Bellamy Fitzpatrick
An Invitation to Desertion
Spring 2018

Backwoods: a journal of anarchy and wortcunning, No. 1, Spring 2018. Retrieved on September 22, 2018 from https://viscerapvd.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/bellamyfitzpatrick-aninvitationtodesertion.pdf
Backwoods is Edited by Bellamy Fitzpatrick, Fera Sylvain, and Thuggy Whiskers, PhD. Backwoods is published twice a year by Enemy Combatant, publishers of anarchist books and pamphlets, with and eye to small scale, low-tech, and natural materials, as much as is possible within the bowels of leviathan.

theanarchistlibrary.org

An Invitation to Desertion

Bellamy Fitzpatrick

Spring 2018

Contents

as to make merely "pockets of happiness" that quickly pass away after our deaths, I believe the choice is clear. It is a modern, utilitarian moral calculus that measures the value of a course of action in terms of its expected quantitative consequences, and thus elicits the dismissive scoff at the possible insignificance of a relatively small number of deserters scattered around the world. For many of the ancients, as well as modern iconoclasts, value and meaning are found instead in the individual's own sense of virtue, all the more so in the face of tragedy. Exactly what such a virtue ethic might be in this late period of civilization will be developed throughout this journal, but the values espoused throughout this piece are a first glimpse.

Thus, our invitation to all those who can hear it: Refuse the submissive values and false hopes of the dominant ideologies; follow the implications of radical critique — say and live what you know to be true. Refuse the slavery of being a mere appendage of Leviathan — take back your life. Refuse the cancerousness of technoindustrial-agricultural life — pursue mutuality with the living world and rediscover your animality.

Notes

ties — against this hubris and death, we assert the return to a self-conscious *animality*.

Our Invitation

To put things only a bit simplistically, we must ask ourselves questions about how we truly want to live in the near future: Will the human being be nothing but a function, a mere epiphenomenon of vast political and social forces, a residue of commodity production and consumption? Or will the human being be an existentialist at the center of her own life, a creature who coparticipates in the creation and consumption of her habitat, an animal among a world she senses as kin? These questions imply profoundly different values, and the outcomes of pursuing them could not be more different.

Through the way of life called civilization, we have become parasites of one another and a cancer to the broader biosphere. The modern human is a tragicomic caricature: a creature who cannot so much as eat or shit without plugging into one of the apertures of a vast, world-eating industrial infrastructure; a creature whose capacities are daily diminished and who is evermore humiliated and moronized by the latest consumerist excrescence, from automated salt-shakers and "organic water" to hiring fake friends to appear in "selfies" taken by that apotheosis of anomie, the smartphone; and a creature for whom the emptiness and ennui of his life is so obvious and incontrovertible that it can only be drowned by ceaseless and shallow distraction. The gravity of our error has been plain for centuries; it is time to turn away.

The present situation is grim: the forces of the parasitic classes are vast, submission and resignation are widespread, and the biosphere is, by some estimates, already irrevocably in a mass extinction spiral. But whether we deserters are so fabulously successful as to initiate a widespread secessionist movement, or so insignificant

Backwoods is an invitation to those who can hear it, those who already know that something is deeply false and diseased about our way of life and who are looking for fellowship in truly confronting our crisis. This crisis is not one of surface issues, something that can be remedied with either well-intentioned social reform or rational tinkering with economic organization — it instead lies at the very core of our way of life: our values, our relations, and our ways of seeing the world. We are living through a great derangement, the ecocidal and immiserating culture of Leviathan, in which the majority are possessed by a slavish and consumerist ethic, a profound alienation from the non-human world, and a deep confusion built on cultural lies.

This piece is an introduction to the theory motivating *Backwoods*. As theory is *thea*, "a view," and *horan* "to see" (Online Etymology Dictionary), we are talking here of a *whole way of seeing*, an understanding of the world and how to act meaningfully within it. It is presented as an antidote to the reigning ideology of neoliberal republicanism, aiming to delve into the roots of our crisis so as to understand how to live as much as possible outside it and against it. Our ethos will be explicated further in this piece and developed continually throughout this journal, but, briefly, it is the following:

I. We indict the Civilization of Leviathan as a truly insane way of life predicated on the creation of States to enforce the enslavement of the many so that the parasitic few may acquire absurd wealth and influence. Such social relations are poisonous to all involved, being based on venality and coercion, ridiculous commodity fetishism, and the death of real human community through domination and atomization.

II. We denounce the world-eating mode of subsistence known as agriculture, with its effacement of ecosystems and their replacement with human domesticates, as a fundamental human error, one generative of mass extinction, soil exhaustion, war, and overpopulation.

III. We refuse the techno-industrial logic that treats the beautiful tapestry of the living world as just so much grist for the mill, as an unliving "resource" to be "developed" — that is, to be endlessly plundered and paved, extirpated of life, and replaced by parking lots, factory farms, waste dumps, extraction sites, and our apartment complexes and offices that fittingly resemble battery cages.

IV. We reject the meaninglessness of modernity that has produced perhaps the most humiliated, dislocated, deskilled, distracted, lonely, unhealthy, and unloved people that have ever lived.

V. We champion anarchy: the freedom that comes from conscious self-ownership and voluntary relations of mutuality with our human and nonhuman kin in small, autarkic, face-to-face communities based in a regenerative relationship with the land.

VI. We call for the application of knowledge gained from both traditional wisdom and modern ecology to the pursuit of modes of subsistence that are harmonious with the world that sustains us: foraging, hunting, fishing, and forest gardening.

VII. We espouse a Neo-Luddism that consists of eschewing toxic and stupefying technologies, learning well-rounded skill sets for furnishing a living, and exploring and reviving traditional knowledge, skills, and forms of healing.

VIII. We embrace the vivacity of deeply ecologically harmonious ways of life and the sense of place, presence, and fulfillment that comes from nourishing and being nourished by an enveloping, living world full of consciousness and agency.

pathic and socially parasitic tendencies of human beings are best addressed by face-to-face, small-scale relations in which dominators and exploiters have no police and armies to manipulate and hide behind, no religious or political ideologies to rationalize their rapacity, and no mass anonymity to obscure to themselves their own naked predaceousness — such parasites could be confronted immediately and directly by a group who could count on one another, which is indeed what happens in such cultures. Against the mass anonymity of modernity, we assert that reinhabitation implies a return to the intimacy of the *band society*.

Belonging and place cannot be truly realized unless and until human communities choose as groups of individuals to consciously relinquish the intoxicated fantasy of human supremacy and relate to the community of beings around them not as owners, managers, or stewards, but instead as cocreators. The earliest-known monumental religious architecture appears to depict humans mastering dangerous animals, and signs of agriculture and animal husbandry developed around the monument not long after its creation (Mann). If religion and agriculture began the human separation from the community of beings by suggesting that the human was spiritually distinct and materially capable of restructuring whole ecosystems for its gain, this separation only deepened with the Abrahamic religions that desacralized and profaned the living world in favor of the supernatural and otherworldly. The secularization brought on by Humanism and scientism deepened it further by positing the world was composed of dead, unfeeling, rationally manipulable matter to be put in service to human civilization. Thus comes our present era of the pathological rationalism of techno-industrialism and consumerism, where toxic lakes are created as byproducts for the production of smartphones with which bored, lonely people diddle away their lives (Maughan). The greatest fruits of our separation from our living kin have been mass extinction, existential anxiety, and a menagerie of stupefying entertainment commodi-

sustained, face-to-face, autarkic communities of kinship. In such a lifeway, it would be possible to know everyone's story, to count on one another, to live without fear of one another, and to be united in a common purpose as what one might call a band society, or, less preferably, a family or tribe.[18] Such a group would not be a suppression of individuality through stifling and incessant collectivism, but in fact the terrain on which a true union of individualities could grow, as the ethnographic record of such band societies suggests (Berezkin, Clastres, Kaczynski, Turnbull).

Averse to utopic thinking, we recognize as philosophical pessimists that human conflict and suffering are perennial — but this perspective only furthers the case for the superiority of this lifeway. Surrounded by lifelong companions, one can face misfortune with the support and compassion of loved ones. Facing the ineradicable difficulties of life and its hard choices, one can be challenged by friends to rise to the occasion, eschew weakness and excuses, and be encouraged to actualize their potential. A culture of ethics, honor, and accountability can only be fostered and maintained through the combination of loving and shaming that comes from sustained intimacy — our culture of late modernity, where one can disappear into anonymity and find a new social group at the first sign of conflict or disappointment, is the grotesque antithesis of healthful human relations. How much of human misery today is a result of loneliness, fear of abandonment, sexual poverty and jealousy, or isolation in times of crisis? Finally, the psycho-

[18] Band, although colloquially odd, is the preferred term among anthropologists for small, face-to-face communities, and it is thus the term we will use in *Backwoods*. Although terminological distinctions are not entirely consistent across anthropological literature, tribe is generally used to pick out groups sufficiently large as to no longer be bound by faceto-face communication and kinship ties, and instead bound through small political institutions and roles like councils of elders, big men, or chiefs — for us, such groups, while still decidedly anti-authoritarian relative to States, are already past the point of anarchy and not part of our goal. Going beyond anthropological accuracy, "tribe" and "family" are to us laden with New Age and cult associations — band is thus decidedly the best term.

To begin communicating our philosophy to those who can hear it, this invitation to the desertion of Leviathan's entrails will consist of: 1. a brief examination of our crisis, which occurs at the levels of human social relations, broader ecological relations, and within the mind of the individual; 2. a frank recognition of the fact that the political realities of modern nation-states mean they can only perpetuate the crisis, not rectify it; 3. a short analysis of the alternative political ideologies of the Left and the Right, revealing that they, too, are incapable of addressing the heart of the issues afflicting us; 4. a look at anarchism, the most radical political tendency, and how even most of its forms fall short of our goals; 5. an introduction to the theory of anti-civilization anarchy on which *Backwoods* is based; 6. and, finally, a first glimpse of the implications for praxis of our perspective: desertion, autarky, and reinhabitation.

The Crisis of Modern Civilization

The vast majority of human beings living on Earth today have extremely little control over their lies and shared world. The ways in which we eat, gain shelter, and make a living are largely decided for us, overdetermined by existing social norms that we can influence only minutely, allowing us only a little room to maneuver in decisions about how we want to live and what values we want to pursue. Most of us eat food from grocery stores or restaurants, grown in distant places we will never see under unknown and uncontrollable conditions. We rent or take out a mortgage to find a home we did not build with neighbors we did not choose and must labor immediately and continually to pay for it. After going from place to place to beg for the opportunity to sell our time, touting our value with a piece of paper that summarizes how compliant and productive we are, we are rewarded by surrendering what is produced with our labor, how our labor is performed, and what is done with the product afterward.

The cycle of life seems to confront us like a blurred, harried race. From childhood, most of us are indoctrinated in compulsory government- or corporate-run schools where we are taught false or misleading histories, trained to be obedient to closely measured linear time, and inured to peer competition in the performance of duties issued by authority. In adolescence, through schooling, socializing, and propaganda, most of us adopt the religious, secular, and/or political ideologies with which we are bombarded that make our reality seem desirable, appropriate, or at least inevitable. Besides the jockeying for selling one's labor mentioned above, what is called success in adulthood for many is vying to exchange the terror of being alone for the sanctioned isolation of the nuclear family, that reproductive unit that allows the cycle to begin anew. Elderhood completes this humiliation, as one's inability or unwilingness to continue laboring often means increasing social irrelevance and impotence that commonly ends in being tended to like an invalid by hired strangers.

What is commonly called our *freedom* consists of only the most trivial and useless forms of freedom: the freedom to vote for some of one's rulers among predetermined and highly similar political candidates, the freedom to choose among commodities that shriek at us with their labels and advertisements, the freedom to escape presence in one's own life through a vast menagerie of pornography, television series, films, and — most recently, at the furthest outposts of moronizing innovation — virtual reality and sex robots.

As we modern slaves — for we do, as we shall see, truly deserve that perhaps inflammatory title — struggle to assert some sense of agency in our own lives, the wider world engulfs us as a vast and variegated, almost unfathomable crisis. Our crisis is multifarious, a web of interrelated and mutually reinforcing subcrises — ecological, social, economic, psychic, philosophical — that not only immiserate our lives and poison our bodies, but, at this late stage, now threaten the integrity of the whole biosphere, that complex association of organisms and their habitats that encompasses the Earth

requires a sense of belonging. The anthropologist Robin Dunbar, through a study of human behavior and neurobiology, has suggested that humans are cognitively equipped to function in group sizes of around one hundred and fifty individuals, a number that we seem to subconsciously gravitate toward in activities that require a high level of trust, efficiency, and self-organization to be performed well.[17] Agreeing with but going beyond Dunbar, I would say that it is only in sustained, regular, faceto-face contact that deep empathy can be fostered and maintained — this is how we evolved and how we have spent most of our existence as humans, in what anthropologists refer to as *band societies*. Humans are certainly capable of com-passion and mutuality; but the tragic history of civilizations incontrovertibly shows us the human capacity for astonishing cruelty and wantonness when other humans and nonhumans can be treated not as sentient beings but as abstractions and aliens. Ours is the era of false communities: we are told, and popularly believe, that we are members of nations, citizens of cities, followers of religions — but most of us live among strangers, with shallow or nonexistent relationships with those near whom we live, with whom we work, and whom we pass on the street.

To truly flourish as organisms in communion with our habitats, we must live in a way that nourishes the human psyche: in small,

[17] Dunbar initially arrived at the number by noticing a positive relationship between the neocortex size of primates and the size of their social groups — he posited that the relationship may be causal and extrapolated from it that human neocortex size suggested a stable social group of one hundred and fifty. Subsequently, he bolstered the theory with empirical data based on numerous human groups that maintained relationships and/or worked together closely across space and time, from military units to factory workers to the number of holiday greeting cards families send. Dunbar's theory has come under criticism on a number of fronts that strike me as picking out serious weaknesses, such as the observation that social insects, with relatively tiny brains, live in societies with their own sophisticated micro-politics — my position does not depend on it being literally true, but only on its being a conceptual guidepost for what is also known phenomenologically.

we purchase blessed ignorance at the price of freedom. Autarky means contesting this submissiveness with the assertion that regaining these skills is not an unfortunate burden necessary for freedom, but instead an enriching of life and an enhancement of personal power — using, and thus strengthening, both body and mind in a variety of ways is a joyful fulfillment of our full capacities as organisms.

Throughout this journal, we will examine *forest gardening* as a methodology of achieving autarky. Through its practice, one can gain subsistence from the land without the ecocide and drudgery of agriculture, enriching the land for not only human, but also non-human, purposes and thus achieving a kind of agricultural counter-revolution. We at *Backwoods* are thus not only true radicals — in the sense of looking to understand and address the radix, or root, of our crisis — but also the truest form of reactionaries.

Reinhabitation

Reinhabitation is the outcome of desertion and autarky. Anarchist Emma Goldman referred to a liberated existence as "simpler, but far deeper and richer"[16] - I say that this is the essence of reinhabitation. It is, in the most profound sense, *being somewhere*. It is shaping and feeding the landbase as the landbase feeds and shapes you, consciously being part of the interconnected senses and metabolic processes of one's ecosystem, coparticipating with other creatures to tend to the whole that sustains us all. Against the globalism of modernity, we assert a return to *place*.

Autarky is possible as a lone individual, but its solo pursuit is both more difficult and more joyless than when done cooperatively. Morever, as primates, we crave companionship and are most vivacious when nourished by intimate relationships — a sense of *place*

[16] To be clear, Emma Goldman's comment was particular to her vision of life for liberated women, but it applies just as well generally.

and gives to it the richness of life in its beautifully simultaneous unity and diversity.

Our ecological crisis is one of accelerating biocide that nearly defies imagination. Because of our technopathological culture of agriculture, urbanicity, and industrialism, species are going extinct at a rate one thousand times faster than the normal, background rate (De Vos et al.). Forebodingly, only the great mass extinctions in the history of the Earth compare to this rate of death, and the signs of its severity surround us. The soils are becoming lifeless (Moss and Scheer) and washing into the sea (World Economic Forum), when they are not being entombed beneath pavement (Brown). The oceans are becoming acidic (NOAA), devoid of coral (Eyre et al.), and emptied of fish (Tanzer, et al.). The air is becoming increasingly carcinogenic (WHO) and extinguished of insects (Hallmann et al.). The more pessimistic of climatologists are currently suggesting that we may be very near or past the point of setting off positive feedback loops that, once triggered, will unavoidably bring about dramatic temperature rises within the next few decades (Hall), and even the minimal goals of the more optimistic are not being met (Shibli).

As without, so within the human psyche is collapsing as surely as the biosphere by which it is nourished. Depression, "the number one psychological disorder in the western world", abounds, afflicting more than 17% of Americans. Since the inception of unmitigated consumerism in the mid20th century, there are an estimated ten times as many people suffering from depression, with the incidence more than doubling in the past twenty years (Pietrangelo, Elliott and Tyrrell), leading some psychologists to bluntly acknowledge depression as the quintessential "disease of modernity," as "humans have dragged a body with a long hominid history into an overfed, malnourished, sedentary, sunlight-deficient, sleep-deprived, competitive, inequitable, and socially-isolating environment with dire consequences." (Hidaka). Fewer than one in five sufferers even seek help or acknowledge their con-

dition — misery, perhaps, is seen as the norm as we expect less and less from life (Real).

Suicide, depression's catastrophic end, is the eighth-highest cause of death and also on the rise — among the middle-aged, it rose thirty percent from 1999 to 2010 (Elliott and Tyrrell). Undoubtedly, one of the most appropriate symbols of our time is the presence of nets below bridges and windows that cannot be opened on tall office buildings and hotels: the social planners anticipate the broken, hollowed-out worker or customer who decides one lonely night to finally end their existence, and they deny them even that freedom.

Meanwhile, empathy, that essentially human capacity to feel what others feel, has fallen at an accelerating rate in recent decades, while narcissism, the defensive enclosure of the self by a false persona (Vaknin), has increased during the same period. This psychic bleaching is attributed by researchers to widespread social changes: an increased interest in accruing wealth, decreased frequency of reading, increased social isolation, fewer friendships, and, of course, a greatly increased use of technological gadgets (Konrath et al, Kristol, Zaki).

The Politics of "The End of History"

To those who take our shared crisis seriously, the politics of the *status quo* can offer no true solution. More than that, the very existence of politics, as a specialized activity separated from life, is itself a manifestation of the crisis: it is the willed abdication of the many from responsibility over their own lives and shared world; it is the modern secular theology (Schmitt), in which one begs for deliverance by a vast and invisible being known as the State through the prayer of voting; and it is, of course, the province of one of the parasitic classes we call *politicians*, the professionalized caretakers of the dysfunctional social order.

In almost all cases, desertion will not and cannot be quick or total, but it can nonetheless meaningfully be incremental and partial, pushing toward ever-greater withdrawal as deserters come together, share skills and inspiration, and create informal networks of mutual aid. This journal is, among other things, intended as an organ for the creation of such networks.

Autarky

In reciprocity with desertion is autarky, the knowledge and practice of providing one's subsistence — again, food, water, shelter, fuel, and medicine — for and by oneself in an unalienated relationship with one's habitat and in voluntary cooperation with others with whom one freely associates. Desertion, if it is not to be suicidal, is only possible in proportion with one's practice of autarky; and, in turn, a true engagement with autarky prefigures and implies desertion.

The economy of capitalist modernity, with its imposed division of labor and its thanatotic evisceration of the living world, pressures us into lifestyles that are psychically and materially distant from our habitats and into occupations in which we tend to learn only a small number of skills related to survival — and perhaps not even that. Pursuing autarky thus implies a rejection of this hyperspecialization in favor of a profound reskilling, a regaining of the venerable and valuable skills of foraging, tending, tracking, hunting, fishing, preserving, woodworking, herbalism, and others that were, until very recently, so common among humans.

Recalling McQuinn's "Slave Syndrome" mentioned above, because the hyperspecialization of our bondage has meant that most of these skills have been so foreign to us for all of our lives, the prospect of learning them and doing all of the activities necessary for living ourselves may be intimidating, even terrifying, such that we may retreat into the false, cloying comfort of servitude in which

vaguely taken to calling "attack," which I feel has been greatly exaggerated in importance, often very misguidedly conducted, commonly easily recuperated by the parasitic social classes, and woefully overshadowing what ought to be the primary goals of desertion, autarky, and reinhabitation. It is only an empty bluff, or a suicidal and mass homicidal impulse, to prioritize attacking civilization when oneself and one's kin totally depend on its infrastructure and social relations for their survival.

It may very well be necessary and appropriate to resist more confrontationally at certain junctures, but much of anarchist activity these days is a repetitive exercise in self-righteous victimhood, a perpetual motion machine animated by a ressentiment-fueled martyr complex: rioting, aggressively confronting police, destroying public and private property — all of which accomplish next to nothing when civic and economic activity returns to normalcy one or several days later, but which often result in arrests, fines, incarceration, and injury for the activists involved. One attempts to assault directly an enemy who is best equipped and enormously accustomed to absorb and/or crush direct assaults, knowing that they will likely only inflict superficial scratches on their enemy while risking the total destruction of their lives — only a virulently self-sacrificial morality that places catharsis over wisdom could motivate such behavior. One loses, but feels vindicated, justified, and redeemed in their loss, and the oppression they receive only proves their dedication to righteousness and the turpitude of their enemies — and so the cycle continues.

At best, rioting may pressure politicians to pass certain reforms, which means one has fallen perfectly back into the trap of reformism. Again, there may be a time and place for certain very specific forms of sabotage and attack, but the greatest destabilization to the dominant paradigm will likely be caused by civilization's own selfundermining productive processes. In any case, desertion does harm the ruling order by depriving it of the resource on which it totally depends: the daily submission of slaves.

The dominant ideology of the modern political class flows from celebrated political scientist Francis Fukuyama's laughably millenarian declaration in 1989 that we had achieved "the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (Fukuyama). Fukuyama's intellectual descendants, the neoconservatives and neoliberals who now dominate both major political parties of the United States, congratulate themselves on ruling a society whose highest virtue is accruing wealth by plundering the living world and climbing to the top of corporate slave hierarchies in the ritualized, pacified war of all against all that we euphemize as "the free market". This ideology's elite are, variously, either so convinced of the greatness of their lifeway or so mendaciously selfserving that they forcibly spread the gospel of "freedom and democracy" to foreign lands through wars for "regime change."

Even among believers in legitimate political authority – that is, those who believe it is appropriate and desirable to have rulers so long as those rulers are good and just — rampant political corruption is an open secret, a fact recognized by the everyperson in quotidian conversation. The ancient habits of graft, influence peddling, embezzlement, and other forms of corruption are not only alive, but thriving — they are a perpetual, inherent feature of a democratic republic, which merely selects for ambitious, venal demagogues who engage in these practices rather than, as it is often imagined, *preventing* their rise. In our present era, the thinness of political legitimacy has reached the point that politicians routinely make speeches in which they deride the political process itself and openly refer to others as bought-andpaid-for political careerists. In this light, when it is often lamented by political commentators that only about half of the US population eligible to vote chooses to do so, we might instead ask why so many people still believe that we can be saved by *getting the right people into office.*

Indeed, the utter emptiness of the political process is lain bare from a cursory examination of the past few decades of U.S. presidential and congressional elections, during which the two dominant parties have repeatedly traded power, but nothing whatsoever has been done to forestall the implementation of newer forms of naked authoritarianism: murder by drone via presidential edict, aggressive persecution of journalists and whistleblowers, the incarceration without trial and subsequent torture of perceived enemies, the nearly ubiquitous surveillance of the population, the normalization of "free speech zones" outside of which protest is not allowed, and the re-legalization of use of the military to enforce domestic law (Abu El-Haj, Mian, Risen, Sterne, Wolf). In 1918, historian and philosopher Oswald Spengler predicted that sometime around the year 2000, the most powerful Western nation, in an effort to resist its decline and destabilization, would become a new Caesarism — we are watching his prediction manifest itself (Spengler).

The Failure of Alternative Political Ideologies

As the desolation around the human being mirrors the desolation within the individual amidst the rise of this new techno-authoritarianism, the political alternatives to the *status quo* on both the Left and the Right, correspondingly, become increasingly ghoulish. With incredible foresight in the mid-19th century, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche predicted that the nihilism brought on by the long, slow disintegration of Christianity would cause people of the West to willingly flee into the prisons of totalitarian political regimes to embrace a new, secular theology as a salve for their existential malaise — the horrors of Communism and Fascism in the 20th century bore out his prediction profoundly (Nietzsche). Now, however, the politically active of the younger generations, with amnesic zealotry, are intent on repeating these

ture, and other technical fixes cannot fundamentally alter this corrupt foundation — they presently function only to obscure it.

Moreover, civilization depends for its stability on reformers of all kinds to protect its human constituents and nonhuman victims from its worst excesses: social welfare protects against crippling destitution and its resultant social chaos, the expansion of civil rights neuters potentially dangerous underclasses and outlaws by allowing some of them to feel they suddenly have a stake in the preservation of the social order, environmental protection legislation means the poisoning and denuding of the biosphere to the point of uninhabitability will take a bit longer. The reformer, who might imagine himself the staunch social critic, is thus ironically civilization's most sincere and adroit guardian. Nearly the same can be said of the revolutionary, who, as was discussed above, is a kind of aggressive hyperreformer, refusing incrementality in favor of a dramatic and immediate transformation of civilization. But the history of civilization is a history of its being reformed and revolutionized — indeed, progressive social reform was part of the very earliest States.[15] We are officially told, and it is popularly believed, that we in the modern West live in the most reformed, enlightened, liberated civilizations that have ever existed (and in the United States, our civilization was born in revolution), yet these civilizations' ruling classes offer us nearly no influence whatsoever on policy decisions, surveil evermore of our lives, crush political dissent outside of narrowly permitted avenues, and have gutted the living world to nearly its last breath — such are the fruits of reform and revolution.

To anticipate the anarchist critic: desertion does not necessarily imply that all forms of *attentat* are to be rejected outright; but it does mean a profound reevaluation of what some anarchists have

[15] Consider the reign of Urukagina, the ensi (ruler) of the city-state of Lagash in 24th-century B.C. in Mesopotamia, who might be civilization's first progressive reformist authoritarian.

the State are reproduced daily primarily through the submissive, undertheorized thoughts and gestures of the many — because civilization is first and foremost the *civitas* that we psychosocially create — it follows that we must unmake it through abandoning its lifeway. Material desertion means decreasing or eliminating dependence on civilized slave economies for one's subsistence — food, water, shelter, fuel, and medicine — in favor of its obtainment through direct interface with one's habitat individually or through voluntary cooperation in free association with others. Psychic desertion means the abandonment of the reified and submissive civilized slave ideologies on which the daily functioning of society is based; the alienated and false relationships of social scripts and roles; and the stupeyfing succor of delusory religions, pacifying entertainment, and commodity fetishism. Replacing this civilized worldview, I suggest, would mean in a nutshell the adoption of a philosophy of conscious self-ownership and personal liberation, the pursuit of openhearted relations based in mutuality and voluntary association in common projects, and the embrace of the hard truths of life with a sense of existentialism and personal honor rather than the comforting illusions civilization offers us as carrots for our submission. It would mean further a deep identification of oneself as part of the flesh of the world, as necessarily tied to the life of all other earthly beings — depending on one's ontological or metaphysical beliefs, this might mean an acknowledgement of the material codependency of all creatures in the biosphere, or coexistence with them as part of the *anima mundi*, or world-soul.

To anticipate the reformist critic of desertion: An immediate corollary of this view is that efforts at reforming society must be rejected as ultimately counterproductive. As was touched on above, civilization cannot be reformed into a benign lifeway for either humans or the wider living world, as it depends foundationally on slavery and irrevocably entails ecocide. We will examine in future issues how the promises of so-called *green energy*, *organic agricul-*

failed experiments in the perfectibility of the human through the authority of the State.

Much of the Left, from more reformist to more revolutionary variants, now embraces what is variously called the ideology of *social justice*, *antioppression practice*, or, usually disparagingly, *identity politics*, in which our crisis is understood primarily in terms of institutionalized oppressor/oppressed dyads: White/Person of Color, Settler/Indigenous, Male/Female, Straight/LGBTQ, Ablebodied/disabled, and so forth. Through this understanding of oppression – a fusion of Maoism and vulgarized postmodernism, often under- or unrecognized as such by its adherents — members of the oppressor half of the dualisms are objectively and perhaps unavoidably dominators: not only their actions but also their ways of thinking are apt to reproduce this oppression, even if the individual in question consciously rejects and resists the system of institutionalized hierarchy as a whole. Conversely, members of the oppressed half of the dualisms are not only perceived as innocent victims but also objectively revolutionary figures well-placed to be the leaders of resistance: their status as the oppressed not only gives them a specialist knowledge of the system as a whole, but also means virtually any action that they take against their oppressors is justified and liberatory.

This dualistic analysis, while certainly getting at something genuine, nonetheless ignores or downplays the fact that the actually-lived experience of hierarchy is contextual and dialectical, not universal and straightforwardly top-down: the parasite is not master of the host, but engaged in a complex and nuanced codependence with it that necessarily includes both some level of submission and

[1] For some excellent expositions of this theme, see the famous master-slave dialectic of Hegel in his Phenomenology of Spirit and the concluding chapter of Orlando Patterson's excellent Slavery and Social Death, in which he argues the biological concept of the parasite is the most parsimonious way of understanding relationships of domination and exploitation.

accommodation by the host and some level of weakness and incentivization by the parasite.[1]

An even worse and more obvious error of social justice ideology is its obfuscation that in our present reality the vast majority of so-called oppressors are themselves dispossessed and enslaved subjects. The European-descended American male, imagined as tremendously "privileged" in this world that is supposedly made for him, is himself likely the descendent of people who were serfs, who were dispossessed of land from which they derived their subsistence, and/or who were enslaved in factories. He himself is born into a world in which everything he needs to survive is owned, psychically and materially barred from him. He is no master, but only a differently privileged slave — and every large slave society has depended for its integrity on such tiers of privilege that divide the slaves against one another. The adherents of social justice ideology have thus internalized their rulers' gambit by blaming our crisis primarily on their fellow slaves.

The creeping authoritarianism of this ostensibly liberatory political tendency increasingly reveals itself in various ways that, while certainly not universal, are nonetheless common and broadly endorsed or tolerated by the Left: a vulgar understanding of poststructuralism that dismisses any pragmatic use of empirical inquiry as necessarily part and parcel of the oppressive Western apparatus whenever its conclusions contradict Leftist ideology;[2] a Marcusean willingness to legally or extralegally suppress the speech of individuals or groups denounced as objective oppressors by equating speech with violence and the suppression of such speech as legitimately defensive counter-violence (Marcuse); and frequent

[2] For example, through a watered-down and distorted version of philosopher Michel Foucault's concept of the épistémè of any era, which he understood as the usually-unconscious, a priori epistemology of an era — that is, the hidden assumptions within a society's discourses of knowledge that make it possible to make truth claims at all. In social justice ideology, this often boils down to shallowly denying the validity of any truth claim deemed as "oppressive."

Right similarly obfuscates the issue by attempting to dissolve it into a common identity of nationalism. The anarchists come closest, but fail to sufficiently delve into either our crises material origins in agriculture and industrialism or their psychic origins in self-alienation, instead positing that a secularized millenarian deliverance will solve our crisis.

As we will explore in more detail in future issues, the further corollaries of the anti-civilization critique reveal that agriculture and industrialism necessarily entail a continual despoliation of the land and a resultant constant need to expand alongside an advancing wave of habitat destruction. The need to perpetually expand, due not only to despoliation but also typically rising populations, inevitably brings civilized peoples into conflict with other peoples (civilized or not) who occupy land into which they are expanding, typically resulting in war, genocide, assimilation, and further enslavement.

Thus, civilization is born in dispossession and reification, maintains itself through slavery and organized violence, and entails war and ecocide. To truly value individual freedom and joy, kinship and love among humans, intimacy with the beautiful nonhuman world, and psychic peace and clarity entails anti-civilization anarchy, the abandonment of the civilized way of life.

Desertion

Here we return to desertion, our invitation at the outset, as the beginning of the anti-civilization praxis, leading further to autarky and reinhabitation. This praxis will be developed both theoretically and practically in the course of this journal, and what follows is intended only as a primer and a further introduction of the themes of *Backwoods*.

By desertion, we mean moving toward the abandonment of civilization, both materially and psychically. Because civilization and

Thus, through self-alienation and dispossession acting in concert, civilized persons are reduced to a highly dependent relationship with the psychic and material institutions of civilization. Their life activities are no longer felt as their own, but have instead become ritualized, stiffened, dissociated from them, as though they were all merely playing a role in a greater body — it is the body of Leviathan, the State, whose function is to acquire and store material wealth, bring power and prestige to a few, wage war on competing Leviathans, and wreck the Earth all the while.

This situation, we contend, deserves the label slavery, with the recognition that slavery has existed in highly diverse, qualitatively distinct forms across civilized history: chattel slavery, concubinage, and indentured servitude, in which a person is more or less directly owned as property; debt, wage, and salary slavery, in which persons are parasitized indirectly through the control of money and property; and temple slavery, eunuchism, and social caste systems, in which persons are owned and Othered as a result of spiritual or religious belief systems.

Slavery is, for the purposes of our journal, *the sustained, ultimately violent parasitization of selfalienating and dispossessed persons*. This definition that we employ in this journal is an extension and modification of that on offer from celebrated historians of chattel slavery David Brion Davis and Orlando Patterson, who, despite their brilliance and erudition, cannot quite bring themselves to describe our present crisis as slavery — even when they come exceedingly close to doing So, going so far as to cite those who do — instead resorting to less inflammatory, more academic language like, "exploitation" or "bondage" (Davis 1966, Davis 1984, Patterson).

Thus, the anti-civilization critique goes far beyond that on offer by the Left, the Right, or the majority of anarchists. The old Left recognized class parasitization, but only recapitulated it through the creation of parties and bureaucracies; the new Left increasingly obscures even this basic insight under a panoply of particularized oppressions that are only the symptoms of a common slavery. The

calls for the mass dispossession, subordination, and punishment of oppressor groups.[3] These authoritarian upwellings are, fittingly, entirely consistent with the history of authoritarian communist regimes.

The past few years have seen a sudden rise in a countercultural Right-wing movement roughly organized around the label Alt-Right, a hodgepodge of White Nationalists or "Identitarians," Neo-Reactionaries, conspiracy theorists, and outright self-identified Neo-Nazis. The Alt-Right ideologues present, and presumably sincerely view, themselves as genuinely countercultural or even revolutionary, as they are resisting the rise of "cultural Marxism,"[4] the suppression of free speech,[5] and, most importantly, the death of European culture and "white genocide" via mass immigration to Europe and the United States coupled with the currently low birth rates of European-descended peoples. With often messianic, mythic rhetoric, they imagine their victory as a kind of second European renaissance achieved through the creation of a European homeland, a "white ethno-state," in which there would be a flourishing of artistic culture, science, and moral and spiritual life.

Some of the social critiques of the Alt-Right — their criticism of censorship, of endless U.S. war under the military-industrial complex, and of the death of meaning under consumerism — are

[3] Consider, for instance, increasingly bizarre and common cases like the autumn of 2017 Texas State University school newspaper publishing an article entitled '(white) DNA is an abomination,' or the April 13, 2017 Huffington Post publication of an article advocating for the global disenfranchisement of white men (which turned out to be a hoax article that they fell for and published).

[4] "Cultural Marxism" is a phrase associated with a Right-wing conspiracy theory that there is an organized Marxist effort to bring Communism to the United States not through sudden, violent revolution, but instead through an incremental change in the country's cultural values.

[5] Many Alt-Right figures have had their speech suppressed in various ways, including de-platforming at speaking events and bans and shadow-bans on social media platforms. To be sure, such suppression is not at all unique to the Alt-Right — similar suppression has fallen on the Far-Left.

wellplaced, though neither complete nor remotely satisfactorily addressed by their proposed solution of racial separatism. There is nothing inherently liberatory about racial nationalism, in spite of its ascendency in European form in the present politics of the Right and in virtually every nonEuropean form in the politics of the Left, past and present.[6] Racially homogeneous societies historically have, currently do, and undoubtedly will continue to involve all of the horrors of civilization enumerated thus far, including slavery. Indeed, the sociologist and historian of slavery Orlando Patterson, in his survey of sixty-six slave societies, came to the perhaps surprising conclusion that racial similarity or difference had no effect on either how well-treated slaves were materially or how much contempt their masters had for them (Patterson). Nationalism only obscures this reality by creating a false unity, an imagined automatic solidarity between parasites and hosts — nationalism is the illusory substitute of the real, intimate community of the small, face-to-face band societies in which we evolved.

At times, Alt-Right figures embrace an eccentric form of pessimistic authoritarianism presented as a kind of amoral, brutalist realism, as when Richard Spencer, in the course of the same conversation, observed that States are essentially institutions of organized violence, that all State societies have aristocracies (whether they acknowledge them or not), and that all States severely infringe on the autonomy of the individual — yet at the same time he asserted that States are inevitable and that he wishes to create a new one, even if that necessitates violence (Warski). This pseudo-radical analysis probes fairly deeply into the nature of authority, yet at the last moment pulls back to redeem it as inevitable and desirable.[7] Indeed, Spencer's vision of establishing a desirable society

[6] Black Nationalism, Chicano or Latino/Latina Nationalism, Indigenism, and so-called Third World Nationalism have all been embraced in various forms by Leftists, at least since the formation of the New Left in the 1960s.

[7] Spencer's maneuver is a good example of Roland Barthes' "Operation Margarine", in which one disingenuously and shallowly critiques something in order

rendering our agency to managers and investors who gain wealth off of our labor, in order to create commodities, goods and services that are detached from those who made them and then more or less passively consumed by others for the subsistence and recreation whose possibility for direct obtainment was prohibited by the time and effort spent working in the first place.

Materially, to varying degrees, civilized persons are *dispossessed* of the means to create their lives on their own terms. Numerous features of the world into which we are born — nonhuman organisms, land, water, minerals — are always already forbidden to us, having been ideologically recreated as State or private property, meaning people become dependent not on the living world, but on these mediating civilized institutions for their subsistence.

The history of civilization, as we will discuss throughout this journal, can be understood largely in terms of a not-entirely-linear, but nonetheless present, stepwise process of dispossession. In the very beginnings of civilization, with the emergence of the first lasting civilizations of Sumer, Egypt, and the Indus Valley, people were dispossessed of land and the fruits of their labor through taxation and theocratic ownership. AS civilizations have deepened and broadened, most people have come to own and/or have access to less and less land. Common stewardship of land used for food, natural medicines, and recreation has nearly disappeared, and the little remaining is often closely managed by State agents. Many people no longer even own their own homes, while those that do almost invariably have tiny parcels insufficient for subsistence. Now, we live in a world where one can step outside their home — which may be only rented from someone else or be in danger of being taken from them by a bank or government — to drive on roads that do not belong to them into cities full of stores with needed foods and goods taken from those who originally made them and available only for a price. Nearly the whole world is claimed as property, and it can only be accessed by the many who need it by performing the submissive behavioral rituals of civilization.

a haze of ideals, his-tory, and ethnicity — enlists, fights, and dies for the empire for whom he is a mere statistic. The mother, hypnotized by the ideal image of the happy family, slaves for her abusive husband and ungracious children, and then blames her own inadequacies when her actual life does not align with this reification.

In this reversal of the existentially-obvious state of affairs, these frozen concepts — which are merely abstractions, symbols, or models of actually-lived, sensual life — are delusorily treated as primary, more real and more powerful than the persons who in fact imagined and created them. Thus it is that, in civilization, people commonly believe themselves to be largely unable to create and live their lives on their own terms in free association with others, instead thinking and acting in these highly submissive and stiffened manners while surrounded by strangers with whom they tend to ritualistically and half-consciously reinforce these shared reifications — just as Cicero imagined in a positive light with his concept of the civitas. In this way, all civilizations, past and present, have been and continue to be founded on a high degree of (often subconscious or semiconscious) voluntary submission to authority.

A concrete example: the activity of *subsistence* — the creation of nourishment, shelter, medicine, and other essentials for survival from one's habitat — which could be done through freely-chosen cooperation with others in a self-directed manner and in an unalienated relationship with the non-human world that supports us all, is instead highly mediated through the confining psychosocial infrastructure we call *the economy*. Because so many of us so often treat our social roles as workers and our abstraction of money as more real than our creative powers and ability to communicate and cooperate, enormous numbers of us submit to dangerous, toxic, humiliating, or simply tedious and unnecessary (Graeber) work, sur-

nature of reification. For a more contemporary take, see Jason McQuinn's 'Critical Self-Theory: The Non-Ideological Critique of Ideology' in the third issue of the journal Modern Slavery from C.A.L. Press.

through an "ethno-state" is either deviously mendacious or hopelessly naïve, as — even if one were, due to an extreme White Nationalism, indifferent to the terror and misery that would undoubtedly be caused by an ethnic cleansing of all or part of the United States — the bureaucratic-police apparatus necessary to achieve it would assuredly develop its own inertia and become an institution of sustained tyranny over its European-American host population. The Alt-Right thus ironically parallels the vulgar communists who imagine, against evidence and intuition, that a *dictatorship of the proletariat*, having seized the State and used its authoritarian powers to secure the transition to communism, would ultimately then allow a *withering away of the State* to create a stateless society. The irony of this parallel dissipates with the clarity that both the political Left and the political Right have, from an anarchist perspective, always had more in common than they have had differences: both have the aim of Statecraft — that is, authority of the few and slavery of the many.

The False Liberations of Minimalist Anarchism

What of anarchism, that most extreme political philosophy of human freedom? Anarchism deserves great credit and consideration for its liberatory recognition that the freedoms of the individual and the freedoms of the community (or positive and negative freedoms) are not always and inherently mutually opposed; they can, in certain arrangements, instead be mutually enhancing. For this reason, we place our project firmly within the anarchist tradition, heterodox though it may be. Sadly, however, most anarchist tendencies are nonetheless bogged down in delusory pseudoliberations.

The concept of social revolution has been with anarchism since its earliest days, being championed by such founding figures as Py-

otr Kropotkin, Mikhail Bakunin, Emma Goldman, and Alexander Berkman. On the ethical basis that the current order is based on nearly-constant violence — however mediated, ritualized, and pacified it might be through law, economic exchange, and social norms — many revolutionary anarchists have and do advocate for attentat, acts of symbolically powerful violence, such as the destruction of property or assassination of individuals perceived as key to the reigning order. Through this "propaganda of the deed," anarchists intend to show that the status quo is not invincible and inevitable, to demonstrate to the everyperson that their latent rebellious sentiments are justified and shared by others, and to promote and generalize rebellious behavior.[8]

But a sober look at the history of revolutions does not reveal a great expansion of freedom, instead only revolutions in the modes of authority. The American Revolution traded one aristocracy for another, eventually producing what is arguably the most terroristic empire the world has ever known. The Haitian Revolution, a literal rising up of chattel slaves against their masters, led quickly from its success to the return of the plantation system they had rebelled against in the first place. The Russian and Chinese Revolutions traded the authority of *ancien régimes* for the tyranny of bureaucracy, surveillance, and police terror.

In an effort to distance themselves from this macabre history, many modern anarchists favor what they call *insurrection*, an entirely decentralized, leaderless mode of revolution based on attentat and propaganda. By avoiding the formation of formal parties or vanguards of any kind, the logic goes, there will be no authority to replace what is destroyed. The collapse of the social order, into ultimately redeem and defend it. Barthes details this phenomenon in a very short essay of the same name in his 1957 book Mythologies.

[8] Exactly how much and what sort of violence is necessary or appropriate for social change has been debated fiercely by anarchists for the past century and a half, with positions taken ranging from pacificsm (e.g., Leo Tolstoy) to deliberate terroristic violence (e.g., Luigi Galleani).

oped only very recently and abruptly in the course of human existence. This way of life is characterized by the growth and maintenance of cities, with a city defined for our purposes as an area of *permanent human shelter with a dense and large population*. By being *permanent*, a city's population cannot move in concordance with local ecological cycles, meaning it has to subsist in spite of them, against them. By being a *dense population*, a city's inhabitants exceed the carrying capacity of their landbase, meaning they must import nutrients from a surrounding rural area typically characterized by agriculture as well as shuttle their wastes elsewhere lest they choke on them. By being a *large population*, citizens exceed the numbers possible for face-to-face and intimate community and therefore exist among strangers, whom they necessarily treat as abstract persons, not kin.

Psychically, civilized persons routinely *self-alienate* their life activity, taking aspects of their lives, powers, and phenomenality[12] and treating them as somehow alien or Absolute;[13] they then reify this imagined entity and submit to it as somehow superior or inevitable. In other words, an abstract idea dreamed up by an individual and reinforced through communication with others around them comes to be half-consciously or unconsciously treated as a concrete force. It is thus that we create this phantasmagoria of "fixed ideas"[14] that seem to dominate and dictate our lives: deities, nationstates, social roles, the economy, the nuclear family, and so forth. The young man who loves his country — which for him is

[12] By phenomenality, I mean what is variously called consciousness or subjective experience, that is, life as it is actually lived and felt, one's own perspective with its sensory experience and inner life of emotions, thoughts, and imagination.

[13] An Absolute is something imagined as a thing-in-itself, something that exists, in, of, and for itself irrespective of relations and perspectives, such as a transcendental deity, a god detached from the world we inhabit. My own philosophy is that no such Absolutes exist — they are dangerous philosophical delusions associated with ideologies of Slavery.

[14] This is the preferred phrasing of Max Stirner, whose 1844 book The Unique and Its Property is an early and excellent investigation into the authoritarian

and so few of us shed, *civilization* means to many of us all that is good and decent about human sociality, typically contrasted with *barbarism* — thus, civilization is the rule of law in contrast to barbarism's arbitrary tyranny, it is orderly cooperation rather than the chaotic "war of all against all,"[11] it is high art and culture in favor of brutish struggle for mere survival, and it is scientific discovery and technological sophistication against ignorance, superstition, and toil. Used in this commonplace way, *civilization* is more an ethical assertion — a claim about how one *ought* to live — than it is a descriptive one — a claim about how people *actually* do live. Even then, it is only a loose, obfuscatory sort of ethical claim, a kind of bromidic ideal, since every so-called civilization will necessarily feature a great deal of so-called barbarism.

In seeking to describe and understand our crisis, however, we will use civilization much more specifically and consistently. The term *civilization* comes from the Latin *civitas*, popularized in ancient Rome by the orator Cicero to describe the supposed implicit social contract to which all Roman citizens had agreed to as the basis of their coexistence. For Cicero, the *civitas* genuinely existed because people *believed* it existed: that they acted and thought in certain consistent ways in dealing with one another is all that civilization really was — it was, as we said at the outset, *a way of life and a way of seeing*. The *civitas* was thus not merely the city-state as a structure or as a population of citizens, but also the shared idea of the civic community, the mutually created and reinforced psychosocial construction of the city-state.

Following Cicero, by civilization, therefore, we refer to both the material and the psychic: civilization is sets of thoughts and gestures reproduced daily as a *whole form of life*, one that has devel-

[11] This is the phrase used by Thomas Hobbes in his 1651 book Leviathan to describe what he imagined as the brutish state of uncivilized humans — Hobbes favorably juxtaposed a voluntary surrender of freedom to a powerful sovereign State, Leviathan. We follow the lead of libertarian thinkers like Ernst Jünger and Fredy Perlman who use Hobbes' preferred term critically.

stead, will open the door for anarchy: the free life of human beings without authority.

But insurrectionism is afflicted with the most poisonous sort of magical thinking and optimism about human beings. For the insurrectionary anarchist's praxis to be achieved, there must be some sort of tipping point at which the rebellion of an anarchist minority becomes generalized, taken up by large numbers of people — it could perhaps be only a small minority of the population, but this would nonetheless involve an enormous number of people who are not currently anarchists or political radicals of any kind, only people in whom, it is imagined, some latent, undertheorized radical instincts exist, waiting to be tapped into by the symbolic actions of the active, self-realized insurrectionary anarchists.

While a great many people are, no doubt, more or less dissatisfied with any number of aspects of the status quo, it is a tremendous and unfounded leap to imagine that they therefore are latent anarchists, only waiting to be tapped by some perfectly performed propaganda of the deed. Rather, the vast majority are afflicted with what Jason McQuinn has termed "Slave Syndrome" — an extrapolation from the idea of Stockholm Syndrome — in that they are deeply conditioned to identify with and act in their social roles, sculpted to have only a few of the skills necessary for survival through their occupations, and very likely to be woefully unprepared for and terrified by the idea of radically reconstructing every aspect of society (McQuinn).

For most people, their dissatisfaction with the status quo consists of wanting more commodities, more leisure, more prestigious and less onerous jobs, better prospects in society for their offspring, and so forth — these are not people who dream of profound transformations of the dominant culture. At best, we might say some significant number of people want a society that feels, in some vague and undertheorized way, more *fair* or *just*, which might translate into a lower disparity of wealth and an expansion of the welfare state. But how many people actually crave to give up cars, air con-

ditioning, Netflix, pornography, and modern medicine? If they are not willing, would the cadre of insurrectionaries then force such a change — or do they instead believe that they could recreate a society with high technoogy and luxury commodities that is, somehow, non-authoritarian and non-ecocidal?

Furthermore, the symbolic culture of society — its religions, myths, mores, notions of success, life cycle events, and so forth — provides most people with a much-needed shield of artificial meaning, protecting them from existential dread and the terror of death — they are thus attached psychically at a deep, partially unconscious level to their cultures: to bring an end to the expected functioning of society at large would entail coming to terms with the reality of one's life and choices as if for the first time, a potentially deeply traumatic experience.[9]

But even were the insurrectionary anarchist to somehow succeed in overthrowing the existent, they would still likely fail in their goals. Far from ushering in the freedom of anarchy, the creation of generalized social chaos that insurrectionary anarchists vie for will likely favor (and historically has favored) non-anarchist dissident factions, specifically the most ruthless and demagogical who wield the greatest ability and willingness to use organized violence. Whoever can quash their rivals and bring about security and access to resources for the many can bludgeon the population into going along with their new way of life whether many of them like it or not. The Leninists and Maoists whom the anarchists tend to despise — yet who are often in the streets with them during protests

[9] This complex point is necessarily touched on only very briefly here. This phenomenon has been examined at length by numerous figures from different backgrounds, such as Émile Durkheim in Suicide, Peter Wessel Zapffe in "The Last Messiah,' and Ernest Becker in The Denial of Death, which led to the psychological concept of Terror Management Theory. I take up this specific issue from another angle in the essay 'Existential Cowardice: Submission as Terror Management,' printed in the forthcoming collection The Prison Built by Its Inmates: Voluntary Servitude Revisited, to be published by Enemy Combatant Publications.

and riots — are quite honest with themselves and others about this and are willing to be those people. They also, unlike most anarchists, concertedly theologize their movements with a new collective mythos — through invocations of the People, the Revolution, the Communist Utopia, all of which are contortions of Christian themes[10]– to provide existential balm in a time of calamity. People who have been born and bred as slaves are far more likely to feel comfortable becoming a new kind of slave than to rise to the terrifying responsibility of freedom.

The revolutionary anarchist is thus selfnegating in their praxis. By making a revolution their telos, they delimit liberation to an almost perpetually-receding future moment, confined in the present to destabilizing their prisons — yet, historically, even in their moments of apparent victory, they find that their past efforts have only aided in the creation of their new incarceration.

Leviathan and the *Civitas*

If we eschew the illusions of reform and revolution, the politics of the Left and the Right, we arrive at a consistent critique and thus recognize our crisis for what it really is. Returning to the claim adumbrated at the outset, our crisis is not merely one of politics, society, or economics, but one of *civilization*, and our liberatory project is therefore not political, reformist, or revolutionary, but instead *anti-civilizational*.

To identify oneself and one's project as being *anti-civilizational* can come across as extreme, absurd, or even maudlin — what can it mean to be "against civilization"? Because of both the mutability of language and the ideological blinders nearly all of us accrue

[10] The similarities among Left-wing politics, Secular Humanism, and Christian theology have been examined at length by many, probably most originally and incisively by Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Stirner. For a more contemporary and approachable take on the influence of religion on politics, see John Gray's Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia.