

The Anarchism of Émile Armand

Émile Armand

1907–1964

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Introduction

The life of Emile Armand (1872–1963) spanned the history of anarchism. He was influenced by Leo Tolstoy and Benjamin Tucker, and to a lesser extent by Whitman and Emerson. Later in life, Nietzsche and Stirner became important to his way of thinking. Previous to this, Armand had broken with Tucker and Tolstoy over the question of violence and illegalism. At the turn of the century many alleged anarchists were turning to crime and violence, *At that time, stealing, counterfeiting, swindling and even pimping were justified in certain anarchist milieus as a means of liberating oneself economically.*¹ Although Armand was himself neither criminal or violent, he felt he could not condemn such activities. However, by 1912, he had second thoughts on illegalism and crime. *In all his subsequent writings Armand was a declared adversary of all violence.*²

When he began his long life as an anarchist writer and thinker, anarchism was mainly oriented to the revolutionary future. One had to wait until “after the revolution” to change one’s life. For Armand, echoing the French individualist named *Liberdad*, one had to live now, not in some the distant future that might not ever come. The point was to live your revolution in daily life and not construct future imaginary utopias. His true libertarian spirit applied to his writings as well. His words and thoughts were never meant to be turned into party lines or dogmas, but to stir the thought processes. *The true libertarian education doesn’t consist of leading another to think as you do but to make another capable of thinking and living for THEMSELVES.*³

Armand wrote scores of articles for a variety of libertarian publications, but mostly for his own self-published magazines, the best known of which were *L’Anarchie* and *L’En Dehors*. *What We Are For — What We Are Against* is as fine an exposition of the anarchist creed as has ever been written. In *Anarchist Individualism as Life and Activity* Armand clearly states the meaning of anarchism, differentiating it from all governmental concepts. *As the word “anarchy” etymologically signifies the negation of governmental authority, the absence of government, it follows that one indissoluble bond unites the anarchists. This is antagonism to all situations regulated by imposition, constraint, violence, governmental oppression, whether these are a product of all, a group, or of one person. In short, whoever denies that the intervention of government is for human relationships is an anarchist.*

In *Property*, he critiques all forms of communism, including anarchist-communism, whether property be in the hands of the State, of the collectivity,

¹ from “Mauricius”, *E. Armand, Son Vie, Son Oeuvre*, La Ruche Ouvrier 1964, taken from the French Individualist Anarchist website.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

or of the communist milieu, or of a few capitalists, as at the present time, it makes the individual dependent upon the community, it breeds the master and the slave.

Pie-In-The Sky utopianism is not for Armand. He brings anarchism down from the angelic clouds to the ground of daily life. *The individualist does not put his hope in the future society. He lives in the present moment, and he wants to draw from it the maximum results. Individualist activity is essentially a present work and a present accomplishment. ...we cannot be taxed with being "future-society-ists". The anarchist individualist is not a future society-ist; a presentist. (The Future Society)*

However, Armand presents contemporary anarchists and libertarians with a number of problems. No doubt influenced by the exaggerations of Max Stirner, he tends to dismiss the importance of society, and indeed, to view it as an enemy along with the state. Contrast this with the approach of Warren, Proudhon, or Tolstoy, all of whom felt that life would be better and freer if society were liberated from the shackles of statism. "Society", no doubt, is the crowd that screams "Hurrah!" at the parade of the crippled from the last general slaughter; (*Life And Society*)

In spite of his strong anti-utopianism, *there is also a utopian element, The life which the Anarchist Individualist wants to live has no relation to the known social life as we know it. (Life And Society)* Contrast this view with that of Proudhon, Kropotkin or Colin Ward, who see anarchism rooted in the daily life practices of the people. There is a certain naïvety here, *I want to live in a society from which the last vestige of authority has disappeared, but, to speak frankly, I am not certain that the "mass", to call it what it is, is capable of dispensing with authority... a complete transformation of the general mentality, a different understanding of relations among men, a universal and individual change of state of mind, that will make certain methods and certain institutions impossible. Thus the individualist can affirm with certainty that authoritarianism will in no case continue in the future society. To imagine a "world to come" where there would still be a trace of domination, coercion and duty is nonsense. (Individualist Perspectives)* Contrast this with Proudhon's calm wisdom that all authority is unlikely to disappear and our best hope is to minimize it.

Note too the elitism in this statement, also repeated in *The Future Society*. *The crowd always goes towards him who speaks well and carries himself well. Its angers last no longer than its admirations. It is always easy to fool and seduce. One can no more base oneself on it now than a century or a thousand years ago. The mass belongs to the strongest, the most superficial,* This elitism compares badly with the populism of the overwhelming majority of his anarchist predecessors and contemporaries.

Nonetheless, these criticisms are minor. His otherwise intransigent anarchism and individualism is needed more than ever in this era of mass conformity, political correctness and unending governmental interference in our lives. At a time when

individual rights are overturned in favor of so-called collective rights and apostles of individual liberty are attacked and vilified as “right-wingers” and “reactionaries”, we need to read and study Emile Armand, the last of the “classical anarchists.”

Larry Gambone

What We Are For — What We Are Against

We are a-political and take no part in party quarrels. In all spheres we are for the voluntary against the obligatory; for consent against imposition; for reason against violence; for free examination against dogmatism.

Individualists, we are against the subjugation of the individual to the State, in any form; against the absorption of the ego into the collectivity; against compulsory contracts; against forced solidarity or cooperation; against the exploitation of the individual by his fellows or society; against the encroachment of the “non-self”, organized or not, upon the “self”, associated or isolated, whatever that self is or has... against blind procreation, heedless of the future of the offspring, against racial hatred.

We are with those who struggle in all places for complete freedom of expression of thought — spoken, written, or illustrated; for absolute liberty of assembly, union, grouping, association and secession. We are for the intangible freedom of exposition, publicity, experiment and realization.

Whatever happens to be the end sought for, the purpose pursued, we oppose external control — statist or governmental — and all censure, restraint, constraint, or requisition, whether administrative, intellectual, economic, spiritual or moral, everywhere and at all times.

We are for individual responsibility and autonomy against the oppression of castes, classes and rulers.

We are for liberty and free agreement against authority and imposed rule. (We regard the economic question as a subsidiary one, but conceive any solution to it on the basis of this principle.)

From *Minus One* #2 April 1964

Anarchist Individualism as Life and Activity (1907)

To say that the anarchist movement embraces several tendencies is not to put forward anything new, it would be surprising if it were otherwise. Non-political, outside of parties, this movement owes its existence solely to the individual per-

sonalities of which it is composed. Since there is no a priori anarchist programme, since there are only anarchists, it follows that each one of those who call themselves anarchists has his own conception of anarchism. Persecutions, difficulties and conflicts of all kinds, demand that whoever professes anarchism should be possessed of a mentality which is out of the ordinary, which is reflective, and which is in a state of continual reaction against a society composed of people who, on the contrary, are not reflective and are inclined to accept ready-made doctrines which make no demands on their intelligence. To ask that all anarchists should have similar views on anarchism is to ask the impossible. Hence a wealth of diverging conceptions are to be found among them.

As the word “anarchy” etymologically signifies the negation of governmental authority, the absence of government, it follows that one indissoluble bond unites the anarchists. This is antagonism to all situations regulated by imposition, constraint, violence, governmental oppression, whether these are a product of all, a group, or of one person. In short, whoever denies that the intervention of government is for human relationships is an anarchist.

But this definition would have only a negative value did it not possess as a practical complement, a conscious attempt to live outside this domination and servility which are incompatible with the anarchist conception. An anarchist, therefore, is an individual who, whether he has been brought to it by a process of reasoning or by sentiment, lives to the greatest possible extent in a state of legitimate defense against authoritarian encroachments. From this it that anarchist individualism — the tendency which we believe contains the most profound realization of the anarchist idea — is not merely a philosophical doctrine — it is an attitude, an individual way of life.

The anarchist individualist is not simply converted intellectually to ideas which will be realized one day some centuries hence. He tries now — for the present is the only time which matters for him — to practice his conceptions in everyday life, in his relations with his comrades, and in his contact with those others who do not share his convictions.

All healthy organisms have a characteristic tendency to reproduce themselves. Organisms which are sick, or in a process of degeneration, have no such tendency — and this applies to the mind as well as the body. So the anarchist individualist tends to reproduce himself, to perpetuate his spirit in other individuals who will share his views and who will make it possible for a state of affairs to be established from which authoritarianism has been banished. It is this desire, this will, not only to live, but also to reproduce oneself, which we shall call “activity”.

These considerations explain our title: “Anarchist Individualism as Life and Activity”. Tending to live his own individual life at the risk of clashing intellectually, morally, and economically, with his environment, the anarchist individualist at

the same time tries to like himself, are free from the prejudices and superstitions of authority, in order that the greatest possible number of men may actually live their own lives, uniting through personal affinities to practice their conceptions as far as is possible.

The anarchist individualist does not live in intellectual isolation. As individuals who share his ideas increase in number, so will his chances improve of seeing his aspirations realized, and as a result he will be happier. As individuals of his own "species" increase, so will the power of environment over his own life diminish. The wider his propaganda spreads and the more his activity grows, the more will his life be intensified.

His relationships with his comrades are based on reciprocity. on mutualism, on comradeship, and take numerous forms, all voluntary: free agreements of every type and in all spheres; respect for the pledged word and the carrying out of promises and engagements freely consented to. It is in this fashion that the individualist of our kind practices mutual aid in his species.

A conscious individual — seeking to create and select others — from being determined by his environment, he tends to become self-determining, to live his own life fully, to be active in the normal sense of the word. One cannot conceive the anarchist individualist in any other way.

In the first place, then, the anarchist is — in relation to all social conceptions based upon constraint — an individual who negates; anarchism is an individualist concept and a product of individuals. The anarchist is naturally an individualist.

The legalists base society upon law. In the eyes of the law those who constitute society are no more than ciphers. Whether the law proceeds from one man alone (autocracy), from several (oligarchy), or from the majority of the members of a society (democracy), the citizen must suppress even his most rightful aspirations before it. The legalists maintain that if the individual subjects himself to the law, which allegedly emanates from society, it is in the interests of society and in his own interest since he is a member of society.

Indeed, society as we know it can be summarized as follows: The ruling classes, through the intermediary of the State, ensure that only their own views on culture, morality and economic conditions, are allowed to penetrate to the masses. They set up their own views in the form of civil dogmas, which no man may violate under pain of punishment, just as in former times, during the reign of the Church, there were severe penalties for daring to challenge religious dogmas. The State — the laic form of the Church — has replaced the Church which was the religious form of the State — but the aim of both has always been to form, not free beings, but true believers or perfect citizens. In other words slaves to dogma or law.

The anarchist replies that when solidarity is imposed from without it is worthless; that when a contract is enforced there is no longer any question of rights or

duties; that coercion releases him from the bonds which attach him to a so-called society whose executives he knows only in the guise of administrators, law-givers, judges and policemen; that he supports only the solidarity of his everyday relationships. Fictitious and imposed solidarity is worthless solidarity.

The socialists base society upon economics. According to them the whole of life resolves itself into a question of production and consumption. Once you solve this problem you will automatically solve the human problem, with its complexity of intellectual and moral experiences. The individual may be conscious, he may be the greatest drunkard or the worst of comrades, but he is only of interest when considered as a producer or a consumer. The call goes out to all – to those who think and to those who do not. All have a right to the collectivist banquet, all have the right to the result of effort without to attempt the effort. It is necessary only to unite and to grasp the power that will permit the seizure of society, and as soon as society has been seized, collectivism will be established and will function, willy-nilly, since any recalcitrants will be compelled to obey, otherwise they will disappear from circulation.

Socialism has been called the “religion of economics” and it is certain that a socialist metaphysic exists. This doctrine teaches that all the products of human activity are governed by economics. This is by no means difficult to grasp and is within the ability of every mentality. From the moment of its triumph socialism, in all its various shades, demands of its adherent that he be a good producer and a no less good consumer, putting his trust with regard to the organization of production and consumption in the wisdom of delegates, whether elected or imposed. Socialism is not concerned to make him an individual – it will make him an official.

The anarchist bases society neither upon the law nor upon economics. Good citizen, good bureaucrat, good producer, good consumer – this flour-spattered meal-trough has no message for him. After all, if it can be proved that in certain cases economics have determined intellect or morals, can it not also be proved that intellect or morals have often determined economics? And one should not pass in silence the role of the sexual factor.

The real truth must surely be that they mingle with and jostle one another; that they alternate and are mutually determined. From reformist socialism to revolutionary anti-parliamentary communism via trade unionism, all these socialist systems make a mockery of the individual and of free agreement between individuals. They give pride of place to the majority, to the economic contract imposed by the greatest number.

The anarchist proclaims that a transformation in mental outlook will always be accompanied by a transformation in the economic system; that a new social edifice cannot be built with stones that are crumbling into dust, that beings who have been

molded by prejudice can never build anything but a structure filled with prejudice, that it is necessary first of all to lay down solid materials, to select individuals.

If he joins a trades union, regardless of its colour, the anarchist enters it purely as a member of a particular trade, in the hope of obtaining by collective action an improvement in his own lot — but he will see nothing anarchistic in gaining a wage increase, or a reduction of working hours. From an economic point of view, under present conditions, each anarchist does what he thinks best for himself, one by working for a boss, another by acting outside the law: one benefits from the advantages obtained by association, another by participating in a “free milieu”, yet another by satisfying his needs as an artisan. None of these ways of getting by are more “anarchist” than the others — they are makeshifts, sometimes “evasions”, neither more nor less.

Since the anarchist conception places the individual at the base of all these practical consequences, it follows that it takes no heed of collective morality and the general pattern of life. The anarchist regulates his life not according to the law, like the legalists, nor according to a given collective metaphysic or mystique, like the religious, the nationalists or the socialists, for example, but according to his own needs and personal aspirations. He is ready to make the concessions necessary to live with his comrades or his friends, but without making an obsession of these concessions.

The anarchist knows full well that if his life is to be enjoyed to the full, if it is to be beautiful and rich in every kind of experience he will not be able to appreciate it if he is unable to master his inclinations and passions. He has no intention of turning his life into a sort of English garden, carefully cultivated, monotonous and dismal. No, he wants to live fully and intensely, he attaches a thousand horses to his chariot, but he does not forget to put a bridle on the neck of each one. The anarchist denies authority because he knows he can live without it. He is guided by the play of agreements freely entered into with his comrades, never trampling on the liberty of any of them in order that none may trample on his.

But in relation to those whose amorphism, ignorance or interest interferes with his living his life, the individualist feels himself a stranger. Moreover, inwardly he remains refractory — fatally refractory — morally, intellectually, economically (The capitalist economy and the directed economy, the speculators and the fabricators of single are equally repugnant to him.) The full consciousness that none of his acts can debase him inwardly is for him a sufficient criterion. Surely the essential thing is that he remains himself?

Again, is not the anarchist constantly in a state of legitimate self-defense against constraint and social servitude?

Anarchist work, activity, and propaganda, therefore, do not consist of swaying the crowd, but of creating and selecting — my repetition is intentional — conscious

individuals, free from prejudice. It is above all a work of undermining, of irony, of criticism, a work of education, but also a work of reconstruction, of the sculpting of a personality free from dominant Spooks. A work of free examination and of independent research in all fields. Instead of talking of love in general, the anarchist talks simply of unity and alliance between comrades, between friends, who fed attracted to each other by affinities of one kind or another, by reciprocity. Instead of postponing individual happiness to the socialist or communist calends, he extols his present achievement of it by proclaiming the joy of living.

Instead of building the great structure of Harmony with material taken at random from the rubble amid the ruins of former buildings, he shows that the first task to be done is to remove the stones one by one from the great human arena.

Anarchists no more want to be masters than they want to be servants — they no more want to exercise violence than to submit to it. They expose, they propose, but they do not impose. They are pioneers attached to no party, non-conformists, standing outside herd morality and conventional “good” and “evil” “a-social”. a “species” apart, one might say. They go forward, stumbling, sometimes falling, sometimes triumphant, sometimes vanquished. But they do go forward, and by living for themselves, these “egoists”, they dig the furrow, they open the broach through which will pass those who deny anarchism, the unique ones who will succeed them.

Adapted from an English version by N.G.

Property

In present society property is only the privilege of a small minority, compared to the multitude of the working classes. Whatever may be the nature of the object possessed — a field, a house, plant for production, cash, etc. its owner has acquired it either by exploiting others, or by inheritance, and in the latter case the origin of the wealth is the same as in the former.

Moreover, what do the owners of this wealth do with it? Some use it to obtain, in exchange, a life of leisure, to taste all sorts of pleasures to which money gives sole access. These are the idlers, the parasites who excuse themselves from all personal effort and merely rely on that of others. To develop their estates, for example, or their farms, they employ a labor force which they pay inadequately and which, while it provides all the toil, does not reap any real gain, does not receive the full wage for its work. If it is a question of personal estate, the capital is used for statist ends, or for undertakings of capitalist exploitation. Whoever owns more than he needs for his own consumption, or more than he can develop by himself — such a man, either directly, by developing his properties, or organizing industrial

concerns, or indirectly, by entrusting his capital to industry or the State, is an exploiter of others work.

Then again, it happened in the course of history, that the size of certain estates prevented their full and rational development, and that, while there were workers without jobs and families with nowhere to live, vast areas lay fallow through lack of good organization.

It is against this bourgeois property, recognized by the State, and jealously guarded by it, that all revolutionaries rise up, all those who propagate liberating ideas, and whose ambition it is to improve the living condition of the mass. It is this, that socialists, communists, and anti-Statists of every shade attack and wish to destroy. It is this which, on the other hand, breeds illegalism – theft, instinctive and brutal in some cases, conscious and calculated in others.

Communism has solved the problem by taking away capital and the means of production from the State in order to restore it to the collectivity which has become sovereign in its turn, and which distributes the proceeds to each, according to his effort. (*EA Means anarcho communism ed.*)

But, whether property be in the hands of the State, of the collectivity, or of the communist milieu, or of a few capitalists, as at the present time, it makes the individual dependent upon the community, it breeds the master and the slave, the leaders and the led. Kept in economic submission, the worker retains a mentality in keeping with his conditions of dependence. He is, strictly speaking, the tool, the instrument, the productive machine of his exploiter – individual or social – it is difficult, in such conditions, to be a fully developed and aware individual.

Let us come now to the individualist viewpoint, which wants the free expansion of the individual ego. Individualism looks at the matter in a different light and brings a solution which does not intend that the individual should be sacrificed to a machine. It claims, above all, for every worker the inalienable possession of his means of production, of whatever kind it may be – tools, land, books etc. These means of production can belong to an association or to an individual – that depends on what agreements are made.

The great thing is that the tools, whatever they may be, should be the property of the producer or producers, and not of the State, big firms, or the milieu in which circumstances have caused the individual to be born.

Moreover, it is essential that the worker should dispose freely, according to his will and necessities of the product of his labour. He should not have to suffer any outside interference in the use which he means to make of it. The individual or association ought to be able, without having to take into consideration anybody else whatsoever, to consume its own output, or exchange it either gratis or for something else, and furthermore, it should be open to it to choose those with whom it will exchange its products and what it will receive in their stead.

Once the individual owns his own tools and his product, capitalism ceases to exist. And from this transformation of the conditions of work, the individual will get something besides economic betterment; he will derive a benefit from the ethical point of view. Instead of being the wage-earner, the exploited victim of employers, endowed in consequence with a “couldn’t care less” attitude toward the making of the product because he does not enjoy it, and wanting to spare his efforts because another will profit by it, the individualist producer will take an interest in his work, will seek unceasingly to perfect it, to make new improvements and use his initiative. He will gain self respect from the work he does, a healthy personal satisfaction and such a lively interest that his work will no longer be drudgery but a source of exhilaration. The same taste for work, the same struggle against routine and monotony will be found in all trades and activities — a taste which at the present time is only the privilege of a minority, more often than not intellectuals, artists, scholars, writers: all those who work under the impulse of a vocation of a definite choice.

Property thus understood and applied, no longer has anything common with “property is theft”; it marks a stage of evolution and it seemingly must be at the bottom of complete emancipation, of liberation from all authorities. It will be a restoration of creative power to the individual according to his abilities, properly understood.

It stands to reason that agreements can be made between consumer-producers to avoid overproduction, by which would be meant (speculation having disappeared) the surplus of production after the needs of the producer had been covered or once, through the play of exchange, those needs had been satisfied. Speculation and exploitation having disappeared, there is no evidence that accumulation holds out more dangers than under communism. To tell the truth, whether it be a question of communism or of individualism, their economic realization in practical terms cannot be separated from a new mentality, from a self-consciousness removing the need for anarchist control by whatever name it is called.

Anti-authoritarian individualism, in whichever sphere one can imagine it, is a function of the entire absence of control or supervision, both of which lead back to the practice of authority

Minus One 10 Sept 1965 Translated by Francis Ellingham

Individualist Perspectives

The anarchist individualists do not present themselves as proletarians, absorbed only in the search for material amelioration, tied to a class determined to transform

the world and to substitute a new society for the actual one. They place themselves in the present; they disdain to orient the coming generations towards a form of society allegedly destined to assure their happiness, for the simple reason that from the individualist point of view happiness is a conquest, an individuals internal realization.

Even if I believed in the efficacy of a universal social transformation, according to a well-defined system, without direction, sanction, or obligation, I do not see by what right I could persuade others that it is the best. For example, I want to live in a society from which the last vestige of authority has disappeared, but, to speak frankly, I am not certain that the “mass”, to call it what it is, is capable of dispensing with authority. I want to live in a society in which the members think by and for themselves, but the attraction which is exercised on the mass by publicity, the press, frivolous reading and by State-subsidized distractions is such that I ask myself whether men will ever be able to reflect and judge with an independent mind. I may be told in reply that the solution of the social question will transform every man into a sage. This is a gratuitous affirmation, the more so as there have been sages under all regimes. Since I do not know the social form which is most likely to create internal harmony and equilibrium in social unity, I refrain from theorizing.

When “voluntary association” is spoken of, voluntary adhesion to a plan, a project, a given action, this implies the possibility of refusing the association, adhesion or action. Let us imagine the planet submitted to a single social or economic life; how would I exist if this system did not please me? There remains to me only one expedient: to integrate or to perish. It is held that, “the social question” having been solved, there is no longer a place for non-conformism, recalcitrance, etc... but it is precisely when a question has been resolved that it is important to pose new ones or to return to an old solution, if only to avoid stagnation.

If there is a “Freedom” standing over and above all individuals, it is surely nothing more than the expression of their thoughts, the manifestation and diffusion of their opinions. The existence of a social organization founded on a single ideological unity interdicts all exercise of freedom of speech and of ideologically contrary thought. How would I be able to oppose the dominant system, proposing another, supporting a return to an older system, if the means of making my view-point known or of publicizing my critiques were in the possession of the agents of the regime in power? This regime must either accept reproach when compared to other social solutions superior to its own, or, despite its termination in “ist”, it is no better than any other regime. Either it will admit opposition, secession, schism, fractionalism, competition, or nothing will distinguish it significantly from a dictatorship. This “ist” regime would undoubtedly claim that it has been invested with its power by the masses, that it does not exercise its power or control except by the delegation

of assemblies or congresses; but as long as it did not allow the intransigents and refractories to express the reasons for their attitude and for their corresponding behaviour, it would be only a totalitarian system. The material benefits on which a dictatorship prides itself are of no importance. Regardless of whether there is scarcity or abundance, a dictatorship is always a dictatorship.

It is asked of me why I call my individualism “anarchist individualism”? Simply because the State concretizes the best organized form of resistance to individual affirmation. What is the State? An organism which bills itself as representative of the social body, to which power is allegedly delegated, this power expressing the will of an autocrat or of popular sovereignty. This power has no reason for existing other than the maintenance of the extant social structure. But individual aspirations are unable to come to term with the existence of the State, personification of Society, for, as Palante says: “All society is and will be exploitative, usurpacious, dominating, and tyrannical. This it is not by accident but by essence.” Yet the individualist would be neither exploited, usurped, dominated, tyrannized nor dispossessed of his sovereignty. On the other hand, Society is able to exercise its constraint on the individual only thanks to the support of the State, administrator and director of the affairs of Society. No matter which way he turns the individual encounters the State or its agents of execution, who do not care in the least whether the regulations which they enforce concur or not with the diversity of temperaments of the subjects upon whom they are administered. From their aspirations as from their demands, the individualists of our school have eliminated the State. That is why they call themselves “anarchists”.

But we deceive ourselves if we imagine that the individualists of our school are anarchists (*an-archy*, etymologically, mans only negation of the state, and does not pertain to other matters) only in relation to the State — such as the western democracies or the totalitarian systems. This point cannot be overemphasized. Against all that which is power, that is, economic as well as political domination, esthetic as well as intellectual, scientific as well as ethical, the individualists rebel and form such fronts as they are able, alone or in voluntary association. In effect, a group or federation can exercise power as absolute as any State if it accepts in a given field all the possibilities of activity and realization.

The only social body in which it is possible for an individualist to evolve and develop is that which admits a concurrent plurality of experiences and realizations, to which is opposed all groupings founded on an ideological exclusiveness, which, well-meant though they may be, threaten the integrity of the individual from the moment that this exclusiveness aims to extend itself to the non-adherents of the grouping. To call this anti-statist would be doing no more than provoking a mask for an appetite for driving a herd of human sheep.

I have said above that it is necessary to insist on this point. For example, anarchist communism denies, rejects and expels the State from its ideology; but it resuscitates it the moment that it substitutes social organization for personal judgment. If anarchist individualism thus has in common with anarchist communism the political negation of the State, of the "Arche", it only marks a point of divergence. Anarchist communism places itself on the economic plane, on the terrain of the class struggle, united with syndicalism, etc. (this is its right), but anarchist individualism situates itself on the psychological plane, and on that of resistance to social totalitarianism, which is something entirely different. (Naturally, anarchist individualism follows the many paths of activity and education: philosophy, literature, ethics, etc., but I have wanted to make precise here only some points of our attitude to the social environment.) I do not deny that this is not very new, but it is taking a position to which it is good to return from time to time.

(First published in the Bulletin of SIA, 1957, This translation by Richard DeHaan first appeared in Views and Comments, No. 25, New York)

The Little Manual of Individualist Anarchism

The anarchist is the enemy of the state and all its institutions which maintain or perpetuate the submission of the individual. There is no possibility of reconciliation between the anarchist and any form of society based upon authority, whether an aristocracy or a democracy... He is the adversary of monopoly and privilege, whether of an intellectual, moral or economic nature. Briefly, he is the irreconcilable antagonist of all regimes, of all social systems, of everything that implies the domination of man or the group over the individual and the exploitation of the individual by another or by the group. Anarchist thought above all, takes the form of a critique.

The anarchist sows revolt against those who fetter free expression. He clears the mind of preconceived ideas, frees those mentalities enchained by fear and aids those who have already been emancipated from social conventions...

An abyss separates anarchism from socialism and all its different aspects, including trade unionism, for the anarchist places first and foremost in his concept of life the individual act. And for this reason it is called individualist anarchism.

He does not think the evils that humanity suffers from come exclusively from capitalism or private property. In a group, human beings think in a flawed manner. Masters cannot exist without slaves nor the gods without worshippers. The individualist anarchist has no interest in a violent revolution which has for its goal the transformation of the mode of distribution of goods in a communist or collectivist manner, yet does not lead to a change in the general mentality and which does

not lead to the emancipation of the individual person. Under communism he will be subordinated to the will of the group. The anarchist will remain as poor and miserable as now. Instead of being under the yoke of the capitalist minority, he will be dominated by the collective. He will be a producer, a consumer, but never an autonomous individual.

The individualist anarchist differs from the anarchist communist in the sense that he considers (aside from the objects of pleasure which form an extension of the personality) property as a means of production and the free disposition of its product as the essential guarantee of individual autonomy.

Taken from *En Dehors* Web Site (trans. L. Gambone)

Life and Society

The Anarchist Individualists wish to live their own lives in spite of and even against society. To this, the main objection of some people is that whether or not the Anarchist Individualists wish it they still remain an integral part of the group they repudiate and without which they could not subsist.

Even as the judge, the businessman, and the prostitute, the Individualist is not outside this environment but plainly in the midst of it. He relishes the same joys and experiences the identical sufferings as do his neighbors. He consumes their production and produces for their consumption. He could not even do without other men's efforts, whereas they could easily do without his. Like everyone else he fulfills the functions that preserve and perpetuate the species. In a word, nothing, as an Anarchist Individualist, makes him differ from his fellowmen..

Now, at first glance it would appear difficult to contest the validity of such reasoning. But with a spark of reflection we realize that the argument attributes to society conceptions that simply depend on life; the latter is too much confounded with organized society. People fail to recognize the great power inherent in life itself; they ignore the fact that the very complex living organisms subsist wonderfully well without organized society, as man himself has done in the past.

Indeed to breathe, move, and reproduce are all phenomena which have nothing to do with the existence of organized groups. Nowadays man does not conceive of individual existence without social function. Still, in relation to life, society is merely an artificial appendage. Many forms of society have disappeared, but their disappearance has never stopped life, for it has endlessly persisted even when continents have sunken away.

It is axiomatic that in order to grow and develop himself the fiercest Anarchist Individualist needed "society". He needed it at an age when his character had not

yet affirmed itself and when he could neither reason nor draw up any kind of appreciation. Later on — the cause does not matter — he became a negator of authority and exploitation. Yet, because he found himself face to face with a social contract based essentially upon authority and exploitation, does it follow that he is in any way a debtor to the organization which imposed it upon him?

Besides what is this organization? An agglomeration of facts and institutions having for its object the maintenance of the individual in constant subjection and his detention in an enclosure of moral conventions and economic servitude. True enough, members of society have sometimes intellectually, morally and economically revolted against it. Although the Anarchist Individualists have (at least some of them) profited by what these ancestors or forerunners had accomplished or written, they are in no way indebted to them; for it is a fact that these pioneers found in their activity the only reward they were entitled to expect. “Society” if we are not mistaken means factories, jails, armories, toilers’ dwellings, prostitution houses, drinking joints, gambling places, manufacturers of asphyxiating gases and big business.

“Society”, no doubt, is the crowd that screams “Hurrah!” at the parade of the crippled from the last general slaughter; it is the long line of hungry men and women in front of missions; it is also he who takes his hat off when the flag-bearer goes by and who goes to the circus only when it calls for a sensational and risky stunt. And to such society, the Anarchist Individualist must render account? Well, factories, big stores, exchanges, totalizers, monstrous guns, aeroplanes, churches, mansions, and all that civilization has produced for the development of the milieu of which we are a part, could disappear and nevertheless life would still continue.

The life which the Anarchist Individualist wants to live has no relation to the known social life as we know it. The Anarchist Individualist leads the existence imposed upon him by the environment because he is compelled, forced and constrained. just as the prisoner wishes the disappearance of his jailers — so does the Anarchist Individualist wish to see society sink; for it impedes him, narrows his horizon, encumbers his forward movement and renders him a perpetual slave. No matter what his actions are, in the last resort, they always tend to screen him from the haughty arrogance of the social milieu, or tend to reduce the latter to pieces, which amounts to the same thing.

Unless he be a fool, the prosperity and future outcome of the “social life” do not bother the Anarchist Individualist; it is enough for him to feel and endure its restraint and tyranny. Life, and life alone attracts him; to live “in freedom” that strongly contrasts with the existence imposed upon him by the economic, political and social conditions. It is life that interests him, solicits, enlivens and lures him. The “natural” life, the one which ignores compromises, adulteration, glitter, deception, overcharged reputation, calculation, and climbing... in a word, all that

characterizes social life, everything which perpetuates “society”. Between “society” and life the Anarchist Individualist chooses the latter, wishing to live in spite of all external pressures and forever excluding domination and exploitation of others.

English version by Jules Scarceriaux.

Our Kind of Individualist (1945)

Essentially, our paper is intended for a certain category of people only, a select body, distinct from the general run of society, who, in default of a better term, must be referred to as “our kind of individualist” and who are, it must be understood, the only variety of individualist we are interested in. This sort of person is invariably a “non-conformist” with regard to the ethics and aesthetics of the bourgeoisie, the present system of education, and, indeed, with most majority opinions in society. He has taken due thought, and has jettisoned all those phantoms, those abstract principles which had haunted him when he floated back and forth on the tides of convention, carried along like ‘a cork on such currents as “everybody does it”, as the conformer must be. He has created for himself a personality which resists the influences surrounding it, which pays no attention to the vociferous, the braggart, or the fickle mob. He wants to know where he is going, though not without having carefully considered the route to be followed, and then without ever losing sight of the fact that his “freedom” must always be dependent upon his “responsibility”.

What else is “our” individualist? He is a person who is united with those of “his world” by comradeship, which we define as “a voluntary agreement between individualists aimed at eliminating all avoidable friction and unpleasantness from their relationships”. Now this definition is more than twenty years old, dating from 1924, and in 1939 I again wrote: “Our conception of comradeship is positive, not negative, constructive, not destructive.” It is because such an idea is creative of good will, contentment and harmony that it will tend to reduce to a minimum the pain of living, and this in a society which is in itself indifferent. “And all this can be achieved without the, protection of the State, the intervention of governments, or the mediation of the law.”

But our kind of individualist is not only mind, spirit, thought. He is neither dry, nor niggardly of heart. If exclusively a rationalist, he would feel himself incomplete, so it is a necessity for him to be both sensible and “sentimental”. This explains his plan for freeing “his world” of useless and avoidable suffering. He knows that this is possible when one speaks and understands “the language of the heart”, when one prefers agreement to struggle, abstention to the unlatching of actions dictated by bitterness, animosity or spite. Individualism as we conceive and propagate it is

understood seriously, without equivocation, passionately. It postulates rectitude, constancy, reciprocity, support, comprehensiveness, indeed compassion. It implies fidelity to the pledged word, whatever the matter in hand may be; care not to interfere under any pretext in the affairs of another comrade (unless asked), or to encroach on his rights, nor to withdraw any rights once given except in cases of betrayed trust. This individualism does not wish to provoke disquiet, disillusionment, torment or tears. Its freedom of affirmation must cease when it threatens another with hardship or pain.

Our kind of individualist must not be misunderstood. He is no moralist. He loathes “conventional lies”, the false pretenses of petite-bourgeoisie. He has discarded all preconceived ideas. he recognizes as a motive nothing outside himself. But he knows quite well that an individualist must give as well as take. He does not ignore the fact that the “gentleman’s agreement” must be honoured equally with the formal bond. He repudiates violence, imposition, constraint, which is not to say that he accepts being exploited, duped, made a game of or inferior, whatever his personal appearance or level of culture might be. He does not wish to receive more than he gives, nor give more than he receives. He is proud. He sets a value upon his person. It means nothing to him that anyone else knows him only as a “poor relation”. Towards those who would humiliate him he reacts and considers himself in a state of legitimate defense ... but he is always ready to make peace on a man to man basis.

Yes, our kind of individualism loves life. It makes no secret of it-it revels in the joy of living, but in a discreet manner, without din or noisy demonstrations. It recognizes happiness as its goal. It welcomes anything that will increase its receptiveness and appreciation for either the products of the human imagination or those of nature. No asceticism, it is repelled by mortification. It is conscious of personal dignity. It can both sow and reap. It pays no attention to what “they say., It is neither young nor old, it is the age it feels its self to be. And while there is a drop of blood left in its veins, it will fight for a place in the sun.

But this joy, the enjoyment of living, the conquest of a life without prejudice, the individualist does not intend to gain at the expense of others, whether his friends or comrades, or only the most humble and least important person in his society. He refuses to play the role of trouble-maker — he would not be the cause of any grief for anyone. He ‘abhors the idea that one of the members of his circle should be in any way frustrated on account of his ambitions-on has account. He could never pardon himself for such conduct.

Nor does he wish to have anything in common with those armchair Nietzscheans or weekend Stirnerites who imagine, poor wretches, that they are “affirming their individuality” by petty dishonesty in money matters, or by forcing themselves upon the companion of a friend in prison. In short, the individualist, as we know

him, abominates brutes, cretins, rogues, schemers, twisters, skunks and so forth, no matter with what ideology they wish to conceal themselves. But he also recognizes that practice does not always conform to theory, and that often, though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. He holds nothing against his associates on account of their inabilities or their weaknesses; he freely forgives them. Concessions are not rarities with him. And any damage he does, or suffering he causes, he will pay for or rectify to the best of his ability. But further than that he will not go — anything beyond compensation is extortion.

In the midst of a social order in which, despite frequent pompous discourses and bombastic declarations from allegedly responsible persons, the pledged word is more often broken than not and the philosophy of “get out of your problems as best you can” is the reigning attitude of man to his fellowman, our conception of comradeship, as described above, raises itself like a lighthouse to remind the world that there are still persons capable of resisting the seductions and gross appetites of our philistine society.

We believe that our kind of individualism has a bigger following than might at first sight appear, and that, though scattered, there is a not inconsiderable number of persons who are trying to reintegrate themselves on these lines; people who have revolted against social determinism and who have decided to submit an ideas to their own personal tests. These people we look upon as a psychological group apart from those who remain in the mass. To them our call goes out.

We look at “association” as a concrete manifestation of comradeship taking some co-operative or mutualist form, always providing that it is based on a sound understanding of the participants character We know perfectly well that if in this association our personality affirms its self that if the goal sought for is attained, it is at the cost of our “liberty”. When he associates our kind of individualist accents the disadvantages along with the advantages and he does not complain.

Adopted from a translation of A Qui Est Destiné “L’Unique” by A.S.

The Future Society (1945)

Individualists concern themselves little with a future society. That idea has been exploited and can nourish the believer just as exploitation of paradise nourishes the priest; but it resembles paradise, in that a description of its wonders has an enervating, soporific influence on those who hear it, it makes them forget present oppression, tyranny and bondage. it weakens energy, emasculates initiative. The individualist does not put his hope in the future society. He lives in the present moment, and he wants to draw from it the maximum results. Individualist activity is essentially a present work and a present accomplishment. The individualist

knows that the present is heir to the past and pregnant with the future. It is not in some tomorrow that he wants to see the end of encroachment by society on the individual, of invasion and oppression of one person by another. It is today, in his own life, that the individualist wants to win his independence.

To be sure, the individualist often fails in his attempts to free himself from the yoke of existing domination. Considering the forces of opposition and oppression, this is very natural. But the future will profit automatically from what he gains. The individualist knows very well that he will not explore the whole forest, but the path he opens will remain, and those who follow him, if they want to, will take good care of it and broaden it.

The individualist is incapable, it is true, of outlining in full detail the map of “future humanity” as it would be if his demands were won. Thus he cannot make a topographical work; but on the other hand he can foresee with certainty both the nature of the terrain and the quality of the liquid that will fill the rivers, and the possible kind of culture. “The new humanity” is not for him absolutely terra incognita. The individualist can, therefore, even now indicate what a “future humanity” will be. He knows it will resemble the present world in nothing less by changes in detail than by a complete transformation of the general mentality, a different understanding of relations among men, a universal and individual change of state of mind, that will make certain methods and certain institutions impossible.

Thus the individualist can affirm with certainty that authoritarianism will in no case continue in the future society. To imagine a “world to come” where there would still be a trace of domination, coercion and duty is nonsense.

The individualist is sure that there will no longer be room for intervention of the State — of a governmental, social-legislative, penal, disciplinary institution or administration — in the thought, conduct and activity of human beings. The individualist knows that relations and agreements among men will be arrived at voluntarily; understandings and contracts will be for a specified purpose and time, and not obligatory; they will always be subject to termination; there will not be a clause or an article of an agreement or contract that will not be weighed and discussed before being agreed to, a unilateral contract, obliging someone to fill an engagement he has not personally and knowingly accepted, will be impossible. The individualist knows that no economic, political or religious majority — no social group whatever — will be able to compel a minority, or one single man, to conform against his will to its decisions or decrees.

We have here a whole series of certainties on which there is no quibbling. “Future humanity”, as the individualist conceives it, “unrolls itself” without terminal station, without point of arrival. It is eternally becoming, indefinitely evolving. A humanity of the dynamic type, if one can so express oneself, ignores stops en route;

or if there are stops at stations, it understands that this is the time strictly necessary to let off those who want to try an experience that will involve only them.

The future humanity, “the new humanity”, as the individualists understand it, constitutes a gigantic arena where, as much in thought and custom as in technique, all imaginable projects, plans, associations and practices will struggle and compete with each other. It is because of these well-established characteristics that “the new humanity” in no way resembles, can have no meeting-point with ours, “the old humanity”. It will be poly-dynamic, polymorphous, multilateral.

When someone asks exactly how, in “the future humanity” that individualists want, one will solve some litigious point, it is clear that the questioner does not understand. But one can reply with certainty that there will never be a recourse to violence, compulsion or force to adjust a difference.

A good number of individualists think that the coming of “the future humanity” that individualists want, depends on an attack, on serious, rational and continued propaganda, against authoritarianism in all spheres of human activity, whether in political or social economy, in morals, in art, in science, in literature. Arguing from the fact that the individual is born into – is thrust into – an already-organized society without being allowed to consent to it or reject it, or able to defend himself from it or oppose it, they deduce that this primordial fact confers on the victim the right to life, without restrictions or reservations. That is, the right to consumption, independent of economic politics; the right to individual choice of the method of production and the means of production; the right to choose the consumers he wants to benefit by his exchange; the right to choose whether to associate with others, and, if he refuses to associate, the right to the means of production sufficient to maintain himself; the right to choose his associates and the purpose for which he associates.

In other words, the right to behave as he finds most advantageous, at his own risk, with no limit other than encroachment on the behavior of others (to put it another way, the use of violence, compulsion or coercion towards one who behaves differently than you). The right to the guarantee that he will not be forced to do what he considers personally disagreeable or disadvantageous, or hindered from doing what he wants to (he will not, therefore, resort to physical force, deceit or fraud in order to gain what appears useful, advantageous or agreeable to him). The right to circulate freely, to move wherever he pleases, to propagate those doctrines, opinions, propositions and them that he feels impelled to, with the reservation of not using violence in any form to put them into practice; the right to experiment in all fields and all forms, to publicize his experiences, to recruit the associates needed for their realization, on condition that only those who really want to will participate and that those who no longer want to can withdraw; the right to consumption and to means of production, even if he refuses to participate in any system, method

or institution that seems to him disadvantageous. The right to life, that is, the right to make one's own happiness as one feels impelled to, alone or together with those one feels particularly attracted to, without fear of intervention or intrusion by personalities or organizations incompatible with one's ego or with the association of which one is momentarily part.

The individualists think that the guarantee of the right to life, thus conceived, is the least a human individual can demand when he realizes what an authoritarian and arbitrary act was committed in bringing him into the world. They think also that all propaganda for these demands favors the advent of a transformed mentality, characteristic of all new humanity. The struggle for the abolition of the monopoly of the State, or of any other executive form replacing it — against its intervention as centralizer, administrator, regulator, moderator, organizer or otherwise in any relation among individuals equally favors, these individualists think, the emergence of this mentality.

I am aware that a good number of anarchist individualists have no interest in the "future humanity". For them: "Without risk of erring too far, we can assume: 1. That there will never be a general, collective, life from which authority, is absolutely excluded; 2. That in all societies there will be individuals or groups who are protestants, malcontents, critics and negators. Without doubt, we will witness transformations, improvements, modifications, even upheavals. The capitalist system of production may vanish in the end, gradually or forcibly. Little by little, one will work less, earn more; reforms will come, menacingly, inevitably. There may be an economic regime unlike ours. But whatever the social system, good sense indicates that its permanence depends on a system of regulation adapted to the average mentality of the people in it. Whether they want to, or not, those to the right or left of the average regulation must conform their behavior to it; and it matters little whether its basis is exclusively economic, or biological, or moral.

"Experience indicates that towards refractories they will use the only arguments men can dispose — of: politics or violence, persuasion or compulsion, bargaining or command. The crowd always goes towards him who speaks well and carries himself well. Its angers last no longer than its admirations. It is always easy to fool and seduce. One can no more base oneself on it now than a century or a thousand years ago. The mass belongs to the strongest, the most superficial, the most slippery. In such a situation, what do anarchist individualists do, what will they do?

1. Some reply that they will remain within the milieu and struggle to affirm themselves — without concerning themselves too much with choice of means, for their great concern — the concern of their lives — is, at all costs, to react against external determination of their lives. It is to affirm oneself if not to diminish the pressure of the milieu on oneself. They are reactors,

refractories, propagandists, revolutionaries, utilizing all possible means of battle: education, violence, ruse, illegalism. They seize occasions when the Power is abusive to stir up rebelliousness among its victims. But it is for pleasure that they act, and not for the profit of the sufferers, or by abusing them by vain words. They go, they come, mingling in a movement or withdrawing, as their independence is or is not in danger of restriction, parting company with those they have called to revolt as soon as they pretend to follow them or constitute themselves a party. Perhaps they do, more than they are.

2. Others situate themselves on the margin of the milieu. Having somehow obtained means of production, they preoccupy themselves with making their separation from the milieu a reality, trying to produce enough for themselves, while eliminating the factitious and the surplus. "Because men, in general, seem to them hardly worth bothering about, they maintain only the minimum relations with people and human institutions, and their social life is limited to the company of selected 'comrades of ideas'. They group together at times, but only temporarily, and the limited association of which they are part is never delegated power to dispose of their product. The rest of the world exists for them only little or much – to the extent that they need it. Perhaps they are, more than they do.

"Between these two conceptions of individualist life, the diverse anarchist individualist temperaments range themselves." For the comrades whose opinions I have just transcribed, any sketch of "future humanity", any hypothesis of an individualist milieu, is a work of imagination, pure literary fantasy. They maintain that, for the mentality, the general will, really to transform itself, it would be necessary that "the species on the road to degeneration, the 'directed categories', deliver the earth of their presence: and that is not likely." It was only justice to make known this point of view that no individualist forgets, even when he speaks of becoming social.

For having depicted in broad strokes a tableau of "the new humanity" to which we would like to evolve, we cannot be taxed with being "future-society-ists". The anarchist individualist is not a future society-ist; a presentist, he could not, without bad reasoning and illogic, think of sacrificing his being, or his having, to the coming of a state of things he will not immediately enjoy. Individualist thought admits no equivocation on this point. It is amid the old humanity, the humanity of dominators and dictators of all kinds, that the "new humanity" appears, takes shape, becomes. Individualists are permanent and personal revolutionaries, they try to practice, in themselves, in their circle, in their relations with their comrades of ideas, their particular concepts of individual and group life. Every time one of

the characteristics of the “new humanity” implants itself in the mores, every time one or more human beings, at their risk and peril, anticipate them by word or action, “the new humanity is realized.” In the domain of art, letters, science, ethics, personal conduct, even in the economic sphere, one finds individuals who think and act contrary to the customs, usages, routines, prejudices and conventions of the “old society”, and attempt to break them down. In their kind of activity, they too represent the new humanity. Already the individualists take part in it, by their way of behaving towards the old world, because they reveal in each of their actions their intention, their win, their hope of seeing the individual free himself from the constraint of the herd, the mentality of the mass.

Can one hope that after many a flux and reflux, many a sad attempt, humanity will some day come to conscientious practice of reciprocity, to the anti-authoritarian, individualist — anarchist individualist — solution, the solution of equal liberty?

Can one anticipate that, more enlightened, more educated, better informed, the inhabitants of our planet will at last come to understand that neither coercion, nor domination of the majority, the elite, the dictatorship of an autocrat, class or caste, are capable of assuring happiness — that is, of reducing avoidable suffering? It is the secret of the future. But, optimistic or pessimistic in this respect, the anarchist individualist will not the less continue to denounce the prejudice which gives statist authority its force: the superstition of necessary government, and to live as though the prejudice and this superstition did not exist.

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Émile Armand
The Anarchism of Émile Armand
1907–1964

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