

# An Essay on Anarchy

Gene Marshall March 2001

I feel some deep affinity with the wildness of any movement which is in wholehearted and joyous rebellion from the stodgy politics, culture, and economics of our mainstream industrial society.

But this does not make me an anarchist. And I do not believe that typical anarchist thinking helps us to become the wild revolutionary movements that are needed.

When you hear some enthusiastic rebel in our culture talking about the final melting away of all governmental structure, you are listening to a philosophical anarchist.

However bad our governmental structures may be, the vision of no government at all is a delusion not an improvement. It may be true that our present political life needs large doses of freedom and creative chaos. The rigid order of the current global economy and its national enforcers needs, I believe, to be loosened up. So let protests happen. Let wildness flourish. Let social critique and creative thinking have all the room it needs to build a viable alternative to the current order.

But let us not in our visionary thinking fall into the pit of naive dream worlds. The real life politics of this or any other age is a struggle to build a new edition of social order, not to do away with social order altogether.

A responsible vision of this new social order needs to reflect the natural wild passion for justice and the wild compassion for one another that is native to our species and is flourishing in our revolutionary movements. But that new social order also needs to be wise about the fact that human beings are prone to temptation, the temptation to cast away their wild freedom and compassion for the pleasure of dogmatic certainty, to cast away their wild freedom and compassion for the pleasure of silly addictions, to cast away their wild freedom and compassion for the pleasure of brutal control over others.

A just social order has to restrain the consequences of such aberrations. Police action itself is not an aberration that will pass away with the coming of a good society. Police action is a good and honorable task right alongside farming or cooking or building or singing or drumming or healing or teaching or anything else that is needed to make human life work. Police action provides humanity with a space of safety within which our freedom can flourish.

This is not a contradiction except in the mind of an idealistic anarchist. In practical living, restraining unfreedom and promoting freedom are two sides of the same coin. What we humans are often reluctant to face is that our true freedom begins with self-restraint. Cain needed to restrain himself from killing Abel before he could enjoy the freedom of a life beyond envy and irrational compulsions. The purpose of police action is to explain that to Cain before he kills Abel. A complete absence of police action would communicate to Cain and to you and I that freedom means it is OK to act out whatever rash feelings come along.

Government never finally melts away because the temptation of Cain never goes away. The grandeur of being human includes the possibility of fleeing that grandeur and becoming some fresh aberration of that grandeur. Bad government is one example of human aberration. Ungoverned rashness is another example of that same aberration.

A fully realistic social perspective embraces the freedom of being human and at the same

time rejects anarchy. Such a perspective allows us to criticize our existing governments even more deeply. We can now hold them accountable for not being the governments they need to be, rather than simply castigating them for being governments at all.

So what do governments need to be? Governments of the future need to be fully reflective of and supportive of the freedom of the human individual. This is the meaning of full democracy, a complete rejection of being ruled from the top-down by someone else's ideology, someone else's morality, someone else's truth and justice. Full democracy rules by the consent of the governed. Indeed, full democracy rules in terms of practical operating consensus patterns formulated by all the governed.

Now a consensus does not mean a conclusion with which everyone completely agrees. A consensus means a practical operational truth, to the construction of which everyone has contributed. A consensus is that statement of truth and/or law that everyone consents to obey, not for always, but for now. Consensus is a process that is ongoing.

And when for the present a particular consensus rules, it rules through the force of governance. Police action in this context is not oppression: it is the action of a democratic population policing itself. Where democracy is absent or degraded, police action becomes part of the oppression.

But in a fully operative democracy, police action is part of our insistence that the process of consensus-building be peaceful rather than violent. And such policing may need to use an appropriate degree of disciplined violent force in order to accomplish this non-violent result. This is not a contradiction: it is just realism.

This fully democratic but non-anarchist perspective also helps us to affirm what is good about our existing governments. The United States does not live up to its own propaganda, but it still remains true that positive values are supported by this long and vital heritage of democratic thinking and governing. This heritage can be built upon; it does not have to be totally replaced.

Even if we believe, as I do, that national governments need to become smaller and that regional and local governments need to be increased in power, we do not arrive at that result by demolishing our existing national governments. Rather we must use our existing national democratic institutions to restrain the multinational corporations and their global institutions.

Some role for large powerful continent-wide and planet-wide governing bodies will always remain necessary as long as humanity chooses to have a global economy and a planet-wide cultural interchange. These large-scope bodies of governance need not be oppressive of regional and local bodies of government. Rather the large-scope bodies need to reflect the will of the governing bodies of smaller scope. The large-scope bodies need to provide the means of arriving at a genuine consensus of all the bodies of smaller scope. The larger-scope bodies need to be authorized by and financed by the smaller scope bodies to carry out their will. As complex this sounds, it is the simple, realistic direction we must go in order to have a planet-wide democratic governance capable of refereeing the economic playing field and thus restraining the huge economic players that now tyrannize our lives.

I realize that many idealistic anarchists will scream at these ideas, nevertheless, I believe that the perspective I am painting needs the anarchist spirit as an ingredient within it. So I say, "Let anarchy reign in rediscovering our freedom, our fun, our joy in being the free compassionate human beings we are." And then I also say, "Let anarchy create the governance we need to restrain the inhumanity we need not be but nevertheless are."