

Supplying the Demand of Liberation: Markets as a Structural Check Against Domination

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I. Introduction: Not Your Grandfather's Anti-Communism

This essay¹ is in the unusual position of taking as completely uncontroversial that the state must be abolished, while seeking to carefully justify private property, money, and commercial exchange. This is in order to contribute to the debate between two competing forms of anarchism – individualism and communism. These terms have been used in countless different ways, but here they will be distinguished by their positive or negative outlook on private property and markets. Individualists favor them, communists oppose them. In addition to assuming that the state must be abolished, anarchist communists are also unlikely to disagree with a second assumption I make here: that anarchism entails not only resistance to the state, but also to all other forms of domination.

One last assumption I'll be making in my favor is much more controversial in anarchist circles. This is that the free market anti-capitalist economic analysis² provided by individualist anarchists is basically correct. In other words, while scattered wage labor relationships and some level of material inequality would still exist in a completely freed market, a wage *system* and *stable* material inequalities would not. These assumptions are made in order to focus specifically on whether individualism or communism better fulfills the anarchist goal of non-domination. Accordingly, many other arguments against communism – such as issues regarding whether or not ignoring alleged property rights constitutes aggression, or the possibility or

¹ Briefly, I should mention three invaluable sources for this essay that didn't end up getting directly referenced, but are partially responsible for my thinking about the divide between market and non-market societies in this way. The first two are Ken Knudson's pamphlet "A Critique of Anarchist Communism," and Neera K. Badhwar's paper "Friendship and Commercial Societies." The third is a long-running set of conversations with Grayson English, which have helped to fully develop and flesh out the claims being made here against anarchist communism.

² See Chartier & Johnson 2011.

impossibility of rational economic calculation without markets – will be bracketed aside as well.

The thrust of my argument here is that individualist anarchism better satisfies the anarchist commitment to non-domination precisely *because* it features the market process, since this leads to greater social plasticity. After briefly highlighting some communist reasons for holding that communism better satisfies the anarchist commitment to non-domination, I will explore some potential dangers with their proposed alternatives to markets. Then, I will explain how these dangers become even more serious when we factor in the dynamics of race, gender, sexuality, and other systems of privilege and oppression. Next, I will explain what it is about the market process that makes it such a powerful engine for addressing these problems. Finally, I will close with some remarks about the nature of domination, and why the non-domination point ultimately goes to individualism, despite communist worries.

II. Why Communism Seems Preferable on Non-Domination Grounds

The anarchist communist is distinguished from other anarchists by their belief that not only managerial capitalism, but *the market order itself* is fundamentally rotten, and “private property in the means of existence” (Berkman 2003 [1929], p. 156) should be abolished along with the state. There are several reasons that communists believe this, but often the most forceful is that they believe the market to be a persistent source of domination. Following the lead of Philip Pettit – who is certainly not an anarchist of any kind, but very concerned with the issue of domination – we can say that domination involves the ability for one person or group of persons to interfere arbitrarily and with impunity against the actions of another person or group of persons (Pettit 1996, p. 578).

It is not difficult to see why someone might believe the market process inherently rests on this kind of domination. The essence of property is exclusion, and if I own this pen, this paper, this field, this factory, or whatever else, I have the final say over how that thing is used, and over who can use it. In fact, I can, within certain limits, use *violence* to prevent alternative uses of that object.³

The danger behind this ability for one person to dictate the terms of use

³ For the purposes of this paper, I will not be focusing on the question of whether or not private property’s right of exclusion is in-and-of-itself inherently dominating. However, I will briefly say here why such a critique seems false. For any given object that is rivalrous and scarce, which two parties intend to use in incompatible ways, at least one will not be able to use it the way they wish. There is no situation in which everyone’s plans over scarce and rivalrous resources are allowed to fully flourish without rights of exclusion. Accordingly, property can be seen as a way to safeguard our uses of scarce and rivalrous resources without arbitrary interference from others. I thank Charles W. Johnson for drawing my attention to this concern.

for a given piece of property is even stronger when we consider the case of one individual working in a business owned by another individual. For many people, one of the clearer examples of domination in their lives comes from their boss. When one person has unilateral hiring and firing power over another, and has ultimate decision-making power over the tools that that other person uses to make a living, subordination is clearly possible. An individual wage labor relationship, even outside of the context of a wage system (a distinction I will explain in more detail soon), is at the very least *dangerous* from the perspective of non-domination.

Earlier I granted myself the assumption that individualist anarchists are right to believe that neither a wage system (as opposed to simply wage labor) nor a stable, rigid pattern of inequality with distinct, persistent classes, is likely to be viable under genuine *laissez-faire*. Yet it's still reasonable to doubt that assumption, and one might prefer communism to stay on the safe side of that doubt. To explain the difference between a wage system and mere wage labor, a wage system is a society in which particular classes of people are essentially forced by surrounding circumstances to work in a wage labor setting or suffer crippling poverty. As anarchist communist Alexander Berkman writes, "the workingman cannot work for himself ... He cannot compete with the big manufacturers. ... You must find an employer," and ultimately "the whole working class sells its labor power to the employing class" (Berkman 2003 [1929], p. 7). As individualist anarchist Kevin Carson summarizes, "workers are forced to compete for jobs in a buyer's market" (Carson 2012). Unlike simple wage labor, for reasons that will be explained later, this situation seems to be not just *in danger* of fostering domination, but actually *inherently* dominating. Similarly, *stable* inequalities in which material wealth remains consistently concentrated in a particular class's hands seem to also be *inherently* dominating, not just in danger of doing so. If the individualist is only *probably* right that such conditions would not survive a freed market, whereas a communist is *necessarily* right – since the absence of money and private property obviously means no material inequality, and no wage labor – then one might understandably prefer communism on non-domination grounds.

III. Alternatives to the Market: Gift Economies

Since anarchist communism is distinguished from individualist anarchism by its refusal to allow money, explicit trade, private property in the means of production, or other defining features of markets, it requires alternative methods for allocating and operating resources. Here we will investigate two of the primary methods of non-state, non-market social organization – gift economies and consensus deliberations – and discuss their potential dangers. It should be noted from the outset, of course, that dangers are only dangers, and the argument is not against gift-economic arrangements and consensus deliberations as such, but against totalizing forms of communism that use

them as the main form of economic organization. Gift-economic arrangements and consensus deliberations are also crucially important for the economy of an individualist anarchist society. The difference is that for individualists, these arrangements are supplements to commercial exchange, whereas for communists, they are replacements.

With regards to the distribution of goods and services, anarchist communists are typically enthusiastic proponents of gift-economies. As one popular anti-market anarchist text, “Evasion” by the CrimethInc Ex-Workers Collective tells us: “In stark contrast to exchange trading, gift-giving is its own reward. In a gift economy, which exists whenever anything is freely shared and no score is kept, the participants receive more the more they bestow. Everyone who has shared a real friendship or a morning of incredible lovemaking knows intuitively that when the opportunity presents itself, human beings return to this natural relationship” (CrimethInc 2003, p. 60).

However, even a cursory look at the anthropological literature on what a gift economy actually entails is enough to show that it is not just continuous Christmas. In observed gift economies, gifts are often given with the intent of compelling return gifts through an ethic of reciprocity (Mauss 2002 [1950], pp. 10-23). One is not typically permitted to refuse a gift (or ignore its accompanying obligation) (Counts 1990, pp. 20-22), nor to demand a particular kind of return gift (which would inch towards barter) (Counts 1990, pp. 22-24). Also, in so far as gift-economic relations happen as a replacement for (rather than supplement to) market ones, one absolutely *may not* simply purchase goods or services with money (Counts 1990, p. 19).

A major distinction between gift economies and markets is that in the former, “exchanges ... [are] not independent of the social relationship between transactors,” whereas in the latter “forces other than social relationships between the transactors (i.e., supply and demand) regulate the amount of goods or services changing hands” (Rambo 1989, p. 89).⁴ For this reason, participants in a gift economy “attempt not to maximize [their] ... economic holdings, but to maximize prestige in the community” (Rambo 1999 [1989], p. 90). A reputation of stinginess due to “long delays in returning goods can also add to hostility over other issues, such as marriage disputes and conflicting land claims, turning previous allies into warring enemies” (Rambo 1999 [1989], p. 90). Due to this crucial importance placed upon social relationships and prestige, marriages are often made strategically for the purpose of forming social alliances (Rambo 1999 [1989], p. 90).

⁴ It also seems that the gift-commodity distinction is not a particularly stable one. For example, is borrowing something from a friend with the understanding that you’ll pay them back with money if you lose it purely gift? Is giving a friend a discount on a given good or service, but still not giving it away for free, still purely commodity? For the purposes of this paper, though, we will bracket aside these ambiguities and proceed with more clear-cut examples of the two. I thank Grayson English for stressing the need to note these ambiguities.

It is not the case that gift-economies operate through people helping one another purely out of the kindness of their heart. Rather, these gifts are often made for reasons no less instrumental than the profits of an explicit trade. Contrary to CrimethInc's understanding, scores are kept in gift-economies, just not monetary ones. Social scores are kept rigorously, and can have devastating consequences for those poor in social capital.

That this is a consequence of anarchist communism is not totally lost on its defenders. Alexander Berkman, for instance, states gleefully that under anarchist communism, rather than valuing goods and services through the price mechanism, “[p]eople will be appreciated according to their *willingness to be socially useful*” (2003 [1929], p. 161, emphasis in original). Social usefulness, here, seems to be judged according to the opinions of one's peers, not according to prices arising out of mutually beneficial trades. Yet anarchist communists themselves are often among the last to dispute that public opinion is a danger to individual freedom. To quote Berkman at length, he writes only a few pages later:

The authority of the past and of the present dictates not only our behavior but dominates our very minds and souls, and is continuously at work to stifle every symptom of nonconformity, of independent attitude and unorthodox opinion. The whole weight of social condemnation comes down upon the head of the man or woman who dares defy conventional codes. Ruthless vengeance is wreaked upon the protestant who refuses to follow the beaten track, or upon the heretic who disbelieves in the accepted formulas. ... More vicious and deadening is compulsory compliance than the most virulent poison. Throughout the ages it has been the greatest impediment to man's advance, hedging him in with a thousand prohibitions and taboos, weighting in his mind and heart down with outlived canons and codes, thwarting his will with imperatives of thought and feeling, with ‘thou shalt’ and ‘thou shalt not’ of behavior and action. Life, the art of living, has become a dull formula, flat and inert. ... Beneath this spirit of intolerance and persecution is the habit of authority: coercion to conform to dominant standards, compulsion ... to be and act as others, according to precedent and rule. (2003 [1929], pp. 165-166)

For these reasons given by Berkman, it seems clear that the importance placed on social capital in observed gift economies is not without danger for purposes of non-domination. The strain laborers experience to acquire financial capital can be debilitating, and the struggle to secure this source of

income can be confining. Also debilitating, and also confining, though, is the strain of strictly adhering to the rituals, traditions, and expectations necessary to acquire and secure social capital in a gift-economy. Under the existing economy of managerial capitalism, those with large concentrations of financial capital clearly dominate those with little or no financial capital. Yet in a totalizing gift-economy, those with large concentrations of social capital also clearly dominate those with little or no social capital. Those wealthy in social capital maintain the power of arbitrary interference over the lives of those without it, and the society itself confines individuals within rigid adherence to dominant cultural norms.

IV. Alternatives to the Market: Consensus Deliberations and Communal Resources

Since anarchist communists believe that “the private ownership of land, capital, and machinery has had its time,” they hold that “all requisites for production, must ... become the common property of society, and be managed in common by the producers of wealth” (Kropotkin 2009 [1927], p. 3). Anarchist communist Peter Kropotkin complains that under current conditions, production “takes no care of the needs of the community; its only aim is to increase the profits of the capitalist” (2009 [1927], p. 7). Simply removing the capitalist and making workplaces into cooperatives privately owned by the workers who work there would of course not eliminate his worry, since then *their* aim would still be to increase their material wealth. So for Kropotkin and other communists, the “means of production and of satisfaction of all needs of society, ... must be at the disposal of all” (2009 [1927], p. 8), and “common possession ... implies the common enjoyment of the fruits of the common production” (2009 [1927], p. 9).

A question arises, then, on how to regulate the use of these scarce, communally-owned resources, and how to make decisions over their use. One could imagine this being done through an elaborate system of committees, through voting-based direct democracy, or consensus deliberation. Carefully addressing all three of these would take too much time, and many anarchist communists have already done an excellent job critiquing both majoritarian (Goldman 1910) and bureaucratic solutions. For this reason, we will focus our attention on grassroots, consensus deliberations.

As the CrimethInc Ex-Workers Collective states: “In contrast to representative democracy, ... participants [in consensus deliberations] take part in the decision-making process on an ongoing basis and exercise real control over their daily lives. Unlike majority-rule democracy, consensus values the needs and concerns of each individual equally: if one person is unhappy with a resolution, it is everyone’s responsibility to find a new solution that is acceptable to all” (CrimethInc 2003, p. 84). Much like gift-economic arrangements, there is nothing inherently wrong with collectively

deliberating on a consensus basis, and it clearly has a significant role to play in any post-state society. However, also like gift-economic arrangements, it is not a panacea, and it is not without its own dangers.

One famous critique of informal, consensus-based organizations within the existing world comes from feminist Jo Freeman's short essay "The Tyranny of Structurelessness." There, Freeman critiques the tendency within radical feminist groups toward less formal structure, claiming that their supposed "'structurelessness' becomes a way of masking power" (Freeman 1972, p. 152), simply replacing visible hierarchies with invisible ones. Thus, Freeman alleges, supposed "unstructured" groups are actually ruled by elites – by which she means "a small group of people who have power over a larger group of which they are a part, usually without direct responsibility to that larger group, and often without their knowledge or consent" (1972, p. 153). These informal elites are not established by shadowy conspiracy, but naturally arise out of friendship groups among those particularly active in the group (1972, p. 154).

This is because

friendship groups function as networks of communication outside any regular channels for such communication that may have been set up by a group. If no channels are set up, they function as the only networks of communication. Because people are friends, usually sharing the same values and orientations, because they talk to each other socially and consult with each other when common decisions have to be made, the people involved in these networks have more power in the group than those who don't. (1972, p. 154)

Given that these networks arise out of friendship groups,

the characteristic prerequisite for participating in all the informal elites of the movement, and thus for exercising power, concern one's background, personality or allocation of time. They do not include one's competence, dedication ..., talents or potential contribution to the ... [task at hand]. The former are the criteria one usually uses in determining one's friends. The latter are what any movement or organization has to use if it is going to be ... effective. (1972, p. 154)

In short, Freeman states that "the informal structure of the decision-making will be ... one in which people listen to others because they like them, not because they say significant things" (1972, p. 157). As an alternative,

Freeman suggests formalizing hierarchies, which serves the function of unmasking whatever power structures exist, so that they can be more clearly accounted for, and more easily held accountable.

Unsurprisingly, anarchists and other proponents of informal, consensus-based decision-making have written plenty of responses to “The Tyranny of Structurelessness.” Cathy Levine, in “The Tyranny of Tyranny,” reminds us that in large, formally structured groups “the individual is alienated by the size, and relegated, to struggling against the obstacle created by the size of the group” (Levine 2009, p. 4). As I said earlier, I will not be directly addressing the dangers with more formal bureaucracies, but will be taking as given that the criticisms posed by those anarchist communists opposed to them are successful, and that such institutions are not without danger. Yet while good points have been raised against Freeman’s solutions, they do not change the fact that the dangers she alludes to are still present – a fact acknowledged by most of her critics (McQuinn 2009, p. 2).

In a somewhat telling string of ad hominem, anarchist Jason McQuinn states that “‘The Tyranny of Structurelessness’ primarily appeals to bookish, socially incompetent – or anti-social – people interested in politics, but unsure of themselves or unwilling (or unable) to negotiate social relationships which aren’t based on written rules of order with formal roles. The ambiguities, spontaneity and informality of mutual friendships and communal relationships tend to provoke anxieties in such people that the security, hierarchy, leadership and discipline of authoritarian organizations are designed to relieve” (2009, p. 2).

Apparently, McQuinn is completely undeterred by the obvious conclusion that more unstructured, consensus deliberations would especially enable those well-equipped for social situations to dominate those who are not. It is not difficult to imagine that this would be even further complicated by differences in neurological makeup, making the arrangement structurally ableist. The lesson to take from this appears to be that while ground-level consensus-based deliberations may be free from many of the dangers facing overt majoritarianism or formalized hierarchies, they are not as domination-free as many anarchist communists presume. Just as social capital is the hidden source of domination in gift-economic arrangements, it is also the danger in informal arrangements that have the formal designation of “consensus.”

V. How Privilege and Oppression Dynamics Add to the Problem

These potential dangers with gift-economic arrangements and informal consensus deliberations become even more troubling when we consider the role of privilege-and-oppression dynamics. By “privilege,” I refer to social forces which systematically confer dominance to those with particular traits over others without those traits (McIntosh 1989). Taking privilege and

oppression as inextricably linked, I use “oppression” to refer to those who are constrained and systematically dominated due to not having the traits shared by those in the privileged group. Some paradigmatic examples of systems of privilege and oppression are white supremacy, patriarchy, heterosexism, cissexism, and ableism – each, of course, in their systemic (rather than simply interpersonal) forms.

The reason that these forces pose a special danger for anarchist communists is because by reducing all social organization to communal and gift-economic arrangements, the communist solution ties one’s ability to live – and to live the kind of life one wants to live – to their ability to maintain good social status. Gift economies, in order to maintain stability, are tied to long-standing traditions. One’s readiness or hesitancy to give a certain person a gift will be influenced by the social acceptability of their intended use – especially given that the giving of that gift will in turn reflect on the gift-giver. With regards to communal decision-making, even when deliberations have the official designation of “consensus,” some people’s input will necessarily be more highly valued than others, and some will have their concerns taken more seriously.

There are times where these features of communist solutions are harmless, and times where they are actually positively good. It is good, for instance, if norms against overt racism make it such that a rabid white supremacist is unable to successfully argue his case for using a communal printing press to publish his racist newsletters. Yet, there are other, more troubling factors that may hinder someone’s social standing, leading to much less savory consequences – by which I refer to the dynamics of privilege and oppression.

In a given deliberation, for instance, someone who is white, able-bodied, cisgender, male, heterosexual, and neurotypical is much more likely to be seen as a reasonable person than someone who is none of those things. This wouldn’t necessarily be because of any explicit, self-aware prejudice, but could be the product of deeply-ingrained implicit biases shared by pretty much everyone in a society infected by white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, cissexism, and ableism. When anarchist communists such as Kropotkin tell us that they desire that “our productive powers were fully applied to increasing the stock of the staple necessities for life” (2009 [1927], p. 10), it is worth asking whose input will be most valued when determining just what is a genuine necessity. Due to differing social standpoints, it may be much more difficult for an oppressed individual to communicate exactly why their intended use of a given good or service is so important. It would be preferable, for example, if transgender persons did not have to justify to the dominant cisgender population – most of whom have never experienced gender dysphoria – the legitimacy of using scarce medical resources for hormone replacement therapy, gender confirmation surgery, or whatever

other specific needs that they have.

So far, I have been referring to these issues as “dangers,” rather than “problems.” This is because there is nothing about gift-economic arrangements and common ownership that makes these methods of social organization beyond repair. Once again, they will likely be an important part of any post-state society. That being said, it is worth examining some things that are not sufficient to fully escape the dangers I’ve outlined.

One cannot appeal to the explicit rejection of domination (and consequently, of systems of privilege and oppression) voiced by anarchist communists to claim that domination will not be present in an anarchist communist society. First, because if anarchy is what’s seriously desired, it will have to be an anarchy comprised of everyone, not just ideologically committed anarchists. Therefore, the transition to anarchy may come quicker than the end of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. Thus, these are problems that a stateless society must have the resources to keep fighting. Second, even ideologically committed anarchists, feminists, anti-racists, and so on are not magically free from the influence of privilege and oppression dynamics over their own daily interactions. This is unsurprising, given the subtle, background nature of implicit biases. That, along with the silencing power of stereotype threat, allows for situations that may look perfectly mindful of privilege-oppression dynamics, and perfectly consensus in nature, but which are actually still subject to domination.

Another non-solution comes from claims that the disappearance of the state and managerial capitalism is enough to lead to the disappearance of all domination. While statism and managerial capitalism are forms of domination that others interact with and build off of, it is excessively reductionist to pretend that without one form of domination, others will just fade away. What is needed is a mechanism within the structure of the society for checking and pushing back against other forms of domination.

Furthermore, these non-solutions fail to consider the extent to which we suffer radical ignorance about privilege and oppression – which is to say that there are, almost certainly, vectors of privilege and oppression of which we aren’t even aware. Not only are we not aware of them, we are probably not even aware that we aren’t aware of them. That they might be a site of oppression is not something we have ever considered.

That’s at least the case under the assumption that we are not uniquely omniscient in ways that past radicals were not. For some classical liberals during the emergence of capitalism, they could clearly see the obvious ways in which monarchs oppressed subjects, but were blind to the new domination coming about with managerial capitalism. Many early anarchists were men who spoke loudly of oppression from both capitalist and king, but were silent or worse about the oppression of women by men. Plenty of twentieth-century radical feminists who boldly unmasked the way patriarchy shaped our lives

were totally unaware of the way their paradigms centered white women's experience. The common thread in these radicals' failures is an inability to see privilege and oppression precisely because of how commonplace it was in their everyday lives. Any strategy for fighting oppression *as such*, then, must not operate under the assumption that we're already aware of all its sources.

Finally, while the point of this section is to emphasize the way in which privilege and oppression dynamics worsen the problem, we should remember that the problem is not exclusively one of privilege and oppression dynamics. In-group tendencies, concentrations of social capital, and the like are serious problems all on their own. Especially when there's no exit.

VI. The Market Process as an Engine of Liberation

A more reliable check can come from the reintroduction of markets – private property, money, explicit exchange, the whole thing. In a market setting, a person who is either unable or simply unwilling to convince someone else of the inherent goodness of whatever they want to do with a given resource can simply purchase it. When you're buying pens and paper, the person you're buying from doesn't have to approve of what you're going to write – they usually don't even know. You just have to be able to provide value for value in explicit trade.

As individuals pursue their private interests, even against the current of social disapproval, this in turn affects the price. Resources are then socially created, saved, and distributed in such a way that must account for each and every use desired by all individuals actually willing to purchase them, rather than just whatever the dominant culture sees as most significant. When discussing the importance of the information-gathering function of markets for efficiency, Hayek notes that producers don't actually need to know why the price of tin has gone up to reorganize production accordingly, they just have to know that it's gone up (Hayek 1945, p. 526). We could add to this that they don't have to *agree* with the reason that they have to reorganize production, either. If the needs or desires of a given group are under-served, this creates a profit opportunity to fulfill that need or desire. While having the right incentives in place does not mean that they will be mechanically followed, it is miles away better than a system where there is *no* incentive, and in fact a strong incentive *against* bucking cultural norms. There is more than ample empirical evidence to suggest that this dynamic leads the market process to serve as an engine of liberatory social change in just the way I describe. Introducing elements of market-like competition to legal systems appears to render greater respect in those legal systems for the rights of women (Lemke 2016, Peden 1977 pp. 91-93). Dalits – India's "untouchable" caste – have seen unprecedented freedom and mobility as a result of market liberalization (Aiyar 2015).

At the risk of excess repetition, it must be stressed one last time that the point of this paper is not to argue that gift-economic and communal arrangements are bad and should be opposed, only that they are not panaceas, and should not be totalizing.⁵ This brings us to another benefit of markets. At the intersection of commerce and collective action, there lies a kind of *entrepreneurial activism*, which can be especially forceful in fighting off lingering forms of domination. A good historical example of this comes from the mutual aid societies of the past, which were able to acquire goods collectively on the market that their members could not have as easily acquired individually (Beito 2000). It is instructive that many of these mutual aid societies were made up of minority populations tied together by their shared needs. Similarly, there are cases where for-profit ventures can be sources of community empowerment. While this is a claim far beyond the scope of this paper, it seems reasonable to suggest that defending the private property rights of queer-owned and queer-oriented establishments – most dramatically at events like Stonewall – did much more for gay liberation than any explicit campaign against homophobia.

What is important about markets is that they provide exit. They serve as an escape hatch from the potentially toxic cultural norms of one's community, and away from the grueling experience of having to publicly justify your concerns to those in an epistemic position that makes communicating those concerns excruciatingly difficult. By providing those avenues for escape, the market process pulls society in directions determined by individuals genuinely seeking to better their own lives, rather than simply trying to make due with the roles assigned to them. This rapidly accelerating ebb and flow of social change is a part of what market anarchist Dyer Lum identified as a major feature of a free society: social plasticity. In contrast to the rigidity of either the existing state-dominated world, or of a proposed anarchist communism, the anarchy of production found in full *laissez-faire* creates a social environment ripe for the production of anarchy.

VII. Conclusion: The Nature of Domination

Finally, this brings us to a reflection on the nature of domination, and a greater understanding of why the proposed institutions of individualist

⁵ If, for the most part, *all* that were available were commercial relationships and market exchange, this would of course have its own set of problems. For instance, such a society might be structurally ableist, essentially leaving many who cannot produce marketable goods or services out to die. This luckily is not a problem for individualist anarchism, which does not eliminate the non-state social safety net of mutual aid, but vigorously welcomes it. There is no reason that the resources available to anarchist communists in treating these problems would not also be available to individualist anarchists. Individualist anarchists do not wish to reduce all of life to a series of money-mediated exchanges; they just want the freedom to engage in money-mediated exchanges. I thank Astrid Wilde for raising concerns about disability.

anarchism are less in danger of fostering it than those of anarchist communism. While a given wage labor relationship and/or the presence of material inequality at any given time are certainly dangerous things worth holding in check, they are not as dangerous as the dangers of communist institutions left out of check. Without stabilization into a wage system, or persistent material inequalities between distinct classes, these scenarios are escapable when they approach domination. The reason that “if you don’t like your job, you can just quit” is such an unhelpful response under managerial capitalism is that often the things one finds distasteful about their job are present in virtually all available alternatives. Once one can reasonably expect to escape that sort of job into alternative employment in a cooperative or self-employed setting, this reply actually becomes meaningful. Meanwhile, if one does not have the check of a healthy market, then the dangerous aspects of communal and gift-economic life are inescapable. This is compounded by the fact that toxic cultural factors like white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and so on, are by their very nature present throughout the entire society.

This bolsters Philip Pettit’s definition of domination that I endorsed near the beginning of the paper, which hones in on a general power of arbitrary interference and control. Also following Pettit, it appears that the best guarantee of fighting domination is to provide structural checks and balances, or domains of *anti-power*, forces that repel back against the power of potential sources of domination (589).⁶ On the importance of structure, it is useful to consider Marilyn Frye’s analogy between oppression and a bird cage (Frye 1983). The bars of a bird cage, taken individually, could clearly never constrict even a bird’s movement. Yet in the context of all the other bars, it becomes impossible for the bird to leave. So too is the case with oppression, and domination – the particular instances of social norms or commands are not what creates true oppression and domination all on their own, but, rather, those norms or commands within the larger context of other oppressive and dominating factors (Frye 1983). If we are able to change the context by providing checks, much of what may be dangerous on non-domination grounds actually becomes harmless. Gift-economic arrangements and common property, in the context of a market society, can be de-clawed and no longer punishingly restrictive against individuals who buck cultural norms. The material inequalities that may occur at any given time in a market setting, or employment in a wage labor setting, when in the context of healthy mutual aid and fierce labor unionism (Carson 2010), are no longer the source of domination we see in our existing world.

⁶ Pettit later drops the “anti-power” strategy for one of constitutional guarantees. However, it seems that for those who want to take his framework to radically anti-statist conclusions, the anti-power strategy is still preferable.

In conclusion, I want to say something in favor of the spirit of anarchist communism. In response to those who tell them that their dream of total freedom is impossible, they defiantly proclaim that they demand the impossible. Far from foolish, this attitude is admirable. Where the communist goes wrong is in their proposals for how to get there. A program of abolishing private property, money, explicit exchange, and the market order, would not bring liberation. It would bring a deeply entrenched, stagnant conservatism. What the individualist anarchist seeks is fundamentally that same dream of total freedom, coupled with institutions that can bring about and protect that vision of autonomy. Where anarchist communism only demands the impossible, individualist anarchism goes a step further, and finds a way to supply it.

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