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Why I Am an Individualist

Frank Q. Stuart

September 15, 1890

Some months ago the editor requested me to write an article on this subject, but not until now have I found myself so situated that I could conveniently do so.

This is a question that may be answered in various ways, but at best it can only be partially answered in a short article.

I am an Individualist first, because Individualism is the only philosophy that furnishes a rational, or if you please, scientific, solution of the great social and political questions of the hour. I am quite sure I am neither a Socialist nor an Anarchist as the doctrines of those isms are respectively expounded by their leading writers. Socialists—and when I say Socialists I refer to State Socialists—seem to have no conception whatever of the Law of Equal Freedom, while Anarchists, on the other hand, recognize only one-half of that law, which is equivalent to no knowledge of it whatever, and because the speculative writings of neither rise to the dignity or partake of the character of philosophy. Every Socialist will tell you Socialists believe in liberty and equal freedom, but the trouble is they do not understand the *meaning* of equal freedom. Every Anarchist will tell you Anarchists believe firmly in liberty and equal freedom, but they regard liberty and equal freedom as one and the same

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thing—the entire absence of extraneous restraint upon, and regulation of, the conduct of the individual. Socialism regards individual competition in the several departments of industrial activity as the root of all evil. It looks upon capitalism as the direct product of competition and as the curse of civilization; and its slogan is: “The abolition of the wage system!” This it confidently hopes to accomplish through governmental ownership and control of all phases of industrial activity, thus entirely doing away with individual competition by making the State the capitalist and general employer, and the citizen the employé, to be remunerated out of the State fund according to the value of the labor he performs. This is the extreme of paternalism and centralization of power, the general objections to which are too well-known to require repetition here, but the specific philosophical objections to which I shall endeavor to make plain later on in this article. There are various schools of Socialists, and perhaps not a few would demur to the foregoing statement of their doctrine; but I think the unprejudiced and careful investigator will find it a fair statement of the logical outcome of their teachings. State Socialism is the advocate of legalized tyranny. It recognizes majority rule in *everything*. Anarchism is directly opposed to Socialism. It advocates *no rule* in *anything*, whether by majority or minority. Their slogan is: the total “abolition of the State!” With Anarchists, the individual is everything and the State nothing. With socialists, the State is everything and the individual nothing. Anarchists advocate the entire removal of all forms of restraint upon, and regulation of, the conduct of the individual. They contend for the *absolute liberty* of the individual to do *whatever he pleases*. Anarchism is the champion of individual competition in every department of life, which it persistently follows and upholds unto chaos. Socialism is the special champion of compulsory cooperation, which it unflinchingly follows and upholds unto tyranny pure and simple. They are both wrong, but there is a germ of truth in each. The marriage of these two germs will

result in the birth of a higher civilization. Both Anarchists and Socialists are so infatuated with their respective doctrines that it is next to useless to point out to them the errors peculiar to each, even when in doing so you fully recognize the half-truth that underlies each doctrine. The majority *does* rule, has ruled, and will continue to rule. This is a bald, physical *fact*, and it is simply absurd and futile for Anarchists to dispute it. The majority is a natural environment, and the majority is “the State” against which Anarchists unceasingly inveigh and which they might as well undertake to “abolish” as to seek to abolish the moon. In this the Socialists are right; the majority *does* rule and should rule. But *how* should it rule? Ah, there’s the rub! Seeing that the majority, like the minority and the individual, has always erred, the Anarchists say it should *not* rule at all. They jump at this conclusion in the face of physical facts and by empirical processes that do violence to pure reason, and they tenaciously and irrationally contend for an impossibility: the entire absence of rule of man over man. As well urge the abolition of the Gulf Stream. But *how* shall the majority rule? Socialists undertake to answer this question, but the libertarian at once discovers very serious and insurmountable objections to their majority made code of rules for the government of human activity. Laws are not *made* by majority or minority; they *exist*. The law of gravity was not *made* by majority, minority or individual. The laws of motion were not made; the law governing the circulation of the blood was not made. Laws *inhere* in the very nature of things. All that man can do is to discover these laws and adapt himself to them. Man must and does suffer the consequences of both intentional and ignorant disregard of nature’s laws. What is the law for the government of human social action? What may and may not men rightfully do as gregarious, sentient animals? The observance of what rule of human social conduct will most conduce to happiness? This question individualism answers, and this question no other ism does an-

swer; and no ism that cannot fully answer it should presume to scientifically teach and direct me as social beings.

Every man has a natural right to do whatever he wills, provided that in the doing thereof he infringes not the *equal freedom* of any other man.

On first perusal of this exact statement of the Law of Equal Freedom, the Anarchist will enthusiastically assent to and indorse it; but when you pin him down and bring him to the crucial test, he will finally admit that he subscribes to only the first have of the statement, viz. "Every man has a natural right to do *whatever he wills*." When, by logical application, you show the Anarchist that the law of equal freedom recognizes majority rule within certain well defined limits; when by logical deduction you demonstrate the utter absurdity of the Anarchist postulate, "Government is the father of all evil;" when you expose the inadequacy of their pet metaphor, "Liberty not the daughter but the mother of Order;" you would better pause; for those who have not seen the error of their way are in good form to strangle you, "at their own cost." It is a notable fact that beyond a certain point the "philosophic" Anarchist is utterly incapable of fair and manly dialectics. I am unable to account for this except upon the hypothesis that he has become hopelessly hypnotized by constant perusal of this sort of epitomized Anarchistic "philosophy": "Property is robbery;" "God is hypocrisy;" "a ballot is a paper bayonet;" "the State—the whore of nations." Just before entering the stage of paroxysmal wrath, however, he will writhe and squirm in every conceivable shape to avoid the logical deductions from the principle above set forth. He will even object to the use of the word "natural" in the first line; and if, for the purposes of argument, you eliminate that word, he will object to the word "right" and in desperation proclaim that men have no rights, natural or other, and he will seek to engage you in discussion concerning the rights of toads and hyenas. But wrath eventually takes complete possession of him and you may invariably expect personal insult in the end. This

6. All forms of compulsory taxation.

7. All other statutes, so-called laws, precedents, customs, and usages that in any way conflict with the Law of Equal Freedom.

Thus limiting majority rule within its true and proper sphere, viz.: the prevention of all kinds of crime; maintenance and control of public highways, waterways, streets, alleys, public parks, etc., and the doing of such other things necessary in matters of social administration as do not conflict with the Law of Equal Freedom.

The Anarchist will tell you he favors these seven demands, but he doesn't at all. He favors *the abolition of the State*—majority rule. Here his philosophy begins, and here it ends. He will give a half-hearted indorsement to these demands, not because he really believes in them, but *because*, with the abolition of the State—majority rule, they would be an accomplished fact. Again the true Anarchist will never assent to majority control of public highways, waterways, streets, etc., etc. He would let Gould, Huntington, Vanderbilt retain their respective railroads and telegraphs and would recognize individual appropriation of waterways, etc. Individualism would eliminate every vestige of compulsion or coercion in matters of social administration, and it recognizes the necessity for collective cooperation, majority rule, in everything of a public nature. It does not seek to abolish the ballot, the State, majority rule, or the universe, but it insists on the doctrine of *laissez faire* in all matters where the activity of the individual in no manner conflicts with the Law of Equal Freedom.

own cost,” or to choose judges or arbitrators “at his own cost” to adjust differences with a neighbor, and that he has no right to appropriate the use of a street “at his own cost” for private profit. The Individualist knows that all *compulsory* legislation is always inexpedient; he knows that *restrictive* legislation may or may not be expedient according to circumstances. Whether a vicious crazy man should be hanged or confined in a hospital, whether a street shall be paved with asphalt or stone, whether the streets of the city shall be lighted by electricity or gas, whether John Smith or Bill Jones shall be judge in case of dispute, are all questions of social expediency which must of necessity and should and always will, as a matter of right, be determined by the majority. Socialism would close up Smith’s factory and place it in the hands of the majority; it would compel Smith to rent land from the majority. Anarchism would all free individual competition in building bridges, constructing toll gates, controlling sewers, and operating street railways. Individualism knows all this to be wrong because in conflict with the Law of Equal Freedom.

Among some of the practical demands of Individualists may be mentioned the following:—

The total repeal and abolition of—

1. All so-called titles of land other than the natural title of occupancy and use.
2. All statutes and so-called laws for the collection of debts.
3. All statutes and so-called laws that in any way interfere with free trade between individual of the same or of different countries.
4. All charters, franchises, and special privileges to corporations and companies.
5. All statutes and so-called laws that relate to the circulating medium of the country.

disease is peculiar to the “philosophic” Anarchists, so-called, and is usually found among the “straight” Anarchists of the Marie Louise type. Anarchism with the latter is a religion, so to speak. They have in mind all the while an ideal state of perfection, and are possessed of a great deal of the milk of human kindness.

Meanwhile the Socialist has studiously avoided reading any article or looking into any book wherein the word “Individualist” is mentioned, except in that vein peculiar to friend Gronlund. It is a sad truth that the average Socialist, from sheer ignorance, regards the Individualist as a sort of devil incarnate. The Socialist is totally oblivious of the fact that Individualism is prosecuting the only rational fight in support of majority rule, upon which alone rest all that is good in Socialism. Hence it is that the spurned Individualists is (perhaps happily) forced to either keep still or address himself exclusively, but in a straightforward manner, to plain, common-sense people.

He tells such that the above principle is a fair and concise statement of the law of equal freedom. He tells you that equal freedom is not absolute liberty, nor would its recognition in matters of social administration at once usher in the millennium. He realizes that a state of perfection must be composed of a society of absolutely perfect men and women. He tells you that the above principle is a *scientifically derived truth*, equally as necessary to be fully comprehended and recognized in the study of social philosophy as are the fundamental truths in the study of mathematics that “the whole is greater than any of its parts”; and that “the shortest distance between two given points is a straight line.” He further tells you that if you do not fully recognize this truth and its importance, it is useless for him and you to hope to reach the same conclusions; for he will certainly expect to engage you in deductive reasoning from the postulated statement. The Individualist is well aware that this method of reasoning is far from agreeable to the “fad” worshipper, and that it is comparatively unknown to the infatu-

ated followers of most social isms, aires, ickies, and ologies, but he also knows that to the ordinary, every-day, common-sense thinker and to the exact reasoner, there is a peculiar satisfaction about it that surpasseth all understanding—"a fascination all its own." The Individualist, therefore, asks the earnest investigator to studiously read at least the first part of "Social Statics," if not the later writings of Spencer on political ethics.

Having thus cleared the way for profitable inquiry, the Individualist will ask you to carefully study out the truth (he cannot do it for you) and make special note of the fact that the principle by no method of interpretation *commands the doing of any overt act*. In every instance and under all circumstances the language of justice is, "Thou shalt not" and never, "Thou shalt." "Thou shalt *not*" murder, steal, maim, rob, slander, poison streams, obstruct the highway, suborn witnesses; "Thou shalt *not*" commit arson rape, perjury, larceny, bribery, nuisance, malicious mischief. It prohibits all invasions of equal freedom, all infringements of rights. But by no mode of reasoning can you deduce from it the language "Thou shalt!" "Thou shalt" perform military duty; *shalt* pay taxes; *shalt* pay for the privilege of using unused land; *shalt* pay thy debts and perform thy contracts; *shalt* be kind, merciful, charitable, forgiving, honest, virtuous; visit the sick, succor the needy, comfort the sorrowful. Simple justice does not *command or compel the performance of duties*; it simply prohibits the *invasion of rights*. If there be a law for the enforcement of duties, outside the human breast, it is higher than, and outside the sphere of, majority rule. It *may* be in the hand of "the Power who holds the winds in his fist." Who knows?

The reader will find this *all-important* point in social philosophy worked out in "Natural Rights," etc., a pamphlet for sale by the Twentieth Century Company; but he will find it more exhaustively and convincingly developed in Patrick Edward Dove's "Theory of Human Progression." As bearing directly upon the point, the student should not fail to read Herbert

Spencer's "negatively regulative" view of government. And I may as well here say that the student who fails to completely grasp and master this pivotal point in social philosophy will never be able to satisfactorily solve all the vexed social and political problems, or to present his solutions in such a manner as to carry conviction to the minds of the people. Neither Anarchism nor Socialism grasps this point, or attaches any importance to it whatever. Individualism does. This is why I am an Individualist. The methods of both Socialism and Anarchism are entirely inductive. They appeal to the sentiments and emotions very largely, but they fail to fully satisfy the reason. The Socialist will work himself into an epileptic fit upon the outrages of capital, while the Anarchist will become frenzied in his hatred of the State; and while thousands of good people realize that wrongs exist, they consult in vain the indictments of Socialism and Anarchism for a rational remedy.

Without a clear conception of this point the student is unable to distinguish between *compulsory coercive* legislation and *restrictive* legislation: the difference between compelling or enforcing the performance of duties, and preventing the infringement of rights; between preventing crime, and compelling virtue; between the absolute necessity for collective cooperation for the prevention of crime, construction, care, and control of highways, supervision of public waterways, streets, alleys, sewers, etc., and the preservation of individual sovereignty in all the walks of life where individual activity in no way interferes with the freedom of others. The Individualist thoroughly understands that the Socialist has no right to interfere with the Anarchist's shoe business, his farm, his bakery, his meat shop; but the Individualist also thoroughly understands that the Anarchist has no right to build a tall bridge across a navigable stream, stop the passage of boats, and collect tribute from the traveling public "at his own cost" or anybody else's cost. The Individualist thoroughly understands that the Anarchist has no right to kill a man "at his