

Two Principles of Anarchism and Other  
Essays

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# CONTENTS

<b>An Introduction to Anarchist Egoism</b>	<b>1</b>
1. The Problem With ‘Objective’ Ethics . . . . .	1
2. Egoist Ethics . . . . .	6
3. Conclusion . . . . .	9
 <b>Two Principles of Anarchism</b>	 <b>11</b>
1. Introduction . . . . .	11
2. Autonomy . . . . .	14
2.1. What Is Autonomy? . . . . .	15

2.2. Why Is Autonomy Important? . . . . .	18
3. Reciprocity . . . . .	23
3.1. Positive and Negative Reciprocity . . . . .	23
3.2. Reciprocity and Society . . . . .	28
3.3. Why Reciprocity Consistently? . . . . .	30
3.4. The Principles of Reciprocity . . . . .	34
4. Property . . . . .	40
4.1. Property As a Guarantor and Extension of Autonomy . . . . .	40
4.2. Absentee Property (e.g. Land and Capital) .	43
4.3. Abandonment . . . . .	46
4.4. The Defense of Property . . . . .	46
5. Sale, Contract, and Consent . . . . .	48
5.1. Contracts . . . . .	48
5.2. Sale . . . . .	51
5.3. Coercion and Consent . . . . .	52
5.4. Just Price . . . . .	56
6. Organization . . . . .	57
7. Order Under Anarchy . . . . .	87
7.1. General Statements . . . . .	87
7.2. A Picture of Order . . . . .	89
8. The State and The Reciprocal Order . . . . .	96
8.1. The Law . . . . .	96
8.2. The State as a Force of Decay and Atomization	98
8.3. The State and Culture . . . . .	100
9. Conclusion: Praxis . . . . .	105
<b>Synthesis Libertarianism: A Manifesto</b>	<b>109</b>
1. Introduction . . . . .	109

2. The Values of Libertarianism . . . . .	111
2.1. Individual Self-Determination . . . . .	112
2.2. Consistency and Equality . . . . .	115
2.3. Entitlement Theory of Justice In Holdings . . . . .	119
2.4. Proportionality . . . . .	122
2.5. The Initiation-Response Distinction . . . . .	124
3. Social Leftism . . . . .	126
3.1. Anti-Traditionalism and Moderate Pluralism . . . . .	127
3.2. Anti-Authoritarianism . . . . .	129
3.3. Social Justice . . . . .	132
5. Conclusion . . . . .	134



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# AN INTRODUCTION TO ANARCHIST EGOISM

## **1. The Problem With ‘Objective’ Ethics**

The common discourse surrounding ethical philosophy in the mainstream is, I contend, largely meaningless. It is dominated by discussions over reified abstractions that have no real ties either to normativity or reality, phantoms which require only a little thought and a single question — “why should I care?” — to disperse. Under the rubric of mainstream ethics, the words “good” and “evil” seem ultimately to break down to “things I desire to do/see done” and “things I do not desire to do/see done,” but yet they are infused with notions of ontological existence

separate from any mind or desire. I believe this is, at its base, where mainstream ethical philosophy has gone horribly wrong, and a return to a subjectivistic and egoistic understanding of morality having its foundation in personal desires is necessary to locate a moral philosophy that people can be *happy* following, and agree on, while eliminating all of the confusion in the field.

The fact that moral statements are ultimately reducible to desires is not surprising. Moral statements are ultimately supposed to motivate action, and the ability to motivate action ultimately breaks down to appealing to desires. It is impossible to motivate any individual to act without some preexisting desire on their part that can be appealed to by explaining how that action actually serves that desire. As Hume said, knowledge of some truth alone does not motivate a person to action; there must be some use they want to put that knowledge to, something they want to avoid or gain, for them to be interested in acting on the basis of any statement of fact:

'Tis obvious, that when we have the prospect of pain or pleasure from any object, we feel a consequent emotion of aversion or propensity, and are carry'd to avoid or embrace what will give us this uneasiness or satisfaction. 'Tis also obvious, that this emotion rests not here, but making us cast our view on every side, comprehends whatever objects are connected with its original one by the relation of cause and effect. Here then reasoning takes place to discover this relation; and according as our reasoning varies, our actions receive a subsequent variation. But 'tis evident in



this case, that the impulse arises not from reason, but is only directed by it. 'Tis from the prospect of pain or pleasure that the aversion or propensity arises towards any object: And these emotions extend themselves to the causes and effects of that object, as they are pointed out to us by reason and experience. It can never in the least concern us to know, that such objects are causes, and such others effects, if both the causes and effects be indifferent to us. Where the objects themselves do not affect us, their connexion can never give them any influence; and 'tis plain, that as reason is nothing but the discovery of this connexion, it cannot be by its means that the objects are able to affect us.<sup>1</sup>

Since moral science is therefore ultimately based in attempting to unearth certain innate desires that can motivate us to act one way or another, there is a perennial search for certain states of being or actions that are so intuitively positive or negative that the human mind cannot *help* but have a certain propensity for them or aversion to them (a certain desire regarding them, in other words), so that anyone who reads a moral treatise based on the application of an analysis of things in terms of those states is motivated to act on the rules and precepts found therein. The common use of moral thought experiments, such

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<sup>1</sup>Hume, David. "A Treatise of Human Nature." *Online Library of Liberty*, [https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/bigge-a-treatise-of-human-nature#lf0213\\_label\\_234](https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/bigge-a-treatise-of-human-nature#lf0213_label_234). See part 3, section 3: 'Of the influencing motives of the will.'

as the trolley problem, or extreme moral hypotheticals (such as child murder, etc) reveals this in bright colors: the only reason such hypotheticals or problems work is because they ignite deep and intuitive desires in the people that hear them, that then motivates them to change their actions or beliefs to allow for that desire. Attempting to understand the deep innate desires humans have often requires an analysis of *what*, precisely, the innate desires of human beings are, too.

The desire to motivate everyone who reads one's moral treatise, instead of just those who already share one's obvious and specific desires, also leads to an incentive to phrase things in terms of *anything but* simple desires, because if the subjectivity of the basis for a moral treatise becomes clear, it becomes easier for people to reject it. That is why in common moral discourse all things tend to *reduce* to desires, but the fact that that is the case is often very obfuscated. Thus we arrive at the second problem with moral discourse I referenced in the opening paragraph: all moral logic must ultimately appeal to desire if it wants to motivate action, but there is a strong push to hide this fact and locate deeper and deeper, more intuitive desires, at the same time.

This analysis of innate desires is itself extremely problematic, however, which brings us to why the other feature of common moral discourse, the meaninglessness and unmooring of moral concepts, is unsurprising. Oftentimes, the intuitive desires of philosophers *regarding* certain states are confused for properties *of* those objects, leading to a confusion of desirability (a property that objects have only in connection with the mind)

for an ontological property. This can be seen in various forms of Platonism, natural law, and divine command theory. This is what the classic is-ought dilemma is attempting to point out: desirability, or valuability, is not a property of objects (whether conceptual or actual) themselves, and so an analysis that contents itself solely with dealing in facts (properties of objects) will not be able to graduate to the status of normative import without fallacy, or at least a hidden premise regarding desires.

Alternatively, attempts to describe these desires in detail, when they are not confused for ontological properties of the objects and so left aside for detailed and futile analyses of the states of the world themselves, are described too rigidly and yet too inexactly because of how they differ in personal situations. This is seen in virtue ethics and, to a certain degree, deontology. This inaccurate description of innate desires happens because human beings do not have direct insight into what we desire; we extrapolate what we actually desire based on the inclinations that we feel, indications of others, and past experiences, and so whenever we come up with a model of what we desire it is necessarily a map, not the territory. When we make that map a part of our moral system, however, we end up serving something that is only an inexact representation of our true desires and values, which causes us unnecessary pain and contradiction.

In either case, whether we objectify desires into objects, or petrify them into concepts, we end up taking the true reasons why we act on something — that we have a desire for it — and reifying it into something external, which we then serve as if it was *not* just an inexact and externalized description of our own wants

and needs. This is harmful to us as individuals for many reasons, and can also be harmful for others insofar as we are possessed of empathy and would, in the absence of such phantoms possessing us, try to help others and avoid harming them. This is why people who have a rigid and exacting morality are not often actually viewed positively by those who have not also bought into the same morality: they know that that person is a ticking time-bomb, ultimately a danger to themselves and others.

## 2. Egoist Ethics

Yet, if we were to accept without embarrassment the fact that we are always acting on the basis of our desires anyway, we would not *lose* anything by doing so (because we were never acting otherwise anyway), and would gain much in satisfaction, with ourselves and others. This need not turn us into selfish, cold-hearted monsters, as many opponents of egoism would have you believe: not all desires are purely self-regarding. Some desires, perhaps very many of them, are positive and pro-social, and there is just as much reason to act in favor of those as to act in favor of others. If you feel a horror at the thought of yourself becoming a cruel and heartless person, thieving and stealing at will, when you consider becoming an egoist, then you are *already safe*, because all you need do is act on those desires not to become a person like that, which is allowed within the egoist framework. The only change the egoist framework asks of you is that you be *conscious* of what you are doing and do it well. To quote Max Stirner:

Sacred things exist only for the egoist who does not acknowledge himself, the involuntary egoist, for him who is always looking after his own and yet does not count himself as the highest being, who serves only himself and at the same time always thinks he is serving a higher being, who knows nothing higher than himself and yet is infatuated about something higher; in short, for the egoist who would like not to be an egoist, and abases himself (combats his egoism), but at the same time abases himself only for the sake of “being exalted,” and therefore of gratifying his egoism. Because he would like to cease to be an egoist, he looks about in heaven and earth for higher beings to serve and sacrifice himself to; but, however much he shakes and disciplines himself, in the end he does all for his own sake, and the disreputable egoism will not come off him. On this account I call him the involuntary egoist.<sup>2</sup>

We must always remember that *the map is not the territory*: while each higher concept or principle that human beings have served (from gods to humanity, from collectivism to property) may perhaps be to some degree an tool for shedding light some *part* of our desires, these concepts are not absolute, and we will be happier and better people if we treat them as general principles or rules of thumb, always ultimately in service of

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<sup>2</sup>Stirner, Max. “The Ego and Its Own.” *The Ego and Its Own* by Max Stirner 1844, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stirner/ego-and-its-own.htm#p1s222>.

ourselves. Make others happy because it makes *you* happy, not because you think you must, because the *concept* of helping others is agreeable to you. Respect property because it is useful to do so, not because it is a fundamental motivating principle.

This might seem like a surrender, relinquishing the field of ethics to the subjectivists, but that is not the case. There are still deeper desires generally shared by humans that we *can* appeal to, or prerequisites and assumptions for all egoism and desire that can be spoken about, or general principles about what is in our interests that hold true; we do not give up the ability to tell someone that they should or should not do something, necessarily. We just lose the absolutism and rigidity of ‘objective’ moral judgements.

Likewise, we do not lose the ability to interfere in the matters of others: if something goes against our values, if we do not wish to see something happen, why *not* stop it? The fundamental contradiction inherent in moral relativism does not apply here: if no morality but my own, based on my own desires and beliefs, holds sway over me, there is nothing to prevent me from stopping others from doing things I consider immoral. I do not have to refrain from interference with the morality of others, because such a principle itself would have to be absolute and objective.

In fact, a declaration of something as ‘evil’ is often encapsulated in this: a statement that one will not permit something, will not accept it or stand for it. When I declare something evil — and this is true for unwilling egoists too — it is a pledge that I would not do that thing, and I would not allow any others, if it is in

my power, to do that thing either. It is a statement of stance, not of objective fact.

Furthermore, we do not lose the ability to convince people to value the things we value, or desire the things we desire, through rhetoric and philosophy, just as we have before; so-called objective ethics was no advantage in doing this, and setting it aside will lose us nothing. We will still even be able to form compromises with those who will not share our desires, just as we have done before, without the added complication of each side insisting that *they alone* are right in everything. Those who truly will not listen to such persuasion, the ‘crazed axe murderers’ of amateur moral hypotheticals, were lost to reasoning about ‘objective’ moral values anyway; no philosophy will reach them anyway!

### 3. Conclusion

Accepting the desire-based and subjective nature of ethics will, I propose, fundamentally solve the field’s problems. Right now, it is mired in obfuscation and confusion, but understanding that all normativity is based in individual, egoistic desire-satisfaction would allow us to analyze more deeply the kinds of things most people desire, and to convince others with compassion and clarity.





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# TWO PRINCIPLES OF ANARCHISM

## 1. Introduction

Up to now the victories of justice over injustice and of equality over inequality have been won by instinct and the simple force of things, but the final triumph of our social nature will be due to our reason, or else we shall fall back into feudal chaos. — Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

There are two principles, which, when generally followed, bring the best average results in life for an individual who follows

them, and also form the basis of a society which benefits all the members thereof. These principles are the principle of reciprocity, and the principle of autonomy. Stated concisely, they can be phrased thus:

1. **The Principle of Autonomy:** each individual must value for themselves as free a range of choice for their own lives, time and labor as possible, and must abhor domination, oppression, and authority.
2. **The Principle of Reciprocity:** each individual should cooperate with as many individuals as will likely cooperate with them, and respond to the interactions of others in kind: refusal to cooperate should be met with refusal, cooperation met with cooperation, and antagonism with antagonism.

These two principles, when generally followed, produce for the individual that follows them the optimal conditions to allow that individual to flourish, by fostering the best kinds of relationships between that individual and their community. When all other individuals in that community also follow these rules, these benefits are multiplied.

The moral force of this treatise, insofar as it can be called ‘moral’ at all, is therefore contained in a form of egoistic rule-consequentialism: it constitutes advice, and general principles for action, which it would be wise for the self-interested individual to take heed of. No principle to be found herein is absolute; each is subject to the overriding force of holistic self-interested considerations, but neither should any principle be completely

without force in the considerations of a rational individual. They should be followed by default, as a general course of action, because they produce positive outcomes far more often than they produce negative ones, and attempting to calculate the most beneficial action in each situation is too prone to error. Essentially, the prior probability in every situation is set strongly in favor of these principles, and so a lot of evidence would need to be gathered to be sure that going against them is a good idea, so only in situations where the benefits are clear and obvious should the principles be ignored. Thus the core of this treatise is an exhortation: if you want to promote your own autonomy and welfare, and moreover if you wish to cultivate a society with more of those things for all its members, then listen to what I say and consider it, because I think I present a good way to achieve those things.

There is also a positivist, amoral aspect to my analysis: because human beings are generally self-interested in tendency, if not in every specific action, and also because of how we have evolved as a social species to act reciprocally even when it is *not* strictly in our best interest in each case, there will be a strong tendency in a free society of people not possessed so strongly by other ideas (about authority and legitimacy, perhaps) to fall into line with my advice without needing to be told to do so. That way, not only can I describe how I believe an egoistic actor should generally want things to be, but I can also speak about how they will *tend* to be in an anarchic state of things.

In the following sections, I will explain why these two principles are indeed as beneficial as I claim, and then I will elaborate on

them in more detail, explaining the implications of consistently applying these principles to various areas of political, social, and economic life. Although I attempt to draw out these implications by clear logical deduction, because each principle and its corollaries are necessarily general rules not to be applied in every situation, my statements concerning their implications are *also* general rules, as are my statements concerning the *benefits* of following any of these principles, corollaries, and implications. Therefore, consider all of my statements as statements of general fact, open to revision in the moment and in light of particular circumstances. Additionally, since this is an ethic for humans and for humans to interact with humans, I find it acceptable from time to time to use extraneous implicit axioms and intuitions, although I try to justify them wherever they crop up as particularly central to any argument. Please keep all of this in mind when reading further.

## 2. Autonomy

*Here's to the greater good, for all Do what you know  
you should, for all We all may die...*

*I said, "Hey (hey), you (you), feed the machine Bring  
them all back down to their knees There's no time to  
waste Remind the slaves They ain't gonna make it  
out alive today" — Feed the Machine, by Poor Man's  
Poison*

## 2.1. What Is Autonomy?

**Autonomy** is the freedom to choose what to do with one's body, time, and labor. To think, speak, and act as one wills. We all, technically, have the *ability* to do those things, even if there is a gun held to our heads, but to be free to do them means to have a range of choices about what to do with them that are all serious options — options that do not in themselves represent serious choices that will further narrow agency or destroy the capacity for it in a significant way, or cause significant harm to the individual. Thus, I am not in fact free to do what I want with my time, I do not have autonomy, if my choices are to do what you want or to starve because you withhold food from me, because my choices are limited to two, one which represents axiological (and actual) suicide, essentially, and the choice you present. Thus, I have autonomy to the degree that there are no serious obstacles to me choosing to do what I want with myself.

The reason I do not use the words 'freedom' or 'liberty' to describe this value, and instead prefer to say autonomy, is that freedom and liberty are, particularly in a right-libertarian context but even outside of it, associated with a specific conception of 'rights' that is unhelpful to my analysis, and allowing such a connotation to creep it would only serve to muddy the waters for those familiar with most discourse around rights and freedoms. In this conception, one is free just in case one can do whatever one has a right to do, and any action that one is prevented from taking outside that sphere has, in this conception, no effect on one's freedom, either to lessen it or increase it. Here is an

example from Rothbard, from *For A New Liberty*:

Freedom is a condition in which a person's ownership rights in his own body and his legitimate material property are not invaded, are not aggressed against. A man who steals another man's property is invading and restricting the victim's freedom, as does the man who beats another over the head.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, in this conception, the fact that I cannot take some food from you, even if I need it, is not a restriction on my freedom, because you have a *right* to that food. This conception of freedom is merely an imperfect representation of what is actually valuable about freedom, however, which is clear from the example that I gave in the first paragraph: if I am presented with two choices, one which represents axiological or actual suicide, and one which does not, then it should be clear that by any normal definition of freedom I am *not* free to simply reject the other option. I am *forced*, the common usage of the term, to take the other option. This is why we say 'I have to work' or 'my boss is forcing me to do' this or that: yes, technically, we can stop working altogether, or disobey our boss, but if we do that, we likely face starvation and homelessness, at least ultimately, so we do not have any other real, live options.

This should be made even clearer by the fact that, in the standard rights-based conception of freedom, I am no more or less free

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<sup>3</sup>See Rothbard, Murray N. "Free Exchange and Free Contract." *For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto*, 2nd ed., Ludwig Von Mises Institute, United States, Alabama, 2006, pp. 59–59.

whether I am a beggar on the street, owning nothing more than the clothes on my back and the labor I can produce, and a tech mogul living an opulent life across five mansions, capable of going anywhere or getting anything at the snap of my finger. Clearly, this is a strange conception of freedom. Moreover, it is a conception of freedom that does not see a hindrance to my ability to choose what to do with my own body and time, when I am prevented from walking my body over someone else's land (trespassing), etc.

On the contrary, all freedom is important: any restriction on my autonomy, whether through bad and limited choices or by physical force, even when used to protect 'rightful' things, is a noticeable restriction on me. If you prevent me from eating by preventing me from accessing food that I have produced, or that you have produced, as far as I am concerned the effect is identical: I starve.

This is not to say that all autonomy is equally worth protecting. The free ability to choose what to do with my body, time, labor, and the products thereof, in spheres which effect few or no one besides myself, is autonomy that is far more important, and far more closely felt, ordinarily, than the ability to go somewhere else and harass someone else. Nevertheless, sometimes it is not: sometimes not being able to do something that might effect someone else is an incredible, costly hindrance, a severe restriction on autonomy. It is important to recognize when some autonomy in the ability to interfere with the business and lives of others has been given up in return for greater security in one's own life, because sometimes more is given up when the former is

released than is gained from the latter. Likewise, it is important to recognize that all talk of rights, property, and freedom defined in terms of these things is an imperfect approximation of what we actually care about what it comes right down to it, because we care about *all* freedom, and sometimes the freedom we care most deeply about does not map onto property rights.

## 2.2. Why Is Autonomy Important?

Why *do* we care about autonomy so much? Another reason that I prefer to use the word autonomy instead of ‘freedom’ or ‘liberty’ is that the word autonomy has an implication of self-directedness and self-determination to it that is important for a holistic understanding of what it is, which in turn is necessary to understand why it is so valuable. It will therefore begin to become even clearer why autonomy is so valuable if we explore the psychological definition of it, and the words surrounding it.

Quoting from the APA Dictionary of Psychology, autonomy is “in self-determination theory more specifically, the experience of acting from choice, rather than feeling pressured to act. This form of autonomy is considered a fundamental psychological need that predicts well-being.”<sup>4</sup> Self-determination theory, in turn, is defined as “the concept that regulation of behavior varies along a continuum from externally controlled (e.g., to obtain rewards or avoid punishments) to autonomous or intrinsically

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<sup>4</sup>“autonomy - APA Dictionary of Psychology.” *American Psychological Association*, American Psychological Association, <https://dictionary.apa.org/autonomy>.



motivated (e.g., to have fun or explore interests). The theory emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation for producing healthy adjustment and asserts that negative outcomes ensue when people feel that they are driven mainly by external forces and extrinsic rewards.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, autonomy is partially so valuable because it means the ability to choose to do things because they are intrinsically valuable or choice-worthy to the individual, instead of to avoid punishments or gain external rewards. Furthermore, I would argue that it is more of a problem to have to act to avoid a punishment than gain a reward — more psychologically damaging, more restricting of the ability to follow one’s own goals, and so on.

Once we have self-determination, so that choices flow from our own internal motivations and/or the goals in the external world that we seek, self-directedness becomes possible for us. Here is a definition of self-directedness, to bring this into focus:

Self-directedness can be seen as the executive branch of a person’s system of mental self-government. People who are self-directed recognize that their attitudes, behaviors, and problems reflect their own choices. They tend to accept responsibility for their attitudes and behavior and they impress others as reliable and trustworthy persons. As a result, a person’s self-directedness is an important indicator of reality testing, maturity, and vulnerability to mood

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<sup>5</sup>“self-determination-theory - APA Dictionary of Psychology.” *American Psychological Association*, American Psychological Association, <https://dictionary.apa.org/self-determination-theory>.

disturbance. Self-directedness is high in people who are mature and happy (Cloninger 2013), whereas it is low in people with personality disorders and those vulnerable to psychoses and mood disorders (Cloninger et al. 1997; Cloninger and Cloninger 2011).<sup>6</sup>

It is impossible, or much more difficult, to feel that one's attitudes, behaviors, and problems reflect one's own choices when those choices themselves were ones someone was forced to take. If someone was really pressured into taking a certain course of action, it is generally recognizable that they are *less* responsible for that choice.

In the absence of autonomy, whatever actions that the individual takes, because they are made at the command, and therefore ultimately the decision, of another, for which the individual is not responsible, can have little joy for them, since it did not flow from them. Whatever they produce is not theirs, and their very time and life is not theirs to enjoy, is separated from them and made a kind of extension of another's time and life in a kind of waking death. If life is good, subordination to another is evil for the very same reasons. Worse, when subordinated to another one is not free to build one's own character as a human being, choose what to become. Instead, another person decides who you are, and you have little say in it, and so you become alienated from what you are. A slave who does whatever their owner

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<sup>6</sup>Garcia, Danilo, et al. "Self-Directedness ." *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*, SpringerLink, 22 July 2017, [https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8\\_1163-1?page=63](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8_1163-1?page=63).

commands because they need food is a person who becomes whoever their owner tells them to be, independent of anything actually stemming from them, and so becomes self-alienated.

Indeed, living too long under the subordination of others will atrophy an individual's capacity to make choices at all. What is unique to them slowly rots away from disuse, until they are dependent on their masters for everything. A person like this, even given their freedom, will not know what to do with it. We see this in those around us, and in ourselves, all the time: we do as teachers, priests, officials, or bosses tell us continuously, until the majority of our lives is consumed by being what other people want us to be, so that we become passive servants in our souls. Often, we do not remember how to learn something on our own, to produce on our own, to become our own person, to think on our own.

Autonomy also seems to be a core component of human flourishing, too: we have brains, can reason and make plans and choices for ourselves, and we are rewarded in mental health, satisfaction, and more for exercising that capacity, just as we are rewarded for exercising any capacity. Autonomy, self-determination, and the ability to self-actualize are key to psychological happiness<sup>7 8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>See Clausen, Thomas, et al. "Job Autonomy and Psychological Well-Being: A Linear or a Non-Linear Association?" *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1359432X.2021.1972973>.

<sup>8</sup>See Harry T. Reis, Kennon M. Sheldon. "Daily Well-Being: The Role of Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness - Harry T. Reis, Kennon M. Sheldon, Shelly L. Gable, Joseph Roscoe, Richard M. Ryan, 2000." *SAGE Journals*,

<sup>9</sup>. To become a full, well-rounded human being is not just some teleological end goal imposed upon us from the outside, but is also something that we can feel inside: there are rewards for becoming fully oneself, becoming fully human, exercising those capacities that make us so.

There is a more fundamental reason that autonomy is crucially valuable, which allows me to treat it as a value that all human beings share — and provides the basis and framework for all others — without assuming that all human beings share the same values in other respects, as a moral realist would. This fundamental reason is that autonomy is the prerequisite for achieving all other values. If one is to pursue any value whatsoever, one must first have the freedom to do so: the freedom to use one's own reasoning mind to choose what to do with one's time and one's body. If someone is subordinated to another they cannot be free to exercise their own mind and choice, and therefore cannot achieve any value of their own except at the sufferance of another, whose interests necessarily cannot be trusted to align with their own.

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<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0146167200266002?journalCode=pspc>.

<sup>9</sup>See Ryff, C. "Happiness Is Everything, or Is It? Explorations on the Meaning of Psychological Well-Being." *Semantic Scholar*, 1 Jan. 1989, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Happiness-is-everything%2C-or-is-it-Explorations-on-Ryff/0b7cbc0e7b5946b39778784a2167019eebd53e52>.

### 3. Reciprocity

“A man ought to be a friend to his friend and repay gift with gift. People should meet smiles with smiles and lies with treachery.” — *Edda*, 13th century

#### 3.1. Positive and Negative Reciprocity

Reciprocity, both in the community and in the individual, is what will safeguard individual autonomy. Communities are composed of individuals, and therefore our first task is to explore how it is in the interest of the individual to engage in reciprocal respect of the interests and autonomy of others. Once that is established, we can speak about how a community of people who understand this common interest can operate.

If one respects the autonomy of others, and interacts with them in a positive way, one is much more likely to be able to convince those others to respect one's own autonomy, and to interact with oneself in mutually beneficial and positive ways. There are two reasons for this.

First, because if you make it clear that you are treating other people positively in expectation of a return of that positive treatment, then they are incentivized to return it, in order to continue your positive treatment of them. If you do not return the positive cooperation I offer you, then reciprocity is broken, and I will cease to cooperate with you as well, ceasing to respect your autonomy and to give benefits to you when you do not respect mine and do likewise for me. Thus I motivate you to

respond to my cooperation with like cooperation by the hopes on your part that I will cooperate with you, and you likewise motivate me to cooperate with you in the hopes that you will continue to cooperate with me. This is what is called a Nash equilibrium: because we both follow the same strategy, it is optimal for both of us to continue this strategy in most cases; otherwise, we lose benefits.

Second, because human beings actually are *more* motivated by reciprocity than would be suggested by the purely rational calculus outlined above: we are motivated to cooperate with people who have cooperated with us even if it is a one time interaction<sup>10</sup>, and to go out of our way to cooperate with those who have cooperated with us, or punish those who did not, even when it is irrational to do so in a direct cost-benefit analysis<sup>11</sup><sup>12</sup>. We are motivated to do this by feelings such as anger and resentment, but also friendship, trust, gratitude, and more. It would be foolish not to be aware of this aspect of human existence and actions in others. It would also be foolish to ignore these feelings in ourselves and try to stick to a rational decision theory

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<sup>10</sup>See Delton, Andrew W., et al. "Evolution of Direct Reciprocity under Uncertainty Can Explain Human Generosity in One-Shot Encounters." PNAS, National Academy of Sciences, 9 Aug. 2011, <https://www.pnas.org/content/108/32/13335>.

<sup>11</sup>See Gilin, Debra A, and Paul W Paese. "When an Adversary Is Caught Telling the Truth: Reciprocal Cooperation versus Self-Interest in Distributive Bargaining." *SAGE Journals*, 2000, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0146167200261008>.

<sup>12</sup>See Fehr, Ernst, and Simon Gächter. "Fairness and Retaliation: The Economics of Reciprocity." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 2000, <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257%2Fjep.14.3.159>.

only, as those feelings are their own negative or positive rewards, that, when not taken into account, take their own toll. Consider, also, that engaging in this form of positive reciprocity with others will actually encourage them to cooperate with you *even if they don't like you*.<sup>13</sup>

Reciprocity is not always just about cooperation and goodwill, however. As mentioned when speaking about punishment and resentment above, in more extreme interactions, where someone not only ceases to cooperate positively, but actually does something negative, actors can respond with **negative reciprocity**. If you actively violate my autonomy, and interact with me in a way that is unfair and deleterious to me, it is in my interest to repay that with like and proportional disregard and harm, so as to motivate you to cease doing that, and it is likewise in your interest to commit to the same strategy, to motivate me to avoid harming you.

Importantly, in the case of negative reciprocity, one can only prove one's commitment to this strategy of repaying harm with harm and unfairness with unfairness by action if someone else has already committed a harm or unfairness towards you, otherwise you would be the one ceasing cooperation first, so it is important to *verbally* post one's commitment to this strategy in order to make it known as a deterrent, whereas with positive reciprocity one can simply demonstrate with actions. Therefore, it is often beneficial to have explicit agreements or contracts with others

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<sup>13</sup>See Regan, Dennis T. "Effects of a Favor and Liking on Compliance." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Academic Press, 31 Aug. 2004, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0022103171900254?via%3Dihub>.

concerning what will cause each of you to engage in negative reciprocity and to what degree, and to form mutual associations to multiply the force of such a commitment. Thus a “law” of sorts, built in game theoretic commitment strategies and contracts, forms in the egalitarian world of mutual reciprocal interaction.

Proportionality is also crucially important when engaging in negative reciprocity: after all, if one engages in a grossly disproportionate act of retribution, others in the social mesh of mutual reciprocity that is the “community,” including and especially the ones you reacted against, are far more likely to view this as a *new* violation of mutual respect for other’s autonomy, instead of a proper response. Meanwhile, if you stick to something in like kind and proportional, it will be clearer what it is a response to, and that it is not an overpayment. This is how one avoids blood feuds and the destruction of the social mesh that comes with such things. Importantly, the proportionality of the violation will have to be established mutually, through mediation with the one you are in conflict with, and socially if others are likely to act on behalf of the one you are retaliating against, or view you as a threat and cease positive reciprocation with you in return for perceived violations of proportionality (which it is in their interest to do, in order to incentivize everyone in the community to stay playing the reciprocal game even better).

Additionally, in a social situation where multiple people are all engaged in interactions with each other in a complex network, distributed cooperation or non-cooperation is possible. If one wants others to engage in sanctions against those who don’t cooperate with them and respect their autonomy, in order to



multiply the power of their threats, or engage in cooperation with those who benefit them, to multiply the power of their bargaining, they need only promise to do likewise for the others (a contract which itself is enforced by positive and negative reciprocation), and it becomes possible for the the whole social network to become self-healing and self-reinforcing! Through the use of reciprocity, cooperation on the part of each of society's members is rewarded, and harm punished, by not just the specific people involved, but by others as well (all, most, or just some). Thus if there are disparities in power between individuals, they can be evened out by the weaker individuals banding together to protect each other from the strong, and reward the strong even more generously for their cooperation.

This ethic of reciprocity might begin to sound like the primitive ethics of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," but there are crucial differences. Primarily, not hurting others (by being unfair to them, exploiting them, or by disrespecting their autonomy as individuals) is a form of positive cooperation with them, and therefore there is a positive clause to balance the negative one: "a gift for a gift and an eye for an eye." Furthermore, this strategy, while primitive, is so lasting for a reason: it is actually, as I believe I have demonstrated, and has been extensively demonstrated in various scientific disciplines, one of the best strategies for actors that have to engage in repeated interactions with each other

and/or can gain reputations.<sup>14 15 16 17 18</sup>

### 3.2. Reciprocity and Society

I have demonstrated above that following the principles of reciprocity and autonomy is likely to be beneficial to each individual, whether or not those the interact also follow this ethic (but especially if they do). However, what benefits are there for promoting these principles generally, and encouraging an entire society to follow them? What, in other words, is the interest of the egoist in promoting others to follow this ethic besides the specific benefits contained in interacting with people who follow it? What are the benefits that are a result of the organic whole

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<sup>14</sup>See Seltzer, Leon F. “The Prisoner’s Dilemma and the ‘Virtues’ of Tit for Tat.” *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, 27 July 2016, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evolution-the-self/201607/the-prisoner-s-dilemma-and-the-virtues-tit-tat>.

<sup>15</sup>See Bravetti, Alessandro, and Pablo Padilla. “An Optimal Strategy to Solve the Prisoner’s Dilemma.” *Nature News*, Nature Publishing Group, 31 Jan. 2018, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-018-20426-w>.

<sup>16</sup>See Trivers, Robert L., and Search for more articles by this author. “The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism: The Quarterly Review of Biology: Vol 46, No 1.” *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, 1 Mar. 1971, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/406755>.

<sup>17</sup>See Axelrod, Robert, and William D Hamilton. “The Evolution of Cooperation - Science.org.” *Science*, 27 Mar. 1981, <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.7466396>.

<sup>18</sup>See Jaeggi, Adrian V, and Michael Gurven. “Reciprocity Explains Food Sharing in Humans and Other Primates Independent of Kin Selection and Tolerated Scrounging: A Phylogenetic Meta-Analysis.” *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 7 Oct. 2013, <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rspb.2013.1615>.

of society applying this?

I will sketch out the answer in brief. If society follows these as general principles, and treats a violation of positive reciprocity on the part one of its members as a violation to all of them, then one can expect to find a society in which it is most pleasing to live, as each interaction leaves both sides better off than before, and no one accepts subjugation of themselves, nor attempts to subjugate others. Every person gives a little of their autonomy, in choosing not to dominate others, in return for similar (and much greater because of the difference in number) consideration on the part of all others, while not really losing much, since autonomy as it is exercised in the domination of others is far less important than autonomy in one's own labor and life choices.

Such a society, committed to the autonomy and mutual benefit of all, would be on average the best society to live in. Yes, there are a few who would be on the top of the hierarchy of a society which did not value these things, but the probability that any given person would be a member of that powerful elite is minuscule, and the conditions in such a society of the vast majority would be so far improved that the tiny probability of even greater advancement is outweighed by a rational calculus. That is not to mention the general benefit to all of more people being free and able to support themselves, in innovation and a healthier market and society at large.

According to social anthropologists, reciprocity is actually a powerful basis for the success of our species and the formation of civilization, too. Quoting from Wikipedia (because I don't

have access to the sources it is referencing, and because it's quite clearly written):

Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin attribute the very nature of humans to reciprocity. They claim humans survived because our ancestors learned to share goods and services “in an honored network of obligation”.<sup>[11]</sup> ... Cultural anthropologists support this idea in what they call the “web of indebtedness” where reciprocity is viewed as an adaptive mechanism to enhance survival.<sup>[12]</sup> Within this approach, **reciprocity creates an interdependent environment where labor is divided so that humans may be more efficient.**... Each member can devote more time and attention to his or her allotted task and the whole group benefits. This meant that individuals could give away resources without actually giving them away. Through the rule of reciprocity, sophisticated systems of aid and trade were possible bringing immense benefits to the societies that utilized them.<sup>[1]</sup> Given the benefits of reciprocity at the societal level, it is not surprising that the norm has persisted and dictates our present cognition and behavior.

### 3.3. Why Reciprocity Consistently?

Instead of relying on a distributed, decentralized network of reciprocal actions and game theoretic payoffs to protect one's

autonomy and interests, why not enforce it from the top down? Surely, if one desires to protect and ensure something absolutely, it is better to have a single entity that can impose it by force, for surely anything so loose and fluid as a reciprocal order cannot give as absolute guarantees!

Not so. The introduction of unilateral force into any situation immediately gives everyone who you are using violence against an interest in rebelling against you. Worse, in instituting a system that is above you in order to safeguard your autonomy, you have placed your autonomy in its hands, and have it only at its sufferance. In your attempt to save your autonomy, you have in that very act destroyed it.

Additionally, creating an institution of centralized power introduces an ineradicable conflict between everyone around it. It becomes a race to capture power by those who have a vision of society that they wish to use that power to enforce — whether that power was intended for that end originally or not, power is fungible, and any institution powerful enough to protect your freedom is powerful enough to destroy it — and people who now have no choice but to struggle for power in order to, at the very least, prevent others from getting their hands on it.

Even more terribly, the introduction of unilateral force into a social network destroys all interest others might have in voluntarily helping you and cooperating with you: they will be subject to your violent invasions anyway, so they might as well acquiesce only at the point of your gun.

In essence, while the reciprocal order is a natural equilibrium

point, an attempt to introduce a centralized means of control inherently and necessarily destabilizes any network of interactions, turning it into a race for control of the institution, and incentivizing all sides to use it for their own gain and to the detriment of others. The principles upon which such an institution stands, compromising autonomy for some for the purposes of others, subordinating all to its will and enforcing a singular outcome, requiring the fealty of those under it, are principles that undermine the possibility of freedom and mutual benefit. To introduce or support such a thing might benefit an individual in the short run, but ultimately endangers their own interests as well: if you create something that can unilaterally ignore the interests of others, you have no guarantee that it will always operate in your interests; and if you create a culture that sees it as acceptable to ignore the autonomy of some and subordinate them to you, you create a culture that accepts subordination, and sooner or later it will turn on you.

Another question that arises is why one should hold principles at all. Why not calculate out the benefits and costs of cooperation with others in each individual circumstance, and do as one pleases no matter what?

The answer to this is threefold. First, because being *known* to have committed to a bargaining strategy, and taking steps to actually make it difficult to undo such a commitment, is an excellent way to actually get other people to cooperate with your strategy<sup>19</sup>, as they feel they can trust you better. Compare this

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<sup>19</sup>See Ross, Don. "Game Theory." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,

to someone who respects the autonomy and interests of others only when they feel like it, or only when the benefit to them is obvious and the ramifications of not doing so severe. No one will want to interact with such a person, as it is simply too dangerous. Therefore, self-interested considerations of the general, overall effects of one's actions in a cumulative sense outweigh whatever one might think specifically and in the moment.

Second, because adhering to a principle unless in exceptional situations actually changes one's habits and character, which is likely to make it far easier and more natural, and therefore even somewhat less costly, and certainly more safe and sure, to follow those principles. Committing to following certain principles, and building habits around them, is advantageous even if in some specific cases ignoring those principles is also advantageous.

Now that I have hopefully demonstrated that the reciprocal ethic is an advantageous set of general principles to live by, and that a society founded on it will be far more stable and peaceful, and beneficial to each of its members instead of just a few, I can now freely continue elaborating it. In the next sections, I will be working out the implications, as I see them, of the two principles (autonomy and reciprocity) that compose this ethic. It should be noted that this is not an exercise in pure axiomatic deduction; instead, this is a working out of the implications of the reciprocal ethic by means of a combination of logic and intuition, as the task requires, since the point of this ethic is

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Stanford University, 8 Mar. 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/game-theory/#Com>.

to foster understanding and cooperation between people, not purely philosophical robots, and so if something is a clear point of intuitive agreement, whether or not it can be fully justified from the ground up, it is acceptable. As long as the ethic clearly derives from a concern for individual autonomy and mutual reciprocity, it will serve to foster like concern in others, and eventually result in them following these principles as well.

### 3.4. The Principles of Reciprocity

There is a fundamental difference between two kinds of positive reciprocity, and so far I have treated these two variations of reciprocity as equivalent for the sake of simplifying the foregoing conceptual analysis. I think it is time, however, to split them out, as I begin to formalize what the principles an individual following this ethic of reciprocity would follow.

These two forms of positive reciprocity are *active* positive reciprocity and *passive* positive reciprocity. Passive positive reciprocity is cooperation with others to the extent of *avoiding* taking certain actions towards them. This is best exemplified in positive reciprocity with respect to autonomy: to positively cooperate with someone in respecting their autonomy, all I need do is refrain from interfering with them. Conversely, active positive reciprocity is more stringent: I need to actually take a particular action that is different from the action I would have taken otherwise, in order to give a positive gain to the other person that they would not have received had I not taken that action. It is the act of giving a gift, as compared to the act of



simply leaving someone alone.

Passive positive reciprocity, because it usually requires so little from the person giving it, while increasing the likelihood of receiving something so important (safety from harm and theft, and one's autonomy to act and pursue one's own interests without being subordinated to or hindered unjustly by another) is a principle which holds effect in a far greater range of circumstances for a self interested actor than active positive reciprocity. After all, this ethic is only a set of heuristics and principles for a self-interested person to act by, not an absolute deontological set of rules handed down from on high, so if great enough needs arise, it can (and should) be cast to the wayside.

This is why there is a greater expectation and focus, in my ethical and social writing, on passive positive reciprocity, in the respect for the autonomy and boundaries of others, than there is for active positive reciprocity, which is by far a more variable principle and depends almost exclusively on individual circumstance.

In light of this, the first and most important principle of the ethic of reciprocity is this:

**(1) DO NOT HARM OTHERS IF THEY HAVE NOT HARMED YOU.**

This is the principle of passive positive reciprocity: cooperate with others, by *not* invading their boundaries and by respecting their autonomy, as long as they continue to do likewise and in

the interests of encouraging them to do so. If they cease to cooperate with you, cease to cooperate with them: you are free to take positive action against them and their boundaries, to a proportionate degree. I will cover this in the next principle. If they begin cooperating again, return to cooperation with them, as that will ensure that they have an incentive to continue to cooperate with you, since if you will cease cooperating with them permanently, they have no incentive to start cooperating again either, because you won't respect them either way, and that way lies feud and gain for no one.

Always, then, the first principle is to maintain and continue and encourage *positive* passive reciprocal relations, whether that means opening with cooperation with new people, building up commitments and a reputation for such cooperation, or forgiving people (perhaps after some reparations to you) for ceasing to positively cooperate for awhile and returning to positively cooperating with them once that is done. The point is that when everyone engages in positively reciprocal, mutual relationships, everyone gains, and being willing to return to positive reciprocal relationships, after some punishment (either in negative reciprocation or just the cessation of positive reciprocation for a time), ensures that those who mess up or do bad things have an incentive to stop doing so.

**(2) IF SOMEONE HARMS YOU, HARM THEM BACK IN A PROPORTIONATE MANNER.**

This is principle of negative reciprocity: if someone ceases co-operation with you, especially if they take action to disrespect your boundaries or your autonomy (negative action), you *must* respond in like kind, in order to discourage them from doing so again, and therefore maintain positive reciprocal relations across the board. This means responding to negative actions towards you with negative actions (active negative reciprocity) and responding to a disregard of your autonomy, boundaries, or interests with like disregard (passive negative reciprocity).

Be mindful, however, that the purpose is not simply to punish them for the sake of punishment, but to demonstrate a commitment to not being pushed around; furthermore, the purpose is not only or primarily to satisfy one's own desires for revenge, but to do things rationally. Listening only to one's desire for revenge is how you violate proportionality in the eyes of the person you are in conflict with and the eyes of the community, breaking reciprocity yourself and making it worse for everyone. Thus it is better to act in a way that involves a punishment voluntarily agreed upon by the person who violated your autonomy and satisfactory, if relevant, to the rest of those with whom you wish to maintain positive relations, in the interests of placating everyone and returning to positive reciprocity while also disincentivizing violating it in the first place.

Furthermore, it is in your interests to focus on making the ability to positively reciprocate whole again, which means ensuring

that the person who hurt you is not themselves unilaterally or unsympathetically punished, and not resentful and unlikely to resume positive relations with you simply because you punished them. This means that negative reciprocation must be more voluntary than not on the part of all parties, even the one who initially broke reciprocity. This does not mean it must always be so, however, because in extreme enough cases the benefit of stopping or discouraging negative action far outweighs the dangers of permanently ending a chance for positively cooperative relations or proportionality.

**(3) ACT TOWARDS OTHERS AS YOU WOULD HAVE THEM ACT TOWARDS YOU, AS LONG AS THEY CONTINUE TO DO LIKEWISE.**

This is the principle of active positive reciprocity. This is actually in one's own interest in fewer situations, and to a less significant degree. It should not dominate the wide middle swatch of payoffs the way the previous two rules should. However, when taken as the basis for mutual, peer-to-peer interaction and voluntary, fluid organization, it can be a very beneficial strategy indeed.

The ultimate expression of this third principle of reciprocity is the gift economy and mutual aid, two principles of social organization not commonly associated with left-market anarchism, but perfectly compatible with it and actually endorsed by the principles outlined here.

In the gift economy, one grants needed items to others, with the hope and expectation that one one likewise needs something

that other people have, they will grant it to you. Note that the concept of a gift economy relies on the concept of property being associated and rightfully aligned to a person, but simply being granted to others by its owners without a direct and upfront, proportional charge. Hence a gift economy is only possible within the context of a society that supports property as an extension of autonomy and reciprocally respects it.

Mutual aid<sup>20</sup> is when participants, who view each other as equals, instead of charity-giver and charity-receiver, organize together in an attempt to help each other (and themselves by extension) and solve problems, by attempting to pool what they can give and take as little as possible (only what they need). Essentially, a voluntary organization along the lines of Marx's classic saying "from each according to [their] ability, to each according to [their] need," at a small enough scale that free rider problems can be avoided through social repercussions, and within the context of individual autonomy instead of absolute individual subordination to the community or the collective. These can work to provide insurance, health care and health insurance<sup>21</sup>,

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<sup>20</sup>See Whitley, Matthew. "Why 'Mutual Aid'? — Social Solidarity, Not Charity." *OpenDemocracy*, 14 July 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/why-mutual-aid-social-solidarity-not-charity/>.

<sup>21</sup>See Long, Roderick T. "How Government Solved the Health Care Crisis: Medical Insurance That Worked — Until Government 'Fixed' It ." *Formulations*, Free Nation Foundation, 1993, <http://freenation.org/a/f12l3.html>.

and law enforcement<sup>22</sup>, and banking<sup>23</sup>.

## 4. Property

*Devaluation reigns And fear of self destruction Adapt  
or be replaced And follow their instructions... So lay  
waste to all we've made For your corporate palisade...  
And no enterprise on Earth will make us kneel To  
your empire of steel — Empire of Steel by Essenger*

### 4.1. Property As a Guarantor and Extension of Autonomy

Although most forms of anarchism are hostile to property, I view it as a crucial guarantor of individual autonomy. Without the ability to own things, both to support one's own life, such as food and shelter, and to allow for the ongoing support of one's life, in the means of production, the individual is placed at the mercy of the collective. This can be formalized, as it is in some forms of anarcho-communism and in all forms of authoritarian communism, where the means of production are officially owned by the community, and so each individual is in the end subordinated to one community or another, unable to

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<sup>22</sup>See Long, Roderick T. "Anarchy in the U.K.: The English Experience With Private Protection." *Formulations*, Free Nation Foundation, 1994, <http://freenation.org/a/f2111.html>.

<sup>23</sup>See Greene, William B. "Mutual Banking." *The Anarchist Library*, 17 Mar. 2019, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/william-batchelder-greene-mutual-banking>.

separate themselves from groups. This can also be informal: if anyone can take from you your means of survival and production at any time, for any reason, whenever they feel like it, you are just as at the mercy of everyone else as if it was formalized, just in a different way. You have no sphere to plan and act according to your own will.

It is not just necessary to have the *ability* to own property for use that is important to individual autonomy, however: it is the actual state of owning such property that is equally important. One's actual autonomy expands and contracts in conjunction with the amount of property one is able to use. Someone who has the ability, technically, to own the means of production necessary to their own work is still not free if someone else owns the tools they use; their labor time is still subject to the commands of the capitalist, and the products of their labor still forfeit. Therefore, a too-strict adherence to private property in the Lockean sense still leads to the subordination of individual autonomy to the will of others, just as in communism or collectivism; the only difference is that instead of being subject to the community's will, and thereby at least having some say (in anarcho-communism anyway), the worker has no say whatsoever but to leave.

It is crucial to note, in the course of this argument, that the function of property for the individual as a guarantor of individual autonomy hinges on *use and occupation*. Property does not enhance the autonomy of an individual that never uses that property — in that sense it is completely neutral to them. Therefore, at least under this first understanding, there is no reason to respect someone's property if they are not actually using or

occupying it; if you cease to respect their absentee property, they will cease to respect yours, but no great amount of autonomy of your own will be lost in that, and much will be gained by no longer being subject to the commands from afar of capitalists and landlords.

Property is also an extension of autonomy in another way, however. It represents *stored* labor time. To take away someone's property is to make it so that all the time they spent working to produce or buy that property was not actually spent for their own purposes, in service of their own plan for life, both then and in the future, but instead was spent laboring in service of your plans. Suddenly they were laboring under your command, for your purposes, in negation of their own will. The theft of property is therefore a violation of someone's past autonomy. This is not as serious an offense as the violation of someone's future or current autonomy, through direct coercion or the protection of property which allows you to hold dominion over them, but it is still a violation which has some serious impact, and is therefore a breach of reciprocity in an important sense. This must be considered even when seizing absentee property, although it may not weigh particularly heavily on the decision-making of an egoist adhering to my framework.

So, property is both a guarantor of, and an extension of, individual autonomy. At the same time, property is *just* that, not a substitute for it. Elevating respect for and protection of private property to the top of one's hierarchy of values is to serve an abstract ideal. This might seem like the right thing to do, but that is only because some of one's own self-interest in



generally protecting property has been invested into that ideal, and you are serving that component of your self-interest to the detriment of the others, and poorly as well. To do that is to make yourself a slave to something that is not representative of your full interests, and therefore is just as problematic as elevating god, altruism, the collective, the state, tradition, or a specific master over oneself. In light of this truth, the wise egoist must not make the same mistake that proprietarians (right-libertarians and anarcho-capitalists) make by substituting true freedom for the freedom to dispose of property (externally or in one's own person) how one pleases. There is more to freedom than that, even if that represents, and protects, some important components of freedom.

#### **4.2. Absentee Property (e.g. Land and Capital)**

Given this second conception of property, which is admittedly similar in many respects to the Lockean or Nozickean conception of property, it is important to clarify a key difference between the account of property in a reciprocal ethic, and the account of property in a side-constraints or natural rights ethic. In a side-constraints or natural rights ethic, property must be respected at all costs, and only in terms of its extension in labor, not the consequential extension the possession of property brings to people in having a free sphere for action. This is not the case in my ethic. If the possession of certain property is doing greater damage to the autonomy of an individual or group of individuals than violating positive passive reciprocity in this case would bring by making others (and the community as a whole) less

likely to respect those individual's own property, then it is in fact in their interest to cease respecting that person's autonomy as expressed in that property.

This is a tricky calculation: one the one hand, we have a great subordination and loss of autonomy because of the possession of some property by some person. On the other hand, we have an uncertain chance of another amount of autonomy being lost if the individuals harmed, or the community at large, stopped respecting autonomy in property to one degree or another, as a result of the individuals subordinated ceasing to respect the property being used against them. In most cases, the subordination to others that takes place because of property is not onerous enough to justify this: for instance, having to work in order to trade for what one needs in life is a small price to pay for security in the product of one's labor and a sphere in which one is safe to act as one pleases. I could certainly try to live for free off the produce of others, but soon they would cease to respect my autonomy, or my ability to possess things, and I would quickly lose *everything*. Furthermore, in most cases, disrespecting other's property disrespects their direct autonomy as represented in the first aspect in which property means autonomy, as well as indirectly in because of the labor time stolen. Both of these together are a very powerful investment of autonomy into something, and so to stop respecting property in which both of these things are invested is a very great violation of passive positive reciprocity and would be greeted as such.

In the case of *absentee* property, conversely, the story is different. Absentee property, through extortion, rent, or profit, can exact

huge losses of autonomy on people, as the loss of something intimately necessary to their ability to labor, live, etc. is threatened in order to get them to subordinate themselves to another's authority docilely. On the other hand, the loss of absentee property causes no loss of autonomy in the first sense in which property is invested with it on the part of the absentee owner, as they were never using that property to begin with, nor was it something they were relying on to maintain their autonomy or free sphere of action. There is a loss of autonomy as represented in the past labor time invested into the property by the absentee owner, but with the benefit in alleviating subjugation, the direct gain in gaining new property to labor on and govern oneself with, and without the added direct loss of autonomy in the first respect, as well as the fact that others besides the owner of the property may not choose to even involve themselves in negative reciprocation, it should be clear that in most cases respect in absentee property should be hard to come by.

Not that absentee property should not be totally disrespected in all cases; controlling the product of one's labor is very important to an individual's autonomy, and thus the respect of someone's labor time as it is invested in objects is too. A society that constantly, lightheartedly, and frivolously violated property rights, even in absentee property, undercuts half of the reason anyone respects anyone else's property at all, and endangers itself. Thus, property that is owned by a person who does not regularly use it, but which is neither needed by others, nor regularly used by others who are dominated by its owner, can and should be respected as a general principle.

### 4.3. Abandonment

Another exception to the rule of respecting private property on the basis of the invested labor time of the original owner is in the case when the thief, having held the property for some amount of time, has actually invested more labor into it than the original owner did, in either repairs, upkeep, or improvements. In such a case, to return the property to the original owner would be a greater disrespect of the autonomy of the thief than the thief's original theft was of the owner's autonomy.

Of course, this is not a hard-and-fast rule, as proportionality is more in the eyes of the beholders than it is an objective rational science, but it would still produce a tendency for property to stay with the person who has worked on it more. Additionally, such cases are usually only going to arise in the case of property that was either clearly abandoned, or absentee to begin with, with the original owner swooping in at some later date in order to reclaim something they never cared about before. That means that people are even less likely to care about respecting their original claim.

### 4.4. The Defense of Property

I must note here that one is not simply justified in using any means necessary to protect one's property, but instead must use methods to protect it that are proportional to what the violator did. For example, if someone enters my house, I cannot begin by shooting them. I must ask them to leave, try to guide them out by the arm, and only when they start resisting my attempts

by attacking me, may I engage with them in self-defense while also trying to move them out of my house. However, preventing someone from entering my house in the first place is not an attack on their autonomy, as they had no right to be there in the first place, nor is preventing someone from entering some space, as I have just as much right to stand in a certain spot (even if it happens to be at the entrance of some place they desire to go) as they do, and if they attack me to move me out of the way, that is *their* fault.

Furthermore, all the direct and known-beforehand consequences of actions taken in the name of negative reciprocity count as part of their consequences, and therefore must be counted when it comes to whether they are proportional or not. Thus, kicking someone off of my property and hence directly off the edge of a cliff, forever, does not merely count (as naive right-libertarians imagine) as kicking them off my property, but also counts as killing them when they reach the bottom of that cliff. This does not include consequences of actions taken in defense of my autonomy that are merely the continuation of something that would have happened otherwise, where the violation of my autonomy which I am undoing is merely a suspension of what would have happened had that violation of my autonomy not occurred at all. For instance, if someone is dying, and they hook themselves up to me in order to use my body to survive, when I unhook them, I am defending my autonomy, but as a direct result of my action they are now dying again. This, however, is not my fault, since they were already dying before they interacted with me or I with them, and my action was merely removing

an unjustly acquired suspension of an already-occurring process from their grasp.

## 5. Sale, Contract, and Consent

*The devil went down to Georgia, he was lookin' for  
a soul to steal He was in a bind 'cause he was way  
behind And he was willin' to make a deal — The  
Devil Went Down to Georgia, by Charlie Daniels*

### 5.1. Contracts

There are a myriad of forms which the hierarchies of authority which sap individual autonomy may take. One is force, another is dependence (typically through claims on absentee property), and a third, less often discussed, is *contract*. Under the traditional conceptions of contracts seen throughout society and often preserved in right-libertarian writing, a contract is essentially a promise that is legally, or ethically, enforceable. Therefore, whatever each side of the contract promises to do or provide can be compelled from them if the other side of the contract performs their end of the bargain.

This has clearly authoritarian and oppressive implications. On a conceptual level, each person is in some sense the same individual as they were when they originally made a contract, but in some sense crucially relevant to autonomy, they are not. They are a different, similar person, and to be indefinitely and implacably bound to the promises and statements they have made in the

past is its own special kind of odious bondage. If I promise to do something, but later realize that it was a poorly thought out idea and no longer want to participate in whatever I promised to do, it is fundamentally an extreme abridgment of my ability to rationally plan my own course in life and choose my actions, as well as my ability to control how my time (and labor) is spent, and with whom, to compel me by force to adhere to my promise. After all, when I, in passive positive cooperation, respect the autonomy of others, no positive action is required of me, and no encroachment is made into the sphere within which my autonomy exists. My absolute freedom is abridged, perhaps, but only slightly, and in return, a much more relevant freedom is ensured. And there is nothing on the other side of this equation: if I refuse to adhere to a contract, *no one's autonomy is abridged!* People are disappointed, certainly, and they may choose not to interact or trade with me in the future because they do not view me as trustworthy, but I *have not broken passive positive reciprocation whatsoever*. Therefore, the only motivation one has to keep contracts is the social motivation of wanting to be viewed as trustworthy and wanting to engage in positive active reciprocation.

There will still be a need for the actual paper and language of contracts to some degree in a world of reciprocal ethics, however. After all, in the social realm, it is still useful to have a record of the promises one has made and the conditions under which everyone agreed to consider them fulfilled, in order to have some way of settling disputes concerning allegedly broken promises and betrayed trust, so that those involved do not get their reputations

destroyed unfairly or unnecessarily.

What about when there is mutual consideration involved in contracts, however? In that case, if one side does not uphold their side of the contract, but receives and takes the property of the other, the conditions under which the other side agreed to consider that property a product of the invested labor time of the other party do not hold, and so that other party is currently holding stolen property, which is a violation of the autonomy of the other party, and the property should be returned. Likewise, if the cheated party did labor for the other party, again their autonomy was abridged, as they were forced to use their bodies and time in a way that they would not have if they had known the truth of the outcome; however, labor is an immaterial, ethereal thing which disperses into objects and representations, and therefore, a direct return of that labor may be impossible. If it was invested into a particular object which was then to be transferred to the cheating party, that object becomes the property of the person who labored on it, as one example of how that limitation might be evaded.

In repossessing stolen property, it is important to remember that if damage is down to the thief in excess of the damage done by the theft, and the subsequent defense of that theft if applicable, it should probably be repaid in some way. This is likely to be ensured if both sides are interested, as they should be, in re-establishing positive and cooperative relations, and if both sides have mutual defense or insurance associations representing their interests, as they probably would, both side's interests are likely to be represented, although in clear-cut cases, it will be fairly



easy to discern who violated reciprocity — which all parties view it as in their interest to preserve — and so those representing that side will be less likely to defend them because they don't want it to be common for those who violate reciprocity to get away with it easily, as that is not beneficial to them either.

In light of all this, a new picture of contracts emerges under this ethic: one where contracts can be voided at any time, for only the return of any transferred property or labor to their original owners if possible. This respects the choices and autonomy of all involved in my view.

## 5.2. Sale

Given the incompatibility of being forcefully held to one's promises and individual autonomy itself, what about sale? It would seem, since sale is simply the promise of an item to another person, that the seller could simply repossess their sold property at any time. This is actually incorrect, however: when someone transfers some property to another, they are not giving up the freedom or autonomy of their future selves at all. On the contrary, they are merely stating in that moment that the labor time that they invested in that object was done ultimately for the gain of that other person, and thereby disavowing a connection with that labor time. Once the connection is broken, it is no longer considered a part of their sphere of free action, their autonomy. Instead, the labor time the buyer invested in whatever they traded for the property is now invested in that property, as they *had to invest that labor time* in order to receive

that property and so, by analogy, that labor time is invested *in* the property. Furthermore, it becomes part of their sphere of autonomous action.

### 5.3. Coercion and Consent

One crucial component of any contract, or any other interaction for that matter, is consent. Without consent, one party is merely subjugating and dominating the other party, abridging their autonomy and breaking the positive reciprocation of cooperation. Acting on someone without their consent is in fact the *primary* example of disrespecting someone else's autonomy, because when you do so, you are choosing for them — either directly, through non-consensual physical invasion — or indirectly — through extortion or other means — what happens to their body, time, and life, without consulting them as to whether it is part of their free plan for life, a choice of their own that is a product of their thinking mind. Furthermore, if someone does not clearly know the consequences of agreeing to some interaction, and the commitments that would entail, engaging in that interaction is just as clearly a violation of their autonomy as engaging in an interaction they actively reject. After all, if they do not know the consequences of what they are agreeing to, how can they actually have chosen what will result from that interaction?

What constitutes consent and coercion, exactly, though? Technically speaking, it could be said that any action is 'consensual' if the other party is not specifically imposing consequences that, but for their choice to do so, would not be present, and which

constitute direct invasions of someone's body or property completely absent any choice on their part. This is the definition of consent/coercion that is most directly hinted at by the analysis above. This is the simplistic definition of consent: if there is no one holding a gun to your head, or someone else's head, or threatening to steal something, etc., then the action is consensual and does not constitute an abridgment of autonomy.

As should be clear from how I have been using the concept of disrespecting (or abridging) autonomy up until now, however, consent is not an obviously binary thing. The simplistic picture is an incomplete analysis. An interaction which is technically 'voluntary,' in that it does not constitute a direct violation of person or property, or threat thereof, can still remove much autonomy, much ability to choose what to do with oneself and one's time, labor, etc., without being strictly coercive in the simplistic sense. This can happen when someone is faced with options that in themselves represent enough of a loss of autonomy that it seems that to preserve what autonomy they have, they must choose from a far more restricted set of options. Once the stage is set like this, the person is left open to those who control the restricted set of options to use their advantage to control the choices, time, and labor of those with restricted options to almost as great a degree as the other options themselves. Thus, if my choices are starvation, suicide, and working for someone, they can, if they so choose, push the loss of autonomy of working for them all the way up to the point where it is just barely better than starvation or death. If they do so, it is unclear how this choice to work for them, and the life under

them, can be termed free, consensual, or voluntary without being nearly farcical. There is no autonomy to be found in the other two choices, and nearly none in the final choice taken; as such, squeezing the autonomy out of the only choice that has some of it at all should clearly be recognized as an abridgment of autonomy. Not as great as the simplistic version of coercion, perhaps, and depending on the amount of autonomy left in the unpleasant options and the amount squeezed out of the main option, the greatness of the coercion can vary, but nevertheless, using a superior position to do such things represents a violation of positive cooperation in respect for autonomy to some degree.

In conjunction with my arguments in section for with regard to absentee property, this understanding of consent as representing the amount of autonomy left in all the options one has open to one, and violations of consent being perpetrated by those who control the amount of autonomy represented in certain options, present a powerful argument against collectivism, but also capitalism, workplace harassment, and more. This is also what justifies the definition of consent as needing to be ongoing and enthusiastic: if consent is actually positively withdrawn, then to continue is a violation of autonomy no matter what; if consent is not enthusiastic, then there is probably a limiting of autonomy going on, which in turn is probably a violation of the reciprocal order, which might need more or less of a response.

How should this response be carried out? Because consent is more of a gradient than a binary switch, and the degree to which consent is given — and therefore the severity of the reciprocal response required, if any, from either the person involved or the

community as a means of protecting each other — any response is going to be inescapably subjective. It is not possible to require (or enforce) a single, legitimate, ‘correct’ decision regarding of coercion has taken place or not. As such, each person will have to react to an interaction that may or may not be consensual by their own lights, defending the person being taken advantage of, or not, to some degree or another, as they best see fit. Each person’s actions and commitment to their opinions concerning the matter will be judged against the others by the action of market forces and the interactions of the reciprocal order, with people who react truly out of line themselves violating the reciprocal order and being brought back down to earth. Thus, a system of ‘enforcement’ of consent will develop through a stigmergic process, instead of enforcing a single consent standard that might, on the one hand, be too lenient, or on the other hand, bar someone from making a bargain that, while an abridgment of their autonomy, is simply the best option available. Without a centralized system enforcing a single ‘legitimate’ rule concerning what counts as consent or not exceptions can be made for particular situations as needed by those best in a situation to know what is needed.

To establish a base level of ability to consent, maturing people could perhaps be presented with a rite of passage, or a psychological evaluation that results in a score or set of scores, on the basis of which each member of the community could judge whether the person is generally — when in their right mind, etc — able to consent to interactions, and react to that person and those who interact with *them* accordingly. It would be important that there be no specific ‘pass’ or ‘fail’ state to such a test, but

instead a score that accurately represents some capacity, so that the decision is made available for all to judge.

#### 5.4. Just Price

There is also perhaps the seeds of a 'just theory of price' here: if the price, represented in property, demanded by a seller far exceeds (in invested labor time) the amount of labor time actually invested in the object, then it could be the case that this person is not respecting the autonomy of the other person, as represented by their labor time, as much as their own. This is not a total violation of positive reciprocal cooperation, but it is something important to consider, and may or may not constitute something that requires correction. This is especially true in the case when the amount of labor time (and invested autonomy) required for the use of property is designed to be indefinite and limitless, such as in the case of rent, profit, or interest: in those cases, we have someone demanding near limitless concessions of autonomy in return for a small concession of autonomy on their part. In this specific case, the limit of any number over a number tending towards infinity is zero, and so it could be said that the landlord, capitalist, or banker, in asking for these infinite rents, has no respect for the autonomy of others. Therefore, in this particular case of unequal price, it is not only an unequal respect for autonomy, which might be dealt with but might not (depending on the circumstances), but a complete violation of reciprocity, which should probably be met with some response. Note that this only applies to people charging a continuous price for a singular item which they invested a finite amount of labor time

into in the past; if it is an ongoing service, then it is fair to ask an ongoing price for it.

This is crucially different than the Marxist labor theory of value because it does not specify absolutely that any unequal price, when calculated in labor time, is exploitation on the part of one person or another, nor that every exchange must take place between things that the same amounts of labor have gone into. I do not reject the marginalist viewpoint on the origins and nature of value and price on the market. Instead, this is merely to set boundaries on price. As long as prices are roughly sensible, no one will have an issue, even if they are fairly unequal in invested labor time. As long as the amount of effort and skill invested in something is recognized in the trade, it will be seen as acceptable cooperation; but if the amount given on one side is vastly out of proportion to the amount given on the other side, then cooperation will begin to break down dangerously.<sup>24</sup>

## 6. Organization

*What a hell of a day to embrace disorder And there  
is something in your eyes that burns — Dark All  
Day, by GUNSHIP*

In a society of individuals committed to autonomy and an ethic

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<sup>24</sup>See Bland, Amy R, et al. “Cooperative Behavior in the Ultimatum Game and Prisoner’s Dilemma Depends on Players’ Contributions.” *Frontiers*, Frontiers, 1 Jan. 1AD, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01017/full>.

of reciprocity, it is impossible to dictate, plan, or predict what the specific modes of organization and solutions to problems would be. To expect an individualist anarchist to give a precise account of what life post-state and post-capitalism *would* look like is like asking someone to predict the next invention on the market, or the next philosophy that would be produced, or any number of the other things that are the product of the creativity of individuals, acting alone or in concert. It is simply an impossible task, and a task that no one should *want* to do: freeing up individuals to use their own reason and their own ideas in their organization with others and attempts to figure out how to live with others is the entire point of anarchy, and the fact that so many more creative and individual minds will be set to the task, and so many more new solutions tried, is one of the many benefits. Therefore, not only can I not offer a picture of what an individualist anarchist ‘society’ would look like, I refuse to! However, I can offer some ideas about what I think will be most likely, and some ways things *could* work. Keep in mind, all the more, however, that these are merely ideas, not plans or prescriptions.

Individuals committed to the ethic laid out herein would probably organize, insofar as they organize at all, in very different ways than individuals in our modern socioeconomic context do. First of all, in order to preserve their autonomy within the sphere of production, there would be a great preference for independent contracting: each individual producing what they think best to produce on their own, under no authority, with the means of production that they personally own and use, under the guidance



of no one but themselves.<sup>25</sup> This ideal is increasingly possible, as the means to manufacture everything (both physical and non-physical) become smaller and cheaper; we can see the seeds of this in the DIY and ‘maker’ communities, as well as in the world of software development. Kevin Carson gives a modern example of something like this in Italy:

The closest existing model for sustainable manufacturing is Emilia-Romagna. In that region of 4.2 million people, the most prosperous in Italy, manufacturing centers on “flexible manufacturing networks” of small-scale firms, rather than enormous factories or vertically integrated corporations. Small-scale, general-purpose machinery is integrated into craft production, and frequently switches between different product lines. It follows a lean production model geared to demand, with production taking place only to fill orders, so there’s no significant inventory cost. Supply chains are mostly local, as is the market. The local economy is not prone to the same boom-bust cycle which results from overproduction to keep unit costs down, without regard to demand. Although a significant share of Emilia-Romagna’s output goes to the export market, its industry would suffer far less dislocation from a collapse of the global economy than its counterparts in the United States; given the small scale of production and the short local supply chains, a shift to production primarily for local needs

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<sup>25</sup>See Kevin Carson’s book, *The Homebrew Industrial Revolution*

would be relatively uncomplicated. The region's average wage is about double that of Italy for a whole, and some 45% of its GDP comes from cooperatively owned enterprises.[2]

Emilia-Romagna's production model is a fulfillment of the potential of electrically powered machinery. The decentralizing potential of small-scale, electrically powered machinery was a central theme of Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories and Workshops*. With electricity "distributed in the houses for bringing into motion small motors of from one-quarter to twelve horse-power," workers were able to leave the small workshops to work in their houses.[3] More important, by freeing machinery up from a single prime mover, it ended all limits on where the small workshops themselves could be located. The primary basis for economy of scale, as it existed in the nineteenth century, was the need to economize on horsepower — a justification that vanished when the distribution of electrical power eliminated reliance on a single source of power.<sup>26</sup>

This revolution in radically distributed production techniques will only become more possible without a patent monopoly limiting competition dramatically (especially in preventing individuals from producing patented goods) and enforcing cartelization. As

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<sup>26</sup>Carson, Kevin. "The Seeds of the New System." *Center for a Stateless Society*, <https://c4ss.org/content/23567>.

Carson says in a different essay,

Without intellectual property, in any industry where the basic production equipment is widely affordable, and bottom-up networking renders management obsolete, it is likely that self-managed, cooperative production will replace the old managerial hierarchies. The network revolution, if its full potential is realized (as James Bennett put it in the appropriately titled article “The End of Capitalism and the Triumph of the Market Economy”), will lead to substantial redistribution of power and money from the twentieth-century industrial producers of information, culture, and communications—like Hollywood, the recording industry, and perhaps the broadcasters and some of the telecommunications giants—to a combination of widely diffuse populations around the globe and the market actors that will build the tools that make this population better able to produce its own information environment rather than buying it ready-made.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, this model of highly networked and decentralized demand-focused production based on general-purpose manufacturing tools, managed by individuals without the need for huge corporate hierarchies, is far more efficient in the world of 21st century technology than the old corporate model is:

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<sup>27</sup>See Carson, Kevin. “How ‘Intellectual Property’ Impedes Competition: Kevin A. Carson.” *FEE Freeman Article*, Foundation for Economic Education, 23 Sept. 2009, <https://fee.org/articles/how-intellectual-property-impedes-competition/>.

But the corporate framework is itself unsustainable. The proliferation of even more productive small-scale machinery, like desktop digitally-controlled machine tools, combined with the unenforceability of “intellectual property” law in the digital age, and combined as well with new ways for ordinary people to pool dispersed capital, are leading to a singularity that will tear down the corporate walls. The separate terminal crises of corporate capitalism are reinforcing each other to create a perfect storm: the corporate economy’s need for subsidized inputs continues to grow exponentially, even as the collapse of the rents on intellectual property causes the base of taxable value to implode.

So long as the state successfully manages to prop up the centralized corporate economic order, libertarian and decentralist technologies and organizational forms will be incorporated into the old corporate framework. As the system approaches its limits of sustainability, those elements become increasingly destabilizing forces within the present system, and prefigure the successor system. When the system finally reaches that limit, those elements will (to paraphrase Marx) break out of their state capitalist integument and become the building blocks of a fundamentally different free market society. . .

Peer production and the open source model were originally developed in the immaterial realm, lead-

ing to the stresses on the culture industry described earlier. But as technology for physical production becomes feasible on increasingly smaller scales and at less cost, and as the transaction costs for pooling many dispersed small-scale capitals for a single venture approach zero, there is less and less disconnect between the respective applications of peer production principle in the immaterial and physical realms. In effect, the distinction between Richard Stallman's "free speech" and "free beer" is eroding in the realm of physical production. Michel Bauwens writes:

- P2P can arise not only in the immaterial sphere of intellectual and software production, but wherever there is access to distributed technology: spare computing cycles, distributed telecommunications and any kind of viral communicator meshwork.
- P2P can arise wherever other forms of distributed fixed capital are available: such is the case for carpooling, which is the second most used mode of transportation in the U.S. . . .
- P2P can arise wherever financial capital can be distributed. Initiatives such as the ZOPA bank point in that direction. Cooperative purchase and use of large capital goods are a possibility.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>"self-determination-theory - APA Dictionary of Psychology." *American Psychological Association*, American Psychological Association, <https://dictionary.apa.org/self-determination-theory>.

These independent producers would trade with each other for parts or whatever else they need to produce a finished project at their stage of production, and perhaps create contract agreements to buy certain amounts at certain prices with each other, but such contracts are of course not enforceable and so the network of independent producers would be fundamentally fluid, responding rapidly to the demands of the market and the abilities of individuals, as a peer-to-peer, distributed economy. This would be further facilitated by just-in-time manufacturing techniques, and further advantaged in competition with large centralized corporations (or cooperatives) by the fact that transportation and centralization would no longer be subsidized by a State. These fluid ‘mesh networks’ of producers would also be far more efficient and responsive to market conditions, and lacking all of the knowledge and calculation problems inherent in centralized, non-market modes of production. This would make the economy far less likely to experience boom-bust cycles, as it can more rapidly respond to demand shocks.

Insofar as it is impossible to break some process of production down into sections that can be performed by individuals or very small groups in a reasonable manner that is not overcome by transaction costs, individuals will need to form organizations to produce certain things. It is my opinion that worker cooperatives of one type or another will be preferred for this task. Worker cooperatives are a superior organizational form to corporations for many reasons.

First of all, it is easier for worker cooperatives to hire workers. They present a far better offer: one in which the profits of working

for the cooperative are directly placed in the hands of the workers, instead of the workers having to depend on the caprices, poor knowledge, and adverse incentives of bosses in order to get a reward; in which the each worker is subject to far less arbitrary authority and hierarchy, and indeed retains some control over their workplace, through being a partial owner of the whole business; and one in which, because of that partial ownership, each worker enjoys far greater job security and stability, as well as the hope of decreased hours across the board and stabilized pay in the face of automation, instead of (sometimes) increased pay for some and unemployment for others. To quote Bertrand Russel:

This is the morality of the Slave State, applied in circumstances totally unlike those in which it arose. No wonder the result has been disastrous. Let us take an illustration. Suppose that, at a given moment, a certain number of people are engaged in the manufacture of pins. They make as many pins as the world needs, working (say) eight hours a day. Someone makes an invention by which the same number of men can make twice as many pins: pins are already so cheap that hardly any more will be bought at a lower price. In a sensible world, everybody concerned in the manufacturing of pins would take to working four hours instead of eight, and everything else would go on as before. But in the actual world this would be thought demoralizing. The men still work eight hours, there are too many pins, some employers go

bankrupt, and half the men previously concerned in making pins are thrown out of work. There is, in the end, just as much leisure as on the other plan, but half the men are totally idle while half are still overworked. In this way, it is insured that the unavoidable leisure shall cause misery all round instead of being a universal source of happiness. Can anything more insane be imagined?<sup>29</sup>

Second of all, worker cooperatives are also likely to be more efficient, as they do not suffer as severely from worker incentive problems, principal-agent problems, knowledge problems, and calculation problems. To quote once more from Carson, on the subject of knowledge, incentive, and agency problems:

In an article in last June's *Freeman*, I applied some ideas from the socialist-calculation debate to the private corporation and examined the extent to which it is an island of calculational chaos in the market economy. I'd like to expand that line of analysis now and apply some common free-market insights on knowledge and incentives to the operation of the corporate hierarchy.

F. A. Hayek, in "The Use of Knowledge in Society," used distributed, or idiosyncratic, knowledge — the unique situational knowledge possessed by each

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<sup>29</sup>Russell, Bertrand. "In Praise of Idleness." *The Anarchist Library*, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/bertrand-russell-in-praise-of-idleness-11-02-05-22-00-46>.



individual — as an argument against state central planning.

Milton Friedman's dictum about "other people's money" is well known. People are more careful and efficient in spending their own than other people's money, and likewise in spending money on themselves more so than in spending money on other people.

A third insight is that people act most efficiently when they completely internalize the positive and negative results of their actions.

The corporate hierarchy violates all of these principles in a manner quite similar to the bureaucracy of a socialist state. Those at the top make decisions concerning a production process about which they likely know as little as did, say, the chief of an old Soviet industrial ministry.

The employees of a corporation, from the CEO down to the worker on the shop floor, are spending other people's money, or using other people's resources, for other people. Its managers, as Adam Smith observed 200 years ago, are "managers rather of other people's money than of their own."

By its nature, the corporation substitutes administrative incentives for what Oliver Williamson called the "high powered incentives" of the market: effort and productivity are separated from reward. As Ronald

Coase observed some 70 years ago,

If a workman moves from department Y to department X, he does not go because of a change in relative prices, but because he is ordered to do so. . . .

It can, I think, be assumed that the distinguishing mark of the firm is the supersession of the price mechanism.<sup>30</sup>

Concerning the calculation problems inherent in the corporate form, he says:

This calculation argument can be applied not only to a state-planned economy, but also to the internal planning of the large corporation under interventionism, or state capitalism. (By state capitalism, I refer to the means by which, as Murray Rothbard said, “our corporate state uses the coercive taxing power either to accumulate corporate capital or to lower corporate costs,” in addition to cartelizing markets through regulations, enforcing artificial property rights like “intellectual property,” and otherwise protecting privilege against competition.)

Rothbard developed the economic calculation argument in just this way. He argued that the further removed the internal transfer pricing of a corporation became from real market prices, the more internal

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<sup>30</sup>See Carson, Kevin. “Hierarchy or the Market.” *Center for a Stateless Society*, 5 Apr. 2013, <https://c4ss.org/content/18100>.

allocation of resources was characterized by calculational chaos.

Mises's calculation argument can be applied to the large corporation—both under state capitalism and to some extent in the free market—in another way not considered by Rothbard. The basic cause of calculational chaos, as Mises understood it, was the separation of entrepreneurial from technical knowledge and the attempt to make production decisions based on technical considerations alone, without regard to such entrepreneurial considerations as factor pricing. But the principle also works the other way: production decisions based solely on input and product prices, without regard to the details of production (the typical MBA practice of considering only finance and marketing, while treating the production process as a black box), also result in calculational chaos.

The chief focus of this article, however, is Mises's calculation argument in the light of distributed information. F. A. Hayek, in "The Uses of Knowledge in Society," raised a new problem: not the generation or source of data, but the sheer volume of data to be processed. In so doing, he is commonly understood to have opened a second front in Mises's war against state planning. But in fact his argument was almost as damaging to Mises as to the collectivists.

Mises minimized the importance of distributed in-

formation in his own criticisms of state planning. He denied any correlation between bureaucratization and large size in themselves. Bureaucracy as such was a particular rules-based approach to policy-making, in contrast to the profit-driven behavior of the entrepreneur. The private firm, therefore, was by definition exempt from the problem of bureaucracy.

In so arguing, he ignored the information and coordination problems inherent in large size. The large corporation necessarily distributes the knowledge relevant to informed entrepreneurial decisions among many departments and sub-departments until the cost of aggregating that knowledge outweighs the benefits of doing so.

Try as he might, Mises could not exempt the capitalist corporation from the problem of bureaucracy. One cannot define bureaucracy out of existence, or overcome the problem of distributed knowledge, simply by using the word “entrepreneur.” Mises tried to make the bureaucratic or non-bureaucratic character of an organization a simple matter of its organizational goals rather than its functioning. The motivation of the corporate employee, from the CEO down to the production worker, by definition, will be profit-seeking; his will is in harmony with that of the stockholder because he belongs to the stockholder’s organization.

By defining organizational goals as “profit-seeking,” Mises—like the neoclassicals—treated the internal workings of the organization as a black box. In treating the internal policies of the capitalist corporation as inherently profit-driven, Mises simultaneously treated the entrepreneur as an indivisible actor whose will and perception permeate the entire organization. Mises’s entrepreneur was a brooding omnipresence, guiding the actions of every employee from CEO to janitor.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, the worker cooperative remains a form of authority and hierarchy, just a less severe and despotic one than corporations and bossism: after all, one is subordinated to the collective vote of the other workers. One has some say in it, at least, and at least everyone who is in control is at the same level of the organization as those who are controlled and are therefore subject to whatever rules they make for themselves, but nevertheless democracy is *not* perfect individual freedom, whatever the communists will tell you.

I do not deny that corporations may exist, either, but I suspect they will be greatly reduced in power when worker cooperatives are free to compete with them; right now, under the current state capitalist system, there are very many subsidies, monopolies, and privileges that corporations and the wealthy have received, and continue to receive, from the system which do not stem from

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<sup>31</sup>See Carson, Kevin. “Economic Calculation in the Corporate Commonwealth.” *Center for a Stateless Society*, 16 Nov. 2012, <https://c4ss.org/content/14497>.

free market forces.<sup>32 33 34 35 36 37</sup> To quote Roderick Long:

Corporations tend to fear competition, because competition exerts downward pressure on prices and upward pressure on salaries; moreover, success on the market comes with no guarantee of permanency, depending as it does on outdoing other firms at correctly figuring out how best to satisfy forever-changing consumer preferences, and that kind of vulnerability to loss is no picnic. It is no surprise, then, that throughout U.S. history corporations have been overwhelmingly hostile to the free market. Indeed, most of the existing regulatory apparatus—including those regulations widely misperceived as restraints on cor-

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<sup>32</sup>See Carson, Kevin. “Hierarchy or the Market.” *Center for a Stateless Society*, 5 Apr. 2013, <https://c4ss.org/content/18100>.

<sup>33</sup>See Childs, Roy A. “Big Business and the Rise of American Statism (1971).” *Praxeology.net*, Molinari Institute, <https://praxeology.net/RC-BRS.htm>.

<sup>34</sup>See Carson, Kevin. “How ‘Intellectual Property’ Impedes Competition: Kevin A. Carson.” *FEE Freeman Article*, Foundation for Economic Education, 23 Sept. 2009, <https://fee.org/articles/how-intellectual-property-impedes-competition/>.

<sup>35</sup>See Carson, Kevin. “Primitive Accumulation: The Process That Keeps Giving, and Giving...” *Center for a Stateless Society*, 2 July 2015, <https://c4ss.org/content/38562>.

<sup>36</sup>Read “Markets Freed from Capitalism” by Charles W. Johnson in <https://radgeek.com/gt/2011/10/Markets-Not-Capitalism-2011-Chartier-and-Johnson.pdf>

<sup>37</sup>See Carson, Kevin. “Health Care and Radical Monopoly.” *FEE Freeman Article*, Foundation for Economic Education, 23 Feb. 2010, <https://fee.org/articles/health-care-and-radical-monopoly/>.

porate power—were vigorously supported, lobbied for, and in some cases even drafted by the corporate elite.[1]

Corporate power depends crucially on government intervention in the marketplace.[2] This is obvious enough in the case of the more overt forms of government favoritism such as subsidies, bailouts,[3] and other forms of corporate welfare; protectionist tariffs; explicit grants of monopoly privilege; and the seizing of private property for corporate use via eminent domain (as in *Kelo v. New London*). But these direct forms of pro-business intervention are supplemented by a swarm of indirect forms whose impact is arguably greater still.

As I have written elsewhere:

One especially useful service that the state can render the corporate elite is cartel enforcement. Price-fixing agreements are unstable on a free market, since while all parties to the agreement have a collective interest in seeing the agreement generally hold, each has an individual interest in breaking the agreement by underselling the other parties in order to win away their customers; and even if the cartel manages to maintain discipline over its own membership, the oligopolistic prices tend to attract

new competitors into the market. Hence the advantage to business of state-enforced cartelisation. Often this is done directly, but there are indirect ways too, such as imposing uniform quality standards that relieve firms from having to compete in quality. (And when the quality standards are high, lower-quality but cheaper competitors are priced out of the market.)

The ability of colossal firms to exploit economies of scale is also limited in a free market, since beyond a certain point the benefits of size (e.g., reduced transaction costs) get outweighed by *diseconomies* of scale (e.g., calculational chaos stemming from absence of price feedback)—*unless* the state enables them to socialise these costs by immunising them from competition – e.g., by imposing fees, licensure requirements, capitalisation requirements, and other regulatory burdens that disproportionately impact newer, poorer entrants as opposed to richer, more established firms.[4]<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>See Long, Roderick T. “Corporations versus the Market; or, Whip Conflation Now.” *Cato Unbound*, 25 Apr. 2013, <https://www.cato-unbound.org/2008/11/10/roderick-t-long/corporations-versus-market-or-whip-conflation-now/>.



In fact, it's not even clear if the corporation, at it exists under modern state capitalism, is even a free market institution at all:

A corporation that is compatible with natural law is no more than an association of natural persons, who agree to recognize the association as an artificial person "in its own right." However, as far as other persons are concerned, the existence of the association and its recognition by the partners as an independent artificial person in no way diminish the responsibility or the liability of the partners. How the partners assign responsibilities and liabilities among themselves is their business, but they lawfully cannot agree to deflect them to the artificial corporate person that they created. The partners own the corporation, and, as owners, they are fully responsible and liable for what "it" does. I cannot give lawful personality to my dog or my car and tell others that, when an accident happens, they should sue the dog or the car and leave me alone. In natural law, a corporation is just as much a means of human action as a dog, a car, or any other tool might be.

The privilege of "legal personality," however, consists precisely in the dilution of the responsibilities and liabilities of ownership. For those who receive the privilege, it is both an immunity and an empowerment. For others, the privilege is a dilution of their

respectable rights.<sup>39</sup>

I also think that the economy will be much more focused on local business. Not only is size itself probably more of a disadvantage than an advantage without the state to protect large corporations from competition, large scale combined with large spacial distribution is even more of a problem: if diseconomies of scale do not overwhelm global and national corporations by default, being forced to pay the full costs of long distance transportation probably will. On the free market advantage or disadvantage is not a matter of absolute costs, so even if transportation is cheaper and more efficient on the free market, if those who actually *use* long distance transportation are forced to bear the full cost of doing so (in maintaining roads, etc), instead of being able to share the costs with everyone else through the tax system, they are relatively worse off in comparison to local businesses that don't have to pay for long distance transportation, in comparison to the balance under the state. This means that we could expect a shift towards local businesses on a free market, although maybe not the total elimination of non-local businesses. To quote Roderick Long (from the same article) again:

Vast corporate empires like Wal-Mart are often either hailed or condemned (depending on the speaker's perspective) as products of the free market. But not only is Wal-Mart a direct beneficiary of (usually local) government intervention in the form of such

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<sup>39</sup>See Van Dun, Frank. "Is the Corporation a Free-Market Institution?" *FEE Freeman Article*, Foundation for Economic Education, 1 Mar. 2003, <https://fee.org/articles/is-the-corporation-a-free-market-institution/>.

measures as eminent domain and tax breaks, but it also reaps less obvious benefits from policies of wider application. The funding of public highways through tax revenues, for example, constitutes a *de facto* transportation subsidy, allowing Wal-Mart and similar chains to socialize the costs of shipping and so enabling them to compete more successfully against local businesses; the low prices we enjoy at Wal-Mart in our capacity as consumers are thus made possible in part by our having already indirectly subsidized Wal-Mart's operating costs in our capacity as taxpayers.

Additionally, under a free market, labor unions would be far more free to equalize the bargaining power between corporations and their workers. The corporate state has currently taken firm control over unions, turning them into a sort of 'controlled opposition' party and fostering conservatism and minimal demands. To quote Charles Johnson:

Too many of my comrades on the Left fall into the trap of taking the Labor Day version of history for granted: modern unions are trumpeted as the main channel for the voice of workers; the institutionalization of the system through the Wagner Act and the National Labor Relations Board in 1935, and the ensuing spike in union membership during the New Deal period, are regarded as one of the great triumphs for workers of the past century.

You may not be surprised to find out that I don't find this picture of history *entirely* persuasive. The Wagner Act was the capstone of years of government promotion of conservative, AFL-line unions in order to subvert the organizing efforts of decentralized, uncompromising, radical unions such as the IWW and to avoid the previous year's tumultuous general strikes in San Francisco, Toledo, and Minneapolis. The labor movement as we know it today was created by government bureaucrats who effectively created a massive subsidy program for conservative unions which followed the AFL and CIO models of organizing — which emphatically did *not* include general strikes or demands for worker ownership of firms. Once the NLRB-recognized unions had swept over the workforce and co-opted most of the movement for organized labor, the second blow of the one-two punch fell: government benefits always mean government strings attached, and in this case it was the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, which pulled the activities of the recognized unions firmly into the regulatory grip of the federal government. Both the internal culture of post-Wagner mainstream unions, and the external controls of the federal labor regulatory apparatus, have dramatically hamstrung the labor movement for the past half-century. Union methods are legally restricted to collective bargaining and limited strikes (which *cannot* legally be expanded to secondary strikes, and which can be, and have been,

broken by arbitrary fiat of the President). Union hiring halls are banned. Union resources have been systematically sapped by banning closed shop contracts, and encouraging states to ban union shop contracts — thus forcing unions to represent free-riding employees who do not join them and do not contribute dues. Union demands are effectively constrained to modest (and easily revoked) improvements in wages and conditions. And, since modern unions can do so little to achieve their professed goals, and since their professed goals have been substantially lowered anyway, unionization of the workforce continues its decades-long slide.<sup>40</sup>

On a free market, however, unions would once again be totally free to use all of the direct action and asymmetric warfare techniques that they used to get us the eight hour day and the five day work week:

Right-wing libertarians of the vulgar sort like to argue that unions depend primarily on the threat of force, backed by the state, to exclude non-union workers. . . Without forcible exclusion of scabs, they say, strikes would almost always turn into lockouts and union defeats. Although this has acquired the status of dogma at Mises.Org, it's nonsense on stilts. The primary reason for the effectiveness of a strike is

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<sup>40</sup>See Johnson, Charles. "Free the Unions (and All Political Prisoners)." *Center for a Stateless Society*, 1 May 2013, <https://c4ss.org/content/16349>.

not the exclusion of scabs, but the transaction costs involved in hiring and training replacement workers, and the steep loss of productivity entailed in the disruption of human capital, institutional memory, and tacit knowledge.

With the strike organized in depth, with multiple lines of defense — those sympathy and boycott strikes at every stage of production — the cost and disruption have a multiplier effect far beyond that of a strike in a single plant. Under such conditions, even a large minority of workers walking off the job at each stage of production can be quite effective.

Taft-Hartley greatly reduced the effectiveness of strikes at individual plants by prohibiting such coordination of actions across multiple plants or industries. Taft-Hartley's cooling off periods also gave employers advance warning time to prepare for such disruptions, and greatly reduced the informational rents embodied in the training of the existing workforce. Were such restrictions on sympathy and boycott strikes in suppliers [not] in place, today's "just-in-time" economy would likely be far more vulnerable to disruption than that of the 1930s.

But long before Taft-Hartley, the labor law regime of the New Deal had already created a fundamental shift in the form of labor struggle.

Before Wagner and the NLRB-enforced collective bargaining process, labor struggle was less focused on strikes, and more focused on what workers did in the workplace itself to exert leverage against management. They focused, in other words, on what the Wobblies call “direct action on the job”; or in the colorful phrase of a British radical workers’ daily at the turn of the century, “staying in on strike.” The reasoning was explained in the Wobbly Pamphlet [PDF] “How to Fire Your Boss: A Worker’s Guide to Direct Action“:

The bosses, with their large financial reserves, are better able to withstand a long drawn-out strike than the workers. In many cases, court injunctions will freeze or confiscate the union’s strike funds. And worst of all, a long walk-out only gives the boss a chance to replace striking workers with a scab (replacement) workforce.

Workers are far more effective when they take direct action while still on the job. By deliberately reducing the boss’ profits while continuing to collect wages, you can cripple the boss without giving some scab the opportunity to take your job.

Such tactics included slowdowns, sick-ins, random one-day walkouts at unannounced intervals, working to rule, “good work” strikes, and “open mouth sabotage.” Labor followed, in other words, a classic

asymmetric warfare model. Instead of playing by the enemy's rules and suffering one honorable defeat after another, they played by their own rules and mercilessly exploited the enemy's weak points.

The whole purpose of the Wagner regime was to put an end to this asymmetric warfare model. As Thomas Ferguson and G. William Domhoff have both argued, corporate backing for the New Deal labor accord came mainly from capital-intensive industry — the heart of the New Deal coalition in general. Because of the complicated technical nature of their production processes and their long planning horizons, their management required long-term stability and predictability. At the same time, because they were extremely capital-intensive, labor costs were a relatively modest part of total costs. Management, therefore, was willing to trade significant wage increases and job security for social peace on the job. Wagner came about, not because the workers were begging for it, but because the bosses were begging for a regime of enforceable labor contracts.

The purpose of the Wagner regime was to divert labor away from the asymmetric warfare model to a new one, in which union bureaucrats enforced the terms of contracts on their own membership. The primary function of union bureaucracies, under the new order, was to suppress wildcat action by their rank and file, to suppress direct action on the job,



and to limit labor action to declared strikes under NLRB rules.

The New Deal labor agenda had the same practical effect as telling the militiamen at Lexington and Concord to come out from behind the rocks, put on bright red uniforms, and march in parade ground formation, in return for a system of arbitration to guarantee they didn't lose all the time.<sup>41</sup>

This, in conjunction with the increase in peer-to-peer networks of individual producers, and the likely prevalence of worker cooperatives, will likely force even the corporations that *do* exist in the freed market to be far more beneficial to those who work for them. Competition for workers on the one hand, and union power on the other, will make the workplace of the reciprocal order very different from the workplace of today.

In this free market, there will be no official, privileged currency, which only a few banks have the right to inflate and which is the only valid legal tender for paying debts and taxes. Instead, individuals will be free to form mutual banks, and create and trade currency as they please. This will lead to low interest credit being available for all, instead of just the rich and powerful, and to the degree that there is inflation, it will be regulated by the market at large and used for the benefit of the majority, instead

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<sup>41</sup>See Carson, Kevin. "Labour Struggle in a Free Market." *The Anarchist Library*, 4 July 2008, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/kevin-carson-labour-struggle-in-a-free-market>.

of hurting them.<sup>42 43 44 45 46</sup> This will make sure that low cost credit is far more available for individuals to acquire their own capital, without having to go to a capitalist, thereby increasing individual autonomy in the economy. It is also possible that credit, debt, and money will be totally different without a state.<sup>47</sup>

In conjunction with all of this, as well as free (and mutual)

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<sup>42</sup>See Greene, William B. "Mutual Banking." *The Anarchist Library*, 17 Mar. 2019, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/william-batchelder-greene-mutual-banking>.

<sup>43</sup>See Carson, Kevin. "Hierarchy or the Market." *Center for a Stateless Society*, 5 Apr. 2013, <https://c4ss.org/content/18100>.

<sup>44</sup>In the market as it currently is today, inflation has two harmful effects on the working class and poor. Firstly, as inflation goes on, prices rise, as corporations are more than willing to raise prices in order to get more profits. This does not translate to workers' wages, however: corporations are far less motivated to raise wages, only motivated to do so by the competition of other corporations, and so if they can they won't do so. Inflation, and the common ignorance of people regarding it, provides a signal that can be used to form essentially a wage cartel without any centralized planning or direction, as corporations refuse to raise wages, and so prices go up while wages largely stagnate. Moreover, inflated money is not air-dropped evenly throughout the economy, so those who get the new money first (the rich and powerful) get to spend it at pre-inflation prices, but as it circulates through the economy those who get it later benefit from it less and less, until it eventually gets to the poor, who have been paying the higher, inflated prices for a long time, and only now get a commensurate increase in wages (if they even do).

<sup>45</sup>See Carson, Kevin. "Is Money Too Cheap, or Too Dear? Both." *Center for a Stateless Society*, 26 Apr. 2011, <https://c4ss.org/content/6888>.

<sup>46</sup>See Van Der Meer, M. George. "In Defense of Mutual Banking." *Center for a Stateless Society*, 28 Nov. 2012, <https://c4ss.org/content/14775>.

<sup>47</sup>See Cat, Black. "Money without the State." *Center for a Stateless Society*, 7 Oct. 2019, <https://c4ss.org/content/52409>.

banking ensuring that inflation is used, when it exists at all, to benefit everyday individuals instead of the rich and powerful, and that everyone can get low-interest credit, the forces of individuals producing and trading private property, in other words, the free market, will tend strongly towards socialist ends.<sup>48 49 50 51 52</sup> To quote from Kevin Carson:

The natural effect of unfettered market competition is socialism. For a short time the innovator receives a large profit, as a reward for being first to the market. Then, as competitors adopt the innovation, competition drives these profits down to zero and the price gravitates toward the new, lower cost of production made possible by this innovation (that price including, of course, the cost of the producer's maintenance and the amortization of her capital outlays). So in a free market, the cost savings in labor required to produce any given commodity would quickly be so-

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<sup>48</sup>See Carson, Kevin. "Who Owns the Benefit? the Free Market as Full Communism." *Center for a Stateless Society*, 12 Sept. 2012, <https://c4ss.org/content/12561>.

<sup>49</sup>See Carson, Kevin. "Left-Libertarianism: No Masters, No Bosses." *Center for a Stateless Society*, 16 Nov. 2012, <https://c4ss.org/content/14459>.

<sup>50</sup>See Tucker, Benjamin R. "State Socialism and Anarchism: How Far They Agree, and Wherein They Differ (1888)." *Praxeology.net*, Molinari Institute, <https://praxeology.net/BT-SSA.htm>.

<sup>51</sup>See Proudhon, Pierre-Joseph. "The General Idea of the Revolution in the 19th Century." *The Anarchist Library*, 11 Dec. 2018, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/pierre-joseph-proudhon-the-general-idea-of-the-revolution-in-the-19th-century>.

<sup>52</sup>Read also: [https://invisiblemolotov.files.wordpress.com/2009/09/garychartier\\_forprint\\_binding](https://invisiblemolotov.files.wordpress.com/2009/09/garychartier_forprint_binding)

cialized in the form of reduced labor cost to purchase it.

Only when the state enforces artificial scarcities, artificial property rights, and barriers to competition, is it possible for a capitalist to appropriate some part of the cost savings as a permanent rent. The capitalist, under these conditions, is enabled to engage in monopoly pricing. That is, rather than being forced by competition to price her goods at the actual cost of production (including her own livelihood), she can target the price to the consumer's ability to pay.<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, we would, hopefully at least, see an end to the strange, disjointed, and unhealthy individuals in our current society have with work itself:

In theory, we can indeed eliminate bullshit jobs, embrace automation, and shorten the individual work schedule quite significantly and quite easily if not for the fact that wages are not at living wage levels for a lot of people as is and cutting their hours without compensation of some sort would hurt them tremendously. Increased worker ownership would help solve some of this problem since, as Wolff pointed out, worker cooperatives tend not to fire workers, and thus if hours were shortened due to a decrease in

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<sup>53</sup>See Carson, Kevin. "Who Owns the Benefit? the Free Market as Full Communism." *Center for a Stateless Society*, 12 Sept. 2012, <https://c4ss.org/content/12561>.

needed labor, the workers would still receive their same pay for the same amount of production despite the decrease in needed labor.<sup>54</sup>

## 7. Order Under Anarchy

I stand ready to negotiate, but I want no part of laws: I acknowledge none; **I protest against every order with which some authority may feel pleased on the basis of some alleged necessity to over-rule my free will. Laws: We know what they are, and what they are worth! They are spider webs for the rich and mighty, steel chains for the poor and weak, fishing nets in the hands of government.** — Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

### 7.1. General Statements

A common objection levied against anarchists, which is probably now at the forefront of the minds of any who have read this treatise up till now, is that in the absence of the state, it is impossible to provide any stable order for society. After all, how can a community of individuals subject to no legitimized authority from above, which sets down uniform laws that govern how all may act, provide security and protection for its members,

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<sup>54</sup>See Glitterbomb, Logan Marie. “Bullshit Jobs and the End of Work (as We Know It).” *Center for a Stateless Society*, 20 Nov. 2020, <https://c4ss.org/content/53949>.

and prevent or solve conflicts? How will they know what to do, and what is to ensure that they do it, if there is no group of people to force them all to a single plan?

This objection is the product of limited thinking. In the absence of law — that top-down imposition of rules by an authority to govern the actions of all, legitimized as the ‘one true way’ — humans do not suddenly lose the ability to compromise with others in order to achieve peace and prosperous relations. They likewise do not lose their social capacity for good feelings: trust, empathy, etc. Least of all do they lose that common sense intuition for the game theory of interacting with others that allows most people to intuit the content of the two principles of my ethic when they are given time and mental space away from ‘the law’ to do so.

An order that is founded on the autonomy of each individual participating in it, to recognize and compromise where necessary, convenient, or beneficial, and defend one’s own interests and the interests of others in like conditions, can be just as stable as — if not more stable than — an order founded on the top-heavy conception that all order must stem from authority and imposition, instead of compromise and stigmergy. After all, when power is distributed or decentralized, there is no one central locus of control that, if captured, brings the rest of society to its knees. There is no single failure point, and there are true ‘checks and balances,’ in a system where no one has any more control over the behavior and norms than any other.

With these general statements in mind, I think it is time to

elaborate in more depth how protection and conflict resolution might be provided in a system without laws, given that the description of economic organization given above depends on some kind of coherent, stable order. Keep in mind that the same caveats about ‘planning’ an anarchist society that I voiced above are in full effect here: this is all speculation, and trying to state that this *must be* how it will turn out, or trying to enforce such a result in an attempt to make it the only ‘legitimate’ option, would defeat the entire purpose of anarchism in the first place. I am merely presenting what I believe to be the most beneficial and probable methods of providing order to an anarchist society. Even within the context of these projection-suggestions, keep in mind that they will never be, and should never be, the sole source of legitimate decisions. There *is* no legitimacy or illegitimacy under anarchism, only what each individual thinks is correct, because there is no grant of authority to some standard, person, or group of people to decide what everyone says, thinks, or does regarding any matter, and the concept of a single legitimate outcome is a centralizing and hierarchical force itself. In the face of all these caveats, it is nonetheless interesting and sometimes profitable to speculate about how things might be done within the limits of a certain socio-ethical theory, so I will proceed with my analysis.

## 7.2. A Picture of Order

In the first place, it should be noted that a reciprocal order, once established and understood, is stable in itself: each individual is motivated to continue cooperating with everyone else, even

if they are not particularly interested in the cooperation of a specific person, because if they cease cooperation with that person, they might well lose cooperation from others. When they cease cooperation with someone, they run the risk of accruing a negative reputation: others become less sure of positive cooperation on their part being met with positive cooperation, making it less in their interest. If someone does not cooperate with your neighbor when it suits them not to, what is to guarantee that they will cooperate with you?

This, however, is actually a very forgiving system of enforcement, as it may take some time for someone's reputation to be damaged enough to instill such doubts, meaning that a general loss of cooperation from the community, instead of just the individual harmed, won't be immediate, preventing the whole network of reciprocal interactions from crumbling at the first violation. Additionally, this is a response that scales humanely with the severity and frequency of violations on the part of violator, as it operates on the basis of concerns for themselves and views on fairness on the part of the other members of the community, not some unilaterally instituted rule for punishment of violations.

This will probably not be an overly heavy-handed mechanism of 'mob justice' and enforcement of authoritarian social norms, either. After all, no community need be, or will be, wholly of the same mind on a matter. Some may choose to sanction someone for something, but others may choose not to, and it is in the interest of all not to take overly violent or enthusiastic action for fear of general cooperation breaking down. There is no single decided and legitimate outcome, even if a mediator is involved,



so the community can arrive at a punishment stigmergically: if some believe others are punishing someone too harshly, they can try to lighten the load and vice versa, and the balance will be determined by the strength of either side's convictions.

Nor would anyone who values autonomy attempt to use the forces of general social agreement to squash someone else's autonomy, when a culture of doing so would likely hurt them just as much in the long run. Of course, general social oppression could not automatically be avoided in this way — anarchy is not a utopia — but neither is it avoided under the state, and at least absent a state, those oppressed will have no unilateral system making them behave nicely and peacefully toward their oppressors.

This is not an overly light-handed mechanism for enforcement, either. If someone truly commits a serious crime, one which cannot be solved through restitution and restorative justice, and which demonstrates a serious danger to others in the community, there will be a strong incentive on the part of each individual embedded in the network that interacts with the criminal to take the necessary steps to protect themselves and each other. For instance, if there is a serial killer in our midst, it would be naturally in my interest to take it into my hands to put them out of their misery to prevent further harm to myself and others.

Note, however, that this is not an inherently *legitimate* action, the perpetration of which is protected from question and investigation. If some people think I shouldn't have killed the person I did — perhaps they think I didn't have the right person, or went about it the wrong way, or there were innocent casualties

—I am now on the hook for that. There is no ‘qualified immunity’ in a stateless society!

Of course, all of this runs the risk of fracturing the community around a particularly contentious crime, creating blood feuds and lasting, ongoing violence and damage, destroying the harmonious functioning of a reciprocal society. This is where mediators and investigators come in. Mediators are useful both for restoring conditions of peaceful positive cooperation between two or more individuals directly involved in a conflict, but they are also useful in the performative demonstration of listening to all sides of the story, and all sides’ interests, and constructing a narrative about what happened and what should happen next. Nobody will be bound to adhere to this narrative, there is no ‘official’ outcome, but nevertheless, in healing rifts and disagreements in communities, this is a crucial office. Perhaps it could be performed for money by some who specialize in it, or simply by someone whom the community views as sufficiently wise and neutral, or by several such people until an agreed-upon resolution is reached, I cannot say, but I do know that mediation is a crucial element here. Likewise, in aid of those mediators, investigators, who specialize in interviewing people, analyzing evidence, and so on, will likely be important.

Outside of a direct clustered network of reciprocal interactions, or in situations where there is low trust and low social knowledge, this process could be reified to some degree by mutual protection associations: in the event that one person is injured in some way, the rest of the organization agrees to participate in laying some sanction on the perpetrator (after establishing that their member

is in the wrong, of course, to avoid an unnecessary expenditure of resources and social capital). This sanction could take the form of refusal to trade, ostracism, or even physical violence, and would probably be engaged in only if no restitution to their member was possible, or none was offered.

Of course, it is likely that the perpetrator, if they were not so overly prone to crimes that no mutual protection association would commit to protecting them, would have their own protection association, who would want to protect their interests to some degree, even if they weren't willing to commit fully to protecting them because they agreed that their member was in the wrong. Thus, it would be crucial, in order to avoid costly and possibly ongoing conflicts, to appeal to mediators who have a reputation for fairness, and to agree in contract to some resolution of the situation that is agreeable to both sides. Indeed, it might even be profitable for the purpose of stability to create contracts between associations before any conflict occurs, so that in the event of a conflict between two of their members, there is already an understood and respected procedure in place for handling matters. These contracts might include a mutual understanding of what counts as a violation (different from the rules the associations enforce within their ranks, if they do so at all), what to do in such cases, procedures for establishing guilt and the extent of harm, and procedures concerning the limits of restitution and retribution.

Mutual protection associations would not need to be a solely out-facing phenomena, either. Providing mediation and an established code of norms between their members, democratically

decided-upon, might be a quite useful service. This would be superior to how the state provides such services in that the association is non-hierarchical and directly accountable to each of its members, and also because it would be possible to leave an association without legitimate ramifications enshrined in institutions, laws, and society, such as having to leave behind one's home and property, or being killed or imprisoned for treason. This ability to leave means that, by and large, no individual need be governed by rules that they do not agree to; the only concessions they need make is to other people who do not agree to live by the same rules, but even then that is not required, only motivated in order to avoid conflict.

Importantly, in this vision of conflict resolution, every side has allies in a conflict representing and supporting their interests to one degree or another. There is not a single organization that enforces a single mold of 'justice' from above onto the community as a whole. Instead, it is merely the interaction of people, on relatively the same footing, figuring out agreements about conduct and resolutions to conflicts as best suits them, with all of the local information and context at their disposal. This egalitarian view of justice, where it is imposed by incentives and equal individuals, instead of something from on high, is bolstered by its decentralized nature. If every person is, in effect, a law unto themselves, and there is no recognized legitimate set of rules or punishments beyond what those involved agree on, there is no single apparatus that can be seized in order to inflict one's will on others. Even if a whole mutual protection association 'goes rogue' and refuses to cooperate with others,

the rest of the society can band against it and crush it under their greater numbers. And if an association begins to abuse its members — which is unlikely, given that the members are the ones who control the actions of such an association, and the purpose of the organization is not one that even remotely requires hierarchy — it is in the interest of the other associations to step in to defend the minority members of that association thus abused in order to gain their loyalty.

It should be noted that in such a society, it would profit no one to have prisons. If those who want to hold people in prisons must pay for the cost of doing so, they will quickly realize that they are only further hurting themselves, after whatever harm the perpetrator of the harm did, in order to get revenge on the prisoner. Why commit to this course of action, when it is even remotely possible to reintegrate people back into society, since once they are thus reintegrated there is no ongoing cost, and perhaps some ongoing benefits?

Thus we arrive at a patchwork view of social order, where most ‘law’ is provided by merely the necessity of living with other humans and avoiding, or satisfactorily ending, conflicts. For the most part, institutionalized order will not be necessary, as the Nash equilibrium of social order does its work. Order will reinforce itself, and ‘law’, as embodied in agreements, will be fluid, built and destroyed as needed, and individualized to the specific relevant case. In the few occasions where such institutions are needed, they will be radically egalitarian and decentralized, ensuring that there is competition and free agreement as much as possible for everyone, and that everyone’s interests are repre-

sented. This is what I call **the reciprocal order**. As Proudhon says, liberty (autonomy) is “not the daughter, but the mother of order.”

## 8. The State and The Reciprocal Order

Who says government, says negation of the people;  
 Who says negation of the people, says affirmation  
 of political authority; Who says affirmation of po-  
 litical authority, says individual dependency; Who  
 says individual dependency, says class supremacy;  
 Who says class supremacy, says inequality; Who says  
 inequality, says antagonism; Who says antagonism,  
 says civil war; From which it follows that who says  
 government, says civil war. — Anselme Bellegarrigue

### 8.1. The Law

One of the striking features of the reciprocal order is that in it, everyone's interests are represented; order is preserved and conflicts are resolved on a horizontal plane, between equals, where there is not one single verdict or outcome that is universally true or correct. This is in stark contrast to the law of the State, which is enforced from above: each side appeals to a third party (the State) instead of to each other, and it does not matter what *either* side thinks the correct outcome is, nor what everyone else involved in the conflict thinks the outcome should be; only what the State believes is best matters. It is the State's sole

power to perform unilateral action against those it deems ‘guilty’ without repercussions or consideration for the interests of the guilty party. Often, this hurts all parties to the conflict, since the State, being a representative always ultimately only of itself, and which can enforce whatever it so desires without considering the interests of either person, has no interest in making the victim whole again, in restitution or making life return to a cooperative balance. No, it punishes the ‘guilty’ party because they have offended it, and makes the victim pay for it, and leaves both the worse for wear. It leaves the ‘criminal’ with no pathway to joining society again, and therefore little incentive to avoid committing crimes anymore — after all, they will suffer either way, because they are forever marked.

The law of the state is the ultimate violation of autonomy: it descends on all involved, in every case of law, and enforces its will on others without thought for what they want, even when these actions are totally consensual and/or effect no one, and so are not violations of the reciprocal order. It takes property, it gives property, it protects property the very existence of which is a violation of the autonomy of others greater than the autonomy that property represents. It fights wars. It prevents the reciprocal order from forming by preventing people from protecting themselves or others, from constituting alternatives to its enforcement methods. It puts the enforcement of cooperation in respecting autonomy, insofar as it does enforce this instead of violating it, in the hands of people no one consented to do this for them, and prevents other options from forming. The state is the ultimate abomination from the stand point of my

two principles.

## 8.2. The State as a Force of Decay and Atomization

One of the important things to realize is that the very existence of the State not only violates the rules of the reciprocal order, but, as touched on in earlier sections, causes it to decay. After all, if your treatment is not up to your neighbors and those you interact with, but is enforced from above (whether you are treated with respect, or punished), one has little interest or care for what others think of you or how you treat them. If you treat someone poorly, and get away with it, *they* may know what you have done, but what can they do to you that the State will not stop? Hence the very existence of a top-down order of Law destroys much of the inherent interest we have in treating each other well, building trust and communities and relationships, outside of the State and what it can enforce, which is surprisingly little when it comes to the actual harm against people. After all, it is in the State's direct interest to enforce the collection of taxes and other such laws that benefit those in power, but as for actually protecting the people? They care little for that; after all, the people will placidly accept pretty much whatever they do, believing in the lie of the legitimacy of the organization that oppresses them. What little they do care for protecting the individual stems from doing just enough to preserve the fictional legitimacy they hold. They have even made this clear:

“Neither the Constitution, nor state law, impose a



general duty upon police officers or other governmental officials to protect individual persons from harm — even when they know the harm will occur,” said Darren L. Hutchinson, a professor and associate dean at the University of Florida School of Law. “Police can watch someone attack you, refuse to intervene and not violate the Constitution.”

The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that the government has only a duty to protect persons who are “in custody,” he pointed out.<sup>55</sup>

The State also frays the reciprocal order by its very existence in other ways. For one thing, it is a tool of immense power to enact any social or economic change any group wishes to see. Once a State is introduced into society, the race is on to see who can capture it first in order to bend everyone else to their will, be it ‘benevolent’ or not. Worse, every side must compete all the harder for control over the Ring of Power that is the State because, were their enemies, or even those with simply a different vision of the world than they, to seize control of it, it would be worse for them than if no one had control of the State! Thus, by its very existence the State fosters an endless war of all against all for control of the apparatus of power. All the while, of course, those who seek nothing more than power and are willing to do

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<sup>55</sup>See Hassan, Adeel. “Officers Had No Duty to Protect Students in Parkland ...” *New York Times*, New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/18/us/parkland-shooting-lawsuit-ruling-police.html>.

anything to get it hide behind the fiction of legitimacy, social contracts, and constitutions as slowly strangle their society.

Without a state already in place to defend property that others have little interest in respecting otherwise, and to give them privileges, monopolies, and subsidies, it will be difficult for anyone to become too rich, especially on the backs of exploited others, and so it will be exponentially more difficult for any one person to become powerful enough to institute a state themselves. Indeed, to become rich, one would need to already be rich in order to put together what is necessary to defend and acquire the riches one intends to gain, unless one really intends to engage in a war against everyone else. Hence, in a society with no respect for authority, and respect for other's autonomy only if it is reciprocated and only if it does not severely curtail their own, it will be almost impossible for Kings, Presidents, or Ministers to ever arise again. Thus, the reciprocal order protects itself.

### 8.3. The State and Culture

Yes, this vision of a possible society as a mesh network of individual peers interacting reciprocally relies on the majority of the people in it sharing certain cultural beliefs concerning legitimacy, authority, and hierarchy. This is not a difficulty unique to an anarchist order, though: all power structures ultimately rest on public opinion. Whatever the public views as illegitimate ultimately crumbles and falls away, and whatever it sees as legitimate is raised up in response. The state cannot exist if its citizens do not placidly submit to its auspices, either crying

its praises or mumbling about how it is a 'necessary evil' and there is no other option but to accept it. If its citizens refuse to cooperate with it, to lend it their compliance and their support, it will be paralyzed: it will be a few oligarchs and politicians sitting around a table giving orders futilely to people who will not listen to their ranting and raving.

Simply because a man declares himself king or president, it does not become so; most must accept his rule as law, and some must flock to him to enforce his will against the few that dissent. If all dissent, even excepting those few enforcers, where is his power? To quote Etienne de la Boetie, from *Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*:

Poor, wretched, and stupid peoples, nations determined on your own misfortune and blind to your own good! You let yourselves be deprived before your own eyes. . . . You live in such a way that you cannot claim a single thing as your own; and it would seem that you consider yourselves lucky to be loaned your property, your families, and your very lives. All this havoc, this misfortune, this ruin, descends upon you not from alien foes, but from the one enemy whom you yourselves render as powerful as he is, for whom you go bravely to war, for whose greatness you do not refuse to offer your own bodies unto death.

He who thus domineers over you has only two eyes, only two hands, only one body, no more than is possessed by the least man among the infinite numbers

dwelling in your cities; he has indeed nothing more than the power that you confer upon him to destroy you. Where has he acquired enough eyes to spy upon you, if you do not provide them yourselves? How can he have so many arms to beat you with, if he does not borrow them from you? The feet that trample down your cities, where does he get them if they are not your own? How does he have any power over you except through you? How would he dare assail you if he had no cooperation from you? What could he do to you if you yourselves did not connive with the thief who plunders you, if you were not accomplices of the murderer who kills you, if you were not traitors to yourselves?

...

From all these indignities, such as the very beasts of the field would not endure, you can deliver yourselves if you try, not by taking action, but merely by willing to be free. **Resolve to serve no more, and you are at once freed. I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break in pieces.**<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>See de la Boetie, Etienne. "The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude, Part II." *Online Library of Liberty*, <https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/kurz-the->

To ask why anarchy was overtaken by states in the long past is the same as asking why democracy did not form before monarchy: in both cases the question ignores the changing cultural factors that make different power structures possible in the first place. The form of anarchy that humans had in the deep past was based on tribal chieftains, patriarchs and matriarchs, it was not averse to hierarchy and authority, merely not populous enough yet to support the more rigid kinds of it. It was not an ideological anarchy, an anarchy supported by cultural norms against rulers and bolstered by an understanding of the proper ways to organize a decentralized, distributed society. It was anarchy born out of the fact that society was not ready for kings yet. So when society was ready for kings, they took over easily. The cultural beliefs were not ready to support stable anarchy against the impositions of rulers. Likewise, democracy did not form before monarchy because the cultural beliefs behind it, about the equality of all, and government being a representative of the collective will for the collective defense, the ideas of social contract theory, had not yet begun to form, let alone percolate into society. Democracy *could not* have formed before those ideas came about, because the culture would not have accepted and maintained it. In the places where something like modern democracy did form, such as Athens, it was precisely because the culture there believed it to be legitimate, and did not believe kings to be so. Likewise, stable anarchy *cannot* form before the ideas in it percolate similarly. Therefore it is no more a criticism of democracy's stability that it did not form as soon as more than two humans got together,

than that stable anarchy did not. Not all ages of history are interchangeable: simply because something did not arise then, does not mean it cannot arise now, because *culture matters*.

Thus the two most common criticisms of anarchism, first that it is dependent on predominant cultural values, and second that it has not already occurred in history, are shown to grow from the same core fallacy: ignoring the power that public cultural opinion has over *all* things. The statist order is just as subject to the whims of the people as an anarchist one, and the existence of both is defined and limited to the time period in which the cultural values that make them legitimate exist. Monarchy's time is past, democracy's time is now, and anarchy's time is the future.

This also forms the basis of a response to another common objection to anarchy, as opposed to the state. Under the rule of the state, I hear it said, this or that can be achieved by enough people voting in favor of it. Thus, the state's existence brings about an assurance that certain things can be done. The state can be used to prevent bigotry, to provide for the poor, and other such things. What, under anarchy, can be done? To answer this, it one must realize that someone asking this question is hiding the ball: if there are enough people to *vote* for something, there are enough people to contribute to actually doing it directly. If the majority of society is able to vote successfully to end bigotry — than most of society isn't bigoted. If most of society wants a social safety net, than most of society can organize into a federation of mutual aid organizations to provide for each other. Whatever the democratic state does for the people, it does on

the basis of the majority's desire for it to do that thing (that is not to say that it *only* or even *often* does what the people want), and whatever the democratic state can do, the people who vote can do directly.

## 9. Conclusion: Praxis

We have arrived at the truth, but most people are still deluded believers in error; therefore, we must educate these people — via lectures, discussions, books, pamphlets, newspapers, or whatever — until they become converted to the correct point of view. For a minority to become a majority, a process of persuasion and conversion must take place — in a word, education. — Murray Rothbard

Beneath the governmental machinery, in the shadow of political institutions, out of the sight of statesmen and priests, society is producing its own organism, slowly and silently; and constructing a new order, the expression of its vitality and autonomy, and the denial of the old politics, as well as of the old religion. — Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

So, how do we get from here to there? How would a set of individuals committed to an ethic of reciprocity and the society envisioned therein ensure that the social norms and cultural knowledge are in place to support a transition from the *status quo* to an order based on an ethic of reciprocity? There are three

things such a group ('we' from here on) must do, and two it must not. The road I endorse is long and difficult, but I think it is ultimately worth it for anyone committed to the ideas of autonomy, individualism, and peace.

The first thing we must do is to educate others. Reveal to them the brutality of the state and its illegitimacy; tear down the curtains of the temple of 'legitimate' authority and show everyone the feeble little man that works the controls behind them; show that we need not choose between individual freedom and subjugation to the powerful on the one hand, and individual bondage to the collective on the other; explain how freed markets work and how things can be done without the state; explain a proper ethic of life and rid the minds of our neighbors of the propaganda bogymen that haunt them. This education will provide the soil from which all else must grow. All that is necessary for the state to wither, and a stable order of liberty to grow in its place, is that enough of us reject concepts alien to individual autonomy and embrace reciprocity; we must retract the prostrate acceptance of the *status quo* that allows it to run roughshod over us without objection.

The second thing we must do is build: build alternative organizations, alternative methods of doing things here and now, under the capitalist, statist system, as best we can. A purely intellectual, purely destructive or deconstructive movement is infertile, fallow. We must instead demonstrate that our methods and theories work, insofar as we can, and learn the practical knowledge that will be necessary to construct a stable and functional order in the absence of a state. This positive, constructive,



practical action, which can help people even in the present, will draw people to our cause, and prepare society for when, or if, the state does indeed wither away.

The third thing we must do is *think*. No theory is ever complete, because humans are not omniscient. We must not let theory become stagnant dogma, not open to revision or improvement in light of new ideas or new data. We must also let our theories interface with their opposites, their competitors, and their counterpoints. All the best ideas, in my experience, arise from a synthesis of many different sources, each with their criticisms of each other. Thus our theories must exist in a constant state of dialectic refinement or it will die.

There are two things we must *not* do, however. First, we must *not* enforce our ideas on others. I explained why in detail previously, but to reiterate: to force our ideas of social organization — either the absence of a state, or specific choices in that state's absence — on others would be to defeat the entire purpose of allowing individuals full autonomy to explore their options. If a community chooses to not respect certain parts of autonomy, as long as they do so voluntarily, then it would be a violation of their autonomy to try to stop them. Perhaps it might be in our interests to avoid joining such a community or interacting with it, or even to help those who want to escape to do so, but there is no single plan for life and social organization that *must* be followed, only ones that are better or worse for some goals.

Second, we must not become unduly violent. Violence begets violence, death begets death, and blood begets blood. A new

order born in indiscriminate bloodshed will live and die by blood, because it breaks reciprocity and sets a standard for all to see and all to take advantage of in a race to the bottom — a race to death. Nor is it an attractive thing; it is primarily only those who are happy with violence, who revel in it, and who are looking for an excuse to do it will join a revolution of blood and death and stay with it. That is not what anyone who values peace, autonomy, and reciprocal cooperation wants.

I hope that this essay has, in its own small way, contributed to the education component of praxis. I know that it is not wholly original, but I hope that the method of presentation, and the specific arguments put forth here, having largely sprung from my own head, might provide an interesting perspective, and convince a few people who would not otherwise have been convinced. I do not envision the state crumbling today, or tomorrow, or the day after that. I do not envision the oligarchs relinquishing their golden-gloved grip on our throats easily. There is no quick change that we can effect. Yet, not deterred, I write this in service of a brighter, better tomorrow that *can* still be, that *could* be. It may happen a decade hence, a century, a millennium; it may never happen; but as long as I am around I will try to increase the chances that it does. I hope that those who share my values, or come to share them, will join with me in doing likewise.

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# SYNTHESIS LIBERTARIANISM: A MANIFESTO

## **1. Introduction**

There has been an invisible war for the heart and soul of the libertarian movement going on since the 1960s, and corruption is winning. The foundational values of libertarianism have been all but lost in the influx of alt-right and neo-reactionary people, and something must finally be done about it lest we lose those values completely.

Thin libertarianism was the naive dream of a tiny and struggling movement striving to grow at all costs, but what does it matter if the movement grows, if the movement dies and becomes something else in the process? We need to take back “right” libertarianism. The purpose of this manifesto, then, is to establish a core set of foundational values which libertarians must share to have a consistent basis for their libertarianism, values that, we will show, are fundamentally incompatible with neo-reactionaries and the alt-right. Libertarian beliefs can be arrived at from other foundations, but a libertarianism thus conceived will be fundamentally at war with itself at best, and insincere at worst.

This manifesto will focus not on specific conclusions, but instead on the values of the movement, because to do otherwise would turn this into an exercise in gatekeeping and thought-control, rendering our project merely an exercise in cult-building not unlike Objectivism or Austro-Libertarianism and thereby giving birth to nothing new and useful. It should be noted, however, that this focus on values and their consistent application has very broad implications — this is not a thin libertarianism 2.0. We will focus here primarily on the social aspects of this broadening, but values are applicable in a broad variety of cases, so setting out a list of them may have implications outside both politics and social interaction.

If we are trying to rescue “right” libertarianism from its right-wing infiltrators, it might seem odd that we are, in the process, seeking to rename it. However, consider this: if the values that make “right” libertarianism unique are incompatible with the rest of the right-wing, is it truly valid to call it right wing?

Moreover, since the values of “right” libertarianism actually most naturally lead it to embrace certain leftist social — and even economic — values, what better way to express that this libertarianism is a fusion of some economically right-wing ideas and some economically and socially left-wing ideas than to give it a name representative of such a synthesis?

In the following document, we will briefly outline what these values are that libertarians as a movement must hold, and why they lead both to a respect for stricter property rights and social leftism and egalitarianism.

## **2. The Values of Libertarianism**

The most obvious “libertarian value” is, of course, liberty. This is made evident by the very etymology of the name of the movement. There are, however, many different conceptions of liberty: positive, negative, individual, collective, social, atomistic, and more; hence specifying the precise concept of liberty meant when the word is used is far more important than simply saying you value liberty. Almost every post-Enlightenment political philosophy, even the authoritarian ones, claims to bring liberty, by some definition or another, to the political organization and its members, and it is the precise definition that makes the difference between the different political philosophies. If Marxism, fascism, and libertarianism all claim to bring liberty, liberty means very little by itself.

Furthermore, what specific definition you give to liberty, and

the focus that one places on it relative to other values, depends on deeper, more foundational values. So, as simple as it might seem to claim that liberty, or even individual liberty, is the core value of the libertarian movement, I think it is necessary to delve deeper into its foundations.

With this in mind, I will try to locate the deepest foundation of the libertarian value-set, and then build up from there, thus showing how the specific definition of liberty that libertarians use develops from that deeper foundation.

## **2.1. Individual Self-Determination**

The first value that libertarians must hold in order to have a secure foundation for other libertarian beliefs and values is that of individual self-determination: the necessity and desirability of individual human beings applying their own minds and situated knowledge to the particular conditions around them in order to solve problems and achieve goals. This value may be held both because it sustains and makes possible the flourishing of human beings, and because it is the best method of creating a dynamic, creative, and efficient society. A few quotes will serve to substantiate that this is a common libertarian belief:

“Since men can think, feel, evaluate, and act only as individuals, it becomes vitally necessary for each man’s survival and prosperity that he be free to learn, choose, develop his faculties, and act upon his knowledge and values. This is the necessary path of human nature; to interfere with and cripple this

process by using violence goes profoundly against what is necessary by man's nature for his life and prosperity. Violent interference with a man's learning and choices is therefore profoundly "antihuman"; it violates the natural law of man's needs."<sup>57</sup>

"Since knowledge, thinking, and rational action are properties of the individual, since the choice to exercise his rational faculty or not depends on the individual, man's survival requires that those who think be free of the interference of those who don't. Since men are neither omniscient nor infallible, they must be free to agree or disagree, to cooperate or to pursue their own independent course, each according to his own rational judgment. Freedom is the fundamental requirement of man's mind."<sup>58</sup>

"He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. . . he requires and exercises [uniquely human qualities] exactly in proportion as the part of his conduct which he determines according to his own judgment and feelings is a large one. It is possible that he might be guided in some good path, and kept out of harm's

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<sup>57</sup>Murray Rothbard, "Property and Exchange," in *For A New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto*, (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2006), 33.

<sup>58</sup>Ayn Rand, "What is Capitalism?," in *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, (New American Library, 1966), 17.

way, without any of these [qualities]. But what will be his comparative worth as a human being? It really is of importance, not only what men do, but also what manner of men they are that do it. Among the works of man, which human life is rightly employed in perfecting and beautifying, the first in importance surely is man himself.”<sup>59</sup>

“If we can agree that the economic problem of society is mainly one of rapid adaptation to changes in the particular circumstances of time and place, it would seem to follow that the ultimate decisions must be left to the people who are familiar with these circumstances, who know directly of the relevant changes and of the resources immediately available to meet them. We cannot expect that this problem will be solved by first communicating all this knowledge to a central board which, after integrating all knowledge, issues its orders. We must solve it by some form of decentralization.”<sup>60</sup>

Why must this value be held? Because all human beings value the welfare of themselves and, to a lesser degree, other human beings; furthermore, all human beings care about the wealth and health of their society, as this influences their ability to achieve what they desire. Therefore, if one were to believe that freedom to exercise one’s choices was unhealthy for human

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<sup>59</sup> John Mill, “On Individuality, As One of the Elements of Well-Being” in *On Liberty*, 110.

<sup>60</sup> Friedrich Hayek, “The Use of Knowledge in Society.”



beings, not conducive to their flourishing, and deleterious to the health of society, then it would be impossible to consistently and enthusiastically support freedom. Moreover, it is the freedom to make one's own choices that is characteristic of the specific liberty which libertarians endorse, as opposed to the freedom from want or worry or oppression or isolation or even exploitation which other theories of freedom and liberty value more highly. Of course, many of those things can individual self-determination, but it is also possible that the use of one's reasoning can make oneself worried, wanting, exploited, or isolated, and if this is the product of one's free choice, then it is a part of liberty and its corollary, responsibility.

## **2.2. Consistency and Equality**

Another value of primary importance in the libertarian project, one which is necessary to provide a firm foundation for all the beliefs characteristic of those who partake in the movement, is that of consistency or universalizability. A libertarian desires not just individual self-determination (from here on, simply "liberty") for some individuals, but for all individuals equally. A libertarian also requires the same duties and responsibilities from everyone: everyone has an equal responsibility for the consequences of their own actions, both to themselves and others, and an equal duty to refrain from coercing others, short-circuiting their process of individual self-determination by a threat of violence or by the physical prevention of their choice of action. Libertarians should have, and desire, no gods, kings, or masters, and only accept authority insofar as it is bound by the same rules as everyone

else. All human beings share the same essential moral properties: the capacity to use our own reasoning and knowledge, and the capacity to understand, follow, and knowingly violate moral principles. Libertarians recognize this, and realize that whatever reasoning can be given for the liberty of some humans, can be given for the liberty of all humans.

This is why the signature phrase of right libertarians, “taxation is theft,” exists — it is an application of the everyday moral standards and duties of the rest of humanity to the actions of the political class, and a judgement of what they do. This is also why social contract theory has been so important to the history of libertarianism, from Locke to Nozick: an account of how a state may be justified usually appeals to special powers, either granted by god or the collective, that allow some to act in ways that others may not; this is not satisfying to a libertarian, however, and so another account, an account that explains how the state could have arisen only from the common rights of man, must be found. Opinion concerning the success of such accounts is immaterial; the fact that such an account must be found if the state is to be justified in one’s mind is what is important to whether one is a libertarian.

Here are a few quotes on this subject by various libertarians:

“‘Equality,’ in a human context, is a political term: it means equality before the law, the equality of fundamental, inalienable rights which every man possesses by virtue of his birth as a human being, and which may not be infringed or abrogated by man-made in-

stitutions, such as titles of nobility or the division of men into castes established by law, with special privileges granted to some and denied to others.”<sup>61</sup>

“Equality of the general rules of law and conduct, however, is the only kind of equality conducive to liberty and the only equality which we can secure without destroying liberty. Not only has liberty nothing to do with any other sort of equality, but it is even bound to produce inequality in many respects.”<sup>62</sup>

“Anarchists hold that morality must be upheld in all cases, and not abandoned whenever State actions are involved. Men have long since rejected the Divine Right of Kings; surely it is now past time to do the same with all claims that the State is Extra-Human or Extra-Moral. The State must be judged on the same level and by the same principles as all other human actions and institutions; one rule applies to all.”<sup>63</sup>

“If every person has the right to defend even by force — his person, his liberty, and his property, then it follows that a group of men have the right to organize and support a common force to protect

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<sup>61</sup>Ayn Rand, “The Age of Envy,” in *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution*, 140.

<sup>62</sup>Friedrich Hayek, “Equality, Value, and Merti,” 1.

<sup>63</sup>John Peters, “Anarchism and Government,” in *The Libertarian Forum* 2, no. 10, ed. Murray N. Rothbard (New York, NY: Joseph R. Peden, 15 May 1970), 3.

these rights constantly. . . . Thus, since an individual cannot lawfully use force against the person, liberty, or property of another individual, then the common force — for the same reason — cannot lawfully be used to destroy the person, liberty, or property of individuals or groups.”<sup>64</sup>

Why, too, must this view be upheld if one is to be a consistent libertarian? This is perhaps a more complex answer, but it is nevertheless a very important one. The answer has three parts, the first of which I covered before the quotes, and I’ll cover the last two now.

First, because a system which grants liberty to some and not others simply does not resemble what anyone would call a libertarian system; one of the defining features of libertarianism is the fact that it applies the same logic to every single individual within a society, since it is an individualistic philosophy. A system which grants liberty to one class, but allows that class to limit the liberty of another class, is an aristocratic or otherwise authoritarian system, not a libertarian one.

Second, if the goal is to maximize liberty, then it must be recognized that we must give each and every person the maximum amount of liberty possible, and an exercise of too great a liberty of one person lessens the liberty of another (if I steal from you, I gain the liberty to decide the fate of the object I steal, but you lose that liberty; indeed, you lose the further liberty of deciding what to do with the outcomes of your prior choices that are

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<sup>64</sup>Frederic Bastiat, “What is Law?,” in *The Law*.

concretized in that item). Assigning a fully maximal amount of liberty to a few and a proportionally lesser amount to everyone else is not as viable an option, because the maximum amount of liberty one person is able to experience is not as great as the medium amount of liberty of several, and allowing anyone and everyone to violate the liberty of others is not going to solve the problem either, as generally the violation of liberty either simply transfers liberties from one person to another (thereby not increasing the total amount), or decreases the amount of freedom exercised overall.

Which of these three rationales, or what combination of them, you find most important and convincing will depend on what your foundations for holding these values are, but the important point is that you must hold these values.

### **2.3. Entitlement Theory of Justice In Holdings**

Another distinguishing value of libertarianism as synthesis libertarianism seeks to encapsulate it is a certain, as Nozick termed it, entitlement theory of justice in holdings. In this view, any rights one has over something are determined by the historical story of that object: how it was originally produced or appropriated and how it was transferred. There are of course differing opinions on what exactly constitutes just original appropriation, what exactly constitutes just transfer, and what should happen should the full history of an object not be available or be tainted — as most land is — with historical injustice. But the fundamental value that libertarians all share is the view that justice is constituted

in the nature of individual actions and intentions, not in the nature of outcomes, so to establish justice in holdings, as in all other things, one must look to the actions and intentions which generated that holding — the history of that holding. This is, in a sense, an outcome of the corollary of liberty I mentioned some time ago, responsibility, since the fundamental idea is that one has a just claim to a holding if it is the outcome of just actions on your part, and one has no such claim if it is not.

Here are some further quotes to substantiate this as a libertarian view:

“[T]he right to property is a right to action, like all the others: it is not the right to an object, but to the action and the consequences of producing or earning that object. It is not a guarantee that a man will earn any property, but only a guarantee that he will own it if he earns it. It is the right to gain, to keep, to use and to dispose of material values.”<sup>65</sup>

“In contrast to end-result principles of justice, historical principles of justice hold that past circumstances or actions of people can create differential entitlements or differential deserts to things. An injustice can be worked by moving from one distribution to another structurally identical one, for the second, in profile the same, may violate people’s entitlements or deserts; it may not fit the actual history.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Ayn Rand, “Man’s Rights” in *The Virtue of Selfishness*, 94.

<sup>66</sup>Robert Nozick, “Chapter 7: Distributive Justice, Section I, Historical

“Therefore, we do not yet know which one of the two men is the legitimate or just property owner. We can only find the answer through investigating the concrete data of the particular case, i.e., through ‘historical’ inquiry. Thus, we cannot simply say that the great axiomatic moral rule of the libertarian society is the protection of property rights, period. For the criminal has no natural right whatever to the retention of property that he has stolen; the aggressor has no right to claim any property that he has acquired by aggression.”<sup>67</sup>

Why must libertarians hold that private property, born out of the individual actions of people and determined in its justice by the justice of those originating actions, is a value that must be upheld? Again, first of all, it is simply a constituent property of what it means to be a libertarian in the sense that I have been using and in the sense that synthesis libertarianism is attempting to preserve; but secondly, it is because it is a necessary extension of the other principles so far. It is a construction of property which is based on the outcomes of individual actions within liberty, is equally applicable in its principles and rules to all people, and is necessary for people to preserve their own lives by their own hands and minds.

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Principles and End-Result Principles,” in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 155.

<sup>67</sup>Murray Rothbard, “Property and Criminality” in *The Ethics of Liberty*, 51.

## 2.4. Proportionality

Another component of libertarian value which is of primary importance is that of proportionality in justice. Although phrased barbarically, the old saying “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” really does sum up the libertarian approach to justice. A violation of someone’s liberty or property is to be met with a proportional, appropriate response, a violation in equal magnitude used either to prevent the violation from being consummated, or to produce restitution for a completed violation. This is what differentiates libertarians from other political philosophies in many ways: for instance, some progressives will advocate the use of the state — which operates on the basis of the threat of violence and kidnapping — to deal with violations of others that are not nearly so severe, even if they are undesirable: for instance, collusion to prevent someone from getting a job, or discrimination, or hate speech. These are undesirable things that actually violate the values I have previously outlined, but they are either the results of inaction on the part of the parties directly involved, or action that does not rise to the level of physical violence, and therefore to meet them with physical violence or the threat of it is a grossly disproportionate act.

Furthermore, as part of making sense of this, it must be seen that the basis of whether something is a punishable crime is in the specific action that has been committed, and the extent to which it can be punished is in the specific action as well, as the punishment itself must be proportional to the action. Therefore, if no person or group was identifiably harmed, then harm cannot



be done to a particular person or group in retaliation to that action in a proportional manner, because the action itself caused no harm to any particular person or group!

This is why even those libertarians who view the state as legitimate tend to view it as a necessary evil, or an institution which should be limited to making laws against crimes which are proportional to the severity of the powers which it leverages to enforce its laws. This is also why libertarians, although they are interested in historical justice, are opposed to collective punishment based on ancestry or group membership.

A few quotes will substantiate this point:

“I propose another fundamental rule regarding crime: the criminal, or invader, loses his own right to the extent that he has deprived another man of his. If a man deprives another man of some of his self-ownership or its extension in physical property, to that extent does he lose his own rights. From this principle immediately derives the proportionality theory of punishment—best summed up in the old adage: ‘let the punishment fit the crime.’”<sup>68</sup>

Why must this value be held by libertarians? Simply because, if it were to be held that any violation of liberty could be punished equally, then the subtle gaslighting and indoctrination of a religious group, or the oppressive but non-violent ostracism

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<sup>68</sup>Murray Rothbard, “Punishment and Proportionality” in *The Ethics of Liberty*, 80-81.

of a community committed to a particular tradition, could be punished with the same severity, if deemed necessary, as a terrorist attack or a school shooting. Likewise, the failure to give enough to charity, or hire someone for a job, or competition with someone for a job and beating them to be hired, might be offenses punishable by law, because although they are not violent actions, without a theory of proportionality, we would not be able to choose which things are rightly punishable by law and which are not outside of whether we like them or not. Hence without a theory of proportionality, it is very easy to go down a very authoritarian and restrictive route that is inherently antithetical to libertarianism.

## **2.5. The Initiation-Response Distinction**

This is the final, and perhaps most recognizable, libertarian value, although I have couched it in new terms for philosophical clarity. The fundamental distinction here is best elaborated by the idea of the Non-Aggression Principle: the idea that violence can only be justified when used in retaliation, for the purposes of defense or restitution, and is justified by the very fact that violence was initiated, or used, prior. In essence, it points out the fundamental and seemingly self-evident, yet surprisingly oft-missed, moral distinction between the initiation of violence against someone who has done nothing violent, and responding with violence to someone else who has used violence against you. It is possible to be a pacifist and condemn both these things, but there are morally relevant distinctions between them, so that to condemn both, either you would need to broaden your reasoning

from what is commonly used, or use different reasoning for the condemnation of each type. Libertarians specifically value these two things differently: the initiation of a violation of someone's liberty is morally reprehensible, while retaliation against it is at the very least morally neutral, and sometimes even morally praiseworthy.

This view bleeds into many other libertarian views: views on when war is just (only in defense), when violence is just on a personal level (in self-defense or defense of others) and what the law can be used for (in response to actions, never prior to actions, further modified by considerations of proportionality).

Here are some quotes:

“Men have the right to use physical force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use. The ethical principle involved is simple and clear-cut: it is the difference between murder and self-defense. A holdup man seeks to gain a value, wealth, by killing his victim; the victim does not grow richer by killing a holdup man. The principle is: no man may obtain any values from others by resorting to physical force.”<sup>69</sup>

“No one may threaten or commit violence (‘aggress’) against another man’s person or property. Violence may be employed only against the man who commits such violence; that is, only defensively against the

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<sup>69</sup> Ayn Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics” in *The Virtue of Selfishness*, 32.

aggressive violence of another. In short, no violence may be employed against a nonaggressor. Here is the fundamental rule from which can be deduced the entire corpus of libertarian theory.”<sup>70</sup>

This value is, in its essence, an extension of the principle of proportionality outlined above, in the sense that any action in retaliation to no action, or any violent action in retaliation to a non-violent one, is automatically and obviously unacceptable to a libertarian-minded person.

### 3. Social Leftism

So far what we have stated should not be controversial: we have attempted to identify the values common to libertarians, and as such these values are generally agreed-upon in the community. Now, however, we must proceed to the true purpose of this manifesto: an analysis of how a consistent application of these values to more than merely politics and law — as would make sense for anyone who actually held these values, as values cannot be held only in certain cases and not others — leads to non-traditional, and leftist, social views. Let us examine why this is the case.

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<sup>70</sup>Murray Rothbard, “War, Peace, and the State” in *Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature and Other Essays*.

### **3.1. Anti-Traditionalism and Moderate Pluralism**

Following on from individual self-determination, many of the reasons that support a distrust or dislike of state intervention also support a distrust or dislike of social norms and traditions. If the state should not intervene in economic matters because each person is in a generally superior position to know what is best for them and those around them in comparison to a central authority, and central authorities are unable to adapt to change, then it follows that “society” (as a centralized institution of majority enforcement and tradition) does not know what is best for everyone when it comes to lifestyle either. It would be strange to argue that although a centralized authority is not competent to know what the best job or allocation of resources is for everyone, it would be competent to know what the best family structure or lifestyle is for everyone. Likewise, if in economic decisions it is best for human flourishing to allow human beings to make their own choices, using their reason and values and integrity, then how can it be otherwise in the case of social decisions, which are arguably more important to a person’s happiness in many cases?

Thus we must say that tradition is to be viewed as a toolbox or selection of premade molds, which are to be chosen and evaluated by the reason of each individual in each individual case, and social enforcement of norms or normality is merely another form of illegitimate and stifling authority that is of very little use in most cases<sup>71</sup>. This must be extended to gender, sexuality, family

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<sup>71</sup>There is still perhaps a place for the enforcement of social norms con-

structure, and every other corner of social life: every part of it must be subject to the reason of the individual, to be adapted to their unique situation and set of values.

This implication is one even Rothbard himself seems to have grasped to some degree, although his social views did not fully encompass the implications here:

“Meyer begins with the complaint that libertarians are really ‘libertines’... because we ‘reject’ the ‘reality’ of five thousand years of Western civilization, and propose to substitute an abstract construction. Very true; in other words, we, like Lord Acton, propose to weigh the growth of encrusted tradition and institutions in the light of man’s natural reason, and of course we find these often despotic institutions wanting.”<sup>72</sup>

We must also recognize — in what I call “moderate pluralism” — that while some things are universally good for human life and flourishing (such as liberty), there is a wide range within the limits set by those constants within which the proper values of humans can fall, so that what is right for the flourishing of one person may not be right for the flourishing of another. Therefore, although it is possible to say that some lifestyles are wrong, it is

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cerning things that will preserve liberty and the other values of a libertarian community, but in general the range of legitimate social norms is very, very small.

<sup>72</sup>Murray N. Rothbard, “National Review Rides Again” in *The Libertarian Forum* 1, no. 13, ed. Murray N. Rothbard, Karl Hess (New York, NY: Joseph R. Peden, 1 October 1969), 3.

not possible to say that one, or even several, lifestyles are solely right. This is an extension of the economic idea that there are many values that human beings could pursue (within certain limits), and that to attempt to discover which set of values is right for each individual in order to enforce it is a foolhardy task, but that if it were possible to do so, then freedom would be unnecessary and perhaps even undesirable.

Hence libertarians must not simply tolerate those who pursue different lifestyles, while doggedly sticking to traditions, but must instead value in themselves pluralism and non-traditionalism, attempting to strike out and discover what is best for their individual case while praising and valuing the social entrepreneurship of others who try still other lifestyles. Thus it is impossible to truly be a conservative — one who thinks that following tradition is the best thing to do for all people, and does so themselves, and finds others who do things they don't do disgusting or degenerate — while holding libertarian values.

### **3.2. Anti-Authoritarianism**

Libertarians are generally defined, on the two-dimensional political compass, at least, as in opposition to authoritarians by default; as such, it might seem redundant and even comical to list this as a value that is not often shared by right libertarians nowadays and must be specified. However, I think that, like the other values, the dislike for authoritarianism which libertarians express concerning the state is not often applied elsewhere, both in the social and the economic world. Many libertarians decry

the authoritarianism and paternalism of the state, but see no problem with priests, pastors, and patriarchs telling people what to do down to the smallest minutiae, or with bosses and CEOs who are so far removed from the process of production as to be completely ignorant of it making choices for workers all day long, ensuring that those workers become little more than mindless machines or trained animals.

At this juncture, many libertarians will recoil with horror at our lambasting of these social and economic phenomena, retorting that these things are not (usually) born of coercion and violence and therefore libertarianism may have nothing to say concerning them. That is not so! The idea that, simply because a value cannot be enforced by law, it is outside the scope of valuation in political philosophy is a fallacy born of the too-long-extended existence of an invasive state; there are many other ways of pursuing and enforcing a value than mere violence, ways that both libertarians and authoritarians have forgotten.

A true libertarian at heart, one which shares the values I have listed above, will not enjoy seeing the subjugation, even if voluntary and convenient, of one human being to another, the surrender of their will and reason to them, and the enforcement of this through any means whatsoever. Sometimes it is necessary or convenient, but it is never something one should seek or enjoy seeing. It is always, like some libertarians view the state to be, a necessary evil at best, and an unnecessary atrocity at worst. An overbearing father, pastor, priest, or patriarch can be as damaging to the flourishing of someone, and the operation and adaptation of the social community, as any government law,



sometimes moreso; likewise, a surfeit of centralization in the economic world (whether through hierarchies of authority or through democratic means), or an overgrowth of corporatism and command-thinking, can be just as damaging to an economy as state intervention, although the latter is what usually leads to the former existing in damaging amounts.

Furthermore, seeing all human beings as fundamentally morally equal, a libertarian must view any subordination or authority as a contingent and emergent phenomena, one which is not fundamental to the relation of one human being to another; thus the default, the null hypothesis if you will, is that there is no authority whatsoever, and any authority which wishes to establish itself must explain and justify its existence before a libertarian will bow to it. As Locke says, “there [is] nothing more evident, than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection. . . .”<sup>73</sup> The process of seeking such a justification for the state, as I have said previously, is seen in the social contract tradition. As Noam Chomsky, a noted anarchist but not libertarian, has said:

“Hierarchic and authoritarian structures are not self-justifying. They have to have a justification. So if there is a relation of subordination and domination, maybe you can justify it, but there’s a strong burden

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<sup>73</sup>John Locke, “Chapter. II. Of the State of Nature” in *The Second Treatise of Government*, sect 4.

of proof on anybody who tries to justify it. Quite commonly, the justification can't be given. It's a relationship that is maintained by obedience, by force, by tradition, by one or another form of sometimes physical, sometimes intellectual or moral coercion. If so, it ought to be dismantled. People ought to become liberated and discover that they are under a form of oppression which is illegitimate, and move to dismantle it."<sup>74</sup>

### 3.3. Social Justice

The fact that libertarians value justice in the current distribution of holdings, and view it as an outcome and consequence of the justice of the individual actions that led to that distribution, lends itself naturally to a concern for historical injustice. While a conservative may say that some historical injustice is not relevant to the present, because it took place in the past and was performed by no person alive today, as they are more concerned with protecting the actual holdings and distributions of the status quo, libertarians who find that historical injustice has taken part in the production of the current situation, being committed to the protection of the moral right to property and not the positive right, must view this as immediately relevant to current events and what actions they should take.

This is not to say, necessarily, that libertarians must be in favor of reparations. After all, although most libertarian theories

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<sup>74</sup>Noam Chomsky, interview by Tim Halle, *Reluctant Icon*, 1999.

of property rights are very similar, the specific details of how they are justified and worked out can have large effects on what should be done about holdings that have an illegitimate or unjust history. Furthermore, there are many morally relevant differences between different cases; Rothbard's theory of property and criminality, for instance, in dealing only with present cases of theft, has six distinct cases in which the proper action is entirely different. (As far as I know, too, very few libertarian theories of property rights have very much at all to say about inheritance not based on explicit contract, which makes dealing with historical injustices more difficult). Importantly, in addition, libertarians are primarily concerned with individuals. Therefore, the collective punishment aspect of reparations, which is often done on the basis of racial groups, is immediately at least suspect and to most libertarians, off the table.

Nevertheless, the historical process by which current holdings are arrived at, and current states assign their positive property rights, should be of interest to libertarians, and they should seriously consider the implications of the fact that much property, especially in land, was originally claimed by conquest and genocide. It cannot be so easily dismissed, as Mises did in *Human Action*, by simply pointing out that most property is not held in a direct line of inheritance now that a market system is in place, either<sup>75</sup>; although this is a relevant factor, and perhaps indicates how a solution can be found and why those who own land now should not themselves be viewed as violent expropriators, it is

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<sup>75</sup>Ludwig von Mises, "Chapter XXIV. Harmony and Conflict of Interests: 4. Private Property" in *Human Action: Scholar's Edition*.

not necessarily the last word on the issue.

## 5. Conclusion

We hope to have shown, in this short manifesto, that to hold the values that provide a solid and consistent foundation for libertarianism consistently, social views that are fundamentally at odds with conservatism and reactionary thinking must be adopted as well. It is only possible to be a personally conservative libertarian to the extent that it is possible to tolerate cognitive dissonance, holding one set of values when force is involved, and one set of values when it is not.

The commonly accepted fiction in the libertarian community of “thin libertarianism” is an impossible illusion. It is impossible because it puts forward the idea that as long as one holds certain beliefs, it does not matter what values undergird those beliefs, nor, if those beliefs are based on libertarian values, whether those libertarian values are held consistently. But those who do not share libertarian values can at best have a fleeting, insincere, and contingent libertarianism, and are murderous bedfellows indeed, and those who do not hold libertarian values consistently are open to cracks in their foundation of such a significant nature that it is a wonder that their beliefs do not crumble at a touch; moreover, those who profess to hold inconsistent values are prone to selecting one value set over another, and only pretending to maintain the other set, thereby often converting into the first type of insincere libertarian. Thin libertarianism was the dream of a

strategy to radically grow a tiny and struggling movement, but it has ultimately failed, because it has led us to allow into our inner sanctums and philosophical cannon those who fundamentally do not care about the things we care about, do not value the things we value, and refuse to apply the values that they do share with us consistently.

We have welcomed fascists into our ranks because they were willing to support property rights, we have welcomed religious reactionaries into our ranks because they were willing to support property rights, we have sold our souls for property rights — only to find out that the people we allied ourselves with don't value liberty, don't value property, they merely want to be free from the government because the government doesn't do what they like, and as soon as the government does do what they like, or as soon as they can achieve power by some other means, they will do all they can to destroy what we value. Worse, they have corrupted and weakened our philosophical foundations, furthering the fiction that any value set can arrive at consistent and hearty libertarianism. This is a falsehood.

Libertarianism must reclaim its soul, by recognizing its values and applying them consistently, and in doing so it must transition from merely a statement about when violence can be used, to a statement about what we value, what is good, what is desirable. We must realize that simply not condoning coercion and violence is not enough, that we cannot sit back and claim the moral high ground merely because we are not murderers and thieves, and cannot expect anyone to want to be around us simply because we have done the *bare minimum*. There is more that a libertarian

community must value and work towards. This will change what libertarianism is, fuse it with leftism and even a little socialism, but that is not something to lament or view as a necessary evil — those parts of these views which we synthesize into our position are merely the natural extension of what we already value, and so we should welcome a synthesis libertarianism with open arms, for it is a full embrace of what we already love so dearly.