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Everyone Wildly Surprised That Anarchists Are Anarchists

William Gillis

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Again and again over the last month's political turmoil folks from all political comers—and many that should damn well know better—have gone absolutely apoplectic to discover anarchists still consistently denouncing and opposing authoritarianism, from Castro to Trump, maoists to alt-righters. In short they're seemingly wildly surprised that anarchists are anarchists. In one absurd instance I was personally called a “dogmatic hack” who “only cares about anti-authoritarianism.” Well yes. What did you think anarchism was about? Such hilarious expressions of shock have been widespread across social media. Among the left there's been a unending feed of: “Wait, you even oppose left-wing dictators?!!” “Wait, you even oppose indigenous nationalists?!!” (And similar if more absurd consternation from those of a right-wing bent who are just shocked to discover that abolishing states would also involve abolishing borders, or that an ethical commitment to liberty means uncompromising opposition to noxious and oppressive collectivist ideologies like white supremacy and patriarchy.)

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Now there are of course sometimes complex strategic considerations in practice, but anarchists are not going to stop holding anarchist values and working towards anarchist ends. This shouldn't surprise anyone. Yet the toxoplasma of the US election has once again revealed that so many people see anarchism not as an ethical philosophy or value set but either as a weird subculture within their tribe (or their enemy's), or as a mere set of tools and tactics.

Anarchism is not defined by association. It's not a flag of convenience. Its definition is given in the name: *an-archia*. Without rulership. We oppose all domination and constraint of people. We seek a world of perpetually expanding freedom and possibility as all the things that limit and control us are uprooted or bypassed. We think that such a vision is possible because we don't ultimately see individual freedoms as conflicting with one another. We don't carve the world up into distinct groups and clusters, rather we seek to build greater interconnection. This is because we look at freedom as a whole.

Anarchism is a simple statement: "*The freedom of all is essential to my freedom. I am truly free only when all minds are equally free. The freedom of other minds, far from negating or limiting my freedom, is, on the contrary, its necessary premise & confirmation.*" —Bakunin

We care about all and seek to liberate all. Not merely our friends or countrymen. Not merely people within some cultural tribe. We're not left-wingers plus bandannas. We're not right-wingers plus bowties. We're anarchists. We don't fight for your group, we fight for freedom.

This means opposition to all constraints. From dictators to cops to politicians to the imposition of the majority's wishes. From cancerous cognitive shortcuts that fetishize false entities like collective identities and organizations, to gods and spirits. From economic systems that keep billions in poverty and starvation that go by a certain name, to economic systems that keep billions in poverty and starvation that go by a different name. Etc. etc. etc.

The struggle for liberty does not terminate with some simplistic demand like a better system of property rights or the end of white supremacy and colonialism. It extends as infinitely as the cosmos, as deeply as any relationship between two minds can be. There is no "good enough" just as there are never "but surely this exception." Anarchism is as uncompromising as it is audacious.

We cannot betray your team because we were never on the side of anyone but freedom.