

# Anarcho-Distributism and Anarchist Federalism

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## Distributism, Libertarianism, and Anarchism

Distributism is a social philosophy that advocates a market economy within a framework of government that creates certain rules. It advocates the wide distribution of wealth in an egalitarian manner, but not through any sort of Marxian-style redistribution. Instead, distributists want to create a governmental framework that makes it easier for people to become the owner of their own business. Distributists want individuals to have the opportunity to own their own private business or become a worker-owner in a worker-owned and worker-managed co-operative. Additionally, distributists emphasize the importance of social welfare programs. Within a framework of rules that favor widespread distribution of property, the market will naturally redistribute wealth in a just and egalitarian manner.

There has been a lot of debate between distributists and free-market libertarians. These debates have taken place between statist distributists and the more vulgar “right-wing” libertarians. However, I don’t think that there is necessarily a contradiction between distributism and market-libertarianism. The advocates of *laissez-faire* advocate both free markets and *fair* markets. A market is not free if the government compels you to purchase a good or service, but neither is it free if a corporation can compel you to purchase a good or service. A truly free market—a fair *laissez-faire*—requires a lack of compulsion. It requires protection for consumers. Great free-market economists like F.A. Hayek and Hernando de Soto Polar have observed that free markets are predicated upon “rules and social order.” A business owner needs to have rules that can guide him. He needs a framework of property rights (or right of possession) of some sort before he can sell anything or exchange anything. He needs some sort of recourse against theft. His customers need some sort of recourse against him, just in case there is a dispute. Suppose that the business owner takes a customer’s money but then fails to provide the goods/services that were purchased. There must be some system of courts, arbiters, or dispute resolution organizations. Without this sort of framework, there can be no free market.

A truly free market is based upon voluntary exchange, which means that it is free from compulsion from corporations just as much as it must be free from compulsion from government. This point is at least implied in the *non-aggression principle* of Murray Rothbard. If businesses

and corporations are allowed to tax their customers by taking money without providing services, then the corporation is tantamount to government and the market is not free. A “free market” where corporations are allowed to reign without any limitations or regulations is not a free market. Additionally, the corporations and businesses must not be allowed to restrict competition. If they can restrict competition through intellectual property laws or other legal privileges, then the market is not free. If the market is truly free and fair, then you have a genuine market economy. If the market is interventionist, with privileges for corporations and regulations that restrict competition, then you have capitalism rather than a free market. The critics of *laissez-faire* are mistaken in their assumption that free markets are markets without regulation.

The distributists have also set themselves apart from the anarchists. Their critique of anarchism is largely a Rawlsian critique. John Rawls justified the existence of the State on the basis of assuming that people would prefer a society with some safety net or basic welfare system to a society without such a thing. The problem with this justification of statism is that it assumes that only statism can provide such a society. In reality, a consensus-based conciliar model of governance in a stateless society could also provide a welfare system. The members of the community could voluntarily contribute money towards universal basic income, universal healthcare insurance, and other such welfare measures. In fact, it is likely that any collectivistic, communist, or mutualist anarchist society would have some sort of welfare system in place. There is no reason why Rawls’ argument would lend support to a statist liberal democracy over a voluntaryist or anarchist society with a welfare system. And as long as an anarchist society can have rules and social order and a welfare system of some sort, then there is no reason that an anarchist society could not also be a distributist society.

Perhaps the compatibility of anarchism and welfare isn’t so apparent, so allow me to give an illustration. For instance, an anarchist *polis* (autonomous city) with a consensus-based conciliar form of governance could, theoretically, choose to establish a welfare system. Everyone in the community could contribute \$100 per month, if that is what they agreed to during the consensus process. This would be like the “voluntary taxation” of the voluntaryists. On the other hand, the community could make note of inequalities in wealth and income and decide that it is not fair to have all people contribute the same amount. They could choose to implement a sort of *voluntary differential tax*, where the poor are allowed to pay less and the wealthy pay more.

It is even conceivable that such a society might be persuaded, by the arguments of Proudhon and Henry George, that the value of land that results from location and/or nature rather than from labor ought not to be viewed as rightly belonging to the individual proprietor—this could even be expanded to the value of products above the cost of production. If property rights are legitimately derived from labor, then any value that does not derive directly from labor would not rightly belong to the individual proprietor. And the community could agree that each individual is to hand over the surplus value to the community as a Georgist-style land value tax on a consensual and voluntaryist basis.

So long as this “tax” (not a real tax, but a voluntary contribution) was agreed upon by everyone through a Formal Consensus process, there is no reason that it would be incompatible with anarchist principles. It is precisely for this reason that I believe that distributism and anarchism are not mutually exclusive—distributism and anarchism are not incompatible. Market-libertarianism, distributism, and anarchism are not necessarily mutually exclusive and incompatible schools of thought.

### **Police, Military, and Law: An Anarcho-Distributist Model**

Anarchism is an ethical organizational theory. It holds that it is possible to organize society—from factories to governmental bodies—in a non-coercive, non-violent, and non-hierarchical fashion, so that true freedom and equality can prevail. Anarchism does not advocate violence and it does not advocate chaos. It advocates true democracy—direct democracy. Anarchy does not mean “no government.” It means “no rulers.” It means no political domination of one man over another, no institutions of control that allow certain individuals or groups to impose their arbitrary rule upon others.

Anarchism is not utopian. It does not claim to present a perfect model for society. It merely claims to present principles upon which the *best possible* model might be constructed. Unfortunately, we live in an imperfect world and the best possible systems will always fall short of perfection in practice. Anarchists are not utopians. Anarchists are realistic. And we realize that perfection is unobtainable. Nevertheless, we also recognize that perfection is something that can be approximated or approached, so that one model of social order can be an improvement over another. While we may never achieve perfection, we ought always to strive in that direction.

What might the organizational structure of an anarchist society look like? Well, it would be highly organized and ordered. It would not be an atomistic sort of individualism with a war of all against all. The stereotypical caricature of anarchy as violence and chaos is totally antithetical to everything that anarchists actually advocate and strive for. This false caricature of anarchy came about as the result of government propaganda.

An anarcho-distributist society would apply the principle of *subsidiarity* to politics. “*Subsidiarity* is an organizing principle that [holds that] matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority. Political decisions should be taken at a local level if possible, rather than by a central authority.”<sup>1</sup> The rules of the social order would be created locally.

Rules governing the commons (public space) would be made using a Formal Consensus process. Rather than representative democracy, anarchists advocate direct democracy. Formal Consensus has been demonstrated to work with large-scale organizations. Local communities would form councils, including **all** members of the community. (There might even be smaller community councils within a city that would federate together into a larger body for the city as a whole.) These councils would break up into smaller groups, thus allowing for easier discussion. The groups would each send one delegate (not representative), to present its proposal to the larger council.<sup>2</sup> The delegates would present the proposals of their groups, there would be discussion among the delegates, and then they would break back up into the smaller groups and further debate and discussion would take place. Each individual in the group could *consent* to the motion, *block* the motion, or *stand aside* and allow the motion to pass (while having some concerns)—Occupy Wall Street uses hand signals to allow people to express their stance in a non-verbal fashion, and such a system of hand signals might be employed here too. If a blocking motion is made, then further debate must be had until all concerns are resolved and consensus is reached. The communal council would make decisions regarding public matters, like road maintenance, traffic laws, speed limits, rules in public parks, and when to employ the militia in national defense.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subsidiarity\\_%28Catholicism%29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subsidiarity_%28Catholicism%29)

<sup>2</sup> In representative democracy, a *representative* is a person elected by the people as a politician—the representative speaks and acts of his own accord, not necessarily as the voters would like. A representative is given decision-making power. In direct democracy, a *delegate* has no political power but merely presents the views of one group to another group—the delegate tells one group of individuals what the consensus reached by another group of individuals was. The delegate has no decision-making power in himself.

Ultimately, this process leads to every member of the community having an equal say in the decision-making process. No one individual can be left out. This process guards against a proliferation of laws since it is difficult to reach consensus on things that are not clear-cut. In reality, we do not need thousands of pages of regulations to govern every aspect of our lives. This difficult process of passing laws is the great bulwark of liberty in a libertarian society. It makes it impossible to impose laws that the people do not want.

In today's age, this consensus process could be streamlined and greatly facilitated through technological means. It may not even be necessary for the council to meet in person, since much of this could be done online or using an app on a smartphone. And the blockchain technology could make it nearly impossible to manipulate the system, while also allowing for anonymity.

These communal councils would be local and autonomous. They would be independent of other such councils. However, anarchists propose the *federation* or *solidarisation* of such communities. The local communities would form contracts with one another and create a federation for mutual defense. Each community would form a local militia or national guard for its own defense. These militias and national guards would cross train and collaborate with other militias/guards within the federation. Consequently, an anarchist federation would have a military for national defense. Whether or not the militia/guard of any of the local communities would go to war would be a decision made by the community council through the Formal Consensus process. Unjust wars would be a thing of the past. The consensus process would require the soldiers and the community in general to consent to war before the military could be sent off to fight. (Of course, if the territory were under attack, then that would be another matter, since the people would organize for defense immediately under an understood consensus without a formal process.) Under such an anarchistic model, there would be no more soldiers blindly following orders and doing the bidding of corrupt politicians and corporations. Soldiers are always willing to fight and die for just causes. If their consent is required for declaring a war and engaging in combat, then defensive wars would still be fought. But soldiers are not likely to voluntarily go off and fight an offensive war against non-aggressors if they are allowed to be part of the decision-making process! What soldier would choose to put himself in harm's way for any reason other than to defend his family and country?

Anarchists oppose statist militaries because they are based upon the principle of *authority* or *force*, rather than being based upon *persuasion* and *consent*. Since statist militaries are based

upon authority, the commander-in-chief can use the military to do things that are morally despicable. He can initiate unjust wars, drone-strike schools and hospitals, and topple foreign governments for the sake of corporate interests such as oil, gold, and money. In a statist system, the military is not solely or primarily an instrument of national defense. On the contrary, the military in a statist system is primarily a political force under the control of the sovereign(s). Under an anarchistic system, militaries would be exclusively for defense, since **all** soldiers would be part of the decision-making process and soldiers are not so stupid as to actively pursue a policy that would put their lives at risk unless it be for the purpose of protecting their family and countrymen. In an anarchistic system, the military must be *persuaded* to fight, which means that there has to be sound rational and ethical reasons for going to war. The anarchist model is diametrically opposite of, and totally antithetical to, the existing statist arrangements.

As for the governing of the commons and the enforcement of rules regarding public matters, the militia might take over the police function or else the community council might decide to contract the police function out to a private security agency.

Within an anarcho-distributist society, the militia would not have a monopoly on defense service. A free market would flourish. Competitive agencies on the free market would be allowed to offer defense and security services. One model for “law and order” proposed by anarchists is the market-oriented insurance model. This model was originally proposed by Gustave de Molinari and developed further by Benjamin Tucker. In recent times, anarchist theorists have developed it even further and answered every imaginable objection to it. The Molinari-Tucker model proposes that you could take out insurance on your person and property with private insurance/security services or “rights enforcement agencies.” These “rights enforcement agencies” or private security services would insure your person and property against aggression and violation. If you are harmed or your property is stolen or vandalized, then the “rights enforcement agency” would be required to pay for the damages. They insure you against such things. Consequently, they have an incentive to prevent crime and protect you and your property. If they fail to prevent crime, they have to pay out claims for damages. If they cannot prevent the crime, then they are incentivized to investigate and locate the criminal so that the criminal can be made to pay restitution (otherwise the security agency has to pay the claim itself).

And the “rights enforcement agency” can always be taken to court if they refuse to pay damages for a legitimate claim. The court may be either a private “dispute resolution organization”

(DRO) that is mutually agreed upon by both parties involved or else it may be an arbiter or court appointed for such purposes by the community council through the Formal Consensus process. Furthermore, disputes between different “rights enforcement agencies” could also be resolved through private DROs or courts appointed by the community council. Some opponents of anarchism have argued that violence might break out between the “rights enforcement agencies” or that the “rights enforcement agencies” might try to use force to establish a monopoly and create a State. Within the anarcho-distributist model, the community would have an independent militia for national defense, separate from any market security forces, and the community could use its militia to intervene if any such problems were to arise.

This model of policing stands in absolute antithesis to the statist model. This model is not based upon *authority* or *arbitrary rule*, but on **service**. This anarchist model makes the duty of the security services (“police,” if you want to call them that) nothing more than to literally “protect and serve.” The security agency is there exclusively to protect the person and property of their customers. The security agencies in this anarchistic system would have no incentive to enforce arbitrary rules. They would not arrest people for “victimless crimes,” such as possession of marijuana or psychedelic mushrooms. Why? Because the “police” in such an anarchistic model do not work for the government, they do not enforce arbitrary laws written up by politicians—they work for the individuals and families who insure their persons and properties against aggression and theft through the insurance/security agency.

There may be some positive laws enacted by the community council through the Formal Consensus process that are arbitrary, and the community council may choose to contract out the enforcement of those laws to such private security agencies. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that those laws will have been reached through consensus, by persuading the entire community, and so the individuals who are prosecuted for any violation of positive law will truly be individuals who had a real social contract. All the members of the community will have consented to those laws. Furthermore, unjust positive laws would never be passed through a Formal Consensus process. If you tried to ban something harmless like marijuana, you would never get the consent of the entire community, so such a thing would never pass through to law under such an anarchistic system of government. At the same time, the community could regulate the health and safety standards of groups that give out food in public spaces, etc.

Everything that I am advocating here has been proven to work. The Spanish anarchists governed Catalonia for 3 years and successfully fought off the fascists with an anarchistic organizational structure, but finally were overtaken during World War II. I know you are thinking “but they were overtaken during the war,” yet I would like to point out that the French government also fell during that time. The anarchists only fail where **all** forms of government fail. The anarchists did not lose because their principles and style of government were weak but simply because they were vastly outnumbered by the fascist and national socialist hordes.

And there are a multitude of examples of the success of private courts and private police within a competitive system, from Ireland under the Brehon Code to modern Detroit. The anarchistic model does work, it has been proven to work, and there is absolutely nothing unrealistic about it. Furthermore, modern anarchists can look to these historical examples and create a synthesis, a new sort of anarchy that incorporates the best aspects of each.

In fact, the modern anarchist federation of Rojava Kurdistan has done precisely that. They have been autonomous for three years now (as of January 2016) and they’ve been fighting ISIS with their anarchist militias. In the last year, the size of the anarchist federation of Rojava Kurdistan in northern Syria has tripled. Not only has it historically worked, anarchy still works.

### **What About Difficult People?**

I would like to take a moment to address a particular objection to my model of a voluntary social order based upon consensus and direct democracy. The objection goes that there will always be people who will impede the consensus process: some people just won’t play fair—anti-social individuals will block consensus for no valid reason.

This objection ignores the power of social pressure. Social pressure is a power much stronger than law. For instance, people all stand and place their hand over their heart at ball games. The odd man in the bunch, the foreigner, immigrant, or anarchist, will conform and do the same, even though he feels no patriotic sentiment. The glaring eyes of others will pressure him to stand. The power of social derision is so strong that ostracism or shunning is usually not even necessary in order to force conformity. In fact, the mere thought that your actions might bring attention to yourself can often force conformity.

For instance, Pavlov’s bell experiment has been modified in order to condition people to stand upon the ringing of a bell. The unwitting subjects of the experiment found themselves



conforming to the herd and standing upon hearing the bell for no apparent reason, other than the reason that they felt pressure to conform. This psychological phenomenon is the reason that the government wastes money on things like Reefer Madness and paid patriotism. If the government could convince the people that drugs are bad so that society looks upon potheads with derision, then social pressure would enforce the law much better than any policeman ever could. If there is real shunning and ostracism, social pressure is nearly impossible to resist. Just as general strikes and boycotts can force businesses to change their behavior, so too can shunning persuade individuals to alter their behavior. This has been an idea propagated by anarchists from Bakunin to Rothbard.

Allow me to illustrate how things might play out in an anarchist federation of the future. Suppose that we live in the anarcho-distributist *polis* of Bellocshire. Our autonomous city (*polis*) is one community within a greater anarchist federation. We have a conciliar consensus model of governance, such as the one I have outlined above. The population in Bellocshire is 50,000 adults.

Let's suppose that there is a particularly anti-social individual named Mr. Misanthrope in our town. He is rather unfriendly and blocks consensus all the time. He doesn't have any good reason for it; he just likes to be a jerk. We are gathered together to discuss the road situation. We need traffic laws and some road maintenance. Nearly everyone has come to agreement on a 50mph speed limit on the big roads and a 30mph limit on the residential streets, but Mr. Misanthrope blocks consensus without a reasonable counter-proposal. Nearly everyone agrees on contributing \$5 per year for repairing the roads (which gives us \$250,000 for road maintenance each year, with the excess carried over to the next year). Mr. Misanthrope blocks the motion. Well, the town does need these things and the motions were both perfectly reasonable. So, how is the community going to force Mr. Misanthrope to get on board with consensus for the sake of the greater good? My answer is *social pressure*.

After having blocked consensus and thereby upsetting the community, Mr. Misanthrope goes to the store to buy groceries. The owner of the store is so upset with Mr. Misanthrope's anti-social behavior that he refuses to sell him any food. Furthermore, Mr. Misanthrope frequents a brothel—a brothel, by the way, that is collectively owned by the women who work there, a brothel that has regular STD screening for both prostitutes and clients, a brothel that has really good security and high wages too. Mr. Misanthrope goes to the brothel, but they have banned him. The women will not offer their services until he learns to play fair. "Well, no problem," thinks Mr.

Misanthrope, “I’ll just find a girlfriend.” He calls up his highschool sweetheart Angelina McCutebutt, but she too does not want anything to do with him. She wants children someday; and she wants her children to live in a society with safe roads. Furthermore, when Mr. Misanthrope gets home, he finds a letter from his insurance/security agency: it tells him that they have dropped his coverage due to their disapproval of his behavior, and because he is a greater risk to insure since the entire community hates him now. Moreover, protesters are now picketing outside his business and no one purchases his services anymore because of a boycott. The community has organized against him! Well, Mr. Misanthrope has a lot of social pressure against him now. It will be impossible for him to survive under such conditions. He will be forced to change his “block” to a “stand aside” and let the motions pass.

It has been suggested that the “bad apples” would just bounce back and forth between different communities. Let’s assume that Mr. Misanthrope instead withdraws from the community and moves to a neighboring community. He goes to the anarcho-communist city of Bakuninople, which is part of the same federation as Bellocshire. Well, Bakuninople denies him citizenship/residency because they contacted folks in Bellocshire to inquire about his character, and the people of Bellocshire do not recommend him. The communists of Bakuninople will not give him possession of any land in their community. He must turn elsewhere. So he turns to Rothbardville, a propertarian city in the federation. The people of Rothbardville let him in, but he finds that there is no consensus process there. The roads are all privately owned. He has to pay a toll in order to use the roads. Additionally, he must obey the traffic rules and speed limits set by the individuals who own the roads. Hence, he is forced by the proprietary nature of Rothbardville to comply with traffic laws and he is forced to contribute to road maintenance through tolls. He may stay in Rothbardville and begrudgingly obey the proprietary rules or he may decide to return to Bellocshire.

He will likely think that Bellocshire was nicer because he got to have a say over matters like traffic laws, whereas proprietors can arbitrarily set unreasonable rules in Rothbardville. Additionally, Bellocshire has a welfare system with healthcare benefits and a universal basic income, whereas Rothbardville lacks such benefits. In Bellocshire, the people had consented to each contribute \$100 per month to a welfare fund, which adds up to a welfare fund with \$60,000,000 of contributions per year. And the welfare fund is much higher than that number

because excess funds are carried forward to the next year. So he will decide to return to Bellocshire and play fairly in the future because of the welfare benefits.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, we find in anarcho-distributism a non-hierarchical social order that is both egalitarian and libertarian, with a strong military and police forces but without any war-mongering or unnecessary aggression, with a system of rules that ensure fairness and a welfare system that provides a safety net. In anarchism, every necessary or desirable function of the State is provided without a State, and every negative consequence of State action is eliminated. There is no longer any logical reason for people to defend statist systems of government. The State is now obsolete.