal revenge. With their extreme hatred of priests and nobles, they certainly provided plenty of material for the legends later embraced by the left. However, their often senseless and reckless excesses contributed significantly to the fact that little new emerged from this struggle. Their anger was justified and easy to understand—and the cruelties on the side of the princely troops were often even worse—but it increasingly led to defeats and the discrediting of this powerful, restless movement. As a result, hardly any visions for a new order could flourish, and plans rarely extended beyond the immediate moment.

The protest focused on details and, as the historian Christa Dericum writes, was more a concentration of revolting forces than a revolution. Neither the intellectual elite nor their radicalized base ever reached the visionary heights of, say, the ancient Greeks; their concept of freedom did not go beyond the Bible. The third article of the Bundschuh reads: "It is found in Scripture that we are free, and we want to be free. Certainly not so that we want to be completely free and have no authorities. God does not teach us that."

Thinking beyond God was simply taboo. This applied even to the interesting "marginal phenomena" of the Peasants' Wars, which appeared with almost unprecedented radicalism, such as the Anabaptists, the communes of Münster and Mühlhausen, or about a hundred years later, the Diggers and Ranters, with whom the religiously inspired revolts in England came to an end.

In the wake of all these upheavals, a wave of expectation for salvation swept across Europe: The longed-for kingdom of God's justice had arrived, and it had to be lived here and now! The Anabaptists traveled through the lands, quoting millenarian prophecies and proclaiming the new era to the chosen ones. As everywhere, the ideas of radical equality and the end of economic bondage were well received by the common people.

In the Thuringian town of Mühlhausen, the armed secret society of Thomas Müntzer succeeded in conquering the city, and with the help of the peasantry, a commune was established that attempted the practical experiment of communal property. In 1525, Müntzer's peasant army was defeated in Frankenhausen. One of the survivors, the printer Hans Hut, then began preaching a generalized militant uprising. His program amounted to a social revolution: Christ would wield the sword to punish all sins, destroy all governments, and divide all possessions. Even after Hut's execution, the Anabaptist communities continued to spread. They lived in communal groups and rejected church rituals and sacraments.

Only after the suppression of the Anabaptist commune of Münster in 1535 did this movement dwindle. Jan Bockelson (Johann of Leiden) had won over the inhabitants in 1534 for his millenarian visions and proclaimed the "New Jerusalem" in the Westphalian city. For one year, an extensive communal property system was practiced here, including both production and consumption. Money was abolished, and everything was available to everyone. However, the driving force behind this experiment was not Bockelson's love of freedom but the religious fanaticism of the "chosen ones."

The Anabaptist regime was, contrary to all legends, thoroughly authoritarian and led to a new tyrannical code of laws that permitted men to practice polygamy* and forbade children from talking back to their parents under penalty of death. It culminated in the coronation of Jan Bockelson as "King of the Children of God and ruler of the new Zion." The rebellious citizens and peasants of Münster had indeed proven that they could free themselves from the authorities and

organize themselves successfully, even economically—but only at the cost of a new rule that was hardly less tyrannical than the old. After a long siege and famine, Münster was finally taken by episcopal troops.

The victors took bloody revenge.

After this experience, the Anabaptists became strict pacifists. Especially in Central Europe, they founded numerous communes and communities. The communitarian-pacifist millenarian Jakob Hutter became the founder of a economically flourishing settlement movement in Bohemia, Moravia, southern Germany, and Austria. Although the Hutterites knew no private property and lived relatively modest lives, their solidarity economy brought prosperity to their communities. Besides religious intolerance, economic envy was a main reason that led to their expulsion in 1622. Quite a few emigrated to the New World, where their colonies in the USA and Canada still exist today.

None of this sounds particularly encouraging, nor does it sound like "early forms of anarchy." But let us not forget that we were searching for essentials. So let us try a summary:

Almost all uprising movements show striking similarities. They are always about regaining or defending "freedom." Freedom initially always means shaking off concrete rule. Wherever goals become apparent, they almost without exception point towards equality, community, and justice. Often, as with most peasant revolts, old rights are demanded that are based on collectivity: cooperatives, autonomy, or common property such as the commons*.

With religious heretics, the picture is the same: the guiding motif is always the (re)establishment of a Christianity perceived as "true." And "true" interestingly always means: living in community, acting in solidarity, condemning wealth, shared possessions, rejecting bondage, church hierarchy and power, respect for life, love for people, and — within the limits of an intuitively felt divine ethics — freedom of spirit and usually of the individual person. This reads almost like an anarchist manifesto from the 19th century, if — yes, if only — the dear Lord did not constantly peek out between the lines.

The concept of God is therefore the key to understanding all these rebellions.
We probably cannot comprehend today the simple fact that the Middle Ages was an era in which thinking outside the framework of "God" simply did not take place. Godless thinking was literally unthinkable. "God" was not primarily a religious object here; above all else, God was the only existing system of knowledge. Beyond this image, there was simply nothing, period. "God" was synonymous with "worldview."

Today religion is a private matter. Not every believer in God is religious. Not every opponent of religion is an atheist. Atheists can follow the most varied philosophies. But let us try to imagine today any social or political movement outside our modern worldview! Do Social Democrats, Islamic fundamentalists, fascists, Christians, anarchists, voodoo followers, communists, Buddhists, liberals, existentialists, esotericists, or materialists doubt that a plane flies because forces act according to Newton's laws? Or that the Earth revolves around the Sun? Or that the Moon causes tides? Even the Pope believes this.

The role that natural sciences play in our worldview today was played by God in earlier times. Certainly, many modern people doubt scientific findings — maybe Newton was not right after all, and who really understands Einstein! There is plenty of scientific criticism, and sometimes rightly

so, but still — and this is what matters — we all think within the framework of our current system of knowledge. Of course, so does Einstein, every devout Catholic, and even the esotericists who more than anyone else like to convince with logical analogies.

Precisely for this reason, the idea of "natural law" is so important, that "trick with consequences" that appeared among the Cynics and the Stoics: God is nature and nature is reason! Someone in the Middle Ages could have been seized by exactly the same ideals, feelings, and thoughts as a 20th-century anarchist — yet he would hardly have been able to arrive at a "worldview without God," even if that same person today would probably be an atheist. Just as little as an anarchist today can arrive at a "worldview without nature." Of course, he can criticize the natural sciences, but he nevertheless remains within the framework of our current positive knowledge. Likewise, a thousand years ago he could criticize religion, but not deny the idea of "God" — because that would have meant negating everything conceivable. Max Nettlau's suggestion that fear of persecution prevented many medieval thinkers from sharpening their criticism must be taken with some caution. Clear minds and brave visionaries like Meister Eckhart, Giordano Bruno, Margarete von Porete, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Galileo Galilei, Copernicus, and countless others were not afraid to write down what they thought. For much less, people were burned at the stake back then. Therefore, even if they were genuine precursors of modern natural science, we should hardly understand many thinkers' reference to a divine order as a tactical disguise to protect themselves from persecution. There are no "atheists" in the Middle Ages not because there weren't any, but because they themselves could not possibly have defined themselves that way conceptually.

We would therefore do well to understand many instances where critical medieval thinkers use the term "divine" as an axiom*, much like how today someone says "natural." Many strange restrictions on the concept of freedom then appear in a different light. When old sources say that human freedom finds its limits where it violates divine order, we must "translate" this as our freedom ending at the limits of nature. That suddenly does not only sound understandable but even very reasonable. We can certainly debate these limits of nature and its essence, just as the people of antiquity debated the nature of God and its limits. But arguing whether God existed must be imagined as absurd as a dispute today over whether nature exists.

From this perspective, we should repeat our critical assessment of those movements, and now it becomes really interesting. The question where the libertarian dividing line runs would then be whether God was understood as a religious figure or as an ordering principle. Was He a tyrant or nature, the fearsome monster with a flowing beard, or the fact that the year has four seasons? This test should be applied to every single movement and philosophy we have encountered if we want to assess their content of "anarchism." The more "God-ordained order" was understood as a synonym for "natural harmony," the closer the spirit of such movements was to the positions of today's anarchism. The more critically they distanced themselves from the Bible, the more they resembled today's libertarians who hold a science-critical approach.

Only very few great minds of the time had the education and will to understand the world and at the same time read the Bible against the grain. From rebellious peasants, most of whom could barely read, we should not expect such intellectual achievements at a time when the first Bible translations were still freshly printed. From them sprang the spirit of outrage and revolt.

Ultimately, it is interesting that what both groups — critical thinkers and outraged rebels — imagined as ideal goals closely corresponds in essential parts to what is also the quintessence of modern anarchism: freedom, community, mutual aid, economic equality, and disgust for tyranny.

This shows at least one thing: that there apparently has been a drive in this direction at all times, and libertarian ideas can hardly be dismissed as an "overblown invention of modernity."

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Chapter 22: The Time is Ripe

"Communication is the essence of freedom.
Coercion cannot convince.
Make people wise,
and you make them free."
– William Godwin –

THE BOOK HAD A DREADFULLY LONG TITLE, and it gave British Prime Minister William Pitt a headache. Not because of the cumbersome heading — that sort of thing was fashionable at the time — but because of its content. The content was as explosive as a load of gunpowder. Pitt considered having the author arrested, but ultimately refrained and consoled himself with the thought that "a book priced at three guineas cannot do much harm among people who don't have three shillings to spare."

However, the book was soon being sold at half the price, and workers were forming subscription groups to acquire it. In Scotland and Ireland, the first pirated editions were already circulating.

The book in question is William Godwin's An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness. The manuscript with the ponderous title had sat in a drawer for nine years. In 1793, four years after the French Revolution, it was finally published and immediately caused a considerable stir.

Yet it was far from a justification of the bloody upheaval in France and stood out favorably from the mass of demagogic pamphlets flooding Europe in those years. It was a philosophical work of fundamental principles with shockingly radical conclusions for social life—strictly logical in structure and nearly all-encompassing in content.

At the Threshold of Anarchism: William Godwin

Indeed, the 37-year-old Godwin—who was eking out a living in London as a hack writer—had, without knowing it, written the first "anarchist classic." In many ways, it can still be considered a foundational work. Sadly, one must say, many of his criticisms remain all too relevant today.

Fittingly, Godwin came from an old family of religious dissenters and received a strict Calvinist upbringing that was as egalitarian as it was critical and rationalist. After a brief theological career, he gradually evolved—under the influence of Rousseau and Swift—into an enlightened, radical atheist who, like few other intellectuals of his time, set about analyzing society free from religious or nationalist prejudices. His Political Justice doesn't just touch on isolated aspects of libertarian thought like earlier anarchoid predecessors did, but addresses its entire spectrum in a thoroughly considered system. With Godwin, we find a first global and coherent vision of anarchist critique and utopia.

With unshakable persistence, he explores how humanity might achieve the greatest possible happiness. Along the way, he rejects patriotism, positive law, and material wealth, as well as religion, oppression, and servility. In the end, he calmly concludes that such happiness could only be realized under one condition: in a society without government. He deals not only with issues of philosophy, human nature, and ethics but also with economics, education, administration, law, punishment, violence, sexuality, and even ecology. Naturally, he also asks by what means this new society should be pursued and established, and under what structures people might live in it. His approach is thoroughly rationalist in the spirit of the Enlightenment: Godwin places great hope in human reason; the capacity for intellectual and moral development, he argues, grows with the freedom of its conditions. To that exact degree, authority—and thus the state—would become obsolete. Even in his own lifetime, Godwin had to revise some of this unwaveringly rational faith in humanity in favor of acknowledging the irrational side of human character, thus anticipating modern anarchism, which no longer bases itself on the expectation of reason either.

Pedagogy was Godwin's lifelong passion. Accordingly, he saw this development as a long process of maturation, not something that could be achieved through a sudden, violent upheaval of society. For Godwin, revolution was a sequence of steps. Unlike conventional reformists, however, he already regarded political parties as entirely incapable of truly changing society—200 years ago. Much like Landauer later, he saw no future within state structures. Instead, he recommended a network of small, independent circles meant to inspire their surroundings by example—a vision remarkably close to modern libertarian organizational theory and its catalytic affinity groups. Although Godwin advocated a nonviolent strategy and was a declared opponent of Jacobin revolutionary terror, he was not an absolute pacifist: violence, he believed, might become unavoidable or necessary in certain situations to prevent greater harm.

In place of the existing tyranny, Godwin envisioned a decentralized and simplified society, based on the voluntary association of free and equal individuals. For more complex matters, he developed the idea of coordinating bodies and district federations. For conflicts, he proposed arbitration committees and warned of the dangers of bureaucracy and hierarchy—he proposed rotating offices and voluntary political functions, as well as protection of minorities and the principle of consensus. Godwin's juries are rightly seen as precursors to a libertarian council system.

As an economist, Godwin was one of the first to clearly recognize the connection between property and government: "The rich are the direct or indirect legislators of the state." Like Proudhon later, he distinguished between property and possession and outlined a voluntary communism for production and distribution that allowed ample room for enjoyment, pleasure, and leisure. He recognized the ambivalent role of money and analyzed the contradictions between needs, production, and capital. He was unsparing in his criticism of the conditions in British working life. His claim that in a well-organized free society, the working day could be reduced drastically—to just half an hour per day, he estimated—sounds downright visionary.

Yet Godwin was feared more as a critic than celebrated as a utopian. In fact, he devoted most of his work to examining the conditions of his time—not merely condemning them, like many of his fashionable reformist contemporaries, but dissecting and questioning them as a whole. He was undoubtedly a biting rhetorician. "Whips, axes, and gallows—prisons, chains, and torture racks are the most beloved and common tools for enforcing obedience," he wrote in his reflections on the penal system, which he deemed equally immoral and useless: "Whoever does not come out of prison worse than he went in must either be unusually skilled in the practice of injustice or a

man of sublime virtue." In his novel Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams, published a year later and his first bestseller, he exposed the British justice system in the style of an early psychological thriller.

A free society, Godwin believed, should not destroy or imprison criminals, but treat them "with kindness and gentleness." Another red flag for him was the education system. "National education has the tendency to perpetuate errors and to mold every consciousness according to the same model. (…) It teaches students the art of justifying those doctrines that happen to belong to established knowledge." His educational goal was something else entirely: to enable children to create and enjoy a free society. In doing so, he questioned the entire traditional educational approach, which he saw as inherently despotic, and advocated learning driven by intrinsic motivation, where teachers are regarded as equal partners.

"Once laws have begun to be made, it's hard to find an end to it. Human actions are diverse, and so are their benefits and harms. When new cases arise, the law always proves inadequate, and one must constantly make new laws." Marriage, too, for Godwin, is "a law—and the worst of all laws. (…) It would be absurd to expect that two people could agree completely for a long period of time. (…) The institution of marriage is a system of deceit. As long as I seek to claim a woman solely for myself, I am guilty of the most abhorrent form of despotism."

It is not without irony that Godwin and his partner Mary Wollstonecraft, contrary to their shared convictions, were forced by tragic circumstances to give in to societal pressure and ultimately did marry. However, to the mocking critics who accused him of being a "hothead with cold feet," the two took the wind out of their sails by treating their marriage as an involuntary formality, continuing to grant each other the same freedoms as before.

Their happiness did not last long. Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the first great feminists in history, who had written her brilliant Vindication of the Rights of Woman in 1792, died in 1797 while giving birth to their daughter Mary.

The new century began on a somber note. England, nearly constantly at war with France, entered a long, oppressive period of extreme reactionary patriotism. The French Revolution, already a failure in content, had politically degenerated into the despotism of Napoleon, who ultimately lost the war he had initiated. On the victorious side, England basked in triumph and paved its way toward becoming a global power. Imperialism, industry, and ignorance triumphed. Men like Godwin were forgotten, and reformers of all stripes took over the daily political business. Parties, trade unions, and cooperatives emerged, whose leaders occasionally invoked Godwin — without ever matching the depth or radical universality of his thinking.

Godwin continued to live in London under bleak economic conditions, publishing numerous additional writings that, with one exception, garnered little attention. That exception came in 1812, when the young poet Percy Bysshe Shelley—an ardent admirer of Godwin who had believed his idol to be long dead — visited him. It was a turbulent and consequential meeting, at the end of which the revolutionary and romantic aristocratic offspring became Godwin's son-in-law and even provided him with financial support.

Shelley soon became one of Britain's most celebrated poets. Until his early death in 1822, he remained not only a committed follower of Godwin's life philosophy but also immortalized it in a series of unforgettable works. The Mask of Anarchy is one of the first allegories in which the word "anarchy" is used in a positive light.

When William Godwin died peacefully in his bed in 1836 at the age of 80, the men who would later be known as the "Fathers of Anarchism" were still young lads in Russia and France.

There was no direct connection between them and Godwin—neither personal nor through social movements. Not even his book had gained much recognition outside of England. As a result, the development of these ideas had to start almost entirely anew just a few years later.

It would take a long time for anarchist philosophy to return to the level of insight reached by that unlucky writer Godwin, who had already come to the simple realization at the end of the 18th century:

> "Communication is the essence of freedom. Coercion cannot convince."

Where Did a Spirit Like That Come From in 1793?

In the previous chapter, we were still deep in dark times — where even the boldest minds could only imagine isolated fragments of freedom, and every rebellion had to operate within the framework of divine order. And then, suddenly, two centuries later, the anarchist blueprint is complete and ready to go!?

Well, Godwin is no genius who suddenly fell from the sky. He too had his background—the time was simply ripe for someone like him.

So let us look at what happened between the Reformation and the French Revolution: how social movements intensified and how a diffuse libertarian history of ideas gradually solidified into a genuine anarchist vision—one that merely needed to be "born."

The Skies Begin to Clear

In medieval thinking, there was no place for the individual. For better or worse, it was an age of collective subjugation: people were defined by, assigned to, and used by groups. The world was strictly ordered and clearly structured—there was God, emperor, pope, king, nobles, priests, burghers, and peasants; there was above and below, right and wrong. This was true even in less hierarchical domains—such as free cities with their autonomy or guilds based on mutual aid: everything still remained tied to the group to which one belonged—or didn't. Freedoms only applied within the city walls. Those outside the guild rarely got in; those without a lord had no protection. And those who weren't Christian were burned.

Only with the Renaissance—the "rebirth" of Classical Antiquity in European intellectual life—did things begin to change: Greek philosophers were translated, humanist ideals rediscovered, even fashion and architecture were imitated: antiquity became trendy! The individual was once again visible, old traditions were questioned—and imagination was stirred.

In 1516, Thomas More published his Utopia in England, depicting a scandalously different fantasy society—one that (he subtly implies) was far better than the despotism of his king and patron, Henry VIII (who would later have him executed for unrelated reasons). "Utopia" not only became a new political term, but also sparked a literary trend that continues to this day.

A year later, a theologian named Luther triggered an avalanche of debate in Wittenberg, at the end of which stood the idea of a "free Christian" who could finally read the Bible for himself. The era in which religion defined people—and everything else—was drawing to a close.

Thinkers suddenly began to think—from scratch, like Descartes, the systematic doubter, freely and unbound by sacred dogmas. And they discovered something intriguing: humans are not

static, but changeable—and therefore capable of improvement. Scientists began observing nature, trusting their eyes, and drawing conclusions. Galileo, Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton shook the Church's doctrine and worldview to its foundations. The new keyword was "reason." The result was Enlightenment—and that word is meant literally: it grew brighter.

Europe discovered new continents, people traveled, emigrated, and new goods arrived—the horizon widened. Agriculture and craftsmanship were no longer the economic center. Trade and manufacturing gained importance, and industries emerged whose consequences would shape every aspect of the centuries to come.

After civil war and revolution, England had been a parliamentary democracy since 1688. In 1765, the steam engine was invented. Not long after, a colony defeated its "motherland" for the first time: the citizens of the United States of America now lived under a constitution that spoke of "human rights." And of all places, in France—the classical land of centralization and absolute monarchy—everything tipped over passionately, violently, and chaotically: the 1789 French Revolution brought forth a republic under the hopeful slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."

While the revolution ultimately failed to live up to the humanist ideals of the Enlightenment, it was still its full-fledged child. Revolutionaries beheaded the king—an unprecedented act—and soon began beheading each other and anyone who dared to protest: terror in the name of reason.

The following century initially saw a conservative restoration after Napoleon's fall, but history could no longer be reversed. The seeds of Enlightenment had sprouted.

And with industry came a new class. Freedom—whatever people might mean by it—became a topic for the masses.

Thus, in these three centuries, more happened than in the previous one and a half millennia.

The an-archic thread we are following becomes ever thicker and takes on an increasingly clear shape in intellectual history: first as Enlightenment, then liberal, then libertarian, and finally anarchist—with fluid boundaries between each phase. Along this path, we encounter individuals who can rightly be called early libertarians. Their thinking increasingly approaches a position that would soon be defined as "anarchist."

Godwin stands among them: the first anarchist—because his thought has global scope; yet also the last early libertarian—because he never called himself an anarchist and did not belong to any anarchist movement, which only emerged years later. He quite literally stands on the threshold.

We can find early libertarians by the dozen in these centuries. Here, we'll touch on only the most interesting of them.

The Early Libertarians

The most significant current of Enlightenment thought comes from France. François Rabelais, a former monk who speaks bluntly in his satirical reckoning with the institutions of his time, describes in his 1534 utopia Gargantua and Pantagruel a life free of domination in the imaginary Abbey of Thélème. Life there is anti-authoritarian, bawdy, and pleasure-seeking—but only for the privileged members. The motto of this anarchic vision is: "Do what you will!"

A clearly more libertarian stance is found in Rabelais's contemporary, Étienne de La Boétie. In his philosophical work Discourse on Voluntary Servitude (1571–1573), he fundamentally questions the very existence of government. People, according to La Boétie, submit voluntarily to rule,

for which there is no rational justification—and which, therefore, can be overcome. His analysis of political power forms an early foundation for the idea of civil disobedience, and thus stands firmly in the pacifist tradition.

Michel de Montaigne, a close friend of La Boétie, also offers eloquent traces of libertarian thinking in his work—though more subtly expressed. His warm portrayal of a stateless indigenous society is incorporated almost word-for-word by Shakespeare into his play The Tempest. In the essay On the Education of Children, Montaigne makes a compelling anti-authoritarian argument for teaching with kindness and freedom, without harshness or coercion, culminating in the remarkably modern demand for flowers instead of rods in the classroom.

A strongly anarchist-tinged utopia was presented in 1676 by Gabriel de Foigny. In The Adventures of Jacques Sadeur in the Discovery of the Southern Land, he vividly describes the social order of the terre australe, where church, state, property, and authority are unknown. The inhabitants — incidentally of androgynous nature — coordinate with one another in a daily morning assembly.

Foigny, who had settled in Protestant Geneva, managed to portray the advantages of this society so convincingly that the authorities deemed his book subversive and briefly imprisoned him. A German translation of the Voyage to the Southern Land appeared in 1704 and is considered the ancestor of German-language libertarian literature.

The popular utopian form was also employed by François de Fénelon, archbishop and tutor to the young Duke of Burgundy. In his didactic novel Télémaque (1699), he compares the land of La Bétique with the city of Salente. Both bear strong features of a peaceful libertarian communism, though compared to Thélème they are rather puritanical — for happiness, in this view, arises through renunciation. Louis XIV did not find this amusing at all and banished Fénelon.

We know little about Jean Meslier, an angry village priest whose Testament, written around 1720, was only published after his death. In harsh terms, he delivers a scathing indictment of religion and the Church, culminating in the assertion that God simply does not exist.

The anti-clerical part of the Testament, in which the former man of God declares that he would most like to strangle all noble bloodsuckers with the entrails of the priests, was later published by Voltaire.

When one realizes that Meslier also proclaimed that the liberation of ordinary people lay in their own hands — and that this could only occur through a violent social revolution — it becomes clear why the complete text was not printed until 1865.

The two great names of the Enlightenment, Diderot and Rousseau, also deserve a place among the ancestors of libertarian thought. In the case of the famous encyclopedist Denis Diderot, a love for libertarian ideas flourished—though, apparently out of caution — rather in secret.

In private circles, he — who publicly advocated for an enlightened monarchy in the mid-18th century—held the view that nature had given no person the right to rule over others. He, too, wrote a utopia, naturally set in the South Seas, which described a harmonious life without government and laws.

However, he did not dare to publish this Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage. Despite this, his Encyclopédie served for a long time as a source of inspiration and a wellspring for radical and subversive thought.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, to whom the not entirely accurate phrase "Back to nature" is often attributed, was certainly not a dyed-in-the-wool anarchist. He never truly questioned the state or authority; government, however, he viewed as an artificial institution, created by free individuals

in the hope of making life easier. The relationship between rulers and the ruled, he believed, is regulated by a free contractual agreement—the contrat social. The contradiction, however—how freedom and being ruled can coexist—he does not resolve.

Nevertheless, his influence on later anarchism and many of its major theorists was immense. Particularly stimulating were his analysis of the connection between property and authority, as well as his views on education. Rousseau oriented himself by the "laws of nature," which he contrasted with actual conditions — this made him a sharp critic of modern civilization.

With a series of "Discourses," published starting in 1750 and culminating in Émile in 1752, he launched a veritable trend that sparked a collective longing for the "noble savage." His impact on the development of a libertarian movement lies therefore less in the consistency of his ideas than in the wide influence he had, which was rooted in his extraordinary popularity.

Marquis de Sade: One name that was hardly expected in this list is that of the Marquis de Sade, who is known to most people only by his bad reputation, without ever having read him. In France, his writings remained banned until 1957.

It is a mistake to believe that the message of the Marquis' writings consists in "sadism," commonly understood as the pleasure in tormenting others. What he depicts in some of his novellas as sexual excesses is literary fiction, not the life of the real person de Sade.

Insofar as he recognizes the importance of sexuality in general, and examines the consequences of sexual repression, he is a forerunner of modern sexual psychologists such as Wilhelm Reich, as well as of the sexual revolution of the 20th century. Repression of desire is recognized as one of the roots of tyranny.

De Sade, an anti-religious yet highly moralizing man, not only demanded the sexual liberation of women; in his 1794 novel Juliette, he also advocated the view that an anarchic condition of nature is preferable to all laws and governments.

The French Enlightenment thinkers carry an air of a certain philosophical sanctity; at least the great ones among them enjoy the highest reputation. Their ideas deeply shaped the intellectual history of those centuries and remain influential to this day. The names of the early British libertarians are not quite as famous—perhaps also because among them were quite a few men who wrote less and acted more.

Early Libertarian Thought in Britain

During the English Civil War, radical millenarian groups like the Diggers (1649 in Surrey) and Ranters emerged. Inspired by religious ideas, they advocated communal living (no private property) and rejected state, church, and army. The Ranters were even more radical—individualistic, nonconformist, and sexually free—seen as immoral by contemporaries. Leaders like Gerrard Winstanley and Abiezer Coppe were suppressed by Cromwell's regime.

Jonathan Swift: More of a social critic than an anarchist, Swift introduced the Houyhnhnms in Gulliver's Travels (1726): rational horses living in an anarcho-communist style, resolving decisions by assembly every four years. Orwell called Swift a "Tory anarchist."

Edmund Burke: Initially supportive of revolution, he changed his mind post-1789 and wrote A Vindication of Natural Society (1756), which was later republished in the U.S. as an anarchist tract. He opposed political authority as presumptuous.

Thomas Paine: A radical liberal, Paine insisted on minimal government and strongly supported the American Revolution. His 1776 Common Sense frames "society" against "government" and influenced long-lasting libertarian ideas in America, seen today in groups like the Libertarian Party and theorist Murray Rothbard.

William Blake: A poet and critic of authority—"every man hates kings," he wrote—Blake saw prisons as built from law and brothels from religious edicts. A devout Christian, he viewed Jesus as a rebel acting "by impulse, not by law." Blake regarded authority as the root of injustice and the state as hindering true, divine brotherhood.

Continental Germany

Germany also had its libertarian voices. Freiherr von Knigge, often known for social etiquette, was actually a genuine libertarian. Wilhelm von Humboldt (founder of Berlin University) wrote On the Limits of State Action (1772), describing humans as creative individuals needing freedom. He saw the state's role as minimal—at most a "night watchman."

Immanuel Kant: Although he never advocated anarchism, Kant gave a meaningful definition: he considered "anarchy" as law and freedom without enforcement—that is, freedom with norms but no coercion. However, he still viewed it as a negative political form, favoring the republic instead.

The Changing Meaning of "Anarchy" — A Word Transforms

To be sure, this was already a highly enlightened perspective on the term anarchy, which, as we recall, had been transmitted with a negative connotation since ancient Greek times, and whose later development we had not yet followed closely.

Historically, "anarchy" (from Greek origins) carried negative connotations — lawlessness or godlessness. Medieval and Reformation-era figures used it pejoratively, for example to brand Anabaptists. Starting in the 16th century, thinkers like Oresme and Erasmus began using it in political debates.

The negative undertone remained unchanged in the Christian-influenced language of subsequent eras. During the time of the Church Fathers, the word was rarely used, and when it was — such as by Theodoret of Cyrrhus — it referred to a "power subject to no one." In the Middle Ages, the term appeared repeatedly in biblical contexts. Sometimes it meant "beginning," symbolizing the primordial state before Creation, and in other instances, it denoted "godlessness."

Only Nicole Oresme, who translated Aristotle into French, gave a political definition in 1571, calling anarchy the "emancipation of slaves" and introducing the term into the European vernaculars. From the 16th century onward, the word became a philosophical-political term, describing a condition of powerless disorder resulting from a lack of authority. Still entirely negative in meaning, it was associated with social movements only to defame and disparage them.

For example, Erasmus of Rotterdam and John Calvin used the term to slander the Anabaptists. Stephen Gardiner, envoy of Henry VIII, warned the king of the dangers of "anarchy," having found it among those who claimed that humans were subject only to God's law and to nature—a claim not entirely wrong.

By the early 17th century, the term was increasingly used in academic discourse. It broadened—much like in ancient Greek usage—to include meanings such as "licentiousness," and was thrown around in a variety of polemical debates. Now it referred to atheism, barbarism, and Anabaptism—

forces seen as aiming to overthrow monarchy and replace it with "democracy and anarchy"—two concepts explicitly used as terms of horror! Thomas Cooper, the Bishop of Winchester, openly referred to his opponents as "Satan's pestilential anarchists."

During the Enlightenment, "anarchy" continued to be used negatively, even by early libertarians — despite their ideas often aligning closely with modern anarchism. However, the more critical a writer's stance toward the state, the more nuanced their view of an "anarchic condition" became. Thinkers like Diderot, Rousseau, and Mirabeau would have preferred a state of "anarchy" over despotism. The same goes for Godwin, paradoxically the first real anarchist, though he never called himself one.

Only with his son-in-law Percy Bysshe Shelley did the word anarchy take on a positive twist — now describing the triumph of liberation for the oppressed.

With the French Revolution, the term became widely used and highly fashionable — though mostly as a slur, applied to all manner of "radicals": the left-wing Jacobins, followers of Babeuf and Hébert, and all "uncontrollable elements." In 1797, the oath sworn by members of the "Council of 50" even included the phrase: "Hatred of royalists and of anarchy!"

Around the same time, Wieland introduced the word anarchists into German, using it to label "freedom fanatics." Joseph Görres was likely the first in the German-speaking world to use anarchy positively, incorporating it into his typology of religious-social forms of rule.

In 1796, the young Friedrich Schlegel defended the right to rebel against despotism, arguing that tyranny was "a far greater political evil than even anarchy." By 1801, his view had grown more differentiated: for him, anarchy—meaning "absolute freedom"—was now the ultimate goal of humanity, though only as an ideal to be approached but never fully attained.

This shift in Schlegel's thinking is symbolic of the broader paradigm shift of that era: on one hand, a "libertarian climate" emerged, anticipating anarchistic ideas without yet calling them "anarchy." More and more people began thinking in increasingly libertarian ways. On the other hand, the word anarchy, still largely negative, began to be linguistically differentiated, gradually moving toward those positive libertarian ideas. It was only a matter of time before someone brought the two together.

By the early 19th century, Europe had both a growing libertarian climate and a linguistic shift: "anarchy" moved from a term of condemnation to one describing positive, libertarian ideals. These two trends converged into what became modern anarchism.

The Early Socialists

The overwhelming mass of accumulated philosophical ideas we've just worked our way through could lead to the mistaken belief that anarchism is nothing more than a pleasant intellectual exercise. But the anarchist idea also includes social movement and political action. So far, we've seen little of that—mainly because such fusions of philosophy, rebellion, and experimentation were rare in early history. And of course also because we deliberately focused only on the history of ideas in the previous chapters.

At the beginning of the 19th century, however, there were increasingly frequent attempts at practical experimentation, in which the application of an idea took center stage. Somewhat arbitrarily, these movements were later grouped together under the term "early socialism"; Marx and Engels referred to them—quite disdainfully—as "utopian socialism." The driving force behind

their actions became the worsening social problems caused by accelerating industrialization. The ideas and experiences of these movements later served as a source for social democracy, communism, and anarchism alike, since at that time the elements of all three currents were still freely intermixed. For all three, they form the link between intellectual history and social movement. We could just as easily have addressed them under the category of "early libertarians", since anarchic elements are, of course, also evident among the early socialists. But they differed from the early libertarians in one key way: their focus on practical implementation—an aspect entirely absent in the more theoretically mature work of Godwin, for example.

The French social critic Claude Henri de Saint-Simon, a destitute count who fought alongside Washington in the American War of Independence, recognized—like many of his contemporaries—the devastating social effects of industrialization. His critique focused on the question of property: inheritance should be abolished, and the means of production should become communal property. Science and industry were to be the pillars of a future classless society, managed by a hierarchy of the most capable. It's easy to recognize in this the roots of Marxist communism. However, Saint-Simon saw the driving force of the movement in public education and the enlightened bourgeoisie; the working class was more a target audience to be uplifted.

He gathered around him a circle of prominent figures and orchestrated an ambitious infiltration of France's institutions. Even after the death of their master, the Saint-Simonians attained influential positions and played a certain political role around 1830. But many of these reformers became corrupted by their comfortable posts or fell into internal disputes. Naturally, none of this changed the lives of workers—an important negative experience that early anarchism would not forget. Starting with Bakunin, anarchists became resolute opponents of all forms of "political careerism." Even in 1970, German anarchists issued a stern warning to the APO against the "long march through the institutions."

Most disillusioned followers of Saint-Simon subsequently turned to the ideas of Charles Fourier. As a merchant, Fourier developed a deep aversion to the "parasitic nature" of his profession and became a thorough critic of the system. His views—especially in his younger years—were far more libertarian than Saint-Simon's, and they influenced anarchists from Kropotkin to Bookchin. Fourier's worldview is expansive, imaginative, and contradictory. He envisioned entirely new forms of communal life and labor, with an ethics of work and pleasure suited to human nature. Social freedom, he insisted, is worthless without economic equality:

> "We need luxury for all, not equality in misery!"

Long before Marx, he assessed a society's degree of freedom by the social position of women and their liberation. He also commented on education, sexuality, and ecology — and even advocated for animal rights.

What makes Fourier unique is that he fused all these ideas into a concrete plan for the Phalanstères. In these "colonies of harmony," up to a thousand people were to live, work, and farm the land together. The foundation of labor would be cooperatives, where every member had the right to education, work, and a guaranteed "social minimum." Higher performance would be rewarded with higher "dividends."

But more important to Fourier was pleasure: it was no coincidence that the Phalanstère was to be housed in a kind of palace—a place where passion, joy, abundance, and love could flourish.

This sounds appealing, but in detail, Fourier's ideas often reveal a longing for hedonistic, masculine aristocracy. Although he supported women's equality and rightly recognized that sexual satisfaction contributes to social harmony, he also organized sexuality in a hierarchical way that exposes his male bias. His ideas on education were likewise dogmatic and naïve.

Regulation was his forte: he even described the daily schedule in the Phalanstère so meticulously that there was barely any room left for individual initiative. The life of the commune was so thoroughly planned that it sometimes resembled a gentle prison more than an earthly paradise.

Only after Fourier's death did his ideas gain broader influence. Although he witnessed the foundation and failure of the first settlement in France in 1833, Fourierism only became a significant movement after 1848. Numerous followers developed and promoted his doctrine and tried to implement his utopias. Experiments were carried out in Switzerland, England, Germany, and especially in the USA, where at one point there were three dozen Fourierist communes. However, none lasted more than a few years — most collapsed due to internal conflict.

Fourier's lack of trust in people's freedom, his tendency toward regulation, and his hidden hierarchies were not blameless. But crucially, these early communes provided experiences that proved valuable for the future. Godwin relied solely on persuasion through debate and remained sterile. Fourier added the power of practical example. Even after failure, that had lasting effects: Fourier's ideas of free association and cooperation had a huge influence on the cooperative movement, especially in Britain—and even found resonance in Russia.

Decades later, Fourier continued to influence alternative movements—from the 1892 off-grid settlement La Cecilia in southern Brazil, with its idyllic village called "Anarchy," to the Surrealists of the interwar years, and the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 70s.

Anarchist or Libertarian?

We have now reached the time when the theory of modern anarchism begins to form—and soon becomes a new social movement. The preconditions were all there: in the realm of ideas, the notion of a society free of domination was widespread; economic hardship was giving the working class growing self-confidence; and first practical experiences had already been made.

Of course, it is naïve to believe that from the moment people began to openly call themselves anarchists, a clear distinction between anarchists and non-anarchists became possible. Not everyone who thought and acted libertarian joined the new movement—and unfortunately, not everyone who now called themselves anarchists thought and acted libertarian.

The disunity and contradictions of the new movement alone ensured that, even after Proudhon's "anarchist coming-out," many great libertarian minds chose to remain on the sidelines—though they were very much in sympathy with the movement's ideas and goals. Thus, the line of early libertarians continues seamlessly into the 19th century.

In England, for example, the artist William Morris and writer Oscar Wilde, and in the USA, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, were not only close to anarchism, but in some cases directly involved in anarchist projects. English social philosophers like John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, and Edward Carpenter, who can be described as both libertarian and liberal, all defended the individual's rights against the state and advocated for a minimalist government.

Also belonging to this group is Henry David Thoreau, who in 1854 published "Civil Disobedience", a foundational text for all future forms of nonviolent resistance—and helped establish a deep tradition of libertarian dissent in America.

Certainly worth mentioning here is the often misunderstood German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, whose questionable reputation stems largely from the fact that his sister manipulated his literary estate to suit Nazi ideology. In truth, few have spoken more sharply against state, nation, and religion than Nietzsche. His radically individualistic philosophy of the "Übermensch" is intellectually close to Max Stirner. Anarchists like Benjamin Tucker, Emma Goldman, Rudolf Rocker, and Herbert Read drew inspiration from the Saxon philosopher — while many other libertarians rejected him outright.

Nietzsche himself, incidentally, gave the decisive reason why he did not see himself as an "anarchist." Despite the intellectual proximity, he believed the anarchism of his time was headed in the wrong direction because its "complaints about others and about society sprang from weakness and narrow-minded resentment." That was, in fact, a rather accurate criticism of the anarchist movement in the late 19th century — and in a sense, it still applies to certain cherished self-pitying tendencies found among some anarchists today.

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<archive.org/details/FreihteiPurPlus>
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