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Mirror Kaleidoscope Dagger

What is Anarchism?

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Contents

Anarchism as mirror	5
Anarchism as kaleidoscope	6
Anarchism as dagger	6

- Armed Joy by Alfredo M. Bonanno
- “Black Anarchism” by Ashanti Alston
- The Bonnot Gang by Richard Parry
- Direct Action by Ann Hansen
- Franco’s Prisoner by Miguel García
- The Haymarket Tragedy by Paul Avrich
- If Beale Street Could Talk by James Baldwin
- Into the Forest by Jean Hegland
- Letters of Insurgents by Fredy Perlman
- “Maroon: Kuwasi Balagoon and the Evolution of Revolutionary New Afrikan Anarchism” by Akinyele Umoja
- “Resistance to Civil Government” by Henry David Thoreau
- Sabaté by Antonio Téllez
- Sasha and Emma by Paul Avrich
- “The Sun Still Rises” by Conspiracy of Cells of Fire
- We are the Birds of the Coming Storm by Lola Lafon
- “What is Green Anarchy?”
- Without a Glimmer of Remorse by Pino Cacucci
- Written on the Body by Jeanette Winterson

“The subject is not whether we accomplish anarchism today, tomorrow, or within ten centuries, but that we walk towards anarchism today, tomorrow, and always.”

Errico Malatesta,

“Towards Anarchism”

What is anarchism? The question itself opens like a budding flower, exposing further questions. Do we speak of anarchism as a political theory, with its corresponding list of important books and figures? Or of anarchism as an approach to life, a way of living one’s days in a way that is liberating? Anarchism can be both of these – and much more – because it is elusive, defiant of orthodoxy and final words. Let us not speak of anarchism in the dead tongues of Great Men, the dusty language of library shelves, or the meaningless prattle of the artistic avant-garde. In defining some basic principles, let us cut new paths away from definitive pronouncements.

Anarchism as mirror

It is impossible to envision a free world when our everyday lives are poisoned by Power: from above (police, prisons, bosses, courts, landlords), from others (the cycles of abuse that plague our relationships, the petty snitch mentality), and from ourselves (our own acceptance of and participation in the above). Anarchism offers us a mirror with which to evaluate ourselves, to recognize faults and, ultimately, to make changes.

Am I capable of living without authority? This question breaks through all hand-wringing about utopia, bringing our ideal world into dialogue with our own behavior. Are we slavish, sycophantic, submissive? Are we exploitative, dishonest, manipulative? Are we dominating, uncaring, sadistic? Are we living our lives, now, in a way that opens doors for experiments

in freedom – or has all of this world’s bitterness diminished our capacity for simple human kindness?

The mirror exposes us for what we are, and only through this will we change. Anarchism does not wait for “material conditions” or the “contradictions of capitalism” to transform us – it demands we sow the seeds of a new humanity now.

Anarchism as kaleidoscope

As our daily lives are impoverished by systems of power, so too are our dreams deadened and constrained. Political ideologies – with their dogmas, “strategic thought,” and “objective conditions” – strangle our unrestrained day dreams of cooperation and free life. The beauty of anarchism is that it has dispensed with ideological certainties, scientific measurements, and grand plans, favoring instead the limitless possibilities that can spring forth from the unknown. Each turn of the kaleidoscope – this way and that – brings new arrangements of light, unique and vibrant colors, evanescent and determined by the movements we, ourselves, make.

Anarchism as dagger

Much has been made of the anarchist as wild-eyed bomb thrower, and much more has been vomited in response by those “anarchists” who fall over each other to distance themselves from any tinge of violence. Whatever one’s personal inclination toward or against violence, the reality of our lives within capitalism and under the state is one of ruthless brutality and exploitation. This will not be done away with by simply wishing it were so, or by loving the hand that beats us. To retaliate against the violence of work and law, property and alienation, is self-defense. More importantly, it is a small assurance

that those who wish to violate us will not do so without repercussions. In the face of the violence of the system, dignity is to be found in the counter-violence of our direct action.

Having traversed some fields and forests with you, I will leave the “justification” for anarchism to others, as so much has already been said about the human history of free cooperation and mutual aid. Neither will I dwell upon the intricacies of an anarchist society (who will take out the trash, etc.), because I find such questions impossible to answer in the midst of this social prison. Besides, there will not be one answer to such questions; systematic thinking is what has ensnared us in the barbed wire for so long. What to do with a world of total freedom will be determined by those who live in that world. The best we can offer are visions, small experiments that summon that world in our immediate lives, and audacious actions to rid ourselves of Power and its footsoldiers.

Anarchism is a path made by walking. It is a tension: against Power, toward unknown freedoms.

Without map, we traverse the wilderness. We do not fear the dark; it hides us from our enemies. We do not fear the wild beasts; they are our companions. We do not fear hunger; the trees are plentiful. We do not fear disease; many among us are healers. We do not fear each other; tenderness abounds. We know not our destination – only that behind us the city without silence consumes the horizon with its cataractous glare. In the darkness we can see the stars. They are so beautiful.

Margot V.

Some tappings on the cell wall

- Anarchism and Violence: Severino Di Giovanni in Argentina 1923-1931 by Osvaldo Bayer