

PRINCIPLES
OF
ANARCHISM

Tim Parise

PRINCIPLES OF ANARCHISM

All human beings are equal.

This is an assumption. It is not grounded in observable or logically demonstrable fact. It may be argued for on the grounds of physiological similarity, which is deceptive, or on the basis of social interactions, or natural law, or divine ordinance, but in spite of all the possible arguments that can be made for the equality of human beings, such equality can never be proven absolutely. It must be taken on trust, as a starting point. However, once it is, a number of other principles can be logically derived from it.

Attempts may be made to narrow the impact of this axiom by narrowing the definition of a human being. Reasonably enough, that which is not human is not necessarily equal to a human. It may be less, or it may be more. In either case, it can be defined as inhuman. If it is not human, then the principles deduced from an assumption of human equality would not apply to it. The fact that such a chain of reasoning can be constructed opens up the possibility that

certain humans could purposefully be defined as inhuman and denied acknowledgment of their humanity by their fellows in order for the latter to avoid acknowledging the rights they would share in if human. To rule out this possibility, and for maximum comprehensiveness, it may be stated that a human being is any creature which possesses, or possesses the ability to develop in its own lifetime, the characteristics of individuality, reason, creativity, and will. These attributes define humanity, not physiology. Intangible rather than tangible qualities are the determining factors.

All human beings possess equal rights.

If all humans are equal, and especially if their humanity is determined on the basis of a certain set of intangible characteristics they possess in common, it follows that they must share equal abilities, or at least equal potential abilities. It is impossible to hold that one man is entitled to take a certain action and another is not if both men are equal. Were any distinction to be made between them, it would be evidence that they were not in fact equal, or that the observer making the distinction did not accept the postulate that all human beings were equal. Conversely, equality by definition does not enable distinctions to be made between individuals. From this we may infer that if all

human beings are equal, then the rights of any one of those humans must be exactly equal to those of any other member of the human race. Equal beings must possess equal rights if the requirement for their equality is to be met in the first place.

The right of every human being is to complete freedom of independent action.

Having deduced that humans must share equal rights, we must next ask, somewhat paradoxically, if such a thing as a human right actually exists. A right may be defined as the freedom or entitlement to act in a certain manner, without constraint. That definition implies that humans are free or entitled to do certain things, to take certain actions - but not other actions. But if one human being shares the freedom to act in a particular way equally with every other human being, no single man or collection of men can claim a superior freedom of action that will allow them to impose a limit on, or grant an entitlement with regard to, that particular action, since none of them have a better right to do so than anyone else. If they all have equal rights, then none of them can be a source of authority. And if there can be no restrictions in one case, through the absence of a source of restrictions, there can be no restrictions in general for the same reason. Furthermore, if there can be no restrictions on

freedom of action, there can be no rights, either, since rights are the opposite of restrictions and defined only in relation to them. All that is left is complete freedom of independent action for the individual.

Freedom of action cannot be transferred between or among individuals or groups.

If every man possesses the capacity to act as he chooses, without limitation, then the absence of limitation necessarily means that his capacity for freedom of action cannot be added to in any way. He cannot acquire additional freedom of action from another. And since that freedom is inherent in him as a human being, he cannot transfer, delegate, or surrender it even if he wishes to do so. It remains with him permanently, undiminished, as a result of his humanity.

No individual or group can claim authority over others through special or collective freedom of action.

If all human beings possess the same freedom of action, then it is obvious that no single man can possess a special or distinguished freedom of action which is greater than that of his fellows or takes precedence over theirs. To admit that

possibility would be to rule out the equality of man in general. Furthermore, since freedom of action cannot be alienated from the individual, a man cannot delegate his freedom of action to another individual or to a group in the belief that doing so will enable that individual or group to exercise it on his behalf. They can never acquire it and he can never give it away. If all men are equal, no man has a better claim to rule than any other, nor should the claims of any individual to authority be considered plausible or reasonable.

No form of government is valid, or has a logical claim to authority over human beings.

Government, considered as an entity separate from an individual ruler, is a concept administered by a group. As it is an idea and not a human being, it does not possess its own freedom of action inherently. Nor can it acquire freedom of action, since it is the intellectual and conceptual creation of individuals. For a government to acquire freedom of action during the process of creation, individuals would have to transfer their own freedom of action to it, which is not possible. Hence, a government cannot possess freedom of action at all.

Individuals may, in exercising their own freedom of action, choose to live under a system of rulers or government.

Freedom of action entitles individuals to choose what they will do and how they will do it. There are no restrictions on that freedom. If an individual voluntarily wishes to stop exercising that freedom to some extent, in order to enjoy the perceived benefits of life under the rule of another, he is perfectly able to do so. However, choosing to temporarily or partially abandon the exercise of that freedom does not deprive him of it, since it is inherent in him as a human being. He may at any time abandon his present choice and make a new one. Or he may not. Both options are available to him.

Individuals may also exercise their freedom of action by choosing to live or participate in a society.

A society is defined by its limits. More precisely, the existence of a society is determined by the presence of behavioral patterns within a group of human beings, and such patterns always involve limitations and prohibitions on the actions that members of the group may take. Therefore, the society is inseparable from the limits it places on its members freedom of action, and it can thus be said to be defined by those limits. Nevertheless,

an individual may choose to participate in a society, just as he may agree to subject himself to a government, even though the choice in both cases results in his having to agree to a series of limitations on his freedom of action. Such a choice is, in and of itself, an exercise of freedom of action. Consequently, the society possesses no existence apart from the collective beliefs and practices of its members. Nor can it, even conceptually, since its requirement for limits in order to exist violates the human equality axiom.

Society engenders government.

Governments and rulers are the outcome of society. Once a society has established itself as a body of individuals who have collectively agreed to limitations on their freedom of action, it requires a mechanism to formalize that agreement and to enforce the limitations. A government is that mechanism, with its claim to authority justified by the society on the grounds that it possesses either an inherent or a transferred freedom of action greater than that of the individuals over which it presides. Such a greater freedom does not exist, only the freedom of action of individuals exercised in coordination under the assumption that there is a common limit to their actions. The vacuum of individual inaction produced by those

accepted limits is mistaken for the presence of authority.

The scope of government is limited at most to those who deliberately choose to live under it.

Logically, the scope of government is limited to those who have agreed to live under it. It is established by either an explicit or an implicit social contract, by the agreement of individuals to adhere to a defined set of rules as an exercise of their freedom to choose. Those who choose to reject the social contract cannot reasonably be held to have any obligations to the government established by that contract, or to those of their fellows the government terms citizens. The government may, of course, try to compel their submission, but such an act is merely an example of one group of individuals employing force to coerce another individual or group into obedience by making them fear the consequences of disobedience. As such, it falls under the heading of what residents of the early twenty-first century would term terrorism.

Every government is an extreme manifestation of individual action.

This is more obvious in a case where there are few rulers or only a single ruler. Rulers

expand their own scope of action by minimizing that of those they rule. The fewer the limits by which they are bound, the greater the limits they place on the freedom of others. The effect is less clear in the case of a government which exists only as a concept, given that the exercise of its functions is generally distributed among a much greater number of individuals. Still, it involves certain individuals expanding their exercise of freedom of action at the expense of that of other individuals, and as such involves freedom of action being manifested unevenly.

In a sense, ultimate tyranny is the same thing as ultimate freedom for a single individual. A tyrant with total control over his population, with no possible human restraint on his behavior, has a maximum potential freedom of action available to him, while those who have agreed to have their freedoms restricted in order to accommodate him have a minimum.

Every man has the freedom to rule and the freedom to resist being ruled.

This is a logical deduction from freedom of action. There are no obstacles to a man using his freedom of action to force others to obey him, if he desires that. The men who obey him, by virtue of their shared humanity, are also free

to resist his efforts to force them into compliance. Both sides have equal freedom of action.

Anarchism involves a surplus of freedom, not a shortage.

Anarchy is the absence of any authority over the individual. A condition in which all human beings are considered equal rules out the possibility of any authority existing simultaneously with such equality. Therefore, that condition is anarchy. This differs from the conditions set up under the auspices of most societies and governments, organizations which emphasize maintaining a twofold balance. On the one hand, the rights of a single individual are balanced against the rights of the group as a whole. On the other hand, the rights of all individuals are balanced against the presumed rights of the society or government. These balances are not possible in anarchism. In acknowledging the equality of all humans, it rejects the idea that any individual can have his freedom of action restricted at all, regardless of whether it is for the benefit of others or not. If one individual is oppressing another (oppression is loosely defined as preventing another human being from exercising his full freedom of action), he has the freedom to do so. However, his freedom to act in such a manner does not negate that of his opponent, as it

would in a system where an entitlement had been granted to the former but not to the latter for the sake of satisfying a requirement for balance. Because anarchism does not encompass the concept of justified restraint on freedom of action, or balance, it may be considered to allow for a surplus of freedom even when oppression is ongoing. Both sides in a conflict are free to act as they choose.

The full exercise of freedom of action leads inevitably to conflict.

It is fairly easy to arrive at the conclusion that if all human beings have the freedom to act exactly as they please, there will be conflict among them. In the course of exercising their freedom, two or more individuals will inevitably have conflicting desires, or share a single desire which it is not possible for all of them to achieve. In attempting to achieve the same objective, or contradictory objectives, they will clash. Among a large number of individuals, these clashes will be frequent, and those individuals who are not satisfied with the outcome of a previous conflict will be likely to exercise their freedom of action again in attempting to change the situation. This process will be repetitive and self-sustaining. Therefore, freedom of action is inseparable from human conflict.

This conflict is known as war.

War may be defined as any act which compels your enemy to do your will. This definition is sometimes altered slightly by specifying an act of force, but that is redundant, since any act of compulsion must necessarily involve some kind of force. At any rate, a conflict caused by as few as two individuals exercising their freedom of action qualifies as war, since it involves each man trying to compel the other to give way to his wishes. The nature of their objectives is not particularly important, nor are the methods or urgency with which they pursue those objectives. When the desires of two human beings are not mutually compatible, and one of the men attempts to achieve his own desire at the expense of the other, a state of war exists between them. This definition holds true regardless of the number of individuals involved or the sort of desires for which they contend.

Anarchism is a way of thinking.

If all human beings are equal, with equal freedom of action, there can be no such thing as human authority, leading to the conclusion that the existence of anarchy is synonymous with and inseparable from the existence of humanity. Anarchy, however, is only a descriptive term for a condition in which

humans exist with equal freedom of action. The practice of anarchism is the actual exercise of that freedom of action on the part of the individual. And logically, for the individual to exercise his freedom fully, he must first be aware that he has it, without limitation and without the possibility of denial. If he is not aware of its existence, he may allow others to oppress him in the belief that they have the freedom to do so and that he does not have the freedom to resist. The source of this necessary awareness is not important. It can be assumed on the basis of personal desire; it can be deduced from the equality axiom. Once that awareness exists, regardless of how it was arrived at, it can be used to drive actions. A man who realizes that he possesses complete freedom of independent action, which is inherent in him as a human being, and who chooses to act on that freedom, is an anarchist. The realization - the thought - precedes the action. Consequently, anarchism is primarily a concept that is acted upon, and only secondarily the actions stemming from that concept.

Anarchism is not nihilism.

This is an important distinction, especially because it is one that is usually overlooked. Authors and governments in particular sometimes have trouble distinguishing between anarchism, which

involves a rejection of authority and an acceptance of individual freedom of action, with nihilism, which is often presented as the desire to randomly destroy anything that exists merely because it exists and because one is able to do so. G. K. Chesterton famously attached the latter definition to the former term in his novel *The Man Who Was Thursday*, crediting anarchists with aspiring to destroy the human race as a whole. Freedom of action is a logical conclusion to draw from the equality axiom, but there is no connection between that conclusion and a desire for destruction. It does not lead, logically and inevitably, to a love of destruction in the individual or to destructive actions. An individual may choose to take actions that are widely destructive, either to objects or ideas or other individuals, but those are not the only actions he is capable of taking. He may just as easily choose to take actions which his fellow men would view as constructive. Both kinds of action are possible. But the actions themselves are irrelevant. A human being has the freedom to take any action he desires, such freedom being inherent in his humanity. Anarchism is the exercise of individual freedom of action and all the actions which that freedom makes possible. It mandates no specific course of action, destructive or otherwise.

Anarchism tempered with concern for others is communism.

Communism as originally defined describes an end state in human development in which both government and formally structured society have become obsolete and no longer exist. As such, it is similar in principle to anarchism, as there is no authority over individuals. However, in an anarchist environment, the consideration of individual freedom of action is paramount. In a communist environment, individuals are free from the constraints of law and custom which compel them to limit their freedom of action, but in spite of the absence of such constraints, they choose to limit their freedom anyway, on a personal basis, in order to minimize conflict. The effect is much the same as that of law and custom, but it proceeds from collective, unorganized free choice rather than compulsion or a formal contract. As such, communism might be called anarchism with a conscience.

Anarchism is simultaneously both rational and irrational.

It must be rational following an acceptance of the human equality axiom, because the absence of authority is a rational conclusion drawn from that axiom, as is the

individuals choice to act upon such a conclusion. However, within that framework, individuals have the freedom to make choices which are in themselves irrational, for no more logical reason than that they desire to do so. The contradiction involved is superficial only and not real. Even the most apparently irrational choice is implicitly logical, because the individuals freedom to make that choice may be derived rationally, and therefore all choices made by the individual are equally logical consequences of his humanity.

Anarchism suggests but does not mandate respect for the freedom of action of others.

If an individual demands freedom of action for himself but objects to others having the same freedom, he walks into a logical trap. Freedom of action is deduced from the principle that all human beings are equal. Accepting the conclusion logically demands acceptance of the postulates from which that conclusion was drawn. However, those same postulates make it clear that freedom of action cannot be constrained, that all human beings possess it equally. If you deny that someone else has it, you automatically deny the entire line of reasoning by which you claim to have it, and you expose yourself to having this pointed out to you by others as evidence of your inconsistency, as well as potentially having them

deny you freedom of action on the same grounds. The nature of the trap is fairly obvious. Even so, its existence encourages an individual to interfere with the freedom of action of others as little as is compatible with his own choices and the exercise of his own freedom of action. Common sense and self-interest.

Anarchism is individual.

Anarchism is the expression of what is most beneficial to and sought after by each individual and as such cannot be codified. It is freedom of action in its purest form. Any man can overrule any logical principle of anarchism in accordance with his own desires. He can reject its entire reasoned basis and still be acting within its conceptual framework, even if he does not accept the framework itself or is ignorant of it. Nonetheless, by exercising his own freedom of action, an individual implicitly acknowledges the basis of human equality from which his freedom may be deduced, and thus recognizes the freedom of every other human being to do the same, even if the actions of another contradict or oppose his own wishes. Anarchism is not just a way of thinking. It is a way of thinking where individual concepts are more important than general ones in practice, no matter how much they reinforce the general concepts in the abstract.

Ethics are defined by the individual and cannot be broadly applied to groups.

Ethics and morals may be defined as behavioral obligations to or standards of conduct imposed by a source of authority. Since there can be no such thing as a human source of authority, given that all humans are equal, then there can be no such thing as human-defined ethics, either. The choice of standards of behavior is thus left to the individual, as a logical extension of freedom of action, and for the same reason cannot be extended beyond the individual. Any individual is free to attempt to impose his own choice of standards upon others if he feels so inclined. Likewise, any individual has the freedom to refuse compliance with standards agreed upon by his fellow men. The same reasoning applies here as in the case of human reactions to society and government. A man may choose to share in the opinion of others, or he may not. If all humans are equal, there is no one among them who can set a reference point, and if there is no reference point, then there is nothing to constrain free choice, or actions made on the basis of such choices.

Note that standards of conduct imposed by a superior nonhuman source of authority would not logically contradict the human equality axiom and would thus be able to exist simultaneously with those conclusions drawn

from the axiom - provided that such an authority could be proven to exist.

Anarchists can work together in groups without giving up their individualism.

Freedom of action is not constrained if individuals choose to act in the same manner, or to coordinate their actions with one another. This is a different thing from agreeing to surrender freedom of action in favor of accommodating the limits of a society or government, or the orders of a ruler. If multiple individuals share a goal, they can work towards it independently without having to obey the instructions of a leader and without fear of oppression if they disobey him. Each man retains his own freedom of action, but because he shares the same ideas as his fellows, he is capable of rationally deducing the steps he may take to further the accomplishment of those ideas and taking them. As long as the central concept is shared among individuals, central direction is not needed for a cooperative endeavor to be successful. The only question is whether they will choose to act in concert. If they do, then they are actually exercising their freedom of action rather than limiting it.

Anarchism is incompatible with urbanism and industrialism.

For human beings to exercise their freedom of action most effectively, logic suggests that each man should come into contact with as few other men as possible, so that his freedom of action is likely to be minimally constrained by conflict with them. The higher the number of human beings in a given area, the higher the number of conflicts that will occur and the higher the number of individuals who will be having their freedom of action suppressed in war, simply as a result of population density. Consequently, a small, widely dispersed population is most conducive to the practice of anarchism. For this reason, the existence of cities and industries, both of which require large concentrations of individuals in order to function, creates unfavorable conditions for the exercise of individual freedom of action. Beyond the risk of constant conflict resulting from a high population density, urban environments also place an additional restraint on freedom of action in that they require interdependence in order to ensure physical survival. Individuals who are members of a large, integrated community are incapable of feeding, clothing, housing, and otherwise providing for themselves on the basis of their own efforts. Thus, in order for anarchism to exist in practice, without any authority and with complete

freedom of action for every individual, there can be no restraining factors such as cities or industries.

Anarchism reduces war and violence in spite of its apparent encouragement for conflict.

At the group level, because anarchism precludes the existence of large nations or states under central authority, there are no large armies to fight one another, and no large workforces behind the scenes pouring out supplies and weapons to enable those armies to kill more efficiently. Even the largest conflicts can only occur between relatively small groups of men, and such a war is proportionally smaller and less destructive than one fought by a state. There are no economies of scale involved in a war between two anarchists or two groups of anarchists. At the individual level, an anarchist possesses freedom of action to do as he pleases - but he is also a reasonable being. He will act as a check on himself. He will weigh the risks of taking an action which would cause someone else to take reprisals against him. This is a more effective deterrent than the threats of retribution usually made by a state. The threats of a government are remote; the threats of a neighbor are immediate and convincing. Consequently, the anarchist is inclined to be circumspect and avoid unnecessary conflict out of self-interest.

There is no such thing as ownership or property.

Since all humans have equal freedom of action, they are all equally able to possess a particular item or to occupy a particular space. Consequently, there can be no ownership at all in the sense of one human being having a particular right to possess a certain item or space to the exclusion of all others. If a particular right is ruled out, and a shared right is assumed on the basis of common humanity, the only distinction that can be made is between a man who currently possesses a specific item and one who does not. Such a possessor may be regarded as the owner of an object or a property out of convenience, but that does not give him any greater right to continue to possess that object than his fellows have.

There is no such thing as a right to privacy.

Just as no individual can have a special right to possess an object, because his freedom of action is equaled by that of every other individual, so he cannot have any overriding right to conceal information regarding himself. He may choose to attempt to conceal personal information if he likes. That is an option open to him as part of his freedom to choose. But, on the basis of that same freedom, any other

individual may also attempt to discover and share that information if he wishes to and is able to do so. The principles of surplus of freedom and the inevitability of conflict are particularly obvious in this example. There is no accommodation that can be made, since both men in such a case are free to act in opposing ways, the one to conceal and the other to reveal. Both actions are logically identical: exercises of individual freedom of action, and as such, one of those actions cannot be held to be prohibited, even if the prohibition is claimed to be in the interests of an individual.

The term anarchy only describes human interactions without passing judgment on them.

The old phrase “Whatever is, is right” is illogical. Whatever is simply is. For a standard of right and wrong to be imposed on human beings, it would have to be universal, logically deducible, and originate in a source external and somehow superior to the human race, since every human being has the freedom to set his own ethical standards. A purely human set of ethics for general use would contradict the principle of human equality, as no individual or group would have a superior freedom of action entitling them to impose it, and no human being would be obligated to adhere to it. In the absence of such an ethical measuring stick, all

human actions are ethically neutral. Nothing is either right or wrong until a human being decides it to be one or the other and applies the label of his choice. Even then, that definition is valid only for him. Other human beings are free to make their own definitions. The end does not justify the means because, to the anarchist, neither the end nor the means require justification. The anarchist observes, describes, and accepts - not tolerates - without needing justification. He is free to decide and free to act, and he recognizes that same freedom in others.