The Time is Ripe

Pure Freedom — The Idea of Anarchy, History and Future — Chapter 22

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"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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