

Chapter 16 – Agorist Living

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Agorist Living

by Nicholas Hooton

The idea of joining the Libertarian Party tempted me years ago when I first discovered libertarian philosophy, as I’m sure it has tempted many before and since. The Party website stared me in the face, and with a few clicks and keystrokes I could be a card-carrying member of an organized body of liberty-minded people.

Eventually, the same rational thought processes and self-examination that led me to libertarianism revealed to me the true motives behind my desire to join: a base psychological need for attention and belonging. I’m proud to report that I left the website unaffiliated, as I had always been before and have been ever since.

I later learned just how close I came to never knowing the peace and prosperity that comes with an understanding and practice of anarchism*. The temptation had not been one of simply belonging, but of obtaining power – political power, in this case. I knew that, if I ever ran for public office, I would most likely need the financial backing of a political party, and running under a Democrat or Republican ticket would have been downright hypocritical.

This thinking occurred, of course, when the last vestiges of statism still clouded my vision as the remaining threads and rags of a blindfold that had been clawed at for years. I still considered the Constitution to be sacred, limited government to be the goal, and the social contract to be the only way life and property could be protected.

“There are two methods, or means, and only two, whereby man’s needs and desires can be satisfied,” I later learned from noted social critic Albert Jay Nock. “One is the production and exchange of wealth; this is the economic means. The other is the uncompensated appropriation of wealth produced by others; this is the political means... The positive testimony of history is that the State invariably had its origin in conquest and confiscation. No primitive State known to history originated in any other manner.”

For many years, “anarcho-capitalists” (under the direction of Mr. Libertarian himself, Murray Rothbard) have attempted to work within the political means to bring down the State. From the inception of the Libertarian Party up until its remaining anarchists were disinvited by means of the “Denver Accord”, to the attention-getting attempts at the

Presidency by libertarian poster child Ron Paul, anarcho-capitalists have put their trust in the very political machine they reject. These attempts have been fruitless, of course. The American political machine is stronger than it has ever been, arguably more powerful than any State in man's history; and the Libertarian Party has become such an impotent hiss and by-word that it no longer garners even comedic targeting.

While "Partyarchs" were busy sacrificing principle on the alter of political intrigue, the "new libertarian left" was born. Some called themselves voluntaryists and rejected every political means to obtaining libertarian ends. Voluntaryists are noted for abstention from voting, some even claiming it to be immoral. They are also known for peaceful non-cooperation. Nowhere has this strategy been better explored and implemented, however, than in the school of thought within this movement that calls itself "agorism".

Rothbard's libertarian manifesto published in 1973 offered little in the realm of strategy; indeed, the subject took up only a few pages in an epilogue and centered mostly on educating key groups in society about the philosophy of liberty. Seven years after (and most likely in response to) Rothbard's work, Samuel E. Konkin III published his New Libertarian Manifesto in which he laid out the groundwork of agorism, his philosophical extension and fulfillment of libertarian moral philosophy.

In this work, Konkin described what he called "counter-economics" or "all (non-coercive) human action committed in defiance of the State." Agorism is "the consistent integration of libertarian theory with counter-economic practice." Counter-economics includes black market activities – illegal activities that are not violent or invasive and therefore "victimless" – and grey market activities – activities that are not illegal but conducted in a manner prohibited by the State.

Many are shocked when they first learn of counter-economics. Engaging in illegal activities isn't how they envisioned their political activism or the way they live their lives; but the fact is that nearly everyone has engaged or regularly engages in such activities. If you've ever had a lemonade stand or a yard sale or sold something online without complying with all applicable regulatory and tax code mandates, you're a counter-economist. If you've ever used an expired prescription or someone else's prescription or smoked weed, you're a counter-economist. If you've ever been so much as a penny off on your income tax return, even without knowing it, you're a counter-economist.

My earliest lessons in counter-economics were taught to me by my dad, although I didn't know it until years later. He taught me about buying and selling automobiles to and from trusted acquaintances. In such transactions, the seller could provide the buyer with a bill of sale stating a greatly reduced sale price in order to reduce or eliminate the buyer's sales tax burden.

As a salesman, my dad went on more road trips than I can remember and frequently brought me along for company. I remember that he had a radar detector to avoid speeding tickets. He also had a CB radio with which he would converse with trucking convoys to avoid speed traps and the like. He taught me the lingo and helped me to understand how to earn the trust of the other CB operators by developing a reputable handle.

Such activities as these and many others offer a consistent and realistic strategy for undermining and ultimately replacing the State. As agorists engage in under-the-radar commerce with other agorists and liberty-minded merchants, organizations such as barter networks, cooperatives, mutual aid associations, local exchange trading systems, arbitration firms, and security networks can slowly and surely provide viable alternatives to services ostensibly provided by the State. Prosperity will follow.

One of the sublimely emancipating realizations one has in living the agorist life is one that seems to have escaped Konkin and other early agorist thinkers, and that is that a free society is not some far-off goal toward which we are working. It is not an unattainable utopia, or even an attainable arrangement many centuries down the road. No, “free society” is a tautology. Every society is free, as is every market. I will explain, because this notion, I believe, is key to consistency in libertarian philosophy, as well as for each individual to obtain the full measure of peace and prosperity that agorist living can provide.

A society is simply a group of two or more individuals, and a market is simply a place or system wherein two or more individuals engage in mutual exchange. If libertarian moral philosophy is valid, if the principle of non-aggression is indeed a universal ethical principle by which human interaction ought to be guided, then it is true at all times and in all places, in all societies and markets.

For example, the geographical area known as North America contains many free societies and free markets in which several well organized criminal syndicates known as States operate unchallenged. They are currently too powerful to be repelled by any private security firm or syndicate, and they have used mass propaganda to obtain the sanction of most of their victims.

I don't think any libertarian is so naïve as to assume that no crime exists in free markets. Libertarians advocate freedom to pursue voluntary solutions to crime. If a free market is a market in which zero crime or aggression occurs, then there will never be a free market, and we strive for it in vain. If we respond to criticisms of free markets by claiming that “we don't live in a free market”, then we are admitting that the non-aggression principle actually does not apply in our society, and therefore the State's actions are perfectly legitimate.

To know that you are free, that you always have been, and that you always will be, is one

of the most peaceful and liberating ideas I have ever uncovered. You are free. Any aggression committed against you by the State or by any other person or organization is illegitimate, and you have the right to defend yourself. The question isn't what you will do to achieve a free society. The question is what you will do, each and every day, to respond to the significant criminal threat extant in this free society of yours *right now*. I submit that agorism is the only philosophically consistent answer to that question.

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* Anarchism is properly and here defined as: the absence of the State.

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