Pure Freedom

The Idea of Anarchy, History and Future

Horst Stowasser

2007

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Foreword

Paradoxically, the collapse of the communist dictatorships seems to have signaled the end of social utopias — even though state socialism was never truly a real alternative. The short-winded triumph of the Western market economy cannot obscure the fact that no current system is capable of offering a way out of the ecological and economic madness in which we live. Therefore, the coming decades are likely to bring a turning point that will force all of us into a serious search for new models.

This development is reviving interest in social visions that have so far remained in the shadows. In his new book, Horst Stowasser presents the most compelling of these "forgotten utopias": anarchism.

Anarchy — a word that has always evoked fear and horror — reveals itself, upon closer examination, as a fascinating grab bag of wonders. Its essentially simple structure claims nothing less than to be a new grammar of human organization. It seeks to replace the "brutal chaos" of our society with the "gentle chaos" of interconnected, horizontal societies, in which the domination of human beings over one another and over nature becomes meaningless.

Vividly narrated, clearly written, and broadly conceived, this book has every prospect of becoming a political standard work. Alongside a critical introduction to the world of libertarian ideas and a journey through the surprisingly rich history of anarchist experiments, the author also explores future scenarios — culminating in the thesis:
"The social form of the coming millennium will be an anarchic one."

Horst Stowasser, born in 1951, lives as a freelance author in a libertarian project in southwestern Germany. He earned his high school diploma in both Argentina and Germany and studied agriculture and Romance studies. He has traveled the world. Since 1969 he has been active in the anarchist movement, participating in major international meetings and congresses and holding membership in various organizations. He was politically persecuted into the 1980s and imprisoned multiple times.

In 1971 he founded the anarchist documentation center "Das AnArchiv", an extensive collection of documents, magazines, and literature on international libertarian themes, with a focus on German-language anarchism. He is the editor of various magazines and journals and the author of numerous books, essays, and studies on social and political topics.

Front Matter

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For Till

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Please see important notices on the following page!

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The following people, topics, or terms are covered in the chapters indicated in parentheses:

Abolitionism (penal system/criminality) (4, 19)
Alternative Movement (38)
Anarchy in Classical Antiquity (20)
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Asia (Anarchism) (33)
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Ravachol, Claude (27)
Socialist League (33)
Spontis (Spontaneous Leftists) (37)
Taoism (20)
Yippies (38)

Terms that are already part of chapter titles are not listed here.

Notes on the Book

This book aims to both inform and entertain its readers. It is designed to be easily understandable and accessible without prior knowledge. For that reason, I have avoided lengthy footnotes and academic citations. Instead, all uncommon or foreign words are marked with an asterisk (*) at their first appearance, and listed and explained alphabetically in the appendix. At the end of most chapters, there are reading suggestions meant to encourage further exploration. The book also contains an address section in the appendix. In this way, practical usefulness is given priority over academic formality.

The first part addresses the question: What exactly is anarchy?
The second part recounts the diverse history of anarchisms in chronological order.
The third part explores the future perspectives of anarchic scenarios.

The chapters and parts are structured so that they are mostly self-contained and comprehensible on their own. Therefore, the book can be read as a whole, in parts, forward, backward—or anarchically.

The idea and basic structure of this book are built upon my 1972 publication "What Is Anarchism, Actually?"
— H. St.

Preface: Why This Document Exists

I FIND IT HARD TO REMEMBER where and when exactly I first became aware of this book, which actually only appeared ten years ago (1995) and very soon thereafter was marked as "out of print and no longer available." Around 1996/97, Freiheit pur ("Pure Freedom") circulated among a part of my circle of friends, and I probably borrowed it at that time—perhaps even from the Munich City Library, where there was a copy (which eventually got stolen…).

I'm not a materialist, but I always believed—probably like the thief—that you simply have to own the truly great books. Either to be able to lend them to others, or to have immediate access to the information yourself. (And then there are books whose content stands in such sharp contrast to the present that it's better to buy them while they're still legal.)

Already during my first reading, it was clear to me that Freiheit pur belonged in the category of books one absolutely must own.

So how was I supposed to get my hands on a copy of this fascinating work?
I called Eichborn Verlag: no luck! — of course, all stock had long since been depleted. And although Freiheit pur had sold well, a new edition was not being considered there — for reasons that remain unclear.

I visited antiquarian bookshops and political bookstores, spent hours on the phone, and somehow even managed to find Horst Stowasser's phone number. He was very kind but immediately said that if I managed to track down any leftover copies, I should call him again — he himself only had one single copy of his book left.

But there was also good news: the publishing rights had by then passed to the anarchist Karin Kramer Verlag in Berlin, and in the meantime, Stowasser had begun working on a revised edition with a photo section, which was to be published there.

The people at Karin Kramer Verlag also agreed that this was a good book — only, unfortunately (and as is often the case), they lacked the funds to pre-finance new books or reprints. When I tried again a year later, I received more or less the same answer:
"We can only publish a very small number of books each year."
The disappointment wasn't quite as great this time, though, because in the meantime, I had — for the first time — made practical use of the internet and managed to buy a copy of Freiheit pur through an online antiquarian bookshop. At last!

You'd think I'd be satisfied.

But after reading it again — as exciting and enlightening as ever — I increasingly found myself in situations where, after a great conversation, I really wanted to recommend this book to someone… if only it would've made any sense. And of course, I couldn't lend out my sacred copy to everyone at once — especially since many borrowers tend to eagerly borrow something at first, only to be put off soon after by the length of what seems like a "dry" nonfiction book.
And so it often ends up that, after months or even half a year, you finally recover a dusty, unread book…

It was too sad, because by then I was more convinced than ever of the relevance and potential of Stowasser's book.

I once gave my copy to my mother (who, like most mothers, is not easily persuaded to adopt unconventional ideas) as reading material for a trip. I hoped that the wise words of the author might help her better understand my own worldview and way of thinking. And indeed, when she returned, she seemed genuinely impressed; she even admitted to me that after finishing it, she had started reading it again…

Around that time, I was attending — as an unofficial guest student — a political science seminar on "Anarchism" at the university. Apart from a peace-loving punk, I seemed to be the only person in the room with any prior knowledge of the subject. Most of the actual enrolled students were quietly disinterested, and especially the elderly professor — who did approach the topic in a well-meaning way, but with a rather naïve attitude — clearly had no real understanding of the subject he was teaching.

I don't remember exactly why I kept showing up every week — probably out of solidarity with the battered idea of anarchism — but I do remember one thing very clearly:
How much I would've loved to recommend a good bibliography to the lecturer — something that could have brought him a bit closer to the libertarian spirit: this very book, Freiheit pur!

In 1998, I finally moved from Munich to a small intentional community in a tiny village on the Baltic Sea near Poland. Although the people in Klein Jasedow didn't explicitly refer to anarchist ideas, life there was — quite naturally — permeated by principles, an ethic, a structure, and not least a spirit that felt deeply familiar to me from reading Freiheit pur.
In my own life, dreams and utopian theory had become, at least in part, a bit of practice.

But I am becoming increasingly aware of how privileged a little island I find myself on — while the vast majority of the world seems more and more to be going up in flames.
Since September 11, 2001, and the rise of the anti-globalization movement, the prevailing conditions have at least occasionally been called into question in public, and more and more people are beginning to look for viable ways out of the planetary catastrophe.

I, too, have felt renewed energy for political engagement since then. At one point, I was even determined to somehow produce a new edition of my favorite book, even if it meant self-exploitation and dipping into my modest personal savings.

After all, isn't the world practically crying out for signs of a new societal path?
Everywhere, the system's crises are plainly visible — and yet, no compelling political vision or even a seriously developed alternative can be heard of. In this context, a good book about the never-disproven idea of anarchism might just offer one or another valuable inspiration for a general discussion — which hopefully will emerge on a broader level soon!

I dare to hope for nothing more, but also nothing less…

After I had already begun forming concrete plans to champion Stowasser's book on my own, a surprising turn occurred on July 5, 2002: during one of my sporadic online searches for Freiheit pur copies in antiquarian bookstores, I stumbled upon the website of Olf Dorlach from Zwickau, who, at www.utopie1.de, offers dozens of full online editions of important books on the topic of "social utopias."

It was unbelievable: the search engine had automatically directed me to the homepage of my long-sought favorite book, and at first, I couldn't believe it was really there — in its entirety,

down to the last letter, freely accessible and completely free of charge!
I immediately wrote a letter to Olf Dorlach, thanking him for his good idea and the clever implementation.

Still, it has to be said: despite the eye-friendly font on utopie1.de, no reasonable person will read a 400-page book on a computer screen. The printed version also turned out to be unfortunately unreadable, so I took the time and effort to reformat the text into a version that prints and reads well.

On a website of my own, I now make the PDF file available to the interested public.

I wish all living beings on Earth a life free from unnatural constraints!

— Jochen Schilk,
Klein Jasedow, October 2005
(Contact via Mama-Anarchija.net)

Addendum, March 2006:
Since the beginning of the month, the long-awaited revised edition, now with an extensive photo section, has finally been published by Nautilus Verlag. The book is now titled "Anarchie! – Idee, Geschichte, Perspektiven", and this new print edition is in fact based on the digital version that has been available for download from Mama-Anarchija.net since November 2005.

For about a year, I've been in active correspondence with Horst Stowasser on the topics of anarchism and matriarchal research. The fruits of this exchange can be found both in relevant Kurskontakte articles (also available on the website), and in the Anarchie! chapters 9 ("The Patriarchy") and 20 ("Mama Anarchija – On the Feminine Origin of Freedom").

I've come to an agreement with Horst Stowasser and Nautilus Verlag that I may continue to offer the older version of the book — expanded to include the matriarchal chapters — as a free download on this website. We assume that any enthusiastic reader will want to own the beautifully bound print edition of the book once their appetite has been whetted by this online version.

So do yourself and all of us a favor — and honor the wonderful new printed edition as well: Ask for Anarchie! at the bookstore of your choice!

A Kind of Introduction: On Rage and Freedom

> "Anarchy is not a matter of demands, but of life itself."
> — Gustav Landauer

IN THE BEGINNING WAS RAGE.
The unspeakable, unrestrained, and unpredictable rage that sometimes overtakes the slave and drives him to either smash his master's skull or run away.
Rage that one human being is allowed to command another.
Fury at servitude and oppression.
Hatred for the arrogance of power that humans wield over one another.

Rage, rebellion, escape — an ancient driving force in human history, a vicious cycle whose boundaries even a rebellious slave five thousand years ago may have come to know. In this dead-end street with no destination moved a Spartacus*, just as much as Michael Kohlhaas or "Che" Guevara*, for all of them sooner or later had to face the question:
What is the goal of rebellion?

Freedom, of course!
But what exactly is that? Where could it be found? Could one go somewhere and find it?
Did escaping authority — the mere absence of the oppressor — automatically mean the presence of freedom?
And doesn't all experience show that freedom is a deceptive hope? Isn't one form of domination always just replaced by another?
Above all: Is the human being even capable of freedom?

Outrage, fury, rebellion — these are negative values. They only tell us what should not be, but not how it could be otherwise, or better.
Hatred is not constructive*; it is destructive — how could it be otherwise?
Of course, it would be absurd to expect a slave, who rebels in his moment of greatest torment, to already have a fully formed plan for a free society.
Liberation has always been, and still is, primarily a reaction to unfreedom. But if it stops there, it can never become constructive. And that means: Liberation, ultimately, does not lead to freedom.

It is within this tension between rage and freedom that humanity gave birth to an idea as old as the history of domination itself: the dream of anarchy — or to put it plainly, freedom from rule.

At the heart of this idea lies the question: How can rage overcome itself and give rise to freedom?

Undoubtedly, hatred and fury are poor guides. And it is equally clear that freedom cannot be created through means of unfreedom.
But it is also true that it was often rage that first sparked the thought of a "society of freedom,"

and more importantly, the will to act on it.
Theorists of modern anarchism have called this the “creative power of indignation”, while tirelessly insisting that freedom can never be achieved if we stop at that point.

Thus, anarchism — as a liberating struggle and as the doctrine of a society without domination — was born into this contradiction from the very beginning and remains entangled in it to this day:
How can destructive rage be transformed into constructive liberation?
For what would be the use of every uprising against unfreedom, if it did not lead to freedom in the end?
It would bring only new oppression — unless our thoughts move beyond this spontaneous outrage, beyond feelings like revenge and fury.

Indignation, then, needs an idea — one that leads toward a positive utopia; in a word: a goal.

This goal is what defines the nature of that movement known as “anarchism”, which has always provoked both enthusiasm and fear.
As colorful, bizarre, and contradictory as freedom itself can be — enticing to some, the embodiment of evil to others — it has run like a bright thread through the history of humanity for centuries.
Between the most radical peacefulness and desperate violence, this idea of hope unfolds, still capable of inspiring people today, and perhaps still with its true future ahead of it.

That is what this book is about.

It asks whether anarchy is an unrealistic dream or a blueprint yet to be realized.
It attempts to untangle the knot of ideas that make up this radical philosophy of freedom, and to trace some of its threads.
It tells of failed and successful attempts to make that dream real.
Above all, it tries to look ahead — to sketch out a scenario and examine the thesis put forward by some contemporary thinkers, namely:
The social form of the coming millennium will be an anarchic one — or humanity will perish.

The roots of modern anarchism are very old.
Its origins are lost in the mists of human history — if only because two or three thousand years ago, hardly any chronicler* considered the “history of uprisings” worth recording.
What we now call “modern anarchism,” on the other hand, is only about 150 years old.
Paradoxically, though well documented, it remains almost completely unknown.

Its search for a future society has given rise to an almost endless series of revolts, ideas, and practical experiments. All of them are full of tension and relevance, and in nearly every case, rebellion preceded philosophy.

Even in personal development, rage usually comes before utopia for most anarchists.
Very few people come to the desire for a society without domination through analytical reasoning or philosophical exercises.
Experiencing oppression, domination, and injustice firsthand has been — and still is — the most common and powerful motive for committing to such an idea.

Seen this way, the potential for rebellion is endless.
Almost every self-aware person knows this kind of rage.
Maybe you have asked yourself at some point why there are people above you, people who get to give you orders and decide your life and your future — a whole system of hierarchy, which we all know doesn’t work very well.

But that doesn't mean that everyone who suffers under authority is automatically an anarchist.
Anarchism always involves a search for alternatives and visions of the future.
And today, new ideas for the future seem more urgent than ever.
The global chain of crises on our planet forces us to find new solutions — ones capable of replacing outdated notions of centralism, hierarchy, concentration, and the obsession with growth.

In that search, the rich trove of anarchist experience can offer intriguing suggestions — both good and bad.
But it is good for only one thing not: blind imitation.
Ideology*, dogmatism*, and fanaticism* contradict the very essence of anarchy.

Because that essence — put simply — is: pure freedom.

Part 1: The Idea

Chapter 1: Some Notes on Confusion

> "The word 'utopia' alone suffices to condemn an idea."
>
> — Jack London —

WHAT AN ANARCHIST IS, everyone knows: a violent person, usually a terrorist, also filthy, loving disorder, spreading chaos wherever he goes.
His favorite activity consists of throwing bombs, which he typically hides beneath a flowing black cloak, his face covered by an outdated floppy hat. If necessary, he also resorts to dagger or revolver — the main thing is that he can satisfy his thirst for blood.

Or else he is sick, even hereditary.
A standard scientific work from the 19th century simply defines anarchists as "idiots or born criminals, who also generally limp, are disabled, and have asymmetrical facial features."*
Anarchy as mental illness — that explains and excuses everything.

Then there is the variant of delusion: anarchists are "petty-bourgeois chaos-makers" who have not yet recognized the "objective course of history"; loud in their intentions but ultimately "voluntarist* helpers of the counterrevolution."
Therefore, as "left-wing deviants," they are best "liquidated."
This tone was favored in the past by Marxists of all stripes, who have since fallen silent in the face of the failure of their "objective historical truths."

Finally, the modern definition — a mixture of psychoanalysis and gloom:
Anarchists are said to be early childhood-damaged psychotics* who transform their personal problems into a bottomless hatred of society and forge a "philosophy of nothingness" to justify themselves.
They are as much to be pitied as they are to be fought.

Tragic — nobody seems to love the anarchists.

You probably already suspect it — all this is nonsense, and you're right.
That, however, doesn't make things any easier, because a correct definition is difficult precisely because anarchism is not a unified movement, but a diverse and therefore contradictory one.
That is inherent in its nature, for its nature is freedom, and freedom is not uniform.

Thus, among anarchists there are all sorts of beliefs and strategies for change. From ecologists* to trade unionists, educators*, settlers, and alternative entrepreneurs, all the way to advocates of revolutionary violence and followers of strict nonviolence, everything is represented.
Among them are atheists* and religious people, ascetics* and bon vivants, materialists* and esotericists*.
For some, the decisive lever to overcome domination is education; for others, civil disobedience or direct action; some want to build counterstructures with the same goal, others aim to win over

the working class. Self-management is the credo* of some, while many support infiltration, and still others swear by propaganda, enlightenment, or leading by example.
Finally, there are individualists who couldn't care less about the rest of humanity, and last but not least, there are still some who dream of imposing their ideas on the rest of humanity by force — more or less gently.
The species of bloodthirsty bomb throwers, however, who so strongly shaped the image of anarchism and so vividly fueled the fearful fantasies of citizens, as we will see, have long been extinct.

Now, anarchists by no means see this diversity as a flaw; on the contrary, they see it as an opportunity and enrichment — a foreshadowing of the diversity they seek in a future society. Indeed, anarchism claims to be the only social structure that takes into account the fact that people are very different.

But what then do anarchists actually have in common? Is there even any justification for speaking of "anarchism" and "anarchists" if everything is so wonderfully arbitrary?
For simplicity's sake, let us try a preliminary brief definition that limits itself to the commonalities:

Anarchists strive for a free society of equality in which there is no longer any domination of people over people. The members of such a society are to be empowered and encouraged to take their private and social needs into their own hands without hierarchy and paternalism, with a minimum of alienation*. This is meant to create a different order in which principles such as "free agreement," "mutual aid," and "solidarity" could replace today's realities like laws, competition, and selfishness. Authoritarian centralism would be replaced by federalism: the decentralized networking of small and manageable social units. Misanthropic and environmentally destructive gigantomania* would then be absurd; in its place would arise free associations of purpose, in which people enter into direct relationships on the basis of equal rights and duties. Particularly original about these ideas is the notion that in a geographic area there would no longer be only one society, one state equally binding for all, but a variety of parallel* existing social formations. "Anarchy is a society of societies of societies," as the anarchist philosopher Gustav Landauer once put it.
In short, and put a bit more simply: Anarchy is not chaos*, but order without domination.

In the practical implementation of these rather abstract ideas, most anarchists probably agree that certain institutions of such a libertarian social form are hindrances, to put it kindly. First, the state as an institution and authoritarian principle of order, but also the "state in the head": ideology of domination and belief in authority. Furthermore, its supporting pillars such as capital, police, church, judiciary, patriarchy, the compliant mass media, traditional education, the classic nuclear family, and the like — which brings us to the "favorite opponents" anarchists have traditionally and preferably dealt with.

But all this does not go much beyond the symbolic image of that rebellious slave we invoked at the beginning. Anarchists would indeed act irresponsibly if they limited themselves to smashing negatives without being able to put something positive in their place. Thus, real anarchists are also always characterized by working on models for a new, free society and attempting to exemplarily realize these in practical experiments — even if, within the framework of the existing authoritarian reality, this only succeeds imperfectly.

"Nice, but naive," this could sum up the tenor of all well-meaning critics.
"That may be a beautiful pipe dream, but it's not achievable. Human beings aren't made for that;

they are selfish, they need authority and the strict hand of morality, law, and order. And even if they could live like that — the rulers would never allow such a system, and since they cannot be defeated, it will remain a dream."

Anarchists naturally claim the opposite: for them, such a society is not only desirable but also possible. And they explain why: precisely because humans are selfish, one of their theses goes, anarchy is an adequate way of life. Or that domination and authority are not the same thing, and the former actually prevents the emergence of a well-understood and positive, namely voluntary "authority." And, of course, humans need something like "morality" and "order," but not necessarily the kind we have today. Our laws are quite the opposite of morality — anarchy, by contrast, is the morally highest form of order because it sets its rules and limits voluntarily. Above all, there need not be just one kind of order and one ethics* — there could well be several existing side by side and together.

Such things sound paradoxical* to the ears of people shaped by the state—and that is all of us. These supposed paradoxes are only of marginal interest to us now, because they are theoretical, at best plausible, and ultimately lack evidential power. What does have evidential power is example, experiment. Did you know that in this century there have already been large, functioning anarchist communities, covering entire countries, with big cities, villages, and industry, in which a modern mass society functioned along anarchic lines—from the subway to dairy farming to the school system?

Or were you aware that anarchist guerrilla armies in the 1920s succeeded in liberating vast territories in order to attempt the construction of a society based on free self-administration? No one today suspects that the method of "civil disobedience," which brought colonial powers to their knees and toppled governments, is fully in the tradition of nonviolent anarchism. And who knows that anarchists fought for an eight-hour workday in heavy industry over seventy years ago? On our journeys through the complex paths of anarchist experiments, we will encounter such examples in very different countries such as Argentina and India, Germany, Ukraine, Spain, and Manchuria.

Of course, none of this exists anymore, and many of these large and small experiments fell far short of anarchism's high ideals in practice. But it is also true that not a single one of them collapsed because of its own contradictions—they were all crushed militarily. Truly a "striking" proof; however, not one that could prove the impossibility of an anarchist society.

Today anarchism exists only as a concept*, as a social movement, and in modest practical approaches. The final proof of whether anarchy is a functional structure is therefore still pending; likewise, whether it is a desirable way of life. Ultimately, only those people living in it could answer that.

Chapter 2: The Concept ”Anarchy”

> “But why do I like Anarchy so much in the modern world? Everyone lives according to their own will, and that is my gain as well! I allow everyone their pursuit, so that I too can live according to my own will.”
>
> — Johann Wolfgang von Goethe —

THE WORD ANARCHY is as old as Western civilization itself. Since the existence of rulers, there have been ideas of a life without domination, and since the ancient Greeks, we have inherited the word an archia [αν αρχια]. It means ”no rule,” the absence of power and hierarchy. A provocative word that immediately conjures terrifying visions in people’s minds: chaos, disorder, wildness, destruction. Thus, the meaning of the word today has largely been reduced to the fears that overwhelm the average citizen when faced with this concept; its original meaning has been completely lost. What remains are catchy ”translations” like ”lawlessness,” ”licentiousness,” ”chaos.” This is about as accurate as translating ”dentist” as ”torture,” ”love” as ”sin,” or ”ecology” as ”backwardness.” In everyday language, this might still be accepted as a spontaneous expression of fear. However, it is more than just ignorance or imprecision. For centuries, the official language has used this negative term for anarchy; since the 19th century, it has been used with the obvious intent to discredit anarchism as a philosophy or political movement. For this reason, entire generations of politicians and writers, communists and aristocrats, pastors and housewives have propagated this concept of anarchy. For them, the word is linked with a cold shiver and thoughts of the apocalypse, and they have passed this apocalyptic vision on to millions. Even in reputable reference works like the Duden, anarchy is preferably and quite wrongly translated as ”lawlessness” or ”chaos in the political sense.” But in the Duden editorial office, there are educated people who would never translate ”love” as ”sin.” This is not just about subtle fears but how language can be used to shape opinions. The equation Anarchy = Lawlessness is not just linguistically incorrect and conceptually distorted; it is meant to evoke something in the reader: the idea that if anarchist ideas were realized, society would inevitably descend into chaos, and that rule is the only conceivable form of order. This is opinion, speculation, perhaps manipulation—certainly not an accurate definition of the word. ”But don’t the anarchists want to abolish the state? Aren’t they opponents of justice, police, and the law? Isn’t it then correct to accuse them of ’lawlessness’?” one might ask. The first part is true, and the accusation would be justified if anarchism didn’t know how to replace these institutions with other structures. However, the rejection of our current systems of domination, justice, and punishment does not mean that there would be no rules, agreements, or ethical boundaries in social life. Other forms are imaginable. That those in power fight these ideas out of self-interest is obvious. That the imagination of most people is insufficient to think beyond the existing order is not the fault of the anarchists. Other thinkers have shown more visionary capacity. Immanuel Kant defines anarchy briefly and succinctly as ”law and freedom without violence.” For him, the term ”law” is not the Civil Code, but the entirety of social rules. Similar ideas must have been in the mind of Elisée

Reclus when he postulated, ”Anarchy is the highest form of order.” When rules among people are followed voluntarily and without the use of force, this is a higher stage of social development than the authoritarian one, where social behavior must constantly be enforced through the coercion of the state, the threats of the judiciary, and the violence of the police. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, one of the fathers of modern anarchism, reclaimed the word ”anarchy” in its original meaning around 1840, through a witty dialogue with a bourgeois in politics:

> ”Are you a Republican?” ”Republican, yes, but this word is too imprecise. Res publica—those are the public affairs… even kings are republicans.” ”Well, are you a Democrat?” ”No.” ”What, a monarchist?” ”No.” ”A constitutionalist?” ”God forbid!” ”Then you’re an aristocrat?” ”Not at all.” ”You want a mixed government?” ”Much less.” ”So what are you then?” ”I am an anarchist.”

In Proudhon’s eyes, the state and government were the true disturbers of peace, constant producers of chaos, injustice, and poverty. Therefore, only a society freed from governmental power would be able to restore a ”natural order of human relations,” the ”social harmony.” He sought an appropriate term for this and turned to the old Greek term an archia, giving it its precise etymological meaning. However, the ambiguity of the word ”anarchy” was not dispelled. Even in ancient Greece, the term was used ambivalently; its negative connotation fully took root in the philosophical language of the Catholic Middle Ages. By the time of the Enlightenment, the term was used more differentiably. We will revisit this shift in values at times. However, the prevailing ideology has always succeeded in preventing such distinctions from entering common language. Today, the term ”anarchy” is therefore entirely negatively charged. As a result, there was intense debate within anarchist circles about new names by which they could rid themselves of this stigma. Some later called themselves ”Federalists” (supporters of a non-centralized community based on equal municipalities), others ”Mutualists” (a cooperative order based on mutual aid and solidarity), ”Collectivists” (an order based on community), or ”Syndicalists” (a libertarian society based on a union structure). However, all these terms only reflect a partial aspect of anarchist essentials, and each of them had to undergo similar distortions in meaning, as did the word ”anarchy” itself. The Greek neologism Akratie, whose meaning is almost identical to ”anarchy,” was never able to establish itself permanently. Most anarchists eventually came to the conclusion that they could call themselves whatever they wanted; they would always be slandered—so they might as well stick with the problematic word ”anarchy” and give it a positive meaning. The term libertarian (meaning ”freedom-loving”—not to be confused with liberal!) which emerged in France around 1860, gained worldwide acceptance and is now considered a broader, but essentially equivalent, synonym for anarchist.

Chapter 3: Who is an Anarchist?

> "I pity anyone who was not an anarchist at the age of twenty."
>
> — Clemenceau –

Certainly, there are more "anarchists" than just those who explicitly call themselves one. Many simply don't realize it. We all know these kinds of 'natural anarchists': people who don't like being told what to do, who question what they're told critically, and who refuse to believe or do something just because someone in power says so. Resistance to authority has been a constant thread throughout the history of individuals and groups: sometimes as clever tricksters, sometimes as rebellious insurrectionists, sometimes as stubborn free-thinkers. Their actions and figures are passed down in fairy tales, songs, and legends, and around the world, these small actions against the powerful enjoy universal public sympathy. Actions aimed at authority, with the essence of freedom and justice.

'Natural' and 'True' Anarchists

This is not to say that anarchism wants to claim all free-thinkers, critical minds, or rebels for itself. That would be very uncharacteristic of anarchists, as they do not believe in labeling people. They care about content, not ideologies. Trying to fit historical movements into the box of one's worldview would not only be nonsensical but would also contradict the anarchist understanding of themselves.

Nonetheless, one must consider these "natural anarchists" when asking who "an anarchist" is. It would be narrow-minded to only call those anarchists who loudly and overtly identify as such, waving the black flag in an attention-grabbing way. After all, it costs nothing to call oneself an 'anarchist,' and whether all who do so truly live up to their own ideals is, of course, an open question.

Similar considerations apply to foreign cultures or so-called "primitive" societies, some of which live without government and have long realized one or another "utopian" demand of classical anarchism within their communities. It would not help anyone to stamp the social daily life of these societies with the label 'anarchistic.' Sociologists and ethnologists prefer the term "regulated anarchy." However, the conclusions we can draw from such societies are important for anarchists and often more fruitful and educational than many learned disputes.

While the conclusions we can draw from the millions of people who are "anarchists" without knowing it are fascinating, we will now focus on those who explicitly call themselves anarchists and consider themselves part of an anarchist movement. Interestingly, many of these 'real' anarchists were previously 'natural' anarchists who, at some point, were surprised to discover that what they had always thought actually had a name and existed as a philosophy and movement.

Who is the 'True' Anarchist?

First and foremost, anyone who calls themselves one, because no one could 'forbid' them from doing so. Anarchists, however, are infamous for their disagreements. Fortunately, there are a number of commonalities that most committed anarchists share. So what is the 'common denominator'?

Checklist of Commonalities

At the center of anarchist action lies a global concept of freedom. Freedom should be both the goal and the means to achieve this goal. But what is 'freedom'? For anarchists, this word means more than just a liberal, vague concept. They have always tried to fill it with concrete content, demands, and models. Anarchism is not satisfied with partial freedoms like the liberal freedom of trade, the nationalist freedom of the homeland, or the enlightenment freedom of the mind. Freedom should be all-encompassing and indivisible, a principle that defines human life from the most personal and everyday aspects to global organizational structures. However, freedom is an empty word and worthless if not coupled with social justice. And social justice cannot exist without social equality. Anarchists view it this way: On earth, all people theoretically have the same freedom to become millionaires, but we all know that this 'freedom' is meaningless. After all, we cannot all become rich at the expense of others. On the other hand, in our societies, a millionaire is just as forbidden from sleeping under a bridge as a homeless person—there is equality here too, but it is evident that this kind of 'equality' is worthless without social justice.

Thus, anarchism, in simple terms, is the union of freedom and socialism; for those who favor concise formulas, we could write the equation A = F + S. We will see later that anarchism defines 'S' very differently from what is commonly understood as 'socialism' and has only known through the pitiful models of Marxism or social democracy.

Mikhail Bakunin, the charismatic founding figure of anarchism, captured this tension between the social and libertarian approaches succinctly: "Freedom without socialism is privilege and injustice—and socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality." Considering he wrote this around 1870, one could almost see his view as prophetic—who could have predicted at that time which paths 'unfree socialism' would take in Russia, Romania, Cambodia, or East Germany?

We can say that most active anarchists are involved in freedom-socialist movements, known as 'social anarchism.' There are many different approaches, tactics, and methods, most of which have constructive goals. Most want to change the existing society in a freedom-socialist sense, to undermine unfree institutions to the best of their ability, and simultaneously experiment with and nurture new models to replace the old structures. Unfortunately, our societies rarely allow anarchism to be constructive. More often, it has to limit itself to pure defense. In fact, today, most anarchists are fully engaged in responding to the increasing restrictions on freedom and living conditions. These 'reactive struggles'—whether against arms production, nuclear power plants, environmental destruction, housing shortages, poverty, bureaucratic swamp, police arbitrariness, judicial arrogance, layoffs, social and gender discrimination, tariff extortion, or right-wing radical attacks—are familiar to us all from the present and recent past. Certainly, they are necessary and politically important, but they do not define 'the anarchist.' All too often, those who are constantly acting lose sight of their ultimate goal. The actions typically dissipate when the im-

mediate cause is no longer present. They leave little room for constructive approaches aimed at a new society. The clever ruling system often uses these reactive struggles as a tool to tie up the forces of its opponents in long, exhausting battles.

No upright anarchist would want to shy away from these struggles and passively watch oppression and injustice unfold. However, anarchism is crucially concerned with making the connection between mere reaction and the constructive libertarian element. In other words: the fight against nuclear power plants should become a fight for ecology, and the fight against arms production should become a fight for a peaceful society. From trade union action, new economic and labor models should arise, and so on. All of this would only make sense for anarchists if, in the end, all of these areas connect to the overall concept of a different society. In short: the fight against old relations must not become a ritual—it must give birth to new models.

This is easier said than done. Those in power, of course, do everything—up to using direct violence—to suppress any libertarian competition that seeks to take away their power. This is why, throughout history, there have been anarchists who completely lost sight of the constructive element of anarchism. Filled with hatred and despair, they resorted to directly and frontally attacking the system wherever they could—thus, 'militarily.' Terror, once the monopoly of the state and the church, became, at times, the prevailing tactic of some anarchist currents. The peak of this violent phase of anarchism occurred between 1891 and 1894; today, terrorism no longer plays a role in the libertarian movement. In fact, there are far more pacifists in modern anarchism than supporters of any form of violence. Nevertheless, that brief historical period of assassinations, robberies, and tyrant killings still significantly influences the public image of anarchists: just as often as anarchism is equated with 'chaos' and 'lawlessness,' it is also associated with 'violence' and 'terror.' However, this is nonsense, because the question of violence is neither typical nor defining for anarchism.

As we have seen, the field of action for social anarchism is broad and unfolds between the poles of resistance, action, constructiveness, education, and experimental models. The vast majority of anarchists are engaged in this broad social terrain in one way or another.

There are also anarchists who understand anarchism more as a private philosophy of life and—for whatever reason—see no point in wanting to change the world. These 'philosophical anarchists' either maintain a corresponding lifestyle—such as that of the bohemian or nonconformist—sometimes write insightful books, or are so individualistic that their 'anarchism' has no practical consequences. Until about 1840, 'philosophical anarchism' was the most widespread current and produced rather inconsequential literature in which musings about anarchy and the course of the world were presented. Most of today's 'philosophical anarchists' are not organized in any movements and are therefore not counted as part of 'social anarchism.' Socially active anarchists tend to look down on their purely philosophical counterparts. This is understandable, though unwise, because even an anarchistic attitude helps to create a societal climate that can only benefit social anarchism.

Personal Consequences

Until now, we have only focused on the 'external impact' of the anarchist person. But what about the personal consequences in their own life? Here too, the claim is usually high: anarchists aim to not only conceptualize their ideals for a distant future but to begin implementing and em-

bodying them here and now—albeit in small steps, and as imperfect as that may be in an authoritarian environment. This means, of course, that they must set the bar for anarchistic demands for themselves, which leads to consequences that are not always easy to maintain—especially in a society that preaches and rewards the opposite in nearly every respect. Anarchistic tolerance, renunciation of domination, new forms of interaction between women and men, children and adults, majorities and minorities, a sovereign attitude towards property, sexuality, and work—all these and much more are things that an anarchistic ethics with personal consequences wants to develop and practice. After thousands of years of state-authoritarian ethics, this is no easy task, and many fail to live up to their own standards. On the other hand, anarchism is not a model for saints but for people. This includes the right to be imperfect and make mistakes. Above all, however—and this often turns out to be the hardest part—there are naturally many differing opinions about what is 'right' and 'wrong.' Anarchism would betray itself the moment it tried to forcefully smooth over these differences. However, the fact that most anarchists make their demands the touchstone of their own lives shows that they do not represent a doctrine of compulsory happiness in which people must obey ideals set by an avant-garde that is unwilling to live up to them themselves.

Anarchism is a big roof, a bazaar of diversity, a field of experimentation. Essentially, anyone can come under this roof and say, "I am an anarchist!" Whether this is true and what each individual understands by "anarchism" is an open question. Anarchism is a search and an experiment under the sign of diversity. Basically, everyone who seriously searches for libertarian solutions is an anarchist.

Chapter 4: What Do the Anarchists Want?

> "No power to no one! (Keine Macht für Niemand)"
>
> — The German proto-Punkrock band Ton-Steine-Scherben, 1970 —

There are many good reasons why anarchists have always avoided creating binding programs for a future society; the lack of ideas is certainly not one of them. Quite the opposite: the belief that an anarchistic society will consist of many different societies, forms, and social organisms has always prevented them from trying to fit tomorrow's utopia into the straitjacket of programmatic regulations today.

No Rigid Program

A society according to the anarchists' taste is not a rigid entity; Anarchy will not be "achieved" one fine day. Only the people involved in it will decide how they want to live and organize themselves, and their ideas will likely be different. Therefore, we must imagine "anarchy" not as a society with only one way of life, one ethic, or one type of social organization, but as a structure in a specific geographical space where many different ways coexist, which can freely connect according to interests, inclinations, needs, and desires. Admittedly, this is a difficult concept for us, who are used to the state jealously guarding its clearly defined territory to ensure all citizens are subjected to a single norm—the state norm. We know nothing else; thus, anarchist social and organizational theory seems exotic to us. Its structure is often described as a network, and from biology, the image of mycelium is often used—those chaotic fungal networks that are extremely vital and resilient. All this may seem more confusing than clarifying at this point, but we will address it later.

For now, suffice it to say that the desire for diversity in the anarchists' vision of society prevents a clear or even dogmatic answer to the question of what an anarchist society will look like.

Another reason for the lack of a fixed anarchist program was pointed out by Bakunin. He argued that a completely new society can only emerge from the complete overcoming of the old one. People today, shaped by authoritarianism and the state, are hardly able to come up with truly new ideas. In all their designs, the seed of the old is present and will eventually resurface. A new society, according to Bakunin, can only emerge from amorphism, i.e., from the destruction of the old. The accusation that Bakunin wanted to "destroy everything" to build something new is unfair to him. With the term "destruction," he did not mean blowing up cities or factories; he referred to the breaking down of institutions and mechanisms of power. On the other hand, the radical thinker did not provide a plausible answer to how he intended to bridge the gap between amorphism and a new society—when and where, therefore, new "virtues" and institutions should arise. Spontaneity and imagination alone are unlikely to be enough. Later anarchist thinkers have

answered this question more coherently. For now, it's important to understand that Bakunin's caution cannot be dismissed: concepts and programs that come from the unfree atmosphere of an authoritarian society cannot possibly be as free, bold, sovereign, and visionary as ideas that people might develop in a liberated society. Therefore, anarchism needs fewer programs and rules for a future society, but rather a general model of mutable structures.

Ideas and Positions

"Yes, for goodness' sake, do the anarchists want anything concrete, or are they just hiding behind excuses for why they don't want this or that…?" Yes, anarchists have concrete ideas; they just haven't made them into a rigid program.

The goal of anarchism is the abolition of the rule of people over people. At the heart of its political activity is a socially shaped idea of freedom. From this, it derives the necessity of abolishing the state. The state is not a phantom but an expression of very specific—primarily economically conditioned—relations of power and domination. It is not about hostility to this government or that tyrant, but about fighting the state itself while also developing alternatives to statism.

From this general goal, a series of practical demands, ideas, and objectives have been embraced by the anarchist movement throughout history:

Equal freedom for all people in a society. No one should rule; life should be collectively organized by the people affected by it. This leads to social systems in which as much collectivity as necessary and as much individuality as possible coexist. The degree of "necessary" and "possible" is decided by each individual based on their needs, as long as they can "choose" or create their society. No leveling, but equal opportunities and rights.

This demand primarily fails due to economic injustice. Therefore, anarchists advocate for the abolition of the capitalist mode of production, which they view as inhuman, environmentally destructive, and irrational in its compulsion for growth. They do not wish to replace it with socialist central planning but with a decentralized, federated, solidarity-based economy that prioritizes ecology over economy and human needs over profits.

Closely linked to social equality is the demand for the overcoming of classes, strata, and power hierarchies. Anarchists believe people are indeed different and should remain so, but no social class should enjoy privileges due to birth, or for economic, religious, racial, or gender-based reasons. This leads to a whole catalog of individual demands, ranging from "direct democracy" to criticism of religion, patriarchy, and the family, to property and inheritance rights.

With the abolition of the state, its apparatus and institutions are also called into question: government, bureaucracy, army, borders, justice, police, media dominance, education monopoly, and so on. For those functions of the state that are inherently necessary, anarchism strives to create alternative models. Their foundation is common needs, and their elements include self-organization, free agreements, decentralized networking, and autonomous federation. From the state's perceived unnecessary functions arise typical anarchist action areas, such as antimilitarism, free education, or bureaucratically opposed self-management.

Directly following the state, the church is seen as a classic institution that restricts freedom. Most anarchists are atheists and reject religion. They do not like submitting to higher beings or powers; the church is seen as a gigantic institution of dumbing down. Anarchists, however, do not deny anyone the right to believe, as long as that belief does not restrict others' freedom.

In fact, there are numerous commonalities between the ethics of some religions and those of anarchism. Anarchism is, therefore, more anticlerical than antireligious.

In free societies, there should be no property in people anymore. Anarchists oppose everyday dependency and oppression, especially that of women and children. Most libertarians also reject the institution of marriage and the "bourgeois nuclear family," seeing them as important supports of the state. Instead, they prefer voluntary associations based on the principle of affinity, such as extended families, shared apartments, or communes, whose composition can change. This does not mean everyone must live this way or that two people cannot love each other for life and be "faithful," as long as they do so voluntarily and without the coercive pressure of marriage laws. Rather, the aim is to allow other forms and overcome the usual hierarchy in "normal" families: women and children should be accepted as equal people, and the religiously influenced sexual morality should be replaced by a joyful equality. Patriarchy, the prevalent form of rule, automatically becomes the target of anarchist criticism.

A beautiful utopia cannot thrive in a dying world. Humanity can only survive in harmony with its environment. Anarchists assume that the urgently needed ecological changes must be so radical that they are scarcely possible within a capitalist growth economy. They believe that a decentralized organization of small units with a "needs-based economy on a human scale" is the only truly ecological societal structure and, therefore, the model for the future.

No Paradise

Anarchists acknowledge that even in a libertarian society, there will be injustice, crime, and aggression. Anarchist models do not promise a paradise but attempt to develop structures in which social misconduct is reduced to the extent that the remaining issues can be dealt with differently. Criminals, for example, should not be seen as delinquents and punished, but rather, they should receive help. Mentally ill people should not be isolated but should be integrated into society. Prisons, psychiatric institutions, reformatories, and punishments are seen as bankruptcies of a hierarchical system that mostly produces its own problems.

For an anarchist, freedom is an indivisible good. In our societies, few people are "free" at the expense of many others' unfreedom—economically, politically, and psychologically. The mass media easily sell the "freedom" that rich people can buy by exploiting poorer people as the ideal of the "free West." This injustice does not exist only in the countries we live in but is also rampant on a large scale between poor and rich nations, in the relationship between the "First," "Second," and "Third Worlds." Therefore, anarchists advocate for global models of networking that overcome economic and cultural enslavement and can offer all people a life in dignity and without scarcity. Then, mass migrations out of poverty from the South to the North, from the East to the West, would naturally cease; a society without borders would no longer have to remain a utopia. This is one of the reasons why anarchism opposes imperialism, racism, and colonialism in all its old and new forms.

The list of such anarchist essentials could be extended much further, and one could easily get lost in the details. However, they are nothing more than the practical application of the comprehensive anarchist principle of freedom to the social reality that surrounds us.

In this way, something like a programmatic catalog of libertarian demands has emerged. But even for this "catalog," it holds true that anarchy is always subject to change. Once it hardens and

gives birth to dogmas, it is no longer anarchy. Phrasal anti-imperialism, repetitive class struggle, or blind gender wars do not become any wiser simply by dressing them in anarchist globalism. Unfortunately, anarchists are not always as undogmatic as they claim, and they are by no means immune to doctrinaire black-and-white thinking.

For an anarchist, everything can change: perception, experiences, priorities, personal insights, and individual strength—only the goal remains unchanged. The goal is a truly free society. Everything else is a means to achieve this goal, and these means are shaped by the needs of the people involved.

Chapter 5: What Do Anarchists Do?

> "Anarchists don't fight people, we fight institutions."
>
> — Buenaventura Durruti –

Anarchists wage their fight against state structures and for a free society using a wide range of methods: through education and media, the creation of countercultures and self-management models, as well as through provocation, direct action, strikes, and demonstrations. All of this can be done as individual activists, in loose groups, unions, or specific organizations. Throughout their history, they have experimented with every form of protest and resistance, including creating liberated zones where social experiments could thrive. However, they generally reject the conquest of state power, gradual political reforms within the system, participation in elections, political parties, and governments. They have learned early on that state systems have a great integrative power, and that power corrupts.

Of course, anarchists usually move toward their great goal in small steps. However, they do not become part of the state and its system; rather, their models are designed in such a way that they tend to be directed against state institutions and undermine structures of power, so that in their midst the seeds of a new, stateless society can grow.

Destructive and Constructive Anarchism

In essence, there are two different approaches within anarchism. One primarily focuses on the opponent and seeks to attack and destroy their power. Here, anarchism often boils down to mere anti-state sentiment; the question of building a new society becomes secondary. Thinking is mostly framed in military terms: defense, attack, destruction of the enemy. Such behavior almost always culminates in a gesture of challenge.

The other approach sees the goal as primary. For them, the state is an obstacle on the way to this goal, but not the indirect purpose of anarchism. While they can't avoid opposing and fighting this obstacle, their focus is on concrete, workable models—ways that lead to an anarchist society.

To oversimplify, we could call one direction "destructive anarchism" and the other "constructive anarchism." One directly confronts the enemy, while the other attempts to erode and make it unnecessary. Combat or cunning, open battlefield or catalyst—these are the extreme poles of anarchist activities.

Of course, this is a simplified view, but both forms can be observed: between the bomb-throwing, scruffy anarchist and the grain-eating hermit preaching love and non-violence, there has been nearly every conceivable type within the anarchist movement. One thing, however, can be said clearly: The infamous type of the "conspiratorial anarchist," who, full of hatred, set out to blow up a king and believed that the state would collapse, allowing anarchy to bloom forcefully, practically disappeared in the last century.

This so-called ”propaganda by the deed” was only one among many forms of action anarchism has created—a relatively short-lived one at that. Before that, anarchists participated in popular uprisings, founded secret societies, built worker unions, and established libraries and schools. They created exchange banks and consumer cooperatives, as well as newspapers, theaters, and singing clubs. There were also bank robbers who proudly called themselves ”expropriators” and dutifully delivered every penny to their political organizations, or popular educators who traveled from village to village on donkeys, teaching people the alphabet and announcing the coming of anarchy.

In later years, anarcho-syndicalism saw an increased involvement of trade unions, which anarchists used to build a free society with a libertarian economy—something they managed to do, for a brief time. From popular uprisings, the tactic of guerrilla warfare emerged in other countries, which anarchists also used, briefly defeating state power and liberating large areas. Decades later, however, the guerrilla movement, under a communist banner, was degraded to a mere tactic of seizing power and ultimately failed as a means of liberation. Since the days of Tolstoy and Gandhi, civil disobedience has gained ground in anarchist circles as a particularly sharp weapon in the arsenal of non-violent anarchism. After student revolts, autonomous workers' struggles, and fierce resistance to the nuclear state, militarism, and housing speculation, anarchists today increasingly focus on building practical and vibrant ”projects.” These models of self-management are intended to be anchored in the everyday social life of people and remain resistant to co-option by the prevailing system. These ”prefigured utopias” attempt to serve as a testing ground for a non-state society while simultaneously opposing the state society.

Key Features of Anarchist Action

A typical feature of anarchist action is direct action. Anarchists favor straightforward approaches and mistrust devious tactics. Those affected usually take direct action against the perpetrators of their problems, often using highly effective actions. Where some might collect signatures to protest housing shortages, anarchists would rather occupy an empty house—the prototype of direct action. The question of whether such actions are legal or illegal is usually disregarded by anarchists with carefree laughter: to them, human ethics supersede formal law. If someone is hungry, they must take bread, even if the law protects property over hunger.

Direct actions can be non-violent or militant, humorous, symbolic, or practically outrageous; they can be carried out by one person or by hundreds of thousands—what they all share are two decisive advantages: they usually lead directly to the goal and are immediately understood by most people because they are direct.

Spontaneity is another feature of anarchist action. It arises from the directness of those affected, the dynamic energy of outrage, and the pleasure in unconventional forms of action. The absence of institutions, apparatus, and bureaucracy makes spontaneous action easier. Boring decision-making processes through many levels of authority or dull organizational routines are highly unusual in anarchist circles. A spontaneous and original idea is preferred over a rigid routine. One can be spontaneous alone just as well as in a group, and ultimately, every person is free to act in ways they can justify to their own conscience and to others.

This, of course, is a tricky point. What if students were to ”spontaneously” set fire to their school? It is possible that such a thought would make some rebellious student's heart race, but

that would not be considered a direct or spontaneous action in the anarchist sense—this contradicts a third libertarian principle: the presence of the goal in the means. What one seeks to achieve must also be reflected in the choice of means. Freedom cannot be achieved through unfree methods, truth cannot come through torture, happiness cannot come through coercion, and peace cannot be achieved through war. This is a high moral standard, and anarchists have always struggled with it in the harsh social reality. Can one defeat an enemy without causing harm? How should an anarchist militiaman in the Spanish Civil War fight against fascists if not with a rifle? With sweet words and a flower in hand? Probably not—although the idea is not entirely absurd, as history offers examples of revolutions won and armies defeated through non-violent means, just as there are examples of victory through arms. Still, the anarchists in the Spanish Revolution acted correctly when they fought. The problem lies elsewhere—in the tragic fact that anarchist movements usually cannot choose the form of their actions—it is imposed upon them. In Spain, the revolution began with a fascist coup, not an anarchist one…

Nothing is more anti-anarchist than an army, war, and killing. But history often did not allow anarchists to choose their "weapons." All the more reason for them to insist on the difficult principle of the presence of the goal in the means, and to apply it whenever they can choose the form of their actions.

Between outrage, direct action, spontaneity, and the vision of a free, humane, and non-violent society, there is no better regulative.

Chapter 6: Criticism of the State

> "The state is an abstraction that devours the life of the people – an immeasurable cemetery, where all the vital forces of a country have been generously and devoutly slaughtered."
>
> — Mikhail Bakunin –

What could be so bad about the state that anarchists are so bent on attacking it? Sure, the state restricts me in some ways, politicians lie, there are corrupt officials; the tax office is a den of thieves, and the armies squander our tax money. But the state also builds roads, maintains schools, and when I get old, it has my pension ready for me. Could anarchists perhaps be suffering from some kind of state psychosis, believing the state is the source of all evil?

Such arguments are familiar to every anarchist. Hardly anyone loves the state, many curse it, and it is easy for the average citizen to agree with an anarchist when they are ranting about some injustice or scandal. But then comes the big "but…" and it usually means nothing more than: "It could always be worse."

The fiery patriots have died out; modern citizens have a negative identification with the state, and this love-hate relationship is tough and harder to shake than the hollow nationalism of past eras – a phenomenon anarchists often underestimate.

Now, the indisputable fact that things could always be worse is not a reason not to fight for improvement. This is precisely what anarchists try to do, though they constantly run into the limits set by the state. They often find that even with its positive aspects, the state doesn't measure up. In fact, there is no single service of the modern state that is inherently "state-run." From the post office to railroads, hospitals, road and bridge construction, universities and schools, to pension plans, health insurance, and unemployment benefits, the state has over the centuries simply grabbed a whole range of positive societal achievements. All of these institutions emerged independently from governments and from society itself, and society is not the same as the state. Their origins lie in village communities, monasteries, trade guilds, private companies, individual initiatives, or the collective self-help of those affected. Only after a long time, often under pressure from social reformers and against the resistance of governments, did states take over these institutions. Whether our modern "welfare states" with their bureaucratic apparatus fulfill these tasks optimally, humanely, justly, and effectively is a question even politicians increasingly doubt. The fact that more and more of these sectors are being returned to the private sector – which of course is hardly a better alternative – suggests the opposite.

Social tasks do not define the state. What truly defines the state – and what it would never privatize – are its specific institutions like government, parliament, bureaucracy, civil service, tax authority, monetary and educational monopolies, judiciary, police, military, intelligence agencies, customs, radio and television monopolies, and, last but not least, the right to punish and, if necessary, kill anyone who rebels against any of these things. These are the real functions of domination – they are genuinely "state" functions. Everything else is usurped.

The modern ”democratic” state is less than a hundred years old, yet it acts as if its essence lies precisely in the social realm.

Arrogance of Power

How arrogant all these specifically state ”rights” are becomes immediately clear if anyone other than the state were to claim them. Try to collect money from your fellow citizens under the threat of punishment and persecution. What would happen if you decided to lock someone who violated your principles in a small cage for years or took it upon yourself to decide they should no longer live and killed them? Or pay a few men, give them helmets, clubs, and guns, and let them attack anyone with a different opinion or interests! And if you could even create technical devices capable of killing millions of people in one go and destroying entire cities – how would that be received?

No normal person would resort to such a horrific scenario, let alone try to ethically justify it. On the contrary, such actions are rightly outlawed and condemned. It would simply be ”extortion”, ”deprivation of liberty”, ”bodily harm”, ”murder”, ”forming of a criminal organization”, ”terrorism”, or ”genocide”. However when the state does the same things, they gain an aura of ethical necessity and more pleasant-sounding names: ”tax law”, ”justice”, ”death penalty”, ”police”, ”military”, ”defense”, or ”modern weapon systems”. We all know this contradiction: if I kill someone as a citizen, I’m a murderer – if I do it for the state as a soldier, I’m a hero.

Of course, there are countless justifications for state privileges: ”Without the firm hand of the state, people would tear each other apart”. ”The alternative to state oppression would be chaos”. And the boldest of all: ”The state is us, and it does everything for our good – with considerable success”.

A Record of Failure

The idea that we are the state is a pious fairy tale, and it is astonishing how many people believe in it. We will address this question in the next chapter. The argument that the state oppresses us for our own good is grotesque and denies us any sense of maturity. But is the state system not, in the end, quite successful?

If we understand ”anarchy” in its common negative sense, namely chaos, then we have it today: globally and across the board. A system in which enough food is produced but where tens of thousands of people still starve every day is madness. A system that periodically orders organized mass murder is inhuman. A system that increasingly plunders and makes the planet uninhabitable is suicidal. A system that gives wealth to ten percent of humanity while plundering the majority of the poor is despicable. A system that can only prevent its citizens from killing each other by threatening them with death itself is a moral bankruptcy.

If anarchists seriously proposed such a system in a discussion, they would rightly be laughed at. They would be called cynics. But this is the system we have today, it rules every piece of land on this earth, and we live in the middle of it. It is the state system that ultimately fails and creates a chaos of unimaginable proportions worldwide. We just don’t perceive it because we are used to thinking in double standards. Let’s not forget: the state does not only exist in our liberal, western democracies, where it is admittedly easier to live – the state is also Bangladesh,

Burkina Faso, Haiti, Laos, Rwanda, and Cambodia. Idi Amin and Helmut Kohl, Saddam Hussein and Boris Yeltsin, Hitler and Kennedy are ultimately representatives of the same structure. The differences between various regimes are not fundamental differences; they are merely different manifestations of the same idea: statism.

The State as a Web of Interests

Such criticism of the state and its organs is typical of anarchism. For anarchists, the state is not just accidentally involved in one or another failure of our society, but from the outset is the wrong approach, an unsuitable organizational structure. It is certainly not the "cause of all evil," but it concentrates many evils, represents and amplifies them, and creates many of the problems it then pretends to fight. Above all, states stand as obstacles to any deep social change because the state is an end in itself. It wants to survive at all costs, and in this, it is tenacious and adaptable. The example of countless revolutions that began with libertarian claims to build a better society but eventually became new dictatorships shows how stubborn statism, centralism, hierarchy, and bureaucracy become entrenched. They fight fiercely for their survival, overgrowing everything positive, devouring and digesting it. Gustav Landauer put this dilemma in the drastic sentence: "Whoever eats from the state, dies from it."

However, "the state" is neither a phantom nor a voracious mythical beast. It is an extraordinarily complex formation of interests, of which the government is just one group of relatively powerless representatives. Economic interests and political power are just as much part of the "state formation" as psychological, ideological, nationalist, religious, or military components. All of these are interwoven and interdependent. Anarchists have therefore not fought specific governments, presidents, or kings; their opponent has always been "the state as such" in all its facets.

The State in the Head

Since many people also experience the state as an everyday oppressor, the question arises as to why they still remain so loyal to it. On the one hand, it manages to channel anger excellently. The media play a decisive role in this. Opinion is produced daily, millions of times over, and very successfully. Blame is sought in the details, in mishaps, minorities, or some "bad people." Public opinion convinces us that a nation is a "community," that we are all equal, and the state merely plays the impartial referee. This masks the enormous social differences within each state and hides the privileges of the truly powerful. On the other hand, we all carry around a "state in our heads" to some extent. It's as if we've swallowed statism by the spoonful: the belief in the omnipotence of authority is inversely proportional to trust in our own abilities. The state convinces us that it, and only it, is capable of handling the complex problems of humanity with its apparatus, specialists, and experts. More and more people recognize that this is not true, but the alternative is lacking, and this makes them demoralized. There is a lack of space for experimentation, for models to stimulate, for experiences that could lead to new societies arising from experimentation – societies without the state.

Anarchistic criticism of the state is very old and in many ways almost prophetic. It is as if anarchists had foreseen the state's abominations of the twentieth century, from Auschwitz to Hiroshima to Cambodia. At a time when the whole world was fervently patriotic and the nation

was the highest ideal, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon wrote the following biting words, which have lost none of their relevance today:

> "Being governed means being under police surveillance, inspected, spied on, directed, buried under laws, regulated, confined, taught, preached at, controlled, estimated, valued, censored, commanded, recorded, registered, captured, taxed, stamped, measured, rated, patented, licensed, authorized, endorsed, admonished, hindered, reformed, aligned, punished. It means being exploited, managed, deceived, cheated, monopolized, betrayed, extorted, fooled, stolen from, and finally, at the slightest complaint, being suppressed, punished, belittled, insulted, persecuted, abused, knocked down, disarmed, gagged, imprisoned, fusilladed, shot, condemned, damned, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed, and on top of all this, ridiculed, mocked, insulted, and dishonored. That is government, that is its justice, that is its morality… The government of man over man is slavery. Whoever lays their hands on me to rule over me is a usurper and a tyrant. I declare him my enemy."

Proudhon knew what he was talking about: In nineteenth-century France, he was both a member of the National Assembly and a prison inmate.

Chapter 7 – Criticism of Democracy

> "Only the most utterly stupid calves choose their own butcher"
>
> — Folk saying –

EVEN THE WORD "DEMOCRACY" is actually an imposition. 'Democracy' means 'rule by the people'. But does 'the people' rule anywhere? Of course not. At best, the people are allowed to choose those who will rule over them. And even those choices are pre-selected.

True democracy would mean that the whole people ruled over the whole people – that each person had exactly as much say over others as they allowed others to have over themselves. That's either nonsense or the end of human rule over humans. Because if everyone 'rules' everyone, then that's exactly the same as no one ruling anyone. But since people have different opinions, such a democracy cannot function within a state – unless one opinion prevails and suppresses many others. And that's exactly what happens in our so-called 'democracies'. The difference between dictatorships and democracies, when examined closely, is that in the former a minority oppresses the majority, and in the latter a majority oppresses numerous minorities. But both are forms of rule by a few over many – an oligarchy, not a democracy – even if the rulers gain their legitimacy from a majority.

Because people have different opinions, which cannot be fully reconciled within one society, democracy – the rule of all over all – is only possible in smaller groups, if at all. A network of small groups, a federation of various societies, is nothing other than anarchy. True democracy is therefore either anarchic or nonsensical.

Now we all know that what is called 'democracy' here really means the parliamentary system. Most people think it's the best of all systems. Granted, there are worse. But the question here isn't how many people feel relatively comfortable in 'parliamentary democracy' because there's nothing better available – but whether parliamentarianism is a democracy at all.

Of course, there is still a ruler – instead of a king, emperor, or dictator, we now have a president, chancellor, or prime minister. All of them – the 'dictators' and the 'democrats' – represent the same underlying state-economic interests we've already examined. That's why it makes no difference to anarchists whether they vote for this one or that one – or vote at all – because in their view, the differences are only superficial. In essence, in their stance toward the state and its interests, they are all the same. Anarchism assumes that the state is, by its nature, anti-freedom. Through the temptations of its inherent hierarchy, it will always find a representative who defends its interests. It doesn't matter whether that representative is slightly more left-wing or right-wing – the key thing is that the foundations remain untouched – and that's ensured by the Constitution and the 'rules of parliamentary procedure'.

In the end, it doesn't matter whether we vote or not; but if in doubt, voting is worse, because every form of oppression prefers to legitimize itself by having the oppressed choose their oppressors: the government. The real powers remain discreetly in the background.

But do we even have a choice?

Elections Without Alternatives

A choice means deciding between two or more genuine alternatives. Suppose you went to a supermarket intending to buy chocolate, and you found yourself having to 'choose' between 21 different brands of detergent – and nothing else. You could certainly make a 'choice', but not choose what you actually wanted. That's not a real choice.

Sure, you might say Party X is a little more liberal, social, or freedom-oriented than Party Y. But if the goal is freedom, and freedom only works without state and government – and all parties are part of the state and government – then I simply cannot choose what I want. I have to create it myself, achieve it, build it. If I want a life without government, it's absurd to choose the people who are supposed to govern me.

Anarchists see all this from a radical perspective: If I'm a prisoner and want to be free – they argue – I won't gain that freedom by being allowed to elect the prison guards. Some guards might not beat me and might make daily life more bearable. Perhaps it's good if I elect them – I'll be a little better off. But I'm still in prison. I might even get used to it, like my fellow inmates: we get drawn into the system, enjoy small improvements, and forget the goal. In the end, we might even take part in prisoner self-governance – and watch over ourselves.

Replace "prison" with "capitalism" and "guards" with "the state", and the comparison becomes a stark allegory of modern political history. Anarchists have always advocated tearing down the prison and starting a new life. Communists blasted a hole in the wall, escaped – and then built an even bigger prison elsewhere. Social Democrats thought you could escape imprisonment by first electing the nicer guards and then electing yourselves. Today, they occasionally become prison directors, doing their best to make things a bit more comfortable for the inmates.

Let's move from the goal of freedom to a very real problem: environmental destruction. The absurdity of parliamentary elections becomes even more obvious. Imagine society as a train racing toward the abyss of ecological catastrophe. One track turns sharply to the right and leads straight to doom. The middle track is slightly longer but ends in the same disaster. The left-hand track takes a detour – but also ends up in the same hole. Choosing between these three tracks is not a choice between real alternatives. The true alternative would be to build a new track. That's what anarchists want – and what the Greens also wanted not so long ago. Today, they've settled for the left-hand track, on the condition they're allowed to pull the brake a little along the way.

To libertarians, this is the playground of parliamentary democracy: it gives people the illusion of deciding, when all essential decisions have already been made – and we're not allowed to make them. That's why anarchists generally don't participate in elections.

Most people believe in elections, or at least think the differences between parties are reason enough to choose the lesser evil. But the question remains: are they really choosing? For example, the chancellor. Do we elect them? Do we pick the candidates? At most, we choose between two already pre-selected lookalikes. In truth, no ordinary citizen has any real influence over their country's political course. The privilege our parliamentary democracy grants us is the ability to make a cross every four years on a list of people chosen long beforehand. Once they're elected, we have no more influence on their actions. In principle, they can do whatever they please. Many politicians stop caring about their promises or voters' will the day after the election. The [German] constitution puts it more politely: politicians are only bound to their conscience.

Hierarchy Alienates

That's interesting. A person is elected to office to represent the will of those who voted for and pay them. No company would hire a manager and then just let them do whatever they want. But in politics, binding politicians to a mandate conflicts with their self-interest. They must never question the principle of governance in favor of direct democracy or even self-management. Why do our politicians resist even the simplest forms of direct democracy like referendums or citizen initiatives? Mostly because the state is an end in itself and must defend its existence against all competition.

The higher the level of political power, the greater the alienation between voter and elected. While local politics may still allow for direct contact, personal influence, and some oversight, such possibilities shrink considerably at the state level. And anyone who's ever tried to bring a problem to their member of parliament, hoping for a solution, knows how hopeless that is. That may explain why some anarchists participate in local elections but boycott state or national elections.

Anarchy Cannot Be Voted In

Why don't anarchists form a party? They could write a platform, get elected, and if a majority supported them, introduce anarchy.

The reasons can be summed up in one sentence: Anarchy cannot be "introduced." You can't vote it in – you must live it. It requires people who think and act for themselves, and a structure in which power is no longer delegated, but directly exercised. Of course, anarchist systems also delegate decisions, execution, and functions – but this is based on trust. Power remains with the individual, who still governs themselves. Electing a government that doesn't govern me is a contradiction – and elections are always about choosing governments. Anarchy is not politics, it is life itself. And for an anarchic society to function, many things must change – and those things change not by electing a political elite, but by people changing themselves and their society.

Every election strengthens illusions: the illusion that we really control our lives, shape our destiny. The illusion that we've legitimized our rulers and that they act in our interest. Above all, the illusion that fundamental change is possible through elections. But that's virtually impossible. Just look at what happens when people who want serious change come to power via elections. In Chile in 1972, a left-wing coalition won. President Salvador Allende, a Marxist, wanted social equality – but that's forbidden. Laws and constitutions provide only a very narrow framework for permissible changes. The same laws protect the things that need to change: ownership, hierarchy, inequality, and power. The tragic lesson of Chile is that even after being elected, the real powers did not tolerate any change, and when necessary, they trampled their own laws. Radical change must grow in reality. The broader, more stable, and interconnected it is, the harder it is to stop.

The Spell of Parliamentarism

In recent decades, Europe has witnessed numerous government changes that brought socialists or social democrats to power: in Greece, France, Germany, Britain, Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Sweden, they all had varying "guest appearances." Even the smallest social reforms led to

immediate reactions: stock market crashes, capital flight, business strikes and boycotts, refusal, and passive resistance, even slanders and conspiracies. Eventually, the difference between socialist and conservative policies boiled down to whether the VAT or welfare was raised by one percentage point or not.

Let's assume, for a moment, that these parties really wanted a more social and free society. The record of all these governments must be interpreted soberly: within the framework of state laws and capitalist norms, even the most timid change that threatens the privileges of state and capital is not possible. Either you send in the tanks or you withdraw the money. Mitterrand, as a 'socialist', had to follow the laws just like Kohl, the conservative. And both probably did so with the same inner conviction, because today, socialists are as reliable pillars of state-capitalist order as conservatives.

According to anarchists, this happens because more than a hundred years ago, they entered the game of parliamentary politics. They thought they could outsmart the system, but the rules were cleverly designed. The machinery of the system grinds steadily, works slowly, and has an astonishing ability to corrupt and integrate people. Even the noblest ideas, and the most integral personalities, eventually fall prey to it.

Chapter 8: Critique of Communism

> "I detest communism because it is the negation of freedom, and because I cannot imagine anything worthy of human beings without freedom."
>
> — Mikhail Bakunin —

COMMUNISTS ALSO SPEAK OF THE WITHERING AWAY OF THE STATE. Karl Marx even regarded this as the ultimate goal of communism. So are anarchists and communists almost the same? Let's ask the rebellious slaves from the introduction to answer that for us:

Let us imagine two serfs, both belonging to the same master, seeking a way out, thinking about liberation, and dreaming of a new society. One represents the communist idea, the other the anarchist one. Let's also be a bit humorous and, for good reason, call the first one Karl and the second one Mikhail.

Karl, the communist, dreams that all the slaves unite and violently take over the master's estate. He is a brooding thinker and, in his free hours, develops complex arguments as to why the slaves—and only the slaves—are destined to become the leading class of the new society. To achieve this, a dictatorship of the slaves must first be established, which controls, plans, and directs everything down to the smallest detail. All people must be equal, live equally, and think alike. Only slaves and their descendants, according to Karl, possess the correct "slave consciousness" and only they are capable of working in a disciplined, diligent, and unpretentious way to build this new society. Unfortunately, the slaves aren't very interested in this, so Karl and his followers, after further reflection, declare them "not yet mature." They then found a "Party of the Slaves" with the goal of being their vanguard and thus helping them to happiness. Although Karl and his friends are among those serfs who work in better positions in the manor house and do not sweat in the fields, they are deeply convinced that only they truly know what the working slaves want and what is good for them. They have no doubt that they will be much better at running the estate than the old master ever was.

> "Once we are in power and thus the slaves own the estate," Karl tirelessly preaches, "then the liberated slaves will work willingly and enthusiastically, and the Party will manage the economy excellently according to the needs of the slaves, since the Party knows these needs better than anyone else…"

Mikhail can only laugh at this. He is more than skeptical.

> "My dear Karl…" he says, shaking his head and patting him on the shoulder, "what you're planning won't work! You're not giving us slaves freedom, you're giving us a new master: your Party. And whether they run things better than our old master—I doubt it. I fear you'll exploit the slaves just as much, and on top of that, you understand even less about how things work."

And then he explains his idea:

> "I'm not interested in taking over this estate and running it better. I want to create something completely new—a life where freedom comes first, not the economy or work itself. Life should be enjoyable too. Everything that needs to be done on the estate should be organized by the people themselves—all people! They can very well decide for themselves what they need to live. Neither the master, nor the Party of the Slaves, nor science, nor the economy should dictate their lives—they should determine it themselves."
>
> If the slaves want to free themselves, says Mikhail, they must not replace the old form of slavery with a new one. There's no need for a huge operation to be centrally managed. Why not let many small, well-functioning enterprises emerge? Then people with different views and inclinations could come together with like-minded others.
>
> "Above all," says Mikhail, raising his arms in earnest appeal, "you can never force people into happiness! Even our master constantly claims he does everything for our own good, and that we slaves are actually doing well. As if we don't know ourselves what we want and what our happiness should look like! What we need first and foremost is freedom and bread. In your system, dear Karl, we certainly won't get freedom, and whether we'll even have bread is highly questionable. Let's rather think about how we can outsmart our masters and then create a completely different society based on our needs. You know as well as I do that, behind our master's back, we slaves already treat each other very differently. In everyday life, everyone helps everyone as best they can. Nobody wants someone to act like the new boss. Those are the ideas from which a new society must be born—not the dictatorship of your bizarre Party, which just mimics the master. I think we should abolish rule—not replace it!"
>
> "Yeah, yeah… that's sort of what I ultimately want too," Karl interjects impatiently. "But you're and always will be a dreamer. We, on the other hand, are scientists, and we've recognized that the course of history has destined the slaves to be the ruling class. First, this class must establish a hard dictatorship to destroy its enemies. Later, rule will wither away all by itself…"
>
> "And why…?"
>
> "Simple: because there will no longer be any objective reasons for its existence—because we'll all be equal!"
>
> "What nonsense! And the big shots in your Party—are they just as equal as the slaves? Will they just stop playing boss and go back to working like everyone else? You can tell that to your grandmother!"
>
> "I knew it—talking to you is impossible. You anarchists should really just be eliminated in the dictatorship of the slaves…"

As so often before, Karl stomps angrily, Mikhail pulls his hair in frustration, and the two part ways in anger…

An Old Polemic

This fictional dialogue roughly corresponds to the historical polemic between anarchists and communists; we just have to replace the words “slaves” with “proletarians”, “master” with “capitalist”, and “estate” with “state.”

We see: Anarchists and communists are not ”almost the same”. Though both emerged from the same historical era, began their activity within the “working class”, both wanted to fight injustice and inequality, and both opposed the “capitalist system”, the differences in their views of humanity, their visions of a new society, and the methods to achieve it were vast from the beginning.

Indeed, Marxism — and later especially Leninism — aimed to seize state power, establish a dictatorship of the proletariat through the Communist Party, and transform this “proletarian state” into a strong, centralized, all-controlling entity, which would then—miraculously—somehow “wither away”. Naturally, this authoritarian socialism could never tolerate the existence of an anti-authoritarian alternative.

In the second half of the 19th century, when the workers’ movement was still in its infancy and all this was nothing more than vague ideas and gray theory, communists and anarchists were united in a common organization—the “First International”. Even then, anarchists foresaw with astonishing clarity where the communists’ dictatorial ideas would lead if they ever came to power. Our fictional dialogue between “Karl” and “Mikhail” took place countless times in various forms between Marxists and anarchists. The main figures in this conflict were Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin. While Marx accused anarchists of lacking ”scientific” thinking and branded them as “petty bourgeois”, Bakunin accused him of playing the “chief engineer of the world revolution”. This polemic did not lead to greater understanding but ultimately to the split of the International. Since 1872, communists and anarchists have gone separate ways. Where the former path led is well known. As for the anarchists, they have largely been proven right in their critique, though they were never able to establish their alternative.

Of course, there are libertarian elements in Marxism too, and it has often been pointed out that Leninism was in fact a distortion of Marxism, and Stalinism its ultimate perversion. That is true. But it is equally true that even in Marx’s original thought, the libertarian elements were sparse and arbitrarily inserted, while the centralist, dictatorial, and authoritarian parts shaped and dominated his doctrine. It’s no accident that Bakunin described him as a “Prussian”.

So if later generations “perverted” Marxism, this could happen all too easily—because the ”perversion” was already built into it.

In general, it is problematic to say “communism” when what is really meant is “Marxism” or “Leninism”. Strictly speaking, “communism” refers to a society of equality. This is also what is meant when we later speak of “anarchist communism”, such as in the works of Peter Kropotkin. All this has nothing to do with the countless sect-like “communist” parties that made this term repulsive and intolerable to most people.

But back to Marxism:

Many anarchists welcomed Marx’s economic analyses and his critique of capitalism. Some of his theses were fully shared—which is unsurprising when one considers that Marx built upon

key groundwork laid by the anarchist Proudhon. Bakunin translated the Communist Manifesto and parts of Marx's main work Das Kapital into Russian. The first and only summary of this complex book understandable to ordinary people was written by radical social democrat and later anarchist Johann Most, finally making it accessible to the workers for whom it was supposedly written.

But when it came to Marx's conclusions, libertarians have always been among the most engaged critics. Above all, they could never grasp how he could invent the bizarre theory of historical and dialectical materialism, which subordinates the course of history to supposed "objective truths" and, with almost religious conviction, dares to predict what must happen, when, how, and why: Everything supposedly scientifically predetermined. In this concept, there is no place for acting individuals.

History has shown that Marxists have again and again made serious misjudgments—up to their own downfall. Even though there have been periods within the anarchist movement that sympathized with Marxism—particularly after the Russian October Revolution of 1917 and the Western European student revolt after 1968—they have never trusted Marxism in one crucial regard: its schizophrenic belief that out of dictatorship, freedom could someday arise.

More than half a century before the Stalinist atrocities in the Soviet Union, Mikhail Bakunin wrote:

> "To pretend that a group of individuals, even the most intelligent and well-meaning, can be the soul, the guiding and unifying will of the revolutionary movement and of the economic organization of the proletariat is such a heresy against common sense that one must ask with amazement how an intelligent man like Mr. Marx could think such a thing. The establishment of a universal dictatorship (…) would be enough to kill the revolution, to paralyze and distort all popular movements (…). One can change the label our state wears, its form—but in essence, it always remains the same. Either we must destroy this state, or come to terms with the most shameful and terrifying lie our age has produced: red bureaucracy".

Chapter 9: Critique of Patriarchy

> "We women bear the heavy burden of the power that men, through many generations of barbarism, have imposed upon us. Feminism seeks to free itself from this burden—not to conquer the domains of the 'stronger sex'. We do not wish to become masculinized."
>
> — Soledad Gustavo —

There is a connecting element that seems to act like glue, binding together all the structures criticized so far—state, democracy, communism—and that is man. More precisely: the principle of masculinity. For many anarchists of all genders, it's striking—and hardly coincidental—that it has been men who conceived, enforced, and ruled with authoritarian structures: men set values and establish corresponding realities.

Indeed, we live globally under male rule, patriarchy. Patriarchy has its own structures, which shape all people—men and women alike. These structures are persistent, domineering, and have entrenched themselves ruthlessly throughout human history. Precisely these qualities play a central role in the critique of patriarchy: the male way of thinking, acting, and ruling, which lays claim to nearly every aspect of life and thus determines the fate of humanity—and of our planet.

Women do not want to be the "better men"

This fact does not change even if women gain more rights or are "granted" them; the framework remains the same. While the early women's movement focused on the liberation of women—seeking legal equality with men, access to voting rights, work, and education—this approach has more and more given way to a global and comprehensive critique of male values themselves. Women increasingly no longer wanted to be like privileged men, but different. In this search, they logically encountered female values. This introduced new perspectives and content into the discussion of freedom and human dignity, which in recent decades has led to a shift in thinking—at least among those willing to confront critical ideas at all.

For decades, economics was the central issue for critical minds—the pivot point for questions of social freedom. The oppression of women was considered a so-called "secondary contradiction." It was believed that with more just economic conditions, and once women gained a proper place in the workforce, their oppression would dissolve into nothing…

But then, angry women came along and pointed out with disarming clarity that the economic system in place was quite plainly a "man's economy," and that this form of economic oppression had male characteristics. The same, they argued, could be said of the causes of the global ecological crisis, and the male-dominated society's way of trying to "manage" it. Or the well-known manly methods of conflict resolution…

Hierarchy and church, justice and science, politics and education—all of it came under scrutiny from a patriarchal critique and promptly led to the realization that it was specifically

male forms and structures that had prevailed. These, incidentally, are often the same structures anarchists love to critique.

Interlude — Women in the Anarchist Movement

It is therefore not surprising that women and feminist themes have played an important role in anarchist philosophy and activism from the very beginning. Since Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792 opened the way with works like A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and The Wrongs of Woman, what two centuries later would be called anarcha-feminist discourse, this stream—driven by strong, self-assured, and combative women—has never ceased.

Legendary figures like Louise Michel, Emma Goldman, or Federica Montseny belong to this current, as do lesser-known women such as Voltairine de Cleyre, Soledad Gustavo, or Milly Wittkop-Rocker. From early on, women's groups and associations formed within anarchist and syndicalist circles. These didn't just articulate and demand rights—they also fought militantly for recognition and societal change.

As we explore the colorful threads of anarchist struggles, ideas, and experiments, we will encounter these women and their pioneering examples again and again throughout the pages of this book.

This development reached its height in historical anarchism with powerful movements like Mujeres Libres ("Free Women"), an organization active during the Spanish Revolution of 1936, which counted over 20,000 organized women. These were women thoroughly fed up with the machismo of Spanish society. The fight against patriarchy here took very concrete—and sometimes very literal—forms: from the self-organization of working women's daily needs in industrial cities, to pushing for full legal and social equality, all the way to fighting with rifles in hand.

In this profound revolution, women simply claimed the unheard-of right to join anti-fascist militias with their own female battalions to fight the fascists—a reactionary and power-drunk alliance of egotistical, domination-obsessed men who had launched a military coup in Spain. Even many fervent male anarchists, who preached equality, suddenly got nervous: Women with rifles? Wasn't that going too far? Wouldn't it be better if female comrades did their part on the "home front"—perhaps in sewing rooms, hospitals, or laundries?

The positive development of the women's movement within the anarchist camp shouldn't obscure the fact that even then, emancipated women had to assert their demands not just against the reactionary-patriarchal society but also within their own political circles. They had to fight for recognition, understanding, and respect.

Because between theoretical insight and practical change, many anarchist men harbored a deep, dark, fear-ridden abyss. And so it was that even some of the bravest, militant, freedom-loving Spanish anarchists of the 1930s may have taken it for granted that they could go out every evening to anarchist meetings, strike assemblies, or libertarian debate clubs—while their compañera stayed home with the children and kitchen.

It's not hard to imagine how irritated such a man might have been when one evening that very same partner wordlessly handed him the baby and a mop, and went off to her meeting with the Mujeres Libres…

Have the times really changed so much since then, as some claim? I leave that to the judgment of my anarchist readers.

In Search of Female Values

The critique of typically male values naturally led to the exciting question of the nature of female values, raising countless further questions. For instance: Are such values innate and unchangeable, or are they socially conditioned and thus malleable? Are women "better" human beings? Should women pursue their own path apart from men and ignore them? Should they aim not for the end of patriarchy but the establishment of a matriarchy—and what would that even be? Or might it be wiser to seek a different, shared path with men?

Among women, too, there are many answers to many questions, and so opinions and beliefs diverge. Without a doubt, there are dogmatic factions in the women's movement, just as there are fantastic and frightening, wise and foolish approaches, pretentious posturing, and passing fads. Men who feel threatened by self-confident women often point gleefully to such "weak points"—while conveniently ignoring that all movements, including anarchism, exhibit these same flaws.

Words like foolish, frightening, pretentious, and fashionable apply just as well—or even more so—to many of the typical traits that male society has produced.

In truth, "feminists"—those women who seek their identity and tie it to the question of humanity—are only at the beginning of a long journey. That is not surprising.

Especially since much of what may have once existed as female tradition has today been largely buried—to put it mildly. History, archaeology, philosophy, morality, anthropology, and religion are, with few exceptions, male domains, and men have done everything possible to obscure the areas of society once shaped by women.

Matriarchal traditions and the experiences connected to them must first be painstakingly reconstructed and researched—regardless of whether they were all "good" or not. From the mystical cult of the ancient earth goddess Gaia, to the great matriarchal cultures of Asia Minor thousands of years ago, to the exterminated world of the last "knowing women", who were burned as "witches" in a well-organized femicide not so long ago.

Thanks to tireless women's and matriarchal research, we are continually uncovering new archaeological artifacts and fascinating insights—fragments that bear witness to a lost culture, so different from our own.

With astonishment, we discover that "civilization" did not begin in Mesopotamian city-states or classical antiquity, and that long before patriarchy, there was already a highly developed social life. In these societies, women often held sway, and from all we know, they seemed to be more humane and far less hierarchical than anything that came after. This mosaic of societies in which "man" did not wield power is today collectively referred to as matriarchy.

Now, of course, many anarchists insist that they desire neither matriarchy nor patriarchy, but rather an-archy: no one should rule—not even women, even if they might do it "better"!

That may be true. But this is not how most feminists understand ancient matriarchy, nor later examples of female-shaped cultures, traditions, and movements that have existed and still exist worldwide. In fact, the academic term "matriarchy" was likely an unfortunate misnomer—at least when applied to the archaic egalitarian cultures of Asia Minor, it's entirely inaccurate.

These were not societies of female domination. Such a concept, as we understand it today, seems not to have existed at all in those times. People would likely have laughed in confusion at the idea of "women's rule".

Ultimately, we are attempting to describe something we do not understand—because we do not know it—with inadequate words from our patriarchal-hierarchical worldview. The Greek root

arché is hard to translate in our value system without using the term rule or dominion, and this makes the concept problematic, because its etymology is far more complex and ambiguous. Our language simply lacks a fitting word—we will return to this issue later.

In any case, the fear that feminism seeks to install a "women's rule" in place of patriarchy arises more from diffuse male anxieties than from reality. Fantasies of female domination exist only in some fringe corners of radical feminism. Today's women's movement—especially anarcha-feminists, who link "woman" and "freedom" into a distinct political discourse—have no interest in enthroning Maggie Thatcher or Angela Merkel.

They view these historical insights more as sources of inspiration and critique—as a buried field of feminine virtues, some of which we may desperately need today.

The critique of patriarchy is therefore more than just an "interesting aspect" or a "stimulating addition" to the anarchist perspective. It is radical and global. That it may be one-sided at times is self-evident—but so are psychological, economic, ecological, or ethical critiques of the status quo.

"One-sided" is, after all, anarchism itself—and sometimes, nothing reveals connections more clearly than a certain degree of one-sidedness. Like the view through a magnifying glass or a microscope. And the feminist view of the world is undoubtedly a powerful microscope. Its imagery may not explain everything, but it certainly helps interpret a great deal that has long been deliberately repressed.

A well-understood critique of patriarchy should not be a "women's issue"—yet it largely is. And it will likely remain so, until men realize that "typically female" values and perspectives are not necessarily a threat, but may indeed be an enrichment—or even a hope.

Chapter 10 Free Love and Other Practical Applications

> "Love is a despiser of all laws, all regulations (…) If the world will ever bring forth equality and unity, it will no longer be marriage, but only love!"
>
> — Emma Goldman —

ENOUGH CRITICISM! COMPLAINING IS NO ANSWER and notorious know-it-alls are nowhere popular. Anarchists are not concerned with being right but with alternative models—life plans that differ from the standards of today's social forms. They should encompass all areas of life, be characterized by the greatest possible freedom, and be based on human reciprocity. Every anarchist alternative is therefore basically nothing more than the practical application of this principle to a specific situation. That's why the number of topics for which libertarian alternatives have been developed is remarkably large. Let us therefore consider two exemplary cases.

Example: "Free Love"

Free Love is a term popularized by the Russian-American anarchist Emma Goldman—a catchword that at all times managed to ignite the imagination of the philistines. Prude contemporaries to this day prefer to imagine only one thing: unbridled sex. Everyone sleeps with everyone, there are no bonds or responsibilities, only greed, lust, and immorality…

In truth, the anarchist ideal of Free Love is quite the opposite of all that. The angry reactions Emma Goldman faced reflect more the voyeuristic wishful fantasies of mostly male opinion-makers, who lost their minds in droves in the face of an equally brilliant and vehement critique of male society. But even puritanical representatives of the women's movement found the political correctness of those days violated and declared her a "heathen" ripe for the stake.

What is so bad about Free Love?

Nothing, except that it exposes the humiliations of marriage, the shackles of morality, and the oppression in a male-dominated society, in order to point a way out of this abomination. This violated more than one taboo. For Emma Goldman, a human society can ultimately only exist in a responsible, equal, and highly emotional togetherness of liberated women and men. That does not mean she had any sympathy for patriarchy or sugarcoated the failures of male society. Red Emma remained mercilessly candid her entire life—a fighter against all kinds of hypocrisy. For this reason, she equally castigates the "tragedy of women's liberation," as she is more radical and foresighted than many of her contemporaries. For her, it cannot be a solution if the women's

movement exhausts itself simply by turning male society upside down, by women wanting to prove themselves to be the "better men". Among the then-dominant "women's rights activists", whose "aseptic* puritanism" she denounced as "narrow-mindedness", such attacks naturally did not go down well.

Vehemently she claimed the right to women's own values, which, for Emma Goldman, were always strongly emotional, combative, self-confident, spontaneous, and also erotic. In almost romantic images, she conjured up the subversive forces inherent in the liberation of women and men. To the "compulsory old maids" of pure female doctrine, she opposed her refreshing, life-affirming, and decidedly optimistic thesis of "free love", in which the freedom of sexuality plays a decisive role. And she lived it herself, self-determined and provocative.

She was not concerned with "sex". Sexuality, freedom, emotion, human warmth, self-determination, conscious motherhood, love, revolution, partnership, and responsibility were for her concepts all related and inseparably connected. Without this, nothing essential would change.

Her starting point was marriage, which she described as a slavish "insurance and economic contract", necessary to keep women dependent and the state stable. Marriage had nothing to do with love, and love nothing to do with marriage: Where no feelings exist, marriage cannot create them, and where they do exist, marriage is unnecessary. Consequently, sexuality—for Emma Goldman "the most natural and healthiest thing in the world"—too often becomes prostitution after marriage at the price of economic security. The alternative for women was at best a professional career. However, she showed that in this society even that rarely led to women's independence—let alone freedom or happiness.

In place of such a coercive institution, Emma Goldman proposed free relationships between responsible individuals. The security of mother and child, when a relationship emotionally dies, should not be guaranteed by the artificial coercive construct of marriage but by a system of mutual aid in solidaristic communities that offer all people independence—not only economic. Communities in which women would be enabled to go their own way, with or without "their man," with or without children. This, she said, meant the end of patriarchal blackmail and the triumph of honest love in self-determination. Ultimately, a new society would be required for this. That is exactly why Emma Goldman was a revolutionary and not a reformist. At the same time, she was consistent and realistic enough not to postpone the implementation of her ideas to the distant future. Here and now, rights had to be demanded, and corresponding utopias had to be lived out in emancipated circles.

Of course, the idea of free love does not only apply to woman and man, mother and child. It demands the free choice of people for every type of affection and sexuality. This includes homosexual love as well as multiple relationships or masturbation. To this day, lesbians and gays are victims of persecution and humiliation—so we can only vividly imagine the scandal these ideas caused around the turn of the century. The downfall of civilization was predicted, as was an unnatural compulsion to promiscuity and sexual overperformance. This is, if not intentional slander, at least a completely mistaken conception of free love. It is neither a competitive sport nor a compulsory exercise in having to love multiple people and not being allowed to feel jealousy. But it includes the freedom of those who want or can do so.

Such ideas were not entirely new at the time—Bakunin and Kropotkin had already advocated for freedom of love and sexuality—but they were still explosive. The debates in today's women's movement show how current they still are. Generations of anarchists have since tried to live

Emma Goldman's visions—above all, she herself. "Free Love" became a fixed part of anarchist conviction, and many were serious: Marriage as the usual norm of social organization is, at least theoretically, despised by most anarchists; in its place came various forms of open relationships. From individual couples to groups, communities, and communes to large social structures like the libertarian collectives in Spain or the kibbutzim in Israel, alternatives to the social shackles of marriage and dependence have been sought.

The experiences have been diverse and contradictory. There were tragedies as well as triumphs, and no one—least of all Emma Goldman—would have believed that the concept of "Free Love" was a magic formula for unclouded bliss. New social forms of interaction do not fall from the sky; they must be learned.

One thing, however, all these attempts seem to confirm: An honest, open, and equal relationship between the sexes is—although it is a difficult learning process—possible. And it is certainly more human, freer, and more diverse than the conventional institution of marriage.

The Free School

For anarchists, the conventional education system is also a red rag. Just as with marriage and the nuclear family, they see the state school system as a pillar of power—both contribute to internalizing hierarchy anew:

In schools—whether state or religious—subjects are made into subjects. Even though the official educational goal may be a "critical and mature citizen", it remains a citizen nonetheless. Besides reading, writing, arithmetic, and much "factual knowledge", one thing is taught above all else: adaptation to existing social conditions—though not as a subject, but hidden everywhere. Even the supposedly value-free "factual knowledge" turns out, on closer inspection, to be full of one-sidedness, ideology, and lack of imagination. Diversity, real alternatives, and especially freedom of learning do not exist.

According to anarchist view, learning in all our societies is an institutionalized coercive process, and the state generally holds a monopoly on it. And it knows why: State-controlled learning is the best guarantee that everything remains as it is. Ideologies may change, curricula may be altered—the essential societal core values taught do not. No matter whether I cram math, history, or German, I always learn that there is a top and bottom, rulers and ruled, state and authority. Questioning this is taught nowhere.

A free society needs free people. If each new generation is raised from childhood with a tendency toward unfreedom, it is obvious to start here and develop libertarian alternatives in education. This practical application of the principle of freedom involves three things. First, as many children as possible should be taken out of the state's hands. This is primarily a political-organizational problem. Second, different content and values should be taught. This is mainly an intellectual-theoretical problem. Last but not least, different forms of teaching and learning should be tested. This is predominantly a didactic problem. So, a lot of work and no easy undertaking.

It was clear since the days anarchists began building "Free Schools" that anarchist pedagogy could not look like state education. And this already happened in the previous century. It was not about drilling children, orienting them toward an ideology, or stuffing them with as much knowledge as possible—and of course, not about breeding the anarchists of tomorrow from the

anarchists of today. Libertarian parents wished for children who could think, act, and decide independently, capable of freedom, and as tolerant as they were self-confident.

But not only children, also adults! Learning and teaching should not be bound to age but a constant and mutual process—largely self-determined and "lifelong," if desired. The content should not be rigid and uniform for all but tailored to the individual abilities, needs, and talents of each person. First and foremost, there should be no pressure to perform or succeed, which presses all people into the same molds, useful for an industrial performance society, but rather talents and preferences—whether intellectual, craft-related, or musical. People prefer and perform better voluntarily in areas they are talented in. The boundaries between teachers and learners were also questioned. Students should have as much say and influence over teaching as teachers.

These are such far-reaching and revolutionary demands that it seems appropriate not to call the whole thing "education" or "pedagogy" anymore. Education, mutual learning, or learning through life would be more fitting terms. The goal of anarchist education is ultimately to dissolve the artificial separation between life and learning; in the end, the "institution of school" — at least in the form we know it — is meant to become obsolete.

But first, practical alternatives had to be demonstrated in everyday life. And a hundred years ago, there were very tangible tasks. In a time when children were trained to be zealous patriots or beaten into devout Catholics, it was already a tremendous step forward if teaching was rationalist, free of religion, racism, nationalism, and corporal punishment. If children were taken seriously and allowed to participate in class. And if school was not just open to the wealthy.

Leo Tolstoy, the "religious anarchist", founded the school of Yasnaya Polyana as early as 1859 and is considered a pioneer of libertarian pedagogy. For the first time on a large scale, such ideas were realized in the free school movement, which the Spanish educator Francisco Ferrer began in 1901 with the founding of the Escuela Moderna in Barcelona. This type of anarchist school quickly spread in Spain and soon emerged abroad as well. For the first time, children were systematically removed from the influence of state and church education. The Spanish government must have seen Ferrer's school project as a serious threat, because in 1909, the 50-year-old educator was put on trial based on fabricated charges. He was accused of being the "intellectual instigator" of a militant general strike and was sentenced to death in a scandalous trial. The suspicion that the state's educational monopoly was a vulnerable spot had thus been tragically confirmed…

Twenty-seven years after Ferrer's execution, his idea would enjoy a late triumph: During the Spanish Revolution, there were provinces on the peninsula where there were more "free schools" than state-run ones. The new type of school proved to be highly attractive and successful.

Libertarian pedagogy did not stop with Tolstoy and Ferrer. Not only did the number of practical experiments grow, but the content and educational concepts also evolved. Alice and Otto Rühle, Alexander S. Neill, Ivan Illich, João Freire, and Joel Spring are just a few of the radical education critics and school pioneers who were able to build on the libertarian tradition. Some of what Ferrer demanded — revolutionary for his time — even exists today, at least in theory, in many schools within state education systems.

But that should have only been a beginning. Although today the experience is greater, the knowledge of learning psychology deeper, and the experiments more diverse than a hundred years ago, the goal remains the same: to build humane, free alternatives to the conventional education system in which self-directed learning without coercion and hierarchy becomes possible.

By now, this vision of education is no longer the exclusive domain of anarchists — which is certainly no loss. Most people who start free schools today are likely unaware of the libertarian roots of this kind of pedagogy. The label doesn't matter much, as long as the content is right.

What has remained, however, are the difficulties. While alternative educators are no longer executed today, the state still reacts sensitively when people attempt to withdraw children from its educational monopoly. Free school forms like Summerhill in England or Tvind in Denmark remain rare and constantly threatened exceptions, and all over the world, lesser-known schools are met with suspicion, harassed, or shut down. Especially in Germany: Here, founding a free school still borders on criminality. It is certainly not due to a lack of interest from parents and children that there are barely half a dozen such institutions in this country.

The "Free School" movement and various libertarian education initiatives at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century had a lasting impact. Even today, alternative education, including democratic schools, Waldorf schools, Montessori, Summerhill, and other progressive institutions, owe much to anarchist pedagogy.

The Free Agreement

The basic pattern of the two examples presented here — and many others that could be added — is the free agreement. What does that mean?

First and foremost, that people take each other seriously. They acknowledge that every other person also has a will, interests, inclinations, and desires. When people enter into a relationship, those interests must also connect. Either they are compatible — or they are not. Accordingly, a connection is formed — or not. Sometimes, they only partly align. In that case, there is a less intense connection — this is also called a compromise — or both parties forgo a shared endeavor. But by coming together, people interact. Experiences are made, learning processes take place, opinions can change. Voluntarily, that is — self-determined, and not as is generally the case today — imposed by rules, laws, religion, or moral pressure.

For anarchists, no healthy relationship between people can arise through coercion — whether between woman and man, student and teacher, or anywhere else. A person does best what they are convinced of.

The basic idea of self-determined action is that simple — and yet so different from the behavior patterns of current societies: The social arrangements that determine our lives today are neither free nor truly agreements. We are all subject to the same laws we did not make. Had we made them ourselves, we'd likely be more inclined to follow them. Had we created different, better rules — ones that met our needs more closely — we'd be foolish to break them.

This typically anarchist credo of self-determined action, when two or more people are involved, leads to a free agreement. It can be short-term or lifelong — and, of course, it can evolve. If many people participate in such an agreement, a contrat social — a "social contract" based on voluntariness and mutuality — emerges. In this way, an-archic societies develop. Different anarchic societies can federate and form a network; multiple networks can exist side by side.

"Free Love" and "Free School" are just two examples of free agreement on the most basic level. Only a few people are involved — between two and two hundred. That alone does not yet make an anarchic society. One must imagine such a society as a mosaic of many such sub-areas that, in their entirety, cover the full diversity of our lives.

From an anarchist perspective, the self-determined free agreement remains the foundational model for all social relationships: No matter whether we organize a craft workshop, act globally against ecological catastrophe, fall in love, draw up a train schedule, build a house, raise children, sow a wheat field, resolve conflicts, go on vacation, or renovate a city — if it is not done voluntarily and self-determinedly, then it will surely never achieve what is ultimately the goal of every anarchist utopia:

To live freely.

Chapter 11 - Art, Culture, Way of Life

> "Of all the fine arts, the art of living is the finest and the most difficult."
>
> – Jules Romains –

LIVING ANARCHY IS NOT A NEW SET OF RULES, but rather an idea for shaping life more freely. But life is not just about eating, sleeping, housing, work, or social organization. Life is all-encompassing, colorful, diverse, creative, chaotic. At least, that's how it should be according to anarchist thinking. If the lives of most people today are not all-encompassing, colorful, diverse, creative, and chaotic, this is hardly a coincidence — it is intentional.

Illusion as Commodity

Chaos, diversity, and creativity can be dangerous to a modern industrial society. That's why people in such a society are leveled out. Their creativity is bought up, redirected toward production, and made useful to companies (whether that "company" produces aluminum rims, theater productions, baby food, weapons, or art exhibitions makes no difference). Whatever longing for color and variety remains is channeled through fashion, trends, or zeitgeist epidemics. To achieve this, it must be made consumable and offered as such. Normally, a TV suffices for this purpose; in more resistant cases, perhaps an open-air concert, an adventure vacation, or a new convertible is needed. All of it can be purchased from agencies, booked, ordered — well lubricated by the grease of advertising.

It's a clever system — especially because those who have been leveled out hardly notice it. They are skillfully allowed to keep the illusion that they are being creative, while in reality, they are simply consuming pre-packaged goods. Illusion that can be bought.

Every Person an Artist?

The value that art, culture, and way of life hold in a society — in place of consumption — is a measure of freedom, because artistic expression requires creativity, and creativity needs free space. It is therefore no surprise that in anarchist thought — and especially in anarchist life — art, creativity, and self-expression play a major role.

Not in the sense that there is some official anarchist theory of art (there are — unsurprisingly — several), or even a specific anarchist art style. Rather, the spontaneous realization of creative ideas is itself a logical component of anarchy. And that, after all, is the very basis of "art." Since anarchists demand the spontaneous self-realization of individuals in all areas of life, their vision aims to break down the boundaries between "art" and "life," as well as the academic distinctions between various "art forms." Creativity, they claim, is as essential to life as bread.

Among anarchists, anyone who wants to can be an "artist", and everyone else is free to like or dislike what is created. This stance clearly opposes an elitist concept of art defined by cultural historians, gallery owners, professionals, and art critics. We are not concerned here with art as a highly-paid commodity of consumer society, nor with the pleasing aesthetics of the happy few, who divide the world into what is "cultural" and what is not — or into the unworthy and those entitled to culture.

This does not mean that art should become a uniform mush, with no place for brilliant talent or professional artists — on the contrary: from an anarchist perspective, a free framework is precisely what allows talent to unfold fully. Today, by contrast, the art market dictates what is recognized — and what doesn't succeed in that market is typically not acknowledged at all. Art and culture have essentially become commodities. This almost always leads to a kind of prostitution — either of the artist to the market or the market to current art trends. For a few artists, this system results in extraordinary careers, while the vast majority are condemned to a marginalized and impoverished existence.

In the anarchist vision, art becomes "everyday" in the best sense of the word. In the libertarian ideal society, everyone gives according to their ability and receives according to their need. People would therefore have a right to life and to economic sustenance. Since artists are (only) human, they too could work freely without economic anxiety. There would be no need to prostitute oneself to the market, nor to produce system-conforming "commissioned works" — like those from the defunct "real socialist" countries, which gave us the unbearable monumental kitsch of socialist realism, past which "the masses" marched like they would before religious icons.

Art and Anarchy

It's no surprise, then, that artists have long felt drawn to anarchism — and have helped shape it significantly. Whether they called themselves "anarchists" or simply acted an-archically is beside the point. The spectrum of artists and anarchism is a wild mix of contradictory and contrasting forms, filled with tension and mutual inspiration — vivid and chaotic like life itself. Names as diverse as:

Richard Wagner and John Cage
Heinrich Böll and Joseph Beuys
Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, Percy Shelley
Leo Tolstoy and Dario Fo
Rainer Werner Fassbinder and George Orwell
Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson
Judith Malina and B. Traven
Franz Kafka, Jaroslav Hašek, Erich Mühsam, Georges Tabori
Konstantin Wecker, Jorge Luis Borges, Theodor Plievier
Peggy Parnass, Herbert Grönemeyer, Stéphane Mallarmé, Gustave Courbet, Rimbaud
Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Ricarda Huch, Rio Reiser, Monika Maron, Leo Malet, Peter Härtling, Lina Wertmüller … and many more

—all make it clear that this "spectrum" is not about ideological commitment or a shared artistic direction. Yet, all of them have something to do with anarchy.

Some called themselves anarchists, others behaved that way, some sympathized with anarchist ideas, and many engaged with anarchy artistically.

Although art and anarchy are closely intertwined, there has never been a distinct anarchist art style — and rightly so. However, many cultural movements, styles, and groups have been significantly shaped by anarchists or libertarian ideas and have found truly original, an-archic forms of expression.

We might mention:

The French avant-gardists and post-impressionists around 1900 — like Signac, Pissarro, Mirbeau, Tailhade, Seurat, Fénéon

The politically engaged British arts-and-crafts circle around William Morris

Dadaism in the 1920s — encompassing literature, theater, and visual arts, and pioneering what we now call performance

Expressionism in painting, film, and literature — traditionally an anarchist domain

In contemporary music, free jazz or political punk

This doesn't mean enforcing any kind of taste — anarchists can be enthusiastic about classical music or folklore just as much, and still find punk detestable. It reflects a broad openness to artistic forms of expression. In the visual arts, both surrealism and art brut have anarchist roots, as does constructivism in the case of the "Cologne Progressives" during the Weimar era. Artists as stylistically diverse as Enrico Baj, Flavio Costantini, or Gerd Arntz share not a common style, but a common artistic understanding rooted in freedom, experimentation, and revolt. You can hardly compare the works of Gustave Courbet and Joseph Beuys, but their attitudes toward life are much alike. The same holds for theater and film: the work of Dario Fo, Franca Rame, Julian Beck, and Georges Tabori share no external unity, just like the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Lina Wertmüller, or Jean Vigo. There's no point in looking for formal similarities between John Cage and Konstantin Wecker, or in literature between Traven and Tolstoy.

So anarchism does not "own" any specific art movement — it is art, in its most all-encompassing sense.

"All-Encompassing Meaning"

"All-encompassing" means that art should permeate life and in doing so, give rise to a new culture — a way of life. What's meant is not a snobbish "lifestyle" tied to expensive accessories that symbolize status, but a savoir vivre independent of money. This means saying goodbye to "edifying art", breaking out of the ghettos of museums, galleries, and temples of the Muses. Life itself would become a "work of art": art, daily life, joy, protest, pleasure, provocation, spontaneity, creation, and communication would become so intertwined as to be inseparable — capable of breaking down barriers. Barriers between people, between areas of life, in consciousness, in perception, and expressive power.

In anarchist circles, there have always been attempts at such a libertarian culture, which consistently overcame the divisions between art, work, politics, and life.

Examples include:

The radical Bohemian scene in central Europe, with its typical mix of cafés, studios, and cabarets in cities like Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and Prague.

The proletarian “workers’ culture” movement rooted in militant trade unions — with its own theater, literature, and music.

A particularly noteworthy example of such a vibrant way of life is the Monte Verità settlement, known as the “artist colony”, which flourished before World War I. On this “Mountain of Truth” in southern Switzerland lived people who were simultaneously artisans and artists, philosophers and workers, revolutionaries and “entrepreneurs”. Anarchist and communal ideas deeply shaped the appearance of this settlement, whose roots go back to Bakunin, who spent his final years in Ticino. And of course, all those who had a name in revolutionary or artistic circles gathered here to be inspired by a way of life in which contradictions fused into an an-archic symbiosis of art, culture, and life — almost like a miniature version of a libertarian society, a mix of seriousness and joy, pleasure and asceticism, planning and madness. In short: a way of life.

Chapter 12: Federalism - Small is beautiful – the idea of networking

> "On the other hand, another phenomenon is emerging in the form of a wide variety of organizations that help people take matters into their own hands (…) This phenomenon is currently only visible in modest beginnings, but in the long run, it will undermine state power. Yes, I think there is reason to hope!"
>
> – Noam Chomsky –

MOST PEOPLE ARE GRIPPED BY COLD FEAR when they try to imagine anarchy in practical terms. Even if they find anarchist ideas quite sympathetic, it remains difficult to imagine how anarchic structures could manage the many complex tasks of a mass society. The fearful question usually goes: "What would anarchist forms of organization even look like — and could they really work? Wouldn't we all starve? Wouldn't the world descend into chaos?"

These are legitimate questions, and anarchists would do well to take them seriously. Too often, they tend to mock those who ask such anxious questions — but that helps no one.

Federalism - A Different Structure

It would be unfair to demand detailed blueprints from today's anarchists for how all the functions of a libertarian society should look and work. Quite apart from the fact that, for good reason, they wouldn't even want to do that, [^1] such a demand would be just as absurd as expecting the pioneers of the French Revolution or the framers of the American Constitution in the 18th century to predict how our republican-democratic societies today would manage postal services, unemployment insurance, or the production of goods.

At the beginning of every revolutionary social idea stands a new structure — one that only gradually fills with content in the real world. It's no different with anarchism. What is different is that libertarian structures fundamentally diverge from conventional ones, and they are meant to lead into an ongoing process that must never end in a new, rigid form. A libertarian society is fluid and diverse; the path is also the goal.

The fundamental structure of the anarchist model of society is a network of small units - a federation.

People identify with things they can grasp and understand. The larger and more complex social structures become, the greater the alienation between institutions and individuals. Our current systems try to neutralize this alienation by creating elites whose actions are, in most

countries, seemingly legitimized through elections — i.e., by the delegation of power. But they don't actually solve the problems that arise from alienation — they merely manage them.

Elites consolidate power, form hierarchies, enjoy privileges, and ultimately decide the fate of all people. A glance at any daily newspaper should be enough to convince us that they don't even do this particularly well. Such a society contradicts key aspects of the anarchist idea of freedom. It is a society in which most people have no real participation. Therefore, an anarchist society must offer structures in which as many people as possible can participate.

This would be the case if participation were easy — and even enjoyable. Because active engagement in social structures works as long as it brings satisfaction. Satisfaction arises when people's involvement produces results they can see, understand, and relate to. In that exact measure, identification with a social system grows — or fades. In our current systems, that identification is approaching zero.

That's why all anarchist social concepts have always aimed to be built on small, manageable units — though that doesn't mean they stop there. These social entities are, so to speak, the smallest components that make up anarchist societies.

I've already pointed out that these "small units" can come into being for geographic, material, technical, ideological, ethical, or aesthetic reasons — or simply from mutual sympathy or practical rationality. Multiple such units can exist side by side — or together — in the same place and time. For example, I might simultaneously belong:

as a resident, to the council of my neighborhood;
as a father, to a group running a free school;
as a connoisseur, to an association for "Anarchy and Luxury";
as a writer, to a guild-like professional committee;
as a responsible citizen, to an ecological council;
as an aesthete, to an artistic bohemian collective;
as a journalist, to an editorial board;
as a cosmopolitan, to a global association of Esperantists;
as a frequent traveler, to a federation organizing railway timetables — and so on …

"But, but …" critics might interject, "You can do all of that already today!" And: "Isn't that a bit too much work and responsibility all at once?" Or: "How many people do you honestly think would be so committed and voluntarily take interest in community work?!"

Let's try to answer these objections one at a time.

Would People Even Participate?

Certainly, I can get involved in all these areas here and now (provided I don't live in a country like Myanmar, Cuba, China, Equatorial Guinea, or Sudan). But there are two crucial differences:

Unless I belong to the elite, I have no real decision-making power in any of my involvement.

My engagement usually achieves nothing.

In our society, activism is a hobby — a vent for discontent, at best a tolerated corrective for tasks that no one else wants to do or pay for. But the actual decisions are made elsewhere: in the apparatus of power.

In an anarchist society, by contrast, these "small units" would be the very places where opinions are formed, solutions are sought, consensus is built, and decisions are made, implemented, and revised. The anarchist society is the interaction of these small units.

There is no centralized power structure, no self-serving bureaucracy, no elites above the rest. Instead, there would be a system of self-determination, self-organization, and self-governance, carried by the connection, collaboration, and consensus-building ability of many such small units.

We call such a connection a network - a federation.

Whether people in such a system would collapse under the burden, or whether the system would fail due to human disinterest — that is indeed an interesting question.

First of all, I'd like to add an important variation to the impressive list I gave earlier, in which I outlined some possibilities for my engagement in a libertarian society: Of course, as an uninterested or even just a lazy person, I would have the right to say: "I won't engage in anything!" Anarchy is based on voluntariness; forced participation wouldn't be engagement — it would be servitude. And naturally, there is also a "right to laziness."

Anarchist social theory speculates, however, that because people can contribute directly in such small units, alienation will remain low, and identification will grow. And the more people take part in social processes, the more the individual's burden decreases. If enough people participate, self-management would no longer be an additional burden, but a natural part of life — not something that happens "after work," but something constant and automatic across all areas of life. It would become a part of both work and daily routine. Just as people today are used to receiving orders, they could learn — and get used to — having a say themselves.

This would give active participation in social life a new quality: it would become not just bearable, but almost a source of satisfaction. Of course, this presupposes that the topics, forms, and conditions would look quite different than they do today. I can hardly imagine myself, under the current conditions of this society, being eager to get involved in my neighborhood's affairs after eight hours of soul-crushing work in a mind-numbing job. I'd probably be relieved if "some office" took care of it. But the framework itself would have to change significantly in a libertarian society. [^2]

Different Frameworks for Engagement

Today, when we imagine social engagement, we automatically think of clubs, political parties, advocacy groups, citizens' initiatives, and the like. These are often filled with bureaucracy, endless dealings with authorities, club cliques, and tightly restricted "jurisdictions." Our entire life is neatly portioned and divided into dozens of "sectors," and ultimately, some office watches over each one.

Anarchism, by contrast, aims at a global organization of life in which the human being and their social reality are seen as a whole. Life, work, fun, and leisure should no longer remain artificially separated. As a result, people involved in these "small units" wouldn't be toiling away for some abstract goal with little to do with them personally — they would instead be caring about things that directly, concretely, and meaningfully impact their own lives and desires.

They'd do this at work and at home, in the neighborhood and in specific groups. In many cases, there wouldn't even be a need for formal structure or meetings — it would become part of the daily routine. People would regain direct access to all areas of their lives. So, the fields in which I, as an "active citizen of humanity," could engage in such a system would include my work life and my pleasure, my housing situation and my emotions, my nutrition, my happiness, and my social security. This would be a matter of my own quality of life, and that of others.

So the driving force of human engagement in a libertarian society would be, in a sense, a social form of egoism. But this type of "egoism" strikes me as the most honest and healthiest impulse imaginable.

What If People Don't Engage?

Of course, anarchists don't believe that everyone would be actively engaged in such a society — nor would that be necessary. What's important are two things:

That everyone could participate, and

That enough would participate.

You can't ban disinterest — at best, you can spark interest! This view is pragmatic, of course, but as soon as anarchism leaves the ivory tower of pure theory, it must think pragmatically — and that doesn't hurt it one bit.

The idea that everyone must be equally committed, enthusiastic, and involved for a libertarian society to function is a naive anarchist myth — worse, it's un-anarchistic. Why? Because it doesn't respect human nature and diversity — instead, it would impose an ideology. And any system that relies on highly motivated "saints" and despises "tagalongs" is doomed to fail.

Besides, no human being is a static creature. Everyone goes through phases of activity and withdrawal, enthusiasm and resignation. That wouldn't harm an anarchist system either, because it would be well-adapted to a constant flux of participants. It would increasingly do away with the need for lifelong specialists. And it's obvious that more and more people would acquire skills, knowledge, and practices across various areas. From the anarchist point of view, that's the most effective long-term antidote to elites, bureaucracy, and domination.

Federalism - Can Networking Work?

Nobody knows whether this kind of social engagement would actually emerge to a sufficient degree. All social utopias are, to some extent, speculative. The crucial point, of course, is how networking would function.

How could it work over long distances?

How in structures that are no longer small and manageable, such as New York City?

And what happens if viewpoints conflict so strongly that no consensus is possible?

We'll explore that last question in Chapters 17 and 19 — but some answers to the others lie in the structure of network systems themselves.

In anarchist theory, network structures function by the same principles as the "small basic unit," except that they deal with questions of regional or global relevance. They connect strangers, facilitate the exchange of knowledge, goods, and values needed for a dignified life. And even within these broader structures:

No elites make decisions;

No hierarchies govern;

Decisions arise from horizontal processes.

These networks must function effectively and reliably. Tasks of regional or global importance would, of course, be coordinated centrally, but not centralistically. No anarchist would suggest something like organizing air traffic control spontaneously and in a decentralized way.

So yes, delegation to committees or councils is possible — and yes, qualified and responsible experts can be involved. This is only seemingly a contradiction: Freedom of decision-making is primarily a matter of content, not technique.

Whether these levels remain within the bounds of rational coordination — or once again give rise to new hierarchies — depends critically on three conditions:

The structure of the network must remain transparent, so it's understandable and accessible to all interested parties.

There must be systems in place that ensure the network is always controllable, open to criticism, and capable of being changed.

The network must be built in such a way that it does not act as a decision-making level, but rather as a coordination level.

It should merely align, implement, or return the decisions made by people at the grassroots level — and only send them back when implementation or alignment is not possible.

(We'll revisit this in Chapter 17.)

If these conditions are met, then anarchy could function even on a large scale — at least in theory.

Distances would pose no greater obstacle than they do today. Anarchists don't categorically reject modern communication tools, and they're not against travel in principle.

Of course, they approach electronic communication more critically and consciously, and a sprawling travel and transport industry would likely shrink in their model — if only because a decentralized, libertarian economy would localize many things that today require unnecessary transport.

On the other hand, many anarchists see real potential in modern communication technology for a "direct, communicative democracy" of a libertarian kind — One where more information is accessible, fewer centers, knowledge hierarchies, and command hubs are necessary.

Even if they recognize the risks of information overload, they do not overlook the possibilities technology might offer in solving communication problems that once seemed insurmountable.

Finally, the size of a social body is not necessarily an obstacle to the functioning of libertarian networks. Yes, the entire concept of anarchist organization is designed to promote small units and discourage the formation of large ones. But that doesn't mean it cannot handle large ones. Sometimes, larger structures are unavoidable — and sometimes, they already exist. Like New York City, for example.

There may well be different opinions about whether such a monstrous entity is even desirable in the first place. Indeed, some believe that megacities like São Paulo, Calcutta, Mexico City, or New York exceed all human proportions and are, in every respect, inhumane and ought to be abolished. Importantly, these critics are not referring to the typical big-city flair or the unique metropolitan culture, but to the effects of an urban moloch that is suffocating on its own unchecked social sprawl.

Let's leave that question open and entrust its "solution" to the people who either know how to live in these places or who will eventually turn their backs on them.

Surprisingly, the answer to our initial question can be found within such megacities themselves. It is precisely here that we see the survival and functioning of structures that could easily be described as "anarchic" — even if hardly anyone does so.

Calcutta, for example, is a multi-million-person city that has been effectively abandoned by the system. It is considered unreformable, ungovernable; the authorities have long since stopped doing anything coherent. The city planning office has been deserted for years, social institutions have practically capitulated. Theoretically, this city should have collapsed long ago — but the people continue to live.

There are social structures, neighborhoods, mutual aid, grassroots initiatives. They resist chaos, crime, arbitrariness, speculators, misery, filth, hunger, and disease. And life goes on. But none of these social formations claim, or aspire, to represent, manage, or govern the whole city.

Similar accounts exist from São Paulo and Mexico City. And it's well known that in the Black ghettos of Chicago or New York, despite poverty, crime, and hopelessness, there is strong social solidarity — which functions better than the official welfare programs.

All of these structures work precisely because people are taking care of their problems directly and themselves, in small, manageable groups — inspired by a positively understood "social egoism."

Now, to be clear: anarchists are not claiming that Calcutta, Chicago, or New York represent their ideal of a libertarian society! Quite the opposite is likely true. What these examples show, however, is that it is precisely an-archic structures that help people survive within absurdly large entities. They prove themselves superior to state-run strategies, which — not only in major cities — are increasingly failing.

There is, then, a general method for how anarchic structures can address the problems of large entities. Simply put:

The big thing must be broken down into small things — so it becomes manageable, regains a human scale, and the people affected can engage with it again.

Only then will they naturally take part in their social environment. But no Black community in the Bronx would presume to be "responsible" for all Black people in New York, or to speak on their behalf. Yet many such communities can work together and jointly create social realities that reflect the situation of all Black people in New York.

This is just one example from one social sphere in a single city. And these dying metropolises are just one example among many grotesque mega-structures born from centralization, concentration, and power thinking.

One could easily draw analogies — for example, with the collapsed artificial construct of the "superpower Soviet Union." Or, more familiar to us, with the way seventeen million Germans in the GDR survived forty years of centralized planned economy:

Namely, by completely uncoordinated, unplanned, and intuitive means, they created a powerful parallel reality with its own counter-economy.

This "subculture," ignored by the official system, was built on small neighborhood-based groupings: illegal labor, improvisation, mutual aid, material theft, solidarity, sabotage, barter economy, truancy, counterculture, and the decentralized organization of resistance and opposition.

All of this not only helped people survive in an inhumane system, but brought down one of the most tightly organized and protected centralized states in the world — quietly and without fanfare.

That is cause for optimism!

The fact that this "culture of anarchic secondary virtues" could itself be swallowed so quietly by our Western video-clip society says little about the quality of that old East German anti-Marxist counter-society — but a great deal about the lack of energy and alternatives on the part of Western libertarians.

Today, we are witnessing a global, creeping collapse of all systems of organization and control based on centralism, hierarchy, concentration of power, and growth.

These structures are reaching their limits everywhere and are failing with increasing frequency.

The unexpected crisis of the "superpower model" — in both East and West — is an indication of this.

And the fact that Europe is now trying, in a narrow-minded act of imitation, to jump aboard this ghost train, proves only one thing: a lack of foresight and global perspective.

Is Federalism aka Networking Effective?

At this point, the question of how effective the anarchist alternative truly is inevitably arises. So far, I've addressed this issue from the viewpoint of anarchists themselves. I'd like to conclude this discussion by shifting to the perspective of people who are more likely to be counted among the opponents of anarchism.

Multinational corporations like VW or IBM have, for some time now, been working to break down their large socio-economic entities into small, manageable units. Hierarchical structures are being dismantled, and equal-status groups of people are expected to find solutions to problems by consensus and are even allowed to participate in decision-making. These companies hope that greater transparency and direct employee involvement will lead to stronger identification with the company and increased commitment. Doesn't this sound familiar?

IBM, of course, doesn't call this self-management or anarchism, but sells it as part of its new corporate identity. UNESCO is conducting research projects on "models for global networking of small, decentralized units." The Club of Rome is working on similar concepts. Protestant academies and management schools, freethinking Jesuits, and even a real-life Berlin interior senator are—driven by their desperate search for more efficient structures—more and more frequently stumbling upon models that anarchists have been advocating for generations.

Yes, even the Austrian armed forces are openly considering how reducing hierarchy, centralism, and authority might increase their effectiveness.

That's something to savor: libertarian structures used to improve the performance of an army!

What am I trying to say here? Not that all these gentlemen and their institutions have embarked on the path to anarchism. In most cases, they're not even aware of the anarchistic origins of what they're beginning to discover. At best, they've found half of the solution—and barely understand even that.

A living example is undoubtedly Hans A. Pestalozzi, former director of Switzerland's Dutweiler Institute, a renowned European "think tank for executives." The moment he, with evident enthusiasm, stumbled upon anarchism in his search for alternatives, he was fired.

No, my conclusion is an indirect one. We had asked whether libertarian structures could be considered effective. Well, here we have some of the most prominent representatives of causal thinking—disciples of technocratic management—people in leadership roles who care only about tangible, measurable results. And these very people, in trying to find models to motivate human beings and keep their global machinery running, are turning to libertarian structures.

If that's not an argument, I don't know what is!

Now, I personally share only the first part of this belief: that such structures can, at least temporarily, increase human engagement. But they certainly won't save the system. It is beyond saving.

That's what I meant when I said: they've understood only half of it.

When a corporation like IBM reduces authority and dismantles centralism, it does so with a very different intention than anarchists, even if they're calling for the same changes. IBM wants to increase the efficiency of its operations, to maximize profit. The rest of the world is more or less irrelevant to that goal. The core issues of domination, exploitation, or ecology aren't on the table.

Anarchists, on the other hand, see these same structures as a means of achieving a condition free of domination, a set of tools to enable anarchism to function.

We've been talking in this chapter about structures. But structures are only forms. What really matters are the contents, the ethics connected to those structures. Certain structures may be particularly well-suited to certain ethics. The networking of decentralized, small units is certainly a very suitable structure for anarchist ethics (and it is very doubtful whether it could be anywhere near as useful for saving the profit-driven world as those gentlemen hope). But in and of itself, a structure says nothing about the quality of what it produces.

The most cynical example of this is perhaps the fact that the Nazis even managed to implement certain forms of "self-management" among prisoners in concentration camps—as part of their machinery of mass extermination.

But we should not fall into the trap of condemning a good structure just because an enemy tries to use it for the wrong goals. That would be just as foolish as believing that a "correct" structure, without the matching ethics, must automatically lead to liberation or constructive alternatives.

What Can We Learn from This?

One thing we can conclude from all this: Anarchists do not have a monopoly on good ideas. And when others arrive at similar insights, it simply shows that libertarian ideas can't be as far-fetched as some think.

Anarchists should actually be happy about this.

Instead, they often get worked up in self-righteous jealousy, mocking anything that "smells" like it comes from outside their own political camp. If ideas don't come from within their own movement, they're usually treated with suspicion.

I'm thinking less of IBM here and more of individuals like Leopold Kohr, the Austrian publicist who coined the now-trendy slogan "small is beautiful." He was by no means an anarchist; in fact, he had a rather conservative Catholic background—yet that didn't stop him from developing a sharp and analytical view of social structures.

Or take the current discussions in modern science, where chaos theory is exploring the paradox that no practical laws of cause and effect seem to apply universally to natural phenomena—yet nature continues to organize itself in a surprisingly vital and effective way, even in the midst of chaos.

Or look at the tens of thousands of people who, for over 20 years now, have been turning away from traditional organizational forms like parties and associations, choosing instead to represent their concerns through citizens' initiatives and grassroots groups, freely networking with one another—and in doing so, significantly shaping the political and social reality of our country.

A Look at Practice

It seems that most anarchists struggle with the simple realization that an-archic structures, forms, and ideas are not bound to anarchist theory or ideology.

Many more examples could be added to support this idea—and in fact, they should be encouraging to any anarchist. They show that anarchist ideas are so self-evident that they're practically "in the air."

But anarchists tend to cling to their fear of contamination and usually only overcome it when prominent thinkers like Pestalozzi or the linguist and structuralist Noam Chomsky independently discover anarchism.

Yet it would not go against their own principles to think and act a little more boldly, across boundaries and disciplines. Because both intuitive-anarchic spontaneous action and consciously anarchist strategy could undoubtedly enrich one another.

In fact, this mutual connection already exists in many places—and the line between conscious and intuitive action is often blurred. In countless areas of society, thinking in hierarchical terms is beginning to crumble, making room for thinking in an-archic structures.

Whether this is a deliberate return to anarchist ideas or an "independent discovery" is often hard to say. But that's not the important question.

What matters is how anarchism responds to it.[^3]

After So Much Theory—A Final Look at Practice

Nothing presented in this chapter is fundamentally new to anarchism. The theories of decentralization, small units, self-organization, and networking have certainly been developed more clearly and precisely in recent decades, but they are, at their core, old news.

In the past, what we now call networking was simply called federation—a word that has taken on a more harmless connotation in today's political vocabulary, which is why I've preferred the more modern term.

In fact, such structures have already proven themselves in various anarchist or anarchoid experiments. I can't list them all here, though some we'll examine in more detail later.

Let me just remind you that anarchists have, in this way, effectively governed the multi-million city of Barcelona,[^4] and beyond that, the social life of entire provinces.

The Jewish kibbutzim are a highly instructive example of decentralized networking—anarchist-inspired and far older than the state of Israel.[^5]

At the height of anarcho-syndicalism, millions of members of anarchist labor unions around the world networked and organized themselves successfully—without centralism or hierarchy.[^6]

And the chaotically decentralized mass movement of Mahatma Gandhi brought the British Empire in India to its knees—without violence and without a power apparatus.[^7]

References:

1) See Chapter 4
2) See Chapter 14
3) See Chapter 38
4) See Chapter 44
5) See Chapter 35
6) See Chapter 32
7) See Chapter 36

Part 2: The Past

Chapter 20: Mama Anarchija: On the Feminine Origins of Freedom

> "Dominion is a relatively late invention in history and is typically linked with the rise of patriarchy."
>
> — Heide Göttner-Abendroth

Let's be honest—what comes to mind when you hear the word "Stone Age"? Perhaps Fred Flintstone, half-naked in a bearskin, dragging his Wilma by the hair into a cave, or clubbing bison? A cliché, no doubt—but a deeply rooted one. "Stone Age" has become synonymous with primitiveness and scarcity, brutality, and a harsh struggle for survival. Culture, technology, prosperity, even refined manners—these are probably the last things we would associate with the Neolithic. An era when, around 11,000 BCE, people were still painting cave walls in the Pyrenees, and which only around 9,700 BCE saw the end of the Ice Age—yet by 10,200 BCE, had already produced the oldest known Stone Age city: Hallan Çemi.

The Stone Age—about 6,000 years long—was when the "Neolithic Revolution" brought humans not just sedentism, agriculture, and animal domestication, but also highly developed and profoundly humane social systems. A time that was the complete opposite of Fred Flintstone's brutal comic world. It was only toward the end of this period, between 4000 and 3000 BCE, that another system slowly emerged—one shaped by dominion, exploitation, and suppression. The new "bearers of culture" were interested in power; they used metalworking to make weapons and writing to codify laws, property, and punishment. Thus began what we now call the modern state.

But can all this really still matter to us in the computer age? After all, "Stone Age communism" is a synonym for dumb, brutal backwardness—and "Stone Age anarchism"? That sounds downright laughable. Still, even if the usual clever critics accuse us of wanting to drag humanity "back to the Stone Age," we should dare to look at that distant, unknown time with an open mind. Because it is not only instructive, but also inspiring for anyone exploring utopian visions of society.

Of course, no one wants to return to the Neolithic, and certainly not slap ideological labels onto Stone Age people. They weren't communists, feminists, and they didn't called themselves anarchists. But: they organized life very differently from us, very anarchic—and apparently did quite well.

Were Stone Age people wiser than we are?

When U.S. General Westmoreland, during the height of the Vietnam War, threatened to bomb the Viet Cong "back into the Stone Age," everyone understood what he meant. What wasn't known then—and still sounds paradoxical today—is that, had he actually succeeded, he might've

done humanity a favor. Because it was precisely in that long-maligned era that thriving societies existed—societies that knew neither war nor hunger, no rich or poor, no clergy or kings. Societies organized far more sensibly than modern nation-states, offering their people security and a good life for millennia.

These Neolithic civilizations weren't vast "empires," but manageable societies in which hierarchy, as we understand it, was essentially unknown: no ruling caste stood above the rest, no generals gave orders, no queens dictated the fate of the community, no chiefs demanded tribute, no high priests instilled fear and dependency. Instead, people organized themselves in networks of mutual aid and equality, which extended beyond tribal boundaries.

And the simple reason? In these societies, it was women who set the tone—and they did so in gentler, more humane, and more effective ways than patriarchal societies ever managed. The authoritarian male-dominated world that still controls us today only replaced this earlier, successful model—a system called matriarchy—relatively recently.

Matriarchy – A Principle of Life

Women shaped the fundamental consensus of communal life—but without actually ruling.

From their values emerged a kind of "social grammar" that didn't need to be enforced through violence because it was universally accepted and naturally structured daily life. And it was exactly these values that made the difference.

At the heart of this female-centered ethics were not domination, oppression, or violence, but life itself.

The woman was seen as the giver of all life and at the same time its protector. The entire mythology of matriarchal societies—documented among other things in more than 30,000 goddess figurines from over 3,000 archaeological sites worldwide—centered on this one essential theme: birth, the protection of life and its foundations, and the natural end within the inevitable cycle of death and regeneration.

The young goddess appeared as a protector of forests and wildlife; the mature woman as the bearer and sustainer of the life she had given; the old woman as the goddess of death. These mystical images reflected nature in all its aspects: from gentle to fearsome. But none of these goddesses represented a punishing, hierarchical "religion"—they embodied the "creative principle". And this principle was generative, leaving no room for arbitrary destruction.

However, there was certainly space for the specifically masculine: the spontaneous and life-stimulating aspects—symbolized by the son, the man, or (positively!) the animal. So, in matriarchal societies, "man" was by no means excluded, but included: he was part of the overarching social principle—the preservation of all life.

The practical application of such a principle in real life aligned almost naturally with a culture of settlement, agriculture, and highly developed craftsmanship.

Matriarchal societies were egalitarian, peaceful, and remarkably productive for their time.

They provided Stone Age people with an exceptionally beneficial era that lasted many thousands of years—and archaeologists have found no evidence of war or famine during this time.

Within this culture, the woman remained the active agent of history—as creator and central figure. These societies were thus matrifocal and matrilinear—the mother stood at the center of society, and inheritance followed the maternal line.

But the concept of domination, as we understand it today, did not fit the "creative foundational principle" of matriarchy—nor did violence, privileged classes, or private land ownership. These ideas were simply unknown—and had they been proposed, they likely would have been rejected as profoundly foolish.

It was clear: collective cohesion in a solidarity-based community was the best way to ensure both the physical preservation of life and material survival.

But Why Do We Still Call These Forms of Life "Matriarchal", When That Implies "Rule by Mothers"?

Quite simply, because we don't have a better word for it. We lack the vocabulary to describe something we no longer know.

The pioneering cultural historian Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–1887) coined the somewhat clumsy term "mother right" (Mutterrecht) for the exciting and surprising insights he gradually unearthed. This was later (somewhat inaccurately) translated into English as matriarchy, but the term nevertheless became widely accepted.

However, the word may not be entirely inappropriate. Matriarchal researcher Heide Göttner-Abendroth points out that the Greek root arché in the word matriarchy does not just mean "rule", but also "origin" and even "womb":

> "In the beginning was the mother, the female principle. And that gets to the heart of it."

In any case, women in those societies didn't rule over men the way men later ruled over women. Instead, they developed common standards for human life.

Gender differences were certainly recognized and appreciated, but not from the perspective of dominance—not about who should stand above whom. That way of thinking only came about within the reality of patriarchy, and that's why it feels so important to us today.

Naomi Hamilton, the archaeologist responsible for examining the graves at the Neolithic site Çatalhöyük, eventually came to the conclusion that Neolithic people had no concept of a "social gender" distinct from biological sex, and thus didn't perceive woman and man as social opposites.

For that very reason, it's inappropriate to project today's modern gender discourse—shaped by our patriarchal industrial society—onto a Stone Age tribal culture from the 6th millennium BCE.

And Yet—What Matters Are the Facts

So are we to believe that humans, whom we often imagine as dim-witted primitives teetering on the edge of starvation, actually created—eight to ten thousand years ago—a society of equality, prosperity, and peace?

A society built on values we long for today, yet one we can't seem to achieve despite all our technology, intelligence, and economic power?

—Yes, that's exactly what the evidence suggests.

But how can we know all this with such certainty? After all, the wise women of the Neolithic didn't exactly leave behind a neatly organized archive of their deeds and accomplishments…

Can you really extract such detailed knowledge from a heap of rubble and ashes, from bones and remnants of walls?

Yes, we can.

And how this has become possible—thanks to modern scientific and technical methods—is without a doubt one of the most fascinating chapters in the adventure of prehistorical research.

Archaeological Detective Work: The Case of Çatalhöyük

In the highlands of southern Anatolia, a striking mound called Çatalhöyük attracted the attention of British archaeologist James Mellaart in 1958. He soon began excavations that, with interruptions, continue to this day. What specialists uncovered here was like a revelation: twelve superimposed layers of a Stone Age city, continuously inhabited from 7,300 to 6,100 BCE, could be read like an open book.

This site, which at times housed up to 10,000 people—an enormous number for that era—was never destroyed or plundered. Though archaeologists have made significant discoveries elsewhere in Anatolia, including cities even thousands of years older—where they've found things like the arrival of the first sheep herds or the import of seeds from unknown locations—nowhere else were the conditions for findings as favorable or the artifacts as revealing as in Çatalhöyük.

For example, a fire had sterilized and carbonized organic material up to a depth of one meter, preserving things almost never found at comparable sites. Thanks to this, we now know the weaving patterns of fabrics, as well as the types of clothing, furs, and leather goods. We know what the people ate, what their woven food baskets and sleeping mats looked like.

From bones, grave goods, and the murals found in almost every home, researchers have reconstructed much about daily life and the economy: age at death, sex, number of births, illnesses, injuries, even child mortality and life expectancy. Trace elements in teeth and collagen analysis of bones tell us about diet in the final years of life; wear patterns on skeletons reveal types of work performed or even how intensively the people of Çatalhöyük danced.

The findings are staggering: child mortality during the Stone Age in Çatalhöyük was 30% lower than in the much more "advanced" Bronze Age 3,000 years later. While Bronze Age elders reached 55–60 years, people here lived to be 60 to 70. The average age was 32 years—not impressive by today's standards, but for the time, exceptionally high. Let's not forget: this average wasn't achieved again in Europe's working classes until 1750. A serf in 18th-century Germany had a shorter life expectancy than a Stone Age person from 9,000 years ago.

But How Can We Know They Lived Without Hierarchies, in Equality and Social Harmony?

Can bones and ashes really tell us about men and women, peace, and freedom?

Admittedly, such insights don't lie openly in the rubble. And even modern archaeology took decades to piece together a coherent picture from puzzling finds and seemingly absurd facts—a picture that defied conventional assumptions, yet clearly showed that Neolithic life was not primitive, but socially and ethically advanced. Coming to this realization wasn't easy.

Even Mellaart—an enlightened archaeologist, but a child of his time—couldn't imagine that the prosperity he unearthed was communal. He assumed the site must have been the "priestly quarter". Only decades later, when it became clear that all of Çatalhöyük looked the same—with no temples, elite buildings, priests, or altars—did scholars realize: they had uncovered the remains of a classless society.

Even in 2003, Mellaart's colleague Ian Hodder followed the trail of several mysterious concentric patterns, hoping to find the long-lost temples or monumental structures—and instead found the city's central garbage dump.

Once it was accepted that Çatalhöyük represented a completely different kind of society, one free from power and dominance, everything suddenly fell into place—a coherent mosaic.

A Society Without a State, with Prosperity for All

Çatalhöyük was a wealthy community without a government, where equality was the core social principle. The city had basically one type of house, but repeated over 1,500 times: functional, spacious, and socially inclusive, like the homes of the rich elsewhere. Each person had 10–12 square meters of living space, and each house included workshops, storage, and a spiritual area—where the dead were buried. Spirituality wasn't reserved for a priestly elite but was an individual act.

These "living houses" hosted much of the social life on their rooftops, and the equality principle was so thorough that unused rooms were sealed off and reopened only when needed—for instance, when a child grew old enough to need a private space. Each house was also a production site, every person worked according to their ability, and no one owned means of production beyond their personal use. All homes contained stored seeds, and skeletal wear suggests everyone worked hard—and celebrated wildly.

What was completely absent were signs of diseases of affluence, which are common in ruling classes of exploitative societies.

But don't imagine this egalitarian city as drab or uniform, like socialist block housing. Life in Çatalhöyük was colorful, diverse, and joyful. According to serious social science estimates, people had about half of their waking hours available for leisure—more than we do in our so-called leisure society.

People gathered frequently, helped each other, created expressive art, and loved to dance: Nearly half the population showed anatomical changes in the femur that could only come from excessive dancing. Remains of such a Stone Age party were even excavated. According to chemist Bernhard Brosius, they show that "the rooftop celebrations of the city left nothing to be desired."

Equality Without Erasing Difference

Equality here did not mean suppressing differences or diminishing exceptional individuals. It meant no privileges at the expense of the community. People weren't made equal—they were treated equally. As archaeologist Naomi Hamilton puts it:

> "Differences do not mean structural inequality.

> Respected age, earned recognition, and social influence based on knowledge or experience do not contradict egalitarian values."

In fact, many touching individual stories uncovered by archaeologists reveal deep individual appreciation, regardless of social status:

- A 17-year-old girl who became disabled from a broken femur received an extraordinarily elaborate burial.
- A hunter gored by an aurochs was lovingly cared for until he died of infection—his family was then cared for by the community.
- A mother and child who died together were sprinkled with red ochre to ensure their rebirth.

Some structures have even been interpreted by medical experts as early hospitals, reflecting a level of institutionalized care that Europe didn't see until Bismarck's welfare laws—and certainly not what we'd expect from "Stone Age people".

What Wasn't Found Tells the Most

The most revealing clues to their social ethics come from what wasn't found in Çatalhöyük:

- No depictions of aggression, conflict, combat, abuse, or torture—motifs that are otherwise classic in ancient art.
- No imagery of justice systems, punishment, human or animal sacrifice, skull deformations, or ritual mutilations, all common elsewhere.
- No signs of violent death caused by other humans in any of the skeletons.
- No evidence of theft or possessions with trade value.
- No weapons of war found in any of the twelve layers.

This strongly suggests a repression-free, fear-free society.

And Yes—In Over 1,200 Years, They Never Went to War

Indeed, there's no trace that this human community was ever involved in war—in over twelve centuries of existence.

Çatalhöyük as an Example

Çatalhöyük is just one example and serves here as a representative of early matriarchal culture, primarily because it is so thoroughly documented. But matriarchy was neither limited to Anatolia nor to the Stone Age. Much evidence suggests that the social systems found here were

generally characteristic of matriarchy—since female-centered societies have been documented on all five continents.

Nor did they all end with the Bronze Age, and they were by no means always replaced by patriarchy. In fact, matriarchal societies still exist today—almost everywhere in the world except Europe, and some have populations in the millions.

Learning from the Stone Age?

So, up to this chapter, we've spent over 150 pages grappling with utopias and social models, forming complex analogies, making use of sophisticated arguments, calling on behavioral science, psychology, neurobiology, and sociology to make the case, and appealing to common sense—all just to make the idea of a non-hierarchical, egalitarian society seem plausible and maybe a little less absurd.

An idea that to most people still seems as "unnatural" as it is unrealistic: a nice thought, perhaps—but clearly just another piece of utopian fantasy…

But what if we had to recognize that this vision isn't so unnatural after all—and not utopian either? What if it was, in fact, a kind of "normal state"—in which humanity lived far longer and far better than in the relatively short era of patriarchal, hierarchical, and exploitative statism?

That would certainly be something worth thinking about.

As Heide Göttner-Abendroth puts it:

> "It's important to realize that many things we take for granted today—simply because we're used to them—were not at all primary or natural in the history of human development.
>
> And whether they are the best just because they're the latest is a completely different question."

In truth, we still know far too little about early social structures to be smugly triumphant about any modern "-ism"—including feminism and anarchism.

The people of Çatalhöyük and elsewhere didn't live as they did to confirm our ideologies, and why they lived this way—we still don't really know. The academic debate over this topic has only just begun.

For instance, opinions differ greatly—often depending on ideological background—about where matriarchy came from and why it disappeared. Some argue it was the original form of human organization, always present until 5,000–6,000 years ago, when it was violently replaced by patriarchy. Others insist that male dominance and oppression existed earlier, and that matriarchal-egalitarian societies only briefly and locally prevailed over male-driven systems of exploitation.

Supporters of a more class-struggle-oriented view even present a compelling archaeological case for a social revolution in the Neolithic city of Çayönü, involving the storming of temples, the expulsion of elites, the demolition of slums, and the construction of social housing. They date this "first social revolution in human history" to "some day over 9,200 years ago."

Yet even such compelling narratives raise more questions than they answer:

- How did people transition from violent liberation to peaceful society?

- Why didn't new classes emerge?
- Why didn't a greedy neighbor simply conquer the rich city?
- When, where, and how did women suddenly gain power?
- And most crucially: Were these egalitarian communities connected with one another—or were they isolated islands in an otherwise hierarchical world?

It would be unfair to expect a relatively young interdisciplinary field like matriarchal studies—which has only existed for a few decades—to already provide clear answers to all this.

Far more important, in my view, is that future interpretations of archaeological evidence proceed without ideological blinkers or fear of controversial insights.

A great example of this open approach is the creative, undogmatic online platform Mama-Anarchija.net, founded by journalist and commune member Jochen Schilk, which explores matriarchal studies and anarchism in a remarkably inclusive forum—and from which I've borrowed the title for this chapter.

If such an ideology-free reappropriation of this exciting topic were to succeed, it could lead to a mutual enrichment of two of humanity's great traditions of freedom: the ancient matriarchy and the modern libertarian discourse. Such an encounter could release tremendous social-transformative energy.

A hopeful sign: a growing part of matriarchal studies has moved beyond archaeology and ethnology, and is now beginning to develop and advocate for a modern matriarchal culture—relevant to our lives today.

And the cornerstones of this proposed culture?

—Not taken from Kropotkin, mind you—

But: solidarity and freedom from domination.

As stated: we still don't know why there were domination-free societies for thousands of years.

But we do know that they existed.

And that is a fact— A fact that can still give us courage today:

Courage to believe in utopia.

Chapter 21: Early Forms of Anarchy

> "The more laws and restrictions there are, the poorer the people become.
> The sharper the weapons, the more unrest in the land.
> The more clever and cunning the people, the stranger the events that occur.
> The more rules and laws, the more thieves and robbers."
> — Lao Ma (13th century BCE) aka Lao Tzu (5th century BCE)

> "A people ruled by a king lacks many things—but above all, freedom,
> which does not mean having a just master,
> but having no master at all."
> — Cicero

Before the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, there was no anarchism—but there were "anarchisms."

TO SPEAK OF ANARCHISM IN ANTIQUITY is a bit like talking about "pre-Christian Christianity." A bit paradoxical, in other words. "Anarchism" as a coherent system of thought—or even as a social movement—has only existed since the mid-19th century.

So is it even legitimate to search for traces of "anarchism" in antiquity, the Middle Ages, or the early modern period?

We would do well not to understand anarchism as an ideology. What interests us is a tendency, marked by very specific cornerstones: freedom, opposition to domination, solidarity, mutual aid, individual autonomy, networking of small units, self-determination, and rebellion against external control.

The historical expressions of such a tendency—some of which we will encounter on the following pages—are products of their time, their respective cultures, and the social problems they faced.

Modern anarchism as a movement arose in Europe and was shaped accordingly: it is a child of its time and responded to the social issues of the 19th century—industrialization, patriotism, militarism, the Church, the bourgeoisie, and the divide between rich and poor.

Therefore, our examination can never be about anarchism as such, but only about a snapshot of it. It would be a foolish mistake to measure, evaluate, or dismiss everything we encounter in our search for traces of anarchism against today's specific form of "anarchism." Such an omission would distort the picture in favor of a dogmatic and formalistic perspective—the kind often embraced by uncritical ideological histories. That, however, is not the intention of this book.

This is why the search for "anarchisms before anarchism" is both legitimate and necessary.

Like a "black thread", the longing for free forms of social life runs through the history of humankind. This thread is not always equally thick—rebellion rarely found its way into official historical accounts—but it was always there.

In the individual fibers of this thread, we can recognize the primary anarchist virtues as substance, not as labels—often hidden behind bizarre masks and usually appearing in contexts where the word "anarchy" was never used. A global vision of a libertarian world is also rarely discernible.

So this is a search for traces—not in the spirit of a formal and therefore ridiculous appropriation, but to show that the impulse toward freedom is an ancient component of humanity, and that modern anarchism was by no means an unexpected, spontaneous birth.

Before the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, there was no anarchism—but there were "anarchisms."

If we keep this distinction in mind, we can embark on this journey with an open heart…

Tao

In the thirteenth century BCE, we find—in the completely unfamiliar cultural world of feudal China—the first witnesses of anarchic thought, whose traces reach into our own time: Taoism, a tradition that continues to shape and influence Chinese society today—a blend of philosophy, social movement, life wisdom, practical science, and non-institutional folk religion. It is often regarded as a kind of primordial anarchist wisdom. Historian Peter Marshall calls it "the first clear expression of anarchist sensibility," and considers its main text, the Tao Te Ching, "one of the greatest anarchist classics."

Almost like a laboratory model, early Chinese high culture saw the confrontation of two "philosophical schools": Confucianism and Taoism. The former promoted a rigid, hierarchical order with virtues like duty, discipline, and obedience in a society where each individual was assigned an unchangeable place. It's not hard to see why Confucianism, in the expanding state system of sixth-century BCE China, quickly became the official state ideology—centralization and bureaucracy followed.

Taoists, by contrast, rejected governments and believed in a life of natural and spontaneous harmony, with a major focus on the human being in balance with nature. In the Taoist worldview, everything is in flux—nothing is fixed or permanent. Not coincidentally, Tao means "the Way." For Taoists, "reality" arises from the interplay of opposing forces—which, though contradictory, depend on each other and are capable of harmony: yin and yang. Much like modern social ecology, Taoism seeks balance within a colorful diversity.

Taoism, however, never degenerates into a mere religion. It doesn't force its worldview on anyone, nor does it develop cults, churches, or clergy. Instead, it evolves clear social and political insights: over time, Taoism articulates a coherent system of political ethics, with parallels to contemporary social movements. Its central principle, wu wei, often mistakenly translated as "non-intervention," is actually a synthesis of what we might call civil disobedience, anti-authoritarianism, or gentle technology.

Wu wei means the absence of wei—and wei refers to imposed, artificial, frenetic, authoritarian action that runs counter to natural and harmonious development. Politically speaking, wei represents the principle of authority. Put simply, Taoists believe: the more humans interfere, the more they try to control, the worse everything becomes—a perspective that aligns strikingly with the insights of modern ecology.

Accordingly, the Taoist school posits that the best government is the one that governs least—a view we find echoed in early libertarians like Wilhelm von Humboldt, John Stuart Mill, or Henry David Thoreau. And when the Taoist Lao Tzu rails against the bureaucratic, warlike, and commercial nature of his time, and portrays property as a form of theft, it sounds remarkably like Proudhon—though rendered in gentle, metaphorical poetry, the typical medium of Taoist wisdom.

Even clearer anarchic tendencies emerge in the writings of philosopher Chuang Tzu (569–286 BCE), who rejected all forms of government, advocating instead for the free existence of self-determined individuals. The core idea of this Taoist ideal society is that people should be left to regulate themselves. This early Chinese version of laissez-faire assumes a high degree of trust in human social capacity—an issue still debated in modern anarchism.

In the Huai Nan Tzu, this question is resolved in a way that could almost be called "Kropotkinian": the well-being of each individual increases as the community prospers. Humans are both individuals and social beings—so whoever acts for the community also acts for themselves. This strongly echoes the "social egoism" of anarchists we've encountered before.

The parallel comes full circle with the claim that such a society would not be conflict-free, but would offer every opportunity to find new balances through the free interplay of opposing forces and interests—in other words, to form new coalitions based on shared interests. This sounds almost like bolo'bolo with yin and yang…

Taoist tendencies have gone through many historical developments and continue to exert influence to this day. It's hardly possible to draw strict lines between wisdom and rebellion, mysticism and pragmatism, religion and social tendency—and that's probably how it must be, for this reflects the Taoist essence.

The practical applications of this philosophy go far beyond the social realm and are accordingly diverse: from meditation and mental focus, nutrition, physical training, psychological techniques, sexuality, talk therapy, all the way to medicine, Taoism offers practical guidance for many aspects of life.

So—just a serene philosophy of life for individuals, without social mobilization?

What's clear is that Taoism, relying with disarming gentleness on humanity's capacity for harmony, has never produced a "social movement" in the modern sense over the past 2,500 years. It differs from classical anarchism less in the radicalism of thought than in the role of action. Where anarchism emphasizes direct action, Tao tends to advocate for enlightened passivity.

Thus, Taoism will likely remain what it has always been: a source of practical wisdom for those who seek full harmony within their own being.

Buddhism

Less obvious is the libertarian spirit that experts identify in Buddhism—which is not surprising when one realizes that, unlike Taoism, Buddhism did give rise to a church and a state-supporting clergy.

Buddhism originally emerged as an Indian religion, founded in the 6th century BCE by Siddhartha Gautama, who called himself Buddha, "the Enlightened One." His rather complex teaching of human perfection revolves around the contradiction between material possession—viewed

as a negative bond—and self-discovery, which culminates in the highest stage of enlightenment, Nirvana. Nirvana is the "nothingness" or "complete liberation."

Initially, Buddhism was purely an ethical and meditative movement that was quickly suppressed in India but managed to establish itself in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Tibet. Early on, it split into a power-politically interested, institutionalized branch called Theravada, and the Mahayana direction, which continued to pursue exclusively the self-liberation of the individual through the quest for perfection.

From the 6th century onward, a development began in China under the name Ch'an, which interprets Buddha differently: as the first rebel, the "breaker of chains" that bind humans in ignorance and unfreedom. This represents a genuine heresy, similar to those we know from the history of the church in medieval Europe. Ch'an reached Japan in the 12th century, where it developed into an independent tradition called Zen.

Zen is neither a church nor a state-supporting religion. Unlike the powerful medieval abbeys in Europe, a Zen monastery is not a center of power, wealth, and knowledge, but a place of equality and poverty. A Zen monk does not see himself as a mediator between "God" and humans but as a kind of teacher, a role model who can help on the path to self-knowledge. Zen recognizes no higher authority of truth than the intuition of the individual, above which not even Buddha stands. More than a sect, it is an experiment through experience, and decidedly egalitarian: Zen knows no elites, mocks authority figures, and promotes an autonomous, self-determined life. Its goal is the liberation of the individual from imposed morality, legality, and authority, in harmony with the environment. In the natural order, Zen finds no justification for rule and hierarchy.

For this reason, Zen Buddhism can be credited with a certain libertarian spirit, just as Taoism can. Both reject hierarchy and domination, both seek individual liberation through self-knowledge in full harmony with oneself. However, both remain silent on the question of whether such ideals are possible in the societies of the twentieth century outside one's own mind. How a society shaped by such ideals might arise is not their concern. Herein lies a fundamental difference from classical anarchism, for which freedom is not only an individual but also a social phenomenon.

Undoubtedly, the ethics of Tao or Zen would provide a more fertile ground for an anarchic society than, say, Catholicism or Islam. Yet, just as certainly, religious concepts such as Buddhism—based on belief in reincarnation and in which fateful karma weighs like a mortgage from the past on the present—introduce new chains. Social and spiritual freedom also find limits here. Either the world and thus humans are determined, in which case true freedom does not exist; or they are not, in which case karma does not exist.

The Ancient Greeks

Ancient Greece, always a favorite place* especially for the German educated middle class, is primarily known to us as the "cradle of democracy." And that is true: In the city-state of Athens, about 500 years before the Common Era, there were 30,000 citizens, of whom up to 6,000 regularly participated in parliamentary assemblies. Such a density of political participation is something modern democrats can only dream of. Administrative and governmental tasks were in the hands of the "Council of 500," whose membership was subject to a rotation principle. Judges were elected, disputes were publicly heard, and bureaucracy existed only in rudimentary forms

that must seem quaint to us today. So, all around there were elements of direct democracy in small, manageable units. Political structures whose key elements were autarky and autonomy, in which the right to free opinion, free speech, and free action were concepts people dealt with both theoretically and practically. All this at a time when in our regions hardly anything else was known than the unchecked despotism of the powerful, and when an individual person did not even really have the right to their own life—let alone their own opinion. Well two thousand years before things like the Magna Carta, the Habeas Corpus Act, human rights, or even general elections came onto the agenda here. [Editor's note: Habeas Corpus Act, English law from 1679, according to which no prisoner may be held in custody without judicial examination.]

So, an island of humanitarian hope in the midst of a dark, barbaric world? One is easily tempted to attach a libertarian label to ancient Greek democracy, but social reality looked different.

First of all, ancient Greece was not only made up of democratic city republics like Athens but also many mini-dictatorships and petty tyrannies; there were the Spartans with their proverbial military toughness as well as the Macedonian Alexander, who set out to conquer a world empire and had nothing to do with democracy.

But even in places where classical democracy à la Athens was in effect, it was anything but libertarian ideals. It applied only to men; women had no rights. Slaves of course also had none. Nor did the majority of immigrant residents who lived in the polis* but were not citizens of the city. All of these made up the large majority but had no say. And political participation was not all that widespread: assemblies often resembled more a show than a place of serious political decision-making. Beautiful rhetoric in itself was an aesthetic value that made visiting the parliament an enjoyment at a time when there was comparatively little mass entertainment available. But real decisions were usually made within political elites, who kept the masses well on a long leash. It was no coincidence that democratic Athens was never free of expansionist and power ambitions and repeatedly threw itself into new military adventures, for example under the skillful leadership of Perikles.

All of this does not seem unfamiliar to us today: discrimination, manipulation, parliamentary show performances, and the illusion of one's own decision-making among the electorate quite correspond to the appearance of our "modern democracies" over the last 150 years. That foreigners are not allowed to vote here is just as taken for granted as the fact that women were excluded from voting at the beginning of the last century.

No matter how democratic we may consider ancient Athens to have been — all this has little to do with "anarchy." Thus, the value of ancient Greece for anarchism lies less in its social reality and more in its philosophical significance. Undoubtedly, the relatively large freedoms offered by a democratic polis provided a good framework for the development of free thinking and unusual utopias, which can rightly be seen as precursors of modern anarchism. The magnificent ideas of some Greek philosophers were indeed embedded in a less magnificent social reality, but they were meant to serve as a source of inspiration repeatedly during the following long, dark periods of ignorance and despotism. Thinkers and philosophers, revolutionaries and reformers have drawn from them up to our days. Max Nettlau, the great and tireless historian of anarchism, somewhat pathetically* but fittingly compares them to the "veins of freedom," through which the often weak pulse of anarchist thinking survived even the worst centuries.

Not that the term "anarchy" had a good ring among the ancient Greeks. Homeros and Herodotos (ca. 490–430 BCE) used it to describe the unfortunate condition of the absence of a

leader or general. For Aischylos (ca. 525–465 BCE), anarchy always leads to the dissolution of the community. Socrates (470–399 BCE), who with his demand to think for oneself and always question authority leaves such a sympathetically anti-authoritarian impression, remains elitist* despite it all. He simply cannot imagine a community without rule. At least he paves the way for the insight that there are no absolute truths and that relative truth is best gained through controversial discussion. Undoubtedly, progress. For Heraklitos (ca. 550–480 BCE), similarly to the Taoists, reality is subject to constant change arising from antagonisms*. Of course, all within a "natural order" where there is no room for anarchy. Nor was Heraklitos a democrat: it would be best to force people to their happiness.

Things really get colorful only after Socrates' death in 399 BCE, when his numerous students begin to stir up philosophical thought vigorously.

On one hand, Plato, a brilliant mind who, however, seems to have received nothing of the anti-authoritarian essence of his master. With his bestseller "The Republic," he becomes for all time virtually the designer of the authoritarian, centralistic, all-controlling state. He is one of the first to give the term "anarchy" a political definition and places it on an equal footing with "democracy." However, for Plato, both are equally reprehensible. He describes anarchy as colorful, unbound, and undisciplined — thus harmful. Platon's famous student Aristoteles places anarchists outside the state and accordingly condemns them as lawless, dangerous beasts. Such definitions were to become influential and remain valid for a long time.

On the other hand, various philosophical schools emerge from the intellectual legacy of Socrates, which in the following centuries would become some of the most important currents of nonconformist thought: the Epicureans, the Cynics, and the Stoics. All of them are individualistic in one way or another, without slipping into crude egoism. And all of them more or less disregard the state, authority, and laws. The autonomous individual moves to the center of their thinking.

The school of Hedonism, founded by Aristippos in the third century BCE and later given the adjective "Epicurean" after the philosopher Epicurus, was the first to bring the legitimacy of pleasure into the focus of philosophy and loosen the slavish dependence of the individual on the terror of the gods. Epicurus, who in his "Garden," where he taught, welcomed women and men of all social classes for free, quickly became unpopular even as his following grew throughout the Mediterranean. His credo stated that societies founded on affection and friendship were more humane than those based on theoretical equality and justice. The Epicureans, far removed from the prejudice of blind pleasure-seeking and lust often attached to them, most closely correspond to the part of modern anarchism that is situated between conscious living, the right to one's own lifestyle, the legitimacy of earthly pleasure, and a combative individualism. Their predecessor Aristippos, who must have been a real snob in contrast to the "ascetic pleasure-seeker" Epicurus, is credited with the saying that the wise man should not sacrifice his freedom to the state.

The Cynics, too, were not necessarily what we today call cynics—that is, people who mock the feelings of others with clever but biting sarcasm. Sharp-tongued indeed, and notorious for their revealing paradoxes*, we can most appropriately see this philosophical school as the spearhead of an anarchoid guerrilla of fun in antiquity that recognized no established authorities. One of their most prominent students, Diogenes of Sinope, was the eccentric scoffer of civilization par excellence. He denounced slavery, proclaimed his brotherhood with all living beings, and declared himself the first "world citizen" in history. He did not want to live better than a dog. His dog-like—Greek "cynic"—way of life earned him a "barrel" as a dwelling, in front of which one day the

mighty general Alexander appeared, offering the famous philosopher whatever he wished. Diogenes' request, that Alexander please step out of his light, was worthy of the authority-defying philosophy of a Kynic and became correspondingly famous.

The ideas of the Cynics focus on the concepts of physis (nature) and nomos (convention), which philosophy had so far tried to reconcile. The Cynic school, however, rejected human conventions, which they regarded as artificial, arbitrary, and imposed. Instead, they sought "natural laws"—physis triumphs over nomos. For example, the founding father Antisthenes, who had turned his back on his aristocratic class, preached to the working population at mass meetings in the open air a path "back to nature," where government, private property, established religion, or marriage would no longer have a place, because in a "natural order" they would be superfluous.

For a Cynic, conventional rules are just as "unnatural" as they are annoying. Law, hierarchy, and customs differ among various peoples and times; therefore, they have no universality and consequently no moral authority. This anarchic element of the Kynic school is especially evident in the person of Diogenes, who despised money, practiced passive resistance, and lived a subversive everyday life.

The Stoics are positioned even closer to anarchism. For Kropotkin, Zenon of Kition (4th and 3rd centuries BCE) was **"the best exponent of anarchist philosophy in ancient Greece."** No wonder, since he opposed Platon's state communism with the ideal of a free commune without government. Zenon recognized—just like his Russian admirer—that humanity has both the instinct of self-preservation, which manifests as egoism, and the social instinct, which leads to cooperation. Both tendencies are in free play, with social cooperation increasing as humans align themselves with their "natural needs." Coercive institutions would then become unnecessary.

Thus, the Stoics build on the Cynics' concept of "natural principle," but unlike them, they do not reject the benefits of civilization. They are more realists than provocateurs, and from the Epicureans, they adopt the capacity for enjoyment. A pleasant mixture that contains strong elements of what we today would call individualism, rationalism, equality, and openness to the world.

The idea of "natural principle" equates "God" with "Nature" and "Nature" with "Reason." A philosophical trick with far-reaching consequences for a long time: divine law thus corresponds to natural law; the limits of humans compared to the gods are exactly those set by nature. To rebel against nature (= God) is irrational. Therefore, it is rational to respect natural law (= divine order). Natural science would consequently be the study of this order. It is clear that such a concept of God increasingly distances itself from mystical religion. Rationality acquires a divine character, while the religious element withers. In all this, Stoicism strongly resembles the ideals of the Enlightenment, just as it shares the nearly boundless belief in the goodness of man, provided he can develop "naturally" — a belief, by the way, that has lost much of its persuasiveness since Rousseau and is now seen more critically in anarchism. However, 2200 years ago, this way of thinking was groundbreaking, as it was the first counterweight against the local, authoritarian, god-fearing power mentality in mainstream Greek philosophy with its personified deities. This allowed a coherent political worldview to emerge:

A wise person, according to the Stoics, participates in political life if not prevented from doing so, but the state by its nature prevents such engagement. Therefore, all states are equally evil. Stoics also prove to be true cosmopolitans. Unlike Plato and Aristotle, they consider all people to be of equal worth and consequently oppose slavery in the polis. In Zenon's "Republic," there are no racial or social distinctions, no courts, police, armies, temples, money, marriage, or schools.

In such a "natural order," "everyone works according to their abilities and consumes according to their needs." It would be more than 2000 years later before the tradition of such radical ideas was timidly revived: by Lessing and Fichte, and more vehemently by Godwin, Kropotkin, and Landauer.

But let us not forget one thing: Zenon's Republic was not a real existing territory, but philosophy. Ideas that have come down to us as written fragments or reports. Epicureans, Cynics, and Stoics were fringe groups of society, standing in opposition to the prevailing morals and philosophy. Probably considered "cranks" by most people who even knew of them. Little is known about concrete attempts to put such ideas into practice. If there were approaches extending beyond the private homes of philosophers, they were unsuccessful—otherwise, we would likely have heard about them. Philosophy was a hobby of privileged people in ancient Greece.

Nevertheless, the impact of these philosophical schools should not be underestimated. On the one hand, they were trendsetters. Undoubtedly, they influenced the spirit of the age and affected the social life of an era. For example, Stoicism found followers throughout the Mediterranean, especially in Asia Minor and Rome, where it had a lasting influence on jurisprudence—the idea of natural principle (or sometimes natural law) replaced formal law. On the other hand, they became part of human cultural history and acted like seeds of freedom that survived for centuries until one day falling on fertile ground and sprouting in social reality. The few enlightened thinkers of the Middle Ages drew from this seedbed as did Renaissance philosophers, Enlightenment thinkers, and early anarchists.

Dark Times in the Shadow of the Church

The following centuries are poor in such freedom-giving "seeds," and the "veins of freedom" pulse very weakly for a long time. The Roman Empire was not only the political triumph of the state itself but culminated in an unprecedented imperialism. Almost the entire Western world was subject to a single, powerful, centralized state doctrine serving Rome. Bad times for the love of freedom.

Then came the so-called "Dark Ages," which, although not as dark in many respects as commonly believed, were so regarding global freedom. In the wake of the new Christian religion and its singular, strict, neurotic-authoritarian God, a new religious imperialism followed—with some delay: the church, clergy, and monasteries spread across Europe an equally dull and intolerant unified doctrine. It was built on fear and entwined excellently with secular state power. Thinking outside religious categories became nearly impossible for one and a half millennia.

Therefore, most of what has been preserved from these times in terms of freedom impulses is either direct rebellion against oppression or deviation from church doctrine. Slaves and heretics, peasants and dissenters are the protagonists of this resistance. The sources from today's perspective are almost maddening. Pure rebellion movements produced hardly any writings or theories; they are known to us only through the reports of the victors and fare correspondingly poorly. For heretics, there are more written documents since their thinkers mostly originated from the church itself and were diligent scribes. Much was destroyed, and the rest must be painstakingly pieced together from inquisitors' records. This is about as authentic as trying to reconstruct the worldviews of anti-Hitler resistors from Gestapo interrogation protocols.

Since the turn of the era, there has not been a century without uprisings and heresy. An unbroken chain of defiance accompanies the "official" development of society. Plebeians, Gracchi, Spartacus-led slaves, Cimbri, Teutons, and Donatists rose against the Roman Empire. In our immediate vicinity, Batavians, Saxons, Slavs, Frisians, Lutizens, and repeatedly the oppressed peasants resisted oppression and disenfranchisement. Cologne, Magdeburg, Strasbourg, Mainz, Würzburg, or Brunswick experienced uprisings against authority just as Bavaria, Alsace, Thuringia, Pomerania, Dithmarschen, or Sundgau did. They all cannot be enumerated or investigated here.

Did such rebellions have anarchistic traits? In a strict sense, certainly not, since they generally lacked the totality of a vision free of domination. Thus, Max Nettlau in his History of Anarchy concludes that the uprisings in ancient Rome exhibited authoritarian forms just as the early Christian communities did, which, despite their communist-democratic beginnings, were quickly absorbed into the new state religion. For the cause of freedom, Nettlau states, "none of these were relevant," allowing only a few exceptions. However, in the spirit of our impartial search for essentials beyond the modern concept of anarchism, a closer look is worthwhile.

"Oh, you fools! Anyone can write whatever they want in a book; and the one who wrote the Gospel could also write whatever he wanted." Such disrespectful sentences coming from the mouths of convinced Christians sound unusual. And yet they are typical of that egalitarian and anti-authoritarian thread that runs as opposition throughout the history of Christianity and has never been silenced to this day.

The quote comes from the final phase of the Cathars, an immensely popular Christian protest movement that spread over large parts of southern Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries. These people understood themselves, following the Greek kátharos, as "the pure ones" — a word from which the German word Ketzer ("heretic") developed. They opposed widespread poverty and the privileges of the nobility, mocked the institutional church along with its dogmas and pomp, preached a simple life, and regarded all people as equal. This also applied to women, which in the patriarchal world of the Middle Ages was an incredible provocation.

Apparently, such ideas met the needs and tastes of broad segments of society and became a serious threat to the church. Since heretics also lacked the necessary respect for the Holy Scripture and the Holy Roman Church, Pope Gregory IX found himself in such a tight spot that in 1232 he invented the "Holy Inquisition," a tribunal that was supposed to combat all kinds of "heresy" by means of court proceedings, torture, and the death penalty. This was followed, hand in hand with state power, by outright extermination wars — for example, against the Albigensians in Provence or the Waldensians in France and Northern Italy. Despite all the brutality, it took more than seventy years before the Cathars were finally destroyed — only to make room for new protest movements that were also persecuted. The Inquisition — which still exists today but is no longer allowed to impose secular punishments — has never been idle in its almost 800-year history.

Church rebels — whether in word, writing, or deed — have been generally called "heretics" since the days of the Cathars. And heretics, unless they were repentant and pardoned by the mother church, were burned, hanged, quartered, or broken on the wheel well into the 18th century. Often it was enough just to deviate from the official opinion and to think independently. More accurately, the word heretic (from the Greek hairesis, meaning "choice") designates people who "adhere to self-chosen views or ways of life." Already in the second century AD, the church used the word for the crime of "arbitrary human opinion" and henceforth denoted a "deviant" from

the divine truth, which, naturally, was defined by the church. And deviation was considered a grievous sin worthy of death.

Yet "heresy" existed before the church — strictly speaking, even before the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth. He was only one of many "utopian cranks" who, at the time, wandered around the Jewish homeland with their provocations and prophetic visions and presumably got on the nerves of the respectable citizens. Much like during our own hippie era, in Palestine at that time, difference, universal love, challenges to authority, new ways of life, visions of equality, and of course resistance to state power were very much in vogue. And before that ridiculed provocative prophet Jesus was crucified, became a myth, and under the nickname "the Anointed One" (Christ) became the founder of a new religion, he had most likely been connected with a radical religious sect, the Essenes. They lived in a kind of village commune on the shores of the Dead Sea and practiced a "pre-Christian" love communism in equality, poverty, leaderlessness, and religious searching in harmony with nature and its laws. Without doubt, much of what the wandering prophet Jesus said and did was borrowed from here.

Only decades and centuries later did some people who were not there write down all the anecdotes and legends about Jesus that circulated by word of mouth. Thus the "Gospels" came into being — part of that dubious collection of texts called the Bible, which as the "Book of Books" still must not be questioned today. From this quickly grew a package of "truths" that served a power-obsessed, dogmatic, and intolerant church calling itself Christian. Presumably, the historical Jesus of Nazareth would have been the church's first rebel.

This means nothing less than that heresy, in its true sense, is not a deviation but rather something typical of Christianity itself — quite simply because Jesus of Nazareth, as a free seeker of divergent views and ways of life, was himself a typical heretic. In this respect, the Christian church would be the real degeneration* of Jesus' ethics. At least that is how more or less all heretical movements see it: they always strive for a "true" Christianity, wanting to return to the unadulterated origins. In doing so, they seek the meaning of the message less in the meticulous interpretation of church texts and more in the spirit they believe they have found exemplified in the life of Jesus. This tendency is not limited to the Middle Ages. It runs uninterrupted from the Essenes to Tolstoy. Jesus as a rebel — that inspires to this day!

For example, the "Liberation Theology" of Latin America, the Catholic worker-priesthood, or the work of the religious-pacifist socialist Leonhard Ragaz. Groups like the "Catholic Workers" from the USA go even further. They apparently have no difficulty reconciling Christ and anarchy. Their activists Dorothy Day, Ammon Hennacy, and Peter Maurin represented a kind of religious anarchism, similar to what the Russian thinker Nikolai Berdyaev did on a philosophical level.

Religious, and indeed explicitly "Christian anarchism," has long formed a small but interesting side thread in the "black thread" of the libertarian movement. Religious views are not forbidden in anarchism, and atheism is by no means an automatic requirement. Nevertheless, most anarchists cannot follow here. In our age, they argue, "religion" and "nature-harmonious worldview" are clearly separated, making the "philosophical trick" with natural law unnecessary. It is all the more incomprehensible how anyone wants to reconcile freedom from domination with submission to divine authority and omnipotence.

"Nothing is more foreign to us than the state" — this statement by Tertullian, one of the oldest Latin church fathers, shows how strongly and naturally Christian-anti-authoritarian virtue was still represented in the 2nd century. That was soon to change. The sect of Christians built its own hierarchical apparatus even while persecuted by the Roman Empire and eventually became the

state religion. Christianity made a radical turn from its communal roots toward the persecution of utopian-Christian visions. From then on, all those who rejected collusion with power and wealth and instead saw the true message of Jesus in the egalitarian example of love became persecuted. Even Tertullian broke with the bishop's church during his lifetime.

The Gnostic* Carpocrates of Alexandria demanded in his book On Justice in the mid-2nd century a communism that he considered willed by God and observable everywhere in nature: Everyone should equally share all goods; no one should possess more than another. Lust and desire should not be suppressed since they are also natural and therefore pleasing to God. Bishop Ambrose of Milan (340–397) also appealed to this equation of natural law and divine will, proclaiming: "Nature has produced the law of community. Arrogance created private property." In Syrian Antioch, John Chrysostom (354–407) expressed similar views and later, as bishop in Constantinople, preached a communal social system with common ownership to subjects groaning under Roman tax servitude. He died in exile. Augustine, a student of Ambrose, gave away all his possessions to work in Africa. A sharp opponent of the entanglement of church and state, he created with his book De civitate Dei ("The City of God") the first Christian-inspired political utopia, in which the Golden Age of humanity was not in the lost paradise but in the earthly future. This vision of God's kingdom culminates in the sentence "Love and do what you want," which almost literally reappears in 1534 in the utopian writings of the French "early libertarian" Rabelais. Augustine thus becomes the founder of millenarianism, the hope for a thousand-year reign of God on earth, characterized by equality, justice, brotherhood, and love. Many later church rebel movements would draw from this source.

Yet ideas like those of Carpocrates, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Augustine, and others almost always remained without practical consequences. The early Christian communities initially lived in a kind of primitive communism anyway, and the bulk of the population barely reached these teachings. At best, smaller groups took such sermons to heart and followed men like Basil, who around 370 propagated the vision of a city of charity and care. The result was a number of monasteries. Furthermore, the early critical thinkers of the church were usually either stripped of power or corrupted.

An exception is the state- and church-critical Donatist movement, which in the 4th and 5th centuries in the North African province of Numidia inspired the social rebellion of impoverished tenant farmers against large landowners and appears in many ways as a precursor to the German Peasants' Wars. There were tax strikes, land occupations, and finally armed conflicts with the Roman Empire. Bishop Donatus, elected in 314 as a "grassroots candidate" against Rome's favorite, supplied the rebels in their fight for rights with biblical ammunition. For him, who is credited with the phrase "What has the emperor to do with the church?" natural law of man mattered more than the interest of the state. When the Donatist uprising and its militant wing, the Circumcellions, threatened to spread to other Roman provinces, Rome cracked down hard. Donatus was exiled to Gaul and the movement outlawed, persecuted, starved, and slandered.

In the 9th century, rebellious ideas broke out again and grew into a broad social movement: In the Balkans, the Bogomils taught disobedience to authority, mocked the church, and refused to serve the nobility. Extremely popular among the peasant population, the movement sent missionaries to Western Europe, where their example fell on fertile ground. Over the centuries, from these roots arose the Cathar movement, which we have already encountered. They too followed the ideal of voluntary poverty and rejected rule. They understood their life as a radical break from usual norms and order: state, marriage, secular courts, military service, and oaths were equally

taboo, as was the killing of humans and animals. Many Cathars chose a wandering life, and so the idea spread epidemically: in Belgium, Italy, Germany, and especially France, the movement predominantly seized the urban population.

Persecuted, suppressed, and beaten, however, "heresy" never came to an end. It merged with new movements, changed, and soon it became difficult to clearly distinguish between the different heresies. Despite all persecution, they survived—such as the Waldensians, who arose in the 12th century—and endured underground, in exile, and in guerrilla warfare until the German and Swiss Reformations, thus lasting until our days.

At the end of the 12th century, Joachim of Fiore announced the dawn of the "third age of the Holy Spirit," in which all lords would disappear, and life would be pure joy and pleasure. Tens of thousands of ecstatic people danced through the lands, unsettling both upright citizens and church authorities alike. Similar upheavals to this millenarian wave were caused by the uncompromising pacifist Francis of Assisi, whose radicalism the church, however, was able to channel into a monastic order.

In the 13th century, the Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit appeared, who adhered to a radical pantheism* and placed the unity of God and nature above secular law. They based this on Paul's words in the Letter to the Galatians: "But if the Spirit governs you, you are not under the law." With their free communism, they consciously positioned themselves outside society, its morals, and customs. They were closely intertwined with and hard to distinguish from the Beguines and Beghards, who also practically organized themselves in residential and work communities.

With the Beguines, we encounter a very early and extraordinarily active women's movement of the Middle Ages. They increasingly succeeded in fighting for free spaces for their feminine, pantheistic, and mystical religiosity in their own convents. The practical goals of these mostly upper-class women aimed at economic independence through work in a domain free from domination—the women's monastery. The wandering Beguines, in contrast, were not tied to monasteries and roamed freely through the land. It is reported that they occasionally chased the satiated* monks out of their monasteries with slogans like "Death to the Church." The Beguines violated the church's views on property, work, chastity, and the sacraments. Women like Hildegard of Bingen, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, or Sister Katrei, who was close to the heretical mystic Meister Eckhart, were increasingly perceived as threats by the church hierarchy. After the wandering Beguines were eliminated, Rome forced the women's monasteries into obedience or destroyed their movement by fire and sword. Marguerite Porete was publicly burned in Paris in 1310.

In England, in 1381, the peasants rose in revolt against the nobility and oppressive taxes, led by the priest John Ball. He gave voice to the protest in a now-famous couplet: "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?" Although the movement, after initial successes, marched with 100,000 armed men into London, it was stalled by the king's promises and finally outwitted. Nevertheless, John Ball's radical sermons, calling for the abolition of nobility, judges, lawyers, and all the powerful to secure the communal equality of the coming society, remained unforgettable for centuries.

In 1419, the execution of the moderate church critic Jan Hus in Bohemia triggered an uprising. While the Hussites were more authoritarian-nationalist in outlook, the Taborites, arising from this movement, attempted to found a community later classified by historians as an "anarcho-communist experiment": In a small town on a mountain near Prague, baptized Tabor after the

biblical model, they founded a commune without property and taxes, where no authority applied except the Bible. They shared possessions and production and believed, in typical millenarian idealism, that the promised kingdom, in which all laws were abolished and the elect immortal, had now begun. Singing, dancing, and often unclothed, they roamed through the forests. Given such ecstasy, they paid little attention to worldly things like effective production and distribution of goods, so the experiment economically collapsed after a few years. Some Taborites then turned to begging and theft, while others enjoyed their role as the armed arm against the Antichrist and called for the slaughter of all nobles.

A portion of the Taborites distanced themselves from this turn to violence and moved under Peter Chelčický to rural Bohemia, where they founded a pacifist community from which later the "Moravian Brethren" emerged. In his book Net of Faith, Chelčický interprets state and political power as punishment for original sin, which, although currently a necessary evil, would be superfluous in the community of true Christians. For this reason, Kropotkin counts him among the precursors of anarchism, and Rudolf Rocker even regards him as an early Tolstoy.

Against the backdrop of such turbulent heretical ideas, Martin Luther's reform approach seems rather tame. In fact, Luther's criticism of the Catholic Church and the conditions in the German Empire was anything but radical. Primarily, it was intended as a proposal for reforming entrenched institutions, and at first, Luther was no more than one heretic among many, just somewhat luckier than others. That his theses nevertheless caused such a stir and eventually led—through devastating wars—to the birth of a new church was due less to Dr. Luther's originality than to papal stubbornness and the power-political constellations of the time: the collapse of feudalism was becoming increasingly apparent. New social classes had risen, old ones fought against their downfall, and the eternally disenfranchised demanded their rights. But the social structures were ancient and no longer suited for the new era. The call for an "imperial reform" grew louder but was not realized. For over 100 years, peasants throughout the German-speaking area had been rising up against poverty and lack of rights and increasingly took up arms. Emperors, merchants, the church, patricians, imperial knights, and humanists mixed their respective interests into the ferment of this turbulent 16th century. The Reformation unleashed forces within these contradictory interests that could no longer be controlled and also drew foreign powers into play. However, wherever the desire for true liberation and radical change of conditions shone through, the "great reformers" like Luther, Calvin, or Zwingli became determined defenders of peace and order. They never questioned rule, submission, or hierarchy.
But the turbulent century of the Reformation and Peasants' Wars also brought forth other names typical of that bizarre, fractured world.

At the beginning of the 16th century, almost the entire southern German region was in upheaval. The peasants formed actual armies and pressured the authorities with a mix of demands, combat, and negotiation tactics. One of these legendary peasant leagues was the Bundschuh; its structure would today be called "grassroots democratic." The twelve articles of their statutes denounce injustice and demand rights, assert equality and communal ownership, and denounce the privileges of the nobility and clergy—all founded on the spirit of the Gospel. The intellectual, spiritual, and military leaders of these various "peasant mobs," such as Florian Geyer, Ulrich von Hütten, Götz von Berlichingen, Wendel, Hipler, Thomas Müntzer, or Joß Fritz, were not peasants themselves, but pastors, imperial knights, or notaries who joined the movement for quite different reasons: from deeply felt humanism to a sense of justice, religious conviction, political

reform visions, and even calculating self-interest.

Some—though few—names from among the peasants are also known, but the sources usually portray them as shady figures. Desperados, as we would call them today, who often aimed for loot and personal revenge. With their extreme hatred of priests and nobles, they certainly provided plenty of material for the legends later embraced by the left. However, their often senseless and reckless excesses contributed significantly to the fact that little new emerged from this struggle. Their anger was justified and easy to understand—and the cruelties on the side of the princely troops were often even worse—but it increasingly led to defeats and the discrediting of this powerful, restless movement. As a result, hardly any visions for a new order could flourish, and plans rarely extended beyond the immediate moment.

The protest focused on details and, as the historian Christa Dericum writes, was more a concentration of revolting forces than a revolution. Neither the intellectual elite nor their radicalized base ever reached the visionary heights of, say, the ancient Greeks; their concept of freedom did not go beyond the Bible. The third article of the Bundschuh reads: "It is found in Scripture that we are free, and we want to be free. Certainly not so that we want to be completely free and have no authorities. God does not teach us that."

Thinking beyond God was simply taboo. This applied even to the interesting "marginal phenomena" of the Peasants' Wars, which appeared with almost unprecedented radicalism, such as the Anabaptists, the communes of Münster and Mühlhausen, or about a hundred years later, the Diggers and Ranters, with whom the religiously inspired revolts in England came to an end.

In the wake of all these upheavals, a wave of expectation for salvation swept across Europe: The longed-for kingdom of God's justice had arrived, and it had to be lived here and now! The Anabaptists traveled through the lands, quoting millenarian prophecies and proclaiming the new era to the chosen ones. As everywhere, the ideas of radical equality and the end of economic bondage were well received by the common people.

In the Thuringian town of Mühlhausen, the armed secret society of Thomas Müntzer succeeded in conquering the city, and with the help of the peasantry, a commune was established that attempted the practical experiment of communal property. In 1525, Müntzer's peasant army was defeated in Frankenhausen. One of the survivors, the printer Hans Hut, then began preaching a generalized militant uprising. His program amounted to a social revolution: Christ would wield the sword to punish all sins, destroy all governments, and divide all possessions. Even after Hut's execution, the Anabaptist communities continued to spread. They lived in communal groups and rejected church rituals and sacraments.

Only after the suppression of the Anabaptist commune of Münster in 1535 did this movement dwindle. Jan Bockelson (Johann of Leiden) had won over the inhabitants in 1534 for his millenarian visions and proclaimed the "New Jerusalem" in the Westphalian city. For one year, an extensive communal property system was practiced here, including both production and consumption. Money was abolished, and everything was available to everyone. However, the driving force behind this experiment was not Bockelson's love of freedom but the religious fanaticism of the "chosen ones."

The Anabaptist regime was, contrary to all legends, thoroughly authoritarian and led to a new tyrannical code of laws that permitted men to practice polygamy* and forbade children from talking back to their parents under penalty of death. It culminated in the coronation of Jan Bockelson as "King of the Children of God and ruler of the new Zion." The rebellious citizens and peasants of Münster had indeed proven that they could free themselves from the authorities and

organize themselves successfully, even economically—but only at the cost of a new rule that was hardly less tyrannical than the old. After a long siege and famine, Münster was finally taken by episcopal troops.

The victors took bloody revenge.

After this experience, the Anabaptists became strict pacifists. Especially in Central Europe, they founded numerous communes and communities. The communitarian-pacifist millenarian Jakob Hutter became the founder of a economically flourishing settlement movement in Bohemia, Moravia, southern Germany, and Austria. Although the Hutterites knew no private property and lived relatively modest lives, their solidarity economy brought prosperity to their communities. Besides religious intolerance, economic envy was a main reason that led to their expulsion in 1622. Quite a few emigrated to the New World, where their colonies in the USA and Canada still exist today.

None of this sounds particularly encouraging, nor does it sound like "early forms of anarchy." But let us not forget that we were searching for essentials. So let us try a summary:

Almost all uprising movements show striking similarities. They are always about regaining or defending "freedom." Freedom initially always means shaking off concrete rule. Wherever goals become apparent, they almost without exception point towards equality, community, and justice. Often, as with most peasant revolts, old rights are demanded that are based on collectivity: cooperatives, autonomy, or common property such as the commons*.

With religious heretics, the picture is the same: the guiding motif is always the (re)establishment of a Christianity perceived as "true." And "true" interestingly always means: living in community, acting in solidarity, condemning wealth, shared possessions, rejecting bondage, church hierarchy and power, respect for life, love for people, and — within the limits of an intuitively felt divine ethics — freedom of spirit and usually of the individual person. This reads almost like an anarchist manifesto from the 19th century, if — yes, if only — the dear Lord did not constantly peek out between the lines.

The concept of God is therefore the key to understanding all these rebellions.
We probably cannot comprehend today the simple fact that the Middle Ages was an era in which thinking outside the framework of "God" simply did not take place. Godless thinking was literally unthinkable. "God" was not primarily a religious object here; above all else, God was the only existing system of knowledge. Beyond this image, there was simply nothing, period. "God" was synonymous with "worldview."

Today religion is a private matter. Not every believer in God is religious. Not every opponent of religion is an atheist. Atheists can follow the most varied philosophies. But let us try to imagine today any social or political movement outside our modern worldview! Do Social Democrats, Islamic fundamentalists, fascists, Christians, anarchists, voodoo followers, communists, Buddhists, liberals, existentialists, esotericists, or materialists doubt that a plane flies because forces act according to Newton's laws? Or that the Earth revolves around the Sun? Or that the Moon causes tides? Even the Pope believes this.

The role that natural sciences play in our worldview today was played by God in earlier times. Certainly, many modern people doubt scientific findings — maybe Newton was not right after all, and who really understands Einstein! There is plenty of scientific criticism, and sometimes rightly

so, but still — and this is what matters — we all think within the framework of our current system of knowledge. Of course, so does Einstein, every devout Catholic, and even the esotericists who more than anyone else like to convince with logical analogies.

Precisely for this reason, the idea of "natural law" is so important, that "trick with consequences" that appeared among the Cynics and the Stoics: God is nature and nature is reason! Someone in the Middle Ages could have been seized by exactly the same ideals, feelings, and thoughts as a 20th-century anarchist — yet he would hardly have been able to arrive at a "worldview without God," even if that same person today would probably be an atheist. Just as little as an anarchist today can arrive at a "worldview without nature." Of course, he can criticize the natural sciences, but he nevertheless remains within the framework of our current positive knowledge. Likewise, a thousand years ago he could criticize religion, but not deny the idea of "God" — because that would have meant negating everything conceivable. Max Nettlau's suggestion that fear of persecution prevented many medieval thinkers from sharpening their criticism must be taken with some caution. Clear minds and brave visionaries like Meister Eckhart, Giordano Bruno, Margarete von Porete, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Galileo Galilei, Copernicus, and countless others were not afraid to write down what they thought. For much less, people were burned at the stake back then. Therefore, even if they were genuine precursors of modern natural science, we should hardly understand many thinkers' reference to a divine order as a tactical disguise to protect themselves from persecution. There are no "atheists" in the Middle Ages not because there weren't any, but because they themselves could not possibly have defined themselves that way conceptually.

We would therefore do well to understand many instances where critical medieval thinkers use the term "divine" as an axiom*, much like how today someone says "natural." Many strange restrictions on the concept of freedom then appear in a different light. When old sources say that human freedom finds its limits where it violates divine order, we must "translate" this as our freedom ending at the limits of nature. That suddenly does not only sound understandable but even very reasonable. We can certainly debate these limits of nature and its essence, just as the people of antiquity debated the nature of God and its limits. But arguing whether God existed must be imagined as absurd as a dispute today over whether nature exists.

From this perspective, we should repeat our critical assessment of those movements, and now it becomes really interesting. The question where the libertarian dividing line runs would then be whether God was understood as a religious figure or as an ordering principle. Was He a tyrant or nature, the fearsome monster with a flowing beard, or the fact that the year has four seasons? This test should be applied to every single movement and philosophy we have encountered if we want to assess their content of "anarchism." The more "God-ordained order" was understood as a synonym for "natural harmony," the closer the spirit of such movements was to the positions of today's anarchism. The more critically they distanced themselves from the Bible, the more they resembled today's libertarians who hold a science-critical approach.

Only very few great minds of the time had the education and will to understand the world and at the same time read the Bible against the grain. From rebellious peasants, most of whom could barely read, we should not expect such intellectual achievements at a time when the first Bible translations were still freshly printed. From them sprang the spirit of outrage and revolt.

Ultimately, it is interesting that what both groups — critical thinkers and outraged rebels — imagined as ideal goals closely corresponds in essential parts to what is also the quintessence of modern anarchism: freedom, community, mutual aid, economic equality, and disgust for tyranny.

This shows at least one thing: that there apparently has been a drive in this direction at all times, and libertarian ideas can hardly be dismissed as an "overblown invention of modernity."

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Chapter 22: The Time is Ripe

"Communication is the essence of freedom.
Coercion cannot convince.
Make people wise,
and you make them free."
– William Godwin –

THE BOOK HAD A DREADFULLY LONG TITLE, and it gave British Prime Minister William Pitt a headache. Not because of the cumbersome heading — that sort of thing was fashionable at the time — but because of its content. The content was as explosive as a load of gunpowder. Pitt considered having the author arrested, but ultimately refrained and consoled himself with the thought that "a book priced at three guineas cannot do much harm among people who don't have three shillings to spare."

However, the book was soon being sold at half the price, and workers were forming subscription groups to acquire it. In Scotland and Ireland, the first pirated editions were already circulating.

The book in question is William Godwin's An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness. The manuscript with the ponderous title had sat in a drawer for nine years. In 1793, four years after the French Revolution, it was finally published and immediately caused a considerable stir.

Yet it was far from a justification of the bloody upheaval in France and stood out favorably from the mass of demagogic pamphlets flooding Europe in those years. It was a philosophical work of fundamental principles with shockingly radical conclusions for social life—strictly logical in structure and nearly all-encompassing in content.

At the Threshold of Anarchism: William Godwin

Indeed, the 37-year-old Godwin—who was eking out a living in London as a hack writer—had, without knowing it, written the first "anarchist classic." In many ways, it can still be considered a foundational work. Sadly, one must say, many of his criticisms remain all too relevant today.

Fittingly, Godwin came from an old family of religious dissenters and received a strict Calvinist upbringing that was as egalitarian as it was critical and rationalist. After a brief theological career, he gradually evolved—under the influence of Rousseau and Swift—into an enlightened, radical atheist who, like few other intellectuals of his time, set about analyzing society free from religious or nationalist prejudices. His Political Justice doesn't just touch on isolated aspects of libertarian thought like earlier anarchoid predecessors did, but addresses its entire spectrum in a thoroughly considered system. With Godwin, we find a first global and coherent vision of anarchist critique and utopia.

With unshakable persistence, he explores how humanity might achieve the greatest possible happiness. Along the way, he rejects patriotism, positive law, and material wealth, as well as religion, oppression, and servility. In the end, he calmly concludes that such happiness could only be realized under one condition: in a society without government. He deals not only with issues of philosophy, human nature, and ethics but also with economics, education, administration, law, punishment, violence, sexuality, and even ecology. Naturally, he also asks by what means this new society should be pursued and established, and under what structures people might live in it. His approach is thoroughly rationalist in the spirit of the Enlightenment: Godwin places great hope in human reason; the capacity for intellectual and moral development, he argues, grows with the freedom of its conditions. To that exact degree, authority—and thus the state—would become obsolete. Even in his own lifetime, Godwin had to revise some of this unwaveringly rational faith in humanity in favor of acknowledging the irrational side of human character, thus anticipating modern anarchism, which no longer bases itself on the expectation of reason either.

Pedagogy was Godwin's lifelong passion. Accordingly, he saw this development as a long process of maturation, not something that could be achieved through a sudden, violent upheaval of society. For Godwin, revolution was a sequence of steps. Unlike conventional reformists, however, he already regarded political parties as entirely incapable of truly changing society—200 years ago. Much like Landauer later, he saw no future within state structures. Instead, he recommended a network of small, independent circles meant to inspire their surroundings by example—a vision remarkably close to modern libertarian organizational theory and its catalytic affinity groups. Although Godwin advocated a nonviolent strategy and was a declared opponent of Jacobin revolutionary terror, he was not an absolute pacifist: violence, he believed, might become unavoidable or necessary in certain situations to prevent greater harm.

In place of the existing tyranny, Godwin envisioned a decentralized and simplified society, based on the voluntary association of free and equal individuals. For more complex matters, he developed the idea of coordinating bodies and district federations. For conflicts, he proposed arbitration committees and warned of the dangers of bureaucracy and hierarchy—he proposed rotating offices and voluntary political functions, as well as protection of minorities and the principle of consensus. Godwin's juries are rightly seen as precursors to a libertarian council system.

As an economist, Godwin was one of the first to clearly recognize the connection between property and government: "The rich are the direct or indirect legislators of the state." Like Proudhon later, he distinguished between property and possession and outlined a voluntary communism for production and distribution that allowed ample room for enjoyment, pleasure, and leisure. He recognized the ambivalent role of money and analyzed the contradictions between needs, production, and capital. He was unsparing in his criticism of the conditions in British working life. His claim that in a well-organized free society, the working day could be reduced drastically—to just half an hour per day, he estimated—sounds downright visionary.

Yet Godwin was feared more as a critic than celebrated as a utopian. In fact, he devoted most of his work to examining the conditions of his time—not merely condemning them, like many of his fashionable reformist contemporaries, but dissecting and questioning them as a whole. He was undoubtedly a biting rhetorician. "Whips, axes, and gallows—prisons, chains, and torture racks are the most beloved and common tools for enforcing obedience," he wrote in his reflections on the penal system, which he deemed equally immoral and useless: "Whoever does not come out of prison worse than he went in must either be unusually skilled in the practice of injustice or a

man of sublime virtue." In his novel Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams, published a year later and his first bestseller, he exposed the British justice system in the style of an early psychological thriller.

A free society, Godwin believed, should not destroy or imprison criminals, but treat them "with kindness and gentleness." Another red flag for him was the education system. "National education has the tendency to perpetuate errors and to mold every consciousness according to the same model. (…) It teaches students the art of justifying those doctrines that happen to belong to established knowledge." His educational goal was something else entirely: to enable children to create and enjoy a free society. In doing so, he questioned the entire traditional educational approach, which he saw as inherently despotic, and advocated learning driven by intrinsic motivation, where teachers are regarded as equal partners.

"Once laws have begun to be made, it's hard to find an end to it. Human actions are diverse, and so are their benefits and harms. When new cases arise, the law always proves inadequate, and one must constantly make new laws." Marriage, too, for Godwin, is "a law—and the worst of all laws. (…) It would be absurd to expect that two people could agree completely for a long period of time. (…) The institution of marriage is a system of deceit. As long as I seek to claim a woman solely for myself, I am guilty of the most abhorrent form of despotism."

It is not without irony that Godwin and his partner Mary Wollstonecraft, contrary to their shared convictions, were forced by tragic circumstances to give in to societal pressure and ultimately did marry. However, to the mocking critics who accused him of being a "hothead with cold feet," the two took the wind out of their sails by treating their marriage as an involuntary formality, continuing to grant each other the same freedoms as before.

Their happiness did not last long. Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the first great feminists in history, who had written her brilliant Vindication of the Rights of Woman in 1792, died in 1797 while giving birth to their daughter Mary.

The new century began on a somber note. England, nearly constantly at war with France, entered a long, oppressive period of extreme reactionary patriotism. The French Revolution, already a failure in content, had politically degenerated into the despotism of Napoleon, who ultimately lost the war he had initiated. On the victorious side, England basked in triumph and paved its way toward becoming a global power. Imperialism, industry, and ignorance triumphed. Men like Godwin were forgotten, and reformers of all stripes took over the daily political business. Parties, trade unions, and cooperatives emerged, whose leaders occasionally invoked Godwin — without ever matching the depth or radical universality of his thinking.

Godwin continued to live in London under bleak economic conditions, publishing numerous additional writings that, with one exception, garnered little attention. That exception came in 1812, when the young poet Percy Bysshe Shelley—an ardent admirer of Godwin who had believed his idol to be long dead — visited him. It was a turbulent and consequential meeting, at the end of which the revolutionary and romantic aristocratic offspring became Godwin's son-in-law and even provided him with financial support.

Shelley soon became one of Britain's most celebrated poets. Until his early death in 1822, he remained not only a committed follower of Godwin's life philosophy but also immortalized it in a series of unforgettable works. The Mask of Anarchy is one of the first allegories in which the word "anarchy" is used in a positive light.

When William Godwin died peacefully in his bed in 1836 at the age of 80, the men who would later be known as the "Fathers of Anarchism" were still young lads in Russia and France.

There was no direct connection between them and Godwin—neither personal nor through social movements. Not even his book had gained much recognition outside of England. As a result, the development of these ideas had to start almost entirely anew just a few years later.

It would take a long time for anarchist philosophy to return to the level of insight reached by that unlucky writer Godwin, who had already come to the simple realization at the end of the 18th century:

> "Communication is the essence of freedom. Coercion cannot convince."

Where Did a Spirit Like That Come From in 1793?

In the previous chapter, we were still deep in dark times — where even the boldest minds could only imagine isolated fragments of freedom, and every rebellion had to operate within the framework of divine order. And then, suddenly, two centuries later, the anarchist blueprint is complete and ready to go!?

Well, Godwin is no genius who suddenly fell from the sky. He too had his background—the time was simply ripe for someone like him.

So let us look at what happened between the Reformation and the French Revolution: how social movements intensified and how a diffuse libertarian history of ideas gradually solidified into a genuine anarchist vision—one that merely needed to be "born."

The Skies Begin to Clear

In medieval thinking, there was no place for the individual. For better or worse, it was an age of collective subjugation: people were defined by, assigned to, and used by groups. The world was strictly ordered and clearly structured—there was God, emperor, pope, king, nobles, priests, burghers, and peasants; there was above and below, right and wrong. This was true even in less hierarchical domains—such as free cities with their autonomy or guilds based on mutual aid: everything still remained tied to the group to which one belonged—or didn't. Freedoms only applied within the city walls. Those outside the guild rarely got in; those without a lord had no protection. And those who weren't Christian were burned.

Only with the Renaissance—the "rebirth" of Classical Antiquity in European intellectual life—did things begin to change: Greek philosophers were translated, humanist ideals rediscovered, even fashion and architecture were imitated: antiquity became trendy! The individual was once again visible, old traditions were questioned—and imagination was stirred.

In 1516, Thomas More published his Utopia in England, depicting a scandalously different fantasy society—one that (he subtly implies) was far better than the despotism of his king and patron, Henry VIII (who would later have him executed for unrelated reasons). "Utopia" not only became a new political term, but also sparked a literary trend that continues to this day.

A year later, a theologian named Luther triggered an avalanche of debate in Wittenberg, at the end of which stood the idea of a "free Christian" who could finally read the Bible for himself. The era in which religion defined people—and everything else—was drawing to a close.

Thinkers suddenly began to think—from scratch, like Descartes, the systematic doubter, freely and unbound by sacred dogmas. And they discovered something intriguing: humans are not

static, but changeable—and therefore capable of improvement. Scientists began observing nature, trusting their eyes, and drawing conclusions. Galileo, Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton shook the Church's doctrine and worldview to its foundations. The new keyword was "reason." The result was Enlightenment—and that word is meant literally: it grew brighter.

Europe discovered new continents, people traveled, emigrated, and new goods arrived—the horizon widened. Agriculture and craftsmanship were no longer the economic center. Trade and manufacturing gained importance, and industries emerged whose consequences would shape every aspect of the centuries to come.

After civil war and revolution, England had been a parliamentary democracy since 1688. In 1765, the steam engine was invented. Not long after, a colony defeated its "motherland" for the first time: the citizens of the United States of America now lived under a constitution that spoke of "human rights." And of all places, in France—the classical land of centralization and absolute monarchy—everything tipped over passionately, violently, and chaotically: the 1789 French Revolution brought forth a republic under the hopeful slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."

While the revolution ultimately failed to live up to the humanist ideals of the Enlightenment, it was still its full-fledged child. Revolutionaries beheaded the king—an unprecedented act—and soon began beheading each other and anyone who dared to protest: terror in the name of reason.

The following century initially saw a conservative restoration after Napoleon's fall, but history could no longer be reversed. The seeds of Enlightenment had sprouted.

And with industry came a new class. Freedom—whatever people might mean by it—became a topic for the masses.

Thus, in these three centuries, more happened than in the previous one and a half millennia.

The an-archic thread we are following becomes ever thicker and takes on an increasingly clear shape in intellectual history: first as Enlightenment, then liberal, then libertarian, and finally anarchist—with fluid boundaries between each phase. Along this path, we encounter individuals who can rightly be called early libertarians. Their thinking increasingly approaches a position that would soon be defined as "anarchist."

Godwin stands among them: the first anarchist—because his thought has global scope; yet also the last early libertarian—because he never called himself an anarchist and did not belong to any anarchist movement, which only emerged years later. He quite literally stands on the threshold.

We can find early libertarians by the dozen in these centuries. Here, we'll touch on only the most interesting of them.

The Early Libertarians

The most significant current of Enlightenment thought comes from France. François Rabelais, a former monk who speaks bluntly in his satirical reckoning with the institutions of his time, describes in his 1534 utopia Gargantua and Pantagruel a life free of domination in the imaginary Abbey of Thélème. Life there is anti-authoritarian, bawdy, and pleasure-seeking—but only for the privileged members. The motto of this anarchic vision is: "Do what you will!"

A clearly more libertarian stance is found in Rabelais's contemporary, Étienne de La Boétie. In his philosophical work Discourse on Voluntary Servitude (1571–1573), he fundamentally questions the very existence of government. People, according to La Boétie, submit voluntarily to rule,

for which there is no rational justification—and which, therefore, can be overcome. His analysis of political power forms an early foundation for the idea of civil disobedience, and thus stands firmly in the pacifist tradition.

Michel de Montaigne, a close friend of La Boétie, also offers eloquent traces of libertarian thinking in his work—though more subtly expressed. His warm portrayal of a stateless indigenous society is incorporated almost word-for-word by Shakespeare into his play The Tempest. In the essay On the Education of Children, Montaigne makes a compelling anti-authoritarian argument for teaching with kindness and freedom, without harshness or coercion, culminating in the remarkably modern demand for flowers instead of rods in the classroom.

A strongly anarchist-tinged utopia was presented in 1676 by Gabriel de Foigny. In The Adventures of Jacques Sadeur in the Discovery of the Southern Land, he vividly describes the social order of the terre australe, where church, state, property, and authority are unknown. The inhabitants — incidentally of androgynous nature — coordinate with one another in a daily morning assembly.

Foigny, who had settled in Protestant Geneva, managed to portray the advantages of this society so convincingly that the authorities deemed his book subversive and briefly imprisoned him. A German translation of the Voyage to the Southern Land appeared in 1704 and is considered the ancestor of German-language libertarian literature.

The popular utopian form was also employed by François de Fénelon, archbishop and tutor to the young Duke of Burgundy. In his didactic novel Télémaque (1699), he compares the land of La Bétique with the city of Salente. Both bear strong features of a peaceful libertarian communism, though compared to Thélème they are rather puritanical — for happiness, in this view, arises through renunciation. Louis XIV did not find this amusing at all and banished Fénelon.

We know little about Jean Meslier, an angry village priest whose Testament, written around 1720, was only published after his death. In harsh terms, he delivers a scathing indictment of religion and the Church, culminating in the assertion that God simply does not exist.

The anti-clerical part of the Testament, in which the former man of God declares that he would most like to strangle all noble bloodsuckers with the entrails of the priests, was later published by Voltaire.

When one realizes that Meslier also proclaimed that the liberation of ordinary people lay in their own hands — and that this could only occur through a violent social revolution — it becomes clear why the complete text was not printed until 1865.

The two great names of the Enlightenment, Diderot and Rousseau, also deserve a place among the ancestors of libertarian thought. In the case of the famous encyclopedist Denis Diderot, a love for libertarian ideas flourished—though, apparently out of caution — rather in secret.

In private circles, he — who publicly advocated for an enlightened monarchy in the mid-18th century—held the view that nature had given no person the right to rule over others. He, too, wrote a utopia, naturally set in the South Seas, which described a harmonious life without government and laws.

However, he did not dare to publish this Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage. Despite this, his Encyclopédie served for a long time as a source of inspiration and a wellspring for radical and subversive thought.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, to whom the not entirely accurate phrase "Back to nature" is often attributed, was certainly not a dyed-in-the-wool anarchist. He never truly questioned the state or authority; government, however, he viewed as an artificial institution, created by free individuals

in the hope of making life easier. The relationship between rulers and the ruled, he believed, is regulated by a free contractual agreement—the contrat social. The contradiction, however—how freedom and being ruled can coexist—he does not resolve.

Nevertheless, his influence on later anarchism and many of its major theorists was immense. Particularly stimulating were his analysis of the connection between property and authority, as well as his views on education. Rousseau oriented himself by the "laws of nature," which he contrasted with actual conditions — this made him a sharp critic of modern civilization.

With a series of "Discourses," published starting in 1750 and culminating in Émile in 1752, he launched a veritable trend that sparked a collective longing for the "noble savage." His impact on the development of a libertarian movement lies therefore less in the consistency of his ideas than in the wide influence he had, which was rooted in his extraordinary popularity.

Marquis de Sade: One name that was hardly expected in this list is that of the Marquis de Sade, who is known to most people only by his bad reputation, without ever having read him. In France, his writings remained banned until 1957.

It is a mistake to believe that the message of the Marquis' writings consists in "sadism," commonly understood as the pleasure in tormenting others. What he depicts in some of his novellas as sexual excesses is literary fiction, not the life of the real person de Sade.

Insofar as he recognizes the importance of sexuality in general, and examines the consequences of sexual repression, he is a forerunner of modern sexual psychologists such as Wilhelm Reich, as well as of the sexual revolution of the 20th century. Repression of desire is recognized as one of the roots of tyranny.

De Sade, an anti-religious yet highly moralizing man, not only demanded the sexual liberation of women; in his 1794 novel Juliette, he also advocated the view that an anarchic condition of nature is preferable to all laws and governments.

The French Enlightenment thinkers carry an air of a certain philosophical sanctity; at least the great ones among them enjoy the highest reputation. Their ideas deeply shaped the intellectual history of those centuries and remain influential to this day. The names of the early British libertarians are not quite as famous—perhaps also because among them were quite a few men who wrote less and acted more.

Early Libertarian Thought in Britain

During the English Civil War, radical millenarian groups like the Diggers (1649 in Surrey) and Ranters emerged. Inspired by religious ideas, they advocated communal living (no private property) and rejected state, church, and army. The Ranters were even more radical—individualistic, nonconformist, and sexually free—seen as immoral by contemporaries. Leaders like Gerrard Winstanley and Abiezer Coppe were suppressed by Cromwell's regime.

Jonathan Swift: More of a social critic than an anarchist, Swift introduced the Houyhnhnms in Gulliver's Travels (1726): rational horses living in an anarcho-communist style, resolving decisions by assembly every four years. Orwell called Swift a "Tory anarchist."

Edmund Burke: Initially supportive of revolution, he changed his mind post-1789 and wrote A Vindication of Natural Society (1756), which was later republished in the U.S. as an anarchist tract. He opposed political authority as presumptuous.

Thomas Paine: A radical liberal, Paine insisted on minimal government and strongly supported the American Revolution. His 1776 Common Sense frames "society" against "government" and influenced long-lasting libertarian ideas in America, seen today in groups like the Libertarian Party and theorist Murray Rothbard.

William Blake: A poet and critic of authority—"every man hates kings," he wrote—Blake saw prisons as built from law and brothels from religious edicts. A devout Christian, he viewed Jesus as a rebel acting "by impulse, not by law." Blake regarded authority as the root of injustice and the state as hindering true, divine brotherhood.

Continental Germany

Germany also had its libertarian voices. Freiherr von Knigge, often known for social etiquette, was actually a genuine libertarian. Wilhelm von Humboldt (founder of Berlin University) wrote On the Limits of State Action (1772), describing humans as creative individuals needing freedom. He saw the state's role as minimal—at most a "night watchman."

Immanuel Kant: Although he never advocated anarchism, Kant gave a meaningful definition: he considered "anarchy" as law and freedom without enforcement—that is, freedom with norms but no coercion. However, he still viewed it as a negative political form, favoring the republic instead.

The Changing Meaning of "Anarchy" — A Word Transforms

To be sure, this was already a highly enlightened perspective on the term anarchy, which, as we recall, had been transmitted with a negative connotation since ancient Greek times, and whose later development we had not yet followed closely.

Historically, "anarchy" (from Greek origins) carried negative connotations — lawlessness or godlessness. Medieval and Reformation-era figures used it pejoratively, for example to brand Anabaptists. Starting in the 16th century, thinkers like Oresme and Erasmus began using it in political debates.

The negative undertone remained unchanged in the Christian-influenced language of subsequent eras. During the time of the Church Fathers, the word was rarely used, and when it was — such as by Theodoret of Cyrrhus — it referred to a "power subject to no one." In the Middle Ages, the term appeared repeatedly in biblical contexts. Sometimes it meant "beginning," symbolizing the primordial state before Creation, and in other instances, it denoted "godlessness."

Only Nicole Oresme, who translated Aristotle into French, gave a political definition in 1571, calling anarchy the "emancipation of slaves" and introducing the term into the European vernaculars. From the 16th century onward, the word became a philosophical-political term, describing a condition of powerless disorder resulting from a lack of authority. Still entirely negative in meaning, it was associated with social movements only to defame and disparage them.

For example, Erasmus of Rotterdam and John Calvin used the term to slander the Anabaptists. Stephen Gardiner, envoy of Henry VIII, warned the king of the dangers of "anarchy," having found it among those who claimed that humans were subject only to God's law and to nature—a claim not entirely wrong.

By the early 17th century, the term was increasingly used in academic discourse. It broadened—much like in ancient Greek usage—to include meanings such as "licentiousness," and was thrown around in a variety of polemical debates. Now it referred to atheism, barbarism, and Anabaptism—

forces seen as aiming to overthrow monarchy and replace it with "democracy and anarchy"—two concepts explicitly used as terms of horror! Thomas Cooper, the Bishop of Winchester, openly referred to his opponents as "Satan's pestilential anarchists."

During the Enlightenment, "anarchy" continued to be used negatively, even by early libertarians — despite their ideas often aligning closely with modern anarchism. However, the more critical a writer's stance toward the state, the more nuanced their view of an "anarchic condition" became. Thinkers like Diderot, Rousseau, and Mirabeau would have preferred a state of "anarchy" over despotism. The same goes for Godwin, paradoxically the first real anarchist, though he never called himself one.

Only with his son-in-law Percy Bysshe Shelley did the word anarchy take on a positive twist — now describing the triumph of liberation for the oppressed.

With the French Revolution, the term became widely used and highly fashionable — though mostly as a slur, applied to all manner of "radicals": the left-wing Jacobins, followers of Babeuf and Hébert, and all "uncontrollable elements." In 1797, the oath sworn by members of the "Council of 50" even included the phrase: "Hatred of royalists and of anarchy!"

Around the same time, Wieland introduced the word anarchists into German, using it to label "freedom fanatics." Joseph Görres was likely the first in the German-speaking world to use anarchy positively, incorporating it into his typology of religious-social forms of rule.

In 1796, the young Friedrich Schlegel defended the right to rebel against despotism, arguing that tyranny was "a far greater political evil than even anarchy." By 1801, his view had grown more differentiated: for him, anarchy—meaning "absolute freedom"—was now the ultimate goal of humanity, though only as an ideal to be approached but never fully attained.

This shift in Schlegel's thinking is symbolic of the broader paradigm shift of that era: on one hand, a "libertarian climate" emerged, anticipating anarchistic ideas without yet calling them "anarchy." More and more people began thinking in increasingly libertarian ways. On the other hand, the word anarchy, still largely negative, began to be linguistically differentiated, gradually moving toward those positive libertarian ideas. It was only a matter of time before someone brought the two together.

By the early 19th century, Europe had both a growing libertarian climate and a linguistic shift: "anarchy" moved from a term of condemnation to one describing positive, libertarian ideals. These two trends converged into what became modern anarchism.

The Early Socialists

The overwhelming mass of accumulated philosophical ideas we've just worked our way through could lead to the mistaken belief that anarchism is nothing more than a pleasant intellectual exercise. But the anarchist idea also includes social movement and political action. So far, we've seen little of that—mainly because such fusions of philosophy, rebellion, and experimentation were rare in early history. And of course also because we deliberately focused only on the history of ideas in the previous chapters.

At the beginning of the 19th century, however, there were increasingly frequent attempts at practical experimentation, in which the application of an idea took center stage. Somewhat arbitrarily, these movements were later grouped together under the term "early socialism"; Marx and Engels referred to them—quite disdainfully—as "utopian socialism." The driving force behind

their actions became the worsening social problems caused by accelerating industrialization. The ideas and experiences of these movements later served as a source for social democracy, communism, and anarchism alike, since at that time the elements of all three currents were still freely intermixed. For all three, they form the link between intellectual history and social movement. We could just as easily have addressed them under the category of "early libertarians", since anarchic elements are, of course, also evident among the early socialists. But they differed from the early libertarians in one key way: their focus on practical implementation—an aspect entirely absent in the more theoretically mature work of Godwin, for example.

The French social critic Claude Henri de Saint-Simon, a destitute count who fought alongside Washington in the American War of Independence, recognized—like many of his contemporaries—the devastating social effects of industrialization. His critique focused on the question of property: inheritance should be abolished, and the means of production should become communal property. Science and industry were to be the pillars of a future classless society, managed by a hierarchy of the most capable. It's easy to recognize in this the roots of Marxist communism. However, Saint-Simon saw the driving force of the movement in public education and the enlightened bourgeoisie; the working class was more a target audience to be uplifted.

He gathered around him a circle of prominent figures and orchestrated an ambitious infiltration of France's institutions. Even after the death of their master, the Saint-Simonians attained influential positions and played a certain political role around 1830. But many of these reformers became corrupted by their comfortable posts or fell into internal disputes. Naturally, none of this changed the lives of workers—an important negative experience that early anarchism would not forget. Starting with Bakunin, anarchists became resolute opponents of all forms of "political careerism." Even in 1970, German anarchists issued a stern warning to the APO against the "long march through the institutions."

Most disillusioned followers of Saint-Simon subsequently turned to the ideas of Charles Fourier. As a merchant, Fourier developed a deep aversion to the "parasitic nature" of his profession and became a thorough critic of the system. His views—especially in his younger years—were far more libertarian than Saint-Simon's, and they influenced anarchists from Kropotkin to Bookchin. Fourier's worldview is expansive, imaginative, and contradictory. He envisioned entirely new forms of communal life and labor, with an ethics of work and pleasure suited to human nature. Social freedom, he insisted, is worthless without economic equality:

> "We need luxury for all, not equality in misery!"

Long before Marx, he assessed a society's degree of freedom by the social position of women and their liberation. He also commented on education, sexuality, and ecology — and even advocated for animal rights.

What makes Fourier unique is that he fused all these ideas into a concrete plan for the Phalanstères. In these "colonies of harmony," up to a thousand people were to live, work, and farm the land together. The foundation of labor would be cooperatives, where every member had the right to education, work, and a guaranteed "social minimum." Higher performance would be rewarded with higher "dividends."

But more important to Fourier was pleasure: it was no coincidence that the Phalanstère was to be housed in a kind of palace—a place where passion, joy, abundance, and love could flourish.

This sounds appealing, but in detail, Fourier's ideas often reveal a longing for hedonistic, masculine aristocracy. Although he supported women's equality and rightly recognized that sexual satisfaction contributes to social harmony, he also organized sexuality in a hierarchical way that exposes his male bias. His ideas on education were likewise dogmatic and naïve.

Regulation was his forte: he even described the daily schedule in the Phalanstère so meticulously that there was barely any room left for individual initiative. The life of the commune was so thoroughly planned that it sometimes resembled a gentle prison more than an earthly paradise.

Only after Fourier's death did his ideas gain broader influence. Although he witnessed the foundation and failure of the first settlement in France in 1833, Fourierism only became a significant movement after 1848. Numerous followers developed and promoted his doctrine and tried to implement his utopias. Experiments were carried out in Switzerland, England, Germany, and especially in the USA, where at one point there were three dozen Fourierist communes. However, none lasted more than a few years — most collapsed due to internal conflict.

Fourier's lack of trust in people's freedom, his tendency toward regulation, and his hidden hierarchies were not blameless. But crucially, these early communes provided experiences that proved valuable for the future. Godwin relied solely on persuasion through debate and remained sterile. Fourier added the power of practical example. Even after failure, that had lasting effects: Fourier's ideas of free association and cooperation had a huge influence on the cooperative movement, especially in Britain—and even found resonance in Russia.

Decades later, Fourier continued to influence alternative movements—from the 1892 off-grid settlement La Cecilia in southern Brazil, with its idyllic village called "Anarchy," to the Surrealists of the interwar years, and the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 70s.

Anarchist or Libertarian?

We have now reached the time when the theory of modern anarchism begins to form—and soon becomes a new social movement. The preconditions were all there: in the realm of ideas, the notion of a society free of domination was widespread; economic hardship was giving the working class growing self-confidence; and first practical experiences had already been made.

Of course, it is naïve to believe that from the moment people began to openly call themselves anarchists, a clear distinction between anarchists and non-anarchists became possible. Not everyone who thought and acted libertarian joined the new movement—and unfortunately, not everyone who now called themselves anarchists thought and acted libertarian.

The disunity and contradictions of the new movement alone ensured that, even after Proudhon's "anarchist coming-out," many great libertarian minds chose to remain on the sidelines—though they were very much in sympathy with the movement's ideas and goals. Thus, the line of early libertarians continues seamlessly into the 19th century.

In England, for example, the artist William Morris and writer Oscar Wilde, and in the USA, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, were not only close to anarchism, but in some cases directly involved in anarchist projects. English social philosophers like John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, and Edward Carpenter, who can be described as both libertarian and liberal, all defended the individual's rights against the state and advocated for a minimalist government.

Also belonging to this group is Henry David Thoreau, who in 1854 published "Civil Disobedience", a foundational text for all future forms of nonviolent resistance—and helped establish a deep tradition of libertarian dissent in America.

Certainly worth mentioning here is the often misunderstood German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, whose questionable reputation stems largely from the fact that his sister manipulated his literary estate to suit Nazi ideology. In truth, few have spoken more sharply against state, nation, and religion than Nietzsche. His radically individualistic philosophy of the "Übermensch" is intellectually close to Max Stirner. Anarchists like Benjamin Tucker, Emma Goldman, Rudolf Rocker, and Herbert Read drew inspiration from the Saxon philosopher — while many other libertarians rejected him outright.

Nietzsche himself, incidentally, gave the decisive reason why he did not see himself as an "anarchist." Despite the intellectual proximity, he believed the anarchism of his time was headed in the wrong direction because its "complaints about others and about society sprang from weakness and narrow-minded resentment." That was, in fact, a rather accurate criticism of the anarchist movement in the late 19th century — and in a sense, it still applies to certain cherished self-pitying tendencies found among some anarchists today.

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Horst Stowasser
Pure Freedom
The Idea of Anarchy, History and Future
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First translation into English by Michael Schreiber, 2025.

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