

A Collection of Anarchist Essays

By Mathias Baker



This book is dedicated to our predecessors who fought for our rights and laid the foundations of our happiness.

Table of Contents

Page 7—Anarchist Theory and Praxis

Page 16—Intersectionality and Coalition Building

Page 18—The Risks of Overspecialization in the March for Progress

Page 19—Revolution or Reform?

Page 20—Left and Right: Gradual Change vs. Rapid Change

Page 21—Left and Right: Natural Change vs. Socially Engineered Change

Page 22—Left and Right: Unintended Consequences and Risk Aversion

Page 24—Left and Right: Permanent Revolution or Temporary Revolution?

Page 25—Left and Right: Should Progress Be Easy or Difficult?

Page 26—Left and Right: Tradition vs. Progress

Page 28—Left and Right: Human Nature and Free Will

Page 30—Left and Right: Anarchy Is Order

Page 32—Anarchists and Libertarians: Friends or Foes?

Page 34—Leftists and Liberals: Friends or Foes?

Page 36—Secular Leftists and Religious Folks: Friends or Foes?

Page 38—The Limits of Pragmatism

Page 41—The Limits of Humility

Page 44—The Limits of Gratitude

Page 47—The Limits of Debate

Page 49—The Limits of Political Conversion

Page 51—The Limits of Tough Love

Page 53—The Limits of Nostalgia and Parenthood

Page 56—The Limits of Self-Reliance

Page 59—In Defense of Imagination

Page 60—In Defense of Repetition

Page 62—In Defense of the Left

Page 64—In Defense of Meddlers

Page 66—In Defense of Negative News

Page 68—In Defense of the Internet

Page 71—In Defense of Kink

Page 73—In Defense of Extremism

Page 76—In Defense of Abortion Rights

Page 80—In Defense of Trans Rights

Page 84—In Defense of Gun Control

Page 89—In Defense of Immigrants

Page 93—In Defense of Sex Workers

Page 95—In Defense of Feminism

Page 99—In Defense of Euthanasia

Page 102—In Defense of Education

Page 104—In Defense of Workplace Democracy

Page 106—In Defense of Populism

Page 108—In Defense of Pacifism

Page 111—In Defense of Communism

Page 114—Against Derogatory Language towards Marginalized Groups

Page 116—Against Fatphobia

Page 117—Against Landlords

Page 119—Against the Military

Page 123—Against Leadership

Page 124—Against Nationalism

Page 126—Against the Rule of Law

Page 119—Against the Ruling Class

Page 130—The Case for a Compassionate Left

Page 132—The Value of Ambition

Page 134—Emotional Wellbeing

Page 136—How Anarchism Can Improve Your Personal Behavior

Page 137—Radicalism and Growing Old

Page 139—Rocking the Boat

Page 142—Optimism and Pessimism

Page 144—What We Mean When We Talk about Diversity

Page 147—How Will We Pay for It?

Page 148—Maximum Moral Income

Page 150—Are Anti-Capitalists Hypocrites?

Page 151—There Is No Ethical Consumption under Capitalism

Page 155—How Should We Think about Climate Change?

Page 156—Israel and the Left

Page 158—The Anarchist Case for Self-Improvement

Page 160—My Family in the Philippines

Page 162—Unpaid Labor

Page 164—Idle Hands

Page 166—Prescriptivism and Anti-Prescriptivism

Page 167—Should We Show Conservatives Mercy?

Page 169—Should Children Be Allowed to Vote?

Page 172—Political Labels

Page 174—My Political Pedagogy

Page 175—Why Should You Be an Anarchist?

Page 178—Don't Be a Bystander (Resources)

Page 180—Afterword and Acknowledgements

Page 181—Works Cited

Page 186—About the Author

Anarchist Theory and Praxis

I. What Is Anarchism?

Even those who don't consider themselves anarchists tend to be wary of those in positions of authority. This is because those who hold such positions often abuse their power and then get away with abusing their power. This is why the police can shoot unarmed Black people and usually get acquitted. This is why rich people can get away with anything so long as they have a team of expensive lawyers backing them up.

Many people understand the inherent dangers of unequal power relationships, whether we're talking about rich and poor, boss and worker, cop and civilian, landlord and tenant, or elected and elector. A lot of the population would agree that we should reduce authority and hierarchy in the world to the minimum amount necessary to keep society running. Anarchists would agree, though they tend to have a stricter definition of what counts as necessary authority and hierarchy.

To explain anarchism, let me divide it into two premises. One, all forms of authority and hierarchy are to be considered illegitimate by default. Two, in order for any form of authority or hierarchy to be used, it must demonstrate that it's not illegitimate by proving that it's both necessary and beneficial or else be dismantled and replaced with a more egalitarian institution. This is why anarchists are opposed to both the state and capitalism, which they see as top-down, hierarchical institutions, which by their nature create unequal power relationships.

Another way of explaining anarchism is that it's an extrapolation of basic political principles, such as liberty, equality, and democracy. These values are also held by more mainstream ideologies like liberalism, but anarchism carries these values to their logical conclusion, namely, the complete eradication of almost all forms of hierarchy and authority.

The goal of anarchism is one of two scenarios. One, we should dismantle all forms of hierarchy and authority and create a truly free, egalitarian, and democratic society. Two, if scenario one is unobtainable, then at the very least, we should reduce the disparity of wealth and power between those who are in positions of power and those who aren't to be as small as humanly possible to minimize abuses of power.

To give an example of what this entails, anarchists tend to prefer forms of direct or consensus democracy over representative democracy. The reason for this is that

under representative democracy, the people don't get to make the rules. Rather, they elect rulers who, in theory, govern on their behalf. In practice, politicians govern on behalf of whoever contributes the most money to their election campaigns, specifically wealthy donors. As such, representative democracy functions less like a democracy and more like an oligarchy, where most of the political decision-making power is held by a slim minority of rich people and their government enablers.

This is not to say that representative democracy is as bad as having no democracy at all. Under our current system of government, the public is given some input in political decision making, though that input tends to be a choice between extreme plutocrats (conservatives) or moderate plutocrats (liberals). Still, anarchists don't want a society where we vote for our masters. Rather, we're working towards a world without masters, where people govern themselves and each other without unequal power relationships.

It's worth noting that while in casual settings the words "government" and "state" are used interchangeably, anarchists tend to make a distinction. To anarchists, a government is simply any way of systematically organizing society, whether it's in a hierarchical or egalitarian manner. By contrast, anarchists define the state as being a top-down, hierarchical institution which holds a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence in a given territory; in modern times, this means that the state has control over the military and the police. As such, you can have an anarchist government without it being a state, provided that it's organized in an egalitarian manner.

Are there any forms of hierarchy and authority that anarchists would approve of? I suppose most anarchists would concede that the parent-child relationship is both necessary and beneficial. Then again, once you look at cases of abusive parenthood or situations where teens are disowned by their families and become homeless orphans because they came out as somewhere on the LGBT spectrum, you realize that even that form of authority is not beyond scrutiny. Under anarchism, no form of authority or hierarchy is beyond scrutiny.

It's worth noting that while anarchism can be viewed as a goal to be achieved, it's also useful as a method of analysis. Viewing unequal power relationships through an anarchist lens is often helpful, regardless of whether you try to achieve societal change. Still, the choice between anarchism as something to be built and anarchism as a conceptual tool is a false dichotomy. These two options aren't mutually exclusive; understood properly, they build off one another.

II. What Would an Anarchist Society Look Like?

There are as many proposals for what an anarchist society would look like as there are anarchists. As such, I'll only be going over a few examples of what sort of world anarchists want to create.

One of the most common proposals for an anarchist government is a decentralized federation of anarchist territories run via direct democracy. How this would work is that there would be an election commission, which would receive ballot proposals sent by members of the federation, which would then be voted on via referendums. While such an election commission and any agencies created to carry out the decisions made by referendums would be forms of centralization, they wouldn't be forms of centralized authority. The people who would run such agencies would be less like modern politicians and more like modern civil servants. Just like civil servants, their job would not be to make political decisions but rather to facilitate the decisions made by the governing body. Under our current system, the governing body is made up of the wealthy and politicians. Under anarchism, the governing body would be the general public. Such civil servants would likely have term limits to prevent those who hold seniority from amassing power and influence. They would also be recallable at any time if the populace decides that they are no longer fit to perform their duties. That way, they could be held accountable for failing to fulfill their job requirements, unlike modern politicians, who can ignore their campaign promises without any real repercussions.

As for the economy, anarchists tend to reject the free market on the basis that it inevitably concentrates wealth and power into the hands of a slim minority of rich people. Businesses which outcompete other businesses can grow and open new locations, while less fortunate enterprises either stagnate or are forced to shut their doors. Over time, an increasing amount of market share is held by fewer and fewer companies. Capitalism inevitably trends towards monopoly. By contrast, an anarchist society would run its economy through a planned economy formed through democratic decision making by the populace rather than being handled by a central planning authority.

As for currency, anarchists favor a moneyless society on the basis that allowing money to exist means that it can be accumulated and thus leads to disparities of wealth and power. One common proposal for a moneyless society is that each community can take inventory of what their population wants and needs and then send that inventory list to wherever those goods are manufactured.

If you're wondering how work would be incentivized without paying people, I would point out that the assumption that people would just sit around all day and do nothing were it not for money is untrue. Many retired people do volunteer work or get part-time jobs in their spare time. Many people spend their spare time creating open-source software or art and then post it online for free. Most people want to contribute to their communities and are willing to do work, provided that work is meaningful and/or needs to get done. This need is not fulfilled by capitalism, which has created a massive apparatus of pointless busywork and an endless pile of forms that no one will ever actually read. As such, so long as there are enough people who are willing to do work so that the work that needs to get done is getting done, anarchists believe that everyone should receive an equal share in the necessities and luxuries of life, whether they have a "low-skill" job, an in-demand job, or no job whatsoever. Nobody should have to earn their place in the world. Everyone is entitled to a seat at the table simply by virtue of being human. So to answer the question of how an anarchist society would incentivize work, the answer is that it wouldn't. If people want to work, they can work. If people don't want to work, that's okay too.

Anarchists also have suggestions for how other institutions would be run under anarchism, such as public education, voluntary community self-defense (the anarchist alternative to the police), decentralized militias (the anarchist alternative to the military), and so on. For now though, I'll just leave it at that.

III. How Do We Build an Anarchist Society?

I think it would be doing anarchist praxis a disservice to limit it to only the actions carried out by self-identified anarchists. There are ways of contributing to anarchist goals without necessarily being an anarchist. For example, before I became an anarchist, I donated \$3,675 to the medical fund of a trans woman who was saving up for top surgery. I didn't particularly need the money, so I gave it to her. That's not something I can afford to do all the time, or even most of the time, but once in a while? Sure, why not?

While that was mostly just something nice for me to do for her, it was also a subtle way of living in accordance with anarchist values. After all, if anarchism is about a rejection of arbitrary forms of hierarchy and authority, including arbitrary restrictions on gender expression and gender identity, then it stands to reason that supporting trans rights is a way of supporting anarchism. Under that framework, you can see how all sorts of people can contribute to anarchist goals without being aware of it. Indeed, many forms of progressive, leftist, labor, and environmental activism are

compatible with anarchism. Intentionally or not, these people are collaborators in the project to build an anarchist future.

Individual action is weak, but collective action is strong. A single drop of water may not have much impact, but if you gather enough droplets together and move them in one direction, you have a tidal wave on your hands. Every little bit counts. For whatever it's worth, I feel honored to be a part of the anarchist wave, even if it's just in a small way. With that in mind, here's a list of ways to contribute towards building an anarchist society.

One, vote for the lesser of two evils. While anarchists tend to be suspicious of modern voting due to their aversion towards representative democracy, voting can be an effective form of mitigating damage. After all, if we must have political leaders within the current system, we can do some harm reduction by voting for whoever is the least terrible. In the US, that means the Democrats. In the UK, that means the Labour Party. Still, don't devote too much emotional energy to elected officials. Politicians aren't your friends. At most, you're voting for whoever will be an easier enemy for progressive and leftwing activists to pressure into passing progressive legislation.

Two, join leftwing organizations. For example, there's the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), an activist group that calls elected officials to get them to enact leftwing policies, does political fundraising for progressive and leftwing causes, and gets socialists elected into public office, such as House of Representative members Jamaal Bowman, Rashida Tlaib, Cori Bush, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. There's also the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a group that sends volunteer organizers to help workers who are trying to unionize their workplace. It also offers consultation to union organizers in regard to strategy, media, community support, infrastructure building, and bargaining. While it's nice to do activism for these groups, even paying membership dues can help fund their operations.

Three, donate money to progressive and leftwing causes. For example, *Current Affairs* and *Jacobin* are both excellent socialist magazines which provide insightful and entertaining commentary and help spread leftwing ideas around. There are also various advocacy groups and charities, such as Trans Lifeline, Mermaids UK, the ACLU, and so on.

Four, join a protest. Even the most insulated conservative knows what phrases like "the one percent," "defund the police," and "trans rights are human rights" mean,

whether they want to or not. That's just effective branding, and protests are basically political marketing campaigns where you can advertise your ideology. They can also energize your political base, which makes them more likely to be politically active. For example, the 2020 George Floyd protests coincided with a massive uptick in voter registration for the Democrats, which likely contributed to Biden's win in the 2020 presidential election.

Five, unionize your workplace. This one can be difficult, especially if you live somewhere with right-to-work laws. Still, if you succeed, then you and your coworkers have more of a say in how your workplace is run, such as how high wages are set, how schedules are planned, what your working conditions are like, and so on. Workplace democracy is an essential part of anarchism, and building it wherever you work brings us one step closer to an anarchist future.

Six, create political media to spread anarchist ideas further. You can write editorials, make leftwing web videos, record music, record audiobooks, create art, write books, start a podcast, stream live political content on streaming sites, develop video games, film movies, and more. Even posting leftwing memes on social media can help spread ideas around, though you shouldn't confuse social media posts with activism.

Seven, recruit people to our cause. Even the least social among us can reach out to our families and friends and ask if they'd be interested in joining up. Every little bit counts, and every person you convince to join is a step closer to anarchy. The best advice I can give as far as recruitment goes is to not take it personally if someone rejects your offer. Just because they reject your politics doesn't necessarily mean they're rejecting you as a person, nor does it necessarily mean that they're a bad or uncaring person. Direct activism is only one path out of many, and there are many ways of contributing to society and to progress. Plus, just because one person rejects your offer doesn't necessarily mean that the next person will. Everyone has their own experiences and perspectives, and some people will be more amenable to our cause than others. That being said, I'd say aim for people who will be the most in favor of leftwing policies, such as Bernie Sanders supporters, Green Party members, members of leftwing organizations like the DSA and the IWW, feminists, LGBT people, people of color, poor people, religious minorities, immigrants, Indigenous people, sex workers, disabled people, and anyone else our current system has routinely abused. If you want to destroy the establishment, you should aim to recruit the people who would have the least to lose from the establishment being gone. That's not to say that every member

of a minority group will join you, but they're a safer bet than members of majority groups.

Eight, consider following the philosophy of Antifa. Love them or hate them, Antifa groups do keep their communities safe from far-right militias. It would be nice if we could count on the police to protect us, but the police don't really have a problem with far-right militias. Why would they? The police and the far right share a common purpose in that they both exist to terrorize minorities and political dissidents. As such, if the police aren't going to protect us, we'll just have to defend ourselves and each other. That's where Antifa comes in. Antifa is a philosophy of community self-defense, and it's proven to be effective at scaring off far-right thugs who threaten leftwing protesters.

Nine, go to town halls and speak with local officials. This move typically isn't favored by anarchists because we tend not to like politicians, even local ones. Still, giving a presentation to a town council can affect change on a local level, which can inspire other localities to take similar measures. This builds support for progress at higher levels of government. But don't get too attached to your local officials. Once again, politicians aren't your friends.

Ten, practice principled noncompliance with law enforcement agents. If ICE comes to your door and asks if there are any illegal immigrants nearby, tell them no. Once they leave, you can alert your immigrant neighbors that ICE is on their tail. If the police ask if your friend has been doing drugs, unless they have compelling evidence that your friend has, you claim they haven't. Once they're gone, try to convince your friend to go to rehab and get cleaned up or at least learn to consume in moderation. You have no moral obligation to follow unjust laws, a point which you must accept unless you think that the perpetrators of legalized atrocities such as genocides, massacres, sedition laws, segregation, surveillance, mass incarceration, and slavery were in the right.

Eleven, organize strikes and boycotts. Getting people to not go to work and to stop buying goods and services for a temporary period can cripple the local economy, putting you in a position to make demands of your local government or your workplace. The more people you can convince to join you, the more you can stagnate commerce, and thus, the more demands you can make. Such organizing is difficult, but it can be a highly effective way of forcing the powers that be to make concessions. High risk, high reward.

Twelve, take breaks when you need to. It's difficult to be an effective ally in the fight for progress if you're so depressed and exhausted that you can't even get out of bed in the morning. Even from a practical perspective, it's good to convince your activist friends to rest when they need to, take care of their mental and physical health, and generally be happy. Well-rested allies are more effective allies. More to the point, given how hard our progressive and leftwing predecessors fought for our rights, I think it would be doing them a disservice to not enjoy the fruits of their labor even as we continue their fight for a better world.

Thirteen, stay hopeful. The pessimistic mindset capitulates in advance because it's afraid of false hope, and I won't deny that it hurts to be disappointed. Still, if you never risk failure or being let down, you'll never have a chance at success. You miss every shot you don't take. It's better to try and fail than to not try at all. Fortune favors the bold.

This is not to say that you should be unrealistic. While many people who identify as realists are simply trying to make themselves look more reasonable than they actually are, you should generally base your understanding of the world on ideas that are actually true rather than what you want to be true. Still, pessimism and realism are not synonymous. It isn't more mature to be a pessimist, nor is it childish to be optimistic provided that your optimism is rooted in reality and not just what you want to be true.

If you need hope that the task ahead is possible, here's a list of progressive and leftwing accomplishments that have brought us closer to an anarchist world: abolishing the hereditary monarchy, establishing representative democracy, abolishing slavery, securing women's suffrage, establishing the forty-hour workweek and weekends, establishing workplace safety standards, cutting back on child labor, unionizing workplaces, establishing welfare agencies (Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, etc.), pushing forwards women's liberation (enacting laws against sexual harassment in the workplace, bringing more women into the workforce, enacting more lenient divorce laws, etc.), pushing forwards LGBT liberation (legalizing gay marriage nationwide, pushing for more inclusive representation of LGBT folks in media, etc.), overturning Jim Crow laws, enacting the Civil Rights Act, overturning laws that banned interracial marriage and miscegenation, pushing forwards the rights of immigrants (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals [DACA], pushing for looser restrictions on immigration, popularizing the concept of open borders, etc.), creating accommodations for disabled people (establishing handicap parking spots, investing in disability benefits, etc.), pushing forwards the rights of Indigenous people (protecting land rights

and traditional hunting rights, etc.), establishing and raising the minimum wage, pushing for the transition towards carbon-neutral energy sources such as renewables and nuclear energy, building support for the rights of sex workers, and generally making progress towards a truly free, egalitarian, and democratic society. It doesn't make us naive idealists to point out that given that our forerunners achieved great feats through their labor, if we continue their fight, we can accomplish more.

Of course, a lot more work remains to be done. Climate change is a looming threat. Police brutality and surveillance, both by the state and by private corporations, runs rampant. Various forms of bigotry permeate society in ways both overt and insidious. Capitalism is still ruining lives and the environment. I'm not saying that our mission will be easy or quick, or that there won't be setbacks. We likely won't meet all of our goals within our lifetimes. Nonetheless, we can make whatever progress we can and then pass the torch to the next generation to pick up where we left off, just as our predecessors inspired us to continue their fight. So don't be afraid to demand the impossible and keep demanding it until the powers that be either admit it's not impossible and give it to us or are forced to make whatever is possible their compromise.

Are we utopian? Perhaps, but even utopianism has its uses. It focuses our eyes on the eschatological horizon and helps us keep our moral priorities straight. It reminds us of what we're trying to accomplish and motivates us to keep going when times get tough. Marching towards that horizon may never take us to our destination, but we'll go further than we would have gotten if we had aimed lower. Indeed, given that the path ahead will be difficult, utopianism is arguably necessary for perseverance.

The most common anarchist catch phrase is "no gods, no masters." An appropriate one would be "infinitely approaching utopia." Maybe we can't build a utopia, but we can make the best possible society. That makes the fight worth having.

When I envision the future I want to help build, I see the black flag of anarchism flowing in the wind for all eternity. That vision gives me the strength to keep going. That's why I vote for the lesser of two evils, donate \$25 a month to the socialist magazine *Current Affairs*, pay membership dues to the DSA and the IWW while also recruiting for both, give town hall presentations to my local government, and give away any money I don't need to progressive and leftwing causes. I've become the change that I want to see in the world, and that fills me with joy and confidence. A better world is possible if we fight for it. I truly believe that.

Intersectionality and Coalition Building

Of all the concepts in progressive and leftwing thought, intersectionality is among the most important and is essential to proper leftwing organizing. Intersectionality is the idea that various disadvantaged groups, such as women, LGBT people, people of color, poor people, disabled people, religious minorities, immigrants, disabled people, sex workers, Indigenous people, and so on, have common enemies. After all, there are very few single-issue conservatives. A conservative who opposes abortion rights is also usually against LGBT rights, welfare spending, accommodations for disabled people, less restrictive immigration policies, religious pluralism, civil rights for people of color, respecting the rights of Indigenous people, and the bodily autonomy of sex workers.

It's also relevant that most members of the ruling class are white, male, straight, cis, Christian, able-bodied, native-born, descendant from a colonizing culture, and generally prim and joyless. This is relevant because intersectionality is key to progressive and leftwing coalition building. After all, if the cops decide to abuse both people of color and LGBT folks, then the latter two groups have a common enemy. Intersectionality makes it easier for people to see that despite their differences, they are part of a common struggle against the ruling class. It builds bonds of solidarity and makes the members of different disadvantaged groups more sympathetic to each other's causes. This is why conservatives despise intersectionality. If different groups of people are set against each other, it is easier to use divide-and-conquer tactics. But if those groups team up and become a unified political bloc, they become much harder to deal with.

It's worth noting that there are a vocal minority of leftists who call themselves "anti-id pol" or "anti-woke" leftists. These people think that rather than building solidarity between different disadvantaged groups, the left should try to reach out to conservatives, especially the white working class. They tend to view social issues as less important than economic issues and thus think that fixating on creating working-class solidarity is more important than respecting the rights of social minorities. One of their methods of reaching out to conservatives is appealing to conservative values, such as using ethnic slurs and derogatory language towards LGBT people and immigrants. As you can imagine, these people see social minorities as disposable and see the concerns of, for example, trans people as irrelevant.

Mind you, trans people's problems go beyond pronouns and bathrooms. Trans people are more likely to be fired from their jobs, evicted from their homes, and

disowned by their families for being trans. This is why many trans people are leftists. After all, they're well aware of the abuses that can occur due to concentrated wealth and power, especially when most people who hold that wealth and power are cis. Trans people are willing to fight for your rights, but not if you're unwilling to fight for theirs. After all, why should they stick their necks out for you if you're not going to stick your neck out for them?

Fortunately, "anti-id pol" leftists are a vocal minority and don't represent the majority of the leftwing community. Despite their flaws, most leftists are smart enough to know that they have a better chance of convincing a trans person to be an anarchist than a cis person. After all, why cater to the prejudices of bigots when you could just reach out to the people they're bigoted against? It seems that the people on the receiving end of discrimination are our natural allies.

That's not to say that all members of disadvantaged groups are progressive or leftwing. For example, there are conservative Black people and conservative gay people, like Candace Owens and Dave Rubin. Minority groups aren't a monolith. A wide range of experiences and perspectives come from such groups. Intersectionality isn't about every individual member of a disadvantaged group but rather general trends. The fact that there are a few conservative trans people doesn't change the fact that the vast majority of trans people are either progressive or leftist.

Still, building an anti-capitalist future means working together and cultivating solidarity. That means knowing who your people are and fighting tooth and nail for their rights. Fight for them as rigorously as you want them to fight for you. Advocate for the rights of women, LGBT folks, people of color, poor people, disabled people, religious minorities, immigrants, sex workers, Indigenous folks, and anyone else who's been rejected by capitalism and its government enablers. Curry the favor of minorities, and bring as many of them on board as possible. Hell hath no fury like an oppressed person scorned. Winning in the political arena means coalition building. That means standing with your comrades in arms and making it clear that a strike against one of us is a strike against all of us. Frankly, even if a member of a minority group chooses not to join you, you should still fight for their rights because it's the right thing to do and brings us closer to an anarchist future.

Solidarity forever.

The Risks of Overspecialization in the March for Progress

One common piece of advice for getting work done is to focus on one task at a time. That way, you're not overwhelmed by what you're trying to accomplish, and you can focus on small, manageable goals instead of trying to do everything all at once. To an extent, I agree with this advice. It's often good to narrow your focus to a few things you want to accomplish. Completing large projects usually means dividing them into a series of smaller projects and then going through your to-do list one item at a time. I'll even admit that there's a sort of anarchistic appeal to this method of achieving your goals since splitting a broad vision for what you want to do into discrete tasks and delegating work to others so that there's an equal distribution of labor is the sort of decentralization that anarchists like me are fans of.

Still, there are limits to homing in on one thing; namely, it induces tunnel vision and can lead you to imagine that your pet issue is the only issue worth caring about. Much of leftwing infighting comes down to people believing that the topic they've chosen to single-mindedly pursue matters more than everything else. As such, it's wise to divert some of your attention away from your big personal project and towards being informed about other issues. That way, you can keep the world in perspective and acknowledge that the activism that other folks are devoting time to is just as worthwhile as what you're trying to accomplish.

It's also worth noting that everyone has their own bespoke methods of getting work done. While some people might prefer a more focused approach, others might be okay with taking a break on one project to focus on another. This isn't procrastination. This is accepting that one task is too stressful to be dealt with right now and deciding to move on to a different task for now.

To be fair, I do think that effective leftwing activism means being willing to pick a few key issues and sticking with them. This doesn't necessarily mean thinking that what other leftists are trying to accomplish is frivolous. Pushing forwards the enactment of Medicare for All isn't at the expense of trans rights. There are millions of leftists out there, and so long as issues are worth caring about, there will always be people willing to attend to them.

Still, in the spirit of solidarity, let's remember that we're all in this together. The war against the state, capitalism, and bigotry is fought on multiple fronts. If we want to win, we have to work as a team. Workers of the world, unite.

Revolution or Reform?

A common debate in leftwing circles is the idea of whether we should support reform or revolution. This is basically a decision between incremental change and radical change. I've always favored the idea of doing both. If small victories are achievable, let's go for those. If large victories are achievable, let's go for those. These two options are not mutually exclusive.

Furthermore, incremental change can set the stage for radical change. For example, if one town decides to transition to carbon-neutral energy sources, other towns might take inspiration and begin their own transition, thus building support for statewide legislation for curtailing climate change. Once an entire state has started transitioning to carbon-neutral energy sources, other states might follow suit, thus building support for nationwide measures to reduce carbon emissions. Bottom-up methods of social change are just as effective, if not more so, as top-down methods in accomplishing radical change. Very few people can talk to Congress members. Significantly more people can talk to their local town council.

Still, while anarchists like me generally favor decentralized methods of pushing progress forwards, given that we don't currently live in a stateless, anti-capitalist society, we'll take our wins where we can find them, even if they're from centralized, top-down sources.

There is no contradiction between revolution and reform. Understood properly, they're mutually reinforcing.

Left and Right: Gradual Change vs. Rapid Change

One common argument conservatives like to make is that they're not opposed to change per se. They just think that we should prefer incremental or gradual change over radical or rapid change. They see themselves as being cautious and claim they're opposed to being hasty.

On one hand, it's generally good to not make rash decisions. It's good to consider the effects your actions will have on others before you do them.

On the other hand, when conservatives were fighting against gay marriage, it wasn't because they thought that change was coming too fast. It's because they were opposed to gay marriage happening at all. To the dedicated conservative, it doesn't actually matter whether any given attempt at progress was decades or even centuries in the making. Any speed of progress is too fast for these people.

More to the point, it's true on a superficial level that enacting progress takes time. It requires planning, testing, enacting, and implementation, and then you have to wait for the general public to adjust to the new status quo while also dealing with any unintended consequences your policies had.

Still, the fact that change sometimes takes time is an "is" statement, not an "ought" statement. To use the old progressive standby, "is does not imply ought." For example, if I had a magic wand and could wish away all police brutality, I would do it without hesitation. After all, every moment dawdled in getting rid of police brutality is another moment where people are getting abused or murdered by the cops. It's easy for someone to say that we should be slow to respond to injustice when they're not on the receiving end of that injustice. While this doesn't mean that we should make rash decisions, I generally find that people would prefer their progress sooner rather than later. You're not a good person for allowing people to suffer or die needlessly because you were too cowardly to make the right call when people needed you to. The line between caution and indecision is thin.

Maybe we can't save everyone, but we should try to save as many people as possible. The sooner we make progress, the more people we can save.

Left and Right: Natural Change vs. Socially Engineered Change

A point that conservatives often return to is that they're not against progress in and of itself. They just prefer natural or organic change over socially engineered change. Quite why conservatives get to decide what qualifies as natural or unnatural change on behalf of everyone else is unclear. I don't recall voting for them to be the arbiters of what is or isn't organic.

I suppose it's worth asking what changes conservatives think are unnatural. For example, was the Civil Rights Movement socially engineered? Perhaps modern conservatives would say that the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK), and his cohorts was an example of organic change, but that would've been news to the conservatives living at the time of the Civil Rights Movement. If anything, conservatives of the time dismissed those who marched with MLK as being agitators and sources of communist influence on the American public. To white conservatives at the time, people such as Rosa Parks were the villains, not the heroes.

If I'm being honest, I tend to think that splitting progress into natural change and socially engineered change is a distinction without a difference. For instance, there is nothing more "natural" about reducing government regulations than increasing government regulations. Such policies are top-down decisions made by those at the highest level of government in order to accomplish specific political goals. In the case of reducing government regulations, the goal is to create a world where private corporations can do whatever they want without any public accountability or oversight, regardless of how much our corporate oligarchs abuse their wealth and power.

Anyway, I tend to find it annoying when conservatives describe their political preferences as being natural, a designation they've given over the years to their opposition to trans rights, gay marriage, women's suffrage, and abolishing slavery. Indeed, I recommend responding to conservatives who appeal to nature by taking a piece of paper with "IS DOES NOT IMPLY OUGHT" written in big bold letters on it, balling it up, and throwing it at them.

Would I prefer bottom-up techniques for creating progress over top-down methods? As an anarchist, yes. Anarchists tend to prefer decentralized methods of achieving our goals. For example, progress within one locality can inspire changes in other localities, which builds support for such progress on higher levels of government. Then again, given that we do not currently live in a stateless, anti-capitalist society, I'll take progress where I can get it.

Left and Right: Unintended Consequences and Risk Aversion

Conservatives often frame their opposition to progressive and leftwing policies as them trying to avoid unintended consequences and being averse to unnecessary risk taking. After all, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

On one hand, it's generally good to carefully consider the effects your policies will have and plan for contingencies. It's also usually wise to avoid unnecessary risks. For example, I don't think anyone should play the lottery because frankly, you have a better chance of being struck by lightning on your way to buy a lottery ticket than you have of actually winning the lottery.

On the other hand, just because progressive and leftwing policies sometimes have unintended consequences doesn't automatically mean they're bad. For example, abolishing slavery had a lot of unplanned contingencies, but it was still the right thing to do. In such cases, the question becomes whether the benefits outweigh the costs and whether there are ways of mitigating the costs.

To be honest, I tend to dislike the "unintended consequences" argument because it invites the listener to imagine scenarios where any given attempt at progress will go horribly wrong. The key word is "imagine." You can fantasize all you want about how supporting trans rights will result in the collapse of Western civilization, but that sounds like you're making a slippery slope argument. Having vivid nightmares about how one attempt at progress will inevitably result in a domino effect where society is reduced to ruin sounds like you're jumping to conclusions.

As for risk aversion, I would argue that a life without risks is a boring existence. Living without mistakes means you'll never learn from those mistakes, which means you'll never grow or develop. That's not to say that you should go out of your way to screw up, but forgiving yourself for messing up sometimes is just part of growing up.

Let's say for the sake of argument that you eat a plate of spaghetti, and you like it so much that you decide to never eat anything other than spaghetti ever again. After all, if you ate something else, there would be a chance that you wouldn't enjoy it. Not to make any assumptions about you, but I think it's safe to infer that no matter how much you enjoy spaghetti, you would get sick of it if you ate it for every meal of every day. It's good for people to experiment with food to see what they like and what they don't through trial and error. Admittedly, trying out different types of food is a low-stakes

gamble. The likely worst-case scenario is that you have a bad meal. But more ambitious forms of risk taking aren't automatically invalid.

Conservatives can complain all they want about how any attempt at progress is a form of unnecessary risk taking, but *Roe v. Wade* was over forty years ago, and gay marriage was legalized nationwide in 2015. While those far-reaching policies didn't create a utopia, they also didn't cause the sky to fall. If anything, they greatly improved the lives of millions of people.

Conservatives aren't being prudent. They're just being paranoid, and it would be wise to ignore them.

More to the point, there comes a point when you have to accept that the old ways of doing things just aren't working anymore. It's one thing to try out different permutations of the same idea. After all, there were many failed slave rebellions before slavery was abolished. But what if we're not just talking about a bad execution of an idea? What if the idea itself is just bad, such as bigotry, inequality, and capitalism?

When the old wells dry up, you must go searching for new sources of water or you will die of dehydration. A life without risks is a short march to the grave.

Left and Right: Permanent Revolution or Temporary Revolution?

Conservatives often accuse progressives and the left of supporting a condition of permanent revolution, where everything is changing all the time and nothing is solid or certain.

On one hand, I understand that change can be disorienting. Going through several massive shifts all at once can make you feel uncomfortable.

On the other hand, getting mad at the left for looking for solutions to sociological ailments is like getting mad at medical researchers for looking for solutions to physiological ailments. Indeed, your response to any conservative that accuses you of seeking eternal revolution should be akin to how you would respond to anyone who suggested that we should stop all medical research because they've arbitrarily decided that medicine has gone far enough.

We on the left aren't going to stop because there's still more work to do. Capitalism is still ruining lives and the environment. Climate change is a looming threat. Various forms of bigotry permeate our culture in ways both overt and insidious. Police brutality and surveillance, both by the state and by private corporations, run rampant.

Mind you, a lot of these problems were caused by the predecessors of modern conservatives who built capitalism, proliferated bigotry, encouraged surveillance in the name of "public safety," and spent millions of dollars on propaganda meant to dissuade the populace from taking climate change seriously. Much of the left's job is cleaning up after conservatives' mess.

Progressive and leftwing activists still have a lot of work to do. If conservatives have a problem with it, that's just another reason they're not worth listening to. The world waits for no one.

Left and Right: Should Progress Be Easy or Difficult?

A common conservative claim is that the reason that progress is hard is because it's supposed to be hard. If making social change were easy, people would go around making hasty decisions that would hurt everyone in the long term.

Of course, one of the main reasons that making progress is often so difficult under our current system is because of active obstruction by conservatives. They seem to genuinely believe that stopping policies that would reduce avoidable suffering and death is a moral imperative that's worth pursuing.

This is not to say that making progress is easy. We are dealing with complex, multifaceted societal problems, and solutions to such problems will likely be equally if not more complex.

Then again, the fact that making positive change is often difficult is an "is" statement, not an "ought" statement. Indeed, there is perhaps no more devastating critique of all of conservative thinking than the old adage "is does not imply ought." For example, there's a reason that "work smarter, not harder" is such a common aphorism. You could let your wound get infected, but it would be better if you took an antibiotic. You could get the measles, but it would be preferable to get a vaccine.

You could mow the lawn with a lawnmower, but by conservative reasoning, it would be better if you just plucked each individual blade of grass by hand.

Life in general and making progress in specific are hard enough as it is. We don't need conservatives making things even more difficult than they have to be.

Left and Right: Tradition vs. Progress

A core part of conservative ideology is support for traditional values and customs. To be fair, some traditions are nice. Wearing cozy sweaters during the holiday season and listening to old jazz music are perfectly fine traditions.

However, when conservatives say that they want to preserve our heritage and traditions, what are they referring to? Are they talking about watching a baseball game with family or America's traditional treatment of African Americans? Traditions aren't good simply by virtue of being traditions, and if a tradition is worth preserving, that needs to be proven, not assumed.

As for those who would bring up Chesterton's fence,¹ let me address that right here. Chesterton's fence is meant to imply that you should understand why a social tradition exists before you consider getting rid of it. I've never liked this formulation because it implies that we shouldn't get rid of arbitrary restrictions under the vain hope that those arbitrary restrictions will turn out to have been necessary all along. Even if it were just counseling that we shouldn't make rash decisions, it lets conservatives off the hook by shifting the burden of proof onto progressives and leftists to prove that these practices deserve to be abolished rather than having conservatives argue for why these practices deserve to persist. How convenient for conservatives that they don't have to actually defend their political preferences.

Mind you, even if we did buy into Chesterton's fence, that still wouldn't make conservatives right, because it turns out we do know why these traditions exist. Racial discrimination exists because Americans needed a justification for why it was okay to own Black people as slaves or at least to treat them as inferior. Discrimination against LGBT people and immigrants exists because when a society has a problem, it's often helpful to the ruling class to find scapegoats the general public considers to be outsiders. The fact is that the reasons these injustices exist don't inspire confidence in their supposed necessity.

Traditions don't just deserve to exist simply by virtue of being traditions. Many traditions are just defenses of unjust power structures, and we should do away with such practices.

¹"G. K. Chesterton." *Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G._K._Chesterton#Chesterton's_fence. Accessed 15 May 2021.

Still, if you need a tradition to adhere to, consider the leftwing tradition, which has been used by our predecessors in progress to fight for a freer, more egalitarian, and more democratic society. Our forebearers fought for better working conditions, for better treatment of minorities, and to lay the groundwork for the rights we enjoy today. For all of our faults, those of us on the left are part of a noble tradition which, unlike conservative traditions, is worth carrying on. Our every move is the new tradition.

Left and Right: Human Nature and Free Will

Conservatives frequently rationalize their contempt for progressive and leftwing policies by saying that they have a pessimistic view of human nature and people's ability to rise above their circumstances. One way they express this is by saying that you can't regulate away evil.

This can often be frustrating because there's an unspoken element to this assumption, namely that you can't regulate away *all* evil. On one hand, it's true that countries with strict gun control laws still occasionally have mass shootings. On the other hand, such regions have far fewer mass shootings, and the gun violence they do have tends to be far less deadly. Gun control laws don't make these nations perfect, but they do make them better. If conservatives' metric for whether an attempt at progress is worth attempting is whether it can create a utopia, then there aren't any forms of positive change that the right would be okay with. There's a certain black-and-white worldview that comes with rightwing lines of thinking where either evil exists or it doesn't. The existence of shades of grey and the capacity to create lighter shades of grey doesn't occur to them.

As for human nature, it's worth noting that taking a dour approach to people's capacity to improve themselves has dangerous consequences. For example, if a depressed person comes to believe that they're incapable of reform, such logic tends to be self-fulfilling. Internalizing that mindset means they won't try as hard to develop themselves, which will cause them to stagnate. Speaking as someone who's dealt with depression myself, becoming a happier, healthier person was contingent on strongly rejecting everything that even remotely sounds like the conservative view of human nature and accepting that personal growth was possible for me. That's not to say I became a perfect person, but I'm a better person, and that wouldn't have happened if I took rightwingers at their word.

If I'm being honest, I tend to believe that free will doesn't exist and that people are by and large products of their biology and their environment. As such, when people act in a harmful manner, I think it's often less productive to punish them than it is to address the material conditions that led to their hurtful behavior. Did they rob a store because they were desperately poor? In that case, we ought to invest in poverty reduction measures such as a higher minimum wage and more generous unemployment benefits to reduce the material incentives for such actions in the future. Did they have an untreated mental illness which caused them to have a violent episode? If that's what happened, it stands to reason that we should push for universal

access to mental healthcare to minimize these incidents as much as possible. As for those who are incorrigible, such as those with antisocial personality disorder, while we ought to quarantine them in such a way that they can't hurt anybody, we should still treat them humanely. After all, if their brain is built in such a way that they're incapable of being anything other than cruel, can we truly blame them for their cruelty?

I'm sure that conservatives would deeply resent this formulation because they tend to believe strongly in the existence of free will and insist that if people stopped believing in their ability to make decisions, they would go around doing whatever they want, regardless of consequences, and excuse it by saying that they had no choice in the matter. Quite how rightwingers square their belief in personal agency with their deterministic view of human nature is unclear. I would respond by pointing out that an increasing proportion of the population these days is nonreligious, and such people tend to not believe in free will. Yet secular folks don't typically go around committing murders because it turns out that you don't need to believe in free will in order to infer that hurting others is wrong. The way I tend to articulate the nonreligious approach to personal agency is that whether or not free will exists, we're nonetheless obligated to live a life where we make choices, and the results of those decisions are still meaningful. Whether we attribute those decisions to free will or to the forces of nature is irrelevant. Regardless, we can take measures to ensure that making better decisions is easier for people if the systemic incentives that pressure people into making worse decisions are eroded away.

In order to make society adhere to the lightest shade of grey possible, we should take inspiration from the black flag.

Left and Right: Anarchy Is Order

Conservatives see themselves as keepers of order and civility in the world. They believe that they maintain stability and prevent mob rule from taking over. Of course, the fact they use the phrase “mob rule,” an ancient slur against democracy, should tell you everything you need to know about what conservatism is actually about.

Conservatism is about maintaining a top-down, hierarchical society where people in positions of authority can abuse their power and get away with such abuse. This is why conservatives will stick up for the cops when they commit acts of police brutality. This is why conservatives are apologists for the military when soldiers commit war crimes against foreign civilians. This is why conservatives aren't particularly averse to sexual harassment, hate crimes, and other forms of bigotry because for them, being tyrants keeps the underclass in line. For conservatives and members of ideologies which are extrapolations of conservative values, such as libertarianism and fascism, cruelty is the point.

Aside from being a sociopathic ideology, conservatism doesn't even keep order particularly well. Indeed, many forms of chaos are permitted and even encouraged under conservatism. When people are evicted from their homes because they were unable to pay rent, are forced to rob a store for food because otherwise they'll starve to death, or are pressured into a life of crime because our institutions refuse to invest in poor neighborhoods, these are all forms of chaos that the political right thrives on and will use as “proof” that their version of an orderly society is the only thing standing in the way of civilizational collapse.

This is why conservatives refuse to invest in public services. After all, if public schools are underfunded, they will not function properly. The right will use this as “evidence” that public schools can't function properly and use that to justify defunding them even further and funneling more money into private schools, which aren't subject to the same standards of public oversight and accountability that public schools are. The fact that public schools in countries that bother to actually invest in them, such as various European nations, tend to work just fine is irrelevant to the right.

The long-term trajectory of conservative ideologies is consolidating more wealth and power into fewer hands. This is why the right will never be convinced by appeals to egalitarianism and democracy because they ultimately believe that these values are false. Conservatives might use appeals to liberty as a rhetorical tactic to seize and maintain power, but at the end of the day, they believe that only the people

on top of the hierarchy, that is, the rich and the politicians who govern on the rich's behalf, deserve to be truly free. Everyone else should be obedient to their "superiors" and not question them. That's not so much a defense of liberty so much as a rationalization for totalitarianism.

By contrast, an anarchist society, where people are free to live however they want so long as they're not hurting anybody, is a place where people don't start fights in an attempt to abridge other people's freedom. The egalitarianism of an anarchist world makes it so that if someone tries to abuse a person with their wealth and power, at least that person, with their equal amount of wealth and power, has the means to fight back, which creates a powerful social disincentive for anyone who wants to hurt others. A government run under anarchist democracy is one where people can have their wants and needs met peacefully through a political system that's responsive to people's desires, rather than having to start a riot to get their point across. Anarchy isn't the antithesis of order. Anarchy is order, and a society governed by anarchist principles will be far more peaceful than anything that the political right has to offer.

The foundations of the world we want to create will be built on the ashes of rightwing ideologies. We must burn every trace of conservatism's wretched existence from this earth until the very idea of conservatism is merely a horror story told to our descendants.

Anarchists and Libertarians: Friends or Foes?

While both anarchists and libertarians oppose the state, they arrived at that conclusion from very different premises, and that makes their goals mutually exclusive.

Anarchists reject the state because it's a top-down, hierarchical institution which by its nature creates unequal power relationships. This is why the ruling class can send the cops to gun down unarmed Black people, send soldiers to gun down foreign civilians, lock millions of people in cages with no attempt given to reform people who commit harmful acts, silence dissent through sedition laws, set up surveillance on ordinary citizens, routinely abuse their positions of power by sexually harassing their underlings, and commit genocides while not suffering any legal or financial consequences for doing so.

By contrast, libertarians reject the state because they believe that the government gets in the way of the free market. While they act like they reject authority and support liberty, libertarians aren't particularly opposed to the authority exerted by private corporations. If anything, they want to expand the authority of private entities by privatizing public assets.

As an anarchist, and at the risk of sounding like a statist, my response to libertarians is to point out that at least when a public service provided by a democratic government is being run poorly, you can vote for someone whose platform includes reforming it or join and/or start a campaign to have it reformed. Our current system doesn't give the people *much* of a say, but it does give them a say. By contrast, if a private health insurance company decides to jack up your premiums, you don't get to vote out the current CEO of Anthem. In fact, most US states are dominated by a single health insurance company which holds a de facto monopoly within that territory. So unless you want to pay the costs of out-of-state insurance, which is typically prohibitively expensive, you're stuck with whatever deal your private insurance agency gives you.

This makes libertarian claims about supporting small government and being against government dependency farcical. After all, even if your country doesn't have government-run healthcare, such as Britain's National Health Service, you're still going to need to rely on medical services, whether they're provided by public sources or private sources. As such, the choice between government services and private services isn't about whether you're dependent but rather who you're dependent on. Moreover, privatizing public services doesn't make them "non-governmental" in

anything but a legal sense. It just means that the forces that govern you aren't held by a democratically elected government which is subject to public accountability and oversight. Rather, they're held by private corporations, which don't have mechanisms for democratic control.

In short, libertarians aren't actually against the government. They're against democracy. The world they want to create is one where corporate oligarchs hold all the resources that people need to survive and thrive. In order to gain access to those resources, people will have to appeal to our wealthy overlords, which gives them power over us and makes us beholden to them.

The typical response to claims that capitalism is anti-democratic is that you can "vote with your dollar." Mind you, this formulation implies that people with more dollars get more votes. This is why rich people can donate obscene amounts of money to the election campaigns of politicians so that such elected officials will listen to their demands over the demands of the general public. The wealthy also have more money to throw around for advertising and buying up news outlets, which gives them disproportionate control over influencing public opinion. This makes libertarian attempts to make a distinction between economic and political equality seem absurd. In a world where money is power, economic and political equality are one and the same.

Before you say that capitalism is at least better than the state, it's worth noting that libertarians want to privatize the military and the police. In other words, not only do they support the top-down, hierarchical institutions created by capitalism, but they want such entities to hold a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence in a given territory. At that point, in what meaningful sense is capitalism distinct from the state? In fact, given that private corporations don't have any meaningful avenues for democratic control, the world that libertarians want to create is one of dictatorship and oligarchy.

As such, while anarchists like me aren't particularly fond of the state, we do generally prefer a nominally democratic government, which gives the public a slight say in how things are run, over private corporations, which offer people no say in how they're run. In the long term, anarchists would prefer that we abolish these top-down, hierarchical institutions and replace them with egalitarian alternatives which give people an equal say in how things are run and where no one has significantly more power than anyone else. In the meantime, we'll take democracy where we can get it.

Leftists and Liberals: Friends or Foes?

Before I start this off, I do want to make it clear that while I have criticisms of the center-left, I do think that some of the complaints that leftists have about liberals are disingenuous. For example, while I might not like Paul Krugman or Peter Beinart, I'll take them over George Will or Ben Shapiro any day of the week. Liberal policies, while still bad, are less bad than conservative policies.

In addition, I don't agree with leftists who think that we should reach out to conservatives rather than liberals because while leftists and liberals have different beliefs, they tend to share the same underlying values: democracy, equality, liberty, and so on. By contrast, the left shares no common ground with the right. Their worldview is diametrically opposed to ours. Leftists favor egalitarianism while the right favors hierarchy. Leftists think democracy is good while the right spends unfathomable amounts of money on voter suppression efforts and gerrymandering. Leftists think that being free of arbitrary gender norms would be lovely while conservatives think that believing that there are more than two genders will cause civilization to collapse. So no, I'm not interested in "reaching across the aisle." Even the worst liberal is better than the best conservative. I'll even admit that some liberals do good work. John Oliver in particular does pretty good journalism.

Still, it is worth noting that there's a good reason why many leftists tend to be skeptical of liberals, because while our short-term goals may be similar, our long-term goals aren't.

On one hand, liberals believe that capitalism as it exists is broken and needs to be fixed through government regulations and labor unions. On the other hand, leftists tend to think that capitalism as it exists isn't broken. The machine is working just fine. The problem is that the machine in question is a death machine, and we should turn it off and use a different machine.

See, capitalism is about infinite growth and limitless profits. As such, it's never in a corporation's best interest to favor market stability over shareholder value because that would be antithetical to the core conceit of capitalism. So when reckless banking practices cause a financial crisis, like it did in 2008, that's not capitalism being broken. That's how it's meant to function. A few rich folks make incomprehensible amounts of money while millions of people lose their jobs. That's just business as usual in capitalism.

For another example, liberals insist that while they're proud to be an American, being patriotic doesn't mean that you should be needlessly hostile to immigrants. By contrast, leftists tend to view American nationalism or indeed any form of nationalism as inherently toxic. By necessity, nationalism requires an in-group and an out-group. It's inherently exclusionary and can't be anything but. If you're a member of the out-group, the people in the in-group have few qualms about starting an armed conflict in your part of the world, thus destabilizing the region and setting off a cycle of poverty and suffering for the purpose of enriching private military contractors.

This is not to say that the left can't work with liberals. After all, we have more in common with liberals than with the political right. But our alliance is an inherently temporary one. They are allies of convenience and nothing more.

Secular Leftists and Religious Folks: Friends or Foes?

Speaking as someone who used to be staunchly Catholic, I don't really have any grievances against religious people per se. While I am opposed to abuses of religious authority, I don't think that believing in god or an afterlife is bad in and of itself.

I'll even go so far as to admit that I don't like it when secular people claim that Christians who support LGBT rights are hypocrites who aren't properly following their beliefs. My problem with that formulation is that while the Bible does contain passages that condemn homosexuality, what it means to be a Christian isn't limited to just what's written in the Bible. Christianity isn't just about the contents of one book, but rather, it is a complex social institution with a long history and many different schools of thought. What it means to be a "good Christian" is less about the Bible and more about the cultural consensus of Christians. If enough people say that being a good Christian means X, then it means X. As such, while I could respond to an LGBT-friendly Christian by pointing out the hateful rhetoric in their holy book, what do I gain from that? How does that get me closer to my goals? If some Christians have decided that following the teachings of Christ means accepting and loving their gay and trans friends as they are, more power to them.

Bear in mind that while I'm using Christianity as my example, this same logic can be applied to all religions, such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and so on.

This is not to say that you shouldn't criticize religious institutions when they abuse their power or perpetuate bigotry. While being respectful of progressive and leftwing Christians is wise, you're not obligated to be so charitable with America's Christian right, a group of people who have done a lot to earn our contempt. Anarchism is about scrutinizing and undermining all forms of authority and hierarchy, including ones guided by faith. The cruelty of a tyrant isn't lessened by being done in god's name.

Still, even then, we should make sure our rejection of religiously motivated bigotry doesn't morph into its own form of bigotry. For example, a common talking point among conservatives is that it's hypocritical of progressives to support the rights of Muslim immigrants when the governments of some Muslim countries punish homosexuality by death. Mind you, there are many people in the United States, especially of the Evangelical and traditionalist Catholic persuasion, who hold genuinely repugnant views about LGBT folks that are no better than anything believed by reactionary Muslims. While such members of the religious right are loathsome, even the most stalwart leftists aren't recommending that we exile them from the country.

We don't believe that there ought to be an ideological litmus test for residing in any nation because no country is philosophically homogenous. Instead, our methods of addressing harmful cultural values and customs tend to be based on rehabilitation rather than punishment, such as better representation of LGBT people in the media and public education about topics such as gender identity and gender expression. That way, we can curtail harmful behavior towards LGBT people without resorting to needlessly punitive measures like banning people from entering the country based on their religion.

I suppose the reason that I'm so passionate about this issue is that my path towards being a leftist was inspired by Christian socialists like David Bentley Hart and Elizabeth Bruenig. Indeed, many aspects of various faith traditions are amenable to leftwing goals, and we can tailor our rhetoric to be more appealing to religious folks when we need to.

Building an anarchist society means bringing as many people on board as possible, and if there are people of faith who are receptive to our ideas, it would be wise to reach out to them. We can even inspire them to more fiercely advocate for the rights of the poor and marginalized groups.

After all, to quote history's most famous anarchist, "the meek shall inherit the earth."

The Limits of Pragmatism

A common criticism of progressives and leftists is that they're too focused on high-minded ideals and aren't concerned with practical matters.

On one hand, it's generally good to be pragmatic. If there are immediate problems that need to be solved, you should deal with those first. We can talk about our vision statement later.

On the other hand, there's a reason that self-identified pragmatists often make arguments that are just defenses of the status quo. The history of pragmatists is one of people dealing with problems as they arise without trying to accomplish any broader goals. The problem is that such an approach can only get you so far. If you don't have an idea of what you're aiming for, you'll never know if you're actually making progress or if you're just running around in circles. The legacy of pragmatists is one of people treating the symptoms of our society's problems without dealing with the illnesses themselves, that is, bigotry, capitalism, inequality, and so on.

More to the point, broader ideals aren't incompatible with practical concerns. Understood properly, they build off of one another. For example, if you start with a broad idea—for example, we should curtail climate change—you can start thinking about ways to accomplish that goal—for example, investing more in carbon-neutral energy sources like renewables and nuclear energy, and transitioning from gas-powered equipment to electrical equipment. Indeed, one benefit of broad ideas is that they're easy to spread around to other people, who can then make their own contributions to those ideas and apply them in a concrete way. For example, a car manufacturer might learn about climate change and then invest more in designing electric cars. A local elected official might learn about climate change and create a plan for their town to transition to renewable energy sources.

All this ties into feasibility arguments in politics, which typically revolve around whether a given policy is too radical to be enacted or whether a candidate is too extreme to get elected. My problem with feasibility arguments is that they tend to be self-fulfilling. For example, if you believe that a candidate is too radical to get elected, you're not going to spend the political resources to get them elected, which will cause them to not get elected. Perhaps Bernie Sanders would've had a shot at getting elected as president if the Democratic Party leadership hadn't undermined him at every turn. Their reasoning for not supporting him wasn't that it was impossible for him to be elected, but rather, they didn't want him to be elected. Ultimately, the politicians who

constitute the centrist Democratic establishment are collaborators in the Republican project to protect their wealth and status.

Still, if it makes you feel any better, the same people who make these feasibility arguments also thought that Donald Trump was too extreme to get elected. Turns out these people don't actually have a firm grasp on what is or isn't politically possible.

I'm not going to say that everything is possible, but I will say that you don't really know what's possible until you try. Even if you try and fail, it doesn't necessarily mean your idea can't work. Rather, you ask why this attempt didn't work and then try again later. Progress is a matter of experimentation where you figure out what works through trial and error.

Conservatives will never be okay with this arrangement. They need you to believe that this is just how things are and that there is no alternative. They like to claim that every possible alternative to the current system has already been tried and has been found wanting.

Mind you, while I don't know for certain whether it's possible to create an anarchist world, I do know that the people who say it's impossible, unrealistic, or utopian are the same sort of people who dismissed the Civil Rights Movement, the women's suffrage movement, and the old abolitionists as delusional and naive. You'd think that after being consistently wrong about what is or isn't feasible, these people might stop to consider that their perspective is myopic or whether it's really true that every possible permutation of anti-capitalism has already been tried. Alas, these folks are too committed to the status quo to have anything but a stunted and conservative idea of what's politically possible, so I'm not going to hold my breath. That's okay though. We don't need to convince them. We can work towards a better world on our own. They can join us in this project, or they can die mad about it just as their predecessors did. In a way, that's kind of sad, but in other ways, it's quite funny, so I suppose it balances out.

There are of course drawbacks to focusing exclusively on big ideas. It is generally good to be down to earth enough that you don't miss the trees for the forest. Take care of practical concerns first, and we can talk about whether those concerns fit into our overall goals later.

Still, I do think there is value in being a dreamer and striving towards those dreams. Even if you never fully realize those dreams, you'll still go further towards

accomplishing what you want to accomplish than you would have if you hadn't dreamed in the first place.

To reference a quote often misattributed to Mark Twain: "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."²

²Seybold, Matt. "The Apocryphal Twain: 'The Things You Didn't Do.'" *Center for Mark Twain Studies*, 28 June 2019, marktwainstudies.com/the-apocryphal-twain-the-things-you-didnt-do.

The Limits of Humility

I know I'm not a perfect person. I've hurt people in the past, and I'm sure that as far as my worldview goes, I have a lot of blind spots that I need to work on. As such, I try to be humble enough to do some introspection, listen to good-faith criticism, and hear out valid perspectives. I'm also willing to apologize when I harm people and to dedicate myself to being less harmful in the future. Still, there are limits to humility.

First, while introspection is fine in moderation, too much can lead to an endless cycle of navel-gazing, where you overthink every single decision until you become incapable of making choices at all. Speaking as someone who used to deal with depression, I have firsthand experience with dwelling on mistakes to the point of engendering pathological guilt. Not only is such dogmatic remorse unhealthy, but it didn't even make me a better person. I didn't become more compassionate or less likely to hurt people when I was depressed. If anything, I became a worse person because I came to believe that change was impossible for me. Such pessimism is often self-fulfilling. If you believe that personal growth is impossible, you're not going to put much effort into developing yourself, which will cause you to stagnate.

To the extent that I'm happier today than I was a few years ago, it's because I learned to reject that mindset and accept that I could better myself and become the sort of person I wanted to be. Part of that was learning to be decisive. This is not to say it's good to make rash decisions, but once I've thought about what to do, I just do it. The line between caution and indecision is thin. The people who think that the process of dealing with injustice should be slow usually aren't on the receiving end of that injustice.

Second, not all criticism is in good faith, and not all perspectives are valid. I'll listen to a trans person's opinion on trans issues. I'm not interested in a transphobe's views on the matter. That might come off as dogmatic or closed-minded. I prefer to think that an open mind is not an empty mind, and while you should be willing to change your mind when the evidence shows you're wrong, it's not arrogant to be dismissive of people's opinions when they've consistently been wrong. For example, while many editorial magazines talk about the importance of "ideological diversity," they usually don't publish columns from 9/11 truthers or Holocaust deniers, because they rightfully assume that such perspectives have no value and that giving them a platform would merely help spread disinformation.

I'm sure there are plenty of people who would take issue with the fact that I apply the same logic to every member of the political right, be they conservative, libertarian, or even just someone who unironically uses phrases like "social justice warrior" or "virtue signaling." I tend to think such people's opinions don't merit attention beyond simple debunking or mocking. For those who would say that the right is correct about some issues, I would point out that just because a broken clock is correct twice a day you should invest in broken clocks. Conservatives are often wrong, and even when they're right, they're right for the wrong reasons.

For example, I'm not fond of Joe Biden. I think he's a Wall Street crony who voted for the murderous Iraq War and gave a eulogy for famed racist Strom Thurmond. But when conservatives express their disdain for Biden, their reasoning seems to be an aversion for the fact that he shows support for trans people and occasionally says "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas." To be blunt, I don't think anyone who dislikes Biden for the reasons that rightwingers do is particularly worth my time. I have better things to do than listen to some gibbering fool try to explain why their George Soros memes aren't anti-Semitic.

I suppose the reason I'm so defensive is because a lot of people are told that they're too young, too stupid, or too delusional to have a valid political opinion and that they should just listen to their elders or to whoever our culture has currently anointed as an intellectual.

Mind you, even older people and geniuses aren't gods. They make mistakes all the time. The fact that many older folks vote Republican and that public "intellectuals" like Steven Pinker and Sam Harris often just rehash rightwing talking points about the evils of the modern left demonstrates that we shouldn't take as a given that these people have all the answers.

Of course young people don't know everything, but I think it's good to encourage our youth to think critically and to expand their intellectual horizons. After all, how many people who could've been great innovators or philosophers never realized their full potential because the people around them kept cutting them down and insisting that they could never have a worthwhile opinion? It's good for those with developing minds to be able to express their ideas and to expand upon the ideas made by others. Political philosophy is a collaborative effort, and it's nice when the next generation feels comfortable to speak their minds and even to have a healthy amount of self-assurance.

While an overabundance of self-esteem can lead you to being unable to self-reflect on your actions, being confident doesn't in and of itself make you a narcissist. That's why it annoys me when conservatives dismiss progressives and leftists as being smug. Setting aside that this is an ad hominem attack that wouldn't automatically make us wrong even if it were true, what are they basing this off of? That we're confident in our beliefs? After all, pretty much everyone holds the beliefs they have because they think those beliefs are true. If that makes us arrogant, then everyone is arrogant. Even that's setting aside that the political right are the most cocksure people on earth. When you see how dismissive they are towards poor people, the homeless, drug addicts, and millennials, you really get the sense that conservatives see themselves as a higher caliber of person than everyone else. This is not to say that it's good to be smug. Such an attitude tends to turn people away from your ideas. Then again, at least when the left is smug, it's because they think they're helping people. That the right is so smug about deliberately hurting people and stripping them of their rights and dignity really tells you everything you need to know about where their priorities lie.

So don't be afraid to be confident in your beliefs. There's nothing wrong with being stubborn and uncompromising if you're right. Humility is all fine and good until it's weaponized against us by those who want to play on our insecurities. Ignore such people. You don't need that kind of influence in your life.

You might make mistakes, but that's okay. Building an anarchist world means being willing to forgive each other and ourselves for being hapless screw-ups, which we all are at some points in our lives. Nobody is perfect, and while we should try to be decent people, it's not worth it to dwell on past mistakes.

The Limits of Gratitude

A common criticism of progressives and leftists is asking why they can't just be grateful for what they have. This is tied into the talking point that modern leftists are entitled brats who are making unreasonable demands.

This critique is frustrating because you could make it at almost any point in history. For example, if you went back in time to the antebellum South, walked up to a slave, and told that slave that they should be grateful that they have it better than their cave-dwelling ancestors, such a statement might be technically true, but it's also insulting. You're trivializing a person's suffering by pointing out that someone else had it worse. Just because some problems are smaller than other problems doesn't mean that those smaller problems aren't still problems or that they aren't worth solving. It might be superficially true that living under police brutality is better than being a starving child, but that doesn't mean that police brutality is good.

Similar arguments are made in favor of sweatshops, where the authors state that working in sweatshops is actually good because it's better than living as a subsistence farmer. My problem with such arguments is that they measure progress purely by what someone had before compared with what they have now. A better way of looking at progress is looking at what society provides now versus what it has the technological and economic capacity to provide. Under that lens, sweatshops aren't just bad because they're abusive. They're bad because they're unnecessary. After all, the corporations that run these sweatshops have billions of dollars at their disposal, meaning that they can afford to pay their workers a decent wage, invest in safer working conditions, hire more workers to ease the burden on their current workers, and cut back on child labor. These corporations don't do that because they can unfortunately get away with it, and we should do something about it.

As for complaints about entitlement, such criticisms tend to be based on the fact that modern progressives are asking for more than their parents or grandparents received during their lifetime. For instance, a common argument against a minimum wage hike is to point out that older folks were never paid so much for their work, so why should the youth get more compensation for their labor? The answer to that question is to point out that such logic could be used against any form of progress. For example, an older woman who lived during the women's suffrage movement could get mad at a young suffragette for getting the right to vote even though the older woman spent her entire life not being able to vote. The older woman might claim it's unfair. That might be true, but by that logic, all forms of progress are unfair. We can't go back

in time to prevent someone from having a bad life because we have no influence over the past. What we do have control over is the future, and we can try to ensure that future generations don't have to suffer in the same way as older generations did. Maybe that seems unfair to older people, but why should young people have to go through avoidable suffering just to satisfy the egos of old-timers? It's not fair or egalitarian to make people go through needless pain and misery. While people on the left do believe in fairness and equality, we also believe in compassion and progress.

Do you believe that "nobody should have to suffer like I suffered," or "I had to suffer, So why shouldn't you"? Which one you prefer says a lot about your moral priorities.

Here's the dirty secret: rights are made up. We might believe that people have a right to free speech, but rights exist in their enforcement. If the US government decides to pass sedition laws to punish anti-war protesters, like it did under Woodrow Wilson, then it doesn't matter if the constitution says that people have a right to free speech. If rights are not enforced, they don't really exist. So modern conservatives have accidentally made a cogent point when they say that people don't have a right to universal healthcare because under the current system, they don't.

However, the goal of all progressive and leftwing projects is to increase the number of rights and entitlements that people have. While our current system doesn't give people rights to universal healthcare or tuition-free college, the task of leftists is to build those rights, enshrine them in law, and have them enforced. Once that happens, people will have a right to universal healthcare and tuition-free college, whether conservatives like it or not.

Frankly, given that rich people get richer all the time even though they demonstrably don't need more money to survive or live comfortably, why should ordinary people settle for less? If our corporate overlords are going to keep asking for more, why shouldn't the working class keep demanding more as well? Why aren't rich people considered entitled crybabies even though they ask for more than anyone else? They don't need all that money, so why not spread it around?

To be clear, I'm not saying that we should be ungrateful. Smartphones are cool and the Black Death was not. Most people aren't arguing that progress is bad. I'm also not saying that we should be entitled. It's good to try not to make unreasonable demands from people and to respect the limits of others.

Still, what's unreasonable to ask of the people around you and what's unreasonable to ask from your government are two completely different questions. To be blunt, I think we should keep demanding more from the ruling class and continue taking from them until they have nothing left to take.

Working to create a better future and being grateful for what you have aren't mutually exclusive. You can do both. I have no problem with gratitude until it's used as a weapon against the left.

The Limits of Debate

Let's say for the sake of argument that there is a debate between an evolutionary biologist and a creationist. In this hypothetical scenario, the scientist makes his points very poorly and just isn't a very good public speaker, while the creationist is charming and eloquent. In this situation, much of the debate's audience is going to come away thinking that the creationist won the debate even though evolution is 100% real.

That's the thing about debate: it's not about what's true but rather what's convincing. The unfortunate fact of the matter is that it's not hard to lie or use fallacious arguments really convincingly if you have no shame. What's your audience going to remember more: your opponent saying something short, pithy, and wrong, or you giving a detailed explanation of why what they just said was disingenuous?

The fact of the matter is that when you're debating a conspiracy theorist or a rightwinger, they can throw everything at the wall and see what sticks. They can make whatever argument sounds best, whereas you can't do that. If you're arguing for science or for leftwing ideas, you have to stick with the truth, which is pretty inconvenient if the truth can't be reduced to a memorable sound bite. Also, even if you do decide to give a lengthy reason for why your opponent is wrong about any particular point, they can say ten more wrong things while you're doing that.

Debate is not necessarily always bad, but it's more of an academic sport than a reliable way of arriving at the truth. So if your goal is to convince people to join your cause, it might be better to try different avenues.

To be clear, while I am saying that you generally shouldn't debate rightwingers, I'm not saying that you shouldn't dispute them. You can still refute their arguments and make fun of them, but you don't need their involvement. Indeed, quite a few leftwing YouTubers such as Shaun and Three Arrows have made careers based on demonstrating the falsity of rightwing talking points, and their explanations work better because the people they're refuting aren't invited to participate. The rightwingers don't get to control the messaging or drown them out with a million lies.

If debating conservatives stopped conservatives, they wouldn't be constantly asking to debate leftwingers. They know that if you choose to debate them on, for example, Twitter, that gives them access to your followers. At that point, it doesn't even matter whether everything they say is wrong because all that matters is that they convince at least a few of your followers that they might have a point. If they can do

that, they win. That's of course assuming that they're not just intentionally trying to waste your time or make someone they don't like miserable, which frankly gives a good impression about how pathetic these people actually are.

By contrast, simply addressing rightwingers' arguments or ridiculing them without their involvement can often be a good way to not only stem the tide of bad ideas but also help entertain and engage your audience, which puts them in a better headspace to be willing to consider good ideas. Plus, showing the types of arguments these people tend to make can make your audience better equipped to recognize when such arguments are used again, making them more resistant to being convinced by such arguments.

A common response to such criticisms is "thanks for the free advertising." This is meant to imply that by publicly shaming these people for their views, you're just giving them more attention. First, it's telling that this is their response and not "here's why your criticism was wrong." It's just a means of deflection so that they don't have to admit that they don't have an actual response to the criticisms lobbed at them. Second, it's worth asking, are you giving them free advertising? The answer is that it depends on the situation. For instance, if we're talking about some random rightwinger on Twitter with ten followers, then you probably shouldn't engage with that person. Even if what they have to say is toxic, they can only spread those views to a few people, and thus engaging with them really would give them unwarranted attention. By contrast, if you're talking about opinions published by think tanks like the Cato Institute or the Heritage Foundation, it's worth noting that such think tanks tend to get millions of dollars in funding from their billionaire donors. As such, they're going to get their message out there either way. In that instance, it's actually good to publish arguments for why their positions are wrong or why they're not a reliable source of information.

I will admit that it can be demoralizing to think that the people pushing these false views have a lot of money and influence. If it makes you feel any better, progressives and leftists have been doing their activism for centuries at this point. While there have been setbacks and disappointments, the gains they made were real and worth fighting for. Furthermore, such gains were made against people with more money and power than them.

The truth exercised properly is a powerful weapon against the powers that be. While you probably shouldn't express that truth through debating, it would be appreciated if you helped get the truth out there.

The Limits of Political Conversion

Of all of the forms of progressive and leftwing activism, perhaps the least useful is reaching out to rightwingers and trying to change their minds.

On one hand, I'll admit that it's not always impossible to get people to switch sides. It sometimes happens. For example, Wendell Potter was an executive at a private health insurance agency before deciding to support Medicare for All.³ Humans are often fickle, and our perspectives change a lot over the course of our lives.

On the other hand, let's be clear about what trying to convert conservatives to our ideologies actually entails. We are talking about people who by and large only get their news from rightwing outlets,⁴ only listen to rightwing pundits, and, in some extreme cases, have cut progressive and leftwing friends and family members out of their lives because they don't want that sort of influence.⁵ In short, those who favor the proselytizing approach are trying to change the minds of people who've spent a lot of time and energy in never having their minds changed.

That's not to say that there are zero folks on the political right who can be convinced, and if you find a conservative who you believe is amenable to our cause, by all means see if you can guide them in the correct direction. Still, I often feel that it's better to invest time and resources into other forms of activism than waste time on people who've chosen to remain wrong.

There are ways of achieving progressive and leftwing goals that don't require the approval of conservatives. For instance, if the US government granted statehood to Democratic strongholds like Puerto Rico and DC, what Republicans have to say about Medicare for All or a Green New Deal would be irrelevant. That's not to say that Republicans couldn't still try to seize and maintain power, but to do so, they'd have to appeal to a more solidly progressive electorate. Keeping the GOP alive in such circumstances would mean that conservatives would have to move further left, whether they wanted to or not. Given that this would likely mean that rightwingers

³Potter, Wendell. "Perspective: I Sold Americans a Lie about Canadian Medicine. Now We're Paying the Price." *Washington Post*, 6 Aug. 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/08/06/health-insurance-canada-lie.

⁴Mitchell, Amy, et al. "Political Polarization & Media Habits." Pew Research Center's Journalism Project, 21 Oct. 2014, www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits.

⁵Hilpern, Kate. "You'll Never See Me Again." *The Guardian*, 14 Nov. 2008, www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/nov/15/family-relationships-fdr-defoo-cult.

would have to cut back on their bigoted rhetoric and policies, I wouldn't exactly shed a tear for the political right.

I'm sure that conservatives would complain that such tactics would be cheating. Such an accusation might be more convincing if Republicans hadn't spent the last few decades suppressing voters and taking part in extreme gerrymandering. More to the point, if allowing Puerto Rico and DC to have a say in the government that rules over them means that Democrats would be more likely to win, then it sounds like the only way for conservatives to stay afloat is to eliminate any public say in the decisions that affect their lives. As such, I suppose I appreciate the honesty of rightwing libertarians like Jason Brennan who write books such as *Against Democracy*.⁶ It's good that they're so open about their despotism these days. It means that we don't have to beat around the bush.

If we care about creating a truly free, egalitarian, and democratic society, then we should accept that accomplishing our goals means working around conservatives rather than with them. As far as convincing the public of the value of our policies, we ought to talk past rightwingers rather than trying to start a dialogue.

I'm sure that some liberals would take umbrage with a more hostile approach to achieving progress and would insist that we should sink to our adversaries' level. I'd respond by asking why we should let the political right decide what sinking to their level means. It doesn't make you a good person to try and play a game fairly with someone who's cheating, especially when it's a game with stakes as high as politics.

I'm not asking you to kill conservatives or take away their voting rights. I'm just saying that their ideas are beneath our consideration, and we should practice principled noncompliance with them. To be honest, I sympathize with rightwingers who sever ties with left-leaning family members and friends. I think the discourse about getting out of political echo chambers is often disingenuous.

Just because it's wise to listen to good-faith criticism and valid perspectives, that doesn't mean that all criticism is in good faith or that all perspectives merit attention. There's nothing wrong with being dismissive of someone's views if they've consistently proven themselves to be dishonest.

There's nothing shameful about being in an echo chamber if those echoes speak the truth.

⁶Brennan, Jason. *Against Democracy*. Princeton UP, 2016.

The Limits of Tough Love

One of my least favorite aspects of our culture is the idea of tough love, usually typified by phrases like “hardship builds character” or “hard work builds character.” These phrases aren't always necessarily wrong, but they leave a lot of wiggle room for people to mistreat you and act like they're doing you a favor.

It's like if your boss walked up to you and said, “Hey man, when I made you work dozens of hours of unpaid overtime, that wasn't me taking advantage of you. Hard work builds character. If you think about it, I'm actually doing you a favor by making you work for me for free.” For another example, let's say your high school bully walked up to you and said, “Hey man, all those times that I called you ethnic slurs, that wasn't me trying to hurt you. I was just toughening you up and making you more resilient. Why do you have to be so sensitive?”

Mind you, while it is sometimes necessary for people to learn things “the hard way,” there are often ways to teach people what they need to know without causing needless harm. For instance, having good parenting, strong friendships, and a good education, as well as taking your medicine as directed all build character. Things can build you up and make you a stronger and better person without needless cruelty. It's also worth noting that people learn in different ways. While some people might have a hard time learning certain ideas, for other people, picking up on the same ideas might be intuitive and natural. As such, in cases where it's possible to teach people what they need to know without hurting them, you should do so.

Even if there are cases where you do need to show someone “tough love,” you should take care to not hurt that person any more than you have to in order to get your point across. You should apply the minimum amount of pain necessary to teach them what they need to know. Any more than that, and you're not much better than the two mean-spirited individuals I mentioned before who rationalized their callousness by acting like they were doing their victims a favor. “Sink or swim” only makes sense as an ideology until you realize that there are ways of teaching people how to swim without letting them drown and die needlessly.

This ties in with our society's fixation on being brutally honest or “telling it like it is.” It's worth noting that, given that a lot of people with this mindset are conservative, quite often they're literally not telling it like it is. It's hard to take someone seriously when they say they're just laying down the facts while they talk about how climate change is a hoax created by the Chinese government.

While it is sometimes necessary to be brutally honest with somebody, there are often ways of telling people what they need to know without being needlessly hurtful to them. For example, if you're out shopping with your girlfriend and she asks you whether the clothes she's trying on look good, you can politely tell her that they're not really to your taste or you can start screaming at her about how hideous she is and start berating her about her looks in an unproductive and unhealthy way. I'm sure your argument about how you're just telling it like it is will be very convincing to the security guards who show up and drag you out of the mall.

More to the point, even when you do have to be brutally honest with someone, you shouldn't be more brutal than you have to be to get your point across. For example, if somebody isn't respecting your boundaries, you can firmly let them know that if they keep it up, you're going to cut them out of your life and never speak to them again. Harsh perhaps, but necessary. On the other hand, if you respond to that behavior by finding out where they live, posting their address on the internet, and opening them up to harassment and death threats, I'd argue that you're going overboard. There are probably ways of curtailing their creepy behavior without being needlessly cruel. I'm also not interested in any excuse about how they "deserved it." Minimizing suffering is a valuable goal in and of itself, and being needlessly hurtful to people is never justified, regardless of whether you think they had it coming.

I'm not saying that you shouldn't be honest with people, but there are ways of being honest while not being unnecessarily mean about it.

The Limits of Nostalgia and Parenthood

When I suffered through depression between the ages of eighteen and twenty, one of the ways it manifested was in me wishing I could go back to how my life was back in high school, which seemed to me to be the last time I felt truly happy. I suppose this longing was understandable given the circumstances.

Still, to the extent that I'm happier today than I used to be, it's because I rejected that mindset and learned to be more forwards-looking. That's not to say that I never feel nostalgic, but I've come to accept that even if I could go back in time and relive my childhood memories over and over again, I wouldn't want to because that would get boring very quickly and I'd eventually want to start having new experiences again.

I've also learned to appreciate the perks of being an adult. If I wanted to, I could go out right now, buy ten burgers, and eat them all in a row. I wouldn't do that because that would be a mistake, but it would be my mistake. That's a level of freedom that's both terrifying and liberating. It's a shame that we don't typically afford such freedoms to adolescents.

People who romanticize their childhoods or their teenage years don't properly remember them. Being beholden to your parents, teachers, and other authority figures isn't fun. It's especially annoying when you're a teenager and you've come to be old enough that the people around you start telling you to act like an adult, but you're still not old enough to have any of the privileges of adulthood.

I think this is why so many people discover anarchism in their teenage years. While it might come off as adolescents simply trying to stand out and be edgy—which, to be fair, isn't an entirely untrue assumption—a lot of it comes down to the fact that the process of becoming a young adult means realizing how arbitrary and unfair many of our social systems and customs are, both on a societal level and a personal level.

Parents who dismiss their teenage children's newfound interest in anarchism as a rebellious phase that they'll grow out of could stand to consider that one of people's first interactions with authority and hierarchy is in the parent-child relationship, which even at the best of times is one where the parent has unilateral control over their child, who either has to obey or be punished.

To be fair, it's safe to assume that most anarchists would concede that the parent-child relationship is a form of authority and hierarchy that's both necessary and

beneficial. Children aren't old enough to be able to take care of themselves and need to be protected so that they don't get into trouble. Then again, once you remember cases of abusive parenthood and situations where teens are disowned by their family and become homeless orphans because they came out as LGBT, you realize that even the parent-child relationship, perhaps the most justifiable form of authority in existence, is not beyond scrutiny. Indeed, should we ever manage to build an anarchist government, I imagine one of the first agencies we'll create is an anarchist version of Child Protective Services, though perhaps that version will have more public oversight and accountability to prevent abuse.

That's not to say that kids know everything. They still have a great deal to learn, and they need to know that they can't do everything by themselves. Often, we do have to rely on people with different areas of expertise to accomplish tasks that we can't do on our own. Still, it's regrettable that the way parents tend to impress this idea on children is to teach them to obey and respect authority figures, such as cops, teachers, elected officials, business owners, and of course parents. We're conditioned from birth to show deference to those in positions of power by schools, colleges, workplaces, news outlets, and even our own homes. This indoctrination follows us from the moment we enter this world until the day we die. Being a true anarchist means fighting against a constant stream of propaganda every day.

At the end of the day, those in positions of authority are not banal and genial folks who are there to help us. Even benevolent dictators are still dictators, and even if they don't abuse their power, the fact remains that if they wanted to, they could. This in and of itself should be enough to make you skeptical of them. After all, even the most loving parents often make it clear in unspoken ways that they don't really understand their children's inner worlds. LGBT folks who have had to deal with conservative relatives can attest to that.

I suppose the reason I'm so ambivalent about nostalgia is that it's endemic to conservative thinking. Plenty of our rightwing neighbors will wax lyrically about the "good old days" without any awareness that for a lot of people, the good old days weren't very good. The eighties weren't particularly sunny to those who died during the AIDS crisis. The fifties weren't especially grand to Black Americans who lived in the segregated South. That's why I sincerely hope that no matter how blinded by nostalgia I become over the years, I never forget that while my formative years may have been good for me personally, they were less kind to others. I grew up in the 2000s, the decade which kicked off the War on Terror and featured the 2008 financial crisis that put millions of people out of work.

Nostalgia is fine in moderation, but in the long run, it's better to work towards a better future. Learn from the past, but remember the past is dead.

While the future has much to fear, it also has much to look forward to. All potentialities exist in the future, which is both terrifying and exciting.

The Limits of Self-Reliance

The rightwing tendency to valorize self-reliance and “pulling yourself up by your bootstraps” takes a fear of dependency and creates an exaggeration of independence.

On one hand, it's true that you should try to take care of yourself and not be a burden to others. On the other hand, when people express that idea by saying that the world doesn't care about you, I don't entirely agree. Whenever I've needed assistance, I've always been able to find it, whether it's from family, friends, therapists, or in the form of unemployment benefits. We all depend on each other in ways both big and small. Most of us don't grow the food we eat or pave the roads we drive on. As such, I don't think it's fair to demonize people who ask for help.

I suppose the rationale for the right's contempt for the poor is that it's supposed to encourage those in poverty to lift themselves up. After all, if we simply gave help to whoever asked for it, pretty soon we would be living in a society of moochers. This is more based on puerile stereotypes than empirical evidence. Studies have shown that when you give money to homeless people, they usually don't do what conservatives say they will, that is, spend the cash on booze and drugs. Often, they spend that money on necessities like food.

To be honest, though, even if a homeless person did decide to spend some of their cash on booze, I wouldn't blame them. Life's hard, especially when you're poor. Sometimes you need a drink. It's worth noting that some of the major driving factors behind homelessness are the increased cost of living, stagnant wages, lack of access to mental healthcare, and lack of affordable housing. These problems are exacerbated by conservative austerity policies, which defund public services meant to alleviate these issues. As such, given that a lot of our society's problems were either caused by or worsened by the political right, it would be wise to ignore rightwingers when they complain about how people cope with the hardships caused by rightwing policies.

I tend to also apply this lens to drug addicts, another group of people that conservatives have decided are beneath them. The fact that people have reservations about seeking aid for addiction because they're rightfully worried that they'll be imprisoned for owning drugs that were made illegal by conservatives doesn't seem to weigh on the minds of rightwingers. It also doesn't deter conservatives to know that many of the reasons people develop drug dependencies are related to coping with the world that the political right has built, where many communities don't receive adequate

investment and the folks who live in such neighborhoods are left to fend for themselves.

I admit that I tend to think that drug addiction should be treated as a medical issue rather than a legal one. If someone is struggling with drug dependency, I would prefer that they be offered rehabilitation and treatment instead of locked in a cage and abused for years on end. Incarceration isn't an adequate substitute for giving people the resources they need to either get clean or at least learn to consume in moderation. For the record, if someone is able to consume in moderation, then you should pay them as much mind as you would pay someone who drinks alcohol in moderation, which is to say you should mind your own business.

I'm reminded of the old rightwing aphorism, "If you don't want to do the time, don't do the crime." It's a way of shifting the blame of how people deal with living in an often cruel and unjust political and economic system onto the shoulders of individuals rather than the policy makers who created material circumstances which made such coping mechanisms necessary.

I'm sure that those on the right would insist that if we just created a system that helped everyone, people would abuse that system. This is why they often support drug testing for welfare recipients. Let's set aside for a moment the evidence that suggests that administering drug tests is often so expensive that it's literally easier to distribute welfare without them. It's more relevant to home in on the fact that making poor people jump through such hoops just to get the help they need places unnecessary barriers in place simply to dissuade people from using these programs for their intended purpose. I suppose that conservatives are proud of creating yet another way for life to be miserable for those in poverty because conservatives are the scum of the earth. To be blunt, even if welfare recipients were spending some of their money on drugs or alcohol, I wouldn't care. Our country gives bailout checks to every corporation too inept at doing business to save money for times of financial decline. If we as a society can afford to subsidize the lifestyles of rich parasites, I fail to see why we shouldn't subsidize the lives of the poor, a group of people who have done far less to earn our contempt than any member of the ruling class.

Is it annoying when people are too lazy to contribute? Sure. Then again, even when a person is so averse to being helpful to their community that they refuse to do work, I still don't think it's okay to just let them die. So long as there are enough people willing to contribute that the work that needs to get done does get done, letting people die needlessly is evil regardless of whether you think they have it coming.

Self-reliance is a lie that the rich and privileged tell themselves to soothe their consciences. No man is an island, and personal flaws don't exist in a vacuum. While this is not to say that you shouldn't try to take care of yourself, be a good person, or help lighten the load of your coworkers, it's worth forgiving yourself if for whatever reason you can't find the strength to get out of bed in the morning.

In Defense of Imagination

So long as you're able to distinguish between fantasy and reality, I don't think it's bad or unhealthy to have a vivid imagination. In fact, there are many benefits to having one. For one, it can be very entertaining. It's nice to be able to think about something else when you're doing something boring at work. For another, it can be very helpful if you work in a creative field to be able to visualize what you want to create before you start making it. Also, it can be very inspiring. I think it's nice that a lot of people fantasize about having superpowers so that they could use those powers to help people. That's encouraging, and if it inspires people to do something kind for others in the real world, more power to them.

Such imagination is also helpful in a political context. After all, one of the first steps to addressing an injustice is to imagine what a world without that injustice might look like. Maybe the reality of such a world might not look exactly like it does in your head, but if the vision inspires you to contribute to progress, who am I to judge? I would also like to distinguish between imagining a more just future and having a fantastical flight of fancy. For example, if you want to imagine what a world without transphobia might look like, you can read studies about the issue and put all that information in your head. That way, whatever you imagine a world free of transphobia might look like is more grounded in reality. Maybe the reality of such a world won't look exactly like it does in your head, but it might be pretty close.

Anyway, I enjoy thinking about stuff. I like having an active mind. It brings me a lot of joy. My brain used to feel cloudy and dull all the time, and I felt empty inside. Mind you, I still have thought patterns that are unhelpful and unhealthy that I need to work on. Overall, though, I think having an active mind is a net positive.

The life of the mind is lovely, and more people should be encouraged to take part in it.

In Defense of Repetition

A common joke conservatives make about people who criticize them is that they tend to be repetitive. They mock us for how often we make fun of Trump or *Fox News*.

I would argue that the reason we keep making the same points over and over again is because conservatives keep making the same mistakes. Over the centuries, since the likes of Edmund Burke helped birth modern conservatism, the political right hasn't changed their tune very much. It's always the same invocation of ideas: for example, that some form of political progress is going to cause civilizational collapse, that society's values are in decline and that we must return to the old ways, or that the social and economic underclass deserve their station in life. Conservatism is by its nature repetitive. An ideology that maintains a dogmatic opposition to social and economic progress isn't one that's prone to change. Its rhetoric or tactics might change, but the underlying ideas are always the same.

More to the point, the reason that progressives and leftists repeat themselves a lot is because the ideas they preach are correct, and they want those ideas to be spread to as many people as possible. Repetition is one of the most effective methods of persuasion. Even the most insulated conservative knows what phrases like "the one percent," "defund the police," and "trans rights are human rights" mean, whether they want to or not. This is the power of effective branding, and it shows how repeating an idea ad nauseum can change people's minds and shift the Overton window.

In addition, reiterating the same ideas frequently is also an effective way to keep existing acolytes on board. It reminds them of what their values are, of who they're fighting against, and that they should be as politically active as they can manage. Even preaching to the choir has its uses.

Think of repetitive arguments like millions of years' worth of rain slowly eroding a mountain. The rain represents progressive and leftwing ideas, and the mountain is the ruling class. Sometimes it's enough to just be persistent.

I'll admit that whenever I write these essays, I tend to repeat myself a lot, and it does sometimes bug me. Still, reiterating previous points helps me remind myself of what I'm fighting for and who I'm fighting against. It also helps keep my brain active and limber, which improves my analytical skills.

This is not to say that repetition is always good. If an idea is so obvious that anyone would know it, telling it to someone as if they don't already know it might come off as condescending. The depressed person in your life doesn't need to hear that every cloud has a silver lining because they've heard it already, and the fact that you felt the need to repeat it implies that you think they're stupid. Still, the worst-case scenario is that you think you've come up with a novel idea which turns out to have already existed. While this situation is mildly embarrassing, it's not something you should lose sleep over. If anything, it just means that you can add to that idea based on your own life experiences and expertise.

It's good to spread ideas around to as many people as possible. It's good for people to make their own contributions to various ideas, which make them stronger and more convincing. It's good to figure out what works through trial and error and not to give up on good ideas just because a previous attempt failed. For example, for all that conservatives like to say that anarchism could never work, they haven't actually proven that every possible permutation of anarchism has been tried and found wanting. Sometimes an attempt at progress fails because it was an inopportune season, and we just need to wait for the right time to try again. Sometimes you need to learn from previous failures to figure out what to do next time to have a better chance at success. Progress is made through experimentation, which is repetitive by default. In order to verify whether or not an idea works, you have to try it over and over again in different permutations until you've exhausted all possible options.

At the very least, ideas like socialism, anarchism, and communism are good ideas which deserve to be experimented with to see what works and what doesn't. We have yet to truly discover whether or not these ideas are plausible. Indeed, whenever an experiment for such ideas is set up, the ruling class of capitalist countries do everything in their power to undermine and sabotage such experiments to try and "prove" that such ideas can't work. Mind you, the fact that their "proof" that such ideas can't work is the result of purposeful sabotage and obfuscation is pretty telling. They're afraid that if these ideas are tried and they turn out to be successful, then their entire *raison d'être* will be diminished and people might realize that they don't actually need their corporate overlords or their government enablers to live in a prosperous society. The ruling class has to lie, cheat, steal, and murder because if they don't, they might lose their wealth and power. This in and of itself tells you everything you need to know about the capitalist project and what it really represents. If an idea isn't broken, don't fix it. Platitudes are platitudes for a reason. Sometimes it's good to remind yourself of what's true, even if you've heard it a million times before.

In Defense of the Left

While there are some toxic individuals on the left, I think most of that comes down to the fact that as a group gets popular enough to attract a lot of people, a few of those people are going to be piles of horse pucky. No population of people is filled with saints. For whatever it's worth, I do feel that the people who are most prone to toxic behavior and infighting are just a vocal minority. Most leftists are average people who are neither particularly good nor particularly evil. I'll even admit that a few leftists are actually pretty decent people who just want to make the world a better place. For an example, watch the web video creator hbombberguy's archive of his Donkey Kong 64 stream⁷, which raised over \$300,000 for the trans charity Mermaids UK.

I think people tend to overgeneralize about the left in ways that aren't necessarily true or fair. For example, if you go to the comments section of a leftwing video on YouTube, you will see some toxicity. But here's why you should avoid making grand statements about the left based on that. One, most of the people who watch such videos don't leave a comment. Even the comments section itself is a vocal minority. Two, even within the comments section, not all comments are toxic. Even the negative comments are left by a vocal minority. Three, the comments section of a YouTube video doesn't represent the entire left. Most leftists don't watch leftwing web videos. This same principle applies to leftwing Reddit threads and Discord servers. While there are toxic individuals in these spaces, most leftists aren't part of these spaces, and even the ones who are don't all behave in a toxic manner. A lot of people's complaints about the left just amounts to social media drama. While online harassment is a problem, it's worth remembering that terminally online leftists don't represent the entire leftwing community.

I think the reason people feel this way about the left is that our brains process negativity differently than positivity. It doesn't even matter if most of the comments on a leftwing video are positive. Even one bad comment can put you in a bad mood. Nevertheless, I think it is important to keep things in perspective.

While I do wish that more leftists were politically active, this problem is not unique to the left. A lot of people have trouble putting their beliefs into practice. I'm not saying this is good. I would like it if more leftists got involved in actual activism. Still, it's worth remembering that this is not a uniquely leftwing issue. If it makes you feel

⁷Hbombberguy Live. "DK Nightmare Stream 1: Hours 0-5." *YouTube*, uploaded by Harry Brewis, 14 Mar. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlz8XOsDMrA&list=PLUXp-Uz1In_lIXBc97fzOSgTsfhBFFEcl.

any better, this problem affects the other side just as much. Plus, it's good to keep in mind that a lot of leftists are politically active. Many leftists vote, join protests, join organizations like the DSA or the IWW, organize unions, donate money to progressive and leftwing causes, and/or do other forms of activism. Leftists aren't perfect people, but they're mostly fine. Anyone who says otherwise is just being mean.

In Defense of Meddlers

Whenever somebody tries to frame those who assist others as sanctimonious meddlers, it's worth noting that while you should take care to not help in ways that are misguided, it's generally a good thing to be willing to uplift people.

Frankly, if somebody offers you help when you don't need it, it's often enough to politely decline. Nine times out of ten, do-gooders will take the hint because most people don't go out of their way to help people who neither ask for nor want assistance. On such occasions, it's often a good idea to redirect altruists to those who require help so that they can satiate their kind-hearted impulses through more productive means.

To be clear, demonizing people who are just trying to help out and be decent isn't just bad for meddlers. It's also bad for people who, for whatever reason, do need to ask for help. It makes those who are in dire straits feel like they're weak or lazy. Attributing moral insolvency to those in bad circumstances isn't true or fair. We've all received help at some point in our lives. Most of us do not grow the food we eat or pave the roads we drive on. We all make mistakes sometimes, and if we weren't able to forgive each other and help each other out, society wouldn't be able to function.

I'm not saying that you shouldn't be responsible. You should generally try to take care of yourself and not be a burden to others. But the idea that helping the less fortunate makes those people dependent moochers is really just another nasty stereotype we perpetuate to justify not helping them.

Moreover, appealing to the notion that people should "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" discourages those in need to ask for help when they need it. Such rhetoric plays on the egotism of those who think they don't require assistance even when they really do. This isn't bad just for the more arrogant members of disadvantaged groups, but also for their friends and families, who would prefer that their comrade not suffer and die needlessly. As such, it's often good to advise folks who refuse to accept help even when they need it to swallow their pride and allow themselves to be assisted, if not for their sake than for the sake of those who care about them.

This is not to say that you should feel personally responsible for the plight of the poor. You didn't ask the world to be built the way it is—unless you're a rich person or a conservative, in which case, your opinion on the matter is irrelevant. The answer to

these issues isn't individual charity but systemic change. For whatever it's worth, I do think that such change is possible. We ought to lay the groundwork for a more equitable society whenever we can. Let us do our best within current circumstances while still working towards a better future. Take care of yourself, give assistance to others when you can, and ignore anyone who calls you self-aggrandizing for doing so.

In Defense of Negative News

A common criticism of news outlets is that they're overly negative and that they should focus more on positive events. People often complain that reading the news makes them depressed or angry.

I have three criticisms of this outlook. One, negative news retains audience engagement more than positive news. Negativity sells. Two, the point of such journalism is not to make you feel bad about yourself or the world, but to point out a problem in hopes that doing so will help get that problem solved. For example, if you see a news story about transphobia, the point is not to make you feel hopeless but to make you think about donating money to a trans charity or a trans person's GoFundMe. You might also consider voting for politicians whose platforms include expanding access to trans healthcare. These are all healthy and valuable ways to contribute to social progress. It's not good to maintain ignorance. It is good to bring up valid criticisms of our society so that we can see if we can get these problems solved. Three, even outside of immediate activism, reading negative news can help you understand what you're up against and remind you of how much work is left to be done. Again, the point is not to make you feel depressed but to inspire you to be more involved in politics.

To be clear, I'm not saying that you should absorb negative news all the time or even most of the time. Constantly absorbing negative news is neither helpful nor healthy, and it'll leave you feeling burnt out. It's healthy to take breaks every now and then. Brew some coffee, read a book, and get nice and relaxed. That being said, once you're feeling better, it would be appreciated if you jumped back in.

Frankly, it frustrates me when people end up in a state of apolitical solipsism where they've absolved themselves of any responsibility for trying to make the world a better place. Such folks will often rationalize their apathy by saying that we should all get our own house in order before trying to be politically active. Mind you, taking care of yourself and pushing progress forwards aren't mutually exclusive. If anything, they reinforce each other. For instance, you can go to work at your minimum-wage job so that you can pay your bills and still use some of your free time to advocate for a higher minimum wage.

I concede that it's important for politically active folks not to blame themselves for our socioeconomic circumstances. We didn't ask for the world to be built this way, and while we should try to be part of the solution, feeling guilty doesn't help. Still,

while people might not have full control over the direction society takes, they have more of a say than they realize. While not everyone can be a full-time activist, almost anyone can vote or donate money to a progressive or leftwing cause. Every little bit counts, and while individual contributions may not amount to much, cumulatively they add up to a lot.

Making progress is hard enough as it is without “apolitical” folks exacerbating the difficulty of our project through their inaction. A lot of work still needs to be done, and while you should take care of yourself and take breaks when you need to, staying informed is vital for continuing our march towards a truly free, egalitarian, and democratic society.

In Defense of the Internet

A lot more people are talking about the psychological impact of the internet these days. Even people who have made their careers creating online content have voiced concern over the state of social media and online discourse.

Speaking as someone who spends a lot of their free time on my laptop, I find that this sort of discourse is often disingenuous. This kind of conversation keeps coming up every time a new sort of technology becomes widely available. We had this talk when televisions came out, as well as during the advent of radios and telephones.

Are there unique harms of the internet that previous technologies didn't have? I'm not sure there are. I won't deny that online harassment is a problem, but it mostly just affects public figures and e-celebs. I'm not saying that's great, but increased public scrutiny is a natural consequence of being famous. This has been a problem ever since celebrities became a thing, and it's definitely not unique to the internet. I will concede that it's unfortunate when members of marginalized groups get dogpiled on social media, and we should take measures to curtail that. Still, given that online spaces have also given marginalized groups more avenues for personal expression, I'm not sure that the downsides outweigh the upsides.

In response to studies that suggest that young children might have developmental problems if they use the internet too much at a young age, I would point out that the same is true of television, but that hasn't stopped parents from distracting their kids by turning on the television so they can take a break from parenting for a few minutes. I'm not saying it's good, but the issues with parenting in the modern era wouldn't magically go away if the internet stopped existing.

I've always been annoyed by this sort of moral outrage about new technologies because it's usually a distraction from more important issues. Turning off your smartphone isn't going to stop another recession from happening. Going offline for a while isn't going to make Medicare for All come any faster.

I guess the reason that I'm so defensive about this is that I've gotten a lot out of the internet. Much of my political education comes from online sources, especially leftwing YouTubers. I owe a debt to video makers like hbombguy, Philosophy Tube, ContraPoints, Lindsay Ellis, Big Joel, Thought Slime, Folding Ideas, Kat Blaque, and Innuendo Studios for informing my political perspective in an accessible and entertaining way.

I don't think that it's a coincidence that the rise in popularity of leftwing ideas came about during the internet age. Prior to the internet, being a leftist meant reading a lot of dry theoretical books by dead white men with beards. Nowadays, many people have found ways to express leftwing ideas in ways that are fun and that keep people engaged. Of course, this sort of communication technology has drawbacks. The same technology that has accelerated the proliferation of far-left ideas has also accelerated the proliferation of far-right ideas. The internet is a double-edged sword. Still, I don't see compelling evidence that the bad outweighs the good. Even if leftists don't use the internet to spread their ideas, the right definitely will. Online spaces are a new front in the culture war, and winning that war will require using the internet, whether we like it or not.

Maybe some older people would condescend to younger folks for getting their political education from the internet, but given that such old-timers get their ideas from *Fox News* and fundamentalist churches, I don't really care what they think a good source of political pedagogy is.

If it weren't for the internet, I wouldn't have come into contact with these ideas. That would be a real shame, because learning leftwing ideas has inspired me to be more politically active in real life. Such activism has been a boon for my mental health because feeling like I'm contributing to social progress brings me a lot of joy. It's also helped me become a more compassionate and confident person. Likely, none of this would have happened were it not for the internet. So when people talk about online spaces and social media like they're a blight upon humanity, the message I get is that they want to take away a lot of things that make me happy.

It's also worth noting that these people's criticisms of online culture tend to be myopic. Maybe they pine for the good old days before online lynch mobs, apparently forgetting that the good old days had actual lynch mobs. While neither are good, I can't help but think that I prefer the former over the latter. The past was a carnival of horrors, and anyone who seeks to return is either deeply evil or deeply foolish. Nostalgia is a mind killer, and it takes away your ability to keep things in perspective or to view the past through any lens other than rose-tinted glasses.

Anyway, speaking as someone who used to deal with a bad case of depression, to the extent that I'm happier today than I used to be, it's not in spite of the internet but because of it. Sex-positive and body-positive feminists I found online taught me that I shouldn't be ashamed of my body or my sexuality, so long as I respect people's

boundaries. Videos including Philosophy Tube's piece on suicide and mental health⁸ helped me process my emotions in a healthier way. Video clips of Fred Rogers on YouTube helped me transition away from self-loathing and towards becoming happy with who I've become. Many people online, both in web videos and on social media, taught me that it's okay to make mistakes. If you never risk failing, you'll never have a chance at success. You miss every shot you don't take. It's better to be someone who tries and fails than someone who doesn't try at all. Fortune favors the bold. Thanks to these ideas, I have learned to be optimistic. I have learned the value of demanding the impossible and to keep demanding it until the powers that be either admit that what we want isn't impossible and give it to us or are forced to make what is possible their compromise. Ambition, resourcefulness, and decisiveness are virtues I have learned from people online, who taught me values that the people I know offline would never have taught me.

Content creators such as Thought Slime and hbomberguy introduced me to leftwing and anarchist politics, which has helped me not only to be more politically active but also to treat the people around me in a more patient and empathetic way. I try to be more considerate of other people's emotional and physical needs in a way that I simply wouldn't have in a pre-internet setting. I don't want to be parasocial because, ultimately, I don't know these people I've found online. They are strangers to me, and it's not healthy to put people you've never met on a pedestal. But I don't think it's hyperbolic to say that they've vastly improved my life, and I'm eternally grateful for that.

Given the blessings given to me by the internet, you can have my smartphone when you pry it from my cold, dead hands.

⁸Philosophy Tube. "Suic!De and Ment@l He@lth | Philosophy Tube ★." *YouTube*, uploaded by Abigail Thorn, 28 Sept. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQNw2FBdpyE.

In Defense of Kink

Many kinks or paraphilias are related to the taboo, that is, the parts of life that are considered deviant or shameful. As such, a lot of kink delves into problematic material, such as unequal power relationships.

To be clear, I don't think being into such kinks necessarily makes you a bad person. What a lot of people don't understand about paraphilias is that they're usually done between consenting adults who are taking part in these activities because they want to and they enjoy it. Many kinks even have measures to ensure that the people involved remain safe. For example, people who are into BDSM often utilize a safe word, which when spoken means that whatever they're doing stops immediately. Such people also make use of aftercare, a practice in BDSM which ensures that no lasting damage, be it emotional or physical, is done to any participants. That's a level of control that you don't typically get even in most vanilla relationships. As such, I do not think being into paraphilias, even problematic ones, automatically makes you a bad person. If anything, I think it's good and well within anarchist principles for people to be allowed to explore what makes them aroused, regardless of whether it's what society says they "should" be attracted to.

That being said, we all need to decide for ourselves where we want to draw the line between acceptable and not acceptable. That line is going to be different for every person based on their personal experiences. This is fine so long as you respect people's boundaries and sexual agency. "Do whatever you want so long as you're not hurting anybody" is not a vain formula. Personally, my line is the distinction between kinky fun and actual bigotry.

On one hand, some women enjoy being called dirty names during sex, and I don't think that in and of itself is bad so long as it's done between consenting partners. On the other hand, when I'm on some porn site and the images come with tags like "patriarchy," "natural order," or "misogyny," it's hard to avoid the conclusion that for at least a few people who are into this paraphilia, this isn't just a fantasy. It seems such folks actually do have toxic views about women. That's not sexy. Just because some women enjoy being called dirty names in some contexts doesn't mean that all women appreciate such rhetoric in every context. Indeed, even for women who are into degrading language during sex, I imagine most of them would still take issue with it if you called them dirty names outside of sex. After all, they didn't consent to that.

To use another example, while I don't think being into raceplay inherently makes you a bad person, when a lot of the blogs dedicated to raceplay make repeated use of slurs, confederate imagery, Nazi imagery, and tags like "white supremacy," it's hard to avoid the conclusion that some people into this kink really are just racist, and their participation in raceplay is a reflection of their actual views on people of color. I think that's bad. I can sort of understand the appeal of raceplay, but I don't think there's anything even vaguely sexy about racism.

Also, when I see blogs with a lot of imagery related to Blue Lives Matter, MAGA, insulting liberals, and/or mocking feminists, I immediately tune out. I don't like the idea that the porn I'm consuming is going to influence me to be more conservative or reactionary. Any porn that seems like it's headed into that territory gets a hard no from me.

To be clear, I am just describing my personal limits. I'm sure other people have different limits and that's okay, so long as you respect people's boundaries and sexual agency.

For whatever it's worth, a lot of vanilla relationships have problematic elements too. For example, having a "type" means preferring people with certain features over others, and while that's not inherently bad, a lot of the reasons why people prefer certain features over others might dip into problematic territory. For instance, if you're on Tinder and you find that you're more likely to swipe right on somebody if they're cis than if they're trans, it might be worth asking why that might be. This is not to say that you have to be attracted to all trans people. I'm sure most trans people would prefer to go out with someone who genuinely finds them attractive. That being said, it's worth scrutinizing why it is that you find that you're more likely to be attracted to cis people than trans people and whether that plays into transphobic ideas. I'm not saying you're a bad person if you have a type. I also have a type and I don't think that makes me a bad person. Still, it is worth enjoying what you enjoy while still being able to scrutinize why it is that you enjoy it and whether those reasons are ones that you're comfortable with.

Everyone has their own limits. What might be too problematic for some people might be perfectly fine for other people. What might seem banal to some might be seen as extreme by others. That's perfectly fine. Once again, "do whatever you want so long as you're not hurting anybody" is a good rule of thumb. Just respect people's boundaries and make sure any paraphilias you engage in are done so consensually, and you'll probably be fine.

In Defense of Extremism

While the golden mean—the idea that the truth exists between two extremes—can sometimes be a helpful conceptual tool, it is not the end all and be all of finding the truth. Being in the middle of a spectrum doesn't automatically mean you're correct, nor does being on the extreme ends of a spectrum automatically mean you're incorrect. For example, some people might find it extreme to avoid eating meat and all animal products, but that's just a way of life for vegans. While I'm not personally vegan, I'm not going to begrudge them their life choices. If what they're doing works for them, they have my blessing. I'll even concede that eating a diet of primarily fruits and vegetables is probably really good for your health, provided that you also have a source of protein like beans or tofu. For me at least, rather than asking whether or not an idea is extreme, it's often more productive to ask whether an idea is true. There's nothing diminishing about being extreme if the extreme option is a valid option or even the correct option.

That's just when the golden mean is applied to our personal lives, not even getting into when it's applied to politics.

To be honest, I don't really care for centrists or moderates. What frustrates me is not that they're always wrong, though they often are, but that they have a really annoying attitude. They seem to genuinely think that their lowered expectations and lack of ambition makes them mature, reasonable adults and dismiss anyone with grander goals as being naive idealists. It's kind of weird to be smug about supporting policies that are deliberately designed to be banal and ineffectual. That's a strange thing to be proud of.

More to the point, my main problem with moderates is that a lot of their approach to politics is less about their views' content and more about their cadence. For example, they like to speak calmly, be polite, and seek compromise. These aren't inherently bad traits, but they're not synonymous with rationality. Being calm isn't rational if you're in danger. You have no obligation to be polite to someone who's trying to take your rights away. Compromising with ideas that don't merit being compromised with is merely capitulation.

While we're criticizing moderates, I may as well mention that I hate horseshoe theory, the idea that the far left and far right have more in common with each other than with the center. Even setting aside whether this is true, my main problem with this line of thinking is that it's lazy. It reduces both sides of a political issue to absurd

caricatures and stifles any possible nuance or complexity of a conflict so that moderates don't have to actually think about it. They can just say that both the left and the right are equally bad, which is convenient for them because it means they can turn their brain off and not have to listen to anyone who dares to suggest that their centrism is myopic.

This also ties into the idea that the left and the right are filled with violent extremists while the people in the center are perfectly peaceful people who don't want to start a ruckus. Let's ignore for a moment whether dismissing extremists as categorically violent is a fair assessment. Instead, I'll point out that moderates tend to support bipartisanship, where both parties put their differences aside to reach common goals. Of course, the invasions of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Vietnam all passed through Congress with bipartisan support. These wars killed thousands if not millions of people, most of whom were civilians. As such, you'll have to forgive me if I don't buy into the idea that being a moderate somehow makes you more peaceful. The only real difference between a moderate's violence and an extremist's violence is that moderates tend to do violence in legal ways, such as having Congress authorize armed conflicts, supporting the police, and so on. This might seem like a meaningful distinction to moderates, but if someone shoots me in the head, I'm not especially concerned with whether it was done legally.

Moderates are not necessarily wrong about everything, but if they're right, that needs to be proven, not assumed.

I'll admit that back a few years ago when I was dealing with depression, one of the ways it manifested was in me making extreme decisions which harmed me in a lot of ways. To the extent that I'm happier today than I used to be, it's because I learned to rein in my self-destructive habits. That's not to say that I'm against making extreme decisions, but I do try to more carefully consider them before taking action. Nonetheless, where once I made extreme decisions because I was unhappy, I now make different, better, but no less extreme decisions because I'm happy. Long live the far left.

Still, since the cadence of moderation can be applied to anything, here's my moderate-sounding pitch for anarchism. Feel free to imagine that the rest of this essay is being spoken by a bland middle manager with a flat voice.

While anarchism might seem extreme, it's worth noting that we live in an age of extreme inequality, extreme levels of incarceration, and extreme police militarism. If

anything, the status quo is extreme, and anarchists are moderates who are just trying to get things back on track. While anarchism might seem like a far-out notion, it's mostly based on the banal observation that people in positions of authority often abuse that authority and that we ought to curtail such abuses by reducing the disparity of power between those who are above and those who are below. It's not some highfalutin idea. It's really as simple as it gets. Rather than living in a world of higher-ups and underlings, we in the anarchist community believe that everyone should be co-equal colleagues in the project of building a better future. So please join the DSA and the IWW so that you may uphold our company's values of teamwork and fair play.

Thank you for listening.

In Defense of Abortion Rights

To express my contempt for the anti-abortion position, I would like to go through several common arguments against abortion and explain why they're wrong.

I. Life begins at conception.

At the moment of conception, the fetus has no thoughts or feelings. It feels no pain or desires, up to and including the desire to live. In short, it has none of the attributes that we would associate with being human beyond the capacity to eventually grow into a human. But if that's your logic for life beginning at conception, why not go back further? After all, if a sperm cell is put in the right conditions, it will eventually grow into a human. Does that mean that all forms of secreting semen are genocidal since many sperm cells die in the process?

Of course, the real reason for "life begins at conception" arguments tends to be based on the conservative Christian understanding of personhood, where the soul enters the fetus at the moment of conception. Mind you, that's a faith-based argument, which if enshrined in law would impose Christian morality on an increasingly nonreligious population. Frankly, I don't relish the idea of living in a theocracy.

II. You oppose abortion and yet you were born. Isn't that hypocritical?

People who use this argument tend to rely on an old Reagan quote, namely, "I notice that everyone who is for abortion has already been born."

To respond to this claim, let's propose a scenario. Let's say that your parents had chosen to remain abstinent. From your perspective, there's little difference between abstinence and abortion. Either way, you don't get to come into existence. With that in mind, should your parents have been forced to have sex so that you could come into existence? On one hand, I appreciate my parents for bringing me into the world. On the other hand, I don't think they should have been forced to have sex just for my sake.

Am I suggesting that this argument is a pro-rape argument? I'm just saying that if your ideology prioritizes creating life as the ultimate good, what objections could you have to rape other than practical ones? This is what makes it so disgusting when Republicans support laws which say that a pregnant person shouldn't be allowed to have an abortion even in the case of the pregnancy being induced by rape. If that's the

stance that you want to take, then you're prioritizing protecting your conservative norms over the wellbeing and consent of rape victims.

III. What if everyone stopped having babies? Wouldn't humanity go extinct?

385,000 babies are born per day. I think we have the situation under control. Maybe it would be bad if people stopped having kids entirely, but what's the likelihood of that happening? Even in developed countries where birth rates are lower, people still have children. So long as enough people are having kids that the human population is sustainable, why should a person be forced to have kids if they don't want to? "Do whatever you want so long as you're not hurting anybody" isn't a vain formula.

A common response to this is that if not enough people have kids, it would be bad for the economy because then there would be more old people retiring and who need to be taken care of but not enough children who can grow up and take old-timers' places in the workforce. My rebuttal is that while having fewer kids might cause the economy to contract slightly, the question becomes whether the benefits of a world where people are free to not have kids if they don't want to become parents outweigh the economic costs. I would argue they do. After all, while having less kids means fewer workers to provide goods and services, it also means less people around who require goods and services. This seems like a problem that would solve itself in the long term.

IV. What about fetuses with Down syndrome?

A more recent argument from people who conspicuously have never cared about disabled people before now is that there tend to be high termination rates for fetuses with Down syndrome. They claim this is a form of hypocrisy. After all, aren't leftists supposed to be against ableism?

I have two responses to this, one accusatory and one sympathetic.

The accusatory response is to point out that people who make this argument have never cared about the rights of disabled people before now. It's not like they've been advocating for increased accommodations for disabled people. They support disabled people exactly insofar as they can be used as a weapon against abortion rights. The moment disabled people stop being politically useful to them, conservatives will happily go back to using ableist slurs and refusing to support policies that would materially benefit disabled folks.

The sympathetic response is to point out that the problem here isn't abortion but rather the society we've built, which devalues the lives of disabled people. Ableism is a serious problem, but it's not going to be solved by taking away abortion rights. If you do genuinely want to help disabled people, advocate against people using ableist slurs, support increased investment in accommodations for disabled people, and support increased funding for programs like Social Security, which a lot of disabled people rely on to survive. Do that and maybe more people would be willing to have disabled kids.

V. How about late-term abortions?

Ninety-one percent of abortions are performed within the first thirteen weeks of gestation,⁹ so this point is moot. To be honest, late-term abortions are so rare that to legislate against them would be like crafting legislation for people who get struck by lightning. It's a waste of legislative resources that could be better spent on problems that are more pressing.

In conclusion, most of the arguments against abortion are wrong. There is one that I have some sympathy for though, and I suppose for the sake of honesty I should mention it. This one is sometimes posited by religious leftists.

VI. We should support people who want to have kids.

Many Catholic socialists such as Elizabeth Bruenig are opposed to abortion but don't want to make it illegal because they think that such punitive policies would do more harm than good. Instead, they want to reduce abortions by investing in policies that make childcare more affordable, such as paid parental leave and Medicare for All. Studies show that abortion rates tend to decline when countries invest more into welfare programs. There is an appeal to this argument. After all, being pro-choice means that people who want to have kids should have that choice. Indeed, if there are economic barriers to people having children, we should eliminate them in the name of making society freer.

That being said, I still take issue with this argument because it cedes too much ground. It still posits that there's something wrong with having an abortion, which I don't think there is.

⁹"Abortion after the First Trimester in the United States." Planned Parenthood, 2015, www.plannedparenthood.org/uploads/filer_public/99/41/9941f2a9-7738-4a8b-95f6-5680e59a45ac/pp_abortion_after_the_first_trimester.pdf.

Still, I'm more willing to work with these types of pro-lifers since they're not the type to scream "Abortion is murder!" to everyone who walks inside a branch of Planned Parenthood.

Anyway, I hope it goes without saying that any intellectually consistent anarchist supports abortion rights. People putting themselves in a position of authority so that they can control what other people do with their bodies even though abortion hurts no one is an unnecessary form of hierarchy.

As such, supporting abortion rights is a way of laying the groundwork for an anarchist future.

In Defense of Trans Rights

To explain one of the reasons why I support trans rights, let me explain a medical condition called congenital androgen insensitivity syndrome. Those who have it may have female bodies, have female genitalia, and have been raised female their entire lives, but when you look at their cells, they have Y chromosomes. If you were pedantic, you could attempt to argue that a person with such a condition was secretly a man their entire life, but to do so would be to elevate the Y chromosome to a level of metaphysical importance that's completely detached from that person's lived experiences.

Mind you, you could argue that such a person doesn't match all of the traditional requirements of womanhood, but neither do a lot of cis women. For example, lesbians are not traditional women because women are traditionally attracted to men. Gender nonconforming women like tomboys are not traditional women because they do not dress or act in traditionally feminine ways. Nonetheless, we accept them as women because aside from rightwing fools, we as a society have accepted that it's good to have a more inclusive definition of womanhood so that everyone who feels like that label applies to them can use it.

The fact of the matter is that our old understanding of sex and gender was overly simplistic and left a lot of people out, such as trans women, trans men, nonbinary folks, gender nonconforming people, and anyone else who didn't fit into the neat little boxes of traditional manhood and traditional womanhood. As such, the modern LGBT movement seeks to reform our understanding of sex and gender to encompass the whole range of human experiences of gender, gender identity, and gender expression.

So, is a trans woman a woman? Yes. She may not match all the traditional requirements of womanhood, but as we've already established, neither do a lot of cis women. So long as she sees herself as a woman, identifies as a woman, and lives as a woman, she is for all intents and purposes a woman.

I would now like to address two arguments against the validity of trans identities and explain why they're wrong.

I. What about their genitalia?

Let's ignore the fact that many trans people receive gender reassignment surgery to make their anatomy more in line with what's traditionally expected of their gender. Even if they didn't, that wouldn't necessarily mean that their claim to the gender they identify as is invalid. For example, do you consider female hermaphrodites—that is, people who are raised as women, identify as women, and live as women, even though their anatomy is not in line with traditional womanhood—to be women? If you can accept female hermaphrodites as women, I don't see why accepting trans women as women is that much of a stretch.

II. Aren't trans folks socialized differently than their cis counterparts?

While trans women may not necessarily receive the same socialization as cis women, it's worth noting that not all cis women receive the same socialization either. Cis women aren't a monolith. Some cis women may experience a great deal of sexism in their lives while others deal with comparatively little. Some cis women are straight while others are lesbian, and that creates differences in how they're socialized insofar as lesbians have traditionally been stigmatized, and even today people tend to treat straight folks differently than they treat gay, lesbian, and bisexual folks.

Also, while trans women may not receive the same socialization as cis women, they don't necessarily receive the same socialization as cis men either. Oftentimes, trans people will come out as some other queer or gender nonconforming identity before coming out as trans, and adopting such identities effects how they are socialized insofar as queer and gender nonconforming people are treated differently than heteronormative people.

In addition, socialization doesn't end at childhood. For instance, once a trans woman transitions and starts to be seen by others as female, others tend to start treating her like they would a cis woman, which socializes them in a way more in line with cis women.

It's also worth noting that as people transition at a younger age, their childhood will probably be more in line with their cis counterparts, which means their socialization will be even more similar. For the record, I do think children should be allowed to transition at a young age if they want to. Studies have shown that even at a young age, children are already aware of their gender identity and thus have the knowledge necessary to decide whether they want to transition. You're not doing your

kid a favor if you force them to live as the gender they were assigned at birth if they don't want to. You're not making them accept their "real" gender. You're forcing them to adopt a fake gender that they don't identify with and doesn't feel authentic to them. If you do this, you're not doing it for your kid. You're doing it for yourself because you prioritize maintaining a conservative understanding of gender over your child's wellbeing.

As for the fearmongering about whether children should be allowed to make such major decisions at a young age, given that they might regret it and do "irreversible damage" to their bodies, let's ignore for a moment that the vast majority of trans people who receive gender affirming care approve of their care and feel that it helps them live their lives in a way that they find authentic and fulfilling. Let's also set aside the fact that much of these changes are reversible. People can stop taking hormone replacement therapy medications or hormone blockers and their body will revert to what's more in line with the gender they were assigned at birth. There are also surgeries such as penis transplants that allow people to have anatomy more in line with the gender they were assigned at birth if that's what they want.

Even if we ignore all that, the question remains of how many of the bad decisions you make during your lifetime can be reversed. If you decide to drink an entire bottle of whisky one night and regret it afterwards, can you go back in time to stop yourself from doing that? If you decide to have an abortion and end up having second thoughts once it's over, can you take back that decision? No, you can't, and you know what? That's fine. What matters is that people have control over their own lives and can make their own decisions. For example, if I wanted to, I could go out right now, buy a cake, and eat it all in one sitting. I'm not going to do that because it would be a mistake, but at least it would be my mistake. Freedom means being able to make your own decisions and living with the consequences of your decisions. Indeed, liberty means that people are allowed to make choices that others think are wrong. There are limits to freedom, of course. For instance, you aren't free to act in ways that harm others or, to an extent, yourself. Still, the progressive adage of "do whatever you want so long as you're not hurting anybody" isn't a vain formula, and being trans doesn't in and of itself hurt anybody.

On the contrary, trans people fighting for their rights has meant that more people are able to live their lives in a way that makes them feel comfortable and fulfilled. This isn't just good for trans people, by the way. It means that anyone who wants to step outside the expectations of the gender they were assigned at birth should be allowed to. If a man wants to buck the trend and live in ways that some

people might consider more effeminate, he should be allowed to. If a man wants to adhere to the expectations of traditional masculinity, he should be allowed to. Accepting trans rights means accepting that people should be allowed to dress, behave, and present however they please so long as they're not hurting anyone. A trans-positive world is a freer world.

Speaking personally, while I'm probably never going to experiment with my gender or step outside the expectations of the gender I was assigned at birth, I do appreciate having the option to step outside those boundaries if I want to. Indeed, I genuinely appreciate the contributions the trans community has made towards laying the foundations for the sort of society that anarchists like me want to build. In return for their services, I will gladly advocate for them and fight for their rights. They deserve liberty as much as anyone else.

Should the day come when capitalism has fallen and a lone anarchist stands on a hill to fly the black flag to celebrate our victory, would it surprise anyone if that anarchist was trans? Frankly, if anyone should be allowed to herald the birth of a truly free, egalitarian, and democratic world, it should be our trans comrades.

In Defense of Gun Control

Before we begin, I would like to make clear that while I do favor strict gun control, I'm more flexible on this issue than I am on others. While I generally won't listen to someone who's transphobic or hates immigrants, I'm more open to the idea of giving a fair hearing to the opinions of gun owners. I'll even admit that there are leftists and leftist organizations, such as the Socialist Rifle Association, who support gun rights, though they tend to do so for different reasons than National Rifle Association (NRA) members.

Still, I don't consider members of the NRA and those who parrot their talking points to be especially worth my time. I favor gun control pretty strongly, and I don't just mean background checks. I mean abolishing the Second Amendment and gun buyback programs that ensure that there are fewer guns out on the streets. To explain why, let me go through three common arguments made in favor of gun rights and why I think they're wrong.

I. Object X kills more people than guns.

A common argument made by gun rights advocates is that since hammers kill more people than guns, we therefore shouldn't ban guns. After all, would we ban hammers?¹⁰ To respond to this, one statistic I would reference is that dogs kill more people per year than sharks.¹¹ Is this because dogs are more dangerous than sharks or because people spend more time around dogs than they do around sharks? I'd argue that if people spent an equivalent amount of time around sharks as they did around dogs, the number of people killed by sharks would go up substantially. As such, we have to ask whether hammers are actually more dangerous than guns, or if there are simply more households with hammers than there are with guns.

More to the point, at least in the case of hammers, you could argue that they're a necessary risk. People need to nail stuff to the wall somehow. By contrast, how many people who own a gun actually need to own a gun? I'd posit that unless you have one of the few jobs where a gun is necessary, such as certain kinds of farmwork, owning a gun creates an unnecessary risk for yourself and the people around you.

¹⁰Wade, Peter. "GOP Rep. Boebert Bizarrely Compares Firearm Killings to Murder by Hammer." *Rolling Stone*, 27 Mar. 2021, www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/boebert-hammers-guns-1147986.

¹¹"Dog Attack." Florida Museum, www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/shark-attacks/odds/compare-risk/dog-attack. Accessed 15 May 2021.

II. The self-defense argument.

A lot of people who have conspicuously never been in a gun fight before insist that they need to own a gun in case they get into such an event or if their house gets broken into.¹²

Mind you, the vast majority of Americans will never actually be involved in a violent crime. Statistics show that one to three percent of Americans are involved in a violent crime per year.¹³ The firearms held by those who make self-defense arguments will likely never be used for their intended purpose.

Some gun rights advocates would insist that's the point: the guns are meant to be used as a deterrent to dissuade people from instigating conflict with you. This argument might hold water if countries with strict gun control laws had significantly higher rates of violent crimes. Given that's not the case, the point is moot.

What owning a gun does mean is that you have higher chance of shooting your spouse during a heated argument¹⁴ or committing suicide.¹⁵ Indeed, an underexplored element of the gun debate is that states with higher rates of gun ownership tend to also have higher rates of suicides. This makes sense since one of the most efficient means of curtailing suicide is to take away the easiest, most efficient way of committing suicide. Mind you, someone who is truly committed to killing themselves can still do so with a knife, but a knife is less instantaneous and more painful than using firearms, which tends to scare people off. Speaking as someone with a history of depression, if gun control helps limit the number of people who commit suicide, I find that encouraging.

Put simply, I don't think that most of the people who own a gun actually need to own a gun. I'm sure people might respond by pointing out that people don't strictly need to have access to cheeseburgers and alcohol, both of which routinely kill people. However, in the case of burgers, there is an arguable need that's being addressed.

¹²Raphelson, Samantha. "How Often Do People Use Guns in Self-Defense?" *NPR*, 13 Apr. 2018, [choice.npr.org/index.html?origin=https://www.npr.org/2018/04/13/602143823/how-often-do-people-use-guns-in-self-defense](https://www.npr.org/2018/04/13/602143823/how-often-do-people-use-guns-in-self-defense).

¹³Saad, Lydia. "What Percentage of Americans Are Recent Crime Victims?" *Gallup*, 14 Feb. 2020, news.gallup.com/poll/285644/percentage-americans-recent-crime-victims.aspx.

¹⁴Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund. "Domestic Violence." Everytown Research & Policy, everytownresearch.org/issue/domestic-violence. Accessed 15 May 2021.

¹⁵"Guns and Suicide: A Fatal Link." Harvard School of Public Health, www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/magazine/guns-and-suicide. Accessed 15 May 2021.

People need to eat. Furthermore, in the case of both burgers and booze, while access to both can be abused, it is possible to consume in moderation. By contrast, is there such a thing as owning guns in moderation? I'd say even one gun is too much for most people.

Moreover, even though burgers and alcohol can be unhealthy, I understand why people consume them. Burgers are tasty and getting drunk is fun. I don't want people to live a joyless and spartan life that's devoid of pleasure. By contrast, does anyone really *need* to own a gun to be happy? On one hand, at least in the case of burgers and booze, even if what you're doing is harmful, which it isn't if you consume in moderation, at least you're only really hurting yourself. On the other hand, if you own a gun, you're not just creating a risk for yourself. You're creating a risk for the people around you as well.

III. Overthrowing the government.¹⁶

I have two points to make about this argument. First, it's worth noting that the people who make these arguments tend to also be supporters of Blue Lives Matter and the military, that is, armed and uniformed agents of the state. As such, when they talk about stopping tyranny, they're not referring to police brutality or military aggression. They're likely talking about people who say "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas" and those who take issue with them using slurs. I would posit that's a strange thing to be willing to kill someone over. Second, while I'm sure that a shotgun is highly effective for hunting deer, it's considerably less useful against predator drones. Against modern military hardware, a shotgun is about as useful as a squirt gun.

To be clear, I don't like this. I don't like the idea that if the American military decided to overthrow the government and install a military dictatorship, there wouldn't be much we could do to stop them. Still, however we go about solving that problem, I doubt that individual gun ownership is the answer. Owning firearms creates an unnecessary risk for you and the people around you for no real benefit other than an unjustified sense of increased security and the potential to offend liberals.

To be fair, I do think one argument in favor of gun rights has some credence, and for the sake of honesty I will address it. This argument is posited by leftwing gun owners and especially anarchists.

¹⁶Michel, Casey. "The Myth That Civilian Gun Ownership Prevents Tyranny." *Think Progress*, 30 Apr. 2018, archive.thinkprogress.org/civilian-guns-do-not-prevent-tyranny-f831c6aa871c.

- IV. People shouldn't rely on the police, whether they're owned by the state or a private company, to protect them.

One of the proposed alternatives to the modern police is voluntary community self-defense, a rotating group of people who temporarily take on the responsibilities of keeping their community safe and whose tenure has term limits. Such a group would be recallable at any time should their community feel that they are no longer fit to perform their duties. This arrangement prevents those who hold positions of seniority from accumulating power and influence. It also provides higher levels of public accountability and oversight to those charged with keeping the peace so that they don't become a privileged group who exist above the public they're sworn to protect. I fully support this idea and will concede that if such a group did exist, they would need to have some guns lying around for the situations where such weapons are necessary. I'm not going to pretend that there are zero situations where firearms would be needed.

Still, I'd argue that if such a group did exist, the members would likely use guns sparingly, and they wouldn't carry them around with them for the same reason that modern police forces in countries like the UK don't carry firearms around, namely, that carrying guns around has a tendency to escalate situations.¹⁷ When the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. When the only tool you have is a gun, every problem looks like another act of police brutality.

I also think that even in a future socialist or anarchist society, most people would be discouraged from owning guns because, again, unless you're in one of the few occupations where owning firearms is both necessary and beneficial, it's best if you don't own a gun. Owning a gun when you don't need to isn't merely reckless but actively dangerous. You're creating an unnecessary risk not only for yourself but for the people around you as well.

Still, I'll admit that the leftwing argument for owning a gun is a lot more sophisticated than the NRA's stance on the issue, and as an anarchist I fully support the idea of abolishing the modern police and replacing it with a more egalitarian institution.

¹⁷Smith, Alexander, et al. "The Vast Majority of U.K. Police Don't Carry Guns. Here's Why." *NBC News*, 15 Sept. 2017, www.nbcnews.com/news/world/why-london-won-t-arm-all-police-despite-severe-terror-n737551.

Nonetheless, insofar as we don't currently live in a stateless and anti-capitalist society, it would be to our benefit to sharply cut back on the number of guns on the streets, and I'm not just applying this standard to civilians. I think the American police should be disarmed as well so that they're not tempted to cause needless death. As for how the police would deal with situations that required a gun, one proposal is to keep guns in a secure compartment in the trunk of the police car instead of carrying them around everywhere. We could also require that officers must receive prior authorization from a higher-up or a civilian oversight committee before they're allowed to use firearms.

However we deal with this situation, it's clear that the fewer guns we have floating around, the better.

In Defense of Immigrants

Before you support deporting someone, it's worth considering what that actually means. When you deport someone, you're taking them away from their home, their family, their friends, their place of work, and their community. You're sending them to a country that they may have no real ties to and may not have seen for decades. In short, you're sending this person's life in disarray for the crime of being born on the wrong side of an imaginary line.

I'm not interested in anyone who claims that they shouldn't have been here anyway. While what they did was unlawful, you have no moral obligation to follow laws that are unjust, a point you must accept unless you think that the people who upheld the legal institutions of slavery and segregation were in the right.

Whenever you hear a story about an immigrant who's been deported, you'll often find that they were just people trying to make a living, minding their own business and not causing problems for anybody until folks like Trump and ICE decided to make it a problem.

Anti-immigration activists like to make pithy jokes about how if you think immigration doesn't kill people, you should ask the Native Americans. Mind you, immigration is not the same thing as colonization or invasion. Not every movement from one country to another is a form of transgression. Colonizers and invaders hurt people. Immigrants, by and large, do not. In fact, studies have shown that immigrants tend to have lower crime rates than native-born folks.¹⁸

I'm also not interested in whatever complaint you might have about an immigrant taking your job. Let's ignore the fact that this is often untrue. Most immigrants work jobs that native-born folks don't want to do, like farmwork and other forms of manual labor.¹⁹ Even when it is true, so what? Why shouldn't a business hire whoever is the most qualified for the work, regardless of national origin? You might think that said job belongs to you since you're an American citizen, but it really doesn't. After all, what's distinctly American about mopping a floor, washing dishes, or

¹⁸Barncard, Chris. "Undocumented Immigrants Far Less Likely to Commit Crimes in U.S. than Citizens." University of Wisconsin-Madison, 7 Dec. 2020, news.wisc.edu/undocumented-immigrants-far-less-likely-to-commit-crimes-in-u-s-than-citizens.

¹⁹"Immigrant Farmworkers and America's Food Production—5 Things to Know." *FWD.US*, www.fwd.us/news/immigrant-farmworkers-and-americas-food-production-5-things-to-know.

administering a vaccine? Why should it matter where the person came from so long as they can do the work?

As for claims that illegal immigration lowers wages, let's ignore the fact that this is often not true and that, in fact, immigration has often been tied to higher profits for businesses.²⁰ Even if it were true, why are you blaming immigrants who are just trying to make a living for themselves? Why aren't you blaming your boss, the person who signs your checks and decides how much to pay you? The fact is that immigrants make for a convenient scapegoat and your boss is laughing at you for being so foolish that you're actually blaming the immigrant for your low wages rather than the person whose job it is to set your wages. They could choose to pay you more or they could make up some excuse about how "market forces" have forced them to not raise your wages even as they force you to work unpaid overtime. Our economic conditions aren't the fault of immigrants.

As for conservative fearmongering about a lack of "cultural cohesion," what quality do you think that immigrants lack that they would need to live in your country? They're still human and they still eat, work, and have fun, the same as everyone else. Maybe they speak a different language, but while that can be inconvenient, it hardly justifies deportation. There are plenty of workarounds, like using an online translating service or finding a bilingual person to help you out. Also, this is really only a problem for first-generation immigrants. After they have children, those kids will be raised in the culture and language of the country they're living in rather than in the one their parents came from. More to the point, while immigrants may have some different values than you, since when has that ever been a litmus test for living in America? There are many people in this country that I strongly disagree with, especially Republicans, but I don't want them deported. I don't think that where you live should be contingent on some arbitrary morality quiz.

Anti-immigration activists also like to quip that progressives claim that diversity and multiculturalism are good but also say that we're all part of one human family and that we're all the same deep down. Those who favor restrictions on immigration claim that this represents a contradiction. Mind you, not only are there differences between cultures; there are also differences within cultures. No two people from the same society are identical. They have different hobbies, experiences, and perspectives. Even

²⁰Estrada, Cesar. "How Immigrants Positively Affect the Business Community and the U.S. Economy." Center for American Progress, 22 June 2016, www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2016/06/22/140124/how-immigrants-positively-affect-the-business-community-and-the-u-s-economy.

two members of the same family aren't the same. We have all had disagreements with our parents and siblings. While those differences sometimes lead to arguments, that's not to say that we don't care about each other or that we can't live together. We are all different from each other and, in that regard, we are all the same.

I'm also not especially interested in arguments against immigration that focus on Japan and its low crime rates and relatively high standards of living. By that logic, North Korea should also be a nice place to live in since it too has a mostly homogenous population. If you're going to respond to that by saying that North Korea's problems are unrelated to its level of ethnic purity, why do you assume that Japan's success is because of its ethnic purity rather than some other mitigating factors? Also, Japan is hardly a utopia. It has a long history of war crimes, and its birth rate is abysmal. Ironically, if Japan wants to have a sustainable population, it's going to have to loosen its restrictions on immigration.

As for the assumption that if we abolish borders, everyone would go to the "good countries"—first of all, don't flatter yourself. Most people who immigrate don't do so recreationally. They do so because they feel like they can find better opportunities in other countries or maybe because situations have deteriorated in their country, often because of the foreign policy of the countries they're immigrating to, like the US. Maybe Mexicans wouldn't be so inclined to leave Mexico if America hadn't pushed the War on Drugs so hard that many parts of Mexico are unlivable. Maybe Middle Eastern people like Syrians wouldn't be so fast to leave the Middle East if it weren't for conflicts like the War on Terror, which destabilized the region and helped create a cycle of poverty and suffering. If you helped cause a problem for people and then have the nerve to complain about how those folks cope with that problem, you're unworthy of consideration.

Second, modern militarized borders are a recent invention. They came into prevalence in the lead up to World War I and coincided with the rise of nationalism and the rampant xenophobia that came with that. It used to be that you could just go to another country if you had the funds. You didn't even need a passport. Steven Zweig, in his book *The World of Yesterday*, states that "before 1914 the earth belonged to all. People went where they wished and stayed as long as they pleased. There were no permits, no visas, and it always gives me pleasure to astonish the young by telling them that before 1914 I travelled from Europe to India and to America without passport and without ever having seen one."²¹ This is not some utopian dream. This is how the world was organized for most of its history.

²¹Zweig, Stefan. *The World of Yesterday*. pp.410. The Viking Press, 1943.

Finally, why shouldn't a person be allowed to live wherever they want so long as they're not hurting anybody? If an immigrant wants to live in Manhattan, Paris, Seoul, or Lagos, what's it to you? Frankly, if ICE came to my apartment complex and asked me if there were any illegal immigrants in the building, I would stare them in the eyes and tell them no. Once they left, I would give a heads up to my immigrant neighbors. I wouldn't take issue with one of my neighbors being an illegal immigrant. It doesn't hurt me. It doesn't affect me at all. I barely even talk to my neighbors. What does it matter to me where they came from or whether they're here legally?

I'm not saying that building a world with open borders is going to be easy or quick, or that there won't be setbacks, but we can do it. Do your best within current circumstances while still working for a brighter future. In the long term, we ought to lay the foundations, both ideological and political, to create a future where people can live wherever they want because, ultimately, it's nobody else's business. In the meantime, support DACA as well as policies and politicians that uphold the rights of immigrants. Encourage policy makers to let in more migrants and refugees. Donate money to charities and organizations that assist immigrants, refugees, and migrants. If you're forced to interact with ICE, do not cooperate. Lie if you have to.

Maybe we can't save everyone, but we should save as many people as possible. If that's the best we can do, then I guess that'll have to be enough. I know it's hard, but courage in the face of adversity is the mark of a true hero. Make no mistake, those who stand and fight for the rights of immigrants have earned the right to call themselves heroes.

No gods, no masters, no nations, no borders.

In Defense of Sex Workers

Whenever people complain about sex workers, a lot of it comes from a sex-negative attitude that views sexuality as a threat. Mind you, if someone wants to be more sexual or wear more revealing clothing, they should be allowed to. If someone doesn't want to be sexual or prefers less revealing clothing, that's fine too. "Do whatever you want so long as you're not hurting anybody" isn't a vain formula.

Conservatives often respond to this by saying that sex work does hurt people because of the exploitative working conditions within the sex industry as well as human trafficking. I would reply that the problem here isn't sex work but the culture we've built that stigmatizes and criminalizes sex work, which makes it more dangerous than it has to be. I'd argue that we should do more to address that culture rather than getting mad at people for having an OnlyFans account. Obviously I'm opposed to human trafficking, but I'm also opposed to people using human trafficking as a weapon against sex workers. After all, so long as sex work is consensual, who cares?

I'm also not interested in any argument against sex work that suggests that such work is degrading. Aside from demonizing people for daring to have a libido, it's worth noting that a lot of people consider being a janitor to be demeaning. Ignoring the classism of such sentiments, those who make these claims aren't in a hurry to criminalize janitorial work. This is because if some people find that work fulfilling and the work needs to get done anyway, isn't that a win-win? Bear in mind that I have a broader view of necessary work than most people. For example, I think that entertainment is essential labor insofar as I would prefer that life not be boring and joyless. Given that sex work is a form of entertainment, you could argue there's a social need for it. At the very least, the world would be a much poorer place were it not for the efforts of those in the sex industry. In fact, I'd posit that there's far more social utility to being a sex worker than there is to being a hedge fund manager or a CEO.

While I do believe in fighting against exploitation in the sex industry, that's not so much an indictment of sex work than it is an indictment of capitalism. Indeed, if we ever do manage to build an anti-capitalist society with better working conditions, I think sex work would still exist. So long as there's a demand for that labor and there are folks who find that work fulfilling, it will always get done.

The only argument against sex work that makes slight sense is that you can't put sex work on a resume, but even that argument has problems. First, the reason you

can't put sex work on a resume is because our culture stigmatizes and criminalizes such labor. If we decriminalize and normalize sex work, maybe people would feel comfortable putting their tenure as a prostitute on their resume. After all, being a sex worker gives someone a lot of customer service experience. Two, even within current circumstances, sex work is often quite lucrative, and you can earn far more money as a stripper than you would make flipping burgers at McDonald's. There are risks to sex work, of course, but there are also huge benefits, and it's up to individuals to decide whether the benefits outweigh the risks. Indeed, for the people who would ask, "Why be a sex worker when you could work a less risky job?" a valid answer is that if a consenting adult wants to be a sex worker, they should be allowed to.

Sex work is real work. Sex worker rights are human rights. Anarchists should fully support the rights of sex workers and advocate for them both because it's the right thing to do and to eliminate arbitrary forms of authority which limit people's bodily autonomy.

In Defense of Feminism

Let me discuss some of the criticisms of feminism and explain why they're wrong.

- I. Feminism is irrelevant because women today have it better than women of the past.

We can appreciate the progress we've made while still acknowledging that there's more work to be done. I don't have much to add other than to point out that the people who make this claim are using the laziest possible argument against feminism.

- II. Does the gender wage gap exist?

While women and men who work in the same jobs tend to make the same amount of money, the problem is that women often can't get into well-paying jobs. Several industries, such as corporate workplaces, are often hostile to women, who often have a hard time advancing to higher-paying jobs within those workplaces.²²

It's unfortunate that we've cultivated a culture where a woman who might be interested in becoming a game designer might feel pressured not to because she knows about the sexist work culture within that industry.²³ This issue is comorbid with the struggle of men who want to become nurses and feel pressured not to because the field is typically dominated by women.²⁴ This is a problem because people should be able to do whatever they want so long as they're not hurting anybody, and if there are barriers getting in the way of them getting into their field of choice, we should try to alleviate them.

- III. Is sexual assault and rape really that big of a deal?

Given the unfortunate prevalence of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape within our culture, it's unfortunate that men's rights activists' (MRAs) arguments about "false rape accusations" tend to proliferate, especially since such instances are vanishingly rare.

²²"Glass Ceiling." *Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glass_ceiling. Accessed 13 May 2021.

²³Lorenz, Taylor, and Kellen Browning. "Dozens of Women in Gaming Speak Out about Sexism and Harassment." *New York Times*, 23 June 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/06/23/style/women-gaming-streaming-harassment-sexism-twitch.html.

²⁴Brusie, Chaunie. "Why Nursing Is a Great Career Choice for Men." *Nurse.Org*, 16 June 2020, nurse.org/articles/Male-Nurses-And-The-Profession.

More to the point, claims that cast doubt on the legitimacy of testimonies given by victims of sexual violence contribute to a climate where people who've had such traumatic experiences are often afraid to report it, not just because they're afraid that the police won't believe them, a fear that is unfortunately well-founded in many of cases, but because they're afraid that they'll be ostracized by their community for supposedly being crazy or just trying to start drama.

This state of affairs is contemptible. People who've experienced sexual violence might not be able to get the help they need because they're afraid of retribution. Perpetrators of rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment might escape accountability and go on to commit similar acts towards others. This issue isn't exclusive to women. It's a problem for everyone, including men who are afraid of being perceived as weak or unmanly for being the victim of sexual violence.

Is this to say that you should always believe accusations of sexual harassment, assault, or rape? No, but it does mean that you should always take such cases seriously and not dismiss these people's concerns out of hand. If your response is to claim that the accused are innocent until proven guilty, while that might be true in a court of law, such a burden of proof isn't reasonable to expect in a nonjudicial setting. Indeed, if a friend or family member comes to you and reports that they've had a traumatic experience, your response shouldn't be to demand a wealth of evidence before you take their claims seriously. Rather, your job is to comfort them, listen patiently, and offer any assistance you can manage.

MRAs will often complain about how unfair it is to the accused, who might have their reputation ruined. My response to that is to ask which is worse: (1) someone being falsely accused of rape and suffering a temporary loss in reputation or (2) someone who's committed rape not being held accountable because the victim was too afraid to come forwards?

IV. Feminists are prudish.

Feminists are not a monolith. There are different schools of thought within feminism, and as such, dismissing all of feminism as being prudish is like dismissing all chairs of being unusable regardless of what the individual chairs are like. For example, many feminists identify as sex-positive feminists, and they tend to believe that sexuality is a perfectly healthy way to express oneself. Such folks tend to place high emphasis on bodily autonomy and sexual freedom. In addition, these feminists tend to support the

rights of sex workers and the right to make porn, though they might have criticisms of the exploitative labor practices within those industries.

That's not to say that people who support sex positivity have no criticisms of how women are portrayed in media or how people treat women in real life, but such feminists don't categorically reject all instances of female sexuality. Indeed, much of feminist critique of how women are portrayed in media comes down to context, such as whether the characters have sexual agency, if any sex displayed is consensual, whether the piece of media frames nonconsensual sex in a negative or positive light, whether any portrayal of sexual violence is gratuitous, and so on.

As for women in real life, sex-positive feminists believe that if a woman wants to be sexually active and wear revealing clothing, she should be allowed to. If a woman doesn't want to be sexually active and prefers more modest clothing, that's okay too. People should be allowed to live however they want so long as they're not hurting anybody.

As for any claims that women who have been sexually assaulted had it coming because they were wearing revealing clothing, the real problem is not a lack of modesty but the culture we've built where men don't feel like they have to respect women's consent or sexual agency. It would be prudent to focus more on reforming that culture rather than punishing a woman for wearing a tank top.

Rest assured that these same principles apply to men, as well, who feminists typically believe should also be allowed to express themselves in ways that feel comfortable and fulfilling for them, so long as they're not being harmful.

V. Feminism shames women away from being stay-at-home moms.

The reason that fewer women are homemakers these days is because there are more women in the workforce, which means our sisters and mothers are more economically independent than they used to be. Where once they were dependent on their husbands and thus had to appease them to survive, now they can make their own money, and thus being a homemaker is a choice rather than an obligation. This is also one of the reasons why divorce rates are higher these days. In an age where women are more economically independent, they don't have to try and make a failing marriage work. Since women don't need their spouses' financial support, staying in such a relationship becomes a choice rather than a necessity.

That's not to say there's anything inherently wrong with being a stay-at-home parent. "Do whatever you want so long as you're not hurting anybody" isn't a vain formula. Being a stay-at-home parent does not, in and of itself, hurt anyone. However, pressuring someone into being a stay-at-home parent, either financially or socially, is harmful and is an unnecessary infringement on people's liberty.

VI. Miscellaneous arguments from MRAs about divorce settlements or men dying in military service.

When MRAs make these arguments, it's not because they actually care about men dying in needless wars. If they did care, they wouldn't be so inclined to support increasing the military budget or sending more young men to die in new wars. Considering that many of these people tend to vote Republican, I'm not inclined to believe that they actually care about military aggression. Rather, these arguments are merely meant to delegitimize feminism by insinuating that since men have unique problems too, feminism is the enemy. Such claims aren't made so that men's unique problems can actually be solved, but to score cheap political points against people they don't like.

Speaking personally, I consider myself a feminist and I'm against men dying in pointless wars. I don't want men to needlessly suffer from problems that are generally unique to men, like prostate issues and being dismissed as unmanly by their peers. I believe that men should be able to live however they want so long as they're not hurting anybody. If that means presenting in a more traditionally masculine way, fine. If that means presenting some other way, such as more feminine or gender nonconforming, more power to them.

However, men aren't going to get such freedom under our current gender norms, which pressure men into fitting into neat little boxes of what conservatives have arbitrarily decided constitutes a "real man."

The truth about feminism is that, properly understood, it's merely another front on the common struggle for all people to be free. We will not stop until we've achieved our goals.

In Defense of Euthanasia

While I do support people having a right to euthanasia, I also believe that we should eliminate any mitigating factors that might pressure people into getting euthanized, such as prohibitively expensive medical treatments and the sense that the sick are a burden to their friends and family. Indeed, one reason to support universal healthcare is so that patients have access to the resources they need to make an informed decision about whether they want to go through with physician-assisted suicide, such as financial assistance for health-related bills, therapy, and community support. I bring this up because some opponents of euthanasia are disabled people who argue that they've been pushed towards euthanasia because of our society's ableist attitudes that devalue the lives of those with disabilities.²⁵ As such, I want to clarify that I do believe that the lives of disabled folks have value, and we should fight cultural attitudes that suggest otherwise.

Nonetheless, while I do believe that we should eliminate any factors which make people feel like they're forced to go through with euthanasia, I do believe that access to physician-assisted suicide should not only be legal but covered by single-payer healthcare. My reasoning for this is that while I'm not suicidal, I'd be lying if I claimed that zero situations exist where suicide is a rational option.

For instance, in the year 74 CE during the Siege of Masada, Roman soldiers surrounded a fortress and trapped the Jewish rebels inside. When the Romans finally managed to break inside, they found that the rebels had all committed suicide.²⁶ On that day, the Jews of Masada decided that death was preferable to a life of captivity and slavery. While I'm not sure I would've made the same choice, it would be disingenuous to suggest that the rebels didn't have compelling reasons for their final act.

For a more modern example, let's say your doctor walks in and tells you that in a few months your dementia will have degraded your mental faculties so thoroughly that you'll enter a persistent vegetative state. On one hand, you can wait until you've devolved to the point where everything that has defined you, such as your memories and personality, have vanished and all that's left is an empty shell. On the other hand, you can go out on your own terms.

²⁵Gorman, Anna. "The Disability-Rights Advocates Fighting against Assisted Suicide." *The Atlantic*, 30 June 2015, www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/06/disability-rights-assisted-suicide-california/397235.

²⁶"Siege of Masada." *Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Masada.

That's not to say that I think such a decision should be made hastily. I'll concede that it weighs on my mind that many people who attempted to commit suicide and failed say that they no longer wanted to kill themselves after a few hours or even a few minutes have passed.²⁷ Suicidal impulses are often acted on in the spur of the moment and may very well go away as all fleeting emotions do. As such, I tend to disagree with the libertarian argument for people having a right to commit suicide, namely, that allowing people to kill themselves if they want to makes them freer. I'd respond to that claim by pointing out that while a person might want to commit suicide in the moment, given that they might feel differently if they wait a few minutes, is it really a reflection of the principle of liberty to let people act on immediate self-destructive impulses?

Of course, there are limits to that formulation. Being free means being able to make choices that other people think are wrong. If you only let individuals make decisions when you agree with their course of action and disregard everything you don't agree with, in what sense are such people meaningfully free? Even dictators often hold fraudulent elections and lie about the results to boost their ego.

Still, I suppose that even liberty has its limits. If someone is about to commit an act of violence against others or themselves, you're well within your rights to prevent them from doing so by force if necessary. I have no opposition to suicide hotlines and, to a lesser extent, court-ordered hospitalizations for those with suicidal tendencies. I'd imagine that most anarchists would begrudgingly admit that perhaps the power held by doctors over their patients is a necessary form of authority.

Then again, as anyone who's been physically, emotionally, or sexually abused by the staff of mental health facilities can tell you,²⁸ even that form of authority isn't beyond scrutiny. Speaking from my personal experience of mental health hospitalization, I can attest to the fact that even at the best of times, the doctors and nurses at these facilities are often condescending and disrespectful. They treat their patients like children who don't know what's best for them. One wonders if the staff of psychiatric wards believe that their clients should be allowed to vote, given that

27Murray, Rheana. "What Is It Like to Survive a Suicide Attempt?" *TODAY Specials*, 31 Aug. 2018, www.today.com/specials/suicide-attempt-survivors.

28Department of Health and Social Care. *Modernising the Mental Health Act*. GOV.UK, 2019, pp. 53–57, assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/778897/Modernising_the_Mental_Health_Act_-_increasing_choice__reducing_compulsion.pdf.

they've ordained that stripping the freedom and dignity from those under their care is wise.

Anarchism is based on the premise that all forms of authority and hierarchy are to be considered illegitimate by default and that for any form of authority or hierarchy to be used, it must demonstrate that it's not illegitimate by proving that it's both necessary and beneficial or else be both dismantled and replaced with a more egalitarian institution. In the context of suicide prevention, this means giving patients more of a say in how they're treated and placing the staff of mental health facilities under greater public oversight and accountability to reduce instances of abuse.

At most, anarchists like me posit that maybe we should have a waiting period before someone is allowed to go through with physician-assisted suicide so that they can think through their decision thoroughly. But once the waiting period is over, I think it's safe to assume that we've given the person in question enough time to come to an informed decision.

If a person is so deeply in pain that even after being given time to think through what they'd like to do, they still believe that death is preferable over being forced to live, are we doing them a favor by not allowing them to go through with euthanasia? In my opinion, no.

In Defense of Education

Much political discussion has an anti-intellectual dimension to it. Indeed, a common rightwing talking point is complaining about college students and Marxist professors. Mind you, I've never met a Marxist professor, even though I work on a college campus.

On one hand, I get why people sometimes believe in the phrase "ignorance is bliss." For example, there are people who wish they were cats for understandable reasons, namely, because cats don't have to worry about political issues or paying bills. They just lounge about all day. On the other hand, cats also gain a lot from veterinary care, which are medical treatments researched and administered by sentient beings with mental capacities beyond those of felines. As such, if there are people who enjoy thinking about medical treatments and animals who benefit from such care, isn't that a win-win?

This is why I've never cared for the attitude behind the phrase "ignorance is bliss." At most, I'll begrudgingly admit that you don't need to know everything. For instance, I'm not interested in my boss telling me about his political opinions. Nonetheless, what about the serfs and slaves who went their entire lives without being educated? They were certainly ignorant, but they weren't happy about it. They didn't even have the luxury of knowing why they were in their situation or the political forces that led to it. That's regrettable because if they were given knowledge about their circumstances, they might have gained the information necessary to organize with their fellow workers and fight back against their masters. It's cliché to say that "the truth will set you free," but it's not a vain formula. The lifeblood of all progressive and leftwing movements is making people more aware of how they're being screwed over so that they can get angry about it and fight back. Say what you will about Marxists, but they deserve credit for popularizing the phrase "class consciousness."

This is why education is essential for democracy. After all, if we're going to have people govern themselves, they need to have the knowledge necessary to make well-thought-out decisions. This is also why libertarian arguments against democracy fail when they claim that poor people shouldn't be allowed to have a say in their government and that we should all defer to the rich, who are supposedly more educated. Mind you, the reason that rich people are sometimes better educated is because they can afford to go to expensive private schools. If we took that money and used it to fund public schools so that everyone could get the information they need for rational analysis, it's fair to conclude that the masses could govern themselves just fine.

That being said, I do want to draw a fine line and make it clear that I'm not saying that people without a formal education or people with mental disabilities are necessarily lesser people. Speaking personally, I dropped out of college a few years ago, and while I felt guilty about it for a while, in the long run, I think it was the right decision. I don't consider myself uneducated or dumb just because I didn't finish college. There are other ways to educate yourself, such as reading, talking to people with different perspectives, watching leftwing YouTube videos, and so on. This is not to say that college is bad, but it's only one path to education out of many. There are plenty of legitimate avenues for learning.

Still, if you can afford college, I do think it can be helpful. Many colleges have international students, meaning that you can meet people from other walks of life. It's also good for LGBT students to find a place to express themselves, especially if their families back home are more conservative.

While we're on the topic of learning, I think discussions about intelligence are often misguided. What does it mean for someone to be intelligent? A person who's good at understanding molecular physics might know nothing about fixing a car and vice versa. So when you ask someone if they're smart, the correct response is "smart about what?" Honestly, I think it's better to move away from deciding whether people are intelligent and towards deciding whether they're knowledgeable, because that's a less deterministic way of looking at the issue. A person can become more well read about a topic just by researching it, whereas "intelligence" is fixed and unchangeable. In my case, I'm knowledgeable about leftwing politics and less knowledgeable about rocket science. That's not even me being self-deprecating because, to some people, knowing about leftism is more important than knowing about rocket science. You can have a discussion with your peers about anarchism, but you probably can't have a conversation with them about rocket science unless you have a very specific group of friends. That's not to say it's bad to know about rocket science, especially if you're a rocket scientist. Ultimately, it depends on your personal circumstances.

To be honest, I enjoy having an active and limber mind. It brings me a great deal of joy. The life of the mind is beautiful, and more people should be encouraged to take part in it.

In Defense of Workplace Democracy

I don't have too many problems with my current job. Working in a campus dining hall isn't the most glamorous job in the world, but I do feel like I'm fulfilling a genuine human need. After all, people need to eat. My job also pays me well enough to deal with bills, and I've made many friends at work. That's not to say my job is perfect because no job is. There's a fair amount of busywork, and while the higher-ups aren't the worst in the world, they can still be quite annoying. Still, if I had to work at my current job for the rest of my life, I wouldn't mind it.

Still, there's a lot of room for improvement. Being an anarchist, I'm favorable towards the idea of having management duties be distributed to all employees instead of having all decision-making power held by a workplace dictator such as a boss or an oligarchy like a team of managers. I think it would be nice if all employees had an equal say in how the company is run, such as how high wages are set, what schedules are like, how to improve working conditions, and so on. Such an arrangement would be slower because all employees would have to be trained on how to do administrative work in addition to their regular duties, but organizing a workplace this way would increase the likelihood of fair outcomes that reflect the will of the entire staff rather than the whims of an individual business owner. The structure I just described is the basic premise of a worker-owned cooperative,²⁹ and starting such a company is a valid way of living in accordance with anarchist beliefs.

Of course, there are also labor unions, a form of workplace organizing where employees band together to gain leverage over their employer and force them to make concessions, and the consequences of not doing so can be crippling for the business. Workers can go on strikes, thus depriving the company of labor and interfering with the enterprise's ability to make a profit. Unionizing is a risky business which can get you fired, but succeeding means that you and your coworkers can democratically control your workplace, which allows the staff to have a greater say in their pay rate, working hours, health and safety standards, and so on.

This is why "right to work" laws, i.e. legislation that allows employees of a unionized workplace to not pay union dues if they're not a member of the union, are so pernicious. Such laws are completely antithetical to democratic principles because even if the majority of a company's workers agree on a set of demands to be met by

²⁹"Worker Ownership—U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives." United States Federation of Worker Cooperatives, www.usworker.coop/what-is-a-worker-cooperative. Accessed 15 May 2021.

their boss, the existence of a few selfish pricks who don't like the idea of contributing to the union can undermine the entire project.

Such legislation is often defended under "right of association." The argument goes that if a worker doesn't want to pay union dues, why should they have to? The answer is that just because they're not a member of the union, that doesn't mean they don't still benefit from the union's activities. Such fence-sitters still get higher wages, more paid time off, and better working conditions because of the union's ability to get concessions from the business owner.

It would be like if someone who didn't like having to pay for public roads could just decide not to pay taxes. Such tax evaders would still benefit from public roads insofar as they could use them. They just wouldn't contribute to funding such infrastructure, even if that left everyone worse off because a few self-absorbed pricks opted to withhold the money necessary to pay for road maintenance.

If being forced to pay into a social contract seems totalitarian to you, it's worth noting that both unions and, to a lesser extent, the government have democratic mechanisms in place. As such, if you don't like how your union dues or tax dollars are being spent, you can attend the next union meeting or election for public office to get a say in how that money should get spent. Your demands might be overruled by the majority, but at least you got to vote on what these democratic organizations are doing. That's a higher level of control than what you'll get from a non-unionized company or an authoritarian government.

I'm not saying that building a more democratic economic system will be easy, quick, or without setbacks, but we can do it. Do your best within current circumstances while still working towards a better future. In the long term, we should aim for an abolition of capitalism and the establishment of equal and democratic workplaces, where employees have seized control of their industries and can run them how they see fit. In the meantime, we can still start worker cooperatives, unionize as many industries as we can, and fight to overturn "right to work" laws which make labor organizing prohibitively difficult.

The union will make us strong.

In Defense of Populism

Many mainstream political commentators have taken to dismissing populism as a political tool, viewing it in the same way that classical conservatives viewed democracy, that is, a form of mob rule. As that description implies, the underlying assumptions of anti-populist thought are often deeply elitist and fundamentally anti-democratic. The people who make arguments against populism are effectively saying that the masses should have no say in the decisions that affect their lives both in the political and economic spheres, whether they say it out loud or not. This is disingenuous because it's not like the history of elite rule inspires confidence. The history of the hereditary monarchy, nobility, aristocracy, autocracy, oligarchy, and other forms of authoritarianism is a history of bloodshed and abuse, mediated by a ruling class that neither understood nor cared about the people it presumed to rule over.

Is that to say that populism is an unalloyed good? Not necessarily. But it's worth remembering that populism isn't an ideology but a political tool. Anyone can say that they "support the people," but it's worth asking what they mean by that. Do they mean raising the minimum wage and supporting single-payer healthcare to benefit the working class, or do they mean implementing nativist policies designed to harm immigrants even though such policies don't actually address society's underlying issues?

As that description implies, I'm fond of progressive and leftwing populism. These forms of populism have noble histories of listening to the perspectives of the working class and of minorities, be they racial, sexual, or otherwise. That sort of populism seeks to actually address the problems that underlie society, such as poverty, homelessness, discrimination, bigotry, nativism, capitalism, and everything else that exists to prop up the wealth and status of the ruling class.

By contrast, rightwing populism is a sham. Donald Trump can say he supports the white working class all he wants, but he still passed budgets that cut the taxes of rich people, focused more on cultural grievances such as political correctness over the actual problems that face blue collar workers, and was generally an authoritarian brute whose whole schtick was pretending to support the people as a means of protecting his wealth and status.

It's worth noting that dismissing all forms of populism is like dismissing all forms of protest, regardless of what's being protested or what methods are used.

Black Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter may both be protest groups, but they're not morally equivalent. Being against police brutality and being in favor of police brutality are not the same. Also, say what you will about Black Lives Matter, but that group is not the one that decided to storm the Capitol building on January 6, 2021. In the same way, both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders are populists, but that doesn't mean they're the same. In fact, their goals are diametrically opposed. Trump is an extension of the GOP's long running history of authoritarianism and plutocracy, while Sanders is trying to undermine conservatism and all the problems it helped create. That's not to say that Sanders is perfect or that he shouldn't be criticized, but I'll take him over Trump any day of the week.

I'll end this by saying that if any pundit decides to opine on populism and tries to draw a comparison between Trump and Sanders without noting the potentially meaningful distinctions between the two, they're not worth listening to, and you should probably ignore them. You don't need that kind of influence in your life.

In Defense of Pacifism

For as much as people accuse pacifists of being cowards, even the most ardent war hawk knows that they should at least pretend to abhor unnecessary violence and that violence should only be used when it's absolutely necessary. Pacifists would agree, though they would have a stricter definition of what qualifies as necessary violence.

Let's divide pacifism into two propositions. First, all violence is to be considered illegitimate by default. Second, for any form violence to be utilized, it must prove itself to not be illegitimate by demonstrating that it's both beneficial and necessary.

For example, most pacifists would agree that violence is justifiable in the case of self-defense, though they would probably insist that even in that instance, you should either take care to not cause any more harm than is necessary to neutralize the threat or, if possible, just run. I'm sure plenty of people would call such an approach cowardly. I would respond by saying there's nothing brave about putting yourself or the people around you in needless danger. That's not courage. That's just recklessness. That's you putting your pride ahead of other people's wellbeing.

What's important to remember is that even when violence is a necessary evil, it's still evil. There's no glory in watching the light fade from a person's eyes or breaking their body in such a way that they'll be crippled for life. Even throwing a punch, while hardly extreme, should only be done if absolutely necessary to keep yourself and the people around you safe.

I bring this up because there's often talk about revolution in politics, and I have mixed feelings about it. On one hand, it seems unlikely that revolution will happen within current circumstances. On the other hand, things change. Circumstances could be radically different in 50 years or even 10 years. So I'm not going to make a claim about whether or not revolution is possible. I'll just say that we'll see.

That being said, whether or not we agree on whether revolution is possible or necessary, I hope we can agree that it's not desirable. I think that one of the major reasons that revolution hasn't happened yet is because, by and large, people don't want to kill each other. They can be convinced to do so if they feel it's necessary or in their best interest, but it's not something most people want to do. There's no glory in shooting someone to death, even if they're your enemy, and that's if you're lucky. That's assuming your opponent isn't quicker on the draw than you are. It's not fun to sit in a cold, lightless building because the enemy forces decided to bomb the local power

grid. It's not enjoyable to return home from war to find that your hometown has been destroyed.

That's not to say that revolution is impossible or unnecessary. It may very well be true that it's not only possible but, given the circumstances, morally obligatory. But it's not something that you should see as a source of valor.

To give credit where it's due, at least when people on the left recommend revolution, it's because they think it will help people in the long term because it will pave the way for a society where more people are able to live fulfilling and comfortable lives with their needs being met. We can criticize them over whether their methods are feasible, but at least in that case, a cost-benefit analysis can be done to see whether the ends justify the means or whether there are more peaceful options for achieving our goals. I don't necessarily agree with the criticism that they would be unable to pull off a revolution because they're untrained. After all, the Haitian Revolution wasn't won by Navy Seals. Sometimes people do rise up against those who're oppressing them.

By contrast, the right's justification for revolution seems to be an excuse to kill people who say "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas." Weird reason to kill someone.

That being said, I do believe that anyone who pines for a violent revolution is a fool. Even at the best of times, war encourages a mindset where you stop seeing humans as people and start seeing them as expendable resources. The people you're fighting become enemies who you should kill as many of as possible like you're trying to get the high score in a video game, instead of human beings whose lives have value.

The choice to incite a revolution isn't a determination you should make lightly, nor is it a determination that you should make alone. After all, while you might be on board with revolution, what about the people around you? Do they get a say in the matter?

This is why leftists hate conservatives with hawkish foreign policy. Rightwingers will claim they abhor unnecessary violence, but the decision doesn't seem that hard for them. They're not fighting back tears as they authorize wars that will kill thousands, if not millions, of people. Worse, their reasoning for war isn't even for any particular benefit to the public. They'll cite "national interest" as their reason for war, but all that national interest seems to be is the bottom line of private corporations and rich people.

Why should we throw our lives away, as well as the lives of foreigners, so that arms dealers can make a quick buck?

When they defend their militarism by saying that the defense industry provides jobs, I would advise them to find different jobs. Become a doctor, a firefighter, or a janitor for all I care. Mopping floors may not be glamorous work, but at least janitors can sleep soundly knowing that their livelihoods aren't based on carpet-bombing civilians. Am I saying that revolution is impossible or unnecessary? No, but I am saying that the choice to engage in violent conflict shouldn't be an easy decision. If the thought of killing someone weighs on you, that's good. It means you're still human.

In Defense of Communism

Before we consign socialism and communism to the dustbin of history because of the unfortunate horrors of the Soviet Union and other “communist” states, it’s worth keeping a few things in mind.

First, some of the greatest critics of the Soviet Union were leftists or communists themselves. Anarchist Emma Goldman and democratic socialist George Orwell are well known for their critiques of the Soviet Union precisely because it didn’t live up to leftwing principles of democracy, equality, or liberty. Indeed, there’s a long list of communist dissidents who were killed by the Soviet Union for criticizing the regime.

Second, many of the terrible actions of various “communist” states have been exaggerated after the fact by people with an ideological agenda. Most famously, the *Black Book of Communism* purposely exaggerated the amount of people killed by various “communist” states in order to make their case that communism could never work and should never be tried again.³⁰ That’s not to say that countries like the Soviet Union or Maoist China were good. They were terrible. However, it’s worth noting that rightwing ideologues have a vested interest in making these countries seem worse than they actually were in order to serve their agenda.

Third, we can have a long terminological debate about what words such as “socialism” and “communism” mean and whether countries like the Soviet Union or Maoist China fit under those definitions. For now, let’s just note that modern socialists and communists aren’t asking for a return to Soviet norms. That’s why modern socialists tend to refer to themselves as democratic socialists to distinguish themselves from the authoritarian “socialists” of the Soviet Union. Admittedly, there are what are known as “tankies,” a vocal minority of leftists who are essentially apologists for the Soviet Union and other authoritarian “communist” states. These people don’t merit attention, and they don’t represent the vast majority of leftists or communists, who do in fact think that democracy is good and the Soviet Union was bad.

Fourth, before you denounce socialism and communism for the atrocities committed in their name, I think it would be disingenuous for you to not be consistent and apply the same standards to the main rival of these ideologies, namely, capitalism.

³⁰“The Black Book of Communism.” *Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Black_Book_of_Communism#Criticism.

Under capitalism, millions of people starve to death every year³¹ even though we have the technological capacity to grow enough food for everyone and distribute it accordingly.³² Many people die from exposure every year,³³ even though many countries have more unoccupied houses than they have homeless people. These problems go unsolved not because they're impossible to solve, but because the capitalist ruling class doesn't consider it profitable to solve them. They would rather let people starve to death needlessly instead of making a slight cut in their profits to meet everyone's needs.

I don't think that these issues go unaddressed because people are naturally selfish or whatever nonsense the right is trying to sell you. I think the ruling class has spent a lot of time and resources convincing people to not care about the plight of less fortunate people. After all, how many times have you heard conservatives tell people to be "self-reliant" or to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps"? People are the products of their environments, and capitalists have spent a very long time cultivating an environment where they can preserve their wealth and status. Under a different economic system with different incentives, people would be conditioned to act differently.

Capitalism is about profit seeking and doesn't have built-in measures to meet people's needs beyond what is profitable. This puts it at odds with leftwing ideologies like socialism, communism, and anarchism, which are based on the idea that everyone deserves an equal share in the necessities of life, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, nationality, disability, employment status, gender, or any other qualifier that has traditionally denied people access to meeting their basic needs. We can argue all day about whether leftwing ideologies are feasible, but it's worth noting that insofar as capitalism is not about addressing human need, a lot of people die pointless and avoidable deaths under the current economic system.

That's not even getting into the more direct ways that capitalism has killed people, such as rich people leveraging their power over governments to wage armed conflicts on their behalf. An example of this is the mass murder of communists in

31"The World Counts." The World Counts, www.theworldcounts.com/challenges/people-and-poverty/hunger-and-obesity/how-many-people-die-from-hunger-each-year/story. Accessed 15 May 2021.

32Holt-Giménez, Eric, et al. "We Already Grow Enough Food for 10 Billion People ... and Still Can't End Hunger." *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture*, vol. 36, no. 6, 2012, pp. 595–98. doi:10.1080/10440046.2012.695331.

33Lane, Kathryn. "The Dangers of Cold Weather." *Public Health Post*, 1 Feb. 2019, www.publichealthpost.org/research/counting-cold-related-deaths-new-york-city.

Indonesia under the dictator Suharto, who was propped up by the United States and other Western governments.³⁴ Another example was the Chilean coup where the democratically elected Salvador Allende was overthrown by Augusto Pinochet, who installed a fascist dictatorship and tortured and killed thousands of political dissidents.³⁵

When I was in high school, one of my Spanish teachers was from Chile, and he relayed a story from the Pinochet era: one day when he went to class, he found that his entire class had disappeared. I'll leave it to you to infer what happened to them.

Capitalism is incompatible with human life, and to the extent that humanity will be able to flourish and grow, it will be because we undermine capitalist norms and replace them with leftwing norms that are based on addressing human needs rather than profit seeking.

I'm not saying that this process will be easy, quick, or without setbacks, but we can do it. Just as predecessors brought slavery and feudalism to an end, so too can we make headway towards an anti-capitalist future. Even if we don't complete our goals within our lifetime, we can make as much progress as possible and then hand off the torch to future generations so that they can pick up where we left off, just as our forerunners inspired us to continue their fight.

To quote Ursula Le Guin: "We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings."³⁶

³⁴"Indonesian Mass Killings of 1965–66." *Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesian_mass_killings_of_1965%E2%80%9366. Accessed 15 May 2021.

³⁵"Human Rights Violations in Pinochet's Chile." *Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_violations_in_Pinochet%27s_Chile. Accessed 15 May 2021.

³⁶Ursula K. Le Guin (2016). "Words Are My Matter: Writings About Life and Books, 2000–2016, with a Journal of a Writer's Week", p.115, Small Beer Press

Against Derogatory Language towards Marginalized Groups

When people insist on their “right” to use slurs and other forms of derogatory language towards marginalized groups, you have to wonder how their moral priorities got so skewed. After all, even the most ardent free speech warrior is still hurt by personal insults and understands that they should be careful with their words to avoid being needlessly hurtful. Such consideration is valuable in every conversation, and it’s especially important when the words we use have a history of being weaponized against minorities to dehumanize them.

As for complaints about oversensitivity, it’s worth asking why basic politeness has become a hot button issue. It costs you next to nothing to not use slurs and to learn a trans person’s pronouns. If using kinder language makes members of marginalized groups feel more included, I fail to see the problem. While I won’t deny that a few people overreact to derogatory language, such individuals are merely a vocal minority and don’t represent the vast majority of marginalized groups.

More to the point, while free speech is a right, it’s not an absolute right. Many forms of speech are illegal, such as false advertising, slander, libel, perjury, fraud, and threats. Threats are the most important limit of free speech to consider when talking to a member of a marginalized group. After all, when you use language that demonizes an entire population of people, you contribute to a cultural atmosphere where mistreatment of that population is more permissible. This is what leftists mean when they talk about stochastic terrorism, which is the process by which the public dehumanization of a group of people results in the incitement of violence against those people.

Of course, there are limits to this formulation. You could argue that if demonizing someone can incite violence against them, then all forms of public criticism could be considered forms of stochastic terrorism. Such an argument would be disingenuous since that would mean we could never hold those in positions of authority to account for abuses of power. Still, even in instances of valid criticism of the power that be, we should try to phrase our critique in such a way that doesn’t cause unnecessary harm. We should also try to cultivate an audience for our work that’s disinclined towards harassment and other forms of toxic behavior. Then again, the reason it’s not okay to use slurs against marginalized groups is because the members of those groups aren’t categorically evil, and dismissing them as such is overgeneralizing. By contrast, insulting public figures such as the rich, politicians, celebrities, and rightwing pundits is both entertaining and necessary. If making fun of

such authority figures causes harm to befall them, it's worth asking whether (1) we can be held to account for the actions of listeners, especially since no audience is filled with saints, and (2) the harm caused is justifiable. While violence is always evil, it's occasionally a necessary evil. Frankly, while I won't advocate for the murder of people like Ben Shapiro or Tucker Carlson, if the abundance of jokes made at their expense accidentally causes them to get hurt, I'm not going to lose sleep over it. Reactionary commentators have done a lot to earn our contempt, and it's not incumbent on us to feel sorry for them when their actions have repercussions for them.

I suppose those are the terms for public discourse. We should show compassion and consideration for the oppressed and employ rigorous mockery towards oppressors.

Against Fatphobia

Speaking as someone who's overweight, I've always tried to maintain a body-positive attitude. After all, being fat doesn't automatically make a person unhealthy,³⁷ and skinniness doesn't necessarily indicate that you're taking care of yourself.³⁸ Furthermore, being chubby doesn't in and of itself make you unattractive. Beauty is subjective, and I'm sure there are people who I find attractive who others wouldn't. I'm not saying that being conventionally attractive doesn't give you an edge, but it's worth remembering that beauty standards are always changing.³⁹ Anyway, there's someone out there for everyone, and if you keep looking, you'll find someone right for you, unless you're asexual and would prefer not to, which is also okay.

While everyone should try to take care of themselves and maintain good health, fat shaming doesn't work. It doesn't motivate people to exercise more or eat healthier. If anything, given that many overweight people cope with depression and anxiety by eating more, fat shaming only makes the problem worse.⁴⁰

Everyone has their own methods of staying in good health. One conceptual tool that's been helpful for me is thinking less in terms of eating healthily and more about eating less unhealthily. Maybe drink diet soda over regular soda. Eat out once a week instead of multiple times a week. It's about striking a balance between not eating so poorly that you destroy your body while also still allowing yourself to eat food that isn't tasteless swill. For whatever it's worth, that's worked out well for me so far.

Anarchism is about rejecting arbitrary forms of authority and hierarchy, including cultural norms that make people ashamed for having a different body type. While I don't know if I would go so far as to refer to fat people as a marginalized group, I wouldn't be surprised if overweight folks were more amenable to being recruited into our cause than skinny people. That's certainly how it turned out for me.

37Anderson, Laurie. "Fat and Fit?" *WebMD*, 1 July 2008, www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/features/fat-and-fit.

38Mayo Clinic Staff. "Anorexia Nervosa—Symptoms and Causes." *Mayo Clinic*, 20 Feb. 2018, www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/anorexia-nervosa/symptoms-causes/syc-20353591.

39Edwards, Vanessa. "Beauty Standards: See How Body Types Change through History." *Science of People*, www.scienceofpeople.com/beauty-standards. Accessed 15 May 2021.

40Vogel, Lauren. "Fat Shaming Is Making People Sicker and Heavier." *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, vol. 191, no. 23, 2019, p. E649. doi:10.1503/cmaj.109-5758.

Against Landlords

The problem anarchists have with landlords isn't with individual landlords. It may be true that your personal landlord is a nice person with a good soul who will go to heaven. I don't know and I don't care. Rather, our problem is with landlords as an institution.

First, landlords don't provide housing. Architects design shelters, and construction workers build them. Landlords buy up those living spaces and charge a premium for access to them. Once you pay for access to one of those locations, you don't get to own it. It's not like buying a house. Rather, you're paying for permission to stay in a place that someone else still owns and has complete control over.

Landlords' justification for this is that while you might not own the home you're paying for, you at least get access to various services like maintenance and other amenities. That's nice and all, but even setting aside horror stories about negligent landlords who don't bother to take care of the apartments they own, couldn't tenants just pay for their own maintenance if they just owned the place where they lived? It's not as though private homeowners aren't able to get appliances fixed when they break. It's slightly less convenient, but they can call in a plumber, electrician, or any other service provider required when stuff breaks.

More to the point, the tenant-landlord relationship is inherently unequal, and that leaves a lot of room for abuse. For example, if a regular person on the street decides to insult you or make unreasonable demands of you, at least you have the means to fight back. You can make fun of them and refuse their commands. By contrast, if your landlord decides to mistreat you or starts making unreasonable demands, you have to watch what you say because they can create some pretense to have you evicted. That's not even getting into the fact that your landlord owns a key to your living space and can just enter and leave at any time without you even knowing.

Maybe you think that your landlord wouldn't do that to you. Perhaps you're certain that they wouldn't take advantage of you. You might even be right. However, if they wanted to abuse their power, they could, and there wouldn't be much you could do about it. That in and of itself should be enough to concern you. If your landlord mistreats you, you can try to sue them, but given that landlords are rich property owners, they can probably afford a better lawyer than you can.

That's why anarchists advocate for alternative housing arrangements. Perhaps housing could be publicly owned with democratic oversight, rather than being hoarded by private owners who then charge a premium for their use. That way, housing could be distributed based on need rather than profit.

Another solution is to start a tenant-owned cooperative housing association,⁴¹ a living arrangement where apartments are collectively owned by their tenants, and the members of the association decide together how the property should be run, such as if and when to renovate, how maintenance is taken care of, and so on.

There's also the possibility of holding a rent strike,⁴² which is when tenants come together and refuse to pay their rent en masse until specific demands are met by the landlord. There are risks to this approach, such as your landlord deciding to evict you. Still, if you can pull it off, you will gain leverage over your landlord, which you can use to lower the cost of rent, increase the quantity and quality of the amenities offered by the property, and so on.

Ridding the world of landlords won't be easy, quick, or without setbacks, but we can do it. Do your best within current circumstances while still working towards a better future.

So for now, continue paying your rent. Do whatever it takes to survive. It's hard to be an effective ally in the fight for progress when you're dying on the street from exposure. In the meantime, though, also consider laying the groundwork for a future where housing is not a privilege but a right.

41"Living in a Building with Tenant-Ownership—Own or Rent—Stockholms stad." Stockholm stad, boende.stockholm/ombilda-till-bostadsratt/converting-tenancy-to-owner-occupied-apartments/living-in-a-building-with-tenant-ownership--own-or-rent. Accessed 15 May 2021.

42"Rent Strike." *Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rent_strike. Accessed 15 May 2021.

Against the Military

Under present circumstances, the institution that perfectly encapsulates the conservative worldview is the military. It's an organization of strict hierarchy and discipline where everyone fulfills their prescribed roles and nobody steps out of line.

To be clear, I don't think there's anything inherently wrong with preferring a disciplined lifestyle. Some people like living according to a strict routine, and I don't think that's a problem in and of itself. "Do whatever you want so long as you're not hurting anybody" isn't a vain formula.

That being said, conservatives' love for the military really shows how hollow their rhetoric about freedom and liberty is. They bring this prescriptivist mindset into civilian life as well as military life. So you're totally free, but they are still going to try and restrict your freedoms based on your gender, gender identity, race, nationality, disability, employment status, homelessness, economic status, and so on.

To be fair, there are limits to the anti-prescriptivist mindset. For example, even if we shouldn't force any individual person to be a doctor if they don't want to, we still live in a world where we need doctors. While we shouldn't prescribe roles for people, we do still need those roles to be filled.

Nonetheless, the way we should go about doing this is not by forcing people into certain paths of life against their will but rather by removing arbitrary barriers that get in the way of them getting into their desired field, such as low pay, prohibitively expensive tuition fees which make getting into certain careers unaffordable for most folks, exploitative working conditions, and discriminatory policies that prevent people from getting into their preferred jobs based on their identity. If these barriers are removed, the roles that need to be filled will be filled as a matter of course. More people would become doctors if becoming a doctor wasn't so expensive. That way, the way that labor gets done in a society is guided by principles of liberty rather than principles of authority. We don't need to force militaristic discipline on everybody to get work done.

That's not to say that I don't know why conservatives like the rigidity and authoritarian hierarchy that's essential to modern militaries. There's an aesthetic appeal to being clean-cut, well organized, and hardworking. The sense of purpose and moral certainty that comes with being a soldier attracts many people. Then again, when considering the prevalence of human rights abuses in military operations,

especially war crimes against foreign civilians,⁴³ the limits of certitude become obvious. It turns out that giving young adults guns and teaching them to kill without hesitation doesn't improve their moral decision making.

All this doesn't even get into one of the most insidious aspects of the American military, which is that it tends to recruit from low-income neighborhoods filled with people of color and advertise military service as a gateway out of poverty.⁴⁴ Mind you, the only reason those neighborhoods are poor in the first place is because their local governments refuse to provide public investment in those communities, leaving the inhabitants in a desperate financial situation where they seek any way out, including going abroad and murdering noncombatants. The state creates a problem so that the military, which is owned by the state, can sell people a solution.

Would war continue to be waged in an anarchist society? I don't know. A few anarchists are pacifists, and they tend to believe in stopping wars before they happen. Hawkish boasts about how brave soldiers were in World War II fail to note that were it not for the Treaty of Versailles, the agreement enacted at the end of World War I, which largely blamed Germany for the conflict and forced the German government to pay staggering amounts in reparations, perhaps Germany wouldn't have been in such dire economic conditions that the Nazis started to seem appealing to the public. We often create our own enemies or at least exacerbate the process by which our foes emerge.

I'm sympathetic to the pacifist position, but just in case, I'll explain how warfare would be conducted in an anarchist society. It's worth noting that anarchists tend to be strict egalitarians and thus don't support a centralized, hierarchical military. Instead, one common suggestion is a decentralized series of autonomous militias, an organization method that has been used by guerilla forces across history to thwart modern military forces to great effect.

Another proposal is that in situations which require a coordinated assault, the members of a military force could vote for a person or a group of people who would temporarily take on the role of military leaders. These positions would have term limits to ensure that no one can gain power and influence through seniority. Such leaders would also be recallable at almost any time should their soldiers feel that they are no longer fit to perform their duties. That way, those in charge can be held accountable for abuses of authority. The only exception to recallability would be during active combat

⁴³Al-Haj, Ahmed. "Saudi-Led Airstrike at Yemen Wedding Killed at Least 20." *AP NEWS*, 23 Apr. 2018, apnews.com/article/958102426bd34d90a50b3c7658a096b4.

⁴⁴Martin, Nick. "The Military Views Poor Kids as Fodder for Its Forever Wars." *New Republic*, 7 Jan. 2020, newrepublic.com/article/156131/military-views-poor-kids-fodder-forever-wars.

since a warzone is not an ideal place to hold an election. You can question your general's tactical decisions once the fighting is done.

I'm sure conservatives would oppose this on the basis that it would promote factionalism within a military force. I would point out that if we followed the logic of maintaining group cohesion at all costs, then we should have no problem with one-party states where a populace is ruled by a single ruling body rather than factions vying for power. We don't do this because one-party states tend to be dictatorships, and if we wouldn't organize a society solely by the metric of group cohesion, why would we organize the military that way?

Anyway, it seems pretty rich for Americans to dismiss the efficacy of decentralized militias when their centralized military was defeated by the guerilla fighters of the Viet Cong and has been stuck in a war of attrition against scattered groups of terrorists in the Middle East for decades.

Of course, one goal of all leftwing ideologies is to create a society which doesn't require a rigid work ethic, where people are free to goof off, sleep in if they want to, and have plenty of leisure time. Building such a society will not be easy, quick, or without setbacks. Ironically, building a world which doesn't require constant discipline will require a fair amount of discipline from progressive and leftwing activists.

For whatever it's worth, I do respect the work being done by such activists. They are living in the tradition set by the Civil Rights Movement, the suffragettes, those who fought for LGBT liberation, and the abolitionist movement. For all of their faults, progressives and leftists are part of a noble tradition of laying the foundations for a truly free, egalitarian, and democratic society. If there are any troops you should support, it's them.

Still, it's hard to be an effective ally in the fight for progress if you're so depressed and exhausted that you can't even get out of bed in the morning. As such, I do hope that these activists will take breaks when they need to, do activities which they find relaxing, and generally be happy. Well-rested allies are effective allies. Moreover, given how hard our predecessors fought for our rights and to lay the groundwork for our happiness, I think it would be doing them a disservice to not enjoy the fruits of their labor even as we continue their fight for a better world.

It can be difficult to take breaks when you know your cause is so important. Paradoxically, it takes discipline to force yourself to be undisciplined and to take

breaks when you need to. It's a hard skill to learn, but it's necessary for effective activism.

Still, once they're well-rested, I hope our allies will jump back into the fight. There is still so much work that needs to be done. Fortunately, we don't have to do it alone. We have each other, and if we act in the spirit of solidarity and resourcefulness, we will one day reach the promised land. Maybe not today. Maybe not even within our lifetimes. But we will get there. Even if we can't make it all the way there ourselves, we can inspire future generations to pick up where we left off, just as our forerunners inspired us.

The war on capitalism is ongoing. Let's do everything in our power to ensure that we emerge victorious.

Against Leadership

I'm not interested in a promotion or a salaried position at work. Part of that is that I don't really need it. My current position pays the bills just fine, it's a lot less work than a salaried job, and I don't need the health benefits because I have Medicaid. More importantly though, I don't want to be promoted because while I do have better self-esteem than I used to, I still don't trust myself to be in a position of power.

Admittedly, that's not saying much. I'm an anarchist, so I don't really trust anyone with authority. When a person is placed above others in a hierarchical system without accountability or oversight, they can not only abuse their power but also get away with it.

That's why I'm apprehensive about being friends with my supervisors or my boss. While they're not necessarily bad people, I'm not interested in being friends with someone who could have me fired if I say the wrong thing to them. It doesn't even matter if they're the type of person who would do that. The fact that they could if they wanted to is reason enough for me to be worried. That's not to say that I hate my supervisors. They should do whatever they have to do to survive in this capitalist hellscape. I'm not even saying that all leaders are bad people, though I would qualify that by saying that even benevolent dictators are still dictators.

Still, I think it's good that progressives in general and leftists in specific are working towards creating a more egalitarian world, where if a person tries to use their wealth and status to abuse you, at least you, with your equal amount of wealth and status, have the means to fight back.

This is why I'll never be a cop, supervisor, boss, landlord, politician, or priest. I don't need that sort of temptation in my life. This is also why, while I do enjoy contributing to groups like the DSA and the IWW, I'll probably never take up a leadership position in any such organization. I'm not interested in leading the charge. I would prefer to be a humble soldier in the fight against capitalism than a general.

It's not about putting myself below others. It's about working towards a world where nobody is above or below anyone else. I don't just want to pursue egalitarian ends. I want to accomplish them through egalitarian means.

Against Nationalism

Of all of humanity's wrongheaded ideas, one of the worst is nationalism, the ideology that claims that a person's worth as a human being is determined by whether they're on the right side of an imaginary line, that is, our country's borders. The worship of the nation and the way that people are conditioned to identify with their country of residence as something worth dying for has been a scourge to our species for as long as it's existed and has led to a long history of bloodshed and suffering.

Nationalism is by its nature exclusionary. There's an in-group and an out-group. Those who are unfortunate enough to be considered part of the out-group are often subject to becoming scapegoats for society's problems, being distrusted without just cause, having their rights taken away, being physically and emotionally abused, and being murdered en masse by those in the in-group. The fact that nationalists are often bigoted isn't incidental. Supporting racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, nativism, colonialism, militarism, sex negativity, religious discrimination, anti-intellectualism, suppression of political dissidents, and so on are all endemic to those who have chosen to build their entire self-conception around being part of an arbitrarily defined in-group.

It's not even that nationalists hate those outside their borders, though they often do. It's more that they see foreigners as morally equivalent to ants, which is to say disposable and not something to be concerned with if they get stepped on. When hawkish members of the ruling class authorize armed conflicts, it's not necessarily out of animosity. It's simply that they don't care whether people in other countries live or die. Callousness is often a greater source of evil than active loathing.

Of course, maintaining the nationalist mindset means ignoring many aspects of the world we live in. It's inconvenient for those who worship their country to acknowledge that their country has been the setting for many human rights abuses, which is why nationalists often downplay or deny the historical crimes committed by their predecessors. It's very convenient for Japanese nationalists that they don't have to think about the Nanjing Massacre. Turkish nationalists must feel very much at ease when they claim that the Armenian Genocide never happened.

Another fact of life that nationalists have to ignore is the abundance of ways we benefit from the labor and resources of people from across the world. How many of the products that we use on a regular basis were actually made in our country of

residence? How many foreigners laid foundations of our happiness and wellbeing? The sad reality for those with a provincial mindset is that cosmopolitanism just works.

Anarchists like me believe that all nation-states should be abolished. To hell with the narrow-minded worldview of those so insulated from the rest of the world that they disdain people from other parts of the world that they've never met and never will meet. The path forwards for humanity is one we ought to travel together, not separately.

I'm not saying that building a world without nations will be quick, easy, or without setbacks, but we can do it. Do your best within current circumstances while still working towards a better future. For now, you can stay in your country of residence if you wish. Do whatever it takes to survive. But in the long term, let's cultivate solidarity with each other and realize that for all our differences, our hearts beat as one.

Workers of the world, unite.

Against the Rule of Law

Slavery was legal, and the people who freed slaves were considered criminals. The Holocaust was legal, and the people who hid Jews to protect them were considered criminals. Segregation was legal, and the people who fought against it and paved the way for the Civil Rights Act were considered criminals. The law is not the arbiter of morality. If there are laws which are unjust, you have no moral obligation to follow them, a point you must accept unless you think that Germans during World War II should have been honest with the SS officer at their door about the Jews hiding in their basement in the name of being law-abiding citizens.

I'm sure plenty of moderates and conservatives would take issue with that formulation. They would insist that we follow the rule of law, and if there are laws which are undesirable, then we should go through the officially sanctioned avenues to have them repealed or changed. The problem with this is that the process of reforming laws is incredibly slow, which is unfortunate when people have pressing needs right now. The illegal immigrants hiding from ICE don't have time for Congress to pass immigration reform. The people losing all their money from medical bankruptcy don't have time to wait for Medicare for All. If the law isn't responsive to people's needs, then people will take matters into their own hands, whether it's legal to do so or not.

Am I saying that all laws are illegitimate? Not necessarily. For example, I don't think that you should go around murdering people. The laws against committing murders are worth following. Then again, the reason they're worth following isn't because they're the law but because committing murder is wrong. If committing murder were legal, that wouldn't automatically make it okay. This is a concept that police officers who get acquitted for murdering unarmed Black people should take care to remember.

There are many forms of injustice in our society that are either officially or de facto legal. Wage theft—the practice where employers purposely pay their employees less than what they owe them for their labor by messing with the time sheets that record how many hours their employees worked—might be officially illegal, but it rarely gets prosecuted. Not only do many private corporations not pay taxes, but given that they receive tax credits from the government, we actually subsidize such companies with our tax dollars.

The law exists to preserve the wealth and status of the ruling class, whether they be the wealthy or their government enablers. It's a tool used to keep the social

and economic underclass from rising up and taking what rightfully belongs to the people. Deference to the law is taught to young children, and we are all indoctrinated to believe that following the law is good in and of itself from the moment we're born to the moment we die through a stream of constant propaganda from news outlets, teachers, and even our parents.

I'm sure many people would take issue with the idea that the law is the illegitimate product of the desire of corporate oligarchs to cling to their ill-gotten gains. Perhaps they would insist that even when the law is wrong, it's arrogant of us to think that we should be able to make our own rules for living. If we did that, then people would just go around doing whatever they wanted, regardless of consequences. I've always found this idea strange. If it's self-evidently good for us to not go around killing people, why do we need to force the public to not kill others under penalty of legal punishment? Why do you assume that society would collapse if the law and its enforcers were to go away for even a minute?

Maybe such people think that these laws aren't meant for normal people but rather for sociopaths who don't hold regard for human life and need the threat of harsh repercussions to keep them in line. I would point out that countries which have legal systems that focus more on rehabilitation than retribution, such as the Nordic countries and Portugal, tend to also have lower crime rates. Rather than punishing people for stepping out of line, they address the root causes of their harmful behavior. They push forwards poverty reduction measures to reduce the risk that people will be so poor that they feel the need to rob each other. They establish universal access to mental healthcare so that people with mental illnesses can get treated before they have a violent episode. Drug addiction is treated as a medical issue rather than a legal one. As for the criminals themselves, rather than being punished, they put in safe environments for treatment where they can enter a headspace where they're able to reform themselves. Rather than being locked in a cage for years on end, their needs are addressed, so when they exit prison, they can be healthy members of society.

Speaking as an anarchist, I don't think people need the iron grip of the state to keep them from hurting each other. I think that communities can teach their members to not be hurtful without relying on needlessly cruel punishments. It doesn't take a rosy view of human nature to figure out that if you condition people to be kind and respectful to one another, they can manage their moral decision making just fine without the aid of state-sanctioned torture and incarceration.

I don't want to see criminals punished. I want to see them treated. As for the ones that can't be treated, such as people with antisocial personality disorder, I want them quarantined in such a way that they can't hurt anybody, but I still want them treated humanely. After all, if a person's brain is built in such a way that they can't be anything other than cruel, can we really blame them for being cruel?

That's not even getting into various forms of state-sponsored violence that goes unprosecuted. Our militaries commit atrocities against foreign civilians constantly. Our police forces abuse their positions of authority and then get let off the hook because our legal system collaborates with them to make sure they aren't held accountable. The everyday violence of poverty, where people can be forced out of their homes if they can't pay rent or might starve to death if they don't have the money to buy food, goes on unhindered, only somewhat abated by a threadbare social safety net that keeps getting defunded by the rich, who don't want to pay a little more in taxes to make sure their fellow human beings don't go hungry or die of exposure.

As for what we would replace the police with, one solution proposed by anarchists is voluntary community self-defense, a rotating group of people who temporarily take on the responsibility of keeping their communities safe. Members of this group would have term limits to prevent them from amassing power and influence through seniority. Those who serve in this organization would also be recallable at any time if their communities feel that they're no longer fit to perform their duties. That way, the people in charge of upholding the moral standards of their communities are able to be held accountable for their actions.

Punitive justice doesn't work. It doesn't reduce recidivism, the evidence that it reduces crime rates is dubious at best, and it definitely doesn't address the root causes of harmful behavior. Those who favor retribution over rehabilitation are just adding more suffering to the world for no benefit other than the sadistic gratification they get from seeing someone get what they "deserve." Mind you, what a person deserves is subjective. You can't prove that a bank robber deserves to rot in prison any more than I can prove that such a person deserves rehabilitation and treatment. What a person deserves is not an empirical question but a question of values.

Do you want people to suffer needlessly for your own sick pleasure, or do you want people to be able to reform themselves and become healthy members of their communities? Which one you prefer says a lot about your priorities in life.

I'll admit that living in accordance with this philosophy can be difficult, especially if you have a lot to lose. Just remember that those who marched as part of the Civil Rights Movement, the people who freed slaves and led them to the North, and the Germans who hid Jews in their basements to keep them safe also had a lot to lose. They also had friends and families they might lose if things didn't go as planned. I know it's hard, but we have to do the right thing. Courage in the face of an uncertain future is the mark of a true hero. Those who practice principled noncompliance with unjust laws have earned the right to call themselves heroes.

Can we build a society with no laws at all? I don't know, but at the very least, we should abolish the current legal system and replace it with legal institutions that serve the general public rather than the ruling class.

I'm not saying that abolishing the rule of law will be easy, quick, or without setbacks, but we can do it. Do your best within current circumstances while still working towards a better future. For now, comply with the police so that you don't get shot. Follow laws within reason unless you think that you can get away with doing what's right rather than what's legal. Vote for politicians whose platforms include criminal justice reform. In the long term, we should focus on defunding and eventually abolishing the police. We should focus on addressing the root causes of harmful behavior to stop cruel acts before they happen. We should work towards a world where we can decide for ourselves what's moral without having orders given to us from on high.

The law is the mechanism by which those in positions of authority control the thoughts and behaviors of those on lower rungs of the top-down, hierarchical systems we're all part of. To the extent that humanity will be able to grow and flourish, it will be to the extent that we work towards a world where laws are slowly abolished one by one until the only things keeping us in line are our own consciences and the people around us who hold us accountable for what we do.

Only then can we finally realize that we never needed the law to make us moral. We are quite capable of knowing right from wrong without the state breathing down our necks.

Against the Ruling Class

I've always liked the golden rule. It's a good rule of thumb to follow, and it helps people learn how to be empathetic and considerate. Still, there are exceptions to many rules, and while empathy is usually something worth having, I don't think that you should apply that logic to the rich and powerful. I bring this up because political commentators sometimes say that you should have sympathy for those in positions of authority. After all, their jobs are hard, and they work long hours.

There are several problems with that perspective. First, if you're in a position of power, that means that you have the ability to delegate tasks. Indeed, one of the primary duties of leadership is hiring people to do work for you. So if your job is so hard, why not just find people who can lighten your load?

Second, those in the ruling class are very wealthy, meaning they can afford better mental healthcare than most people will ever have access to. If they think their job is hard, they can see a therapist. A counselor can listen to their woes while poor people find themselves unable to get such treatment because the government decided to cut the budget for Medicaid.

Third, nobody forced them into positions of power. Nobody held their hand behind their back and told them to take a managerial position. They could've just refused that promotion or found work elsewhere. Just saying, janitorial work may not be glamorous, but at least the money people make by mopping floors wasn't made by exploiting people or by gaming our unjust economic system.

Fourth, while being part of the ruling class can be stressful, it's also very lucrative. It sure seems like the benefits outweigh the costs, so what are they complaining about? Bill Gates used to work eighty hours a week? Well, that's great. Mind you, burger flippers could work eighty hours a week, but it wouldn't make them rich enough to personally have more money than some countries' entire GDPs.

Fifth, if you're a person in a position of authority, that means you're going to be scrutinized more. That's not necessarily because we hate you, but because we need to hold you accountable. After all, rich people can afford better lawyers and can thus get away with a lot more. Cops are often acquitted for murdering people because the courts rely on cops to do their jobs and thus need to maintain an amicable relationship with them. With great power comes great responsibility, so if you're a politician, a rich person, or even just a celebrity, we need to scrutinize you more, because there's an

increased likelihood that you'll not only abuse your power but then get away with abusing your power. Is it fair to scrutinize a person that much? No, but it's also not fair for a few people to have that much power and influence in the first place.

Sixth, there is another option for the ruling class. They could help lay the foundations for a truly free, egalitarian, and democratic society. Managing to bring about such a world would probably be a great relief for our leaders since decision-making power would be distributed to everyone rather than being laid on the shoulders of a slim minority of rich people and their government enablers. If they're not willing to do that because they'd prefer to hold on to their wealth and privilege, that sounds like a "them" problem, not an "us" problem. They can have fun working sixty to eighty hours a week because they're too stubborn to just delegate tasks like a normal person.

Maybe that seems harsh. Perhaps others would say that we're all just human. It would be nice if that were true, but it isn't. We live in a world with unequal power relationships and wealth distribution. Boss/worker, landlord/tenant, and cop/civilian are all arrangements where the few are placed above the many and the majority has to either submit or suffer. That's why leftists in general and anarchists in particular support creating a more egalitarian world, where no one has unnecessary authority over others. Building such a world won't be easy, quick, or without setbacks, but we can do it.

Just remember that insofar as there's anything good and worthwhile in the world, it's in spite of the ruling class, not because of them. For instance, people like to credit Henry Ford for popularizing the forty-hour workweek, but that wouldn't have been possible if labor activists and socialists hadn't spent decades pushing forwards the idea of lowering working hours to a reasonable level and made it mainstream, often in spite of people like Ford. Our overlords like to take advantage of people and then take credit for the work of those they took advantage of. They're not innovators. They're parasites.

No gods, no masters, no sympathy for the ruling class.

The Case for a Compassionate Left

Progressive and leftwing rhetoric often revolves around contempt for oppressors, such as those who make use of language, tactics, and policies that are designed around racism, homophobia, transphobia, nativism, ableism, classism, misogyny, and other forms of bigotry.

I agree with this approach to an extent. It's good to be angry at people when they're being cruel and abusing others. Contempt for oppressors riles people up and makes them more likely to contribute to your political cause. Anger can be an effective motivator and makes people more likely to vote, donate money to a progressive cause, join a protest, and/or join an organization like the DSA or the IWW.

However, anger is a double-edged sword. In a heated moment, you might lash out at someone who you care about. You might have difficulty maintaining personal relationships because the people around you consider you a needless source of stress. You might start treating everyone who disagrees with you as an enemy, even if the person you're mad at is no more rich or powerful than you are.

That's not to say that you shouldn't be angry at the rich, the powerful, and the political right. Their actions have been very harmful, and only someone with a very skewed moral compass would feel undisturbed by what they've done.

Nonetheless, there's a different approach, one based not in contempt for oppressors but in compassion for the oppressed.

The core of leftwing politics is kindness. It's built on the premise that LGBT folks, people of color, poor people, immigrants, disabled people, and other marginalized folks are human beings who deserve to have their rights respected. Such an attitude is an effective antidote to the worst tendency of angrier forms of politics, namely, the tendency to reduce people to their political utility, as if they're a resource to be spent. Once you adopt such a realpolitik approach to politics, it can be difficult to keep things in perspective. You forget that the reason you got into politics in the first place was because you wanted to help people who were hurt, not just to punish those who hurt them. You stop seeing people as people. This is especially true in regard to more violent methods. While violence is occasionally a necessary evil, it inherently pressures you to stop seeing your targets as people and to start seeing them more like enemies in a video game, where you kill as many as possible to get a high score.

That's not to say that a more compassionate approach is incompatible with anger. On the contrary, sympathy for trans people necessitates anger towards transphobes.

Still, once you adopt compassion as your guide, rather than anger, it becomes easier to keep your priorities straight. It's not enough to fight abusers. You have to care for and uplift the abused. This story doesn't end when we shoot the bad guys like it does in an action movie. It's not enough to undermine the old order. We must build a new, more humane one in its place.

Building a better world means being charitable with one another and accepting that not everyone who disagrees with us is trying to undermine us. Sometimes intelligent people disagree. Building a better world means listening instead of talking at times. It means that disagreements become topics of discussion rather than debate. Building a better world means accepting that nobody's perfect. This is not to say that we shouldn't try to be good people, but it does mean being willing to forgive both each other and ourselves.

Holding on to petty grudges doesn't get us any closer to Medicare for All. Obsessing over minor disagreements doesn't bring us any closer to a Green New Deal.

That's not to say you should be so charitable with everybody. We have entirely valid reasons to distrust and dislike conservatives, libertarians, cops, bosses, the rich, and the politicians who govern on behalf of the rich.

Still, just because we have good reasons to oppose such people doesn't mean that we should sink to their level. The foundations of the world we want to create is built on trust and mutual aid. It's based on the idea that it's wrong to dismiss everyone around you as trying to screw you over or take advantage of you. That's not to say that you should blindly trust people, but it does mean that you should give people the benefit of the doubt and not overgeneralize by saying that everyone is trying to hurt you.

The fight for a more just world is ongoing, and part of that fight is being angry at those who put us in this mess. However, an equally if not more important part is being kind and patient with those who've been hurt. Kindness and forgiveness are not weaknesses, and lacking these values is not a strength. Humanity's path forwards shall be built upon the principles of solidarity and camaraderie. Solidarity forever.

The Value of Ambition

Let's say for the sake of argument that you have a negotiation between a labor union and a boss. The union wants to raise its workers' wages to \$20 an hour. How they do this is not by asking for \$20 an hour. Rather, they ask for \$30 an hour, and once they've set that baseline, they force the boss to argue down from that. By the end of the negotiation, they might not have won \$20 an hour, but they'll still likely have more than they would have gotten if they had aimed lower.

This is the benefit of being ambitious. You aim as high as you can manage, and even if you fall short, you'll still achieve more than you would have otherwise.

There is historical precedence for this. For example, one of the reasons that Franklin D. Roosevelt pushed forwards the New Deal was to dissuade the American public from taking inspiration from the Soviet model of development. The US government was forced to move left in order to curtail the people from moving even further left. That's not to say that the Soviet Union was good. They still committed a lot of human rights abuses. But they also accidentally improved the lives of the American working class simply by being an extreme point of reference. While we on the modern far left shouldn't valorize the Soviet Union, this example shows what the job of the far left is within modern politics. Our mission is to (1) move as far left as possible, (2) gain enough political power to hold sway over the public imagination, and (3) wait patiently while the centrist political establishment moves further left, whether it wants to or not.

This is one of the reasons I'm an anarchist. While many of my political tactics might look similar to average progressive, I'm willing to aim a lot higher than most progressives because ambition has a tactical usage in politics. This is also why, although I don't consider any politician to be my friend, I begrudgingly respect Bernie Sanders for moving the political discourse farther left. He helped popularize concepts like single-payer healthcare and comprehensive climate legislation simply by refusing to compromise or aim lower. That's quite impressive considering he himself is a member of the ruling class and stands to gain a lot from our plutocratic status quo. This is not to say that you should worship Sanders. No politician is your friend. But his example provides an interesting rubric for people even further left than Sanders to follow.

The tactical use of pessimism in modern politics is that the ruling class gets the general public to aim lower and settle for less. It's not enough for our corporate overlords to simply get in the way of progress. They want to break you. They don't want

you to even be able to imagine an alternative to the current system. They'll insist that every alternative has been tried and has been found wanting.

Mind you, many failed slave revolts happened before slavery was abolished. Progress is a matter of experimentation and finding out what works through trial and error. Who's to say that every single permutation of anarchism has been tried?

History isn't over. It's just getting started.

Emotional Wellbeing

One of the best pieces of advice I've received is that you shouldn't treat happiness as a goal to be achieved. Treating happiness as an aspiration as opposed to a passing mood makes happiness out to be a permanent state of constant bliss that nobody has. I've generally found that it's better to improve your life in other ways, and then happiness will come naturally. Indeed, one of the reasons I do political activism is that it helps me feel like I'm contributing to a greater cause, which boosts my confidence and brings me joy.

It's also okay to experience other emotions. Feeling sad, angry, afraid, or bored is not a sign that you're broken. That's how your brain is supposed to function.

That's not to say that you should feel sad all the time, but if a family member died or you watched a sad movie, being sad is a perfectly healthy response.

Also, while it's not good to be angry constantly, if you don't feel at least a little upset by the state of the world, your moral compass is broken. I'm not asking you to panic, but maintaining measured fury is both a valid response to current circumstances and a good source of motivation for fighting injustice.

Furthermore, while I'm not recommending that anyone be bored, it's not like there's something exciting happening all the time. Sometimes you have a boring day at work or you have a conversation which just isn't that interesting. That's not great, but it's not exactly a tragedy either. Feeling bored is an understandable reaction to a world which can often be listless.

It's good to promote emotional wellbeing. That's why I advocate for increasing access to mental healthcare so that more people can deal with their feelings in a healthy way. Be sure to speak to a therapist if you're having mental problems and take your medications as prescribed.

If you're ever in a bad state of mind, it's okay to reach out to people. Your friends and family care about you and want to help.

How Anarchism Can Improve Your Personal Behavior

While living in accordance with anarchist values mostly entails political activism and trying to achieve change on a systemic level, there are also benefits on a personal level.

For example, if you're someone who has difficulty respecting people's boundaries, you can think of a solution in anarchist terms. After all, if you find yourself crossing others' lines, you're putting your emotional wants over other people's need for personal space and safety. In that sense, having boundary issues represents a sort of unequal power relationship because you're putting yourself above someone else. Since anarchists are strict egalitarians, it stands to reason that following anarchist principles means respecting other people's boundaries.

Bear in mind that such an approach is applicable to all individual morality. Indeed, many values central to anarchism, such as liberty, equality, and democracy, are also the foundations of being a decent person. Letting people live however they want so long as they're not hurting anybody, not putting ourselves above or below anyone else, and being willing to listen to others and allow them to have a say in decisions are good pieces of general life advice and a practical application of anarchist theory. Ironically, even though anarchists are infamous for their willingness to engage in criminal behavior, many anarchist ideas are just common-sense methods of personal decision making.

A more immediate benefit of being on the far left is that you're more unwilling to settle for less. Say what you will about radicals, but I don't think you can credibly call them unambitious. Being willing to demand the impossible and to keep demanding it until you get results is both a solid tactic for achieving social progress and an effective way of making yourself more confident. That's not to say there aren't limits to this approach. While it's good to demand worthwhile things which might seem impossible, things which are destructive and pointless shouldn't be demanded at all. Fortune may favor the bold, but direct that boldness towards the ruling class rather than a woman you keep pestering to go out with you. Still, a willingness to aim high is generally a good trait to have, provided that you're directing that energy towards worthy goals.

Trying to get closer to accomplishing far-left goals is also an effective way of learning how to be resourceful. After all, if we're going to have a shot at undermining capitalism, we need every person we have at our disposal. Coming to understand the folks who are on your side and figuring out how to best make use of their unique skills

is both necessary for fighting the ruling class and a fine source of leadership skills. Mind you, if you're an anarchist, you might want to phrase it as "coordination" or "facilitation" skills rather than looking like you're trying to put yourself above others.

Another way that far-left praxis can be a valid form of self-improvement is that it engenders decisiveness. Our world has many problems to solve, such as capitalism, climate change, bigotry, violence, and so on. Therefore, it's in our best interest to mitigate the damage caused by these issues as efficiently as possible because, to give an example, every moment we spend in ending police brutality is a moment taken away from the lifespan of cops' tendency to abuse their power. This is good because even one minute less of police brutality is a minute where someone who would've suffered or died otherwise instead gets to live in peace. That's not to say that we should make rash decisions. It's good to think through what we're trying to accomplish. Still, people generally prefer progress sooner rather than later. Indeed, coming to grasp the urgency of modern politics is a good way to train yourself to make timely decisions.

However, the most important values that being an anarchist can give you are compassion, empathy, patience, forgiveness, and a willingness to be more considerate. Advocating for the rights of marginalized groups means getting to know them and coming to understand that they're just regular human beings who have had bad luck. Thinking about how to build anarchism can lead you to contemplate the world more deeply than you would have otherwise. Building a coalition capable of taking on the rich and powerful necessitates being willing to make amends and overlook petty disagreements.

I'm not saying we anarchists have always lived up to our noble ideals, but that's okay. Forgiving ourselves for our shortcomings is just as important as forgiving others for theirs. Making progress towards a truly free, egalitarian, and democratic world means doing our best to be good people while also being willing to be kind to hapless screw-ups, which we all are at some points in our lives. I'll end this off by saying that I've never liked the idea that you should live every day as if it's your last. If I spent all my money on cocaine and hookers under the assumption that I would die tomorrow, I would be screwed if it turned out that I have quite a lot of time left to live. Living in the moment is one thing, but it's also good to develop long-term planning skills. As such, I've always preferred the adage that you should make every day count, a formulation that allows you to enjoy the present without precluding being able to enjoy the future. Speaking personally, spending everyday bringing society a little bit closer to anarchism has given me a sense of purpose that I'll always be grateful for.

Radicalism and Growing Old

A common refrain from older conservatives is that leftists are young idealists who don't know anything about the real world.

First, this is an ad hominem attack. Even if it were true, it wouldn't automatically make us wrong. The fact that many climate activists are young doesn't mean that climate change doesn't exist or that reducing carbon emissions is a bad goal. Homing in on the age of your interlocutor puts focus on the person making the argument rather than the argument itself.

Second, this is tied into the idea that we'll grow more conservative as we get older. Mind you, so long as we're alive, there's always a chance that we'll have a life-changing experience that alters our worldview. So it's technically true that we might change our minds on some issues. Then again, so might our opponents. So might anybody.

For whatever it's worth, back in high school, I was more of a centrist liberal with a strongly held Catholic faith and abhorrent anti-abortion views. Now I'm an agnostic anarchist. I'd argue that I grew out of centrism. I suppose it's possible that I might change course, but I don't think that's necessarily a forgone conclusion. After all, Bernie Sanders, Noam Chomsky, and Jeremy Corbyn are all old and they're all in favor of progressive and leftwing politics.

More to the point, I think the evidence that people grow more conservative as they get older is less substantial than conservatives claim it is. For example, one study suggests that people who voted for FDR in their youth continued to vote Democrat more than the national average even during their old age.⁴⁵ Of course, our current batch of elders tends to vote Republican, but I think that has more to do with the proliferation of *Fox News* and conservative radio stations than any inherent aspect of aging.

If I'm being honest, the true answer to the question of whether I'll grow more conservative as I get older is that we'll see, but I do hope that I've shown that's not a foregone conclusion.

⁴⁵"The Generation Gap and the 2012 Election." Pew Research Center, www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/legacy-pdf/11-3-11-Generations-Release.pdf. Accessed 13 May 2021.

To be clear, I'm not saying that because I want to stay relevant or "hip with the kids." I've never been relevant, and I wasn't cool with the youth even when I was a youth. I believe in ideas like supporting LGBT rights and opposing police brutality because I think those are the correct ideas to believe. Admittedly, there's always the danger of the bandwagon effect, where people just believe in something because everyone else believes it or because it's trendy. Still, I think it's possible to go too far in the other direction where you notice that a lot of people believe in something they didn't believe in before and therefore it must be just a trend. It's the stance of ideological hipsters. That's not to say that newer progressive movements are automatically correct, but if they're wrong, that needs to be proven, not assumed.

I think the whole idea of getting more conservative as you get older comes down to the idea that people become wiser and more experienced as they get older. As such, it's worth asking whether that's true.

On one hand, I loved my mother and I'll admit she taught me many life lessons that I'll remember for the rest of my life. On the other hand, she was also a Republican and said a lot of racist garbage about Black people. For example, her stated reason for not voting for Obama was that she thought that he would lead Black people to get revenge for slavery. I'm glad that I saw that for what it was even at a young age.

The truth about growing older is that it can sometimes mean growing wiser and more experienced, but it can also mean becoming incapable of moving beyond the preconceptions of the past. Anyone who's had to deal with a racist older relative can attest to that. More to the point, as you get older, you tend to get more involved in the political, economic, and social systems that govern our current society. This makes you more emotionally and financially invested in the status quo, regardless of how unjust it is. It's hard to get excited about smashing the establishment when you've become part of the establishment.

This doesn't mean that young people are always right, but it's good to have people around with fresh perspectives, unhindered by the social norms of the past.

To be clear, I don't want to be ageist. I have friends who are older than me, and I appreciate my parents and teachers, who made me into who I am today. Nonetheless, to respond to the claim that folks grow wiser as they get older, I've always preferred the adage that while some people grow up, others just grow old. Indeed, should there come a time when I'm old and conservative, I do hope that the youth of the future will be able and willing to call me out on it. The old are not owed deference or authority.

Still, for now, I'm young, and while I might one day regret my current actions, I've always found solace in a quote often misattributed to Mark Twain which states "twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."⁴⁶

⁴⁶Seybold, Matt. "The Apocryphal Twain: 'The Things You Didn't Do.'" *Center for Mark Twain Studies*, 28 June 2019, marktwainstudies.com/the-apocryphal-twain-the-things-you-didnt-do.

Rocking the Boat

An old aphorism is that you shouldn't rock the boat. It's a phrase meant to advise against creating needless drama.

My problem with that thinking is that it's often argued in favor of maintaining the status quo, regardless of how unjust it might be. Sure, you shouldn't create needless drama, but not all drama is needless. If a trans person asks you to not misgender them and you respond by accusing them of trying to create a ruckus, you are complicit in maintaining our culture's transphobic norms.

Often, appeals to "apolitical" thinking are just convincing people to be bystanders. Such people might view themselves as "keeping the peace" in the same way that a person who just walks by as they see someone getting mugged without helping them or at least calling 911 is "keeping the peace." Fence-sitters permit injustice to persist through their inaction. They'll soothe their consciences by saying nothing could have been done, even when that's literally untrue. You can vote, join a protest, donate money to a progressive or leftwing cause, become a member of an organization like the DSA and/or the IWW, or do literally anything other than nothing.

To protect their egos, spineless bootlickers like so-called apolitical folks will invoke the idea of escalation. They reason that if you try to stop one act of injustice, it destabilizes the situation and makes things worse. Such logic tends to rely on the slippery slope fallacy. Why jump to the conclusion that getting involved will have catastrophic results? You can fantasize all you want about how sticking up for your trans friend when they're in trouble will cause a fight, but all you're doing is justifying not helping them. Plus, the alternative to taking action to stop injustice is to lie down and take your abuse quietly. I would prefer to die fighting, to be honest.

Progress was never made by people who stayed quiet. Progressives and leftists have made progress by being very vocal and refusing to back down or make compromises. The LGBT liberation movement wouldn't have taken off if LGBT folks had stayed in the closet. Civil Rights protesters didn't politely ask for their rights to be respected.

To paraphrase Martin Luther King, Jr., apolitical people prefer a negative peace, which is the absence of tension, over a positive peace, which is the presence of justice.

By all means, carefully consider your decisions to make sure you're doing the right thing. Be willing to listen to constructive criticism and to do some introspection to make sure your values are sound. However, once you're done with all of that, take action. Being so indecisive that you're unable to prevent people from getting hurt or killed doesn't make you a good or thoughtful person.

I'm not saying that building a better world will be quick or easy, or that there won't be setbacks, but we can do it. Keep fighting if you can, take breaks if you must, and ignore anyone who tells you otherwise.

Optimism and Pessimism

I like to think that I'm optimistic about some issues and pessimistic about other issues. I believe that both optimism and pessimism are valid, but they're both incomplete. As such, I try to maintain what I consider to be a healthy level of optimism, not having so much as to be delusional but enough to get me through the day and help keep things in perspective. There are parts of life that are genuinely worth being optimistic about and fights that are worth having. I think that's worth remembering.

It's also worth noting that most people have a mix of optimism and pessimism. I think you need a little bit of both to have a complete view of reality. Speaking personally, while I tend to err more towards optimism, I'm not optimistic about everything. There are plenty of things I have negative feelings about, such as conservatives, cops, capitalism, and so on. On one hand, I don't like dwelling on these things because I don't go out of my way to be miserable, and I don't think dwelling on the negative aspects of life is healthy or productive, or even that it gives you a more honest understanding of reality. On the other hand, I do think that parts of life aren't worth celebrating and are fair game for criticism.

More to the point, while I do think having some optimism can be healthy and help keep things in perspective, some forms of optimism are toxic. For example, I don't like the type of optimism that, in order for it to be maintained, you have to deny that certain problems exist. One of the best examples of this comes from nationalists who, while defending their country as one of the best in the history of the world, if not the best, will often downplay or deny atrocities committed by their respective nations. For instance, Turkish nationalists will often deny the Armenian Genocide and Japanese nationalists will often deny the Nanjing Massacre. That's not to say that Turkey or Japan are necessarily bad countries, whatever a "bad country" even is, but if your love for your country is based on purposeful omission, then your love isn't real, and it will fall apart under the slightest scrutiny. Admittedly, I take a more cosmopolitan view of the world, and thus I don't really think any form of nationalism is worth believing in. However, if you must love your homeland, you should at least be willing to acknowledge that it has not always been kind to people, either within or outside its borders.

While we're at it, while I do believe that optimism is worthwhile, that's only insofar as that optimism is rooted in reality and not just what you want to be true. For example, when conservatives claim that they're giving "tough love" when they cut the budgets for important social programs like Medicaid or food stamps, the underlying

assumption is that it will help poor people become less dependent and will allow them to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps.” Setting aside for a moment the fact that this is often needlessly cruel, it’s always struck me as a post hoc rationalization for mean-spirited behavior, trying to frame hurting people as somehow helping them.

Aside from being a morally repugnant act, this idea also quite utopian. It’s as if these people really think that by depriving people of resources, those people will magically be able to meet their own needs. Mind you, “sink or swim” only works as an ideology if you ignore the fact that there are ways of teaching people how to swim that don’t require just letting them drown and die. Letting people die needlessly is actually very bad, and ideologies that say otherwise don’t merit attention.

At least when people on the left are utopian in their ideas, they typically posit that such utopias will only exist in the far future, if they even happen at all. Also, their utopias are typically based on actually meeting people’s needs and helping people. We can quibble all day about whether their ideas are feasible, but I’d be hard pressed to say that they’re hurting anybody. If having such a vision inspires them to be better people in the present day, more power to them.

By contrast, conservative utopias, aside from being hellish nightmares, are also demonstrably unworkable. You want to believe that you can trust the police to protect you and uphold the law impartially and without bias? There are a lot of Black Americans who would take issue with that idea. You want to believe that a society governed by Christian principles can be a just society? Plenty of LGBT people would have to disagree. You want to believe that the free market is the best way to organize the economy? Several recessions, persistent unemployment, a threadbare social safety net, and private corporations blatantly abusing their power without any accountability or oversight seem like compelling pieces of evidence that such a conclusion might be premature.

Of course, I’m not against being optimistic. I believe in social progress and the possibility of positive change as much as anybody. However, I’m not against conservative utopias because I’m trying to be pessimistic. I’m against them because I think those visions are obviously false and only exist as facile justifications for hurting people.

Still, while there are strains of optimism that I feel can be destructive, I’ve always taken greater umbrage at pessimism because I’ve found that the people who I’ve met over the years who I’d define as pessimists have been uniformly disappointing.

The tragedy of pessimists is that they're not idiots. Many of them are quite intelligent, and if they put their mental resources to good use, they could help a lot of people. But they'll never do that because that would go against their perspective, and they would prefer to be useless than to acknowledge that maybe progress is possible. While I don't believe that most pessimists are mentally ill, their worldview reminds me of cases of people with severe depression or antisocial personality disorder. Those who carry such ailments are often quite smart in many ways, and in a different life, they could've been great innovators or thinkers. Instead, their brains are built in such a way that they're barely capable of basic functioning, let alone leading the charge towards a better future.

Perhaps pessimists are inclined to dismiss optimists like me as naive fools, and perhaps there's some truth to that. Still, I reckon optimists like me are right to dismiss pessimists as wasted potential.

Speaking personally, I have a pessimistic reason for being optimistic and utopian, namely, that as someone who's dealt with debilitating mental illness, I wouldn't be able to get out of bed in the morning if I didn't fight to maintain a sunny outlook. Pessimism and hopelessness aren't luxuries I can afford anymore.

Anyway, we on the left have a lot of work left to do, and if pessimists would prefer to wallow in self-pity than actually contribute to mitigating the damage caused by capitalism and bigotry, so be it. We'll go on ahead without them because we don't have time to wait for them to get over themselves.

A better world is possible if we fight for it. If pessimists refuse to fight for it, then I guess we'll just have to leave them behind.

What We Mean When We Talk about Diversity

Conservatives often mock progressive and leftists for supporting diversity and tolerance, and for being nonjudgmental. They'll ask why we don't support ideological diversity or being tolerant of rightwing opinions. This is mostly them being purposely disingenuous. It's not that they don't understand what we mean when we talk about diversity. It's that they don't care, and they just want to undermine us.

I suppose it's worth explaining to those who are political neophytes, such as teenagers just getting into politics for the first time, that when the left talks about tolerance, we're talking about tolerating those who've been unfairly maligned or stigmatized by society, such as LGBT people, religious minorities, and sex workers. Members of marginalized groups are often made the target of harassment and violence for their identities, even though being trans, Muslim, and/or a prostitute doesn't in and of itself hurt anyone. We tend to follow the mantra that people should be willing to do whatever they want so long as they're not hurting anyone.

This is why we're not obligated to tolerate bigots. Bigoted opinions such as transphobia, Islamophobia, and sex negativity do cause harm to many people because proliferating bigoted views creates a cultural climate where mistreatment of marginalized groups is permissible. As such, we're quite happy to harshly judge rightwingers for their rhetoric and actions because they've brought suffering and misery to a lot of people who were just minding their own business.

People may be created equal, but ideologies aren't. While anarchists like me tend to be strict egalitarians, I'm happy to create a hierarchy of political perspectives where far-left worldviews including socialism, communism, and anarchism are at the top and rightwing belief systems like conservatism, libertarianism, and fascism are at the bottom.

How Will We Pay for It?

Of all the responses to progressive and leftwing policies, perhaps the most asinine is the question of how we will pay for it, usually brought up alongside the old aphorism that money doesn't grow on trees.

This mentality is frustrating because the people who use it are often deeply hypocritical. For example, back in 2020 during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trump administration injected 1.5 trillion dollars into the stock market.⁴⁷ So if we can afford to prop up the wealth of Wall Street vampires, why can't we afford Medicare for All? It's not as though the people who make these sorts of arguments provide evidence that we simply can't raise taxes, particularly on the wealthy and corporations. Also, money is made up. The government controls how much money is in circulation and can always print more. It can't go overboard with this, or it'll lead to hyperinflation, but if it was worth it to conjure up over a trillion dollars to subsidize the lifestyles of rich parasites, why isn't a Green New Deal deserving of investment?

The "how will we pay for it?" argument is always disingenuous, but it's especially dishonest when it comes to discussions about single-payer healthcare. After all, our private healthcare industry has an incentive to raise prices as much as they can get away with while providing as few services as it can manage in return so that it can maximize profits. By contrast, government-run programs don't have that profit motive and only have to pay for labor, resources, and administration. As many proponents of Medicare for All have pointed out, most people would actually pay less in healthcare costs than they do under our current medical system.⁴⁸ Taxes would go up, but you'd also not have to pay premiums for private health insurance anymore. How would we pay for it? Maybe by taking a portion of the money we're currently spending on private health insurance.

If we're being honest, when people ask, "How will we pay for it?", they frame it as merely a pragmatic concern, but really it's an ideological concern. They're too cowardly to say what they actually mean, namely, that they don't want to pay for

⁴⁷Hansen, Sarah. "Fed Injects \$1.5 Trillion to Prop Up Crashing Markets." *Forbes*, 12 Mar. 2020, www.forbes.com/sites/sarahhansen/2020/03/12/fed-injects-15-trillion-to-prop-up-crashing-markets/?sh=7be1c6f46adb.

⁴⁸Friedman, Gerald. "Take It from an Economist, Medicare for All Is the Most Sensible Way to Fix Health Care." *USA TODAY*, 8 Apr. 2019, eu.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2019/04/08/medicare-for-all-reasonable-practical-health-care-reform-column/3393034002.

Medicare for All because they think that poor people who can't afford medical treatment deserve to die. Ignore these people. They don't merit attention. If you bring them up at all, it should only be to debunk or ridicule them.

Maximum Moral Income

Whenever anti-capitalists criticize rich people for spending their money on pointless guff like yachts, some bootlicker will happily come out of the woodwork to accuse us of hypocrisy. After all, we buy lattes and own a smartphone when we could've given that money to a homeless person. The proper response to such a claim is that last time I checked, the money it costs to buy a latte and smartphone is considerably less than one person personally having more money than the entire GDP of some countries. These two things are not equivalent, and anyone who says they are is either being purposively disingenuous or deeply ignorant.

Still, I suppose that does raise an interesting point, namely, where we should put the line between what we consider to be acceptable indulgences and what we should dismiss as harmful excess. My answer to that question comes from a study that suggests that people tend to be happier the more money they make until they hit about \$75,000 a year, at which point their happiness plateaus.⁴⁹ \$75,000 a year is more than enough for most people to not only afford to meet their basic needs but also afford to live a very cozy existence. As such, I posit that we tentatively set \$75,000 a year as the maximum moral income. Any cash made on top of that should be taxed away, given to charity, or otherwise expropriated.

Mind you, I'm not against people having some luxuries. I enjoy smartphones as much as anyone. I don't want people to live a joyless, spartan life devoid of pleasure. However, I am against people having more money than they could possibly need to survive or thrive during a time of great deprivation,⁵⁰ especially since all that extra money isn't even making them any more satisfied or improving their quality of life. So why not give it away to people who could make better use of it?

There's nothing just about a system where a few people have far more money than anyone needs in order to meet their needs and live comfortably while other people have to get by on scraps.

⁴⁹Kahneman, Daniel, and Angus Deaton. "High Income Improves Evaluation of Life but Not Emotional Well-Being." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 107, no. 38, 2010, pp. 16489–93. doi:10.1073/pnas.1011492107.

⁵⁰"The World Counts." *The World Counts*, www.theworldcounts.com/challenges/people-and-poverty/hunger-and-obesity/how-many-people-die-from-hunger-each-year/story. Accessed 13 May 2021.

Are Anti-Capitalists Hypocrites?

Capitalists often like to accuse anti-capitalists of being hypocrites. After all, leftists say they hate capitalism, yet they still buy products made under capitalism.

Mind you, this is like if you accused an abolitionist of being a hypocrite because they ate food grown by slaves. Believe it or not, it's pretty hard to abolish slavery if you're starving to death. Building a better world doesn't absolve you of living in the current one. That's not hypocrisy. That's doing your best under current circumstances while still working towards a better future. Likewise, anti-capitalists can still buy from Amazon while agitating against Amazon's abusive working conditions. It's perfectly possible to purchase from Amazon while still voting for politicians whose platforms include improving labor conditions and increasing the minimum wage.

I think charges of anti-capitalist hypocrisy reflect the idea that you shouldn't criticize capitalism because it makes all of these wonderful goods and services. In response, I would ask whether the products made "under" capitalism were made "because" of capitalism. After all, slavery also provided goods and services that people needed in order to meet their needs and live comfortably. Yet we don't support slavery because it turns out you can make all of the amenities that people need to survive and thrive without brutal and exploitative labor conditions. That's why we got rid of slavery and that's why, god willing, we'll eventually get rid of capitalism. This ties into the claim that capitalism built the smartphone. My problem with this assumption is that workers built the smartphone. Engineers designed them and factory workers put them together. Capitalism's contribution to that project was ensuring that these phones would be made under exploitative labor conditions. Capitalists like to take advantage of people and then have the audacity to take credit for the work of the people they took advantage of.

The fact of the matter is that the harsh working conditions people face under capitalism are inherent to the system. For example, privately owned businesses don't have the same democratic oversight or accountability that government services have. If a private health insurance agency makes a decision that its customers don't like, such as raising premiums, those customers don't get to vote out the current CEO of that company. In fact, since most US states are dominated by a single health insurance corporation which holds a de facto monopoly within that territory, unless you can pay the cost of out-of-state insurance, which tends to be prohibitively expensive, you're stuck with whatever deal your state's main insurance provider happens to give you. By contrast, if a public service is being run poorly, you can try to vote in someone whose

platform includes reforming that service or you could start, and/or join a campaign to have that service reformed. Our current government doesn't give the public *much* of a say, but it does give them a say. Private corporations are anti-democratic in nature, and attempts to put them under public oversight are fought tooth and nail by corporate lobbyists.

In addition, since the primary goal of private enterprises is to make a profit, they have an incentive to make those profits by any means necessary, even if it means subjecting workers to revolting working conditions and fighting legislation to increase the minimum wage. Terrible working conditions such as unpaid overtime, crunch periods of overworking, hostility to people trying to organize a union, constant surveillance of workers, sweatshop labor, and child labor are all incentivized by businesses' need to perpetually profit and grow under capitalism.

This makes it somewhat hollow whenever some corporation like Walmart actually does raise its workers' wages. On one hand, good for those workers. On the other hand, what if higher wages were a right to be enjoyed by all instead of a gift from corporate oligarchs? Maybe people's wellbeing shouldn't be dependent on whether or not some rich person is feeling generous today.

Still, I can't even blame private businesses. If they don't fight wage increases and labor regulations, they might get outcompeted and go out of business. Indeed, if enough companies go out of business and one company continues to profit and grow, we come ever closer to a monopoly, meaning that the corporation in question can set prices as high as they want because it's not like they have to worry about competition.

You can fight this with antitrust laws and regulations, but rich people have more money to throw around for funding politician's election campaigns, which means that politicians will listen to their demands over those of the general public. Also, rich people aren't particularly in favor of having their profits dip slightly because of laws meant to prevent monopolies from forming, so they have a vested interest in undermining such legislation.

In conclusion, capitalism is bad, and we should abolish it. A capitalist world is an anti-democratic world where a few corporate oligarchs hold control over the goods that people need to survive and thrive. This gives them influence over us and makes us dependent on them. That's a lot of power to have and leaves a lot of room for abuse.

This is not to say that abolishing capitalism will be quick or easy, or that there won't be setbacks. I doubt it will happen within our lifetimes. Still, we can still make whatever progress we can and lay the groundwork for future generations of anti-capitalists to have a better chance at ending capitalism.

There was a time before capitalism and there will be a time after capitalism.

There Is No Ethical Consumption under Capitalism

A common leftwing aphorism is that there's no ethical consumption under capitalism. It's a reference to the fact that all of the products we rely on to survive and thrive were made under an inherently exploitative economic system. What that means in terms of personal behavior varies depending on who you ask, but for me, it means that your personal buying habits are not praxis. One person deciding not to buy from Amazon doesn't meaningfully affect Amazon's bottom line, so you're not influencing them to cut back on their abusive working conditions that way.

Admittedly, boycotts can work if they are collective and organized, but it's hard enough to boycott your local coffee shop, let alone a global hegemon like Amazon. I'd honestly argue that it's more ethical to continue buying from Amazon while voting for politicians whose platforms include improving working conditions and raising the minimum wage than it is to not buy from Amazon but otherwise do nothing.

At the individual level, your personal buying habits don't qualify as meaningful political action, but rather as personal expression. To be fair, personal expression isn't unimportant. I prefer buying from my local unionized grocery store than the nearby Walmart. I won't buy anything from Chick-fil-A. Still, I don't consider that activism. Those are just decisions I make to feel better.

On the other hand, donating money to a progressive or leftwing cause is worthwhile activism because that is collective and organized. Most charities rely on large amounts of small donations. While an individual donation might not amount to much, cumulatively they add up to a lot. The same principle applies to voting, joining a protest, and becoming part of an organization like the DSA or the IWW.

A single drop of water may not have much impact, but if you gather enough droplets together and move them in one direction, you have a tidal wave on your hands. For whatever it's worth, I feel honored to be part of the anarchist wave, even if just in a small way.

How Should We Think About Climate Change?

The current Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change goal is limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. However, even if we backslide to 2 degrees Celsius, that's still better than if we hit 3 degrees Celsius. Furthermore, if we backslide to 3 degrees Celsius, that's still better than if we hit 4 degrees Celsius. So on and so forth.

The fact of the matter is that despite what some headlines might tell you, there is no "tipping point." Rather, there is a series of progressively worse outcomes that we should do everything we can to curtail. Frankly, fighting climate change will never be a bad idea because every step we take towards reducing carbon emissions is a step away from people dying needlessly.

I'm sure that some people might not find that inspiring. It may not be encouraging to think that the best we can do is make the future less bad. Nonetheless, if that means we might be able to save some people who would have died otherwise, then the fight is worth having.

Maybe we can't save everyone, but we should try to save as many people as possible. Though our fight might seem hopeless, we need to keep faith. Courage in the face of adversity is the mark of a true hero, and if we manage to save even a few people who would've otherwise died because of climate change, we've earned the right to call ourselves heroes.

It would be quite difficult for us to build an anarchist society if everyone's been killed by global warming. If we wish to build a truly free, egalitarian, and democratic world, the first step is to make sure there's still a world left to build on.

Israel and the Left

Dismissing all leftwing criticism of the government of Israel, especially its treatment of the Palestinian people, as anti-Semitic is itself anti-Semitic. Israel isn't synonymous with the Jewish people writ large, and most of the world's Jews don't live in Israel. Indeed, many Jews have strong criticisms of the Israeli government. For example, there is a long history of Jewish anti-Zionism and of Jews being critical of Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Is that to say that there's no anti-Semitism on the left? Not necessarily. At the very least, we shouldn't hold all Jews categorically responsible for the actions of the Israeli government, nor should we blame all Israelis for the crimes of the state they live under. It would also be wise to clarify that while we're critical of Israel, we're not critical of only Israel. Whatever crimes the Israeli government has committed aren't exclusive to Israel, and we should try to not fixate on one country's misdeeds. Nations such as Saudi Arabia, China, Poland, Russia, and the United States also have human rights abuses to answer for, and we ought to reserve some contempt for their actions as well.

Nonetheless, the way that Zionists talk about Palestinians is genuinely repugnant. For instance, Zionists often dismiss the concerns of Palestinians by saying that they "brought this on themselves." Much of pro-Israel rhetoric is a mix of victim blaming and general bigotry.

Am I saying that Palestinians haven't made some errors in their response to the Israeli government or that they haven't committed their own atrocities? I would answer that by asking whether Palestinians should have to be perfect people to deserve having their rights respected. Their fallibility doesn't mean that they don't merit sympathy, and to claim otherwise is to hold Palestinians to an unfair standard that no population could live up to.

It's also concerning when pro-Israel commentators claim that Israel has a superior culture to Palestine. Given that many of these pundits are liberals, they presumably know why it's disingenuous when conservatives blame the problems faced by Black communities on rap music. Socioeconomic issues are more complicated than the cultural grievances of reactionaries. More importantly, accusing certain populations of cultural inferiority is a tendency with a long and bloody history. A cursory look at the legacy of colonialism and the treatment of Indigenous peoples shows how claims of cultural inferiority have often been made to justify human rights

abuses. While that doesn't mean that the values and customs of other cultures are beyond scrutiny, it's worth taking a step back and asking yourself whether your criticism of one group's bigotry is playing into a different type of bigotry that reinforces negative attitudes towards marginalized groups, such as how condemnations of the anti-Semitic attitudes held by some Palestinians can often morph into hateful rhetoric about Palestinians in general.

One claim that Zionists like to make is that the Jews tried to assimilate to other countries, but they were nevertheless persecuted, and thus they needed their own state. Such logic only makes sense if you don't apply it to any other minority group. For instance, Black people have a history of being mistreated by the United States, yet most of them aren't asking for their own nation. Rather, they want the territory they currently live in to respect their rights. The ethno-nationalists who suggest that they should be forced out are rightfully seen as fools. After all, Black Americans fought hard against segregation. Why would they be in favor of an ethno-state, which is just a broader form of racial segregation?

Also, when people defend Israel by saying that the Jews have a right to their own nation, what does that actually mean? Does every ethnic group have a right to an ethno-state? And if there's no free land to build on, are they allowed to seize land for that purpose? This question is relevant because that's exactly what Zionists did to the Palestinians, who were expelled from their homeland because Western governments arbitrarily decided that Jews had a "right" to that land.

To be honest, I don't have an answer to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There are a lot of unknowns, and all we can say for certain is that we'll see. Still, I do have some suggestions. First, cut off all military aid and funding to Israel. I fail to see why we should support the Israeli government in their mission to terrorize Palestinians. Second, amplify the perspectives of Palestinians and anti-Zionist Jews because their voices are important in these times. Third, ignore anything the pro-Israel lobby says. They're hawkish neoconservatives at best and racist enablers of apartheid at worst.

The situation in Israel often seems hopeless, but we must keep fighting both for the rights of Palestinians and against the tyranny of militaristic states like Israel. For the sake of maintaining our resolve, we ought to remind ourselves that every step we take towards bringing this conflict to a close is a step away from people dying needlessly. Maybe we can't save everyone, but we should try to save as many people as possible. So remain determined and face our adversaries steadfastly and unflinchingly.

The Anarchist Case for Self-Improvement

My path to anarchism has also been a path to self-improvement. By internalizing anarchist values such as radical egalitarianism, democracy, and liberty, I've become a better and happier person. I've learned not to put myself above or below other people. I've accepted that people should be able to live however they want so long as they're not hurting anybody. I've gained a healthy skepticism of authority figures, especially the wealthy and the elected officials who serve them.

Learning about far-left values and trying to live in accordance with those values has led me to becoming more joyful and confident. Being more politically active has been a boon for my self-esteem. I feel like I'm finally becoming the sort of person I've always wanted to be. Speaking as someone who used to have low self-esteem and a bad case of depression, that means everything to me.

So does all that make me arrogant? Am I putting myself above other people by saying that I'm better than I used to be?

I don't think so. The way I like to think about it is that instead of measuring myself against other people, I create my own metric of success based on what I need and want, rather than what other people might need or want. Some people might see success as being able to buy a luxury car. I see success as helping to make progress towards building an anarchist society. Different strokes for different folks.

I also try to see it as not being better in relation to other people but rather being better than I used to be. It's self-improvement, not ranking people against each other.

It's also worth maintaining a distinction between personal success and societal success. Me feeling depressed or developing self-loathing doesn't bring us any closer to Medicare for All or a Green New Deal. If anything, feeling more confident means that I can go out and campaign for the change I want to see in the world, bringing us a bit closer to attaining our goals.

In addition, it's worth noting that what success means is subjective. Maybe most people would see a person who watches anime all day as being lazy. However, if that person's goal is to watch one thousand different anime shows, watching anime all day is making steady progress towards that goal. Who are we to say that they're wasting their life if that's what makes them happy?

That's not to say that all goals are equally valid. If someone wants to give up on their life dream of becoming a cop, being someone's boss, or promoting the conservative agenda, I fully support them giving up on that dream. Being a dreamer is good unless your dreams involve making life worse for a lot of people, in which case you should find different dreams, preferably in a more leftwing direction. Still, so long as your dream isn't hurting anyone, go for it.

Self-esteem isn't synonymous with narcissism. While an overabundance of confidence can make you cruel and prone to making rash decisions, having a healthy amount of self-assurance is worth your time.

If you need help keeping your ego in check, one way I do so is by not making any one person the center of my life. When you put another person on a pedestal, you become unhealthily fixated on them. When you put yourself on a pedestal, you become egotistical.

Humility is not thinking less of yourself but rather thinking of yourself less. That's not to say you shouldn't take care of yourself, but you should also give some attention to other people's needs. Indeed, one of the best aspects of activism and charity is that it can often be a humbling experience that reminds us that we're not the only people in the world that matter. Furthermore, given all the foolish nonsense that rich people like to say, I'm a firm believer in the idea that having too much money rots your brain. As such, if you have cash laying around that you don't particularly need for bills or emergencies, consider giving it away. That's what I do.

I admit that this sounds like I'm bragging. For whatever it's worth, I'm not trying to. I do think that people bragging about their activism can be a bit gauche and can push people away from the cause. Still, expressing the fact that doing activism can be personally fulfilling and can improve your self-esteem can be a good way to bring people in so that they can take part in the same activities that bring you so much joy. It's not just about making yourself happy, but also about sharing that happiness with others.

The true joy in building anarchism is that you can share joy with others and become a better person as a result. While you shouldn't let that go to your head, there's no shame in feeling proud to have contributed to a noble cause.

My Family in the Philippines

When I was young, my mother often sent money over to our family in the Philippines. This is a common practice for overseas Filipino workers. In fact, about 9% of the Philippines' GDP is from such remittances. Once my mother died, the task fell to me to pick up the slack. I was okay with doing it at first, but eventually, the family asked for too much and too frequently that I had to sever ties with them.

I don't regret cutting them off. They were more of my mother's family than my family. I only ever met them once when I was eight during a vacation to the Philippines. Plus, I don't have large sums of money that I can just give out to people with zero consequences. I'm not Jeff Bezos. I'm just a wage worker and not a particularly well-paid one at that. Still, I don't resent them for asking for money. While it would be easy for me to say that they took advantage of me, I don't think that's a fair thing to assume. Maybe they really did need that money. After all, the Philippines is a poor country and doesn't have much of a social safety net. Even when I visited back in 2005, they were living in poverty. This wasn't a case of one person being mooched off of. This was a case where one group of people were desperate and needed the money, and the person they relied on wasn't able to provide for them. It was just a bad situation all around.

At the very least, I'm glad that such an experience didn't ruin generosity for me. I still enjoy contributing to other people's wellbeing. It gives me a lot of joy. That's why I often give to various trans charities. I'm especially grateful that my experience with my family in the Philippines didn't turn me into a conservative. Frankly, there are few phrases in the conservative lexicon that I hate more than "a conservative is just a liberal who's been mugged."

First, that phrase implies an overgeneralization, namely, that because one person decided to hurt you or take advantage of you, you've decided that all people are trying to harm you, which isn't a fair assumption to make about people. I'm not saying you should blindly trust people, but if you're going to dismiss everyone as being out to get you or mooch off of you, I think you're jumping to conclusions. You can help people in need if you're able and willing, but if you're going to write off every person who asks for help as a welfare queen, it seems like you're just making a post hoc rationalization for why you shouldn't have to care about other people's suffering.

More to the point, your trauma doesn't justify bigotry. Just because you suffered doesn't mean that you have a right to inflict suffering on others. For example, in the

case of the mugged conservative, you could argue that maybe the mugger was poor and desperately needed money. That doesn't excuse what they did, but at least there's a rationale there. On the other hand, if getting mugged caused that conservative to support "tough-on-crime" laws like instituting mandatory minimums, I fail to see how they're any better than the mugger.

"Tough-on-crime" laws don't help anybody. They don't reduce recidivism; they don't help people who've committed harmful acts reform themselves; the evidence that they reduce harmful behavior is dubious at best; and they definitely don't address the root causes of harmful behavior, such as poverty and mental health issues. By supporting these laws, conservatives are adding needless suffering to the world with no benefit to anyone. It's only for their own sadistic gratification of getting revenge on people who they've decided are beneath them.

To be honest, that's why I tend to forgive people when they hurt me—not for their benefit, but for mine. That way I don't become like conservatives.

This is not to say that I trust people blindly, but I sincerely hope that no matter how many times I get hurt in life, I don't become like members of the political right. Even at the worst of times, I know who the real enemy is.

Unpaid Labor

One nugget of political wisdom I've kept over the years is the observation that conservatives often act like the amount that someone gets paid is an accurate reflection of their worth to society. This is a strange assumption given that conservatives are also advocates of traditional family arrangements. Surely they've noticed that being a good stay-at-home mother pays exactly zero dollars per year. Indeed, many forms of necessary labor go unpaid under current circumstances, such as parenting, internships, volunteer work, political activism, and more.

To be clear, I appreciate the work of volunteer workers and political activists, and I hope they continue doing their work, paid or otherwise. Nonetheless, it would be nice if we made progress towards a society where these unsung heroes are properly recognized for their work and perhaps even compensated—at least until such a point where we establish a world where people don't need money to live.

I carry this logic over to those in college. After all, my place of work offers paid training to new employees because the higher-ups, for as much as they're swine of the bourgeoisie, are still smart enough to know that learning how to do the job is part of doing the job. As such, not only do I think that university students shouldn't have to pay tuition fees, but I also think that the labor of being educated ought to be compensated. Schoolwork is work after all, as any college student who's pulled an all-nighter studying for an exam will tell you.

This is one reason why I'm amenable to the idea of universal basic income (UBI), a form of welfare that gives all the residents of a given territory the funds they need to meet their basic needs, no strings attached. Aside from being a good policy to pursue on the basis of making sure people don't die of avoidable starvation or exposure, it's also a subtle way of financially rewarding work that has thus far gone unpaid.

It's also worth noting that UBI doesn't seem to disincentivize labor, as was shown by an experiment conducted by the government of Finland.⁵¹ While some forms of modern welfare do seem to discourage people from working, that mostly comes down to the fact that such programs are means-tested, meaning that if you make above a certain income threshold, you're no longer eligible to receive benefits. This

⁵¹Lu, Donna. "Universal Basic Income Seems to Improve Employment and Well-Being." *New Scientist*, 6 May 2020, www.newscientist.com/article/2242937-universal-basic-income-seems-to-improve-employment-and-well-being.

makes people less likely to be productive since they don't want to stop receiving benefits. By contrast, since UBI is universal, that disincentive doesn't apply.

In the long term, I would prefer to live in a stateless, anti-capitalist society where the money motive has disappeared entirely. Until then, I'll settle for UBI, both for meeting people's needs and for paying those whose work goes uncompensated.

Idle Hands

I've never really cared much for the phrase "idle hands are the devil's playthings." On one hand, it's usually good to keep yourself busy. The brain is a problem-solving machine, and if you don't have problems to solve, your brain will create problems by compelling you to engage in self-destructive behavior. As such, it's good to have a goal in mind, whether it's as broad as going back to college and finishing your degree or as simple as finishing a book. Whatever it is, it needs to be something that can keep you occupied or else you'll go crazy.

Still, the idle hands quote has always struck me as something that an old-time conservative would've said to our predecessors who fought for the forty-hour workweek and weekends. "How dare you imply that the filthy poors should have free time! Don't you know that hard work is good for the soul? We need to make sure that they're working constantly in the factories that we just so happen to own and where we profit from their labor. What's that? You think that's a conflict of interest? Bosh!"

It helps if you read the above quote in the accent of a nineteenth-century aristocrat.

My response to that sentiment is that it's not as if people wouldn't have anything to do if there weren't any work around. They could take up gardening, go fly-fishing, learn to play an instrument, or do any of the other millions of recreational activities our world provides. The world doesn't lack ways to occupy your time.

I suppose there are people who feel as if their lives wouldn't have any meaning if they couldn't work. These people are often workaholics and just don't find any joy in life if they're not busy doing something productive. I've always found this attitude unhealthy. What if such a person ever got into a car crash and became disabled in a way that they couldn't do certain kinds of work? What happens when they grow old and don't have the fortitude to do work at all? The fact of the matter is that eventually, we're all going to have to come to terms with the idea that our lives have value beyond our capacity to do productive labor, a point which you must accept unless you think that disabled and elderly folks deserve to die.

That's not to say that we shouldn't do work insofar as there's work that needs doing. Still, I tend to think that it's better for us not to live to work, but instead work to live. Working should always be a means to an end, not an end in and of itself. Viewing productivity as a goal without any regard for what we're being productive towards

leads us to a society where people often work sixty- to eighty-hour workweeks to the detriment of their physical and mental health. All this in spite of studies which suggest that shorter workweeks can actually make us more productive while also giving us more leisure time.⁵²

More to the point, even if we lowered our current working hours from forty hours a week to thirty, it's not as if there aren't ways to keep yourself busy. You can spend your extra free time doing volunteer work, doing household chores, and getting involved in political activism, for example. The world doesn't lack problems to solve. If anything, having a shorter workweek means having more time to deal with problems which have thus far been neglected.

However, if a person decides to spend their extra free time simply playing video games or with friends, I don't think that's an invalid choice either. So long as whatever work that needs to get done is getting done, what's it to you how people spend their spare time?

Perhaps after a while of playing video games, a person would get bored and want to do something more productive. However, in that scenario, that's their choice. The beauty of having extra free time is that you're free to spend that time however you want, whether that's by doing extra work or just by goofing off. A world with shorter workweeks has a place for both ne'er-do-wells and try-hards.

At the very least, given our society's current trend towards automation, you might want to consider how you would want to spend extra free time. It might become a relevant question.

For my part, I'll continue to do work insofar as I'm able to and work needs to get done. I don't mind my current job as a cook at a campus dining hall. It's not the most glamorous job in the world, but I do feel like I'm fulfilling a genuine human need. People need to eat, after all. Nonetheless, should there come a time when there's no more work to be done, so long as there's a way to compensate me for my lost income, such as UBI or even just unemployment benefits, I'm not going to lose sleep over it. Maybe I'll take up kayaking or pottery.

52Chappell, Bill. "4-Day Workweek Boosted Workers' Productivity By 40%, Microsoft Japan Says." *NPR*, 4 Nov. 2019, [choice.npr.org/index.html?origin=https://www.npr.org/2019/11/04/776163853/microsoft-japan-says-4-day-workweek-boosted-workers-productivity-by-40](https://www.npr.org/index.html?origin=https://www.npr.org/2019/11/04/776163853/microsoft-japan-says-4-day-workweek-boosted-workers-productivity-by-40).

Prescriptivism and Anti-Prescriptivism

Prescriptivism is the idea that there's one right way to live and everyone should be forced to live that way. Many people on the left consider themselves anti-prescriptivists. They tend to follow the rubric of people being able to live however they want so long as they're not hurting anybody.

I have mixed feelings about this. On one hand, I do believe that people should be free to choose how they want to live. That's why I support the bodily autonomy of women, trans people, and sex workers. On the other hand, I think you need at least a little prescriptivism in order to have any sort of morality. For example, I have a preference against being murdered.

More to the point, guaranteeing certain freedoms often means curtailing other freedoms. A world where people are free to be trans is a world where people are either disallowed or at least heavily discouraged from supporting transphobic policies. I would argue that progressive and leftwing activism is inherently prescriptive, insofar as it relies on shoulds and should nots—for example, you should support the rights of trans people, you should not use derogatory language towards trans people, and you should not support transphobic policies. I agree with these statements, but they're not anti-prescriptivist. They're a different type of prescriptivism.

Still, maybe I'm looking at this the wrong way. Maybe the difference between prescriptivism and anti-prescriptivism is less a matter of content than of style. For instance, you could support progressive and leftwing policies through gentle persuasion rather than issuing demands. Maybe instead of shoulds and should nots, you could frame your preferred policies as suggestions, for example, politely asking people to stop using ableist slurs, to donate to my trans friend's GoFundMe, and to vote this Tuesday, though you don't have to if you don't want to. I'm not going to deny that taking a more diplomatic approach can sometimes be more effective than ordering people around. There's a place for gentler methods of activism.

Still, there are times when you have to be firm with people. For example, if someone calls me an ethnic slur on the street, I'm not going to try to be diplomatic with them. I'm going to tell them to fuck off. Such language might not change their mind, but it might get them to go away. Nonetheless, there's enough room in progressive and leftwing activism for both a prescriptive approach and an anti-prescriptive approach. It just depends on the situation. Diplomacy and more forceful action aren't mutually exclusive.

Should We Show Conservatives Mercy?

One aspect of progressive and leftwing activism that weighs on my mind is that should we reach our goals, conservatives would also benefit from our policies. A federal minimum wage hike boosts the incomes of our opponents just as much as our allies. The phrase we on the left like to use is “Medicare for All” and not “Medicare for All except Republicans.”

This is intentional. For all our grievances with the political right, the society which we’re working to build is meant to help them too. Just because we don’t especially like them or want to be friends with them doesn’t mean that we think they deserve to suffer and die.

The best way I could put it is that I view conservatives in the same way that I view people who have committed arson or murder: while what they did was wrong, our response should be guided by principles of restorative justice rather than retribution. Just as I think sex offenders should be given psychological treatment to help them overcome their harmful tendencies, members of the political right ought to be rehabilitated or at least managed in such a way that the harm they cause is severely mitigated while still treating them humanely. After all, if a person’s brain is built in such a way that they can’t be anything other than cruel, can they truly be blamed for their cruelty?

I believe in trying to address the root causes of the bigotry that rightwingers like to perpetuate. Improving the representation of the poor and marginalized groups in media and calling people out when they use slurs or other forms of derogatory language towards minorities helps push our culture towards respecting the rights of the downtrodden. Even many conservatives have come around to the idea that being nice to gay people is actually good.

I suppose the reason this matters to me is because my dad is a traditionalist Catholic and Trump supporter. For as long as I’ve known him, he’s spent his time being angry at feminists, acting like a misogynistic prick, and whining about the Second Vatican Council. My half-sisters can attest to the fact that he’s been a foul human being ever since his marriage to the woman who was his first wife and their mother. The lady who was his second wife, my mother, often argued with him. In short, he’s the exact sort of person I don’t want to be like.

Still, I don't bear ill will towards him. I'll even admit that the way I've treated him over the years has often been immature and needlessly antagonistic. In defense of my past self, I would point out that my dad has never made it easy to tolerate him. Nonetheless, I am still willing to help him out in his old age and visit him once a week at the elderly care facility he currently resides at. The world that anarchists like me want to build is for folks like my dad too. We do genuinely want to help conservatives and make their lives better. I just wish they felt the same way about us.

Should Children Be Allowed to Vote?

Of all of my political opinions, the strangest may be that children should be allowed to vote. Bizarre as that might sound, it's worth noting that democratic principles demand that people should get a say in the decisions that affect their lives. Given that children are affected by political decisions, they should be given the right to vote. Let me go through possible counterarguments and explain why they're either wrong or disingenuous.

I. Children are dumb.

We've all made bad decisions in our lives. Even at an old age, we often make mistakes. Would you say that we should take away grandpa's right to vote?

II. Children don't have the decision-making skills required to vote.

Even at a young age, we often teach kids basic moral lessons about sharing and not playing rough with other children, which themselves are applications of more general values like equality and harm reduction. If we can trust that children can learn these principles, why should they have less of a right to vote than adults, many of whom have forgotten these basic values over the years?

III. How can children vote if they can't read or write?

I'm willing to admit that maybe we should limit voting rights to people who can actually fill out a ballot. Babies might have trouble doing this with their tiny hands. That being said, if we have a child who's old enough to read and write, such as a six-year-old, they can be coached on how to fill out a ballot.

Still, even that feels like I'm ceding too much ground. After all, even illiterate people are often allowed to vote under the premise that they too should be allowed a say in the decisions that affect them. Why shouldn't children?

IV. Wouldn't adults simply manipulate children to vote against their own interests?

Politicians often spend a tremendous amount of money on influencing the public to vote for them. That's not even getting into how news organizations and think tanks will also try to influence public opinion. As such, if we're going to dismiss children as being unable to vote because they can be manipulated, that would also disqualify pretty

much every adult from voting as well, insofar as adults have also been tricked into voting against their interests.

- V. If you think children should be allowed to vote, why shouldn't they be allowed to do child labor, drive a car, or consent to sex?

While we generally forbid children from working, driving, or having sex because they're unable to do it safely or make an informed decision, that doesn't necessarily mean that they don't have the cognitive capacity to vote. After all, we don't forbid unemployed people, those without driver's licenses, or virgins from voting because if we did, our political opponents would have an incentive to prevent people like us from finding a job, taking driving lessons, or getting laid, thus creating a surreal political caste system.

- VI. What could children possibly have to add to discussions of policy?

Given that children are often taught that sharing is caring, it's safe to assume that many children would favor radical wealth redistribution. Kids are also told to play nicely with others, implying that they would be stalwart pacifists. These preferences give them a more solid moral compass than any libertarian or hawkish conservative. So if we're going to let the political right keep voting despite the transparent foolishness of their ideologies, we may as well give the right of suffrage to tantrum-throwing toddlers.

On a more serious note, kids would probably have valid opinions on how public schools should be run, what sort of social safety net children should be offered, whether or not poor kids who can't afford school lunches should have their lunches subsidized, and so on. There are areas of life where the young are wise and the old should shut up and listen.

- VII. What if kids make the wrong decision?

If you only give folks a choice when you're one hundred percent sure that they'll make the right decision or, more likely, the decision that you agree with, then you might as well not give them a choice at all. Freedom means that people are allowed to make choices that you think are wrong.

VIII. Children haven't been alive long enough to have the life experiences necessary to vote effectively.

While old age sometimes does bring wisdom and experience, it can also mean being unable to move beyond the preconceptions of the past. The fact that so many old people voted for Trump is proof enough of that. That's not to say that young people are right about everything, but it's good to have people around who have a fresh perspective, unhindered by the social norms of the past.

In conclusion, kids should be allowed to vote. All people should have a say in the decisions that affect them, regardless of their age. There should be democracy in governments, workplaces, and schools. There should be democracy everywhere.

The young will inherit our society when we're gone. It would be prudent to allow them to practice running our political systems by giving them a chance to vote.

Political Labels

Political labels are a tricky business. On one hand, you don't want to put too much stock into them because the meanings of words like "liberal," "conservative," and "leftist" are subject to change. Language is fluid and always evolving. Also, getting fixated on a single ideology often means becoming rigid and fitting yourself into a box. On the other hand, while these words are malleable, they're not meaningless. For example, if I say the word "Republican," it conjures up the image of someone wearing a MAGA hat who doesn't especially care for immigrants. Even if this idea doesn't match every individual Republican, the idea itself is still relevant, and it does influence how people will interact with politics. So while you shouldn't put too much stock into labels, using them as a form of cultural shorthand, a way of getting your ideas conveyed as efficiently as possible, can be useful. It can also be a subtle way of imposing discipline on yourself as you can focus on one idea or set of ideas rather than spreading your energy around to an overabundance of goals.

As such, I identify as an anarchist, though I try not to pick fights with people who use different leftwing labels, such as socialists, communists, and syndicalists. While these groups have a few minor differences of opinion, they mostly have the same goals. As long as we're all on board with abolishing capitalism and establishing a truly free, egalitarian, and democratic society, we can smooth out our minor disagreements later.

This is also why I identify simply as an anarchist rather than an anarcho-syndicalist or an anarcho-communist. Aside from the fact that I'm not well read enough in anarchist theory to know which subset of anarchism I prefer, I don't think the distinctions matter very much. For instance, even if you could decisively prove that an anarcho-syndicalist society would be five percent worse than an anarcho-communist society by some metric, I think that at that point you're just splitting hairs. As long as we create a world with as few unequal power relationships as possible and reduce the disparity between the power of the ruling class and the general public to be as small as it can be, what does it matter which version of that premise we go with?

To be fair, most infighting in leftwing circles is limited to a vocal minority of disruptive buffoons. Most leftists are smart enough to know that despite our differences, we have more in common with each other than with the political right. For whatever it's worth, while the history of leftwing politics features a lot of infighting, it also features a lot of camaraderie, where people put aside their petty differences and interpersonal drama to work together towards common goals.

This isn't necessarily a call for "left unity." While we should avoid needless sectarianism, not all sectarianism is needless. Indeed, if someone in your community is being disruptive and toxic, to hell with unity—kick them out. It's more important to keep your community safe from harassment than it is to tolerate people who are needlessly hostile.

Still, that doesn't mean that we can't still work together. If it makes you feel any better, a lot of leftwing infighting is between terminally online weirdos. Not every leftist in the world spends their free time picking fights on Reddit and Discord.

The online left is ultimately a very small part of the global leftwing community. There's more to being a leftist than drama regarding socialist e-celebs. I think that's worth remembering to try and keep things in perspective.

My Political Pedagogy

While the stereotypical leftist gets their political education from dry theoretical books written by dead white men with beards, my biggest ideological influences are leftwing YouTubers who explain leftwing ideas in a fun and accessible way. I owe a debt to online video makers including hbombguy, Philosophy Tube, ContraPoints, Lindsay Ellis, Big Joel, Thought Slime, Folding Ideas, Kat Blaque, and Innuendo Studios for inspiring me to think more deeply about politics and to be more politically active. I also owe a debt to the staff of *Current Affairs*, a socialist magazine that makes insightful and entertaining commentary. I'll also mention that I follow many LGBT people on Twitter, and because of that I've gotten to see perspectives that simply wouldn't appear on traditional news outlets like *CNN* or the *New York Times*.

This is not to say that I don't value more traditional venues of political education. I do sometimes read books like *Why You Should Be a Socialist* by Nathan Robinson or *Bullshit Jobs* by David Graeber. I just don't think that such venues are the only valid source of political information.

I'm sure that many older folks would mock me for getting most of my political education on the internet. I would respond by saying that, silly as it sounds, I've learned more from watching fun leftwing YouTube videos than I ever did from church while growing up or from any company-sponsored motivational speaker. I'd also point out that given that many older folks voted for Trump, maybe they're not authorities on what counts as a valid source of political pedagogy.

So for anyone out there who got most of their political education on the internet, just know that you're valid. Your perspective is no less reasonable or valuable than those of people who get their ideology from cable news networks or newspapers.

To end this off, I do once again want to thank the people I follow online for entertaining and educating me. Such people are my inspiration, and I respect their work a great deal.

Why Should You Be an Anarchist?

Sometimes when I'm feeling down, I tell myself that I need to be my own best friend. After all, if there's no one around to comfort me, I'll just have to comfort myself. This tendency is understandable for people who, like me, don't have as much of a support network of friends and family to help them out when they need it.

Still, it's a false formulation. When I reassure myself, I use concepts and lessons I learned from others. I'm hardly the inventor of ideas such as "nobody's perfect"; "while you should try to be a decent person, it's good to forgive yourself and others for their shortcomings"; "fortune favors the bold"; "don't settle for less"; and so on. Furthermore, during low periods, I tend to listen to music made by my fellow human beings and contemplate leftwing ideas, which, though I try to make my own contributions to these concepts, were ultimately not my creation.

Indeed, every time I go to work, I'm grateful to the labor organizers and socialists who fought to establish the forty-hour workweek and weekends. Without the hard work of those who struggled to overturn laws that banned interracial marriage and miscegenation, many mixed-race Americans like me simply wouldn't exist. I owe a debt to the LGBT activists who laid the foundations for the happiness and wellbeing of my trans comrades.

The phrase "no man is an island" is as true as it ever was. Nobody truly makes it on their own. While we should all try to take care of ourselves, not be a burden to others, and lighten the load of our colleagues to the best of our ability, even finding the willpower to do that isn't a function of self-reliance. Rather, it's a gift from the collective conscious of all people who lived and died before us and gave us the strength to stand.

This is one of the reasons that I so deeply disdain the idea that you should only trust yourself. Such a concept implies that you've anointed yourself the most trustworthy person in the world, which seems rather presumptuous. I tend to be more confident than I used to be, but even I wouldn't claim that I'm the only person I can rely on because that would be a colossally arrogant thing to say.

More to the point, the main reason that paranoia and distrust are so dangerous is because they're endemic to conservative thinking. Fear of outsiders will cause folks to support policies and politicians that make life harder for immigrants, even if they've never met anyone from another country in their entire lives. Fear of those who are

different leads to contempt and hate crimes for those who go against the grain, such as LGBT people and religious minorities. Many of our society's problems come down to what happens when we base our entire understanding of modern politics on the perspective of those who live in insulated rural towns, where even folks from ten miles down the road are seen as part of the out-group.

That's not to say that you should blindly trust people or let them take advantage of you, but it's often wise to give others the benefit of the doubt and not jump to conclusions about how they're trying to hurt you. A nightmare about the world being out to get you is just a bad dream.

As an anarchist, I have justifiable reasons to distrust and dislike many people. Conservatives, libertarians, fascists, bosses, cops, landlords, politicians, and the rich have all done a great deal to earn the contempt that society shows them.

Nonetheless, the world that anarchists want to build is one based on solidarity and mutual aid. Working towards that world means accepting that not everyone who disagrees with you is trying to sabotage you. Even intelligent people can have different opinions. This also means that it's often better to listen than to talk and that areas of disagreement become topics of discussion rather than debate. While we shouldn't be so charitable with everyone, making progress towards an anarchist society means forging a community.

Perhaps that's the real reason to be an anarchist. Whether or not we ever create a truly free, egalitarian, and democratic world, striving towards that goal means meeting those who share our vision. Even if we never accomplish everything we set out to do, making as much progress as we can will be a source of joy we can share with others.

So don't be afraid to demand the impossible and keep demanding it until the powers that be either admit it's not impossible and give it to us or are forced to make whatever is possible their compromise. This strategy isn't just good because it increases material benefits for us. Rather, getting closer to our goals means that the earth's bounty can be more equally shared by all.

The gift of all leftwing ideologies, once they're properly understood, is that every member of the oppressed, whether they're people who've been mistreated for being poor, Black, Latinx, LGBT, foreign, disabled, Indigenous, feminist, of a different religion, a sex worker, or a political dissident, among others, is someone who you can reach out

to and become allies with. These are your people, and a strike against one of us is a strike against all of us.

Sentimental as it sounds, perhaps the real anarchism was the friends we made along the way. Such a line is conventionally made as a joke, but in this case, it's simply a statement of fact.

Why should you be an anarchist? So that you can stand with your brothers, sisters, and nonbinary siblings and together declare to the world loudly so that everyone can hear, "No gods, no masters."

Don't Be a Bystander (Resources)

I've never understood people who have strongly held political beliefs but who don't live in accordance with those beliefs. For example, if you support Medicare for All (M4A) but you don't vote for politicians whose platform includes M4A, donate money to organizations that advocate for M4A, or join groups that are trying to get M4A enacted such as the DSA, you may as well not believe in M4A at all.

For me at least, politics isn't about just what label you identify with but rather having a set of moral obligations. As such, if you wish to not merely call yourself an anarchist but instead actually start building anarchism, here are a few resources you can use to avoid being a bystander.

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) fundraises for progressive and leftwing causes, contacts elected officials to pressure them to enact leftwing policies, and gets socialists elected into public office, such as House of Representatives members Jamaal Bowman, Cori Bush, Rashida Tlaib, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) sends volunteer organizers to workers who are trying to unionize their workplace. They also offer general labor organizing advice and resources.

Mermaids UK is a charity that offers assistance and resources to trans youth in Britain.

Trans Lifeline is a crisis hotline for trans people in need. They also provide aid to trans folks who are trying to update their ID. Their number is 1-877-565-8860.

Authors such as David Graeber, Howard Zinn, Angela Saini, and Nancy MacLean have all written nonfiction books which can aid in the intellectual development of leftwing readers. A fair number of graphic novels and pieces of fictional literature also express perspectives and feelings that are amenable to anarchist causes, such as *Be Gay, Do Comics* by Mat Bors et al. (2020), *The Dispossessed* by Ursula Le Guin (1974), *Super Late Bloomer: My Early Days in Transition* by Julia Kaye (2018), *Spinning* by Tillie Walden (2017), *Mis(h)adra* by Iasmin Omar Ata (2017), and *Lighter Than My Shadow* by Katie Green (2013).

There are also various editorial outlets that help spread around leftwing ideas, such as *Current Affairs*, *Jacobin*, *Dissent*, the *Baffler*, and so on.

Leftwing web videos can be a fun and accessible way to learn about both anti-capitalist and socially progressive concepts. Some content creators that are worth looking into are hbombguy, ContraPoints, Philosophy Tube, Folding Ideas, Innuendo Studios, Kat Blaque, Thought Slime, Big Joel, Lindsay Ellis, Kyle Kallgren, Jim Sterling, Sarah Z, Shannon Strucci, Curio, Jack Saint, Renegade Cut, Shaun, Three Arrows, Mia Mulder, and Riley J. Dennis.

While social media posting isn't the same thing as activism, some decent commentary can be found if you know where to look. On Twitter, folks like Existential Comics, anarchopac, notCursedE, and Casey Explosion make entertaining and insightful comments. Also, many of the aforementioned YouTubers have Twitter accounts which are worth looking into.

Many people who work in the porn industry also advocate for the rights of sex workers. Noteworthy sex-positive activists include Lorelei Lee and Riley Reyes.

David Bentley Hart and Elizabeth Bruenig are both Christian socialists. If you want a more religious take on leftwing politics, they're worth looking into.

Finally, consider checking out the Anarchist Library, an online collection of anarchist texts which you can view for free. Their URL is <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/special/index>.

Afterword and Acknowledgements

The reason I write about politics is that it helps keep my mind active and limber, allows me to articulate what I believe, and motivates me to be more politically active. I feel like monetizing my hobby would diminish the fun. As such, I won't be selling this book for a profit. Still, I do think that some people will find the ideas present in this text to be helpful and interesting, so I am placing it in the public domain, available for free download online.

I would like to thank our predecessors in progressive and leftwing activism, such as the LGBT liberation movement, the Civil Rights Movement, the women's liberation movement, the labor organizers and socialists who fought to establish the forty-hour workweek and weekends, the women's suffrage movement, and those who sought to abolish slavery. These people are our inspiration, and as we go forwards, I sincerely hope that our forerunners lend us strength from beyond the veil.

I would also like to express gratitude for modern progressive and leftwing activists, such as the Black Lives Matter movement, LGBT activists, fourth-wave feminists, union organizers, anti-war protesters, members of organizations such as the DSA and the IWW, and everyone else who carries on the noble tradition set by our forebearers. When the modern progressive and leftwing movement has made as much headway as it can and hands off the torch to the next generation, the youth of the future will see the activists of today as heroes and will gladly continue their fight for a better world.

Another set of folks I'd like to give my regards to are the people who inspired me to be more leftwing in general and an anarchist in specific. They include David Bentley Hart, Elizabeth Bruenig, David Graeber, the staff of *Current Affairs*, hbombguy, ContraPoints, Philosophy Tube, Folding Ideas, Big Joel, Thought Slime, Kat Blaque, Innuendo Studios, Lindsay Ellis, Kyle Kallgren, Curio, Jack Saint, Jim Sterling, Sarah Z, Jacob Chapman, Shannon Strucci, Renegade Cut, Three Arrows, Shaun, Mia Mulder, Film Crit Hulk, *Existential Comics*, anarchopac, Casey Explosion, notCursedE, Lorelei Lee, and many more. Finally, I would like to give special mention of my friends who give me the strength to keep going. Though I won't list their names for the sake of anonymity, I am eternally grateful to these people.

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