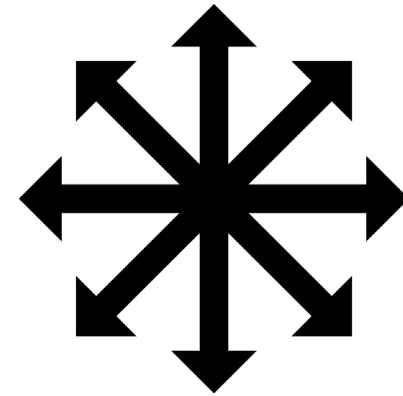


**A REFUTATION
OF COMMON OBJECTIONS
TO ANARCHO-NIHILISM**



mafwr distro
mafwrdistro.noblogs.org

-ALEPH SKOTEINOS-

Originally posted on:

MYTHOUGHTSBORNFROMFIRE.WORDPRESS.COM

Formatted by:

MAFW DISTRO

critics of civil society in itself.

What the hell is society in itself? It's simply the confederation of human social relationships. That's it. That's all it is. Societies are groupings of relationships between individuals who confederate with each other towards what is at least theoretically their mutual advantage. That's what we all really mean when we say that you can't fight the status quo alone. The warm fuzzies we get about togetherness are just a way of obfuscating what is ultimately as egoistic as anything else. Modern societies are also networks of ordered relationships that are necessarily maintained through extensive social control. But modern or no, societies also tend to possess their own sort of normativity, which can create marginalization. You would think that there's no inherent justification for such a thing, but apparently "human nature" demands civil society and so it should not be questioned. But there is no actual "human nature". We are a "social species" only in the sense that humans tend to like and enjoy forming social relationships and fulfill their needs through sociation. But there are also people who are for many reasons averse to such sociation, perhaps even preferring solitude, or who prefer individuation over sociation. You might argue that this is a minority, but that doesn't matter if you consider the obvious fact that such tendencies should not exist if "human nature" is inherently social or collectivist, for the same reason that, if a thing is outside what we call "Nature" it could not be said to exist.

Societies, understood in "materialist" terms, are arrangements of human relationships and their attendant conditions. They are not essential presences of human life, or fixed elements of "nature". They can be altered, reformed, dismantled, or destroyed. "Society" itself is a fixed idea of said arrangements. People blindly conform to it, and then compel others to conform, because they assume that Society is just the essential link of being human. It isn't. It's a frozen image of the bonds that we forge with each other, the rules we assume for and impose upon each other, and in sum the relationships we cultivate. In itself, it has no actual meaning.



I DECIDED THAT IT MIGHT be worth my time to address some arguments against anarcho-nihilism, if mostly because I keep seeing them floating around. This is mostly in reference to arguments from non-anarchist communists, including Marxist-Leninists, but social-anarchists and standard issue anarcho-communists also tend to make similar arguments – either from first principle, as the case may be, or perhaps simply to take after the old "Anarcho-Bolsheviks" who thought that allying with the Soviet Union would save them after the suppression of Makhnovschina. In the process of this, however, we will not spend any time addressing any accusations of fascism, because in reference to our subject those are simply aesthetic slurs made with no consideration of the actual nature of their object, and as such can be dismissed out of hand.

Let's consider the following arguments against anarcho-nihilism:

- "Nihilism means doing nothing"
- "Anarcho-nihilism is the ideology of the ruling class"
- "What has anarcho-nihilism negated?"
- "Anarcho-nihilism is the ideology of serial killers/object immorality/suicidal ideation"
- (the adventurism accusation)
- "Aren't you just pessimists, not actually nihilistic?"
- "Nihilism can only lead back to conformity and submission"
- "We live in a society"

OBJECTION #6: "NIHILISM MEANS DOING NOTHING"

This is a fairly obvious case where the people making this complaint don't even bother to read the quotations presented to them. Let's go to the quotation in question, from Serafinski's *Blessed Is The Flame*, to see where some people might be going wrong:

"The anarcho-nihilist position is essentially that we are fucked. That the current manifestation of human society (civilization, leviathan, industrial society, global capitalism, whatever) is beyond salvation, and so our response to it should be one of unmitigated hostility. There are no demands to be made, no utopic visions to be upheld, no political programs to be followed – the path to resistance is one of pure negation." -*Blessed Is The Flame*, Serafinski (2016)

So, where have critics gone wrong here? The answer is to be found in but another question: how do you derive "do nothing" from "unmitigated hostility"? I suppose the phrases "we are fucked" and "human society is beyond salvation" would have some people interpreting it as a statement of utter resignation to fate, but such a sentiment is in no way reflected in *Blessed Is The Flame*. If it were, why would the book consist of detailed accounts of insurgent resistance undertaken by concentration camp prisoners against their Nazi captors, guided by no hope in futurity but instead by the purity of their desire to destroy systematic and genocidal oppression. Or perhaps it just comes down to the rejection of formal programs or utopic visions? In that case, what you understand as "doing nothing" is simply the rejection of new ways of ordering people, of new grand designs to impose upon the each other after the old ones perish one by one. In this sense we take after Max Stirner when, in juxtaposing insurrection against "Revolution", he said that the point should not be to let ourselves be arranged but to clear the way for us to arrange ourselves, reserving no hope for any great institutions. In this sense, then, rather than advocating for doing nothing, anarcho-nihilism in this sense binds actions towards a locus of agency which is then drawn back into its rightful place in individual (and then collective) subjectivity.

The thing is, though, when Marxist-Leninists make this argument, they are making it against all of anarchism and are always talking about it from the standpoint of certain ideas of revolutionary success. What I mean is, when they say that anarcho-nihilists, or really any anarchists for that matter, have never accomplished anything, their standard is the "success" of the various so-called "socialist" states – the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, Cuba, Venezuela, to name just a few. It sounds believable if you only think about it in terms of holding onto power and controlling states for maybe more

mately, around dominating value-structures, which then order the behaviour of humans in conformity to value. Is it really possible to interpret such organisation as consistent with the anarchist commitment to oppose all forms of hierarchy, authority, and collective domination? Or are we just aiming for new arrangements instead of no longer letting ourselves be arranged by anyone but ourselves?

And then there's despair. I ask you: who in their right mind can persist in the world we live in entirely absent of despair? Who, other than someone who may stand to benefit from the existence and perpetuation of the order of things? Is despair in itself such a bad place to begin collective action? At the very least, it's not a bad place for alchemy and mysticism to get going, and I can promise you that those things have more prefigurative value than many people think! But let's just pose the alternative question: how do you know the nihilist is necessarily a mere reflection of embodied despair? Indeed, the nihilist emphasis on *jouissance* could betray just the opposite attitude. What room is there for despair when there is so much joy to be had in the resistance to and destruction of oppression, and in the transvaluation of values undertaken by each one of us who partakes in the realisation of anarchy in the world?

OBJECTION #7: "WE LIVE IN A SOCIETY"

This last one is something of an *ad hominem*, but, as with the others, makes for an ample springboard for a larger conversation around anarcho-nihilism. The objection is aimed at the destruction of the abstract notion of "society", to which the inevitable retort is that we live in a society. A sardonic quip, a meme, thereby an *ad hominem*. But it is not without meaning.

You see, every materialist is a materialist who questions everything until it's time to question society itself. Every leftist learns to see things as the products of social processes and see social arrangements as at least arbitrary enough that they can be dismantled, until it's time to consider society itself. Now, "society" is sacrosanct to the extent you in your propaganda will tell others that you're actually fighting for civil society. Scratch that, you're fighting for civil society as an organism, your ideology is in fact not ideology, more like the "natural immune system" of civil society, through which you will destroy every "foreign parasite" that threatens its integrity. You congratulate yourself for saying this, to everyone and to yourself, mired in a micro-fascism that you will never recognise for what it is. We tell people that we live in a society when the point is to challenge it. We mean it to mock some sort of reactionary pseudo-profundity but then see how quickly it extends as a cudgel against all

standard do we say that such actions are necessarily “non-reflexive”? It’s not true that there is no planning or critique involved, but it’s also not true that the tactic of direct action is entirely unspontaneous. And insofar as that’s the case, does it entirely matter if, for instance, you could destroy the war effort of a fascist state with or without reflexion, with or without “planning” or “critique”?

But this is obviously only somewhat meaningful. Who says nihilists don’t make plans or engage in critique? As if we don’t have theory for the latter, which is all too often hardly read. No, the real fixation here is on the idea of the “vision of the future”. One could say that, if we’re serious, everyone has a vision of what they want the future to look like, even anarcho-nihilists with an almost entirely negationist vision. From that standpoint, the simple problem is that our future is not your future and that we want our future and not your future. But it’s deeper than that. Part of anarcho-nihilist theory concerns itself with opposition to what is called futurity, or “reproductive futurism”. But you might ask, what is that? Futurity is not just the general idea that we can create and live in a better world than the world we live in. Futurity is the reproduction of order, that is the prevailing social order, it is the idea of teleological Progress which then elicits the concentration of order at the expense of autonomous life.

In Lee Edelman’s *No Future*, as well as *baedan*, we see this concept of futurity tied intrinsically to the familiar reactionary forces of cisheteronormativity and white supremacy, all of whom and even sometimes progressive ideologies appeal to the abstract figure of The Child at the expense of actual children. Put this way, ideologies of futurity and progress can be understood as a devotion to abstract notions of better futures (and, I assure you, there are few things more abstract than “the future”) at the expense of the present or even the actual possibility of a better future world. So then, it is only pitiable that other anarchists might look down on nihilist anarchists because of their lack of faith in “the future”, because at heart what counts for the core of it is the ordering process of futurity, and its inexorable authoritarianism.

Next, consider what Shahin says here: “we can only destroy the values, desires and cultures that destroy us if we also create and affirm new values to take their place”. Now consider what this actually means in practice. What are “the values, desires and cultures that destroy us”? They are dominant value-systems, they are social systems of ordering human life predicated on imperative valuation, they are meant to be understood collectively as structures that are imposed upon subjects. Therefore, what does it mean “to take their place”? It means to create new systems of social ordering based, ulti-

than one decade, but when you think about it in terms of the goals of Marxism itself the argument loses meaning.

Even if we discount the matter of the authoritarianism that they practiced, whenever the conversation about their achievements comes up, it seems impossible to identify any actual establishment of socialism (at least insofar as we define it as a system wherein the working class control the means of production) within these countries. Instead, what comes up is mostly expansions of public infrastructure, maybe some state support for public service, as well as certain quotas about “raising living standards”, all under the supervision of one party states, none of which actually has much to do with “socialism”, let alone “communism”, as such. In Marxism-Leninism, the whole goal of establishing a socialist state or “dictatorship of the proletariat” is to (gradually) establish the conditions of communism, but after over a century (and, keep in mind, Marxist-Leninist governments still exist to this day) not only has this never happened, if anything the reverse seems to keep happening as under their leadership ostensibly “socialist” nations actually seem to be developing rudimentary capitalism, with no sign of any reverse course. So under this very criteria, we can’t actually judge these states as “successful revolutions” just because of the fact that they managed to take power when and where they did.

To summarize, it’s a meaningless objection. That is, it is meaningless to accuse your opponents of “doing nothing” when, first of all, you yourself are doing no more than they are, and secondly, the powers you support, and for which you demand solidarity from others, have failed to achieve any kind of communism anywhere.

Or perhaps the whole canard is simply an extension of the idea that nihilists “believe in nothing” – if you “believe in nothing”, you will ergo “do nothing”, so it supposedly goes. But even nihilism in itself comes in different shades. For one thing there is often a distinction between “passive” nihilism and “active” nihilism. Passive nihilism is understood basically as a sort of Schopenhauerian pessimism, the resignation to life as an “unprofitable episode”, while active nihilism represents the conscious effort to break down existing value structures, at least insofar as they are undesired, so that you can carve your own meaning yourself, and so all may enjoy the same freedom. Very much the opposite of “doing nothing”, especially when applied in the context of the Russian nihilist movement, or for that matter all similar movements.

OBJECTION #2: “ANARCHO-NIHILISM IS THE IDEOLOGY OF THE RULING CLASS”

This is another staple not only of Marxist-Leninist critics but also of social-anarchists, and to be honest I have absolutely no idea how this idea came into being. I have to suspect it comes from the deliberate conflation of any and all individualist forms of anarchism with right-wing ideology. Maybe it also comes from Murray Bookchin, who in *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism* explicitly referred to so-called “lifestyle anarchism” (meaning individualist anarchism and basically whatever else he didn’t like about contemporary anarchism) as “a bourgeois form of anarchism”.

Of course, it’s nonsense. You will never see Joe Biden, Liz Truss, Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, Ursula Von der Leyen, Kristalina Georgieva, or any of the bourgeoisie present any suggestion that they want to destroy society or abolish all of the institutions of capitalism and statehood. In fact, you would think that they all benefit from the very institutions that we would like to see destroyed. That much should seem obvious from even the most cursory reflection, but for some reason people on the Left like to believe nihilism is bourgeois. Are we to forget that the Russian nihilists, who were very likely the first to take up that name for themselves in a modern sense, worked towards the negation of all of the major institutions of Russian society, including class society?

I think that a lot of this criticism rests on the idea of the supposed “individualism” of modern capitalism. Thus, for our purposes, let us put that myth to rest. Whatever capitalism presents as “individual freedom” is often anything but. Whatever you believe to be “capitalist individualism” is actually a sophisticated form of collectivism developed through the admixture liberal ideology and Christian morality. You hear the establishment talk of the importance of “individual responsibility”, but when you ask “who or what is the individual responsible to”, the answer reveals itself as economy, society, the state, work, the major social institutions of the present. Thus “personal responsibility” in capitalist parlance is, in reality, the expectation of the individual to conform to society at large as a productive agent for the state. Social marginalization is the function of societies as collective bodies that then invariably base their order on some kind of authoritarian normativity. And so individuals that defy normativity are either violently repressed or socially shunned. I ask you, what “individualism” is this?

Further, I say that the “communist” objection to nihilism, alongside egoism and individualism, is rendered all the more meaningless by none other than the existential criteria of communism. To illustrate this, let’s consult Karl Marx

scure this for us should be smashed or cast aside. That doesn’t always start from a pessimistic outlook. A pessimist can still be beholden to the same meaning-structures that a nihilist is not or strives not to be. A nihilist may not even necessarily derive melancholy from their position. From the standpoint of at least some nihilists, the rejection of meaning-structures can be an unambiguously positive and joyous thing.

Anarcho-nihilism is admittedly a case where the nihilism and the pessimism interlock. That’s probably part of what makes it meaningful, ironically enough. The pessimism is in the rejection of the received horizons of hope and futurity, of revolutionary optimism, of the idea that there’s a program out there that’s going to deliver us from all of our sufferings – loaded of course with the premise that the only thing left for us is to save ourselves. The nihilism is in the active pursuit of the destruction of the horizons of futurity, normative meaning, and social ordering and, most strikingly, in the joy that accompanies this destructive liberation – in a word, *jouissance*. So then, it is not that anarcho-nihilism is merely pessimistic. It is often pessimistic yes, but it is also strictly more than pessimism.

OBJECTION #6: “NIHILISM ONLY LEADS BACK TO OPPRESSION”

This is an argument I observed in Shahin’s *Nietzsche And Anarchy*, a book that otherwise enjoyed reading and have found very valuable in illustrating a psychological individualist standpoint for collective action based around individuation. Shahin seems to define nihilism in terms of “the trap of reflexive action” (apparently borrowing from Alfredo Bonnano here), action done without planning or critique and with no vision of the future, and appears to argue that we can only destroy the dominant values-structures if we also create new ones to take their place, and without new affirmative projects one slips into despair, self-destruction, and ultimately back into conformity with the status quo. This is another far more interesting argument than the usual *ad hominem*s, and bears a response.

There’s a way in which the emphasis on “reflexive action” as “action done without planning or critique” cuts into the subject of direct action. What is direct action? People don’t always understand it, but it is as the term suggests: taking actions in order to directly achieve political goals or interests. Ziq in *Burn The Bread Book* defines it as “an isolated use of force unconnected to institutional systems of power”. There’s no appeal to any kind of higher authority, no official “legitimacy” conferred upon it by anyone, no monopoly on violence granted to them for or by this action, and often, because of that, nothing to guarantee safety from the threat of retaliation. Now, by what

I say that this perspective runs into severe problems when we consider the possibility of abuse victims using violence to liberate themselves from abuse; namely, it establishes false equivalence between the people being abused and the people doing the abusing. Frequently motivated by the self-righteous belief that anarchism is just a signifier for “good person”, they attack the nihilists for being willing to accept what is already the basis of all politics, and believe that they can transcend it. Now you could say that it is very possible to embody anarchistic relationships without violence, and you can establish small-scale communities to that effect. But how are you going to dismantle the state just by getting into drum circles? The state is never going to abolish itself, even if pacifists, reformists, and orthodox Marxists seem to think so, and I will gods-damned if it is only anarcho-nihilists who are going to be honest about that fact!

OBJECTION #5: “ANARCHO-NIHILISTS ARE JUST EDGY PESSIMISTS”

This objection is somewhat more interesting, because it’s at least ostensibly an actual philosophical objection rather than simply an aesthetic one. Of course, it could still be an ad hominem, but it is worth examining the distinction between nihilism and pessimism.

Pessimism, in itself, is not necessarily nihilism. I find revolutionary pessimism to be highly meaningful and valuable, and the French Surrealist conception thereof is an important part of my current political/philosophical ideology, but even this doesn’t necessarily start off from a nihilist perspective, or at least not inherently so. Pessimism on its own can mean many things, philosophically, often starting from very anti-nihilist perspectives (including forms of Christianity). That said, philosophical pessimism can overlap with philosophical nihilism. An interesting example is 19th century German pessimism, certain forms thereof have sometimes been termed nihilism – Julius Bahnsen, for instance, used that term to describe his own philosophy. But more to the point, a pessimist can be someone who takes a generally dim view of the world, sentimentally or ontologically, they can be someone whose worldview is built on the centrality of suffering, contradiction, or evil in the world regardless of the attitude towards it (religions such as Christianity and Buddhism all can have their pessimistic streaks), or it can be the broad thesis that life is in some ways not worth living. Depending on who you ask, a nihilist might reject at least one of these ideas.

If there’s a definition of nihilism we can work with, it’s the ontological position that existence has no inherent meaning, that meaning only consists of what we create, and, following from this, all of the externalised meanings that ob-

in Critique of the German Ideology:

“In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, to fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have in mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.” -Karl Marx, Critique of the German Ideology (1846)

Communism, in this understanding, would mean a set of social conditions in which an individual is free to pursue any creative activities they desire without the division of labour, class society, and statehood, and without the individual subjectivity of creative activity being locked into any sort of professional identity. In other words, the communist subject is someone who creates because they enjoy creating, not because they are a creator. They produce things in accordance with will, interest, desire, and not because they are workers. Such an understanding is easily transferred towards and nourished by the egoist worldview; for the Unique, in establishing communism on behalf of itself, destroys the totality of existing conditions in order to arrange itself for itself, produce and create for itself, and share this condition with others without coercion or hierarchy.

As a matter of fact, there are at least some Marxists who understand quite well what this entails, and ironically, without realising it, end up as anti-communists because of it. The main illustrative example here would be Domenico Losurdo, a Stalinist intellectual whose main response to Marx’s elaboration of communism is to call for revising the definition of communism entirely, rejecting Marx’s proposal as “fantastical” and “anarchistic” in favour, presumably, of an idea more congruent with the actual conditions of Soviet capitalism. My point here is that at least some Marxists are well aware of what Marx’s communism entails, even if the majority are utterly confused, and one of the responses, ironically enough, is to attack the theoretical basis of communism.

I am well aware that my approach to nihilism and communism is not always accepted even by others in the same milieu, but just to support it further we can turn to none other than Stirner’s egoism itself, at least as presented by Jacob Blumenfeld. Here, I am specifically drawing from a lecture he presented in 2016. Blumenfeld here illustrates that Stirner’s “communism”, or at least communism as unwittingly borne out from Stirner’s egoism, consists in the insurrectionary/revolutionary negation of Capital as a world-historic force, in the liberation of unique individual relationships to create and devour each

other, and in the ontological nothingness of the proletariat and the impermanence of its labour that then enacts its own emancipation in the devourment of the order of things. Communism in nihilist terms is thus to destroy the totality of extant social conditions so as to fully realise the freedom of human beings, manifest in the full negative splendour of the Unique.

OBJECTION #3: "WHAT HAS ANARCHO-NIHILISM NEGATED?"

This is something of a silly question, because, again, those who ask this question have invariably done no more than we have. Actually, when I think about it, this is sort of the same as the first objection. In a way, the better question would be "what is anarcho-nihilism trying to negate?". But then the answer should be obvious.

All of the ordering processes that humans have to created regiment our collective existence, every project that can roundabout be described as "the New Man", every grand teleological design, every new regime of futurity, all of this is what we cast to the fire.

OBJECTION #4: "ANARCHO-NIHILISM IS [INSERT BAD THING HERE]"

Most outside encounters with anarcho-nihilism appear to treat it as either a statement of abject malevolence, an expression of utter despair, or outright suicidal ideation. It's an obvious ad hominem of course, and there really is no evident basis for it other than a reflexive emotional response. Perhaps an unconscious script, you might say.

There is a somewhat prejudicial idea at play here. The idea seems to be that being a nihilist of any sort means that, since you "believe in nothing", supposedly meaning that you believe "nothing matters", you will be willing to do all sorts of heinous things to people just because "nothing matters". There's a bunch of problems with that though. For starters, if nihilism in an ontological sense is just the belief that life does not possess any inherent meaning or teleological will, what about that is supposed to be so inherently anti-ethical, or even "anti-social" necessarily? And what about that belief is supposed to be so conducive to murder, when countless more people have been by people and organisations whose actions were all guided by some greater good they thought they were serving?

That really is the strange thing, isn't it? Everyone seems to have a problem when someone kills maybe a hundred people in a self-satisfying spectacle of violence, but no one seems to have any problem when states, whether

capitalist or "socialist" kill tens of thousands or even millions of people, either directly or as the consequence of a set of conditions they create. You think you are morally upstanding because you condemn some imagined mayhem violence that you associate with statelessness, but in reality by supporting statehood you also support the systematic violence that invariably supports it. You may object, but what are the processes and functions that uphold the existence of states? Wars, incarceration, slavery, patriarchy, punishment, intelligence, eugenicism, economics, even sexual abuse, there are countless apparatuses of violent instrumentality that support the state, and chances are your average non-anarchist person is prepared to support at least one of those things and thereby its effects, all while handwringing over the threat of lawless violence. And it's not because they're assholes or bad people necessarily, it's definitely not because they're "nihilists", "sadists", "sociopaths", "psychopaths" or the like; they're probably often nice people interpersonally in many other respects. In fact, you're looking at the current majority of the world's population, and they can't all be "insane" and "psychotic". And whether they are or not isn't the problem. You can believe anything you want, be "perfectly sane", and under certain circumstances you'll justify the worst atrocities you can think, not because you get off on it but because you think there's a greater good that makes it all worthwhile.

Don't make any mistake: in more people than you might think, there's an ideal that people are willing to countenance sacrificial violence to fulfill. There's legions of people that are willing to condemn the whole world to a long and painful ecological catastrophe so that some way of life that they cherish, that they've taken as the natural order of their lives or life more generally, can continue unabated for generations more. Even more people are prepared to tolerate or even justify the fact of thousands of millions of indigenous peoples being killed and/or displaced, in either case amounting to acts of genocide, if it means they can lead comfortable lives or that the progress of "civilization" can continue to enrich the world or so they believe. So, on that count, people may accuse anarcho-nihilists of being serial killers in waiting (or training) only to deflect the reality of unmitigated violence away from whatever social order they prefer to defend.

At heart the whole objection comes down to the perception that anarcho-nihilists are just anarchists who are just enthusiastic about committing violence. Pacifists hold this objection and sometimes refer to nihilists as "violentoids", while also making the same arguments about violence and authoritarianism that Friedrich Engels already made in *On Authority*, albeit from the opposite perspective to Engels. The pacifist opposes all forms of violence because, like Engels, they deem that all violence is a form of coercion and authoritarianism.