

Anarchy, Monarchy, Malarkey

by

Sam Aurelius Milam III
c/o 4984 Peach Mountain Drive
Gainesville, Georgia 30507

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caveat lector

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We have met the enemy, and he is us.

—Walt Kelly, 1972

Many people confuse anarchy with chaos, which is an entirely different thing. Chaos is disorder. Anarchy is order achieved without coercion. Anarchy has probably never existed, at least not for very long or over a very large area. That's true because of two features of human nature.

The first of those two features is that no matter how good things are, some jerk will always find a way to create a problem. When faced with that kind of a situation, people have four choices.

1. They can tolerate whatever the jerk is doing,
2. they can try to escape from it,
3. they can solve the problem themselves, or
4. they can empower someone else to solve the problem for them.

Tolerance is a good thing unless the problem is intolerable. Running away is inconvenient. Personally solving a problem is a lot of trouble. That leads to the second feature of human nature that always defeats anarchy. That is, when it becomes necessary to deal with someone who's ruining paradise, people generally pass the buck.

Government is a degenerate form of anarchy.

—Thomas George Milam

Passing the buck always seems, at the time, like the easiest way out. Actually, it's a bad idea. When people empower a third party to regulate the behavior of some obnoxious individual then they also empower the third party to regulate their own behavior. It isn't always obvious at the time but the power to regulate the behavior of anyone is the power to regulate the behavior of everyone. That power is government, which began when the first victim failed to solve his own problem and gave someone else the authority to do it for him. Government is a consequence of the easy way out. Given those two features of human nature, government is probably inevitable.

When a lawyer wins a case, he loses a customer.

—[Milam's Notes](#)

Since the justification for government is to solve problems, it follows that the more problems there are the more justification there is for government. It isn't surprising, therefore, that government solutions to problems always create more problems, and more difficult problems, than they solve. As the problems multiply and worsen, people in government service (PIGS) can justify more government. It's known as job security.

Democracy is a currently fashionable form of government advertised as a remedy to the problem of bad government. It returns the responsibility for solving problems back to the people. However, people are very clever at avoiding responsibility and

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give that responsibility right back to the government again through the peculiar mechanism of elected representatives. Of course, after that it isn't really a democracy any more. It isn't a democracy unless the people vote on all of the decisions. When the people don't vote on anything except for the representatives, then it's a strange kind of oligarchy, an elected oligarchy.

Not to be outdone, the elected oligarchs delegate the responsibility for problem solving to bureaucrats. Two hundred and twenty-one years of this particular bad experiment in buck passing provide convincing evidence that, by starting with what happened on March 4, 1789¹, people will always end up with what exists today. It can best be described as bureaucratic tyranny.

Rank has its obligations.

—Gaston Pierre Marc, Duc de Lévis, 1808

For kings rule according to law over voluntary subjects, but tyrants over involuntary; and the one are guarded by their fellow-citizens, the others are guarded against them.

—from *Politics*,
by Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)

The dismal circumstances of this particular bad experiment in democracy are a convincing argument in favor of trying something different. Maybe some other form of government would be better, so what are the choices? What about a monarchy? At least a king might have some regard for his subjects. *Noblesse oblige* certainly doesn't exist in bureaucracies. Patronage and nepotism are sometimes available but never *noblesse oblige*. Also, at least on rare occasions there will be a good king. If a really bad one takes the throne, then perhaps he can be killed. I doubt if there will ever be a good democracy that stays good and nothing can be done about it when a democracy goes bad. A bureaucracy cannot be assassinated. Another virtue of monarchy is that many of the king's most serious threats will be from intrigues within his own government. That gives him an incentive to keep his government small, so that he can supervise it effectively. No such incentive to smallness exists within a bureaucracy. However, the most important virtue of a monarchy is that a king can call a spade a spade and a good king will do so. A democracy must always promise rights and freedom but it doesn't deliver on its promise. What passes for a right is actually a privilege. What passes for freedom is actually permission. It's all dispensed at the whim or discretion of the various bureaucrats and is available only to individuals who cooperate with authority. If a king grants a privilege, then everyone knows that it's a privilege. Nobody thinks that it's a right. Veracity is a great virtue.

¹ The present U.S. constitution went into effect.

The day of small nations has long passed away.

The day of Empires has come.

—Joseph Chamberlain, 1904

When a government becomes large, then it becomes coercive. That's unavoidable. When a government becomes coercive, then the particular forms of that government become irrelevant. A coercive democracy isn't any better than a coercive monarchy. The ultimate solution, of course, would be to solve our own problems and dispense with government. However, it's generally illegal for people to solve their own problems when government is pretending to do it for them. It's condemned as taking the law into our own hands, even though the people are the original source of the law-making authority.

If the establishment of government is inevitable and irreversible, then the next best answer is to make it as small as possible. Any small government, whatever its form, is better than any large one. Objections to this idea generally present the spectre of small governments falling prey to larger ones. Yet, if the conquest of a small government by a larger one is bad, then the objection defeats itself. That is, the small government was better. Too bad that it was overrun by a larger one. The question isn't whether small government is better. That has been adequately acknowledged.

The less government we have, the better - the fewer laws, and the less confided power.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1844

A government big enough to give us everything we want is also a government big enough to take from us everything we have.

—Gerald Ford, 1976

The question is how to keep it small.

I was gratified to be able to answer promptly, and I did.

I said I didn't know.

—Samuel Langhorne Clemens, 1883

How do you keep a government small? You must find your own solution to the problem. No one can do it for you. Isn't that, after all, one of the points of this essay?

America is at that awkward stage. It's too late to work within the system, but too early to shoot the bastards.

—Claire Wolfe

Consider your solution carefully before you start. Re-examine it frequently thereafter. It's far more difficult than you can imagine to correctly predict the consequences of your actions.

Good intentions are the source of more folly than all other causes put together.

—Star, Empress of the Twenty Universes
in *Glory Road*, by Robert A. Heinlein

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