Why We're Right & You're Wrong

Infighting the good fight

CrimethInc.

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Towards a Non-D(en)ominational Revolution

> "Just like every coddled middle class liberal, when it comes down to it he'll just run back home." "Those lifestyle anarchists don't care about anything but themselves. Don't they understand if everyone lived like them, there would be no system to leech off?" "If they're not going to abide by the decisions of the spokescouncil, they shouldn't be here at all. I'd rather they were at home doing nothing than messing up our protest like this!" "How can you expect to ____ without ____? If you really cared about ____, you'd ____! (like me)" "I don't want to be an activist or an anarchist or a part of this at all if it means I have to …"

Why We Can't All Just Get Along

Can we get along? Even for those of us who would prefer to be hermits, there is no question today more important than this one the fate of our species and planet will be decided by it.

There is no shortcut around this dilemma. Any kind of capital-R Revolution, any redistribution of wealth and power, will be short-lived and irrelevant without a fundamental change in our relationships for social structure is an expression of these relationships, not a factor external to them. Revolution, then, is not a single moment, but a way of living: anarchy and hierarchy always coexist in varying proportions, and the important question is simply which you foster in your own life.

We are ill-qualified to reconstruct human relations if we can't even get along with each other in the attempt and nothing seems to create dissension and division like those attempts. Often it seems that the people who know least how to relate to others are the self-professed activists who set out to save them. Yet these conflicts are not an inescapable consequence of human nature, but rather a pattern of cause and effect which can and must be altered. This is a starting place to consider what the challenges are in undertaking this, and why we've had such a hard time to date.

The Scarcity Economy of Self

In a world where free, creative action is hard to get away with, we all feel impoverished, cheated of the experiences and sensations we know should be ours. We compensate as best we can, and often this compensation serves only to preserve our destitution. We seek status in wealth, power, strength, beauty, reputation, anything to soften the blows of wasted days. We compensate by seeking another kind of status, too: the feeling of being superior, a status in our own heads.

We live in a society that teaches there is not enough of any valuable resource to go around, including selfhood. People on television or in books are held up as more important, more noble, more attractive than the rest of us. We grow up in households where our parents don't have enough time for us; we are sent to schools that employ a grading system that permits only a handful to excel, and are discharged into a market that enriches a few of us while exploiting or discarding the rest. We internalize the values of this system. We become used to judging our value by what we are "better than." We rush to despise others, their plans and ideas and habits

and beliefs, in order to reassure ourselves that we have worth of our own. When we should be looking for what is positive in everything, we denounce and criticize instead just to reassure ourselves! The most insecure among us are not even able to enjoy movies and music, because it is so important to them that they have "refined" tastes; they don't realize that when they succeed in failing to enjoy something, no one has lost more than they. If you're going to get anything out of any movie or song or interaction (so as not to have simply wasted time!), you have to take responsibility for finding ways to enjoy and benefit from it.

In its advanced stages, such hypercritical status-seeking can combine with a spectator mentality: from a distance, the critic passively votes for or against the efforts of others, unable to discern that such things as art, activism, community are entirely what he makes of them and that he must make something of them himself in order to get anything out of them. This spectatorship reinforces the sense that everything everyone else is doing is uninteresting or unintelligent, and thus the feeling of superiority the spectator so desperately needs. You rarely encounter a genuinely active, involved person who feels the need to proclaim her actions superior to others'; but in the spectator's scarcity economy of self, any expression of selfhood, even the most generous and positive, can be interpreted as an encroachment, an attack[1]. Every achievement is something to rebel against, assail, deride as if we don't all feel worthless, abused, hunted enough already!

Those of us who would oppose this scarcity system often have additional challenges to face in unlearning its conditioning. Many of us have come to this resistance from a place of conflict and struggle, and this sense of struggle is still imprinted upon the way we approach all our activities. Having been abused, neglected, harassed, having had to fight peers, parents, teachers, bosses, police to establish ourselves, we see selfhood as something that is obtained by fighting. We come to think of being radical as a war hence the more wars we fight, the more radical we must be. We profess intentions to create peace, but the only tools we possess are weapons. Small wonder we end up fighting among ourselves.

"With a little hard work, you can make yourself feel alienated by anything."

Justice and Judgment

Scarcity thinking and the destructive insecurity it fosters have played a large part in shaping our notions of justice[2]. Passing judgment can be the ultimate compensation for one's own shortcomings. It's easy to get self-righteous about someone else's mistakes, flaws, inconsistencies … for we all have them, and the more focused we are on the shortcomings of others, the less we have to think about our own. Witch-hunters who believe that they have found a real live criminal (or racist, lifestyle anarchist, class traitor, etc.), just like the ones in the movies, can reassure themselves that they have isolated the contagion and need look no further and the more vitriolic

[1] The other expression of this same affliction is hero worship, in which one projects all the qualities one finds admirable onto others. This is similarly crippling, of course, and inevitably leads back to the same hostility and scorn for the only thing you can do with individuals or groups you have put on a pedestal is knock them off.

[2] The self-righteous activists sense of justice is derived from the same origins as the justice system which feeds todays prison-industrial complex: a Christianity that emphasized individual responsibility over the cause and effect of social conditions, in order to invent, advertise, and sell the ultimate scarce commodity salvation. In a state of truly mutually-beneficial social relations, such threats as incarceration and hellfire would be unnecessary the threat of expulsion from the community would be dismaying enough.

their denunciations of the enemy, the more afraid everyone else is to admit what they have in common with him.

Once again we live in a violent world. It's as sensible to blame any one of us for being colonized by this violence as it is to blame the oceans for being polluted. The question should not be whether an individual is guilty we all are, at least of complicity but rather how to enable all individuals to confront and transform the violence and ignorance within themselves. Often nothing can help an person to do this more than to offer him forgiveness, to trust that he is interested in communicating with you; this makes it easier for him to drop his defenses and acknowledge what you have to say. This is not to say that we shouldn't defend ourselves whenever we have to, and by any means necessary but let's do this for practical reasons, not out of a thirst for revenge and superiority.

> *"Righteousness is a premium currency in this post-Christian society, though it refers to a mythical world."*

Objectivity vs. Subjectivity

Objectivity thinking, on which our scarcity-oriented, authoritarian civilization is based, posits that there is only one truth. According to this school of reasoning, those who want to explain human behavior or overthrow capitalism should make different propositions regarding the best way to do this, and debate them until the "correct" one is selected. And so, in the ivory towers, intellectuals and armchair revolutionaries debate incessantly, coming no closer to consensus, developing more and more exclusive jargon, while the rest of us labor to make something actually happen. Subjectivity thinking accepts that there is no "the" reality, and infers that any "objective" reality must simply be one subjective reality institutionalized as Truth by those in power. Subjectivity thinking recognizes that people have arrived at their particular beliefs and behaviors as a result of their individual life experiences. This has an important bearing on how we interact with each other, especially in our efforts to change the world. Different people are going to have different beliefs, tactics, goals. Accept this. They don't necessarily think differently than you do because they are not as smart or experienced or perceptive as you they may be your equals in all these regards, but come to different conclusions based on different evidence from their own lives. Respect this, while offering whatever perspectives you can yourself keeping in mind that the less you have in common, the more you would do well to listen rather than speak. When hearing a person's position on an issue, you don't have to immediately begin debating which of you is right. Instead, try to think of projects you could undertake together that would further the interests you have in common. Whatever ideological issues need to be worked out can be worked out in practice, if they can be worked out at all they certainly will not be resolved by another contest of egos disguised as a debate about theory[3].

Obviously, it's impossible for anyone to legislate for everyone else, since every life experience is unique nevertheless, you can offer your own experiences and conclusions, for others to do with what they will (in the words of the divine Marquis: "if you can speak honestly for yourself, you will find you have spoken for others as well"). This may be seen as legislating, by those

[3] Also in taking sides against others, you can forget that everyones positions are fluid; forcing someone to act as a partisan of one side can trap them into identifying themselves with that side exclusively.

who believe that there is only one right way; but those who attack you for offering your own perspective or analysis, on the grounds that it doesn't apply to them (or isn't relevant to all people, starving mothers in Somalia, the transgendered community, etc.) are still working within the scarcity model.

Remember every value you hold, every decision you make, you make for yourself alone. The scarcity-thinkers will attack you as if you are deciding for everyone don't fall into the trap of their thinking by arguing for your own methods and ideas as universals. Simply point out that you act according to your own conscience, and hope to integrate your approach into those of others just as it is up to others to do with you.

The Capitalism of Ideas

Those who still hold that there is such a thing as "objective" truth generally feel a compulsion to persuade others of their truths. This is the self-perpetuating consequence of the power struggles that go on in the market of ideas; as in any economy based on scarcity, this market is characterized by competition between capitalists who strive to preserve and increase their power over others.

In our society, ideas function as capital in much the same way money does[4]. Individuals who can get others to "buy in" to their ideas obtain a disproportionate amount of control over their surroundings; large conglomerates (the Catholic Church, the Communist Party) can come to rule large parts of the world this way, just as corporations do indeed, there can be no entrenched political or financial power without ideological capital to back it up. Little "start-up companies" of competing ideas can enter the market to contest such monopolies, and sometimes one unseats the reigning creed to become the new dominant paradigm; but as in any capitalist system, power tends to flow upward to the top of a hierarchy, from which the masters, the ones qualified to employ it, decide matters for everyone else … and, just as in financial capitalism, ultimately it is not even the ruling class but competition itself that is in control. In this environment, anyone with a value or viewpoint has to rush to sell it to others before being run out of business.

It's hard to imagine from here what a world free from this war of ideologies would be like. Obviously, it would have to be a world free from analogous wars (for money, power, selfhood), too, for it's foolish to insist that "one can think however one wants" when some ways of conceptualizing the cosmos are punished by exclusion or embargo. Those of us who fight for freedom from the power of gods and masters would do well to contest the dictatorships of ideology any ideology which always accompany and enable them[5].

Why People Don't Want to "Join the Movement"

Considering the numbers of public relations agents, televangelists, self-help gurus, and other assorted fanatics and salesmen competing to convert them, the hesitance "the masses" show to get involved in any kind of social movement is actually a healthy self-defense mechanism. Thus

[4] Ideas, like other forms of capital, are considered private property, and protected by law in the cases of plagiarism and copyright infringement, for example.

[5] This statement, paradoxically, rests on ideological assumptions of its own but perhaps this kind of self-contradiction is the first, necessary step in the disarmament of ideology.

the biggest challenge for those who would find common cause with others to make revolutionary change is how to avoid making them defensive in the process.

Radical politics does make people feel defensive in the West today this is a greater obstacle to social transformation than any corporate control or government repression. And this is due in large part to the attitudes of the activists themselves: many activists have invested in their activist identities as an act of compensation at least as much as out of a genuine desire to make things happen for them, activism serves the same function that machismo, fashion, popularity serve for others. Activists who are still serving the imperatives of insecurity tend to alienate others they may even unconsciously want to alienate others, so they can stand alone as the virtuous vanguard. Seeing such activists in action, people who don't have the same insecurities to placate assume that activism has nothing to do with their own lives and needs. Whenever we have an idea for a "revolutionary" project we must ask ourselves: Are we certain of our motivations? Will our words and deeds mobilize and enable, or immobilize and discourage? Are we trying to create a spectacle of our freedom/compassion/erudition, to establish our status as revolutionaries/leaders/intellectual theorists, to claim the moral high ground, to win at the childish competition of who is most oppressed (as if suffering was quantifiable!), still seeking power and revenge in the guise of liberation? People can tell when you are lording yourself over them or playing a role, just as they can sense when you are acting out of honesty and joy. They're much more likely to respond to that, since their lives are already filled with enough role-playing and rivalry.

We would do better to abandon the crusade to "convert the masses," with all its patronizing implications that others are lazy, blind, weak, victimized, in need of guidance. Instead first, we ought to reach out to those who are in situations similar to ours, or ones we have been in; these people, with whom we have the most in common, are the ones to whom our perspectives can be most useful[6]. Finally, we can find common cause with people on the grounds of the "antisocial" things they are already doing and feeling: theft, vandalism and graffiti, "laziness," rebelliousness, general nihilism, compassion.

This is the real significance of the "glorification" of shoplifting, adultery, etc. that some radical propaganda indulges in: not to argue that shoplifting itself is revolution in action (or for that matter that one must shoplift to be radical as if revolution was a commodity in a scarcity economy, only available through certain channels!), but to establish connections to the daily lives and resistances of individuals who are not yet acting out of an articulated desire for revolution. The radical significance of a statement is in the effects of making it, not in whether or not it is "objectively" true. On the grounds of the private longings and frustrations people feel their hatred for busywork, the joy in transgression they find they share with teenagers and anarchists, the instinctive suspicion with which they approach all totalitarian systems a resistance can be established that proceeds from the individual motivations and standpoints of all those who comprise it, rather than the demands of political parties and dogmas. This is the only kind of resistance that can rescue us from both authoritarian power and authoritarian ideology.

When it comes to "under-represented" perspectives, remember it's not your role to "represent" them, as the politicians "represent" us. Better to do your best to represent yourself, and encourage others to do the same … for example, by listening to those who already are. Some people

[6] When the locals began joining in the street fighting, we showed them how to make their shirts into masks so the police couldn't identify them, and how to use lime juice to protect themselves from the tear gas thats anarchist leadership in action, or what we have in place of it: sharing our skills with others, spreading power, instead of concentrating it.

may dismiss your perspective (as "middle class," "reformist," "extremist," etc.), but there is no such thing as an illegitimate perspective it is only illegitimate to act as if any perspective is not legitimate. A lot of this goes on, often perpetrated in the name of the under-represented (an easy trick!) by those who aren't necessarily under-represented themselves. Don't be intimidated you can be sure that if you are feeling something, someone else is feeling it, too, and needs to know she is not alone.

Not Unity, But Harmony

Any kind of "resistance movement" is going to develop conflicts over strategy ("violent" vs. "non-violent," etc.), as different individuals construct their own analyses and test them out in practice. To contest this diversity rather than seeking to benefit from it to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory by turning opportunities to address important issues into squabbles is to wish everyone had the same life history and perspective. Teenage hoodlums are not going to find the same things liberating as middle-aged librarians do but both have a stake in liberation, and must be a part of any struggle for it. Those who would set rules for the unruly and regulations for the irregular would deny the complexity not only of human beings but also of the revolution we hope to make.

Others are always going to have different approaches and goals than you do; the challenge is not to convert them to your own strategy (for who knows could it be they actually know better than you what is good for them?), but rather to find ways to integrate divergent methods into a mutually beneficial whole. Like it or not, if you feel that another's tactics are ineffective or counterproductive, it is up to you to find and add the missing ingredient that can make them effective otherwise, all the energy they put into their efforts is not only wasted, but turned against them and everyone else. Under such circumstances it will be much easier to point fingers and lay blame but this accomplishes nothing.

Approaches that speak clearly to some people may alienate others even and especially proclaimed activists (though, really, the last people any given approach needs to reach or please are people who are already radicalized). In these cases, it's important not to feel too threatened, since you may not actually be and to keep in mind that with the vast diversity of lives on this planet, we'll need an equally diverse arsenal of outreaches. In other cases, approaches that seem to contradict each other may actually form a perfect symbiosis: as in the relationship between masked rioters and well-behaved, well-spoken proponents of social change. No one in power would take heed of the latter without the former behind them (imagine Martin Luther King's nonviolence without the implicit threat of Malcolm X's confrontational stance), and without "respectable" support, insurgents can easily be marginalized and destroyed. In these situations, all parties should remember that others may even have to publicly disavow their tactics in order to continue doing their part effectively[7]; when this happens, there should be no hard feelings.

Certainly it can be difficult to work alongside people who profess beliefs entirely different from yours and you should never work with others you fear will betray you or hijack your efforts to

[7] As the black-masked corporate window-smasher yelled at the law-abiding liberal protester who tried to restrain her: It's not your job to stop me from making your cause look bad, but to distance yourself from my actions as much as you have to to keep the respect of the demographic you're trying to reach! Its my job to make something happen here so they'll have to listen to you in the fucking first place!

serve their own ends. But, again, ask yourself: are your positions significant to you as positions possessions, status symbols, badges of identity or as generalizations that exist to help you create more fulfilling moments of life? It's common sense to integrate the differing tactics of those who share a common goal; it's more challenging, but equally important, to put aside your compulsion to persuade everyone else of your opinions when you must, and work to create harmony between individuals who live in totally different worlds. That harmony might never be complete but it's a nobler objective than any kind of unity enforced by standardization.

Working in Collectives

Just as a band needs musicians who play different instruments, healthy associations don't restrict the participants with "compromises" that force them to limit themselves to the things they have in common, but instead integrate their dissimilarities into a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Working and living in such arrangements, in which every person is conscious that she is responsible for making the projects and relationships work, helps one learn to see oneself as a part of the web of human relations, rather than as an automaton against the world. Under these circumstances, others' desires must be taken as seriously as one's own and this can actually allow an individual to be a more complete person, as her companions can represent parts of herself for her that she would not otherwise express. This makes sense, for everyone is ultimately a product of the same world we are all interconnected, each manifesting different aspects of the same interplay of forces. Without this insight, cooperation and community can only be incidental and haphazard.

Eventually, for the individual experienced in living communally, it becomes possible to regard the entire cosmos as one vast, albeit dysfunctional, collective; the problem is simply how to make its workings more to one's liking. This is not to say the fascists, sexists, etc. can go about their merry business and be "part of our collective" they'd be the first ones to deny that, and follow it up with proof! But remember, the chief argument of fascism and reactionary thinking has always been that cooperation and autonomy are mutually exclusive, that people have to be ordered and controlled or else they will be lazy and kill each other. The more we can demonstrate this to be untrue, the less appeal their claims will have. "Anyone who isn't on both sides of the issue is obviously against me from some direction."

Perhaps the most important thing you can do in this struggle is be there for others, help them believe in themselves, offer real compassion not the condescension of charity when it is needed. But there is no formula for this; mercy comes in the least predictable forms and from the most unexpected sources. Often it takes a person who has suffered something similar to be able to offer real succor to one who is suffering or struggling. That's another reason why it is good that we have all chosen different paths and suffered different things, even things that seemed to isolate us why there is a place even for spoiled rich kids and homeless drug addicts and lovers who have lied and betrayed in this struggle: for who else could relate to others in those difficult situations, offer them guidance and hope? When you recognize how your own tribulations have prepared you to help others, it can make sense of experiences that seemed unjustifiable; at the same time, this may help you to see the importance of others who previously appeared without worth.

Often we have our hands full dealing with our own pain, filled with too much bitterness and confusion to be able to offer others anything, least of all mercy. This means it is all the more

critical that we not miss the opportunities we do get to be good to others whether or not they have "earned" it, whether or not we understand them, whether or not we think it will make a difference.

War, or Revolution?

We would-be revolutionaries so frequently frame our project in martial terms: we set out to Fight Racism, Smash Fascism, Destroy Capitalism, Eat the Rich. This enables us to see ourselves as noble crusaders and more importantly, to have adversaries, which reassures us of our own righteousness. This reassurance is apparently more precious than the success in our efforts it replaces and prevents at least, it is so long as one hasn't yet tasted that success. We have to remember in every instant that our enemies are not human beings: our enemies are the conditions that make us enemies.

A world entirely without enemies is not possible it's not even desirable, for most but understand, war is business as usual for capitalist society: Exxon vs. Shell, U.S.A. vs. Iraq, Communists vs. Anarchists, lover against lover and parent against child. Even if we could kill every last rapist, C.E.O., head of state, police officer, and housemate who won't do the dishes, that violence would remain in the world as the venom and fury of those who survived them (not to mention the ways those murders would leave their mark on us) that's karma for you. Revolution is what happens when you create situations that make the old conflicts all that inertia of resentment and insecurity and antagonism irrelevant.

Of course warfare is necessary sometimes we have to fight all efforts to keep us at war with each other, and for some of us this will mean violence. But, as the venerable sage once pointed out, "if it's you against the world, bet on the world." So many of us alienate ourselves so needlessly from others, eventually relying on some abstraction ("the working class," "the imminent insurrection") for camaraderie once every companion of flesh and blood is gone, or, worse, concluding that cooperation is simply impossible when history shows that it is possible, just not for you, until you're ready to be more patient, considerate, humble, forgiving.

When you can be generous enough not to blame another for her incoherence, selfishness, mistakes, bad ideas, even acts of violence, you can discern what she has to offer you. When you can put into practice a form of justice that takes responsibility for setting things aright, you can heal, rather than impotently dispensing guilt and glory. When you can be patient with impatience, when you can resist contemptation, when you can refrain from being self-righteous even and especially with the self-righteous, you can do your part to liberate all of us prisoners of war.

Doing things you enjoy will help you not to take your frustrations out on others as will working with people you like, whenever it's possible[8]. There's nothing noble or revolutionary about "sacrificing yourself for the cause," especially when it makes you impossible to be around. At the same time, it won't and shouldn't always be possible to surround yourself with people who see

[8] Consensus-based organizing can sometimes create unnecessary conflict and interference. Organizing autonomously and trying another free association whenever one isn't working can give you the freedom you need not to resent others, so you can work well with the ones around you. Revolution may involve learning to live and act cooperatively, but that doesn't mean everyone has to be friends.

things the way you do: be ready to leave your comfort zone, and bring a generous heart when you do.

This is dedicated to all those who have done this over the years, who have taken it for granted that for all their clumsiness, people from other backgrounds and advocates of other tactics really did desire to coexist and cooperate with them: to the men and women of the working class who took the time to explain to bourgeois activists how they were alienating them, even when the latter did not at first know how to listen; to the women who not only demanded that men recognize the existence and effects of their sexism, but also acknowledged the fears and anxieties they felt; to the survivors of abuse who went on to give counseling to both abused and abusers. Without them, we would assuredly have torn each other to pieces already. It's frightening to let your guard down, it's hard to swallow your pride (even when clinging to it would mean betraying yourself) but this is the only way to help others do the same. Until they can, we will live in this barren world of shields and swords, each of us a city-state unto herself. Some anarchy.

Don't be intimidated by the colossal challenge of "saving the world"; there are as many worlds as there are people save yours, the one made up of the life you share with the ones around you. Where one flower blooms, a million more will follow.

I would like to be someone with whom no one would feel she had to be ashamed of any part of herself. I would like to be able to regard the actions of others without feeling threatened by them or becoming defensive, even when they are defensive with me to see others in the context of their lives, not my own. I would like to know how to set limits on how far I rely upon people, so as not to risk losing my ability to respect them. I would like to be able to look those adversaries who should be allies in the eyes and say *Like it or not, this is who I am. This is what the world has made of me, and we must all live with the consequences. I can't feel or believe or act differently than I do, let alone change the decades of life behind me that have wrought this. I don't want to compete with you for moral high ground or anything else. Unless you're prepared to kill everyone who doesn't line up with your standards, or to endure this impasse of animosity indefinitely, you're going to have to accept me on my own terms, as I hope to do with you. You are as responsible as I am for making what goes on between us positive for us both or for the world of strife we will live in otherwise.*

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