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The Incoherence and Unsurvivability of Non-Anarchist Transhumanism

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The more means by which people can act the easier attack becomes and the harder defense becomes.

It's a simple matter of complexity. The attacker only needs to choose one line of attack, the defender needs to secure against all of them. This isn't just true of small thermal exhaust ports, it's true in our software ecosystems today and any other system with many dimensions of movement.

Complexity, more degrees of freedom within a system, allow for greater attack surface. When they can come not just from all points on the compass but from above and below as well.

The arc of human history is an arc bent by our creativity and inquiry towards more options, more ways of existing and acting.

Towards greater freedom. Every human invention expands in the immediate the number of means we have to act.

And intertwined with such freedom has of course come greater destructive capacity. From the eon when only an elite could be warriors, when attack was the purview of a select few, to an era when anybody could carry a spear or sword and kill maybe one other person before dying, to the era of the musket and the automatic weapon.

Today each and every one of us carries small grenades around in our pockets and bags. An incidental byproduct of storing charge for our phones and laptops.

Tomorrow the hobbyist with an RNA printer in her garage in Seattle will be able to download or tweak together an EbolaSARS-deathpox of such apocalyptic virulence that it would never evolve naturally. This is not a danger posed by a single technology, it is inherent to the very arc of technological development itself. As our tools expand our physical freedom they force changes to our social freedom.

As we've progressed through our accelerating technological development — as the knowledge we discover and the tools we invent have inexorably expanded our capacity for attack — our social systems have evolved too. They have had to.

From honor systems to deal with a few great warriors to early majoritarian democracies where counting heads was roughly as good as determining how a battle between sides would play out.

But as our technologies expand our capabilities, the protection of minorities and of the lowest of the low has become increasingly important. From muskets in the woods that enabled a minority of insurrectionaries to break from the British Empire, to sticks of "dynamite" — the great leveler, as it became known to the working class in the struggles of the progressive era.

Our social systems, our political institutions, our civic morals, have grudgingly adapted to this changing context. But they have not adapted fast enough.

and strategies when it comes to the path or paths forward. Peter Gelderloos and David Graeber have found some renown in this regard.

But at core anarchism is an ethical philosophy that seeks to expand freedom. It's most famous commitments are political — the abolition of the state, the abolition of centralized concentrations of coercive power — but it extends further to, for example, critiques of control in interpersonal relations as well as critiques of ideological rigidity. In this respect transhumanism represents yet another arm of anarchism: a focus on expanding freedom in physical terms and a critique of timid retreat to some stultifying "human nature."

dramatically increased the complexity of any number of things. Take humor for example. Consider what was funny in the 1800s, the 1950s, the 1990s, and what's funny today. Hell let's not forget that in the 1700s we thought setting cats on fire was supreme entertainment.

The complexity of our culture, our identities, our narratives, our relationships, and our politics have only accelerated. And with such complexity comes the hope of a reduced capacity for control. It becomes much harder for politicians or advertisers to sell simple universally potent narratives. They already see increasingly diminishing returns and lessened traction.

What this process of accelerating complexity represents is a *social singularity.*

If the technological singularity is the point past which we can't make predictions or maintain control because the complexity of technological developments exceeds our grasp then the social singularity is similarly the point past which we can't make predictions or maintain control because the complexity of our culture, ideas, and relations will have grown too rich, diverse, complex, organic, and meta.

Sure we might be able to unleash AI, but the greatest amount of computational power on this planet is presently locked up in slums, favelas, shantytowns, townships. We don't have to wait on the possibility of some hard takeoff in a decade or more. We just have to unleash and better network the existing power of our minds.

Anarchism comprises a rich ecosystem of theoretical work that it would be laughable to try and address briefly.

If you're interested in game theory and collective action problems I suggest reading Michael Taylor and Elinor Ostrom. If you're interested in the vast array of diseconomies of scale suppressed by the historical subsidy of violence and the tendency of freed markets towards egalitarian ends, I advise reading Kevin Carson. For polycentric legal systems, David Friedman and Robert Murphy. We also have a stunningly broad and deep discourse on methodologies

When we talk about the stunning advancements and changes that have been unleashed by the feedbacking effects of technological development there's an understandable desperation in our language. Guys guys guys this is so important. This is going to be a thing. There are risks to this. We'd better do it right.

But too often people respond to incredibly important questions with "we'll use democracy" — with no analysis of what that actually means. "Democracy" in this context is a cognitive-stop, it's a slogan we use to terminate considerations. To pat ourselves on the back.

The notion that social democracy and transhumanism are reconcilable is absurd.

Democracy in the sense of majoritarian decision making is primeval. It stems from a context where 'how many people' you had determined a battle. But even constitutional democracy, minarchism, enlightened socialism, or technocracy — whatever the system of government — requires control in a way fundamentally irreconcilable with technological empowerment.

Control is like defense. To function it requires a pruning away of complexities, of options, of dimensions.

To attempt centralized control over technology is ultimately to initiate a war that can only be won by totally destroying almost every meaningful aspect of our technologies.

David Cameron, Jeb Bush and numerous other politicians, government functionaries and chiefs of police in the supposedly enlightened west have independently called for the outlawing of cryptography. We laugh at them, we shake our heads and say not here.

But I'm here to tell you what every expert knows, although we desperately try to hide it.

Backdoor systems could totally be made to work. Or at least work *for the state.* Not for us, of course. But we don't matter when the goal becomes control. When we can't imagine any alternative to control. When our visions have narrowed so dramatically that we can't even fathom other ways to collaborate or resolve conflicts.

The internet could very easily become a whitelisted affair, where every packet is signed by government controlled server infrastructure, point to point to point.

Devices could be back-doored from factory to consumer. No production allowed outside the state's view.

We are not yet at the point where fabrication is distributed enough to make suppression or draconian regulation impossible.

The abolition of general purpose computing is a real threat. As are calls for the abolition of the internet.

When it comes to the internet, to information technologies, to the dissolution of intellectual property, we often say that the math is on the side of freedom. But while it often makes authoritarian control somewhat more challenging those challenges can still be overcome with sufficient force, with sufficient infrastructural rigidity, and with sufficient public support.

The most virulent force in the crypto wars, in the copyright wars, and every other battle over technology in the last three decades has been narrative.

We are on many fronts, in many demographics, losing that battle.

The aristocracy has historically been anti-tech. And much of the mid twentieth century explosion of continental philosophers writing nebulous obscurantist screeds against technology and science were from a tradition that knew perfectly well that they had to decrease the technological means people had access to in order to stay relevant.

They crafted Orwellian visions of "freedom" that were about retreating to some kind of confined and protected static state of life. Their rejection of technology amounted to a rejection of positive freedom, the freedom to. What they encouraged instead was: Freedom from knowledge, freedom from choice, freedom from growth, freedom from creativity and inquiry.

This reactionary current seeps throughout our society. It is immensely influential. It's not to be underestimated.

cord. Somehow comply meekly as technology impedes and resists the power they've grown accustomed to. We must take the seemingly more difficult path forward, but one that remains consistent.

But thankfully one of the other things anarchism makes clear is that we do not have to raise huge legions of people to our side to win. A tiny tiny minority can make a huge difference, can make it impossible for control to function — can disrupt the rigidity and overextension inherent to systems that attempt to control us.

When I was thirteen I put on a raincoat and trucked up the pacific coast to streets of Seattle the last weekend in November, 1999. That day has since become infamous. Our "victory" over the WTO ministerial has become mythologized to a dangerous degree, but it's worth conveying the desperation we felt beforehand. In the 90s as it grew dramatically in legal and economic strength unopposed, no one knew the WTO even existed. The neoliberal vision it served was right out of 80s cyberpunk, one of monopolistic corporate control, where capital could freely cross borders to feedback in strength but people were left imprisoned in de facto slave camps like Bangladesh and Eritrea. Of course this remains the case. And today we have the TPP. But every observer agrees the momentum of this process was severely stopped that cold November day. Because a few hundred people fought in the streets, raising such a ruckus that silent processes were derailed significantly.

The spectacle of street protest is of course, not a panacea, just a tactic useful within only a limited context and timeframe.

But it reflects a broader reality, that we have many tools at our disposal that utilize weak points in the overextended and rigid commitments that are inherent to any system of control.

And their inability to manage the churning chaos of young students on the streets reflects how computational complexity remain absolutely critical to political issues.

The information age has led to increasing complexity on many fronts through feedbacking effects. The speed that information technology provides to our memetic and cultural mutations has

the streets of Athens, we've been preemptively churning out the politics of the future for the last two centuries.

But what this experience has also brought is an appreciation for the function of power systems, their boring mechanical dynamics. The sociopathic cancer of our power structures will not go quietly into the night. There will not be some kind of awakening that makes our rulers suddenly okay with surrendering their control over us. Allowing new technologies to make them irrelevant. They will not passively sit back and allow alternate infrastructures and cultures, new worlds to develop in the shell of their old one. They have always fought any attempt at this. And they will need to be fought for the future to win.

Anarchism brings a steely-eyed clarity to the landscape on which we struggle.

It says that while state power can sometimes secure some changes, the more you use it the harder it will be to dissolve that power itself.

Marxists pretended as though their end goal was a classless, stateless utopia of maximal freedom, but the means they chose were incoherent with this goal. You can't gulag people into being free. And you can't regulate the tools people build while maintaining a commitment to expanding their options in life, to making us "more than human."

Ends and means are not precisely 1:1, but they are deeply interconnected. And if anarchism — and our toolbox of respectful autonomy and consent — is the only survivable, the only functional way of handling the ultraviolet limit of expanded technological capacity, then we cannot afford to move in opposing directions today. We must move in ways that do not trade away the future for short-sighted ameliorations.

We can't afford, in short, to take steps backward, towards greater state power, greater power even in the hands of corporate giants like Google, in hopes that these monsters we feed to make our tasks easier today will somehow "wither away" on their own ac-

Freedom-to is disruptive and complex. It expands options. And when truly decentralized — spread to individuals — it makes it impossible for power to function. For any actor, individual or institution, to control the vast unfathomable diversity and complexity of the world. Impossible to impose edicts, even "democratic" ones.

When liberal or social democrat transhumanists declare that what we need is technology "under the control of The People", what is never included in that is how exactly that kind of control is supposed to work.

What does a world look like in which we *have the capacity* to stop people from printing AR-15s? Forget the fuzzy-wuzzy associations of "democracy", even "direct democracy". Ask yourself what actually needs to be done to control gene therapy? Single facilities of government overseen use of high technologies? Massive backdoors in everyone's devices that aggressively monitor and limit use? Totalitarian control of every communication on the planet? Aggressive raids against all hackers and tinkerers? Systematic accounting of every fabrication machinery in existence? Constant surveillance of anyone with knowledge of how these things work? Complete control of all resource allocation on the planet?

This is the ONLY outcome for the logic of "social democracy" when applied to transhuman aspirations.

We cannot control advanced technology without an authoritarianism so complete it would make Hitler and Stalin salivate in their graves.

So what can we do?

At a prior conference here there was a talk on the superhero narrative and I brought up a line from the third X-Men movie in which the president states: "What hope does democracy have when people can move cities with their minds?"

The inevitable response was: "Well we need an ethical awakening, a singularity of empathy that clarifies and refines our values."

Absolutely.

What does that look like? How do you get there? And what are the mechanisms by which such a world can function? How are disagreements settled?

Thankfully we don't need to reinvent the wheel. There's a long-standing movement that has been tackling these social and ethical issues, and developing answers and analysis in depth for the last two centuries.

"Anarchism" as a term was launched by the French journalist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon — a wildly popular reporter and columnist comparable to our Glenn Greenwald today. It was adopted as a way of highlighting and ripping apart the Orwellian use of "anarchy" to signify both maximal freedom — the absence of rulership or of power relations — AND to also simultaneously mean chaotic violence, the presences of competing would-be rulers and fractious power relations. This double use in which the term "without rulership" or "anarchia" is used to instead signify competing or fractured power relations has historically been used to shut down any and all movements focused on liberty, most famously against the peasants in the English Civil war. You want freedom? We all know that freedom is chaotic violent oppression.

In this definition as promoted by the elites of the middle ages the very idea of NOT controlling each other, not domineering each other, not exploiting, thieving, or doing violence to each other, is written out of our language itself. It is made impossible in some real sense to even think.

Proudhon attacked that by returning the term to its etymological roots and this set off two centuries of consistent diligent resistance to power.

Anarchists have never taken power, we have resisted authoritarianism and oppression in every arena. From calling out Marxism long before its draconian aspirations became public record, to fighting and dying to resist fascism, fighting Franco until he couldn't afford to join Hitler and Mussolini and leading the resistance against

the Nazis across Europe. We've fought the robber barons, the czars, the oligarchs, and the soviet bureaucrats.

And we've been extraordinarily popular in different regions at different points in history, although we have not yet had sufficient critical mass to completely transform the world. In every instance where anarchism surged to localized popularity with a few million adherents, as in Spain but also Ukraine and Manchuria, every surrounding power immediately put their wars on hold to collaborate in snuffing out the examples we provided of a better world, of better ways of interacting and settling disputes with one another, that do not turn to control but build a tolerable consensus for all parties when agreement is needed.

We've been at the forefront not just of technology like cryptocurrencies and the tor project, but we've also been at the forefront of struggles against patriarchy, racism, homophobia, ageism, ableism, etc, etc. Since long before there were popular coalitions like "feminism". We smuggled guns to slaves and ran abolitionist journals. We've coursed through the veins of our existing society, pioneering myriad social technologies like credit unions and cooperatives. We've consistently served as the radical edge of the world's conscience, and played a critical role in expanding what is possible while developing and field testing new insights and tools.

Anarchism — as many commentators have wryly noted — has served as the laboratory of the left, of social justice and resistance movements around the world. Even where we remain marginal, the tools we invent eventually become mainstream.

You do not need to wonder how people would resolve conflicts if every super-empowered individual was carrying the equivalent of a nuclear veto in their pocket. We've been testing and developing social forms, advanced game theoretic strategies that treat people that way for ethical reasons alone.

We already represent the ethical framework most at home in navigating a transhuman world of individual superempowerment. For all our ostensible marginalization to the jungles of Chiapas or