

You may already be an anarchist

The Slow Burning Fuse

5.12.25

Most people go through life convinced that anarchism is something strange, foreign, wild, or impossible. They have been told it is chaos, or disorder, or the fantasy of naïve idealists who have never had to pay a power bill. The word itself is so routinely dragged through the mud by the powerful that even those who live anarchistic lives in quiet, everyday ways recoil from it. And yet the truth is far simpler and more subversive – you may already be an anarchist. Not because you wear black, or quote Kropotkin, or attend meetings in drafty halls, but because you already behave in ways that affirm cooperation, mutual respect, shared responsibility, freedom, and the rejection of domination. In your daily life you already rely on anarchistic principles, but you have been taught not to notice.

What would it mean to take that everyday experience of un-coerced cooperation seriously? To recognise that anarchism is not a remote theory but the lived reality of how people actually behave when they are not being shouted at, commanded, threatened, or bribed? If anarchism seems unrealistic to you, it is only because capitalism has trained you to see people at their worst and ignore them at their best. The bizarre superstition that people need rulers to behave decently persists only because the rulers control the media, the curriculum, and the language of “common sense”. And yet the reality of your own life contradicts that superstition every single day.

Think of the thousands of informal agreements you make without thinking – holding the door for someone carrying groceries; pulling over to let a car through on a narrow road; watering a neighbour’s plants when they are away; stopping to help someone lift a couch up the stairs; cooking for a sick friend without expecting payment; splitting a bill among friends without needing an accountant to oversee it; organising a shared ride without a government ministry instructing you how to do so. No police officer forces you to check whether your mate has eaten today. No judge orders you to return a wallet you’ve found on the street. No bureaucratic apparatus instructs you on how to comfort a grieving friend. You just do these things because people, left alone, tend to organise themselves cooperatively, compassionately, and intelligently, unless severe trauma, inequality, or exploitation has distorted those instincts.

If you were truly the selfish, irrational creature that capitalism insists you are, society would collapse every day before morning tea. And yet the opposite is true: society works precisely because people help each other constantly and informally, through countless tiny acts of care, generosity, and mutual support. Capitalism parasitically relies on these anarchistic social rela-

tions while denying their existence. It must pretend that only formal, hierarchical institutions guarantee order and decency, because without that pretence the entire justification for its own authority evaporates.

When the state tells you that you need it to keep you safe, you are supposed to forget that most violence in society is either enabled by the state or committed by it. When capitalists insist that without bosses no work would get done, you are supposed to forget that workplaces already run on workers' informal cooperation, invisible fixes, quiet solidarity, and the creative disorder of people covering for each other and solving problems before management even knows there's an issue. The world runs on anarchism, not authority. Authority simply takes the credit.

You may already be an anarchist in the way you distrust politicians and bosses instinctively. Most people learn early in life that the powerful are unreliable narrators of reality. Yet they assume that their scepticism is merely cynicism, not the first glimmer of an anarchist principle: do not trust those who claim the right to rule over others. Politicians campaign on promises they have no intention of keeping; bosses make decisions that benefit themselves while pretending it's "for the team"; police enforce laws selectively and violently; landlords extract rent without doing anything to improve society; and the wealthy avoid taxes while moralising about public responsibility. To notice this pattern is not apathy, it is political intelligence. Anarchism begins with recognising that hierarchy does not lift people up; it brings them down.

You may already be an anarchist in your rage at injustice. When you see homelessness in a world of empty houses, or hunger in a world of wasted food, or people working three jobs while billionaires contemplate buying a third yacht, something inside you recoils. You are not reacting to a technical problem of policy failure; you are reacting to a moral obscenity. Your body knows what the newspapers refuse to say: nobody has the right to create scarcity in a world of abundance. The hoarding of resources by a tiny few is not natural, inevitable, or efficient; it is enforced with violence, deception, and political manipulation. Anarchism is simply the refusal to accept that arrangement.

You may already be an anarchist in the way you help strangers during crises. When floods hit, or earthquakes strike, or power cuts leave whole neighbourhoods in darkness, people almost universally come together to help. They share food, open their homes, check on the elderly, direct traffic, offer rides, organise clean-ups, and distribute supplies without waiting for permission. This spontaneous cooperation is not an anomaly; it is human nature revealed when the normal pressures of capitalist competition are temporarily suspended. Disaster researchers have shown again and again that people become more cooperative and altruistic during crises, not less. The idea that chaos brings out the worst in people is a myth told by those who profit from maintaining social fear. In reality, crises reveal that ordinary people are compassionate, resourceful, and capable of collective self-organisation. That is anarchism in practice.

You may already be an anarchist if you love the feeling of solving problems collectively rather than competitively. Whenever you've been part of a band, a flat, a sports team, a neighbourhood project, or a DIY fix-it job with friends, you know the joy that comes from togetherness that has no boss directing it. When people collaborate freely, the result is not confusion; it is creativity. Hierarchy suffocates initiative, but mutual aid releases it.

You may already be an anarchist if you've ever been frustrated by needless bureaucracy. The endless forms, the pointless hoops, the small humiliations of dealing with institutions designed to waste your time. These are not neutral inconveniences. They are the architecture of control. They exist to discipline workers, limit access to resources, and normalise obedience. Your irritation is

not private impatience, it is a rational rejection of a system that treats you as a cog instead of a person.

You may already be an anarchist if you've ever taken a small risk in the name of kindness, like bending a rule to help someone. Maybe you've let a customer keep a little extra change when they forgot their wallet, or let a colleague clock out early after a rough day, or quietly ignored some stupid rule that served no one. Your instinct was not to uphold the letter of authority but to honour the lived reality of human need. That is anarchistic behaviour – prioritising human wellbeing over institutional demands.

You may already be an anarchist if you have ever felt suffocated by work that extracts your life while giving little back. The sense that work should matter, that it should strengthen community rather than undermine it, that it should enhance your freedom rather than destroy your spirit. These feelings are not individual preferences but universal human truths. The structure of wage labour, in which your survival is held hostage by your employer, is a form of domination. If you've ever felt the moral absurdity of that arrangement, your intuition is anarchist.

You may already be an anarchist if you want your children, or your partner, or your friends, not to obey you but to flourish. The desire for relationships built on mutual respect rather than power is at the heart of anarchism. Most people do not want to control others; they want to live alongside them in peace. The fact that domination exists does not mean it is desired, it means it is imposed.

You may already be an anarchist if you believe that significant decisions about housing, food, transport, energy, education, health, and the environment should be made by the people they affect, not by distant elites. You may not call this participatory democracy, decentralisation, federated self-management, or horizontal power, but you are describing precisely those things. Anarchism is simply the belief that people collectively should control the conditions of their own lives.

You may already be an anarchist if you have ever felt that something essential is stolen from you when your entire day is dictated by clocks, deadlines, productivity metrics, and financial fear. Capitalism colonises time as much as it does land. Anarchism imagines time freed from compulsion, where labour is voluntary, cooperative, and organised around genuine need rather than profit. If you have ever longed for a life where your time feels like it belongs to you, you are imagining an anarchist principle.

You may already be an anarchist if you have ever felt that culture, creativity, and community matter more than money. Capitalism reduces all values to monetary value; anarchism insists that human meaning cannot be priced. Every time you choose connection over consumption, authenticity over branding, or solidarity over competition, you resist capitalist logic.

You may already be an anarchist if you believe that people deserve to live without fear – fear of losing housing, fear of not affording food, fear of medical bills, fear of unemployment, fear of police, fear of being crushed by debt. These fears do not exist because of human nature; they exist because of systems designed to extract obedience. To want a world free of such fear is to want an anarchist world.

You may already be an anarchist if you believe that the natural world is not a resource to be dominated but a community to which we belong. Indigenous cultures worldwide have expressed this truth for thousands of years, and anarchism aligns with it – ecological stewardship, reciprocity, and collective responsibility are central to living well. Capitalism's endless growth

is incompatible with the planet's limits; anarchism's emphasis on local autonomy, sustainability, and shared care is not just ethical but necessary.

You may already be an anarchist if you know that love, in its fullest sense, is incompatible with domination. To love someone is to want their freedom as much as your own. This principle is political as well as personal. A society built on coercion cannot nurture genuine relationships. An anarchist society, premised on mutual respect and voluntary association, creates the material conditions for love to flourish on a large scale.

You may already be an anarchist if the idea of governing yourself, with others, not over others, feels natural, even obvious. The world trains you to distrust your own capacity to organise, to care, to cooperate. But the evidence of your life contradicts that training. You already practise self-organisation constantly. You organise your home, your friendships, your routines, your projects. You solve problems every day without needing permission. You improvise, negotiate, compromise, invent, and adapt. You are far more capable than capitalism wants you to believe.

So if you are already living these values in miniature, what would it mean to scale them up? To treat them not as private virtues but as the basis for a new world? Anarchism is not the abolition of all organisation; it is the organisation of everything by the people themselves, without rulers. It is not chaos; it is cooperation. It is not naïve; it is honest about human nature. It is not violent; it seeks to end the violence embedded in capitalism and the state.

The claim that humans are too selfish for anarchism is disproved every time someone cares for a sick relative, every time neighbours share tools, every time workers look out for each other, every time friends rally around someone in grief. The claim that humans need authority is disproved every time people organise a community project, create a local sports league, or manage a flat together. The claim that anarchism is unrealistic is disproved by your own daily life.

If you want to know what anarchism looks like, pay attention to the moments when you feel most alive, most human, most connected. Those moments almost never occur in the presence of coercive authority. They occur in relationships of mutuality, trust, and solidarity. They occur in freedom shared, not in power exercised.

Of course, recognising the anarchism latent in everyday life is only the first step. The harder task is confronting the systems that stifle these tendencies: capitalism, patriarchy, racism, colonialism, the nation-state, and all the hierarchies that feed on inequality. Anarchism is not a lifestyle but a struggle. It demands the dismantling of institutions built to centralise power and accumulate wealth. It demands the construction of alternatives grounded in communal self-determination and economic justice. It demands the courage to believe that ordinary people can govern their own lives far better than the minority who currently rule us.

The ruling class depends on your belief that change is impossible. They need you to think that you are too small, too powerless, too insignificant. But look at how much you already do. Look at how much cooperation you already engage in. Look at how many people you help. Look at how many decisions you navigate collectively every day. What would it mean to extend that capacity beyond the private sphere and into the public one? What would it mean to trust in our collective strength enough to demand a world not governed by the few, but shaped by the many?

Anarchism is not about perfect people; it is about the potential already present in imperfect people. It is about recognising that the vast majority of harm in society comes not from individuals acting freely, but from structures that concentrate power and strip people of agency. The more agency people have, the more cooperative they become. The more control they collectively pos-

ness, the more accountable they are to each other. Freedom does not produce chaos; oppression does.

You may already be an anarchist, quietly practising the principles the world tells you are too radical for polite society. You may already be living fragments of a future that has not yet fully arrived. You may already be demonstrating, in countless small ways, that domination is unnecessary and that freedom is possible.

The task now is to recognise these instincts not as personal quirks but as political foundations. To name them, nurture them, and build upon them. To transform everyday anarchistic behaviour into deliberate anarchist practice. To take the implicit and make it explicit. To move from survival to resistance, from resistance to vision, and from vision to transformation.

Anarchism is not a dream waiting for the right conditions; it is already here, scattered through your life like seeds waiting for rain. If you water them, with solidarity, with courage, with imagination, they will grow into something that can crack the concrete of capitalism.

The truth, whispered quietly but unmistakably, is this: you may already be an anarchist, and the best parts of our life are anarchy already.

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