

Advice to My Children, and Everyone Else

As my children grow up, they are beginning to ask more questions about complex concepts. In the last few weeks, my 8yo daughter has asked me what a citizen is and whether or not I believe in God. Answering those objectively while providing food for thought was a difficult and personally rewarding experience for me.

While driving my 12yo son to an orthofacial surgery consultation this week (part of his orthodontic treatment to expose a stubborn canine), we had some time to kill, so I asked him what he knew about “anarchism”. Not much. His only exposure has been the Green Arrow villain “Anarky” and seeing the circle-A symbol in a few video games.

I thought it was a good time to introduce the concept, which is very simple. I started with etymology. “An” is without and “archy” is rulers in the original Greek. Anarchy means “without rulers”. The next step was talking about what a “ruler” is, and how its different from a leader. Rulers are people who try to control other people by threats or force. Leaders are people who inspire others to listen or to follow them. He guessed correctly at what kind of people are rulers, ie. presidents, kings, and criminals.

Then I told him that because I don’t believe that people should be rulers over other people, I considered myself an anarchist. I asked him if he was an anarchist, and he said he was. Then we talked about parents being rulers over their children and what that looks like. This went into my commitment not to be a ruler over him, even though in the past I was. He remembered those experiences, I’m sad to say. But he knows I’m trying, and now he understands a little bit more about my philosophical and ethical reasons for trying not using violence or coercion toward him in any respect.

I’ve given this entire learning experience some thought over the last few days, and the following stanza sums up my principles nicely:

*Don’t hurt people.
Don’t take their stuff.
Don’t ask permission.*

This is the advice I will be giving and reinforcing in my children as opportunity arises, and its advice I give to the rest of humanity. Let’s dig deeper.

Don’t Hurt People

I don’t believe that hurting people is ever the proper course of action in getting what I want out of life. It’s sure to create enemies who will desire to hurt me back. Plus, I won’t be doing my conscience and future happiness any favors by living a life of victimizing other

people. I desire peace and society with my fellow human beings, and hurting them is a poor way to achieve it.

Don't Take Their Stuff

Like hurting people, taking their stuff is wrong for all the same reasons, plus, I don't want people taking my stuff. I work hard for the stuff that I own, which brings my life comfort and enjoyment. When property is insecure, life and markets are far more unpredictable and uncertain. People can't solve problems effectively when the tools to do so are always at risk of confiscation by criminals.

Don't Ask Permission

I know what you might be thinking, doesn't this contradict the first two points of advice? Actually, no, because this final point of advice can only be properly understood within the context of the first two. Hence I stuck it at the end. If you're following all three points of advice, then there's no conflict. What you aren't asking for permission for is not something that would hurt another person or affect their stuff. What you aren't asking permission for is living your life on your own terms, and allowing everyone else the same freedom. So long as what you are doing does not violate the first two points of advice, do it without shame.

That's all there is to the anarchist philosophy, really. The anarchist doesn't hurt other people or take their stuff. And the anarchist doesn't ask permission to do what he's allowed to do by virtue of it not being a criminal action. Asking permission to exercise liberties is to recognize authority that doesn't really exist. Obviously you may do so for practical reasons as a form of risk mitigation, I get that, but this, in my opinion, shouldn't be our default approach to living our life on our own terms. (Rather, engage in civil disobedience and challenge their claims of jurisdiction.)

What do you think about this advice?