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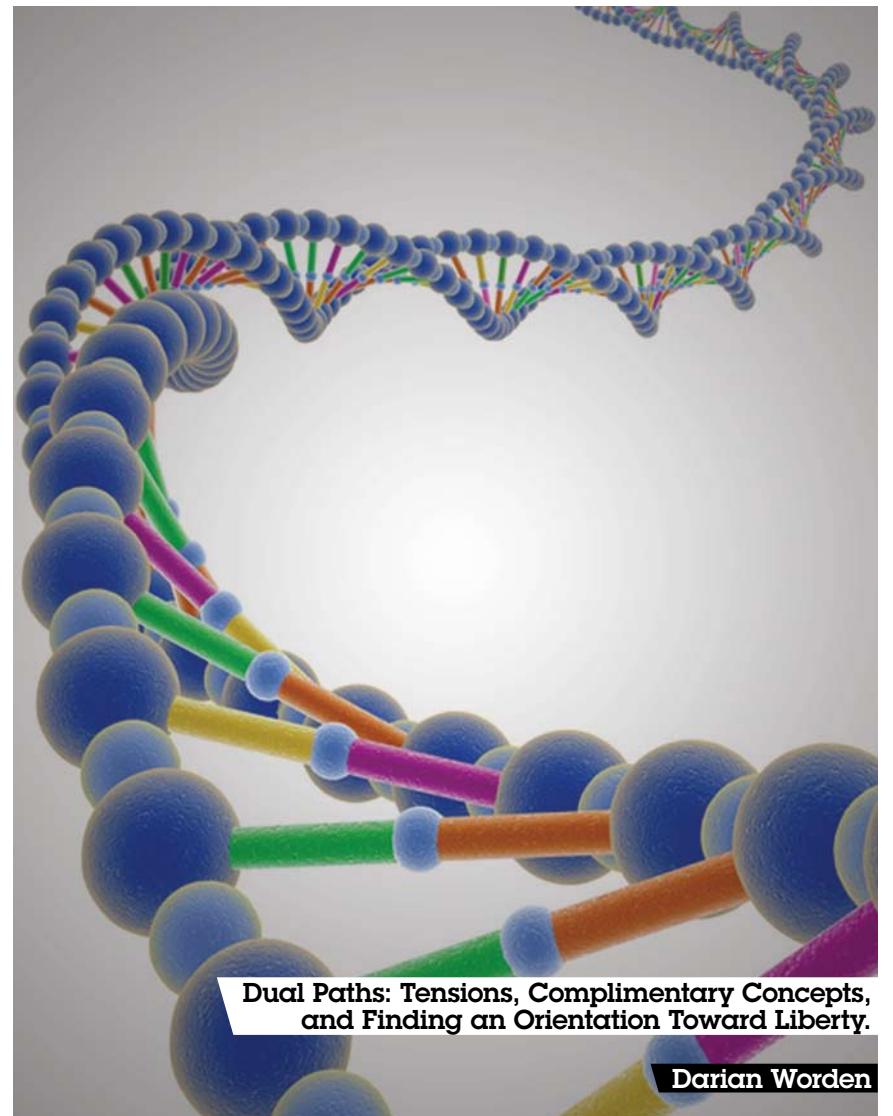


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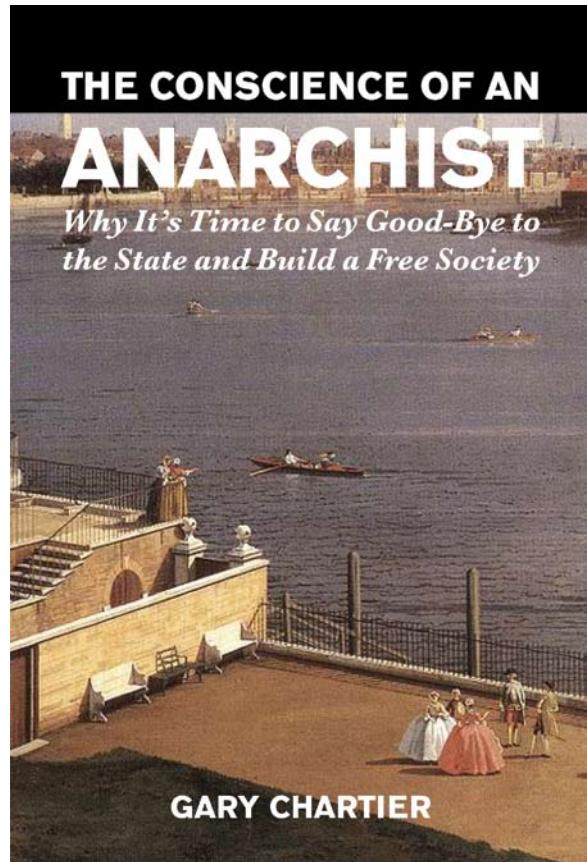
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Dual Paths: Tensions, Complimentary Concepts,
and Finding an Orientation Toward Liberty.

Darian Worden



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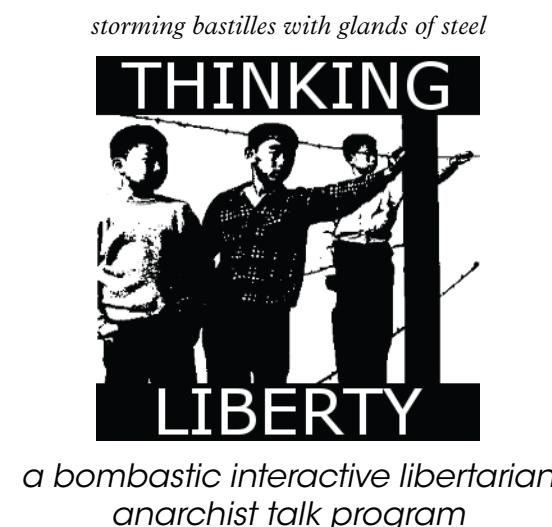
Conclusion.

Achieving the right balance among different approaches to pursuing liberty is not an all-or-nothing affair, but acting with a greater degree of accuracy will be helpful. Sometimes, things that at first seem contradictory are instead complimentary, and even the tensions between opposites can be useful in creating a viable path. Pursuing liberty is a process that requires many different approaches and talents. Liberty is where numerous personalities and tendencies interact to create a society of individual empowerment and social reciprocity.

— This essay is based on a session I led at the 2011 Alternatives Expo, part of the Porcupine Freedom Festival in Lancaster, NH.

By Darian Worden

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Dual Paths: Tensions, Complimentary Concepts, and Finding an Orientation Toward Liberty.

There are many ideas to navigate on the course to liberty. Examining the relations between several sets of seemingly unrelated or contradictory concepts can provide a clearer picture of the way forward to a libertarian society. The following ten explorations are both philosophical and action-oriented. They will hopefully help establish a stronger foundation to the pursuit of liberty.

Individual and Community.

Sometimes the essential conflict of social philosophy is framed as that of individualism versus collectivism, or egoism versus community. Those who speak of reconciling the two can be regarded with suspicion as seeking to subsume one under the other. But there is no reason this has to be so.

Assuming that the individual and the community are involved in a conflict that is irreconcilable, or at best able to be only somewhat mitigated, neglects the idea that the best community is that which is best for individual flourishing, and the most flourishing individual exists in the most functional community. So liberty is both about individuals and about the communities where free individuals interact for mutual benefit.

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Individual Empowerment and the Dispersal of Power.

Different uses of the word “power” can lead to confusion. On the one hand, we have “liberty versus power,” government serving “the powerful,” the evils of the pursuit of power, and calls to “abolish power.” On the other hand, when people are “powerless,” that generally doesn’t mean that they are living in equal freedom, but that they are helpless, without autonomy, entirely at the mercy of others.

Liberty is harmed by power relations where people with vastly unequal amounts of power rule over others. However, anarchy does not necessitate a “power vacuum,” but the *dispersal of power* as widely

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and equally as possible. Doing so is both a project of widespread individual empowerment — helping individuals gain decision-making power over their own lives — as well as the breakup of authoritarian power centers.

Evolutionary and Revolutionary Political Change.

The evolutionary approach and the revolutionary approach to changing the political and social situation are sometimes contrasted and framed as irreconcilable. Such a framing is detrimental. On the one hand, focusing exclusively on The Revolution as a massive overturning of power sets up an all-or-nothing pursuit of a millenarian cataclysmic event. And if the revolution doesn't come or doesn't turn out right, then disillusionment or defense of the status quo sets in. Similarly, if The Revolution is something that happens every day, then revolution loses its meaning as it is difficult for people to live in constant upheaval.

On the other hand, revolutions happen. A movement needs to prepare for them to be relevant enough to influence the course of

the revolution. An exclusively evolutionary approach can be easily confused as accommodating the status quo, or as a non-threatening nuisance to the authorities.

A better approach would be the dual path — an evolutionary approach of building libertarian alternatives that also have revolutionary capability.

Pushing people into revolution is vanguardist and unlikely to be effective, but informing popular dissent, demonstrating libertarian alternatives, and being ready to provide guidance to popular insurrections is valuable. In this way, revolution is viewed more as an event that is sometimes necessary in the evolution toward greater liberty.

A movement needs to prepare for them to be relevant enough to influence the course of the revolution.

because 1) to get to an anarchist society would require sufficient libertarian sentiment to make the re-establishment of authority prohibitive, and 2) not many people want their neighborhood to be a warzone or to see their families' livelihoods burning. The relation between a hard defense of weaponry and armed maneuvers, and a soft defense of solidarity actions and subversion, shed light on how to best increase the potential costs for governments to intervene against an anarchist society.

Network and Confederation.

Social networks and the confederation are two *precedents for* (not necessarily *examples of*) anarchist organization.

The network can be formal or informal, and operates on some combination of trust, affinity, and purpose. It can be geographically concentrated or dispersed. A network can be hierarchical, but in the case of the anarchist network it should be as egalitarian as practical.

The confederation is a way for different actors to identify with a common set of allegiances — a certain political cohesion, a certain set of rules. If sets of rules are established on a voluntary and participatory basis with the goal of mutual benefit and individual empowerment, then it is possible that anarchist societies might look something like a series of confederations. The libertarian confederations would be expected to take a peacemaking approach to relating with each other and in resolving disputes among members, including the process of secession.

The network and confederation model is a mix of description and prediction, but is not meant to be a prescription that must be adhered to. We will understand the organization of a free society better as we refine our theory with practice.

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would be necessary to make everything run. This would of course be mitigated by many necessities being satisfied by smaller worker cooperatives whose meetings would only involve a few people. However, for things like road repair, garbage cleanup, and park maintenance, not everyone is going to be that interested. Certainly, freeloading behavior can be discouraged by mechanisms of reciprocity — someone who doesn't help much doesn't get much help. But people will have a range of interests, and not all disinterest is detrimental.

Indeed, *most people seem to not care about politics so long as they have sufficient autonomy to do what they are actually interested in*. This principle could stand to be examined more by myself and others. If it holds true, then action should take it into account. For example, if anarchy caused savings in living costs that brought significant improvements in living quality for significantly less work hours, and much more control of things you are interested in, is that worth the tradeoff for several hours a year attending meetings, pruning plants, or fixing potholes?

Encouraging an attitude of participation and problem-solving can be helpful, but it can only go so far, and it should only be pushed so far.

Common Defense and Professional Defense.

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At one level we have the common defense — the armed individual, the neighborhood watch, the militia. At another level we have professional defense — the aircraft operators, the special operations forces. The specifics of how they would operate would of course need to be worked out. But they would be unlikely to make war on and conquer each other

Rejection and Direction.

Sometimes it is best to try to steer something in a libertarian direction, and sometimes it is best to reject it altogether. For example, consider a local neighborhood association. It might be valuable for the libertarian to get involved in the organization and make it a vehicle for local autonomy that respects individual liberty. But the association might be so full of authoritarian values that it would be better to reject it altogether and focus on building other networks and organizations.

The decision to reject or direct depends on the situation. Dogmatic rejectionism leads to irrelevance or living as a hermit, but over-direction leads to tyranny or being viewed as a busybody.

Exploring rejection and direction reveals another tension: subversion versus co-option. One can subvert the intentions of authority by moving an institution in a libertarian direction. But by participating in that institution there is a risk of being co-opted into merely perpetuating its current function. This is a tension to be mindful of.

Inroads and Outreach.

It is necessary to make inroads into communities and networks. Interpersonal relations are essential to living, and of course you are going to bring your values and skills to any social situation. But are you going to relentlessly agitate or argue the finer points of theory to friends? Only when the occasion calls for it.

However, outward agitation and disseminating libertarian views are important. This is the function of impersonal outreach, where one seeks to reach as many people as possible with a message, and generalizations are used to do so.

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shows less demonstrable value to people for whom the ideas are only abstractions that nobody they know lives by. But inroads without outreach means less differentiation, fewer people getting the message, and possibly to the communities where you've made inroads being co-opted by more dominant ideologies.

Publicity and Anonymity. When engaging in outreach, it is sometimes best to put a public face behind what you are doing, and sometimes best to sit back and let information be digested without the distractions of personality or a broader ideology.

It is also essential to consider publicity versus anonymity in the context of personal security. It is often assumed that one will be safer in anonymity, and many times this is the case. If the authorities don't know who you are they can't get you, and even when anonymity isn't perfect one can at least present oneself as a smaller fish, not worth the resources to catch. However, publicity can be protective. It might be more difficult to quietly disappear or assassinate someone if they are a well-known figure with respect and roots in a community. The public will only believe that so many "accidents" are possible. Similarly, if a person known to a large, active social net-

work is arrested, they can expect support in the form of calls to jail, resources for defense, and public scrutiny directed at the behavior of the authorities.

Local and Global.

Libertarians should think and act globally and locally (though obviously individual action will emphasize different activities depending on specialties).

Acting locally enables the face-to-face interaction that can create true, experienced alternatives to authoritarianism. But without a global perspective, the local community can become insular, isolated, and more easily defeated. Worse, when there are no other options available for libertarian community, then the single option is more likely to stagnate and devolve into a fight over unifying dogma.

A global approach releases the pressures that are built up in the course of the necessary local approach. Also, organizing on a broader geographic basis can help the message spread to more areas, defying authority globally and inspiring new action locally. Examples of global networks valuable to liberty are WikiLeaks and Anonymous. Examples of organizations that inspire local action are the Industrial Workers of the World, the Alliance of the Libertarian Left, and Students for a Stateless Society.

Participation Versus Specialization, Letting People Alone to Their Interests.

It's generally good for decision-making to be participatory — everyone involved gets a say, and everyone involved has an actual stake in how things operate. However, not everyone is going to be interested in getting involved in every decision to be made, and it's unlikely that any person has the time to get involved in all the meetings and events that

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