

# **Anarchism at the End of the World**

**An Introduction to the Instinct that Won't Go Away**

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*‘And now we’ll pull down every single notice, and every single leaf of grass shall be allowed to grow as it likes to.’ Snufkin.*

*Anarchism is the only way of life that has ever worked or ever can. It is the only actual alternative to the pseudo-alternatives of the left and right, of optimism and pessimism, and even of theism and atheism. That being so you would expect it to be widely ignored, ridiculed and misunderstood, even by nominal anarchists.*

## What is Anarchism?

Anarchism is the rejection of *domination*. In an anarchist society — which means of course in the anarchist herself — nobody is dominated by anyone or anything else. This does not mean, as we shall see, that there is no *authority*.<sup>1</sup> What anarchism rejects is authority with the power to control or coerce the individual against her will.

There are two crucial exceptions. The first is that, in refusing domination, the anarchist necessarily has to restrain those who dominate — force and control — other people. Rapists, murderers, bullies and, less directly, thieves seek to dominate others, and so they must be prevented from doing so.

The second exception is that the anarchist is justified in restraining those who do not have control over themselves. There is no coercion in preventing very young children, sleepwalkers, trippers and drunkards, for example, from walking over a cliff. If someone has control over themselves and *insists* on throwing themselves from a cliff, then an anarchist society would let them do it.

These two exceptions partially answer two of the most common objections to anarchism. The first is, who or what, exactly, is going to stop thieves, rapists and murderers from harming me? and the second is, who or what is going to stop the mad, the sad and the stupid from harming themselves? To which the anarchist ordinarily replies ‘people’. Not the state, not professional experts; *us*. This answer, of course, is incomplete and leads to further objections. To respond to these we need to recognise those elements of the world which control individuals against their will, elements which would need to be removed to create a fully anarchist society. I call these **the seven dominants**. They are, in roughly ascending order of subtlety and pervasiveness:

1. The [autocratic] *monarchy*.
2. The [capitalist-socialist] *state* (which includes its money, law, property, police, etc.).
3. The [totalitarian] *corporation*.
4. The [democratic] *majority*.
5. The [professional-religious] *institution*.
6. The [technocratic] *system*.
7. The [mental-emotional] *ego*.

It is difficult even for anarchists to recognise that these are all *inherently* coercive forces. There are no anarchists who support the monarchy of course, and very few who support corporate control,<sup>2</sup> but anarchist support for the state and its various techniques and institutions is surprisingly widespread (voting, campaigning, supporting its wars,<sup>3</sup>) as is anarchist support for democracy

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<sup>1</sup> Which makes the literal or etymological meaning of anarchism — absence of a chief — misleading.

<sup>2</sup> Largely limited to the preposterous ideology of ‘anarcho-capitalism.’

<sup>3</sup> Usually on ‘pragmatic’ grounds. This is why Kropotkin supported the state, and why Chomsky does.

(trade-unionism, anarcho-syndicalism and other forms of ‘direct democracy’) and for professionalism (professors Noam Chomsky, David Graeber, Murray Bookchin, et al.). The system and the ego are so subtle and pervasive they often do not figure in anarchist literature at all (with the honourable exceptions of Lao Tzu,<sup>4</sup> Leo Tolstoy, William Blake, Henry Miller and Ivan Illich<sup>5</sup>). That anarchists ignore or support the coercive power of dominants, or that they – we – are often forced to compromise (too willingly in many cases), does not make such support an anarchist position any more than some vegetarians having a crafty bacon sandwich makes eating pork a vegetarian position.

Despite what anarchists may or may not think, it is indisputable that the seven dominants are coercive; that they control individuals, and nature, against their will. It is indisputable that kings coerce their subjects, that states do the same, and that possession of property, financial wealth, the ability to write or manipulate laws, the strength of the majority, specialised, technical expertise, professional authority and systemic conformity all confer power to dominate – sometimes even *domesticate* – people. It is also indisputable that tools beyond a certain size and complexity enslave men and women and compel them to think, act and even feel in ways alien to their better nature; for them to serve the car, for example, or transport system, or the farm, or the school, rather than their own, or nature’s, instincts. Finally, it is indisputable that the restless mind and emotions take control of conscious experience and cause men and women to do, say, think and feel things they don’t really want to; cause them to hate, for example, get angry and depressed, or worry. ‘I’ may want to stop wanting and worrying, but, if I am honest I can see that ‘I’ am not in charge here. My stupid self is.

It follows that a philosophy, *the central tenet of which* is that all forms of domination are wrong must – despite inevitable lapses and compromises – set itself against the autonomous power of states, corporations, property, professionalism, money, law, democracy, monarchism, tools and the inherently needy and violent, obsessively wanting, worrying and planning, mental-emotional false-self.

This attitude, to people who have lived in dominating systems, seems strange to say the least. The kind of independence that anarchism describes seems so far from the experience of ordinary people that those proposing it might as well be describing the best way to live on Jupiter; and yet, in fact, anarchism is not just the original state of human society, it is also the way that most of us live already, at least during those times when we are happiest. We are anarchists in our love-affairs, in our friendships, and even occasionally in the very teeth of the system, at work. When the boss is absent and everyone gets together to work out how on earth to sort out the mess he’s created, occasionally, for a fleeting moment, we glimpse a collective so simple and effective it slides under our attention. But then the boss returns, and the ordinary world of work returns, or of politics or police or teachers or money, and someone tells us they are an anarchist and we find the idea, if not ludicrous, at best bewildering. Surely, we think, surely...

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<sup>4</sup> And, arguably, of Jesus of Nazareth; provided that you discount his rather dubious pronouncements (dubious in the sense that they are unlikely to be his) on the formation of the church and those of the mystifying authoritarian propagandiser, [St.] Paul of Tarsus.

<sup>5</sup> And the far less honourable exception of Max Stirner, who was, insanely, *for* the ego.

## Objection 1. Anarchism is inhuman

What is the core of human nature, underneath all the systems of domination that compel us? If nobody and nothing is controlling us — including our own emotions and thoughts — what's left? How will we act? Will we tear each other limb from limb? Steal, fight and fuck our way to the top of the pile? Go insane?

Authoritarians — *genuine* authoritarians that is, those who support the seven dominants above — answer 'yes'. Human nature is *ultimately* violent, selfish and stupid, they say, and so we need kings, states, corporations, democracies, laws, experts and the control of the dominating mind or emotions to prevent 'anarchy' — a word they interpret as something close to late medieval hell, in which human-shaped monsters run around eating each other. Libertarians — and again I am talking about *actual* libertarians, those who refuse to be coerced by anything — answer 'no'. Humans certainly *can* be violent, selfish and stupid, but *ultimately* we are peaceful, generous and intelligent creatures.

Ordinary authoritarian people respond to such an idea by telling us to 'look around — look at people, look at the news — we are *obviously* violent, selfish and stupid.' Authoritarian psychologists agree; they point to the many, many experiments which have shown that people are violent, selfish and stupid. Authoritarian philosophers also agree; they say that there is no order, or meaning, or intelligence outside of the seven dominants. They have very complicated theories to hide their basic distrust of nature and human nature but that is what the authoritarian attitude is based on.

The libertarian might then point out that the 'people' who surround us, those whom authoritarian people complain about and authoritarian psychologists study, have been raised in a world dominated by force. To say that we need authoritarian forces because people who are dominated by authoritarian forces are violent, selfish and stupid is a tautology. It's like saying we need to put birds in cages because birds in cages are dangerous.

The anarchist does not base her view of humanity on how the people around her think and act, but on her *own* nature. In this she is no different from the authoritarian; the difference being that when she looks within herself she finds that although she certainly can be a liar, a coward, a fool and a sadist, that *ultimately* she trusts her instincts, that *ultimately* she is peaceful, generous and has good sense. She goes on to reason that others must be the same; a conclusion borne out by her most intimate relations, which demonstrate to her that absence of control and force *is not disorder*.

## Objection 2: Anarchism is chaos

One of the most common authoritarian objections to the lifting of all constraint that anarchists seeks, is not just the *fear* that anarchism is synonymous with chaos but, as those who control culture inevitably shape the definition of words, *the written fact*. The word 'anarchy' means, in the dictionaries of the system, disorder; despite the fact that actual anarchists, with a few insane exceptions, have never been opposed to order. The question which anarchists seek to ask is what order, or whose. Anarchists believe that the only society worth living in is based on some kind of *natural organisation*, that which naturally or intuitively regulates individual and collective life. For authoritarians this does not exist. They see no evidence of it. What they see in 'intuition' is er-

ratic emotionality. What they see in nature is, principally at least, warfare, fear, pain, hierarchical struggle, pecking orders, alpha males and so on. For such people nature, and human nature, may contain organised elements, but the end result is a neverending, chaotic battle of all against all. Nature might be finely ordered, formally beautiful and good eating; but it cannot be trusted. To organise a society therefore must entail suppression and control of our natural instincts. Result; people become resentful, bored, stupid and violent... which is to say *disordered*.

‘But look how neat everything is! Look how well your phone works! Look at how nicely tar-macked the m25 is’. One of the reasons it is hard to perceive the chaos of the system is that it is *formally* ordered. It all looks good – provided you look in the right place. Everything, for example, looks good on paper, because it is has been priority one for the system, since to invention of writing, to ensure that everything in heaven and earth is *legible* – capable of being named, measured, standardised and controlled. Everything also looks good when it is dead. A modern farm is the epitome of order because nothing lives on it but one, hyper-ordered crop bred to depend completely upon equally ordered synthetic inputs (the same applies to the modern city and the modern computer). Finally, everything looks good when you don’t have to pay attention to what isn’t so good. We do not have a direct relationship with our fellow humans, or fellow creatures, and so we are spared from perceiving the bedlam that reigns beyond the office (flat, farm, factory or shop). All important interactions go via the system, and so we do not have to deal with, or even perceive, the *cause* of our formal order (the actual lives of people who build our computers, for example, or the animals which fill our burgerbuns) or its *effects* (where our rubbish and shit actually go when we’re done with it). The people of the affluent West live in an antiseptic sphere of mini coopers, Dyson vacuums and self-service checkouts. Everything seems to us, just as it did to the ancient Greeks and Romans, who had no idea of the horror their comfortable lives were based on, so very nicely arranged. We are confident in ourselves because we are confident in the safety and order of our surroundings; what lies outside the gates is not really worth paying serious attention to. We know that *something* is wrong out there, or we intuitively feel it, a distant rumble of thunder during the picnic, but it terrifies us, and so we turn to the consumption of reassuring neatness to push the anxiety away. Not that there is anything wrong with organising your record collection or cleaning your kitchen or collecting stamps or poring over maps; but that the system must manufacture toys which soothe the anxieties produced by the chaos which is the by-product of toys which soothe the anxieties produced by the chaos... of domination.

Dominate the land with industrial technology, dominate the people with repressive laws, dominate your children with rigid ‘discipline’, dominate women with physical power or intellectual scheming, dominate your life with strict plans, goals and systems, dominate the darkness with 24/7 light; and what happens? On paper it all works out fine. In the real world domination produces unnatural chaos.

*Domination*, however, is not the same as *power* or even *authority*. The ocean is powerful, but anarchists do not protest the tides. Likewise old people sometimes have, by virtue of their experience, immense authority; but only a fruitcake would oppose age on principle, or refuse to listen to its wisdom. There is a crucial difference – reflected in our language – between being *in* authority and being *an* authority. In the first place your power comes from *holding* a position, which is, by definition, an inflexible role or rank, and in the second your power comes from *being in* a position to use your knowledge, experience or sensitivity; then, when the circumstance changes, the power evaporates, as of course it should.

Fixing power into roles and ranks<sup>6</sup> has the same effect as fixing names into titles, meanings into definitions and guidelines into laws; they become unable to respond to what is actually happening. Result: fabulous inefficiency and, once again, unmanageable chaos, as everyone knows who has worked in an organisation bound by titles, definitions, laws and fixed power. Those at the bottom facing the actual situation find they are unable to deal with it, while those at the top not only have no idea what the situation is, they are terrified by the power of those who can see what needs to be done, and fanatically suppress any attempts to use it.

In an anarchist group whoever has more ability or sensitivity than the others naturally ‘takes the lead.’ Nobody with any intelligence, anarchist or otherwise, would refuse to *unthinkingly obey* an experienced sailor in a storm.<sup>7</sup> Indeed the hallmark of ability and sensitivity is that neither compel. One word from a true leader and everyone does as they please. Once we remove compulsion, then ability and sensitivity naturally take over as sources of authority. Thus anarchist society is, actually, *full* of leaders.<sup>8</sup>

Just as anarchism is not antithetical to authority, power and order, so it is not incompatible with what *appear* to be laws. A common complaint on anarchist discussion boards is ‘this isn’t really an anarchist forum! look, you’ve got rules!’ The question is not the existence of rules, but their *fluidity* (how much they allow for contextual exceptions), their *boundary* (the freedom one has if one disregards them) and their *purpose* (to what end this or that regulation). Anarchist ‘laws’, unlike those of the system, adapt to the intelligence of the individual, and the multitude of exceptional situations she finds herself in, allow dissenters to do what they like beyond their boundaries of application and, crucially, serve the non-egoic truth.

That’s all well and good, you might be thinking, but what will we do about the lazy people, those who will not work, the thieves and the criminals, those who steal what others have or produce? The anarchist answer is that we’ve been supporting such people for millennia. We call them the elites. When people work for themselves and with their fellows, without coercion or control and under reasonably promising circumstances, they do not tend to leach and steal from each other. Of course there will always be some who do, but when they are not in power – as they are now – they can be easily dealt with.

The fear that we cannot take care of ourselves without the police<sup>9</sup> or that we cannot heal ourselves without doctors is identical to the fear that we cannot feed ourselves without Lidl. Take schools. How, the authoritarian asks, will we educate our children without them?<sup>10</sup> The objection, like all objections to anarchism, isolates the institution in question from context and

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<sup>6</sup> States have a long tradition of forcing egalitarian and ‘horizontal’ peoples to appoint leaders.

<sup>7</sup> Although there are few people capable of discerning real authority in a system which brutalises sensitivity. That we all drown at the behest of the various cretins who are popularly exalted as philosophical, artistic, or moral authorities is less of a worry to systemacrats than that someone who knows what they are doing finds the helm.

<sup>8</sup> *‘In any one tribe there may be a hunting chief, work chief, dance chief, women’s chief, age grade chief, and fishing chief. These leaders function only in specific contexts and for limited periods of time; usually, their primacy is based on capacity in the particular activity. It does not carry over into the round of daily life; and, almost everyone in the society is, at one time or another, in a ‘chiefly’ position’.* In *Search of the Primitive*: Stanley Diamond. Similar observations about fluid ‘omnarchical’ leadership have been made by Bakunin, Comerford and Ruskin

<sup>9</sup> The police were invented to track down slaves, control large, defiant, crowds and protect shops; which, combined with more modern functions of surveillance, intimidation, making life unpleasant for unemployed people on the street and filling in forms, remain the principle tasks of the police. Coming round to your house after it has been burgled and being nice is really just a pr exercise.

<sup>10</sup> Meaning without syllabuses, state-compulsion, credentialism and so on. No need to get rid of the buildings, some of them are rather nice. They could even be used, of all things, for instruction and study.

consciousness. It says; given that reality is as it is (a collection of scarce things), that society is as it is (enemy territory) and that people are as they are (selfish apes or sinful gods), if we remove institutions which protect us from reality, which organise society and which regulate people, then everything will go to the dogs. And, given *those* assumptions, everything would.<sup>11</sup>

A world without schools demands an educational society; in which nature, and the activities of adults within it, are freely available to children. Opportunities to learn — meaning opportunities to work and to play — are, like everything else in nature, *abundant* (see myth 3). When children can join adults in their orchestras, garages, workshops, libraries, laboratories, clinics, theatres, farms and football pitches; they learn. The reason that children are not allowed to learn their culture in this way, through direct contact with reality, without the ministrations of a credentialised middle-man, is because that reality is wild.<sup>12</sup> It can be influenced, understood and used — not to mention adored — but it cannot be dominated. It is this — and not the prospect of millions of children vegetating in front of their playstations — that horrifies those who are addicted to institutional control.

Likewise when work is pleasurable (or at the very least meaningful), when rest is available, when the wilderness is close at hand, when ordinary people have access to the tools and techniques of health, when they can self-diagnose and self-medicate, when they can learn to deal with pain on their own, when they can die on their own; when, in short, society is healthy, there is no need for professional doctors. There is a need for people who naturally specialise in complex procedures and risky techniques, just as there is a need for people who naturally specialise in intensely funky drumming, but in an anarchic society everyone has rhythm.

### Objection 3. Anarchism is Violent

If the first thought, on hearing the word ‘anarchism’ is ‘chaos,’ the second is likely to be ‘violence’. Both associations have been relentlessly promoted since anarchism became a force to be reckoned with — as it was for large parts of the nineteenth century — but the idea of the moustachioed fiend creeping through the shadows was first disseminated and sensationalised after a bomb was thrown at the 1886 Haymarket Square riot in Chicago and, over the course of the next decade or so, several heads of state were assassinated by anarchists. The trope has evolved over the years — today the cartoon bomb is usually carried by some dude wearing a *V for Vendetta* mask or a Palestinian Keffiyeh — but it continues to be defined by indiscriminate, juvenile violence.

The essence of the problem was first identified by [the socialist] George Orwell, who complained to his anarchist friend, George Woodcock, that there is nothing to stop groupthink from dominating anarchist societies with the same coercive force as the state does; and indeed this is just what tends to happen. A certain kind of idiot is drawn to anarchism, just as a certain kind of idiot is drawn to classical music, team sports or Hello Kitty. Their idiocy simultaneously reinforces itself (through stigmatising outsiders and glorifying insiders) and degrades itself (through stereotyping and stereotypical behaviour) leading to the ready-made cliché easily sensationalised

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<sup>11</sup> At least initially they would. Weeds initially ravage all fields from which artificial controls are lifted.

<sup>12</sup> Or chaotic — although I prefer not to use this word as the chaos of nature is more like the ‘chaos’ of chaos theory, a paradoxical state between unpredictable chaos and intuitively appreciated and generated (rather than merely mind-made) order. For the educational and organisational power of wild chaos see Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder*. See also Innes H. Pearse and Lucy H. Crocker, *The Peckham Experiment; A Study of the Living Structure of Society*.

and spurned by opponents. Violent young atheists wearing anarcho-acceptable attire, reading Chuck Palahniuk, playing hardcore music in violent demos, living in filthy squats<sup>13</sup> and sharing dank memes fantasising about exterminating pigs, are not hard to come by, but they no more represent anarchism than Cliff Richards represents Christianity or Helen Lewis represents women. In fact a large proportion of anarchists are pacifists, some of them rather extreme (Ghandi, for example, self-identified as an anarchist.<sup>14</sup>) Not that pacifism is necessarily anarchistic either, or that violence<sup>15</sup> is not sometimes necessary (it certainly is – particularly against property). Total and complete pacifism is, actually, an impotent, immoral and very often racist absurdity (even Ghandi, like Martin Luther King Jr., wasn't against armed insurrection when pacifism could not work)<sup>16</sup>. Even those who suggest Native Americans, Jews and Laotians should have sat around holding candles, 'bearing witness' and positively thinking their way out of genocide would violently defend a four year old daughter from attack.

Blanket characterisation of anarchism as 'violent' on the basis of the restless, cliquey child-minds it attracts, or on the occasional use or recommendation of violence, is not just a caricature, it is also a *tad* hypocritical coming from a king, a capitalist, a socialist or any other representative of the system. A more violent way of life than we have now, or have ever had within the system, which has spent thousands of years violently obliterating all that is good on earth, plundering defenceless people, exterminating them or forcibly assimilating them, is nearly impossible to imagine.

#### **Objection 4: Anarchism is parochial**

Another doubt which people commonly have about anarchism is its capacity to work beyond small groups of a few hundred. Critics point out that, okay, tiny groups of pre-agricultural folk and minute radical outfits on the fringe might be able to handle life without coercive laws and the like, but how on earth are we to organise a global post-industrial society informally?

We aren't. It is impossible. A world *such as we have* cannot be run from the bottom up. What kind of world *can* emerge from anarchist principles is, however, an open question. Large-scale anarchist co-operation and free international exchange are perfectly feasible and would lead to an extraordinarily complex world; just not one overruled by czars and commissars. Anarchism, in fact, is no more antithetical to complex federations, than it is to leadership, authority and law. What it opposes, once again, is hierarchical *control*. Anarchist federations are, in fact, hierarchical<sup>17</sup>; just extremely flat ones in which the power of the level above is zero; with those at the peak able to do little more than recommend and relay. This doesn't mean they are ineffective (as advisory bodies are in the system) any more than your grandmother is. As the influential anarchist Colin Ward has pointed out, the international postal service and railways are both massive anarchist structures, with no central control whatsoever, as were a great number of pre-civilised

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<sup>13</sup> Not that there is anything wrong with squats. I've lived in a few I'd be happy to take my nan to.

<sup>14</sup> According to Woodcock in *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*.

<sup>15</sup> A word, incidentally, which is notoriously difficult to define.

<sup>16</sup> See Peter Gelderloos, *How Nonviolence Protects the State*, for a flawed but thorough and convincing critique of totalising pacifism, and argument for the use of violence *in certain situations*.

<sup>17</sup> Some hunter-gatherer cultures are also hierarchical. The word 'hierarchy' is normally used in an entirely negative sense; hierarchical processes are always said to be predicated on force. For this reason the word is probably best not applied to anarchist federations.

societies which, as James C. Scott outlines, were enormous. And we have even glimpsed — alas only for a few moments — a scaled-up anarchist society in modern times, in revolutionary Spain. This lasted a short time, was riddled with compromise, violent (fascist) opposition from the right, equally violent reformist (communist) pressures from the left and all the chicanery one might expect from such a radically permissive experiment; but there were many astonishing examples of spontaneous, peaceful, organisation and generosity — again, on an extraordinary scale — in anarchist Spain.<sup>18</sup>

But, hold on, what's to stop a powerful state overwhelming a weak informal anarchist federation? Almost nothing. Does it mean that our immune system is wrong or faulty because a bullet can kill us? Genuine anarchism prevents authoritarian hierarchies from forming. It is also extraordinary resilient and in many cases better able to fluidly defend itself than centralised states; but it can no more protect us against the vast militaristic power of modern states, that have spent millennia organising themselves (and domesticating their subjects) than an ant's nest can defend itself against a nuke. That doesn't make anarchism powerless though, as we shall see.

## Objection 5: Anarchism is uncivilised

Correct. Anarchism, insofar as it is effective and consistent, rejects the entire dominating machinery of what we normally call 'civilisation'. For most of human history such societies were the norm and, until recently, there were innumerable remnants from that time which displayed, in varying degrees, the consequences of living in a genuinely anarchistic manner; societies in which egalitarian social and sexual relations were the norm, as was enjoyable work, absence of scarcity, no money, no warfare and very little suffering, at least as we experience it today. Certainly nothing like clinical depression, schizophrenia, psychopathy and so on. That humans were long-lived, healthy and happy is *the consensus position* amongst those who study ancient or primal people. There were problems of course, tensions, disagreements, even murders — and of course the wild is a brutally unsentimental companion — but in the absence of property, specialised power and whatnot, interpersonal problems could be dealt with. Likewise there were disagreements and doubts about what should be done, but these were not resolved by means of a vote which a minority was compelled to submit to; indeed very often they were not resolved *explicitly* at all.<sup>19</sup> Problems were resolved in a way which is almost unimaginable today; by looking, together, for the *right* thing to do.

The idea that the most successful social organisation in history should serve as some kind of model for what we should collectively aspire to, goes by the name of anarcho-primitivism; the *general* rejection of civilised forms of organisation, such as centrally controlled cereal cultivation, industrial technology, institutional hegemony and so on. Despite the caricatures which critics

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<sup>18</sup> You wouldn't call the slums of India, Brazil or Pakistan 'successful' in the sense of allowing people to live well, but in that they have allowed them to live at all, under extraordinarily difficult circumstances, has not been down to any kind of central planning, or socialistic intervention. They often exhibit some of the finest examples of anarchy in action.

<sup>19</sup> *“Those who have lived among savage or barbarous peoples in several parts of the world have related how they have attended native councils, where matters in which they were interested were being discussed. When, after a time, the English observer found that the people were discussing some wholly different topic, and inquired when they were going to decide the question in which he was interested, he was told that it had already been decided and they had passed on to other business... The members of the council had become aware, at a certain point, that they were in agreement, and it was not necessary to bring the agreement explicitly to notice.”* W.H.Rivers

invent (*'using a phone! what a hypocrite!'*), anarcho-primitivism does not entail the ludicrous refusal of *all* technology (such as fire, pottery or even agriculture, which, incidentally predates the horrors of state-run farms<sup>20</sup>) or demand anarcho-primitivists take off all their clothes and go and live in a tree; and it certainly doesn't entail, as some critics like to believe, a recommendation for the extermination of mankind. It simply recognises that coercion and control run deeper than kings, parliaments and corporations pushing people around; that we are domesticated as much, if not more, by our tools<sup>21</sup> as we are by those who have power over them, and that a functioning society *must* be based on the non-democratic egalitarianism, sensitivity and wildness of our ancestors. As such anarcho-primitivism *is* anarchism.

Quibbles over terminology aside, primal societies are not the only ones which demonstrate that we do not need money, usurious systems of debt peonage, hyper-specialisation, entrenched networks of professional power, bureaucracy, law and similar civilised techniques to live well together. People around the world, from the middle-ages up to the present day, have functioned on informal, decentralised, systems of decision-making, taking care of their lives, working, playing, educating themselves and dealing with conflict without the interference of dominants. Money supplies have dried up, police have vanished, governments have broken down and people have found that life has not just gone on as before, but has been far easier and more pleasant. Ordinarily this happens during a crisis, such as when the banks shut down in Ireland in 1970, or in the early days of the British, French, Russian, Chinese and Hungarian revolutions, in the spring days in Prague in 1968 and in the breakdown of communism in the former ussr, not to mention in the middle of natural catastrophes, when people have found, in spite of all the horrors that attended these events, collective intelligence, resourcefulness and conviviality. This has surprised them, just as it does us, who are used to seeing the breakdown of 'society' portrayed as brutal chaos. Such chaos does exist of course, but *only when dominants still exist*. It is not the absence of civilisation that causes riots and violence during times of social crises, but its presence.

Peasant societies the world over, some of which are extremely complex and widespread, also demonstrate that the various machines of civilised coercion are not necessary to organise life. Groups living on the periphery of civilised states — the barbarians and the backward folk — have successfully conducted their lives along broadly anarchist lines, while resisting centralised control, for millennia.<sup>22</sup> Again, they haven't been without their decidedly non-anarchistic internal problems, but to those who wish to look, they are also evidence of the genius and harmony that is possible among people working together outside systems of control.

Anarchism works, and there is important evidence to demonstrate that it works. Ultimately, however, evidence is secondary, even tertiary. You don't need evidence to reason that theft is impossible in a society in which nobody owns anything, police are unnecessary when there are no laws to uphold or borders to defend, a teaching establishment is redundant when society itself (not to mention nature) is educational, and medical professionals have nothing to do when the

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<sup>20</sup> James C. Scott, *Against the Grain*. There have been, in Peter Gelderloo's words, '*resolutely anti-authoritarian and ecocentric agricultural societies*'.

<sup>21</sup> Particularly our high tech tools but also the hyper-complex 'tools' of social organisation that build pyramids and feed Pharaohs.

<sup>22</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*. Some large-scale radical movements of the middle ages — such as the rangers and the brethren of the free spirit — were also broadly anarchist. Indeed the so-called 'dark ages' — the period before the stereotyped late medieval period of starvation, servitude, intolerance, poverty and plagues — were only dark to states, who were unable to control them. Many medieval towns were not exactly anarchist, but, after having thrown off their lords, were independent and egalitarian to a level unimaginable today.

causes of sickness and madness are removed. More than that, and most important of all, you don't need evidence to know that *you* do not need governments and institutions to tell you what to do and that, ultimately, *you* are no different from *them*.

## Objection 6: Anarchism is unrealistic

If we accept if anarchism is a viable approach to our lives, and that it is not best represented by the Sex Pistols, there is another — and for many decisive — objection to realising a genuinely anarchist way of life. Given that we are about as far away from an anarchist world as it is possible to be, how on Earth are we to get there? Given that the whole world would have to be anarchist or concentrated technological power would soon overcome everywhere else; how are we to create an international anarchist paradise?

Once again, we aren't. In the first place, on the foundational recognition that nature, including conscious human nature, is inherently intelligent — a *living* intelligence moreover, that is responsive to a phenomenally complex and ever-changing context — anarchist strategies for organising society are *necessarily* extremely weak. People will, when unconstrained, create their own unique federations, associations, cultures, traditions, fluid guidelines for living, styles of working and so on. To be sure we can speak of certain attributes a free, functioning anarchist town or farm or theatre is almost sure to have; ego-dissolving rituals, small groups federated into weaker large ones, tools that ordinary people can fix and use, presence of the wild, love of craft, freedom of women and children, leaders taking the hindmost, etc. Finally though, we don't know how innumerable people in innumerable situations are going to set about organising their lives. And thank God we don't.

On top of this, we face the titanic world-system as it is. Bringing that down and allowing anarchism to grow is obviously impossible for us. As it stands it would take centuries to change our institutions (by some estimates around 400 years to change our energy systems). Add to this the power and extent, not to mention the invasiveness, of the state-corporate technological system and its professional, political and military organs of control, then perhaps multiply by the domesticated passivity, sickness and fear of the masses and lay that against how polluted the planet is, how little tree-cover is left, how much co2 is in the atmosphere, how rapidly the ice-caps and the permafrost are melting and the oceans heating up, how much time we have left before we run out of oil, rare-earth metals, fresh water, fish and top-soil... then heap on top of all that, if you are capable of perceiving it — and few are — the basic abomination of the world, the depths of dissolution and darkness we now live in, so far from collective intelligence or joy that they appear as dreams within dreams within dreams; if they appear at all. And then, finally, consider what it means to situate all this as a *process*, consider the phenomenal *relentlessness* of the system; how it grows continually, picking up the pieces of failed civilisations and institutions, improving on previous techniques, pushing inexorably onwards, spreading indefatigably outwards, colonising, rationalising, fixing, defining and controlling more and more, and more and more. We are on the edge of doom and the system is not merely growing, it is, like the compound interest that drives it, growing *exponentially*. It never stops, never sleeps and never, ever, gives up — it is the evil, inhuman supermind *par excellence*. It is so complete that just as it makes the most radical of us guilty hypocrites ('hohoho, look at this radical wearing shoes made in a sweatshop!'), so, as it disintegrates, it suffocates and scatters not just its supporters, but its opponents. The radical,

forced like everyone else to suckle from the satanic tit, is not strengthened by the weakness of the system, but weakens with it.

Now, after all this, consider what readjustment can achieve, what reform and change and petitions and marches and newspaper articles can do to stop this leviathan for good, so that it *never* picks up its tools again. *Nothing*. Consider how absurd, how blind, it is to suppose that we can legislate our way out of this, or, even more ridiculously, technologically steer growth down ‘eco-friendly’ channels; indeed that anyone can ever rationally control society. Consider what actually needs to be done to prevent the short-term annihilation of the natural world and, with it, our so-called civilisation which we’ve built upon it; immediate and massive negative growth, re-distribution of wealth and power, colossal scaling back on energy usage and a radical dismantling of the state-corporate system (both capitalist and socialist) — and all of this everywhere, pretty much *immediately*. What needs to be done? The system needs to end. For good. And who is going to do it? We, those of us who understand the problem, or even want to, are laughably, stupendously, weak. A few scattered oddbods set against a mechanism, ten-thousand years in the making, which has invaded every last recess of the natural world and the human mind. It is everywhere at all times, in all people. It is the polluted body, the restless emotion and all thought based thereon. We don’t stand a chance.

We don’t — but I know someone who does!

We have an ally in our long struggle against the Zone of Evil, an ally which is to the system, as the system is to us; unimaginably more powerful. Powerful on an epic, universal scale. This ally goes by a few names, but we’ll use here the least controversial, the one closest to common usage; nature. Nature is a more effective activist than man; and she, unlike us, is not one for discussion. Nature does not vote, or protest, or write petitions, or form unions, or write stern letters, or launch social media campaigns. She prefers to effortlessly sweep the world away.

The system thinks it understands nature because it can measure and describe every measurable and describable aspect of her; the so-called ‘objective’ world of things and events (external form) and the so-called ‘subjective’ world of thoughts and emotions (internal form). Because it appears, to the system, that everything is form, philosophers of system regularly claim that everything is natural. The word ‘unnatural’ has no meaning for them because they are incapable of experiencing the *principle* of nature, which precedes and comprises form. ‘Natural’ — the natural organisation that anarchists strive to base society upon — describes the consciousness which *precedes* internal form, and the context which *comprises* external form. It is this natural principle which produces the natural wren and guides it to naturally respond to the earwig. Lack of consciousness, and separation from the context, produces the unnatural crop-duster and guides it to respond unnaturally to the earwig.

Natural organisation is impossible for the self-informed mind to grasp. The mind is an *either-or* mechanism. It perceives *either* wave *or* particle, *either* here *or* there, *either* order *or* chaos. Nature, like consciousness, is *both-and*. It is *both* wave *and* particle, *both* here *and* there, *both* ordered *and* chaotic. When the anarchist asserts (*without either-or evidence*) that nature should reign over scientific method, artistic scenius, transport, education, farming, city planning or anything else in life, mind — to the extent it is informed by mind (or by the mind-made system) — *objects*. It creates an object of nature; a *thing* over there, dis-ordered, out of control, wild and *chaotic*, which must be tamed, isolated, dominated, *ordered* before we bring it over here. The idea that nature can organise society with the same intelligence and beauty as it organises tree crowns and mycelium networks is *unthinkable*.

The nature that is coming to blow the world away is not, then, merely the formal hurricanes, floods, draught, diseases and freezes that, even as you read, are waiting in the wings, not merely the waves upon waves of displaced people sweeping across the earth or the unimaginable civil warfare soon to come, it is also, and ultimately, the super-intimate natural principle behind this cataclysm. Just bringing down the power lines and blowing away the government is not enough to free the mind. The system penetrates the deepest recesses of the psyche. From the moment it is born, the self is gradually moulded into a system-compliant form; through the corrupting (if well-meaning) influence of family – the erratic, emotional pain, and continual (if unconscious) repression of one's finer, subtler instincts – through the continual pressures of socialisation to obey, accept, conform and submit, to the requirements of the school, the office, the court, the parliament and the artificial hyperworld they are slowly being absorbed into; through habituation to the totalising simulacrum of the spectacle, continual exposure to its relentless propagandising and surrender to its addictive enticements, all tailored (again, unconsciously) to the particular anxieties and manias of the individual; through a life lived continually in mediated environments, in which no wild nature, no direct truth, no aesthetic profundity and, increasingly, no reality at all is allowed to penetrate; through total dependency on the system for all its needs, the self slowly turns into an emotionally over-involved, highly abstracted, highly distracted ghost creature, a bland, half-dead, entirely predictable, desensitized, appendage to the system with no way, whatsoever, of discerning that which is not self. Self, in other words, becomes ego, a *self-informed* mental-emotional mechanism which accepts completely the system's determinants of reality. It may rebel against narrow conceptions of 'the system,' it may fantasize about all kinds of artistic and creative freedom, it may invent all manner of fantastic conspiracies to account for its misery and confinement, it may – indeed must – break down or drop out completely, but while the system-ego reigns over conscious experience, the ordinary world forever appears to *be* the ordinary world and not, as it is, every second, a standing invitation to gut-ruptured astonishment and self-shattering psychological liberation.

This profound conditioning not, it is vital to grasp, just an intellectual belief, a question of 'accepting official / social narratives,' (although it is that). Nor are we just talking of the anxiety and craving associated with emotionally-potent sociological conditioning and groupthink (although it is that too). The system-conditioned ego does not just reflexively spout the absurd scientific or religious nonsense of whatever cult, profession or state it belongs to, does not just think, feel or even act as the system does, but *sees and feels* systematically. The *entire self* is colonised. This is how the system – the discrete world of institutions and the diffuse hyperworld of the world brain – appears to merge with nature, with the passing of time. 'It becomes necessity and fate, and is lived through as such;<sup>23</sup> an oppressive, all-consuming, normality. Unlike the normality of nature though, it is alien to us, beyond our capacity to meaningfully experience, influence or understand. In dreams it appears as a monstrous, intangible, dread and yet, upon waking, we defend it with our lives. This is why genuine moments of liberation feel like a kind of dying; because we are not merely overcoming the world out there, but the entire self that creates and sustains it, in here. It is also why, paradoxically, genuinely liberating experiences do not merely amaze the mind and excite the heart, but baffle, delight and stun the natural *body*. Genuinely revolutionary realisations reveal the heartbreaking, radical truth of forms, colours, flavours; of the pressure of

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<sup>23</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*.

the ground under the feet, the taste of sugar on the tongue, the phenomenal, incarnate fact that there is anything at all.

Your sanity certainly depends on your capacity to live, as far as possible, independently from the world-machine, and every step we can take to disrupt its operation or spread understanding of what it is and how it works represents *genuine* progress, the return of the good thing. Debilitating strikes (without reformist demands — simply refusing to clean, for example, wealthy houses, or take their rubbish away), electronic activism which wipes out records (the first and most important act of peasant revolts throughout history), collective refusal to pay rents or loans, disruption of the mechanisms of definition and control, establishing communes (and avoiding activist groups and especially ‘democratic general assemblies’), disseminating the sweet truth and, most effective of all, finding and snapping, or jamming, the weak points that every overextended system creates (while avoiding direct confrontation); these are all meaningful and effective acts, as is learning bicycle maintenance, planting parsnips, distilling whiskey, building a bomb-shelter, making charcoal, learning the bassoon and painting beautiful graffiti on the Thameslink. A committed and intelligent group might even, eventually, at the right moment, be able to deliver a death-blow to the system.<sup>24</sup> Engaging in genuinely subversive and system-destructive acts is not an option for the kind and the conscious, merely living in the unworld compels them; but the most widespread revolt and the most meticulous preparation don’t currently stand a peanut’s chance in the monkeyhouse of completely overthrowing the system or responding intelligently to its imminent collapse. Only nature can do that, the self-shattering principle of your *own* nature.

Ultimately this is the only way to overthrow the self-informed system; to overthrow the self-informed self, or ego, which created and sustains it. As more people realise, learn to experience and express their own nature — an event inevitably interpreted as ‘narcissistic’ by the the egoids plugged into the monolith — so the unimaginable power of natural people working freely together — a chaotic, informal, undemocratic, non-centralised, collection of radically natural folk — will inevitably pull the system apart, as it has so many times in the past.

What this radical internal revolution actually means however — while being, in the end, astonishingly simple — is, to the ordinary, systemic mind, an extraordinary odyssey. It is bizarre, ferocious and wonderful. But it requires another book to do justice to. I cover this — ultimate anarchism — in *33 Myths of the Ego*.

## Objection 7: Anarchism is insane

Many people refuse politics entirely, never read the news, and believe that, on every subject that comes under the rubric of ‘politics’ — such as immigration, government, money, social class

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<sup>24</sup> Kaczynski’s, *Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How* provides a good overview of how such a group would need to be constituted and what it would have to do. His criticisms of half-arsed reformism are, as elsewhere, particularly useful. And funny. *But*, as discussed in the notes to myth 32 of *33 Myths of the System*, Kaczynski has close to zero understanding or appreciation of conscious being, or of the role that ego played in forming the system, or plays in maintaining it, or would play in screwing up the potency of a genuinely revolutionary group. Such a group, along the lines that Kaczynski outlines, may be able provide a service to the earth. Who knows? But I wouldn’t endorse it. The kind of group that could really do what needs to be done, and with style, would be far gentler and more playful than Kaczynski seems to think. This doesn’t mean they would be opposed to violence, or be wishy-washy. It means they would be *human*.

or work — there is very little to say, as it is all complete and utter bullshit. This is pretty much an anarchist position.

There have also been many people in history, indeed for most of history if we look back to the beginning of human experience, who have not had to deal with anything like what we would call politics; with a state, for example, or with professional authority, or with war and taxation and news and technology and whatnot. Among such people are primal hunter-and-gathers, children, animals, plants and every other non-human thing in the universe. They are also anarchists.

Finally there have been people, numerically few, but influential far, far beyond the ambit of their immediate reach, who have refused the moral, intellectual or social authority of their peers and have freely fathomed the depths of their own conscious experience. Such people we call great artists and scientists. These might not be politically anarchist, and their work might be extremely sober and ordered, but in their *approach* to what they do, they were, as Paul Feyerabend has demonstrated, radically libertarian. We sometimes call their work anarchic too; the comedies of Monty Python, for example, the films of Emir Kusturica, the thought of Jiddu Krishnamurti, the Moomin stories, the music of Can, the drawings of Tomi Ungerer; any radical refusal of authority which excites our original, natural instincts greets us as form of anarchism. This is why so many great people are attracted to it. Georges Brassens, Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Blake, Mark Rothko, J.R.R. Tolkien, Lao Tzu, Jesus of Nazareth, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Leo Tolstoy, Albert Einstein and Ghandi all realised, in their own lives, that refusal of all constraint is the only way to further knowledge, experience harmony, live with any integrity or have fun.

This refusal is usually understood as a kind of negativity or as a kind of madness and, *strictly* speaking, that is the case. Anarchism, like that other widely misunderstood idea, nihilism, is largely *defined* by what it is not. But life, the life that anarchists and nihilists revere, is not a definition. Reality, as everyone realises from time to time, is far stranger, subtler and more flexible than what can be said of it.

Anarchism, in the finest sense of the word, resists definition because it claims that the only intelligence, like the only wealth, is life itself — the conscious life of each of us. The reason men and women do not need kings, princes, states, professionals, institutions and systems to rule over them is because the life within them is more intelligent, more apt, more sensitive, more forgiving and more creative than anything else — certainly any human authority. But this life cannot be rationally fixed. It can be expressed, artistically, indirectly, poetically, musically or with tone and glance and such ordinary arts of human interaction, but it cannot be rigidly stated. This is why the ‘beliefs’ of anarchism, as far as direct statements go, are so often negative, why anarchism, like nihilism, is so often dismissed as ‘just being against everything’.

Another reason that people accuse anarchism of nihilism is that anarchism is not a socialist or a capitalist approach to collective problems. The idea is this: ‘You are criticising *our team* (communism, socialism, feminism, the nation, the market, whatever) — therefore *you believe in nothing!*’ The system-state (like the system-institution or the system-corp), and socialist-reformist plans for organising it, is all there is, or can possibly be, forever and ever. Anything else is ‘nihilistic’ (because the system is the universe) or, alternatively, ‘insane’ (because the system is sanity) or, perhaps, ‘unrealistic’ (because ‘reality’ is the Way Things Are and The Way People Are). Domesticated automatons unconsciously serving a technocratic state (or corporate, or feudal) system forever; *that* is reality. Oppose that, and you are by definition an unrealistic, insane, nihilist.

The egoic mind made the world that dominates us and so to say that we do not really need it quite naturally seems, to the mind, nuts. When pressed on what we *do* need, the answers

that anarchist give seem equally absurd; because the egoic mind cannot quite grasp them. This 'ideological elusiveness' is, finally, why many people who are anarchists in so much of their lives, refuse to define themselves as such. When they start to *think* about their politics or their culture they find the thinkable; capitalism, socialism, Christianity, humanism, feminism or some other ideology of the system. And when they *think* about anarchism, they find the thoughts that the system has placed there; it seems inhuman, or chaotic, or violent, or parochial, or unrealistic, or uncivilised, or mad.

And yet life is anarchic, and all good things within it; including you. Take a look at your friendships, at your love life, at your attitude to nature, at your creative life (if you have one), at your play. How do you behave, in other words, independently from coercive systems of centralised power and control? Do you base your closest relationships on authoritarian rule? Do you vote when you are out with your friends? Do you write and rigidly enforce laws with your family? Do you refrain from engaging in loving activities until you are properly accredited? Is there *anything* socialist about your natural life? Do you create and jam and play and collaborate together democratically? I don't think so. There might be the odd 'show of hands,' but by far the most generous, the most intelligent and the most enjoyable reality of collective and personal life is without any kind of domination; it lives mysteriously, naturally and spontaneously. Free.

This is why anarchism is the instinct *that won't go away*. Nature is anarchic, children are anarchic, the free, creative mind is anarchic, all of humanity's beloved ancestors were somehow anarchic and all of human society, beyond the microscopic bubble of the [corp]state, is and has always been anarchic; hunter-gatherers, friends, lovers and most effective working groups. We are anarchists.

## **The Choice You Have is between Anarchism and Anarchism**

What might a free anarchist society look like today? Imagine if we removed the state and all its laws, dismantled our institutions and corporations, made attendance at school voluntary, opened the prisons, abolished educational qualifications and all professional accreditation, allowed everyone access to all professionally-guarded resources, cancelled all debts, abolished the police, the army, modern industrial technology, money, banks and private property. Imagine, in short, that we lived, now, 'as if the day had come'. It seems to us, considering such a prospect, that the result would be unbelievable chaos and suffering. But, even putting aside the fact that, outside a few comfortable bubbles, the world is *already* unbelievable chaos and suffering, it is still an irrelevant objection; because very soon there will be a crash that will do all this *anyway*. We have the choice between that kind of crash and one we organise ourselves. In either case it will be grim; but I know which one I prefer.

This is an excerpt from *33 Myths of the System*, a hyper-radical guide to the unworld; free to download at <http://expressiveegg.org/portfolio/33-myths-of-the-system/>

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Darren Allen  
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An Introduction to the Instinct that Won't Go Away  
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