

Why Anarchy?

Editor's Pick. Written by Daniel.

Anarchy, the Misconception

The state is defined as an organization which claims an ultimate right over all adjudication services within a given territory, and a right to defend this monopoly by force. Statists are people who either believe in the right which the state claims or who believe in the desirability of a state. Anarchy means statelessness, and anarchists believe that states are undesirable and ethically unjustified.¹

Anarchy does not mean chaos or barbarism: although anarchists comprise a very diverse group and I cannot absolutely deny that there are anarchists who support violence, anarchists overwhelmingly believe that anarchy promotes peace and cooperation and that statism does not. Most anarchists would say that Hobbes is guilty of a false premise when he describes the state of nature as “a war of all against all”.² For why should these hypothetical natural folk have waited so long to provide for security to the point that they are literally all at war with one another? Surely there must have been an earlier period in which they lived far enough apart and had enough land to themselves that they had very little need to provide for security and adjudication.

Hobbes's description is less to be expected of a society in which no state had ever existed, but rather one in which an earlier state had collapsed and left a vacuum in the services that it had previously monopolized. The same false premise has been promulgated through the centuries since Hobbes first popularized it. Statists have not examined it critically and have ignored the appeals of anarchists.³ Yet it is only because of the state's monopolization of adjudication and security that one could expect such a vacuum to be possible: if these services were provided by several organizations, none of whom claimed a territorial monopoly, then the collapse of any one would entail no vacuum of power or outbreak of violence. The remaining organizations would be poised to expand and take up the slack.

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