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How to Be an **INDIVIDUALIST ANARCHIST**

by Wendy McElroy



HOW TO BE AN INDIVIDUALIST ANARCHIST

GUIDE 1.1

WENDY
MCÉLROY

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*“Man is born free,
but everywhere he is in chains.”*

—Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*

How do you throw off the chains and live the birthright of freedom? For many the path is anarchism—not merely as a political position but also as the profound understanding that you were born free, you are free. Your natural state is freedom, and no one can chain your mind.

WHAT IS ANARCHISM?

So much confusion and slander surrounds the term anarchism that it is useful to introduce the concept through an explanation of what it is not.

- **Anarchism is not chaos. It means “without the state” but not without order. Indeed, individualist-anarchism involves a type of order known as spontaneous order. (More on this later.)**
- **Anarchism is not violence. Most traditions are explicitly peaceful—for example, the nonviolent anarchism of Henry David Thoreau and Mahatma Gandhi.**
- **Anarchism is not pacifism. A few forms, like the Christian anarchism promoted by Leo Tolstoy, hold pacifism as a central tenet, but most traditions fully recognize the right to use force in self-defense.**
- **Anarchism is not exclusively left-wing. Some forms of left-wing anarchism, like communist anarchism, have received great historical attention. Nevertheless, the first American anarchist was the libertarian Josiah Warren (1798–1874). (For more on Warren, click [here](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individualist_anarchism#Josiah_Warren).¹)**

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individualist_anarchism#Josiah_Warren

- **Anarchism is not an impractical ideal; it is a realistic approach to living individually and within society. Anarchism may be difficult to achieve but, like the ideal of perfect health, it is worth moving as close to as possible.**

If that's what anarchism is not, then what is it? Simply stated, anarchism means "without the state."

Anarchism denies legitimacy to the state. The state is a criminal organization that claims a monopoly over a given territory and requires obedience from the people living there; it is the institutionalization of force. Anarchism looks at the state and does not see services for which people return payment in taxes. What are passed off as services are actually forms of theft and force in and of themselves. Consider the post office, which is often considered benign. By claiming a monopoly over forms of mail delivery, the state robs people who wish to compete of opportunity; it forces people who need the delivery to become customers of the state, whether they wish to or not.

"Anarchists have a 'bad name' in the media, not because they can point to one indiscriminate massacre by anarchists—there have been none—but because the one thing holders of power fear is that they personally should be held responsible for their own actions."

—Stuart Christie

One of the easiest ways to grasp how anarchism functions is to realize it is how most people conduct their daily lives. They live without the state and without realizing that fact. Anarchism is how they function with family, friends, business associates, and even strangers. When a person wakes up in the morning, no law forces him to feed his children breakfast or to kiss his partner rather than beating her. When he carpools with friends to work, the presence of a policeman doesn't make him refrain from picking their pockets. As he moves through the day, no bureaucrat hovers to make sure he pays for a cup of coffee or contributes in his share of the lunch tab. As he walks down the street,

One of the easiest ways to grasp how anarchism functions is to realize it is how most people conduct their daily lives.



he doesn't punch random strangers in the nose. Driving home at night, it is not fear of the state that prevents him from running down pedestrians.

It is civil society that does so. Civil society is naturally peaceful because it consists of voluntary exchanges rather than forced ones. It is from civil society that men acquire the habits and rewards of cooperation. Otherwise stated, most individuals already deal with each other as though they live under anarchy.

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live under anarchy.

*“An anarchist is someone who doesn't need a cop
to make him behave.”*

—Ammon Hennacy

It is the state and other more common criminals that introduce force into daily life. The state arrives in the form of monopoly law that is enforced at the point of a gun. The state tells a person, “You cannot open a business, because it would compete with us or a state-favored corporation.” It says, “Your property is not yours to use but ours to administer.” The state steals a person's earnings to support ventures, even ones that repulse him, such as war; it declares, “Your money is ours to spend as we choose, and your conscience does not matter.” The state requires obedience to a myriad of nanny laws that trivialize an individual's right to choose anything at all, down to which food to chew; it claims, “Your obedience is mine.”

Anarchists respond, “Your property is yours”; “Your money and soul are your own”; and “I do not recognize the state's authority.”

*“Everything the State says is a lie, and everything
it has it has stolen.”*

—Friedrich Nietzsche

WHY ARE THERE DIFFERENT TRADITIONS WITHIN ANARCHISM?

The various forms of anarchism are sometimes called hyphenated-anarchism: communist-anarchism, socialist-anarchism, mutualist-anarchism, Christian-anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism, individualist-anarchism, anarcho-capitalism What unites them all? What separates them?

Traditions within anarchism agree that the state is an institution of organized force and so it is undesirable; that's what unites the hyphenated anarchisms. Where they disagree, however, is on what constitutes institutionalized force and what a society without it would look like.

Contrast the approaches of communist- and (contemporary) individualist-anarchisms.

Communism views laissez-faire capitalism as a form of theft. One reason is surplus value. Popularized by Karl Marx, this concept refers to the value created by workers that is in excess of their labor and production costs. Simplistically stated, a factory worker earns \$1 a week and uses raw material that costs \$1 to produce a good that sells for \$10. According to Marx, a new surplus value of \$8 has been created by the worker. It goes into the pocket of the capitalist factory owner because he is able to appropriate or steal it. The capitalist is able to do so because he owns the means of production, which is protected by the muscle of the state. Thus, capitalism is irrevocably entangled with the exploitation of workers and the violation of their rights. To such leftists, anarchism is necessarily both antistatist and anticapitalist.

Contemporary individualist-anarchism challenges that interpretation. It looks at the same factory worker and owner and sees a consensual relationship by which the worker is paid a wage to which both parties agree and from which both benefit. The profit that the capitalist receives is in exchange for the risks of doing business, for the continuing investment of capital and for his oversight. As long as the state does not promote the capitalist's profit—for example by granting him a monopoly over widget production—then no force or fraud is present. There is only the free market and voluntary exchange.

If the state does intervene by passing laws that favor or harm a business, then the arrangement ceases to be free market and becomes crony capitalism. This is an arrangement in which the state and specific businesses align to their mutual advantage. The ones who suffer are workers, competing businesses, and consumers. Thus, to individualist anarchists, anarchism is antistate and anti-state cronies. It is pro free market, which includes laissez-faire capitalism.

“So where did the idea of laissez-faire originate? Not surprisingly, the words were first uttered by a merchant in the French dirigiste regime of M. Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683), the French minister of finance under Louis XIV. The merchant’s name was M. Le Gendre, described as a ‘most sensible and plain spoken’ merchant and, reportedly, he responded to Colbert’s question: ‘Que faut-il faire pour vous aider?’ (what do you want from me to assist you?), with: ‘laisser nous faire’ (leave us alone).”

—Gavin Kennedy, *Adam Smith’s Lost Legacy*

The profound disagreement over the free market has implications for key concepts used by both forms of anarchism. For example, communist- and individualist-anarchism define class and class affiliation in dramatically different ways. Communist anarchism defines a person’s class affiliation by referring to his relationship to the means of production. He is either a worker or a capitalist; he is either exploited or an exploiter. The two classes are locked in irresolvable class warfare.

Individualist anarchists view the two classes—society and the state—to be locked in irresolvable class warfare.

By contrast, individualist-anarchism defines class affiliation by referring to a person’s relationship to state power; he either cooperates with others on a voluntary basis (society) or he uses force (the state). You are a productive member of society or you are a criminal. Individualist anarchists view the two classes—society and the state—to be locked in irresolvable class warfare. (More on society and the state later.)

Thus, even though all forms of anarchism reject the state as organized force, they can profoundly disagree on what constitutes organized force.



WHAT IS INDIVIDUALIST- OR LIBERTARIAN-ANARCHISM?

“If this is the price to be paid for an idea, then let us pay. There is no need of being troubled about it, afraid, or ashamed. This is the time to boldly say, ‘Yes, I believe in the displacement of this system of injustice by a just one; I believe in the end of starvation, exposure, and the crimes caused by them; I believe in the human soul regnant over all laws which man has made or will make; I believe there is no peace now, and there will never be peace, so long as one rules over another; I believe in the total disintegration and dissolution of the principle and practice of authority; I am an Anarchist, and if for this you condemn me, I stand ready to receive your condemnation.’”

—Voltairine de Cleyre, *Exquisite Rebel*

Those who call themselves individualist or libertarian anarchists do not agree on all aspects of theory. After all, they are anarchists. What is presented here is the dominant viewpoint but not the only one of value. (For an explanation of a competing view within the tradition, please see Gary Chartier’s [“The Distinctiveness of Left-Libertarianism.”²\)](http://bleedingheartlibertarians.com/2012/11/the-distinctiveness-of-left-libertarianism/)

Individualist-anarchism is often based on natural law from which natural or individual rights arise. The word law is not used in a legal or legislative sense. It refers to a principle, or a governing rule, such the laws of physics. Natural means the law is based on the facts of reality and on man’s nature. In its simplest form, then, the type of natural law used by individualist-anarchism is an attempt to ground human values in the facts of reality and of human nature.

Otherwise stated, given what we know about reality and about human nature, is it possible to reason out rules of behavior that maximizes the well-being of human beings? Individualist-anarchism answers “Yes!” and turns to the concept of natural or individual rights. It asks, “Who owns the individual?” There are only three possible answers: the individual does (personal freedom), someone or something else does (slavery), or he is unclaimed property. Individualist-anarchism argues strongly in favor of the first position.

² <http://bleedingheartlibertarians.com/2012/11/the-distinctiveness-of-left-libertarianism/>

“I am not interested in picking up crumbs of compassion thrown from the table of someone who considers himself my master. I want the full menu of rights.”

—Desmond Tutu

A person's claim to his own body is described in different terms, including “sovereignty of the individual,” “self-ownership,” “autonomy,” “self-proprietorship,” and “individual rights.” All the terms refer to the fact that each human being has a rightful jurisdiction over his own body and to the peaceful use of it. It is a jurisdiction that no one else can properly violate. That's the basis of freedom. But to claim his birthright of freedom, every man must respect the equal freedom of others. If he initiates force, then his actions constitute an eloquent argument that freedom is not a human birthright; it is not a natural condition of man. Logically speaking, this destroys his own claim to being free. Rights are either universal or not; they exist to the same degree within each human being or they are not based on human nature at all.

It is this duty to respect rights that every individual carries with him as he enters into society.

Rights and duties are also tools by which to resolve conflict. The nineteenth-century individualist Benjamin R. Tucker used this approach while speculating about the nature of property. Tucker believed ideas arose only because they served a need or answered a question. To illustrate his point, Tucker asked readers to imagine a universe that was parallel to our own but which ran along different rules. The inhabitants could satisfy their needs simply by wishing for goods. Food magically appeared in their hands, clothes miraculously draped their limbs, and a bed popped into existence under their tired bodies. It is unlikely that parallel society would come up with the concept of private property.

To claim his birthright of freedom, every man must respect the equal freedom of others.

He asked, “What is it about the reality of our own world and the nature of man that gives rise to the concept of property in the first place?” Tucker concluded that the idea of property arose as a way to resolve conflicts caused by scarcity. In the real universe almost all goods are scarce, and this leads to competition for their use. Since the same chair cannot be used in the same manner at the same time by two individuals, it is necessary to determine who should use the chair.



The concept of property resolved that social problem. The owner of the chair should determine its use. “If it were possible,” wrote Tucker, “and if it had always been possible, for an unlimited number of individuals to use to an unlimited extent and in an unlimited number of places the same concrete thing at the same time, there would never have been any such thing as the institution of property.”

ENTERING SOCIETY

Rights and corresponding duties are what individuals take with them into society. But why enter at all?

The answer is clear: man is a profoundly social being and society offers tremendous benefits, including friendship, expanded knowledge, a division of labor, and romantic love. Society can maximize your choices if only because many of your decisions, and some of the most important ones, require the presence of other people, e.g., the decision to have a child. Yet you can imagine a society from which you would gladly flee into solitude—for example, a Southern plantation on which you were a field slave and beaten constantly.

The dividing line between a society that benefits individuals and one that destroys them is the use of force.

“A society that robs an individual of the product of his effort, or enslaves him, or attempts to limit the freedom of his mind, or compels him to act against his own rational judgment—a society that sets up a conflict between its edicts and the requirements of man’s nature—is not strictly speaking a society but a mob held together by institutional gang rule.”

—Ayn Rand, “The Nature of Government”

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*“The individual cannot bargain with the State.
The State recognizes no coinage but power:
and it issues the coins itself.”*

—Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*

Two of the most important concepts of individualist-anarchism have been touched on briefly. They deserve to be expanded: the state and society. The nineteenth- and twentieth-century German sociologist Franz Oppenheimer offered a magnificent analysis of the terms in his book *The State*. Oppenheimer wrote, “I mean by it [the State] that summation of privileges and dominating positions which are brought into being by extra-economic power [that is, force]. ... I mean by Society, the totality of concepts of all purely natural relations and institutions between man and man [that is, cooperation].” He contrasted the political means with the economic means—that is, force versus cooperation—in the acquisition of wealth or power. The economic means consist of all voluntary exchanges of labor, goods, and intangibles like culture. Collectively, these exchanges are Society.

Society is a recognition of Rousseau’s statement, “Man is born free.” The State is the embodiment of “Everywhere he is in chains.”

By contrast, the political means consist of appropriating labor, goods, and intangibles. The organization of the political means is the State. As a class, it includes not only politicians and bureaucrats but everyone whose livelihood is based on the wealth that is stolen from productive people through taxes or other appropriation. It includes anyone who receives privileged treatment because of their connection to the state; for example, crony capitalists. It was what the twentieth-century American individualist Albert Jay Nock called “a professional-criminal class.”

Society is a recognition of Rousseau’s statement, “Man is born free.” The State is the embodiment of “Everywhere he is in chains.” Individualist-anarchism returns man to freedom.

A KEY CONCEPT OF INDIVIDUALIST-ANARCHISM

Another key concept of individualist-anarchism is methodological individualism. It is a tool by which to analyze institutions and other social dynamics. It says, “All that exists are individuals.” The individual is the fundamental unit of society and all social arrangements are best understood by examining the interactions of the individuals involved.

“First we must realize that all actions are performed by individuals. ... If we scrutinize the meaning of the various actions performed by individuals we must necessarily learn everything about the actions of the collective whole. For a social collective has no existence and reality outside of the individual members’ actions.”

—Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*

Consider the state. When speaking of the state, it is important to realize that it is an abstraction. Ultimately, the state consists of nothing more than the individuals who comprise it. The state itself has no independent physical existence apart from those individuals; even the buildings that may appear to give expression to the state have been constructed by individuals; they are not the state; they are just buildings. There is no state, only individuals who act on and embody statist principles. When they do so, they act as enemies of society and create conflict where none need exist.

By contrast, the free market creates tolerance and benevolence precisely because people trade with each other out of self-interest. Motives like self-interest are often blamed for creating conflicts between people, but the opposite is true. The advantages of society are maximized when people, including total strangers, cooperate in pursuit of self-interests. Qualities such as tolerance, compassion, and civility flourish when force is removed from a situation; they die when people are coerced or threatened.

When speaking of the state, it is important to realize that it is an abstraction.



In his book *Philosophical Letters*, the French Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire explained why English society was so much more civil and open than French society. A key reason, he concluded, was the freedom of commerce (or pursuit of self-interest) enjoyed by the common Englishman. Voltaire observed,

Go into the Exchange in London, that place more venerable than many a court, and you will see representatives of all the nations assembled there for the profit of mankind. There the Jew, the Mahometan, and the Christian deal with one another as if they were of the same religion, and reserve the name of infidel for those who go bankrupt. There the Presbyterian trusts the Anabaptist, and the Church of England man accepts the promise of the Quaker. On leaving these peaceable and free assemblies, some go to the synagogue, others in search of a drink; this man is on the way to be baptized in a great tub in the name of the Father, by the Son, to the Holy Ghost; that man is having the foreskin of his son cut off, and a Hebraic formula mumbled over the child that he himself can make nothing of; these others are going to their church to await the inspiration of God with their hats on; and all are satisfied.

WHAT WOULD AN INDIVIDUALIST-ANARCHIST SOCIETY LOOK LIKE?

“Anarchism, liberty, does not tell you a thing about how free people will behave or what arrangements they will make. It simply says the people have the capacity to make the arrangements. Anarchism is not normative. It does not say how to be free. It says only that freedom, liberty, can exist.”

—Karl Hess, “Anarchism without Hyphens”

Another dividing line between the various traditions within anarchism is what they believe a stateless society would look like. For example, anarcho-syndicalism aims at an economy of industrial unionism. But individualist-anarchism does not proscribe or dictate any social or economic arrangement and insists only that all arrangements be freely chosen by all involved. It is



not possible to predict the content of those free choices.

The only honest answer to what an individualist-anarchist society would look like is, “I don’t know, and neither does anyone else.” I expect there would be an explosion of innovation and energy that come when individuals and groups are left to run at their own speed and in their own direction. But unlike bureaucracy and socialism, freedom does not have a centralized planner. It is not socially engineered but is the result of millions of decisions made by individuals who pursue their own self-interest.

The only honest answer to what an individualist-anarchist society would look like is, “I don’t know, and neither does anyone else.”

There are two main reasons why no one can predict with any certainty what a free society would look like. The first reason is because such a society is means-oriented rather than ends-oriented. That is to say, the focus is upon the method by which society operates. The method is, “anything that is peaceful,” “society by contract,” “the noninitiation of force,” or voluntaryism.

By contrast, ends-oriented systems focus in on a specific goal and not on a method of operation. For example, egalitarianism aims at creating a pervasive equality across society so that people’s differences are homogenized. It is possible to predict the end result of a successful egalitarianism because it has a set blueprint of what people must do and look like.

People find it difficult to imagine how complex social goals, such as prosperity, would occur without coordination or central planning.

The only end-state individualist-anarchism envisions is the protection of person and property—that is, the removal of force and fraud from society. Whatever society results in at that point is an expression of freedom.

ine how complex social goals, such as prosperity, would occur without coordination or central planning. When they envision order, ranks of soldiers marching in tandem come to mind.

To some people, such an arrangement may seem chaotic, but it is actually an expression of a sophisticated type of order: spontaneous order. Spontaneous order can be a demanding concept. People find it difficult to imagine

In Alan Moore’s *V for Vendetta*, Eve asks, “All this riot and uproar, V—is this Anarchy? Is this the Land of Do-As-You-Please?”

V replies, “No. This is only the land of take-what-you-want. Anarchy means ‘without leaders,’ not ‘without order.’ With anarchy comes an age or *ordnung*, of true order, which is to say voluntary order. ... This age of *ordnung* will begin when the mad and incoherent cycle of *verwirrung* that these bulletins reveal has run its course. ... This is not anarchy, Eve. This is chaos”

When I envision spontaneous order, I picture a large department store on Christmas Eve. If I could hover near the ceiling and achieve a God-like perspective, my first impression might be of frantic or exhausted people jostling each other and rushing from the toy section to the perfume counter. It would look like anarchy in the bad sense.

But what I’m actually witnessing is a sophisticated example of spontaneous order in which all parties achieve their goals even though they do not coordinate with each other. The store wants to sell its goods; the employees want to hold down jobs; the customers want a scarf for Aunt Tilly, cologne for a spouse, a video game for a child. What appears to be the scurrying of an ant hill is the conscious and goal-oriented action of a multitude of individuals whose behavior unintentionally benefits everyone else there, even though they are strangers to each other. Without Christmas shoppers, the store might well go bankrupt. Store clerks would lose jobs; the shopper who wanted to buy that scarf for Tilly would have fewer options. Thus, the chaos I view from above is a perfect example of how the free market satisfies the needs of people without central planning, coordination, or the imposition of rules beyond those of civil society—e.g., a prohibition against violence or theft.

Nonetheless, being unable to script a free society does not cut off educated speculation. Although not an anarchist, Jacob Hornberger of the Future of Freedom Foundation offered a fair assessment of the absence of statism in his “10 Ways a Libertarian Society Would be Different”:

1. **No more welfare-state programs.**
2. **No more income taxation and Internal Revenue Service.**
3. **No more drug war.**
4. **No more Federal Reserve System and government-issued, irredeemable paper money.**
5. **No more economic regulations.**

6. **No more gun control.**
7. **No more immigration controls.**
8. **No more trade restrictions, including sanctions and embargoes.**
9. **No more state involvement in education.**
10. **No more national-security state, including a standing army, military-industrial complex, and CIA.**

To read the article in its entirety, click [here](#).³

I would add, there would be no victimless crime, no laws imposing morality, no national borders, no public schools.

But if those elements would be absent, what would be present?

An amazing diversity of expression and preference. If socialists didn't like the free market in action, then they could set up communes through which to live their own values, much as they do today. And a factory owner could set up a business down the street on his own property. If a group wanted to organize around religious principles and exclude others, then they would be free to do so. Indeed, the Amish and Mennonites provide contemporary examples. If other people want to vote for a leader to whom they transfer certain rights in much the same manner as you assign rights to a lawyer, then they could do so, as long as the leadership is imposed only on those who voted, and only for as long as everyone still agrees. Private societies like the Shriners are examples.

Not everything peaceful or voluntary will be moral. For example, a voluntary society may have strains of racism. Every peaceful means would be available to change people's bad behavior, from boycott to ostracism, from shaming to nonviolent protest. What would not be available is the use force—either directly or in the form of government. Why? Because the freedom of association means that other people have the right not to associate with others for any reason they see fit, including race or gender. They have a right to not invite someone into their homes and to not hire them. And you do not have the right to use force to override their

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³ <http://fff.org/2013/02/01/ten-ways-a-libertarian-society-would-be-different/>



judgment, however wrong that judgment might be. After all, you want the right to shut your own front door and not invite the ignorant racist inside.

WHAT IS PRACTICAL ANARCHISM?

“Direct action meant that the goal ... was to provide ways for people to get in touch with their own powers and capacities, to take back the power of naming themselves and their lives. It was to be distinguished from more conventional political activity. ... Instead of attempting to make change by forming interest groups to pressure politicians, anarchists insisted that we learn to think and act for ourselves by joining together in organizations in which our experience, our perception, and our activity can guide and make the change.”

—Martha A. Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain*

Ideas are indispensable, but direct action is no less so. Having sketched the theory of individualist-anarchism, it is time to explore how to live it. Consider the preceding refusal to commit to a particular vision of a stateless society to be more of a caveat than an actual refusal. For one thing, I have spent many hours conjuring images of what it would look like. I don't want merely to talk about freedom; I want to live it fully in my time.

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One of the most important tasks of practical anarchy is to present a vision of how the essential services provided by the state could be replaced by the free market under anarchism. These services include law enforcement and national defense. This sort of limited state has been called a night-watchman government because it is restrained to protecting person and property. Limited-government advocates argue that only the state can provide such services.

But the discussion of how the free market would provide security from criminals or an invading group has deep and venerable roots. The Belgian-born classical liberal Gustave de Molinari

(1819–1912) respected the free market so deeply that colleagues called him “The law of supply and demand made into man.” Molinari raised a question that deserves serious consideration. Why is security a service that people believe is better provided by the state rather than by the free market?

He stated,

The monopoly of government is no better than any other. One does not govern well and, especially not cheaply, when one has no competition to fear, when the ruled are deprived of the right of freely choosing their rulers. Grant a grocer the exclusive right to supply a neighborhood, prevent the inhabitants of this neighborhood from buying any goods from other grocers in the vicinity, or even from supplying their own groceries, and you will see what detestable rubbish the privileged grocer will end up selling and at what prices!

To him, the free market was clearly preferable. Like every good required by man, security is best provided on a competitive basis with individuals retaining the authority to choose. In short, Molinari was a precursor to free-market anarchism. He was the first theorist to argue that the free market could competitively provide defense, not merely for individuals but for large areas. He proposed a free-market alternative to the service known as national defense. He did so in an article entitled “The Production of Security” and in a book entitled *Conversations on Economic Laws and Defense of Property*.

“The Production of Security” challenged a dominant social theme. The influential seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes had originated some of the fundamental assumptions of Molinari’s day, including what became known as the “Hobbesian state of nature.” Hobbes viewed the natural state between men to be a “war of all against all.” He described this state as thus:

There is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation ... no commodious building ... no knowledge ...; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

Only through a social contract from which the state emerged could men live in harmony. The state made society possible.

Molinari's article opened by arguing the opposite. The natural impulse of man is to combine into society for the mutual advantages that come from trade and other exchanges. He wrote, "[I]mpelled by the self-interest of the individuals thus brought together, a certain division of labor is established, necessarily followed by exchanges. In brief, we see an organization emerge, by means of which man can more completely satisfy his needs than he could living in isolation." That organization is the free market, and it exists to satisfy the needs of man through a division of labor and exchange.

Molinari continued, "Among the needs of man, there is one particular type which plays an immense role in the history of humanity, namely the need for security. What is this need?" It is the individual's need to protect and preserve his person and property. Molinari was not naive. He realized that "since ... Cain and Abel," there had been crimes "against the lives and property of individuals." He acknowledged that Hobbes was correct on one point: Governments are established to address the need for security. "Everywhere, men resign themselves to the most extreme sacrifices rather than do without government and hence security," Molinari agreed. Nevertheless, men were incorrect in doing so because "they misjudge their alternatives." Men would be best served by procuring their "security at the lowest price possible."

Molinari presented three alternative means by which a good or service could be produced. The first was through an assignment of exclusive production and sale—that is, through granting a monopoly to a privileged entity. The exclusivity is maintained by force in order to shut out competition, which raises the price "well above its value, well above the price it would have under a regime of free competition." A monarchy is an example of the monopolization of the service of security; it places authority into the hands of one person or one family.

He posited this:

Under the rule of free competition, war between the producers of security entirely loses its justification. Why would they make war? To conquer consumers? But the consumers would not allow themselves to be conquered. They would be careful not to allow themselves to be protected by men who would unscrupulously attack the persons and property of their rivals. If some audacious conqueror tried to become dictator, they would immediately call to their aid all the free consumers menaced by this aggression, and they would treat him as he deserved. Just as war is the natural consequence of monopoly, peace is the natural consequence of liberty.

The second means occurs when the monopolists are no longer as strong as the consumers to whom they dictate. Then the monopoly is replaced with production that is said to benefit society in general. In his essay “Gustave de Molinari’s Legacy for Liberty,” philosophy professor Roderick T. Long observes, “the market may be managed by ... society as a whole; this is *communism or collectivization*, which in the case of security corresponds to democracy, wherein the security industry is in effect publicly owned.” The authority is in the hands of the collective.

The third means of production is free-market competition. Long continues, “the market may be thrown open to free competition, or *laissez-faire*, a situation which in the case of security Molinari calls *freedom of government*, and which his successors would call *anarchy*.” Here, the authority resides with the individuals who are called customers.

To advocate for the competitive provision of security, Molinari returned to the self-interest of the individual who wished to be safe at the lowest price possible. He argued, “the freedom of labor and of trade” provides the lowest price and the highest efficiency. The interests of the consumer should “prevail over the interests of the producer.”

Thus, the production of security should always be competitive.

And, yet, because security is an essential good for society, it was and is assumed that security must be handled by government through monopoly or collectivization, and not through the free market.

But food is also an essential good. Shelter and energy for warmth are essential goods. Are food, housing, and energy best provided by the state or by the free market? In his book *For A New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto*, the Austrian economist Murray Rothbard offered a thought experiment called “the fable of the shoes.” He wrote, “if the government had, for various reasons, been supplying shoes as a tax-financed monopoly from time immemorial” and everyone had always received shoes from the government, then

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whomever suggested privatizing shoe production would be dismissed. Rothbard predicts the public reaction: “You are opposed to the public, and to poor people, wearing shoes!” Critics would declare: “Who would supply shoes? Which people? How many shoe stores would be available in each city and town? ... What material would they use? ... What would be the pricing arrangements for shoes? Wouldn’t regulation of the shoe industry be needed to see to it that the product is sound? And who would supply the poor with shoes? Suppose a poor person didn’t have the money to buy a pair?” Rothbard called this reaction “status quo bias.”

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Molinari countered the same criticism as Rothbard did about the competitive provision of security. When he asked, “Could security be relegated to free competition?” the answer was a predictable “No.” Why? Because those “who are concerned especially with governments, know nothing about society,” Molinari concluded. “They regard [society] as an artificial fabrication, and believe that the mission of government is to modify and remake it constantly.” To permit the remaking of society, people empower the government “with an authority superior to that of the various individuals of which it is composed.” Molinari rejected the empowering of the state above society, the government above the individual.

He also sketched a blueprint of the alternative. What would a free-market security service look like? To begin with, it would focus entirely on the protection of person and property. That is, it would protect the individual’s interest in safety from criminals and invaders rather than the interests of the state in preserving or extending its authority. This contrasts with a monopoly or collectivized production of security, which leads to external conflict (e.g., war with other nations over territory) and internal conflict (e.g., class warfare over domestic power).

In exchange for protecting individuals from aggression, the free-market agency would receive payment and function as a business. Customers would undoubtedly ask a series of questions of the provider, including if “any other producer of security, offering equal guarantees, is disposed to offer ... this commodity on better terms. ... In small districts a single entrepreneur could suffice. This entrepreneur might leave his business to his son, or sell it to another entrepreneur,” Molinari concluded. “In larger districts, one company by itself would bring together enough resources adequately to carry on this important and difficult business. If it were well managed, this company could easily last, and security would last with it.” In short, Molinari envisioned a system of competing security providers that function much as insurance companies do today. He concluded, “Under a regime of liberty, the natural organization of the security industry would not be different from that of other industries.” (For more on Molinari, please see *Of the Liberty of Government*.)

Question: What would the victim or the defense agency do if the criminal violently resisted apprehension?

“The point to keep in mind is that the criminal is the initiator of coercion. Actions taken by the victim or the defense agency to protect property and life are defensive, hence within the principle of rights.”

—J. Michael Oliver, *The New Libertarianism: Anarcho-Capitalism*

WHAT ABOUT JUSTICE?

In his book *The New Libertarianism: Anarcho-Capitalism*, J. Michael Oliver sketched one method by which an individualist-anarchist society could provide justice. Many others have been offered.

But, first, some background is required.

The state is not necessary for there to be law. History has demonstrated this to be true. The indispensable portion of laws in North America—the part that protects person and property—evolved from customary law. It was not produced by politicians and legislatures but by ordinary people who recognized the value of evolving rules to resolve disputes and to prevent violence. Customary law is defined as “common rule or practice that has become an intrinsic part of the accepted and expected conduct in a community, profession, or trade and is treated as a legal requirement.” The customary law embraced by many Western systems is common law—that is, the part of English law that derived from custom and judicial precedent.

The state is not necessary for there to be order. Common law was and is based on people’s need to interact peacefully and preserve their property. That’s why it evolved. Customary law was meant to preserve order and social harmony in the daily lives of ordinary people. It was a bottom-up approach to social order that became widely accepted. By contrast, legislative law is a top-down process by which lawmakers impose their version of order upon the people.

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Most of the legislation has little to do with protecting person or property; most of it is a violation of person and property. This is the introduction of disorder and social disharmony. Why? Because the state uses legislative law not to promote individual rights but to benefit the few, to benefit the privileged at the expense of all others. The state uses the law to grow.

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Under individualist-anarchism, there would be remarkably fewer laws than exist today. There are several reasons.

Crimes would be limited to attacks on people and property. Victimless or self-affecting crimes, such as using drugs, would not be crimes at all. This alone would eliminate about half the criminals in America. There would be no legal enforcement of morality, such as laws against sex work. There would be no crimes against the state, such as smuggling or disobeying a police officer. No regulations, licenses, or other



state requirements for businesses to violate. In short, laws and the violence that is considered law enforcement would be swept away or vastly reduced. This is especially true since individuals would be able to protect themselves and neighbors by owning guns and other weapons. An armed society is a polite society.

As much as possible, disputes would be arbitrated instead of being tried in court. This would be an attractive alternative as it would reduce the expense. With arbitration and courts provided on a free-market basis, there would be no tax support and the cost of either would be borne by the losing party or split in some manner between both parties.

The focus of justice would be on restitution; that is, an attempt to make a victim whole, or as close to it as possible. This is generally the goal of civil courts when they hear a case involving breach of contract or property damage. Currently, however, criminal courts try a defendant as someone who has committed a crime against the state rather than against the real victim; it is as though the state considers itself to have been raped or burglarized or beaten. If criminal courts aimed at restituting the real victims of violence, or as close to it as possible, then the victims would benefit from the process. The prisons would empty because the goal would not be punishment. The state's hold on the reins of social control would be broken.

The focus of justice would be on restitution; that is, an attempt to make a victim whole, or as close to it as possible.

“Do you want to make it impossible for anyone to oppress his fellow-man? Then make sure that no one shall possess power.”

—Mikhail Bakunin

Having a sense of how dramatically individual anarchist justice would differ from the current non-justice system, consider Oliver's presentation of how crime might be handled on the free market.

A crime has occurred. The victim immediately calls a defense agency in much the same manner the people in distress call a lawyer today. Perhaps he is already a client of the agency or it may well be the first time he contacts them. Agents respond quickly because their remuneration depends on service and speed. Oliver notes, the victim “does not incur any financial obligation to the responders, since the apprehension fee charged by a defense agency is derived from the criminal rather than the victim of the crime.” (This is similar to the percentage fee



charged by lawyers.) The defense fee ensures that the rate of apprehension would far exceed the incredibly poor rate produced by tax-funded noncompetitive police officers whose salaries do not depend on efficiency.

The defense agency works toward a resolution; in fact, various agencies may cooperate as insurance companies often do. “Agencies which have lower chances of apprehending the aggressor might sell information which they gathered to the agency which is most likely to wrap up the crime.” The Liberty Defense Agency is the first to solve the crime but it rechecks everything because, if mistaken, the agency is open to a lawsuit for compensation. This makes for careful law enforcement.

“The Liberty Defense Agency decides to send only a two-man team to approach the suspect at his residence” because he has no history of violence and agents can be expensive. “When the suspect answers the door they present him with a bill, which states the nature of the charge and lists the financial claims against him.” The suspect has three choices:

- **If guilty and impressed by the evidence, then he is likely to negotiate with the agents rather than risk the expense of arbitration.**
- **If guilty but he disputes the expense of the bill, then he can negotiate or go to civil court over the amount.**
- **If innocent, then he can accept arbitration.**

Oliver goes on to spell out the arbitration process as well as other aspect of free market justice. But, again, no one knows with certainty what institutions or procedures would evolve on today’s technologically sophisticated marketplace.

CONCLUSION

Many objections are raised against anarchism, individualist or not. When confronting objections to a political theory, it is important to remember that the theories do not have to be perfect. It almost certainly will not be, if only because there are no perfect solutions to social problems, which include justice and defense. Individualist-anarchism does not promise a utopia.

Nor does it need to. All that a political theory needs to do is answer the problem in a better manner than its competitors. With that in mind, the question becomes, Does individualist-



anarchism provide more justice, freedom, and prosperity than competing forms of anarchism or states? Does it protect the individual better?

“Would you have wished more, or fewer, anarchists around in the Thousand Year Reich or any of the other fantasies of hierarchy?”

—Christopher Hitchens, *For the Sake of Argument*

Since individualist anarchists do not prohibit any other version of anarchism from peacefully forming societies, it clearly protects individuals better and provides more freedom than most other hyphenated anarchisms; Christian-anarchism may be equal in this regard. Unlike the Christian version, individualist-anarchism embraces the right of self-defense and so would provide more justice. It also celebrates the free

Nor does it need to.

market and laissez-faire capitalism, which have been demonstrated to offer more prosperity. Of the anarchisms, therefore, it answers questions and problems in the best manner.

Individualist-anarchism does not promise a utopia.

Even more apparent is the fact that individualist-anarchism protects people, freedom, and prosperity better than the state does. At this point, often all that a limited governmental-ist, a limited statist, has to offer as an objection is, But anarchism is wildly far-fetched! The accusation of being “far-fetched” is strange coming from people who believe government is benevolent, power will not corrupt, and the state will not swell in size and muscle. It is easier by far to imagine living in a political system that resembles the current relationship people have with neighbors and coworkers than it is to summon up images of a limited state that stays limited, and of politicians who do not use power to enrich themselves.

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The state is not inevitable. The state constitutes the chains binding men and denying their freedom. That freedom lives in one word—the ability to say “No.” When that word can be spoken without fear, then a far more important one can occur throughout society: “Yes.”

“A revolution on a world scale will take a very long time. But it is also possible to recognize that it is already starting to happen. The easiest way to get our minds around it is to stop thinking about revolution as a thing—‘the’ revolution, the great cataclysmic break—and instead ask ‘what is revolutionary action?’ ... Attempts to create autonomous communities in the face of power ... would, for instance, be almost by definition revolutionary acts. And history shows us that the continual accumulation of such acts can change (almost) everything.”

—David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*



SUGGESTED READING

- Boétie, Étienne de la. *The Politics of Obedience: The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*.
- Chartier, Gary. “[The Distinctiveness of Left-Libertarianism](http://bleedingheartlibertarians.com/2012/11/the-distinctiveness-of-left-libertarianism/).”⁴
- Chodorov, Frank. *Fugitive Essays: Selected Writings of Frank Chodorov*.
- Konkin, Samuel E. III. The Agorism site has archived SEK3’s work in PDF [here](http://www.agorism.info/).⁵ It includes his book *The New Libertarian Manifesto*.
- McElroy, Wendy. *The Art of Being Free*.
- Molinari, Gustave de. *Of the Liberty of Government*.
- Nock, Albert Jay. *Memoirs of a Superfluous Man*.
- Oppenheimer, Franz. *The State: Its History and Development Viewed Sociologically*.
- Rothbard, Murray. *For A New Liberty*.
- Spooner, Lysander. *No Treason. No. I, No. II. The Constitution, No. VI. The Constitution of No Authority*. [Note: only three parts of this proposed six-part series appeared.]
- Tucker, Benjamin R. *Instead of a Book by a Man Too Busy to Write One*.



WENDY MCELROY

Ms. McElroy is the author/editor of a dozen books on individualist feminism and individualist anarchism. Her most recent book is *The Art of Being Free*.

For more information, please see www.wendymcelroy.com.

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⁴ <http://bleedingheartlibertarians.com/2012/11/the-distinctiveness-of-left-libertarianism/>

⁵ <http://www.agorism.info/>