

An Anarchist Primer

Harold Pickett, Susan Williams

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What is “Anarchy”? According to common notions and the popular press, anarchy is chaos. For example, Time Magazine, in several articles, equated instances of social and political chaos with a “state of anarchy” during the Portuguese revolution. This occurred in several successive issues of the magazine. Confusion is chaotic and there is much confusion regarding Anarchism. However, Anarchy does not mean chaos.

Anarchy is anti-state and recognizes that it is the State that is chaotic. Examples of bureaucratic inefficiency, waste, and plunder are too numerous to be mentioned. These conditions of governmental systems are taken for granted. Occasional reforms only touch the surface, and reforms are short-lived. Anarchy takes the reins out of the hands of the bureaucratic drivers and returns them to the people, who are then free to determine and control their own existence.

The principle of liberty is fundamental to Anarchism. The individual achieves sovereignty over all areas of life. No exterior authority is forced upon any person. When individuals are allowed to exercise reason and responsibility in their lives, freed from coercion and force, the structures of society are revolutionized. A real and meaningful basis in living is attained, grounded in self-respect and personal dignity.

Anarchism is not anti-organizational or anti-structural, as is commonly thought. However, it does question and redefine the essentials of structures and organizations. Organizations exist for the common good, which serves the interests of the individual. The individual voluntarily works within the structure of an organization to further personal goals and ideals. In an Anarchist collective, individuals work together on equal status with another, without resorting to a hierarchy of power and authority. Anarchy is opposed to the coercion by which present structures are imposed.

Syndicalism is an example of non-coercive Anarchist theory. It envisions the economic structure of communities as based on organizations similar to trade unions. This is worker control of their own factories and shops—sharing the actual work, as well as the decision-making and the rewards of their labor. Again, it is a free association of individuals working for their personal, and therefore common, well-being.

Individual initiative in all cases is essential to Anarchism. It must be emphasized that the individual takes conscious and personal responsibility and acts with responsibility for their goals within society. In the context of a collective, the group provides additional means of support to the individual pursuing these goals which reflect the interests and intentions of the collective.

These supports can be informational, financial, or moral. But it is the individual who acts. When a collective takes action, it is the acting-together of free individuals.

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