William Gillis
Every Scientist Should Be An Anarchist

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The first time I encountered the claim that an anarchistic society would impede scientific[1] progress I was too shocked — and later busy chortling — to sketch out a thorough response.

It's a surprising sentiment to me for a lot of reasons, not the least for the well known correspondence between scientific progress and social and material freedom in mass societies. I suppose liberals might be inclined to write this relation off as a low value-correspondence — like solely whether free speech is allowed or if folks even have time for anything besides the struggle to stay alive — but to me the connection seems quite obviously fundamental. Power relations of any kind are ultimately more constrictive of inquiry than they can ever be of benefit to it. The logic is simple: Control can only be achieved through disengagement and rigidity. And so any successful power structure must involve mechanisms to punish and suppress habits of inquiry.

[1] I should note that I'm using the definition of science that involves seeking direct roots-up explanations (ie physics, mathematics, chemistry and a bit of biology) rather than merely anything that dabbles in empiricism.

Parents, teachers, bosses and cops… they all achieve control by mimicking the binary system of threats (absolute law and punishment) that the state uses. Rather than an organic system of constant, decentralized give and take that rewards wider attention, the archist approach seeks to ideally shrink the subject's attention down to a single, controllable input. This creates an artificial environment that rewards habits of rigidity and punishes persistent inquiry. And of course these habits are replicated in the communities and structures they create with their peers. Little has broken my heart more than going from teaching third graders who delightedly took to advanced algebra and calculus to jaded and broken middle schoolers whose priorities were social survival and escape from misery. Suffice to say, people would place far more value in science if they weren't constantly beaten down for having an open mind. Granted, it might end up taking a few generations for literally everyone to become a scientist, but even a moderate improvement would do wonders.

That's the reasoning for my general inclination that anarchistic societies would be far more facilitative of scientific inquiry. But the specifics paint exactly the same picture.

The centralized means of research and development characteristic of state involvement is hugely inefficient. (One can't help but suspect that might even be intentional.) Capital intensive undertakings like the LHC and NASA are widely known to be riddled with bureaucratic inefficiencies, in some cases raising costs by a full order of magnitude. The LHC would work better as a cooperative that elected its own, took donations and acted autonomously in its own interest rather than allowing every decision to be the result of totally unrelated diplomatic jockeying. NASA would work better broken up: some major projects acting like said cooperatives, others competing.

The corporate research model is one of incremental data collection bent severely by patent and military concerns. Aside from being hugely psychologically scarring to scientists and ac-

tively suppressing the sort of deep-thinking paradigmatic leaps that keep theoretical clutter from accumulating, the focus of investigation is largely determined from the top down in order to maximize short term benefits to those in power. Obviously this has led to all kinds of terrible consequences and has helped reinforce the notion of scientists as irresponsible lapdogs of authority, but more importantly it has had a retarding effect on scientific development as a whole. Logical follow-ups on discoveries or theoretical developments aren't just pursued unequally, whole trains of investigation are artificially accelerated or decelerated relative one another creating situations where realizations that speak to core issues with another train aren't discovered until well into its development.

Science works best in a state of informational anarchy. Paywall enclosed journals are now widely recognized as a stain on our field and a detriment to scientific progress. But so too does the severity of non-disclosure agreements (shaped both by market standards distorted towards capital and the availability of state coercion rather than polycentric arbitration systems predicated solely on reputation) not to mention the very enforceability of intellectual property openly suppress competition and innovation.

None of these issues of relative efficiency should be that surprising. Ultimately any collective pursuit is a processing problem and the more decentralized and richly connected a system is the better it's capable of processing.

But what of funding itself?

On the one hand there's a tendency to say well, so what if scientists end up pushing mops part-time? Plenty of scientists currently waste a lot of time on work irrelevant to their investigations (teaching, etc) and some of the best developments have come from people who preferred to earn their bread from less demanding side-jobs.

But the trick is that the efficiencies of anarchistic social arrangements extend to the social support infrastructure for

science as well. A more efficient society provides greater background abundance, freeing inquiring minds that might otherwise be economically trapped and providing greater real wealth across the board. Even ignoring its ridiculous misallocation and inefficiency, government funding for research is both a fraction of that available through private grants and a ridiculously tiny percentage of the taxdollars currently collected even in a world leader like the US. It wouldn't take much to expand the voluntary private/charitable sector (through investment groups or enthusiast donations as currently present in a lot of extremely expensive space exploration development) to at least cover existing costs. Further the interplay between researchers/designers, their supporters and the rest of the population would be more nuanced, transparent and accountable on all ends. And this is likely to stoke even more investment. Hierarchical, centralized and edict-based power structures like the state and corporations act as information bottlenecks on every level and are prone to totalizing swings in policy with no capacity for graduated pressures.

Simply put, it seems obvious to me that there would be more scientists and a higher drive for science in an anarchistic society, plus a higher degree of efficiency that would benefit science directly as well as indirectly.

> If the State had been abolished a century ago, we'd all have robots and summer homes in the Asteroid belt.
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> — Samuel Konkin