

# **Objections to Anarchism**

**The Principles of Anarchism are Timeless Truths**

Michael E. Coughlin

1977

# Contents

Objection #1: . . . . .	3
Objection #2: . . . . .	4
Objection #3: . . . . .	5
Objection #4: . . . . .	5
Objection #5: . . . . .	7
Objection #6: . . . . .	8
Objection #7: . . . . .	8
Objection #8: . . . . .	9
Objection #9: . . . . .	9
Deserve Discussion . . . . .	11
No Divine Right . . . . .	12
Individuals Responsible . . . . .	13
Objection #10: . . . . .	13
Objection #11: . . . . .	18
Objection: . . . . .	21
<b>An Exchange Between Wordsworth Donisthorpe and Benjamin R. Tucker</b>	<b>27</b>

From time to time we will deal with some of the more common objections to anarchism, giving both the criticisms and our answers. Neither critique nor answer can be comprehensive or exhaustive, but they will attempt to outline the problem and suggest an anarchist's approach to answering it. Readers are invited to contribute both critiques and answers.

## **Objection #1:**

*In a state of nature man lived in ruthless and uncontrolled competition with his neighbors. Government was formed to combat this destructive tendency, to bring order out of chaos, to provide the minimum order required for social stability.*

**Answer:** Philosophers have long speculated on the origins of human social life and political life. Some have pictured the ancient condition of man as one of total chaos where people went about plundering everything and murdering everyone they could find. Only government, they say, brought order and peace to this world of conflict. Others have argued with some force that people joined together basically for economic reasons — it simply was the only practical way to survive. They have further argued that this need for physical survival ultimately brought government into being since people needed an organization to settle their personal disputes and to protect them from rapacious outsiders. Both theories are based on benevolent views of government and they form the basis for many people's idea of what government is today, or at least what they think government should be today.

Neither theory, however, offers an historically realistic appraisal of the origin and nature of government. A third and much more promising theory was advanced by Franz Oppenheimer, who argued that the state is formed from conquest.

It is, however, difficult to determine how men actually lived in "a state of nature" because we have few records of how social life was then organized. Since we can know little of the primeval beginnings of the human race, it is best that we look at man as we see him every day around us.

It takes little discernment to realize that all modern governments are the result not of benevolent policing, as many political scientists would like us to believe, but of conquest, of intrigue and power struggles, and of a desire to gain advantage over others through the creation of the state.

Modern governments were not formed by a social contract, not even one remotely resembling Rousseau's ideal. Rather, some of them are the result of revolutions which merely exchanged one set of rulers for another, while others are the children of ancient governments that have passed down the lordship they gained centuries ago through conquest from one generation of political class to another.

Man could not possibly live as a social animal if he lived in a world of universal antagonism. Social life is made possible by our knowledge that most people most of the time are not going to hurt each other or steal from each other. Without that assurance all social life would come to a standstill and there would be no agency or organization of any kind that could bring peace and order out of such a situation.

Man is a social animal and for the most part he will live in cooperative, peaceful relations with his neighbors. It is in this fact of nature, and not some supposed magical power of government, that we discover the essential ingredient for understanding social stability. People by their nature get along with each other. Government doesn't bring them together or keep them together.

People live social lives because it is to their advantage to do so. Government doesn't create order out of chaos. The order of social life is already here.

## **Objection #2:**

*There will always be disputes between people. This is the nature of man. We need someone to arbitrate those disputes and peacefully and justly reach a settlement of them.*

**Answer:** In every age and among all people there will arise some disagreements which will be impossible for the disputants to settle peacefully themselves. This is a fact of nature which no anarchist or any other reasonable person will deny.

Though recognizing that there will be disputes and conflict between some people, we must not make the mistake of assuming that most social relationships will be of this nature. Most dealings between people are peaceful and those that involve some conflict are generally resolved satisfactorily and peacefully by the parties actually involved in the disagreement. Only a few such conflicts must be arbitrated by outside parties.

Any dispute that goes to the point of outside arbitration or settlement involves a conflict which will not be settled to the complete satisfaction of both parties.

As George Barrett explained it in his classic pamphlet *Objections to Anarchism*: "If there are two persons who want the exclusive right to the same thing, it is quite obvious that there is no satisfactory solution to the problem. It does not matter in the least what system of society you suggest, you cannot possibly satisfy that position."

This is as much a fact of nature as is the reality that some people will sometimes get involved in conflict. To assume, as the objection does, that governmentally imposed verdict will be a "peaceful" and a "just" one acceptable to both parties involved, is an unwarranted assumption. It has no fact in nature and no standing in experience. The only thing that "resolves" the conflict is the state's power to enforce its verdict. This ability to club one or both parties into submission to its command is called "justice." It's the only kind of "justice" the state knows and can administer.

It's through this system of "justice" that every state has used its power to favor its friends and to punish its enemies and, in every case, to increase its power over the people.

As anarchists, we say with George Barrett, "such disputes are very much better settled without the interference of authority."

But if it is argued that leaving disputes to be settled voluntarily and without the interference of some ultimate and powerful authority will lead to the eventual domination of the strong over the weak, we answer that today this precisely what you have. The government's strength insures that its will will be done, whether the ends of true justice are served or not.

Perhaps the most socially destructive and far reaching influence this system of "justice via the club" has, lies in what it does to people themselves. It accustoms them to violent settlements of their differences instead of forcing them to rely on the sometimes more difficult but ultimately more peaceful system of arbitrating their problems. In the long run a people's dependence on governmentally established procedures for settling disputes leads to a crippling of that people's ability to settle their own disputes. It accustoms them to look to power for a settlement of all their difficulties and ultimately to confuse real justice with justice brought by the club. It leads in the end to more conflict as people grapple for the reigns of power in order to impose their desires on their neighbors. A lust for power is created and rewarded. The natural tendency of people to

peacefully and voluntarily settle their problems is replaced by a system that neither honors nor respects nor tolerates our neighbors.

At the heart of our answer to the second objection are two observations anarchists have long made:

1. that disputes between individuals will neither be common nor long-lived and will not be as destructive to life and property and as hurtful to innocent and uninvolved third parties as are disputes that arise between peoples when they are ruled by governments.
2. that free people, though far from perfect, will be more likely to find reasonable and just solutions to human problems than will ever be found through the exercise of the state's power to intervene in all disputes.

### **Objection #3:**

*The use of force, even retaliatory force, cannot be left to the discretion of individuals. Peaceful co-existence is impossible if people have to worry constantly about their neighbors clubbing them at any moment.*

**Answer:** There are several implied fallacies in this objection:

1. that in a system of non-coercive or natural justice, that is, in an anarchist world, people will naturally degenerate into vile creatures and turn on their neighbors. There will be a war of all against all. (See Objection #4.)
2. that people will quite naturally turn to the club as the foundation of all their social relationships. Violence is viewed as the most effective method of securing valuable human relationships.
3. Leaving retaliatory force in the government's hands will insure that it will be used only as retaliatory force, and when it is administered, it will be done so justly.

As anarchists, we say with Benjamin Tucker: "the State takes advantage of its monopoly of defence to furnish invasion instead of protection." Because we rightly fear power in anyone's hands, we recognize the foolhardiness of establishing a government with a monopoly of power and then expecting that government not to abuse that power. If it's dangerous to allow individuals to protect themselves, how much more dangerous it is to give that power to government.

### **Objection #4:**

*Anarchism must ultimately lead to violence, to a war of all against all. Without some institution to define the rules of social life and enforce those rules, there will be chaos.*

**Answer:** This objection rests upon a basic but always recurring fallacy — the notion that men are by nature anti-social and anti-cooperative. And just as wrongly, it proposes government as the solution to man's supposed inclination to destroy or injure all of his fellow humans. This is a positively absurd concept of man's nature and is topped only by the even more absurd faith government preachers have in an assumed benevolent nature of government.

Government does not spring from some fancied weakness in human nature that demands it exist to protect us from each other. Rather, it is created by conquest and is a tool used by a ruling clique to rule and exploit others.

The idea that government springs from man's wickedness, yet itself somehow remaining immune to that wickedness, has been rumbling around in the heads of government apologists for centuries. But, how can imperfect men be given power over their fellow men and be expected to use the power in any but an imperfect way? The mystique of the state apparently makes that question unnecessary for government believers to answer.

Imperfect men driven by imperfect motives somehow, by the theory of government apologists, create perfect or near perfect mechanisms for settling the most pressing problems that afflict men. If there is any theory that qualifies for the land of make-believe, it is this faith in the wisdom, justice, and benevolence of government.

We can, and as anarchists, we do recognize that some people, regardless of the social system involved, will take advantage of others. We deny that this exploitation will be widespread and we can point to solid social evidence to prove our position. What violence there is will be sporadic and short-lived and will have no relation to the bogeyman of "war of all against all" preached by anti-anarchists. Though disputes will not be widespread, or numerous, they will, however, occur.

We must find ways to protect ourselves from predators. But we suggest that the way to do that is not to give people naturally bent toward predation (politicians and other power seekers) a sanctioned means to control us.

In addition to recognizing that there will be no general "war of all against all" in an anarchist world, it is important to note, in dealing with this objection, that between anarchists and statist there is a fundamental difference in their approach to dealing with human problems. It was outlined well by Fred Woodworth in his interesting pamphlet on "Anarchism," when he wrote:

Whereas ordinary people will normally rank interpersonal violence as a last resort of social breakdown or crisis, government operates with violence as its immediate priority; determined course of action are decreed, not voluntarily decided upon; ordered, not freely accepted. If the principle of government were extended consistently and uniformly throughout society, true chaos would result — every civilized relationship would give way to the gun or knife; force, not persuasion. We have only the principle of Anarchy operating — the principle of no compulsion — to thank for the fact that the present social condition is not as faulty as it might be. Numerous social interactions even today still take place with an absence of compulsion, although State-ordained procedures are of course increasing daily. In the remaining spontaneous relationships between persons there is no ubiquitous policeman interceding (yet); nonetheless, most transactions, conversations, even quarrels, are accomplished without resort to coercion. Government's standard operating procedure is to use coercion first and discuss matters afterward: "Under penalty of three years in the federal penitentiary or \$10,000 fine, or both, you are herewith required to.." etc. This reversal of proper order, and exaggerated tendency to resort to force, is completely typical of governments; the tendency to place social compulsion uppermost is certainly not natural or justified. It should be noted that even those people who defend government get along fine without it in their relations with friends or

neighbors, most of the time, and would think a person rude, insulting, and violent who behaved privately as governments do publicly.

Without government and the power government has to deliver a regimented “justice,” people would have no effective or sustained means of dominating their neighbors. Without government they would have to deal with each other as equals and use persuasion and compromise as the basic tools of their social relationships.

But with government, they can short-circuit all the natural social bonds people create to peacefully settle problems. They don’t need to persuade; they can club you into submission. They don’t need to deal with you directly, they can manipulate a third party to do their bullying for them. Neighbors are driven apart by government. When there is force involved, the ties developed by natural society are crushed.

Left to themselves, people will develop their own rules of social life. These rules need not be uniform in all places, and there need be no one special method of enforcing them. People will naturally find their own solutions to problems and their own ways of establishing and defining the rules of their social life. As anarchists we do not dictate what social institutions will be used to deal with crime. People will have to discover them for themselves.

It’s not anarchism that breeds chaos. To government belongs that responsibility. It is not the anarchists who are the violent members of society — it’s the government rulers that hold that distinction.

## **Objection #5:**

*If you propose private protection and defense agencies, as some libertarians do, then what is to keep them from becoming coercive governments themselves?*

**Answer:** I don’t propose any system of social organization. Whether people would establish agencies for defense purposes or would keep that responsibility for themselves, makes no difference. So long as they did it without coercion, whatever form it took, it would be anarchistic. Anarchist philosophy doesn’t dictate what system of protection would be best; that is a practical problem that must be solved again and again by people everywhere.

If tomorrow all police functions were turned over to private police forces, we would have no libertarian society. We would just exchange one set of masters for another. Private police forces are no guarantee of a libertarian society, only the people are. And the people will do it only when they are properly disposed to creating a truly free world. Benjamin Tucker explained it thus: “The moment one abandons the idea that he was born to discover what is right and enforce it upon the rest of the world, he begins to feel an increasing disposition to let others alone and to refrain even from retaliation or resistance except in those emergencies which immediately and imperatively require it.” When enough people feel this way, we will have an anarchist society.

Anarchism is a social revolution that will occur only from the bottom up, never from the top down. It must be a people’s movement, not a leaders’ movement.

To talk about private police forces without realizing that they are not an essential element in creating a libertarian world, but might be a natural outgrowth of that world, is to confuse cause with effect. Such police forces won’t bring anarchism, but anarchism might create such police forces. There are no formulas for creating a libertarian social order, and there is, likewise, no way of knowing what shapes social institutions will take in a libertarian society. The future must

be free to make its own arrangements. We are not here to design blueprints for society. We are proposing no utopia.

## **Objection #6:**

*What will we do with criminals in an anarchist world?*

**Answer:** Most “criminals” in our government-controlled world are victims of the law. They are criminals not because they have injured someone else, but because they have violated some government commandment. They have broken some victimless crime law or some edict the state proclaimed to promote its own welfare, e.g., the draft law or income tax law. Abolish the state and these people will no longer be criminals.

There are some individuals who are genuine criminals — the robber, rapist, murderer — who will have to be dealt with. Whether we protect ourselves individually from these ruffians, or by organizing private defense agencies; whether we try them in courts or at the scene of the crime; whether we imprison them or make them pay restitution to their victims, are all issues that must be settled by anarchist societies when they are faced with the problems. Free people will find ways to secure protection and justice for themselves. The point to be understood is that they will do it for themselves when the need arises. It’s not for us to program how they must do it.

There is yet another type of criminal, the institutional criminal, that poses the greatest danger to the health, safety, and welfare of people. He, too, is created by the law, but he has this advantage over all other criminals; he is also the law-maker and the judge of his laws. He is the government.

It is government itself that has been the world’s greatest criminal. In the name of patriotism or national defense or manifest destiny or just plain greed, he has slaughtered more people, stolen more money, and terrorized more individuals than have all the criminals throughout all the centuries of human history. It is government that wages war, operates concentration camps and taxes the people. It’s government that used the rack, operated the guillotine, and dropped the atom bomb. Not anarchists. It’s not an anarchist world that is chaotic and full of conflict — it’s the one in which the state exists. And it’s because of the state, not in spite of it, that we have all these.

What do we do with criminals in an anarchist world? We get rid of the biggest one and try to deal with the rest as best we can.

## **Objection #7:**

*We grant that government has grown too big and with that growth has come admitted problems. But the answer lies in limiting the scope of the government, not eliminating it. We must make it our servant, not our master.*

**Answer:** This is the plaintive cry of the “limited government” preachers. To this Benjamin Tucker replied: “If limited government is good, the perfection of government is no government.”

Somehow, somewhere, given a properly intelligent, some say, “objective” populace, the limited government buff suggests that it will be possible to create a machinery of government that will be controllable. Some of these little-government people may even go so far as to tell you how they will do it. But for most it is pure dream and hope out of which they build their plans for a utopian government.



In many instances this thing they want to create and call a limited government has no relationship and none of the essential characteristics, of any government that has ever existed. Generally, these model states have no power to tax and no absolute jurisdiction over a given territory. Without these essential powers there can be no government.

Government grows; that is its nature. Government is a power broker and an instrument for creating privilege. It must continually take on new functions in order to survive.

Not even the most holy Ayn Rand, followed as she might be with an army of the most objective of objectivists, can change this. It is a fact; it is history. It is the very nature of government.

Regardless of the lessons of history, these limited governmentalsists assure us that it is within their power to create a limited government. And these are people who insist on calling anarchists “dreamers” and “utopians.”

### **Objection #8:**

*You anarchists are utopians. You don't really understand the nature of man. You put too much faith and trust in him to do good. Your dreams are fine, given perfect men, but in a real world they just won't work.*

**Answer:** It's not the anarchist who doesn't understand the nature of man. It's not the anarchist who refuses to learn the lessons history has repeatedly taught. It's not the anarchist who continually puts his hopes in new promises of some nirvana ruled by a “limited” government.

The anarchist cannot be blamed for the world's chaos and terror — for its wars and prison camps and execution chambers, for its surveillance of citizens, for the confiscations of people's property and for the ever-present threat of world-wide nuclear annihilation.

Because we give man credit for being a social animal, we are willing to trust him to deal peaceably with his neighbors — at least most of the time. But we are also wise enough to realize that if we don't want men to abuse power, then we must not give them power. We are realists who recognize man has a social nature, and realists who also know that man, when tempted by power, will be corrupted by it. We say, let man's social nature be the bond that ties men to each other. Yet we warn at the same time that it is because of man's imperfect nature that we must not create government and then trust him to use it peacefully.

Anarchists live in the real world undeluded by dreams of perfect governments, and by hopes that government can reduce crime and eliminate war. We gave up those illusions years ago.

### **Objection #9:**

*I have appreciated getting the dandelion from time to time, and I must say I feel a bit guilty for not being able to subscribe to it. It's not for financial reasons, it's just that I find libertarian views upsetting. Maybe it's because without a government such as the one in this country I'd be a miserable hunchback, out of work, or, perhaps worse than that, I'd probably be pushing daisies in a cemetery somewhere.*

*When I had polio my folks were too poor to afford all of the medical bills without assistance from the government. The operations I had in later years, my education, my rehabilitation, and my current employment are all the result of government financing. I believe the U.S. government has been exemplary in providing assistance to the underprivileged, the down-and-out.*

*Sure, I'm the first to realize the problems in this country, economic, social, etc., but to tout another way by continual criticism of what is, is counterproductive. Give me concrete, workable ways a libertarian based society would protect civil rights, keep the peace, help the economically, physically and mentally disadvantaged of this world. Show me how it would provide food for all of its citizens, stop the exploitation of the "have nots" by the "haves" and maybe I'll begin to take the libertarian views seriously.*

*True, the current U.S. government hasn't done all of the abovementioned tasks all that well, but at least there is a vehicle which the government can work with to solve the problems that exist today. All I've read in your magazine is what's wrong with the current governmental systems and a bunch of quotes from libertarians or anarchists talking in generalities. Try taking a specific example of some kind of problem and then state in specific terms how a libertarian society at least would attempt to come to grips with it, e.g., helping victims of a polio epidemic who were unable to help themselves.*

*As far as I know, no civilization has survived for any appreciable amount of time in an anarchist state. I think of the old west and what a mess it was with bandits robbing trains and gun duels in the street and so on. Set up a society from its roots and project how you see it would be in 100 years under anarchy.*

*I think we're in a sad state of affairs when we think of ourselves first so much we lose track of others and of the sense of mankind that John Dunne so aptly wrote about. I hate governmental corruption and injustices as much as you do, but I just don't think libertarianism is the right way to go. I think it's a step in the wrong direction — 180 degrees wrong.*

**Answer:** This objection typifies some people's fears that anarchist societies will not work. In time we will take each of the ideas inherent in your objection, lay them out individually so they can be properly understood and then shall answer them. But in the beginning we must understand the underlying philosophy on which this objection rests.

It is this: government introduces an element to human society that makes it possible for people, particularly the disadvantaged, to live in society. It tempers the rough edges of human life, giving protection and justice to those who otherwise would be crushed in the rush for survival. You are saying that people, left untouched by governmental control, cannot be relied upon to treat with mercy and generosity and fairness those who are weaker or who have fallen on unfortunate circumstances.

Government alone, according to your objection, brings to society the one power that is capable of civilizing human relationships and you suggest that without government we would be cast into a hopeless abyss of bandits and gun duels.

In sum, then, your objection assumes that:

1. people left to themselves will not take care of their unfortunate neighbors. People will not freely help anyone, particularly those who can in no way return the favor. Their only concern is themselves and the whole of natural human society is rooted in the reality that only the strong will survive.
2. government alone can correct this human deficiency. Government and governors apparently are immune from the human failing detailed in the first point. From this we must conclude that the governing class is made up of a specially endowed race of human beings who are possessed of characteristics of generosity and mercy unknown anywhere else in the human family.

3. government has a moral claim nobody else has that authorizes it to coercively redistribute wealth from those who produce it to those who cannot take care of themselves. The unfortunate have a claim on others to support them and that if this support isn't voluntarily forthcoming it can be wrenched by force from those who do not freely choose to give it.

### **Deserve Discussion**

Each of these premises, to say the least, is highly questionable, but because they are implicit in your objection they deserve to be discussed.

Apparently you have grown up in a much different world than I have because all around me I meet people helping other people and not asking anything in return. And this is in spite of all the government programs that discourage this kind of voluntary neighborliness. The thousands of private charitable organizations in this country give an irrefutable answer to your assumption that only government can and will help the disadvantaged. In addition to the many formal institutions of charity, there are an untold number of private acts of charity that escape public attention altogether but which, nevertheless, add a most humanizing element to social life.

Only by ignoring altogether the multitude of non-coercive acts of charity that exist all around us can you begin to believe your assumption that the government was the only institution that would have helped You and your folks through your severe health problem. Admittedly, the government did come to your help, but that doesn't prove no one else would have. All it demonstrates for sure is that no one else needed to.

Your second assumption springs quite naturally from your first. If people will not voluntarily assist their neighbors, then the only way to get them to do so is to force them into it.

Who is to do the forcing? If all people are naturally uncaring and selfish then we cannot hope to find anyone possessing the qualities of mercy and generosity needed to care for the unfortunate. Any who step forward for the task must immediately be suspect for their true motives.

However, if you now deny your first proposition and allow that there indeed are people possessed of the qualities needed to unselfishly aid their brothers, then there are two questions that need be asked.

1. Why is a coercive power needed to force people to pay for this charity if there are people who will voluntarily shoulder the burden of their less fortunate neighbors? If you answer that it is because there aren't enough of these people around with enough money to adequately take care of the needs of the disadvantaged, then:
2. Where do those who use government to force others to pay the bill for this coerced "charity" get the privilege of playing Robin Hood? Were do they get the right to take the products of one persons labor and forcibly redistribute it to someone else who has not earned it? You are ignoring the one person in this highwayman's game who is always a victim — the taxpayer. When you tax him you have admitted that he wouldn't freely have given you his money, so where do you get the right to reach into his pocket to take what you want from him? You may try to excuse this act of theft as being necessary for a noble purpose, but don't hide its nature as an act of plunder. Who is there that will protect the producer from the ravishing raids of the politically powerful who have set upon their course of plunder wrapped behind a cloak of humanitarianism?

## No Divine Right

Long ago we should have given up the notion that there is some kind of divine right among rulers, that these political masters are cut from a different cloth than the rest of humankind. This fairy tale just doesn't wash. The presence of such jewels as Richard Nixon and Co. should cause even the most believing of today's believers to question the notion that members of the political class have particularly noble and generous characters and are possessed of angelic qualities lacking in the rest of humanity. The governing class is not an elite arising from the people ordained to save mankind from itself. If history should teach us anything, it is that the political class is composed basically of self-servers who thirst for power and privilege and who have found in government the perfect vehicle to achieve their purpose. They are not the noble denizens of this earth that you picture them to be.

You have suggested that an anarchist world would be one full of bandits and gun duels. But the truth is quite contrary. It's a world in which states exist that is full of banditry and gun duels. Governments are virtually unable to check the acts of individual violence that abound in this country and in many cases are directly and indirectly involved in causing them. Throw in a hopelessly outdated court system that doesn't dispense justice and hardly even gets around to dispensing the law, and you have a system that fails miserably to operate the one service government defenders always claim government alone is capable of providing.

But beyond that there is one fact that government defenders often choose to ignore. That is: The biggest and most aggressive bandits and murderers are the governments themselves. Whatever violence there would be in anarchist societies could only pale in comparison to the violence governments through wars and persecutions have brought to human history.

The legalized murder and plunder that go under the name of war are the creations of your beloved government. All the broken lives, destroyed homes, maimed individuals and slaughtered peoples that war leaves in its wake are the children of that state that you so unhesitatingly turn to be the defender of the downtrodden and helpless.

For everyone like you who has benefitted from the state's system of organized theft, there are dozens whose lives have been ruined or destroyed by that same state. Government stands condemned by its own record as an institution that for centuries has been responsible for massive terror, torture, and slaughter. Government has no equal in this grizzly business — and never will.

What I have written so far has largely been a negative response to your remarks. Let me for a bit approach this subject from the positive aspect of anarchism. Anarchism is not a dead or negative philosophy as you suggest — it is very much alive with a positive message for humankind. Far from being solely bent on trying to tear down government, anarchists are a people of peace who ask nothing more than that people respect the humanity and individuality of each other and reject coercion as a way of life. Of course we condemn government every opportunity we get because we recognize it as the single greatest threat there is to human peace and well being. But our attacks on the state are rooted not only in our knowledge that government by its very nature is destructive of true society, but also in our conviction that the full benefits of social life can come only to free people, and, conversely, that only free people can create a climate where true society can flourish.

## Individuals Responsible

Anarchist societies will place responsibility for order directly on free individuals, not on formal government. As William Reichert pointed out so well in his book *Partisans of Freedom*, authoritarians place their faith in the repressive state while anarchists put their trust in social man.

Paraphrasing David T. Wieck, Reichert writes: "Anarchism is not opposed to organization that depends upon the authoritarian principle of command and compulsion for its success. An anarchist society, building upon the social responsibility and initiative of primary groups acting voluntarily, will gradually develop the libertarian social foundations essential for a truly free society."

Anarchism doesn't pretend to offer answers to all the social, economic, and political problems that confront us. It's no grand blueprint that attempts to spell out in detail how anarchist societies of the future will be organized and will solve the problems that confront them.

You challenge me to "set up a society from its roots and project how you see it would be in 100 years under anarchy." In doing so you approach anarchist political philosophy with the same premises you have borrowed from statist ideology. You suggest by such a comment that it is in the power of an anarchist to dream up some social model and program how people would exist in that sort of world. Statists have been trying to do that for centuries and they've always failed.

We don't view people as clay to be shaped and moulded according to our schemes and we have no desire to create models for the future. It's not because our imaginations lack the vitality possessed by other mortals. Rather, it's due to our belief that people know what they want out of life, know how best to achieve it for themselves, and, if left alone, will do so in an orderly and peaceful manner.

We're no afflicted by the urge to create grand designs and then pretend somehow that these visions bear any relationship to what is or could be.

In sum, then, the question is not whether anarchist societies will take care of those who are unable to provide for themselves, but rather whether the aid some few have received from the government isn't greatly overbalanced by the misery, destruction and chaos that governments have always wreaked on the human community.

## Objection #10:

*Some libertarians have defined libertarianism as based on the premise that it is illegitimate to engage in aggression against non-aggressors. As far as it goes, this is fine, but you can do all sorts of damage as well as intolerable annoyance without any physical aggression whatever.*

*Suppose my neighbor didn't enjoy having me for a neighbor so he held meetings outside my door making as much noise as possible at all hours of the day and night. In this case there is no physical aggression, and so I assume that in a libertarian society I would have to put up with the annoyance. Or suppose a young lady is approached by a man who persistently desires to engage in sexual adventures with her, but she has no interest in such doings. He has a right to free speech and he keeps pestering her with his solicitations, much to her displeasure.*

*Where would you draw the line? When does one person's behavior, which in moderation may be offensive, become something you can reasonably defend yourself from?*

*William J. Boyer*

**Answer:** You are right, of course. There are all sorts of “aggressions” such as you suggest in your objection.

One of the homes in my neighborhood, for example, is peopled by college kids who on occasion enjoy sharing their music with everyone within a 100-mile radius. Again, the other day when riding the bus to work one woman got on who was proudly displaying a grossly pornographic magazine. Some of us whose sexual interests don’t lie in such directions could have been offended by the picture.

In the first case, where does the pleasure these college students get from being deafened by their music end and my love for tranquility begin? In the second, where does the woman’s pleasure in pornography end before it begins infringing on my desire not to look at such material?

Obviously, in the cases cited both in the question and above, there is conflict. Whether it’s resolvable or not is another matter. In beginning our consideration of this issue it will be helpful to recognize a couple points.

1. These problems exist today in a world full of government. They will exist in an anarchist world, too. But let’s not suppose that they will in any way be peculiar to an anarchist society. The objection’s implication is that today there are ways to deal with these problems – effective ways – that will not be available in an anarchist setting. Which brings us to a second point.
2. Since these problems will always exist, how are they to be handled? Herein lies the difference between the anarchist approach and the approach taken by those who choose to use coercion.

The statist argues that coercion is the only historically tried and proven method available for resolving problems arising between people. Because coercion is used and because it “works” (someone eventually is clubbed into submission), no further defense of their position is required, the argument goes. By implication they assume that the argument for or against their position is closed and that the only things about which there need to be discussion are the proposals offered as alternatives to coercion. No other method has been tried, they argue, and so those who propose other ways must satisfactorily (to their satisfaction, that is) prove that those other ways “will work.” It’s interesting to note here that the statist who raise this point will often insist that a libertarian be able to prove beyond question that in a free society any and all possible problems will be settled perfectly to everyone’s complete satisfaction. Furthermore, these problems must be able to be settled before they ever arise – that is, we must have a patent perfect answer for “solving” every imaginable hypothetical example thrown at us. If we are unable to do so – to their complete satisfaction – then our approach toward dealing with social problems is discarded out of hand as “useless,” “idealistic,” “unworkable.” Ask their “system to withstand the same rigid interrogation and they will cry that we are being unreasonable. Certainly their system has flaws, they answer, but it’s better than something that hasn’t been tried, isn’t it they ask rhetorically.

It’s not without reason that statist have long employed this line of argument. By so doing they can put their position beyond dispute and throw the whole weight of the argument on the shoulders of their opponents.

Since some social problems by their very nature are unsolvable to all parties’ satisfaction, then, given the conditions the statist impose on the argument, whatever anarchists suggest as ways

to approach handling such problems will be vehemently criticized as “impractical” and discarded as “idealistic.”

In due course we will consider what, if anything, might be done in anarchist societies to deal with difficult social conflicts, but first we must consider the prevailing notion that coercion is a useful method for settling social problems.

One of the first things to note is that state-administered coercion doesn't settle social conflicts, as its proponents would like us to believe. Rather, it causes these conflicts to smoulder as the parties to the disputes chafe under the injustice they feel has been done to them, and it creates a whole new set of conflicts as the disputants struggle to control the state mechanism itself. This latter fact is something statist wish us to ignore because herein lies the real cancer of their system. The struggle for power, for the opportunity to dominate and dictate what shall and shall not be done lies at the heart of our condemnation of their whole system. It is precisely this struggle for power that leads to the major social ills we face today.

Conflicts between individuals or small groups of people historically pale in comparison to the massive social disruption the state has caused. The statist cannot deny the wars, concentration camps, and torture that have been such an ugly part of history, but they attempt to put the blame for them on “human nature,” a bogey man they for centuries have carried in their closet of arguments against freedom. They say that it is an evil human nature that causes these terrible things and that it is government that really holds this perverse nature in check. Without government we would all fall on each other in an orgy of theft, slaughter, and mayhem, or, at any rate, so their litany goes.

Anarchists reply that it isn't “human nature” that is responsible for these ills. Rather, it is the very system of government that creates the worst of the problems and perpetuates them and provides a “justification” for them.

Blatant personal use of violence (murder, theft, extortion, etc.) is recognized by the common mass of human kind as wrong. It's an undesirable and unwanted part of life and in our everyday life we would no sooner think of using it than we would wish that it was used on us. The bully, that is the person who resorts to coercion and violence in his dealings with others, is recognized for what he is. There is no moral justification for a bully's acts and, given the opportunity, no one would have the slightest qualm of conscience about resisting a bully's aggression.

The above is obvious. Obvious, that is, until the bully is the government. Government claims a special moral legitimacy for its existence and its actions. All too sadly for human history, people traditionally have been trained to support these claims.

Rudolf Rocker describes this process in *Nationalism and Culture*:

Thus gradually a separate class evolved whose occupation was war and rulership over others. But no power can in the long run rely on brute force alone. Brutal force may be the immediate means for the subjugation of men, but alone it is incapable of maintaining the rule of the individual or of a special caste over whole groups of humanity. For that more is needed; the belief of man in the inevitability of such power, the belief in its divinely willed mission. [“We're on a mission from Gad!” — Elwood Blues.] Such a belief is rooted deeply in man's religious feelings and gains power with tradition, for above the traditional hovers the radiance of religious concepts and mystical obligation.

Over the centuries the rationale for this legitimacy has changed, but it's there nonetheless. From being the will of the gods, to being something sanctioned by divine right, from an expression of democracy to the product of an historical dialectic, governments have grasped onto whatever fashionable political theology was current to excuse and defend their existence. Particular governments might fall, but government itself as an institution stood bedrock-solid.

Anarchists, however, challenge the whole structure of government itself, recognizing in it the chief cause of the principal ills facing human society. Our position strikes at the roots of the whole system, not just at the people who temporarily hold power. We know that power corrupts and that the solution is to eliminate the power structures that breed social discord, not to find perfect humans who will be immune to the tempting spell power casts over people.

Anarchists recognize that when coercion is used to settle disputes, the conflicts, as often as not, expand, they don't contract. Force by its nature generates an excuse for more force. Whether the wielder of the force be the individuals immediately involved in the dispute or whether it be the government (through its police), the nature of force remains the same and eventually the outcome of its use is disastrous.

While coercion, no matter who uses it, is destructive, there is a crucial distinction between the private use of coercion as it is wielded by the state. To illustrate this fact, let's return briefly to one of the examples cited earlier.

Suppose that my patience with the loud music coming from a neighbor's home has reached its end and I physically restrain them from playing the music. Whether my other neighbors agree with what I did or not, they would recognize my action simply as a violent reprisal for which I am accountable. The rightness or wrongness of my action will be judged on the merits of the case itself.

Suppose, instead, that I call on a policeman to do the coercing for me. Once the uniformed coercer intervenes, the public will no longer judge the issue solely on its merits. Rather, it now becomes a question of "was the law broken?" As a result, people become more interested in controlling the lawmaking and interpreting machinery than they are with establishing systems for justly settling their conflicts.

Law relieves people of the need to find ways for peacefully negotiating solutions to their problems. It gives them a club with which they crush their neighbor into submission, and having the club, they use it. In the name of the "law" government can do all sorts of legally atrocious things and with confidence proclaim, "we had a right to do what we did."

Because government exists, my college-age neighbors and I can struggle to dominate each other behind the shield of the policeman. We can deal with each other violently and righteously and that's a fact that has far broader implications than statist wish to recognize.

Among those ignored consequences of state-administered coercion are these:

1. By using the policeman we can remain anonymous in our acts of violence against our neighbors. No one ever need know who "complained" to the police and, consequently, all the neighbors become suspect in the eyes of the one accused of violating the law. It's hardly a way to foster strong community bonds.
2. By resorting to the government we mask the nature of coercion behind a shield of respectability. We have hidden from ourselves the genuine brutality of the act itself. We ignore the essential nature of the act, uncritically excusing it as something the government has a right to do simply because it is the government.



3. We give to the political machine a power and “right” to act under a set of moral guidelines quite unlike any that are applicable to the rest of the human community. Where it would be blatantly wrong for an individual to use force and violence against another, the wrongness of that violence is obscured when it is used by the state. For me to steal from my neighbors is wrong. Without exception I couldn’t find a neighbor who would disagree with me on that. But if I “authorize” a third party (the tax collector) to do my robbing for me, my neighbors become confused about their right to defend themselves from the thievery. This whole mental subservience makes us perfect targets for most anything the government wants to do to us.

In conclusion, then, I argue that coercion, and in particular institutionalized coercion administered by the state, is a socially destructive way of handling disputes. I also challenge the idea that legislated violence is a time-tested means for achieving peace among people.

But having argued that, the original question still remains unanswered: “in anarchist societies can people protect themselves from offensive behavior?”

Let me answer this in two ways. First, by referring you to an article that appeared in *Liberty*, an American anarchist journal published by Benjamin R. Tucker. The article appears at the [at this location]. The article is an exchange between Wordsworth Donisthorpe and Tucker. It covers the same issue we are discussing here and in outline form presents Tucker’s answer to this objection.

Second, in addition to Tucker’s answer, let me add that the foundation on which an anarchist society will be built is toleration. There will be no anarchist world unless people are genuinely tolerant of the things that make their neighbors different from them. Sometimes these differences are offensive to us, but unless we are willing to bear with them until they become threateningly oppressive, we will never see a world built on peace through a respect for individual freedom. This doesn’t mean that we can’t let our neighbors know we don’t appreciate their quirks or outrageous behavior, but it does mean we will first search for every means other than coercion to deal with the conflict. If we become totally frustrated, having exhausted every peaceful means we could, and, we finally resort to coercion, we must recognize it as a collapse of a better way of dealing with problems and not, as it is today, as something we have a “right” to do.

When there really is no socially sanctioned alternative — when people can no longer rely on the police to do their bidding — then people will begin dealing with problems personally and peacefully.

Being an anarchist, I had to respect my neighbors’ wish to listen to loud music. I can assure you I didn’t enjoy it. Fortunately, those neighbors have since moved and the problem resolved itself. But if the problem had become unbearable my first responsibility would have been to talk with them about it. If that had failed, then I would have had to look for other, non-violent means of handling the situation. I could have suggested to their landlord that he ask them to turn their music down, or I could have bought some earplugs and shut the noise out totally. There are other things that could have been done before I ever turned to coercion.

The point is that when people are committed to finding non-coercive means of dealing with the things that annoy us, then we will have made our first major step toward a peaceful world. Violence may still erupt sporadically, but it will not be the institutionalized violence so widespread today. In a libertarian society it will no longer be a matter of trying to minutely define and determine where our “rights” end and another begin. The emphasis will be on toleration and it will create an entirely different approach to dealing with problems.

When violence does flare up I suggest that one means of trying to handle such situations would be through community juries. Such juries would have a full range of responsibility for dealing not only with whether the parties to the conflict were justified in resorting to violence, but also what if any punishment should be inflicted for a wrongful use of force. Lysander Spooner detailed the powers and responsibilities such juries might have, so I refer you to his *An Essay on the Trial By Jury* for further reading.

But community juries are only one possibility. Free people have been ingenious in finding ways for overcoming their problems — and they will be equally ingenious in this area of administrative justice. It would be foolish for us to define and limit those possibilities now. The future must be free to make itself. There is no single way for handling all problems and I trust that in a libertarian world people would discover many effective ways for peacefully and constructively dealing with the social difficulties they encounter.

Since government-dominated society has led us repeatedly to gross injustice, to wars, and to other massive violence, the libertarian alternative is certainly worth considering.

## **Objection #11:**

*The trouble with anarchism is anarchists. They are verbalists, voluntarists, and romantics. They do not understand the problem and they don't want to. They do not know how to solve the problem and they don't want to. They are dreamers, not doers.*

*What prompts these remarks is the preposterous article in your Spring, 1978 issue. Ron Classen challenges you there to be specific and concrete, and you respond with some general and vague reasons for being general and vague. Good grief!*

*Let me suggest that there is a specific and concrete method for penetrating to the root of political government and destroying it. For lack of a better name, let's call this method "direct democracy." The idea behind direct democracy is that as soon as governments must entice customers to support their services rather than being able to coerce them into supporting them, then governments will begin behaving pretty much like any other industry and a host of ancient problems traditionally associated with government will vanish. This is not an overnight project, but it can be accomplished gradually and it is the only feasible approach there is.*

*I don't really expect romantic anarchists to accept this approach. Given their utopian attitudes it is certainly no surprise that they fail to see the importance of consumer sovereignty. Every practical man however knows the power of the pursestring, yet this reality seems to have escaped anarchists. Which leads me to predict that anarchism, when it comes, will not be achieved by anarchists, or at least not by romantic anarchists.*

*I have yet to see a single anarchist document that evidences the slightest awareness or understanding of what is, really, a very simple and obvious defect in the government industry. At first glance you'd suppose that everybody who took Economics 101 would fully understand the problem.*

*Consumer sovereignty means that each consumer only has his share of control over industry's total revenues. to the extent that an industry insists on doing what customers don't want, under consumer sovereignty it shrivels and eventually goes broke. End of problem. To the extent that it does what its paying customers want, they give it the revenues it needs and everyone is happy. No problem.*

*But when any industry finds itself able to enjoy supplier sovereignty (supplier sovereignty is the ability of the supplier to control its own total revenue) it goes unstable and flagrantly acts contrary*

to its customers' desires. Government is just another industry. Remember, an industry is defined in terms of its products, and governments are firms engaged in supplying certain kinds of products (sweeping streets, killing crooks, pushing papers).

*But all existing governments are political governments. Politics, the acme of supplier sovereignty, is counterproductive wherever it exists. The government problem exists because political governments enjoy supplier sovereignty. Similar problems would exist with any industry that enjoyed the same. This problem can be solved only by eliminating supplier sovereignty and establishing consumer sovereignty. In doing so no utopia will be created. Governments will become no better than other kinds of firms. But they will be no worse, which is the important thing.*

*What is needed is for citizens themselves to directly and continually be able to determine the total revenues and how these revenues are spent of each and every taxing agency to which each citizen is liable. It's that simple. He who controls the pursestrings holds the final reins of power.*

*[At this point, there is described in some detail a system for establishing and conducting "preliminary budgetary ballots." These, the writer says, could be incorporated into the official, annual election process — MEC]*

*Elected officials, who naturally desire to be reelected, will stray little from their constituents' expressed desires. Eventually the process can be made binding as a fiduciary duty upon all elected and appointed officers of government. At which point political government will have been exterminated.*

*Consumer sovereignty is a necessary condition for any industry to be effective, efficient, and stable. But supplier sovereignty is a sufficient condition for any industry to be destructive, predatory, and unstable. Political government can be destroyed a few percent per year, year by year. It's the only feasible approach there is.*

*- J.G. Krol*

**Answer:** Because of space limitations I had to condense considerably Mr. Krol's argument, but I hope I have sufficiently preserved the flavor and content of his objection. Trusting that I have done so, I proceed with an answer.

Mr. Krol makes the fundamental mistake of assuming that government is just another industry providing a range of services. He couldn't be more wrong, and in his error misinterprets grossly the thrust of the anarchist attack on government.

Government is not — cannot be — defined by the "services" it provides. Historically, its unique characteristic has not been that it has made roads, delivered mail, swept streets, pushed papers or killed crooks. It's fundamental characteristic has been the means it has used to exist, not the things it has done.

Benjamin R. Tucker defined government as "the subjection of the noninvasive individual to a will not his own." Whether the person(s) doing the subjecting are lone individuals, gangs of ruffians or "legally" authorized representatives of the state, makes not the least bit of difference. They are all acting as governments whenever they force a non-invasive individual to do something that person doesn't freely choose to do. Coercion is the key ingredient of government. It is its distinguishing characteristic. It is the thing that makes government government.

If Mr. Krol doesn't accept this definition, then let him show why the anarchist definition of government is inadequate. Let him show us that coercion is not the distinguishing characteristic of that institution that throughout history has carried the name "government." Otherwise, we will be embroiled in a hopeless and purposeless semantic debate.

Like other mini-government people, Mr. Krol appears more to be threatened by the word "anarchism" itself than by the actual philosophy of anarchism. Like the rest of us he was raised with

the idea that government is a necessary part of social life. He hasn't been able to break the bonds of that indoctrination. He knows that coercion is evil, so he fantasizes that somehow, somewhere a non-coercive "government" can be organized that will be fully responsive to its constituents' wishes. It will keep the streets clean, carry away the garbage, and deliver the mail and for all these services the people will voluntarily pay the bill. Mr. Krol's idea is that all we have to do is find a way to let the people vote how much they want to be taxed and how they want their tax money spent and we will have found the secret to non-violent government.

Any notion that government will let its victims (that is, the general populace) determine how much tax money will be taken and how the tax money will be spent is folly. By confining yourself to Economics 101, you might think that Mr. Krol's plan is realistic and workable. But a glance at Political Science 101 will convince even the dullest-witted that government isn't going to allow any such thing to happen. After all, what would be the purpose of governing if you couldn't govern? Without control of the pursestrings, as Mr. Krol so well points out, you cannot rule. And ruling is the business of government.

Mr. Krol argues that we can have government (a coercive institution) by "consumer sovereignty" (that is, through voluntary consent). He has constructed a dream-world institution that has no relationship to any government that has ever existed or ever can.

He refuses to understand the true nature of the enemy the anarchists are really fighting.

By its nature government takes what it wants — it doesn't ask for it. The monies we pay into its coffers aren't free will offerings any more than the draft was voluntary service.

Using Mr. Krol's guidelines we can reasonably imagine a group of people voluntarily contributing money to form a pirate organization which is designed to steal from others and to make slaves of people outside the organization. Those inside the organization will not adversely feel the theft or slavery. They could enjoy 100 percent "consumer sovereignty" (the government does exactly what they want it to). For them "consumer sovereignty" is working just fine. But for the exploited it's still exploitation. As much as Mr. Krol might like to ignore it, "consumer sovereignty" is no protection from the evils government forever creates.

The mafia and other "criminal" gangs are criminal not because of what they do (because what they do really isn't much different from what the government does), but because a prevailing and more powerful gang of thugs has "outlawed" them. If the mafia were able to overpower the now dominating ring of governors and establish itself as the single coercive agent in a given area, then it would assume the same status the government enjoys today. It would "legitimate" its power and find all manner of excuses why it should rule.

Whether a government wields its power democratically (by counting the power of noses), or aristocratically (by assuming that some are better than others and therefore ought to rule), or by simple conquest (might makes right), it rules because it holds the balance of coercive power.

Mr. Krol suggests that anarchists are our own worst enemies. We are visionaries and idealists who have no contact with reality, he says.

Perhaps to some extent he is right.

So long as a free world is kept from being because of a group of government meddlers, then it must remain only a dream. So long as some choose to coerce others, then to that extent we will not have an anarchist society. Anarchists are not interested in perpetuating the ugly scars created by government interference in the natural life of society. We don't want the wars and persecutions and terror government for centuries has plagued us with. We believe in a social order built on human cooperation and mutual aid.

If these be idealistic notions, then we are glad to be idealists. We don't offer detailed and grand plans for how a free society can be achieved and held together. We are not interested in building systems and then making people fit into them. We trust that when left to ourselves we will freely find a multitude of ways for dealing with each other and the problems that arise between us.

Mr. Krol seems annoyed that I won't draw out plans for how a free society will be organized. But in doing so he fails to understand the very roots of anarchism. We are not system builders — that is, we are not afflicted with governmentitis. Rather, we advocate letting people find the free and peaceful systems that best handle their peculiar problems. We don't want to organize society, we want society to organize itself.

Because of the length of this Objection to Anarchism and the several points raised here, I felt it was necessary to divide the objection into parts — each of which has been assigned a number. In responding to the objection these numbers will be used as reference points.

the editor

## **Objection:**

*Enclosed is a page from the Chicago Tribune in which John Gardner expresses that his new enemy is "apathy." This, of course, is a symptom of what you were talking about when 40 percent (or 60 percent) of the people don't vote. Gardner says "they don't care enough — that they should get involved and improve things." You say, "Oh, they care all right. It's just that they don't wish to actively impose their idea of social justice onto others and wish that others would leave them alone."*

1. *I say "Gardner's wrong" and that "I wish you were right," I believe that many of the "non-actives" would like to boss everyone else around, would like to be a supreme being. If a God Job opened up, many of us (me first) would apply. Most people, however, are like the guy sent to drain the swamp. At the end of the day, we've been so busy fighting alligators that we forgot to pull the plug. We have our own daily problems to worry about and leave world-saving to the others. The solution, of course, is to get the "others" so busy watching out for their own hides that we develop a society without world saviors.*
2. *Which leads me to the philosophy of limited government. With big government we have a system that permits and even encourages the existence of a class of people with enough power and money to start imposing their will (no matter how benign their intent) on the rest. With a truly limited government, one which has barely enough money, manpower and authority to do the expressly delegated tasks of protection from foreign armies and minimal policing of internal disputes, those entrusted with the power won't have the time or resources to expand their influence.*

*The flaw in my concept, of course, is keeping the government "limited." I haven't really figured out how that might be done.*
3. *In Vol. 2, No. 5 of the dandelion there was an article that said that the State must justify itself. Since it can't, then the "No State" concept wins by default. Anarchists, I'm told, do not need to defend their concept that the state has proved itself to be an evil and that those who oppose it do not need to say what might fill the vacuum.*
  - a. *First, I ask — what is the "state"? We must define the term.*

- b. *If we say that no man can impose his will on another, then what do we do with a situation, for example, when one man, through sheer force of will power, is able to dominate a less strong person? A domineering husband — a meek wife. A father who orders his children to eat their food. These, I propose, are natural and any philosophy which ignores them is utopian and not defensible.*
4. *Suppose there was a man whose neighbor was a nuisance; e.g., played his stereo so loud the first man could not sleep. Does not the first man have the right to use reasonable force to stop the bad neighbor? Won't he do so anyway? If he does, isn't it imposing his will on the second? In doing so, does he not become, in a limited way, the state?*
- a. *Is it OK if he enlists several of his neighbors to do so? If one man doesn't have the right to do so, how can several individuals acquire that right? Frederic Bastiat builds a good case for the argument that if one doesn't have the right (e.g., to set up tariffs) then the many do not either. A corollary: if the one person does have the right, then the many also do have a right, collectively, to do so. Why cannot two people (or 100,000) who have the right individually also have the right to pool their resources to do what they want as a group?*
5. *Your view seems to be that if one person imposes, by force, his will on another, then he is a despot... If enough do it, so many that there is no power strong enough to stop them, then they become unaccountable (and uncontrollable) and become "the state."*
6. *In a sense, I agree. The "state" is a group powerful enough that their actions are not controllable. But, I say, that the "state" becomes evil only when what the group does is evil and that the "state" is OK when the group only does what they, as individuals, have the right to do. The problem, of course, is identifying what is OK and what isn't.*
7. *Second, assume I am wrong. Assume that there should be no "state." Say we, in the USA, dissolve our government and its armies, judges, police, etc. The dandelion said I do not have the right to demand to know what will fill the vacuum. OK, but then you tell me what am I to do when the Russians land their troops and take over? I do not choose to be a martyr. I will not voluntarily submit to the Russians. Yet, as an individual I don't think I can stop them.*

*In essence, I do not believe in the inherent good will of my fellow man. The Russians themselves cannot overcome their police state. How can I (we?) when they land? If you say they won't come merely because we don't want them, then go convince Czechoslovakians that they are free!*

**Answer:**

1. You are most correct. There are always going to be volunteers for the God Job. But more than that, we are also going to find people who want to create God Jobs where there were none before. These are people we have to be every bit as watchful for as for those who vie for already existing power positions.

The great mass of people, however, spend their lives minding their own business, not only because they don't have the time to devote to interfering in other people's lives, but, more importantly, because they just don't have an interest in doing so.

Among the power-hungry, you are quite correct, we will always find ready volunteers for God Jobs. Our purpose shouldn't be to find those who will be efficient Gods or benevolent Gods, but to keep the God Job from ever existing. If we will learn that there is no place for subservience, no need to bow and scrape before others, we will have taken a first and most important step toward freeing ourselves of government. We will have liberated ourselves from the black magic idea that human society needs government to exist. And if we don't believe we need rulers, rulers will have a most difficult chore forcing themselves on us. Most of us just don't want to get involved in politics — and that's as it should be and will be in a free society.

If we refuse to play the game the God Job applicants want us to play, then we will have spoiled their sport. They can go off and play their game by themselves, if they choose, but we will have nothing to do with them running our lives.

The challenge facing us is not just to keep everyone busy watching out for his own hide, but to persuade the great bulk of humankind that the alligators of this world don't have any right to prey upon the rest of us.

2. At least you're honest enough to admit that the limited government concept suffers from a fatal flaw; that is, the inability to keep it limited. The mini-government people will keep blowing their siren song in the wind, but they will never be able to charm their cobra back into its basket. Once born, government by its nature grows and grows and grows. A limited government is the same old social poison, packaged only in a smaller container — a container of which it itself determines the boundaries.

Governments would like us to believe otherwise. For centuries they have fed people many excuses for their existence and by so doing have duped people into submissive obedience and even active acceptance of government. People, as a consequence, have come to believe that their bondage not only is necessary, but is beneficial.

3. Assume that one day you return home to find your house on fire. You aren't going to stand around philosophizing about what you are going to replace the fire with once the flames are extinguished. Being a reasonable person you know the thing to do is to fight the fire and save what you can of your home.

The same holds true for other evils we face during our lives. We keep looking for ways to get rid of them, trusting that life without them will be better than life with them. Life, it is true, may not be perfect, but at least to the extent that the evils are eliminated, life will be better.

Anarchists believe that getting rid of government is much like getting rid of any other evil. We don't propose what life will be like after the evil is eliminated, but we do argue that the elimination of the evil itself is a positive step. Life will be better to the extent that we destroy the disease that government inflicts on the body of society.

I must repeat briefly one of the points of anarchist philosophy that is crucial for understanding anarchism. It's a point some people seem to have great difficulty grasping. That is, as anarchists we do not propose how people will organize the day to day activities of their lives. To do so would be to attempt to program the future, to dictate how people in a free society must live and relate to one another. Doing so, of course, is folly. For anarchists

to do so, however, would not only be foolish but it would be a contradiction of our basic principle. That is, people must be free to live their own lives as they choose to live them.

Anarchists, rightfully, have suggested that there are many peaceful, noncoercive ways of organizing our economic and social lives. While some have gone into great detail imagining how people can socially settle problems which arise between them, it should be emphasized that these are merely speculations about the future. They are not blueprints for that future.

What we do propose, however, is that for society to function freely, anarchistically, it must operate on certain basic principles. Among these principles are justice — or a respect for what is “mine” and “thine” — and the noninitiation of coercion. Founded on these and some root principles, societies could be organized in a multitude of ways.

- a. The state has been reasonably well defined by Benjamin R. Tucker. He wrote: “the state (is) the embodiment of the principle of invasion in an individual, or a band of individuals, assuming to act as representatives or masters of the entire people within a given area.”
- b. This issue was discussed briefly in Objection #10 (see Vol. 2, No. 7, of *the dandelion*.)

But to briefly consider the issue you raise here. You are correct when you say that there are many social relationships in which coercion can be used by one person to dominate another. The family, work situations, friendships, etc., are all subject to occasional coercion. It’s unfortunate but true. But that doesn’t mean that coercion is a justifiable method of relating to each other. If anything, all it means is that people have failed, they have let their tempers control them and have abandoned the peaceful methods of persuasion in favor of violence.

Of course, we must examine all our social relationships, not merely our political ones. We should be keenly aware that all too often there is only a fine line separating a person’s ability to persuade and his ability to dominate and govern. For this reason we must continually assess our relationships with others and strive always to eliminate coercion from those relationships.

But don’t confuse violence and coercion with moral authority. An individual or an organization exercising mere moral persuasion, that is, the ability to peacefully convince others to a particular course of action, does not act as a government or a state in so persuading another. People and organizations, indeed, can and do influence others, but as long as there is not coercion or threat of coercion there is no governing.

You say that domination is “natural.” Sure it is, if you mean by “natural” that it actually does happen. So is murder and so are theft and child beating and vandalism. That doesn’t mean, therefore, that we should condone them or that there aren’t better ways people can deal with each other. All it means is that occasionally people resort to violence. Regardless, our goal should be to root out violence and coercion. It may not always be possible, but as anarchists we argue that it is a goal to work for so that all our “natural” relationships can also be peaceful ones.

4. For a more detailed discussion of this, see Objection #10 in Vol. 2, No. 7, of *the dandelion*.



- a. Naturally, if one person can justly do something then a group of individuals acting together can justly take the same action. Their groupness or individualness has nothing to do with the issue. I believe that Bastiat in *The Law* makes a most powerful case for this position. But, again, don't confuse a voluntary organization with a government. One is formed by mutual need, the other is based on coercion and exploitation. Their origins and natures are fundamentally different. You imply here that the voluntary group you describe has some relationship to government when in fact it doesn't. Individuals don't have a claim to steal just as groups of individuals have no claim to the legal thievery of taxation. We cannot multiply our prerogatives merely by banding together.
5. A despot is a single ruling individual whose reign typically is marked by horrible oppression. A state is the institutionalization of government into an "official" organization and power structure. A mob may be unstoppable, unaccountable and uncontrollable and if it uses non-defensive violence it would be acting as a government. But it would not be a state. When power is formalized and "legitimized," then the institution holding that power becomes the state.
6. I cannot agree with you on this issue at all. The rightness or wrongness of an action doesn't depend merely on what is done, but also on how it is done. The very nature of the state is not principally determined by what it does but rather by how it does what it does. This is most important.

For example, anarchists have no objection to education. Quite the contrary. Many have long argued its merits. But we object to coercive, compulsory "education" operated and financed by state taxation. We don't oppose the goal of having people educated, but we object to the means used to achieve it.

7. Individually, you say, you can't defend yourself from the Russian hordes that you believe will swarm over the world if the United States becomes an anarchist society. You suggest that voluntary means of providing for self defense are not feasible.

How do you propose, then, that we resist the Russians? By drafting people into the military — like the Russians do? By spending huge sums of money on defense — like the Russians do? By spying on our people to discover the "traitors" in our midst — like the Russians do? By encouraging people to hate selected foreigners — like the Russians do?

No thanks! If being free of foreign domination means becoming slaves to domestic masters, what have we gained?

The Russian state, a monstrous wart on the Russian people, has become a convenient bogeyman for the American state. My immediate concern, however, is with the domestic monster that has grown up in our midst. Remember, it's a centuries old and proven tactic of the state to use foreign "enemies" as excuses for domination and reasons for extending their domestic power in every direction. At what cost do we protect ourselves from the Russians without installing our own Kremlin in Washington — if we already haven't done so?

Consider another point. If we are so determined to be free that we won't accept domestic-grown masters, is it realistic to suppose that we would tolerate foreign-born ones? the

cost to a foreign state to dominate us would be enormous. If such a state were forced to conquer and subjugate a land peopled by individuals who prize their liberty as one of the chief goods of life, imagine the continuing problem that state would have maintaining its control. Do you believe that would be possible or feasible? Even if this foreign state did conquer a free people, how long do you suppose it could maintain its empire? The Russian state is plagued by internal dissent and in the years to come that dissent is bound to grow. It would multiply geometrically if the state extended its borders to the American continent. It would be an empire doomed to dissolution as popular resistance movements would tame, harness and finally rid the land of its masters.

In a free society there is no way of programming what social organizations will arise to deal with problems — one of those problems being the need for self defense from predators. I can't know, therefore, what will fill the "defense" vacuum you write about. Some have suggested several options available to us — options free people have resorted to throughout history in all parts of the world. Self-defense associations raised to meet crises and then disbanded are not uncommon occurrences throughout history.

In closing you say that you don't believe in "the inherent good will of my fellow man." Neither do I. That's why I argue that we can't trust any of them to govern us.

# An Exchange Between Wordsworth Donisthorpe and Benjamin R. Tucker

This exchange anent the Objection to Anarchism #10 originally appeared in *Liberty*, January 25, 1890. The first part is by Donisthorpe; the second; by Tucker.

Sir:

That barrel-organ outside my window goes near to driving me mad (I mean madder than I was before). What am I to do? I cannot ask the State, as embodied in the person of a blue-coated gentleman at the corner, to move him on; because I have given notice that I intend to move on the said blue-coated gentleman himself. In other words, I have given the State notice to quit. Ask the organ-grinder politely to carry his melody elsewhere? I have tried that, but he only executes a double-shuffle and puts out his tongue. Ought I to rush out and punch his head? But firstly, that might be looked upon as an invasion of his personal liberty; and, secondly, he might punch mine; and the last state of this mand would be worse than the first. Ought I to move out of the way myself? But I cannot conveniently take my house with me, or even my library. I tried another plan. I took out my cornet, and, standing by his side, executed a series of movements that would have moved the bowels of Cerberus. The only effect produced was a polite note from a neighbor (whom I respect) begging me to postpone my solo, as it interfered with the pleasing harmonies of the organ. Now Fate forbid that I should curtail the happiness of an esteemed fellow-streetsman. What then was I to do? I put on my hat and sallied forth into the streets with a heavy heart full of the difficulties of my individualist creed. The first person I met was a tramp who accosted me and exposed a tongue white with cancer — whether real or artificial I do not know. It nearly made me sick, and I really do not think that persons ought to go about exposing disgusting objects with a view to gain. I did not hand him the expected penny, but I briefly — very briefly — expressed a hope that an infinite being would be pleased to consign him to infinite torture, and passed on. I wandered through street after street, all full of houses painted in different shades of custard-color, toned with London fog, and all just sufficiently like one another to make one wish that they were either quite alike or very different. And I wondered whether something might not be done to compel all the owners to paint at the same time and with the same tints...

Beginning to feel hungry, I made tracks for the nearest village, where I knew I should find an inn... When I reached the inn, I ordered a chop and potatoes and a pint of bitter, and was surprised to find that some other persons were served before me, although they had come in later. Presently I observed one of them in the act of tipping the waiter. "Excuse me, sir," said I, "but that is not fair; you are bribing that man to give you an undue share of attention. I presume you also tip porters at a railway station, and perhaps custom-house officers." "Of course I do; what's that to you? Mind your own business," was the reply I received. I had evidently made myself unpopular with these gentlemen. One of them was chewing a quid and spitting about the floor. One was walking up and down the room in a pair of creaking boots, and taking snuff the while; and third was voraciously tackling a steak, and removing lumps of gristle from his mouth

to his plate in the palm of his hand. After each gulp of porter, he seemed to take a positive pride in yielding to the influences of flatulence in a series of reports which might have raised Lazarus. My own rations appeared at last, and I congratulated myself that, by the delay, I had been spared the torture of feeding in company with Aeolus, who was already busy with the toothpick, when to my dismay he produced a small black clay pipe and proceeded to stuff it with black shag. "There is, I believe, a smoking-room in the house," I remarked depreciatingly; "otherwise I would not ask you to allow me to finish my chop before lighting your pipe here; don't you think tobacco rather spoils one's appetite?" I thought I had spoken politely, but all the answer I got was this, "Look 'ere, governor, if this 'ere shanty ain't good for the like of you, you'd better walk on to the Star and Garter." And, awaiting my reply with an expression of mingled contempt and defiance, he proceeded to emphasize his argument by boisterously coughing across the table without so much as raising his hand. I am not particularly squeamish, but I draw the line at victuals that have been coughed over. To all practical purposes, my lunch was one — stolen. I looked round for sympathy, but the feeling of the company was clearly against me. The gentleman in the creaking boots laughed, and, walking up to the table, laid his hand upon it in the manner of an orator in labor. He paused to marshal his thoughts, and I had an opportunity of observing him with several sense at once. His nails were in deep mourning, his clothes reeked of stale tobacco and perspiration, and his breath of onions and beer. His face was broad and rubicund, but not ill-featured, and his expression bore the stamp of honesty and independence. No one could mistake him for other than he was — a sturdy British farmer. After about half a minute's incubation, his ideas found utterance. "I'll tell you what it is, sir," he said, "I don't know who you are, but this is a free country, and it's market day an' all." I could not well dispute any of these propositions, and, inasmuch as they appeared to be conclusive to the minds of the company, my position was a difficult one. "I do not question your rights, friend," I ventured to say at last, "but I think a little consideration for other people's feelings...eh?" "Folks shouldn't have feelings that isn't usual and proper, and if they has, they should go where their feelings is usual and proper, that's me," was the reply; and it is not without philosophy. The same idea had already dimly shimmered in my own mind; besides, was I not an individualist? "You are right, friend," said I, "so I will wish you good morning and betake byself elsewhere." "Good morning," said the farmer, offering his hand, and "Good riddance," added the gentleman with the toothpick..

I reached home at last, and the events of the day battled with one another for precedence in my dreams. Freedom, order; order, freedom. Which is it to be? When I arose in the morning, I tried to record the previous day's experiences just as they came to me, without offering any dogmatic opinion as to the rights and the wrongs of the several cases which arose. "I will send them," I said, "to the organ of philosophic Anarchy in America, and, perhaps, in spite of their trivial character, they may be deemed to present points worthy of comment." What a pity it is that we cannot put our London fogs in a bag and send them by parcel post to Boston for careful analysis!

Wordsworth Donisthorpe

London, England

Tucker's reply in the same issue of Liberty:

The reader of Mr. Donisthorpe's article in this issue on "The Woes of an Anarhist" may rise from its perusal with a feeling of confusion equal to that manifested by the author, but at least he will say to himself that for genuine humor he has seldom read anything that equals it. For myself I have read it twice in manuscript and twice in proof, and still wish that I might prolong my life by the laughter that four more readings would be sure to excite. Mr. Donisthorpe ought

to write a novel. But when he asks Liberty to comment on his woes and dissipate the fog he condenses around himself, I am at a loss to know how to answer him. For what is the moral of this article, in which a day's events are made to tell with equal vigor, now against State Socialism, now against capitalism, now against Anarchism, and now against Individualism? Simply this — that in the mess in which we find ourselves, and perhaps in any state of things, all social theories involve their difficulties and disadvantages, and that there are some troubles from which mankind can never escape. Well, the Anarchists, despite the fact that Henry George calls them optimists, are pessimistic enough to accept this moral fully. They never have claimed that liberty will bring perfection; they simply say that its results are vastly preferable to those that follow authority...As a choice of blessings, liberty is the greater; as a choice of evils, liberty is the smaller. Then liberty always, say the Anarchists. No use of force, except against the invader; and in those cases where it is difficult to tell whether the alleged offender is an invader or not, still no use of force except where the necessity of immediate solution is so imperative that we must use it to save ourselves. And in these few cases where we must use it, let us do so frankly and squarely, acknowledging it as a matter of necessity, without seeking to harmonize our actions with any political ideal or constructing any far-fetched theory of a State or collectivity having prerogatives and rights superior to those of individuals and aggregations of individuals and exempted from the operation of the ethical principles which individuals are expected to observe. But to say all this to Mr. Donisthorpe is like carrying coals to Newcastle, despite his catalogue of doubts and woes. He knows as well as I do that “liberty is not the daughter, but the mother of order.”

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



Michael E. Coughlin  
Objections to Anarchism  
The Principles of Anarchism are Timeless Truths  
1977

Retrieved on June 29, 2012 from <http://flag.blackened.net/daver/anarchism/objections.html>  
Originally published in serial form in *the dandelion* between Summer 1977 and Summer 1979.  
Back issues of this small magazine can be obtained from the publisher: Michael E. Coughlin  
1985 Selby Avenue St. Paul, Minnesota 55104

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**