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Anarchy Is A Scale-Independent Proposition

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There's a particular narrative–surprisingly common in certain corners of the anarchist scene–that no one has really bothered to call out and so has grown rather fat and comfortable over the last few decades. It goes something like this:

Thinking or acting from a big-picture perspective is–if not The Problem–then at least a major root cause of everything miserable about our world. Any claims, theories, ideals, or motivations that extend our frame of reference beyond our immediate lives are predicated in the same mistaken arrogance, a mistake responsible for the seemingly intractable poison within the left and activist struggles, as well as so much more. In response we must ward ourselves from the ideologies, the grand constructs, the stories that dwarf the particulars of our immediate perceptions, our social circles, our daily struggles. Most of all we must reject the search for universals and focus only on the "human sized".

Often this narrative quickly segues to pattern-matching this "big-thinking" tendency in terms of some unified Judeo-Christian tradition (under the assumption that there's only a

tiny chance of running across anyone with a strong claim to be part of a different tradition). At this point the narrative really picks up steam: There was once polytheism/animism/spiritualism but then all the little gods and little tribes got ground up by the big universal monster and now there's just universal stuff, and we should just break things apart again until they're back on a "human scale"–ala Dunbar's Number–where we can better keep track of everything. And, supposedly, therefor stop our thought from growing "out of control."

All you should be concerned about are your immediate relationships with other people in your social/drama circles, how you relate to them and the kind of psychological states you're able to briefly create together.

For a lot of people this perspective somehow resonates very deeply as a kind of clean break. There's this big boogeyman representation of supposedly all existing paradigms, and then there's them, breaking away, abruptly free to explore an array of new possibilities. You get this with a lot of cults too, once you just see *The Problem* everything is so clear and filled with newness and possibility. Our brains love the feeling of a new perspective or a new context, especially when we're dealing with continually grinding problems. We get to let go of all our frustrating calculations and considerations constantly hanging around, persisting in the back of our minds, and start anew! People get so overwhelmed by that rush that they refuse to pay attention when this new One Simple Trick fails to actually address anything, when the exact same sort of problems creep back, and the limits of the new paradigm start to feel like prison walls again. And so you see people, enraptured by the feeling of the original break, with the impression of it, refusing to feel out for these walls, repeating the same kind of sad content-devoid mantras in response to any input. "*If you'd only see that it's all Moralism maann.*"

Granted, this can be an important step in flexing your brain, I guess, if you come from a certain background, with certain

or local loosening of the weave. The break anarchism signifies is not with the particularities of the west, or of civilization, it goes far far deeper than that.

Why do we throw ourselves on bombs or strap bombs on ourselves to save others? These are not superficial feelings, they are not socialized happenstance or quirk of birth. These are conclusions those who are *radical* in their investigations, their vigilant explorations, find themselves drawn to. As radicals we never allow ourselves to be satisfied with hazy mystical simplified abstractions and spooks like "friendship" rather than concrete realities and dynamics of thought and action. Or wander in circles, adding contextual complications but not even attempting to weigh, reorganize or sort through them. Relishing the self-created maze of notes upon notes and so never attempting to isolate the deeper patterns or consistencies.

The narrative of opposition to "big-thinking" is at its core just a kind of smug pride in timidity, of ritualized fear and comfortable despair. "*We have not won in a few scant iterations of history and this is proof that we will lose.*" "*Some people tried thinking and look at where that inevitably led.*" It's the instinctive recoil of the traumatized animal. A sense that "*when the stakes go up we dare not rise to compete.*" And at its core it swallows and preserves every nihilistic assumption at the core of our sociopathic society. One might be able to relate to the mewling slave repeating "might makes right" like a prayer of absolution, having internalized the masters' intellectual laziness, but one should never join them.

Let us never forget that coffins are made "human sized"; our lives should be bigger than them.

ticipatory delusion / commodity known as "community", but as a ray of absolute resistance against the fundamentally sociopathic and nihilistic social norms of our world. Against an omnipresent foul fog that burns our lungs and seeks to settle deep into our skin.

For us Anarchism has always first, foremost, and at root, presented itself as a sharp critique of this rampantly common and pedestrian perspective, this staunch belief in immediatism and the irrelevance or nonexistence of universals or solids of any form of truly persuasive arguments that might be found–this assumption of the uniform arbitrariness and futility of vigilant investigation beyond one's momentary or happenstance motivations–that infests every abuser, every conman, every social capitalist, every creep, every rapist.

Our anarchism represents a break with this, it is the cry that an-archy is possible, even considerable, that we need not reassign the term like so much litter to denote merely diffuse, local and personal archies. That we need not embrace the orwellian framework in which anarchy is the same shit, only more locally responsive. It is the declaration that there is a substantive differentiation to be found between the ideologies or psychologies of constraint and those of richer, wider engagement, of more expansive identity and compassion. And that the latter is ultimately more attractive than the former. That we need not shy away from reality or lower our gaze in furtive dejection to our immediate trappings, to mere fleeting *impressions* of love and resistance, to aesthetics rather than anything of consequence.

Such an anarchism is an unraveling of the very fabric of power relations that bind almost every society on earth. And critically: there is no scale at which it does not apply.

That big showy tangles of power must also be dissolved is but a trivial ramification, it is no more representative of the anarchist break than any other shift or twist in the fabric of power relations. Nor can our break be characterized by a brief

priorities. But I don't. This shit and the context it comes out of are just so incredibly alien to me. And so the magical salve of returning to the small-scale is just a wad of spit and leaves to me. It doesn't begin to address the things that worry me.

Like a lot of people I didn't originally become an anarchist over concerns about black helicopters or mushroom clouds or any showy large-scale horror. I first became an anarchist because at a very young age I saw people–individual people–exercising control over other people. I saw dynamics of abuse, coercion and manipulation and I recoiled from them. I thought about the way these dynamics worked and then I critiqued and rejected them. Simple as that. Crucially these behaviors were often completely divorced from epic narratives, big ideologies or global forces. They were, in fact, often intensely localized, personal, and situational. Sometimes they gave *rise* to grand ambitions and sweeping frameworks. But they arose separately, and indeed, were often joined closely with an anti-narrative and anti-globalist bent. "*This situation is unique and can't or shouldn't be compared with any other, much less any commonality identified.*" "*Ethics is a delusion for weak people.*" "*There are no constants so why not give into whatever impulses strike me.*" Indeed the most powerful tools in perpetuating these power dynamics were those that denied universals or constants and those that exploited limited knowledge, information or communication. Gaslighting. Triangulation. Isolation.

"*You actually believed me?!*" and then cackling laughter.

Such sociopathy is not a fringe dynamic, but a near constant tendency that is deeply deeply riven in just about every society or culture on this planet. It survives in no small part by keeping its ever present machinations hidden or at least unspoken. It perpetuates itself through narratives that reduce the world to an unmappable formless mess, devoid of constants or directions. It portrays the world and our experiences as a substanceless game of immediate impulses and chance particulars. Everything is arbitrary, so why not? An impulse towards friends and

family after all is just a historically contingent trapping that one could easily emerge without or shed off. Love and compassion just a fleeting affliction of sentiment, with no deep reason to prompt valuing its perpetuation. I may bask in parental love for you today and tomorrow delight myself by your screams as I break your fingers. There are no constants, no universal attractors, no way to argue or persuade that isn't just manipulation, positioning, delusion. Being kind or resisting power might happen to give you some sense of pleasure or happiness but any sufficiently intelligent person can change their brain. Why not take the easier route and just just find ways to hack how you get pleasure? To distract yourself from recognizing oppression and suffering, or to take delight in them?

Cinematic buckets of blood dumped on Carrie or the hordes beating Piggy are not a departure from the norm but are implicit in everything we do. Our society's illusion of normalcy is a detente riven with the fluctuations of our continuing and almost-all-present manipulations, cruelties, and selfish acts. These small violences form a constant fabric whose wrinkles form the scaffolding of larger emergent structures until we arrive at governments, religions and corporations.

Leftists declare such interpersonal power dynamics–insofar as they are ever forced to recognize them–only the consequence of macroscopic patterns like Capitalism. What a laugh! The small is ultimately not so much the result of the big as the other way around. Feudalism, state communism, city states, federated tribes… no matter how you push the wrinkles in the fabric around the psychology of abuse, control and deception that ties it together remains unaddressed. Hunter gatherers like any other iteration of humanity often did horrible things to one another, held each other in abusive bondage, faith and ritual. The bonds that oppress us are no less bonds if they are small-scale and responsive. The might of emperors has oft been but a puff of air compared to aggregate coercive power and suffering caused by every abusive partner or parent or friend in the

world. It does not take the existence of sweeping patriarchal norms and socializations for partners to abuse each other, for parents to be cruel or domineering to children, these behaviors emerge in almost every culture or circle. The rates of abuse and physical violence among lesbians are the same as among heteros. This is not some magically adaptable macroscopic force or conspiracy that absorbs every punch we through at it and reorganizes itself, it is not some huge spectre out there beyond our immediate lives, it is a persistent tendency, a creeping low-level infection riven throughout our immediate lives, our collective and one-on-one relations.

And everywhere it smirks to itself. Every Pope has been an atheist. Every successful president or czar a passionate egoist. They wrap their thoughts in robes, just as most of us wrap our thoughts in what we term '*useful*' delusions in our most clear-headed moments. Temporary allegiances and affectations. Sure the power that binds others often binds the wielder. But not always. And certainly not always in a meaningful one-to-one relation against the subjective desires of the wielder.

This kind of person, this kind of thinking, has no need for universal or big-perspective thinking; they will scramble for power in any context. The problem they represent is irrespective of the scale of pageantry. These sociopathic currents run deep in almost every cluster of individuals and often crawl into our own heads.

The damage we do each other at the small-scale, at the "human level", is usually far more profound in suffering than the damage done by big tangled contexts and social organisms above and beyond our families, lovers, and friends. They intersect, they feedback off each other in interesting ways, and with bigger scale comes bigger risk, to be sure, but at the end of the day the narrative of small-scale against big-scale is utterly toothless against the roots of the horrors we face.

I and many others were originally attracted to anarchism not because we were looking to satiate some hunger for the par-