

FUNDAMENTALS OF ANARCHISM

WHAT IS MUTUAL AID?

*“In The Descent of Man, [Charles Darwin] gave some powerful pages to illustrate its proper, wide sense. He pointed out how, in numberless animal societies, the struggle between separate individuals for the means of existence disappears, how struggle is replaced by co-operation, and how that substitution results in the development of intellectual and moral faculties which secure to the species the best conditions for survival. He intimated that in such cases the fittest are not the physically strongest, nor the cunningest, but those who learn to combine so as to mutually support each other, strong and weak alike, for the welfare of the community. ‘Those communities,’ he wrote, ‘which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members would flourish best, and rear the greatest number of offspring’ (2nd ed., p. 163).” [Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor In Evolution*, 1902]*

MUTUAL AID is the idea that the evolution of Humanity as a sentient species and the emergence of Human Civilization were the result of solidarity for the needs of our fellow community members, cooperation and mutual support to overcome our mutual obstacles, defend against our mutual adversaries and create a society in which all who cooperate will mutually benefit. Mutual Aid is the basis of the village community, the labor syndicate (Union), cooperative and collective businesses, mutualist credit unions, mutual insurance and various mutual aid societies where people volunteer to help others.

Solidarity

The idea that human evolution was shaped by unlimited selfishness and the desire to dominate and exploit others is a Capitalist lie. Modern Anthropology has disproved myths like this one and the one that primitive people were chiefly macho hunters: the truth is that people were scavengers who mostly gathered plants for food and had to rely on their wits and each other to survive.

“The small strength and speed of man, his want of natural weapons, etc. are more than counterbalanced, firstly, by his intellectual facilities; and secondly, by his social qualities, which led them to give and receive aid from his fellow man” [Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 2nd ed., pp. 63-64].

Primitive humans were under 5 feet tall at a time when most predatory animals were twice their current size. To imagine that a single person could have dominated social groups without the aid of their fellows to survive is merely the fantasy of 19th Century aristocrats who wanted to rationalize their ideology of exploitation. Natural human social behavior is evident in primitive tribal groups where even among cannibals “weak people are usually supported; sick people are very well attended to; they are never abandoned or killed” [Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution*, 1902]. Within the tribe, the rule of ‘one for all and all for one’ is the highest value because it is essential to their survival.

This value is reflected in the village society which was the predominant form of human social organization up through the Middle Ages. Modern Mutual Aid groups have their origin in the traditional village community where people with mutual interests grouped together to provide for their collective needs without imposing on the individual or family and provided for their mutual defense, support and justice. Villages were democratically run by what was called the “Folkmøte” in Scandinavia: This was the early equivalent of the New England Town Meeting where decisions were made collectively by all the members of the community. The village dwellers worked together to grow food on land that was used by all but owned by none. They stood together to defend their village against human or animal predators and any quarrel among them was considered as a community affair.

“If a quarrel ended in a fight and wounds, the man who stood by and did not interpose was treated as if he himself had inflicted the wounds” [Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution*, 1902].

Cooperation

Cooperation, *not competition*, has been the driving force of human development and improvements in our quality of life. Most inventions throughout history have been the product of work by many people who shared their ideas and not the lone genius of Capitalist mythology. Even in the Middle Ages when scientists and doctors were burned by the Church for heresy and witchcraft, secret societies were formed to exchange and pass along knowledge. A group which is willing to work together on a project and make the successful completion or operation of the project a priority over personal differences with other members of the group is more effective than any bureaucracy provided that it is democratic and everyone shares the benefits of the work they do.

During the Middle Ages, cities grew where there was trade and groups of craftspeople formed labor associations called “Guilds” through which to trade knowledge, improve their products/skills and train new apprentices so they could become craftspeople. Guilds were formed around every skilled profession from metalworking to shipping. At that time, all the people on a ship had equal status and shared in the benefit of a trading venture (the era of kidnaped crews being whipped into submission by tyrannical captains was a product of Capitalism). The guilds traded with others for food and other necessities and every guild member shared the benefits of what the guilds produced. Guilds established funds to pay for the loss of a home by their members, care for the ill or to take care of the family of a guild member who died. Within the guild, all persons were equals in their mutual relations who agreed to aid each other and settle their disputes through “judges” elected by all of them. Guilds in the same cities cooperated with each other to provide for the mutual defense of the City and each guild often had its own militia which was a unit in the City’s defense force. The Renaissance and the explosion of knowledge, invention and creative arts which characterized it was a product of the guild system where workers owned and managed their own work places and cooperated with each other.

Capitalists have always tried to prevent working people from cooperating because they know that it would enable us to get rid of them and create an equitable society. In the Middle Ages, bands of gangsters were anointed as “kings” by the Church in exchange for their promising to help the Church get rich off the people they would “rule.” The gangsters eventually stole the common land farmed by villagers and gave it to their supporters who became wealthy aristocrats by forcing people to pay rent to live on what used to be their own land. The aristocrats were jealous of the wealth and freedom of the guilds and persuaded the kings to make guilds illegal and let them steal the property of the guilds. They eventually became so obscenely wealthy that they had money they could never spend. The Church supported the rich by calling rebellion against the king a “mortal sin” punishable by death. Kings gave exclusive trading monopolies to their friends who then shared the profit with other aristocrats by selling part of the profit (the shares were called “stock” or “capital”) or by renting the money from other aristocrats through a bank (the rent was called “usury” or “interest”). Later, during the Industrial “Revolution” these practices were used to build factories. Since the land and crafts which people had used to support themselves were stolen by the rich, people were forced to work for the “Capitalists” for almost nothing or starve. The “Capitalists” created governments which made it possible for them to kill or imprison anyone who objected to being exploited or tried to organize their fellow workers. Workers have been fighting to regain their freedom and the full value of their own labor ever since they were first stolen.

Equality

Anarchist Morality is the morality found in nature. The original human ideas about morality were based on watching animals and are simply that you should “do to others what you would have them do to you in the same circumstances” [Kropotkin, *Anarchist Morality*, 1892]. We don’t need 10 Commandments to tell us right from wrong. We are bothered when we see others wronged because it disturbs our natural feelings of empathy: because we know how it would feel if it happened to us. We have a natural desire for equality in mutual relations. Therefore, an injury to one is an injury to all because each time one of us is wronged, we are all threatened.

The great sources of moral depravity in modern society are Capitalism, religion and government because they create and maintain a system of inequality through which people are robbed of their freedom and the fruits of their labor. Capitalism robs us and government and religion rationalize it through laws and religious codes which pervert natural morality by equating it with subservience, obedience and humility. By ridding ourselves of Capitalism, religion and government we can regain the natural morality which they try to distort. We have a right to dispossess our exploiters because we would expect the same to be done to us if we tried to take advantage of others.

“It is in the ardent revolutionist to whom the joys of art, of science, even of family life, seem bitter, so long as they cannot be shared by all, and who works despite misery and persecution for the regeneration of the world” [Kropotkin, *Anarchist Morality*, 1892].

Anarchist Morality

Anarchists don’t believe that people are naturally good or evil, but that we are born free to choose. We believe our behavior is not influenced by supernatural forces, but only by ourselves and, thus, we alone are responsible for our actions. We do not believe that moral behavior can be enforced by coercion or religion, but only by the desire of the individual to respect the freedom of others rather than exploit them for their personal benefit. This is why coercion doesn’t stop violence, stealing or other exploitation and unfair treatment of people. Social peace and moral conduct in the community can only be assured by an agreement among the members of the community that participation in the community requires a respect for others and that the community will confront anyone who doesn’t voluntarily respect others (*e.g.* who wrongs another) in the community and, if necessary, remove them from the community in order to protect the freedom and safety of everybody else. Anarchists believe in Free Association which is also the freedom to disassociate. They believe that the Freedom of the individual should only be limited by the freedom of others: this means that “Freedom” does not include the freedom to exploit others. This also means that the freedom of the individual is maintained by the willingness of others to defend it by coming to the aid of anyone who is wronged and restoring to that person what was taken from them. Those who insist on exploiting others, or whose wrongs cannot be made right, are enemies of freedom and we chose to disassociate with them by removing them from our society.