

CONSTRUCTING ANARCHISMS: A WORKSHOP

This online workshop combines elements of a traditionally structured survey course and a vehicle for self-study. In some ways, it will resemble a year's worth of office hours as much as a yearlong seminar. The goal is to make the basic experience—an extended practical crash-course in thinking about anarchist theory and history—available to as many potential participants as possible. It has been constructed with busy people in mind and should be able to carry on despite some ebb and flow in participation.

This a *practical* course, aimed at providing individuals with the knowledge—or opportunities to gain the knowledge—to accomplish the construction of a *personal theory of anarchism*.

It is divide into four *quarters*:

In the first (December 2020-March 2021), I'll present a series of twelve basic concepts that I have identified as key to understanding my own approach to anarchism, summarizing and extending the work done in the last decade or so. That exposition can serve as an example of one way of approaching this project of constructing an anarchism. But I am also offering the work-in-progress for questioning and critique, in the hope that we can begin by identifying key terms and concepts that we believe should be addressed in our constructive projects. I expect to return to my own construction in the final phase, reorganizing and revising as seems necessary, along with the other participants in the workshop.

The second and third quarters will be dedicated to a rapid historical survey of the period of anarchist history that I have called “our lost continent.” In this course, we'll probably begin in 1834 (with the publication of Pierre Leroux's essay on “Individualism and Socialism”) and end in 1934 (with the publication of the dictionary portion of the *Encyclopédie Anarchiste*.) Half of that time will be spent focused on the period of *anarchists without anarchism*, prior to the emergence of anarchism as a movement in the wake of the final split in the International, with considerable attention paid to the variety of anarchist theories in that period. The remainder will focus on the attempts to address the diversity of anarchist positions in the early decades of “modern anarchism.” My weekly posts, prompts and potential readings throughout this survey will be as much suggestive as representative—and they will be shaped, at least to some degree, by the interests demonstrated in earlier phases of the workshop.

The fourth quarter will then turn more distinctly in the direction of self-study, with participants beginning to choose and explain the concepts around which they are building a basic theory of *anarchism*. I will respond as seems appropriate. I expect that I will be sharing material from the *Encyclopédie Anarchiste* and similar sources, as time allows and as it seems likely to be of general use to the participants. I expect that at this point, if not before, there will be conversations to be had about the uses of *systems* and of *ideologies*, neither of which are necessarily subject to much enthusiasm among anarchists. But we can say from the outset that the intention here is not to frame any new orthodoxy. This is a skill-building exercise—and if some of us manage to square away our uncertainties about anarchist history and theory in a year's time, so much the better, but, ultimately, we probably can't expect so much from a *crash-course*.



One of the advantages of an online workshop is that we can be flexible about the *where* and *when*. I'll be providing a rough syllabus, but if discussions lead in unexpected directions or extend on beyond the given week, we can adapt. Similarly, while we will certainly designate a few forums where discussion can be expected to take place, there is no requirement that we all meet in any one of them. I am on Facebook, Reddit, Twitter, Mastodon and Diaspora. I am not on Discord—but there's no particular reason why some groups of participants might not meet there or somewhere else, in addition to the interactions I will take part in. I will make some efforts to post useful material that emerges in various conversations to this site (the Libertarian Labyrinth) and share links elsewhere. But the degree of centralization or decentralization, synchronous or asynchronous interaction will be largely up to the various participants.

What I can offer, barring unforeseen circumstances, is a steady stream of material likely to inspire thought about the basic elements of anarchist theory, together with availability to discuss that material and the questions it raises. My available time is certainly not endless, and there are projects that will require considerable continued attention, but experience suggests that we are more likely to lose steam early on than to create intellectual demands that can't be met. And, to be honest, I wouldn't mind stretching myself a bit, if it was in serious discussion, rather than as an ineffectual cheerleader.



For the first quarter discussion, I will be presenting material relating to the following concepts:

- Anarchy
- Tradition
- Synthesis
- Governmentalism
- Collective Force
- Aubaine
- Federation
- Mutualism
- Contr'un
- Encounter
- Entente
- Anarchism



Announcements on the forums where discussion is definitely taking place will appear as those decisions are made, in the same places I am posting this general invitation.

I hope that folks will consider participating.

Constructing Anarchisms: How to Participate

In announcing *Constructing Anarchisms* as a yearlong workshop, rather than simply as the focus of my activity for the coming year, I wanted to commit myself to a very general sort of availability for a fairly specific kind of educational activity. At the same time, I wanted to encourage others to encourage others to commit to a similar sort of sustained engagement with both the fundamentals anarchist theory and the kind of anarchist history that is the *raison d'être* for the Libertarian Labyrinth. For all concerned, I think that both the commitment and the specific goal in question are likely to produce useful results, whether it is a question of improving our skills as propagandists for anarchism or of grounding our practice in at least a clearer personal conception of what is at stake.

So, if you can, please consider coming along for the full journey.

There are, of course, no *requirements* in this sort of workshop. If folks want to be prepared to share their vision of anarchism, starting next October, they have the better part of a year to prepare, by whatever means seem best. But for those who want to take advantage of the workshop as an organized event, drawing on whatever expertise other participants can bring, the basic minimum level of participation probably involves reading and considering one blog post each week from me and engaging in whatever level of related discussion is both possible and helpful to their own development. Individuals may take on considerably more than that in any given week—and many of us no doubt regularly already invest more time and effort than that in less focused online discussion. But my goal in hosting the workshop is to provide enough in the weekly posts to allow participants to tackle the final project of elaborating a basic *anarchism* that they can say is really their own.



That said, we're all busy folks—and nothing about our general situation is necessarily conducive to sustained efforts. And the final project may not be the bit with the greatest appeal for all potential participants. There may be folks who want to know what I've been babbling on about this past decade or so, but who are comfortable with their own formulation of anarchism. There may be those interested in the odd bits of history, but not in theory or ideology. And so on...

I would like those folks to feel welcome to drop in and out of the conversation as individual interest and resources dictate, simply asking them to be mindful of the larger project in process and the varying investments of the various participants.

And I probably shouldn't have to say it, but I doubt any of the participants will have much time or energy for trolls...



I'll be posting all updates to [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Reddit](#), [Diaspora](#) and [Mastodon](#). Additionally, there will be some discussion in the following forums:

- [Constructing Anarchism](#) group on Facebook
- [r/mutualism](#) on Reddit

And this list may, of course, grow as we get underway.



There is no charge for the course, but those who wish to support the effort will find *Donate* links at the top and bottom of pages in the Libertarian Labyrinth archive. Donations will be applied to ongoing research and generally result in new digitized materials available to all.

Constructing Anarchisms: What It Is & What It Is Not

Survey courses are peculiar things, particularly when they address subjects of more than just passing interest. The construction of a survey always seems to involve at least some claim regarding the *exemplary* nature of the materials chosen. And if we were more certain about the character and extent of the *anarchist tradition*, we would expect a historical survey to take us, rather neatly, from milepost to milepost along the path of growing ideological clarity. But it's hard to spend any time discussing history and theory with other anarchists—and I spend hours nearly every day—without recognizing that *anarchy*, *anarchism* and the *anarchist tradition* are all things that we struggle with, constantly, without necessarily making much headway in the process.

It is likely that *anarchism*—as a general, *shareable* project, not built from the elevation of certain consistently anarchistic concerns above others—still eludes all of us, to one extent or another. It is even *possible* that it always will, that *anarchy* is, as William Batchelder Greene put it, a *blazing star* that constantly retreats as we pursue it. In “The Anarchist Tension,” Alfred Bonanno argued something similar about “being an anarchist:”

So anarchists keep asking themselves the same question: What is anarchism? What does it mean to be an anarchist? Why? Because it is not a definition that can be made once and for all, put in a safe and considered a heritage to be tapped little by little. Being an anarchist does not mean one has reached a certainty or said once and for all, “There, from now on I hold the truth and as such, at least from the point of view of the idea, I am a privileged person.”

And if there is any truth to this idea that, at least for the foreseeable future, some of the details of a general, shareable anarchism will continue to elude us, then various aspects of *anarchist practice*—if they are to be truly *practical*—will have to reflect that fact.

Those interested in an early look at my own developing *theory of anarchist development* can read through the series of “Extrications” posted here in 2018, starting with “[History, Tradition, Theory](#)” (and linked in the sidebar there.) For those without the time and specific interest, I will be summarizing elements from those posts, along with some that were ultimately left unwritten at the time, as we move into the exposition of my neo-Proudhonian synthesis. And I would encourage all participants to find some time fairly soon to read the essay by Voline, “[On Synthesis](#)” (1924), as the vision there—which is considerably broader and, I think, more interesting than the proposals for organizational fusion usually associated with *anarchist synthesis*—provides a rationale for much of what we’ll be doing throughout the workshop.

But we were talking about *surveys* and *exemplary elements*...

If the *anarchist tradition* is not, in fact, intelligible as the advance toward an *anarchism* that is now clearly and fully known to us, if *anarchism* remains something with which we routinely struggle, then we can naturally expect that the most useful examples for us to focus on are those that accomplish two basic tasks: *bringing certain aspects of anarchist theory into clear focus*, while also *allowing us to focus on what remains clearly unresolved and in need of resolution*.

I'm an old interdisciplinary studies scholar, with a background that has confronted me with all the difficulties of *canon construction* in various contexts and from various sides (popular culture studies, "Great Ideas," etc.) I want, at the outset, to make it clear that the peculiar collection of texts and incidents we will be exploring is hardly *representative* in the ways that we usually associate with even a purely pedagogical canon. At times, our course will be obviously and defiantly idiosyncratic. That is, in part, because the goal here is to prepare participants to come to grips with the anarchist tradition in all of its daunting breadth and diversity and, in part, because educators should almost certainly find ways to lean on their strengths—and my particular strengths are perhaps most evident in the context of the *margins* of anarchist history. There are also obviously considerations that emerge from the loose, largely informal nature of the project and the diverse backgrounds of the participants. Many of you are well-read, but often in different areas of the anarchist literature. Some of you will be engaging in self-study, while others have already formed organized study groups. And there is really no telling, at this early stage, how effective I'm going to be determining and addressing the needs of such a diverse group. I'm making some effort to focus, in my choice of readings, on those that will hopefully present important ideas in some *new light* for the largest number of people.

When it is time for you to construct your own theory of *anarchism*, I naturally expect that many of you will do so from sources quite different from those we are examining together—and perhaps with rather different ideas about how to think about *anarchy*, *anarchism*, *anarchist history*, the *anarchist tradition*, etc. I have no interest in dictating the material you choose to work with. However, in the interest of keeping us more or less on the same page though what is a long commitment, and in order to discourage certain kinds of distractions from or subversions of the shared project, I would like to make two basic suggestions or challenges to participants:

First, as you begin to think about constructing your own *anarchism*, commit to treating *anarchy* and *anarchism* as the first and last of the concepts you will define—and pay some close attention to the degree to which our shared commitment to addressing the first of these concepts does or does not contribute to conceptions of the second that are *shareable* among anarchists generally, however provisionally. I'm not asking participants to embrace the sort of *anarchy-centered anarchism* or the model of *synthesis as anarchist development* that I'll be exploring in my own work—but it might be useful for you to be clear about if and how your own conceptions might be incompatible with that approach.

Second, I would encourage participants to consider the gap between the emergence of *anarchy* and *anarchist* in 1840 and that of *anarchism*, which was probably not a widely used label until almost 1880—and the extent to which the specific emergence of anarchism, *as a particular kind of movement and ideology*, was the condition that made talk about *anarchist history* and the *anarchist tradition* meaningful.

One way of looking at our historical survey would be to break it down into a decade in which anarchist thought was first emerging, another four decades in which there were *anarchists* of quite a wide variety of types, but no *anarchism*, and then fifty years or so in which there were *anarchists* and *anarchism*, movements and ideologies, but perhaps never much shared clarity about what that all meant. That lack of shared understanding was, we know, widely perceived among anarchists, essentially all through the period after the split in the International, driving various internal movements in favor or synthesis or division, and eventually led to monumental, but ultimately unfinished efforts like the *Encyclopédie Anarchiste*. There are a variety of ways to position our own thoughts and efforts relative to that kind of historical framing—but I would like to encourage participants to at least try to find one of their own.



I will probably post just one more introductory text before December 1, an explanation of the final project and introduction to the first phase of the workshop. I've added the beginnings of a schedule to the main page, with the understanding that the holidays will be a period of busy activity for some of us and probably one of isolation for others. We'll be extra flexible through the early weeks, as there will undoubtedly be wrinkles of various kinds to smooth.

Constructing Anarchisms

1.—Making Anarchism « Our Own »

Let's begin with a couple of questions that we are committed, at this point to answering to the best of our ability:

What is *anarchy*?

What is *anarchism*?

No pressure... But if you want to get up and take those questions out for a walk before continuing, I wouldn't consider it a bad opening strategy. After all, these are old questions, which have proven rather resistant to definitive answers. Of course, those committed to an engagement with *anarchy* may put a bit less stock in the *definitive* than others. Proudhon, whose philosophy was all about “progress”—by which he meant never-ending *change*—declared that “Humanity proceeds by approximations” and advocated an experimental practice, against all of the utopian blueprints that might be drawn up. And that means that, despite the importance of the questions, we probably have to be a bit gentle with ourselves. Proudhon, who was not famously relaxed about things, ended the first letter in his *Philosophy of Progress* with this charming bit:

The idea of progress is so universal, so flexible, so fecund, that he who has taken it for a compass almost no longer needs to know if his propositions form a body of doctrine or not: the agreement between them, the system, exists by the mere fact that they are in progress. Show me a philosophy where a similar security is to be found!... I never reread my works, and those that I wrote first I have forgotten. What does it matter, if I have *moved* for twelve years, and if today I still advance? What could a few lapses, or some false steps, detract from the rectitude of my faith, the goodness of my cause?... You will please me, sir, to learn for yourself what road I have

traveled, and how many times I have fallen along the way. Far from blushing at so many spills, I would be tempted to boast of them and to measure my valor by the number of my contusions.

Expect contusions. It would be some combination of foolhardy and self-defeating to approach our task of “constructing anarchisms” with any other expectation. But *forewarned is forearmed* and, expecting to stumble from time to time, we don’t have to treat it as a big deal. We are embarking on a voyage of exploration—through the parts of anarchist history and theory that I have described as « Our Lost Continent »—and ending with an experiment.

This is a work *on the margins* of what we generally think of as the anarchist milieu. So, in some important senses, *it doesn’t have to matter*. For a variety of practical reasons, I try to treat our shared anarchist inheritance with a great deal of care. But I also live with a growing understanding of just how disconnected the facts of the anarchist past *can be* from our present understanding of “the anarchist tradition” or “anarchist history,” without that being a particular problem for anarchism as we experience it generally.

Try to imagine the historical *cataclysm* that would be necessary to transform modern anarchist theory by itself. Was Bakunin perhaps actually an agent of the czar, as was claimed? *So much for Bakunin!* We are arguably better at walking away from *problematic* aspects of our shared heritage than we are at embracing the new problems it might pose.

The one thing you can probably be certain of, at the end of a year of exploring the margins of anarchist tradition, is that—at least as far as the *milieus* are concerned—you *can go home again*.

So *expect contusions*—but perhaps, depending on your own agendas and commitments, not of any very lasting sort.



To talk about making anarchism « our own » involves a kind of double allusion to anarchist thinkers who will be known by at least some of those involved in our joint exploration. On the one hand, it seems useful to raise—and from the outset—a set of questions about on what terms an individual might “construct an anarchism.” Is *anarchism* the sort of thing of which there might be multiple, varied instances? Is it the sort of thing that might be constructed by individuals? Are individuals equal to the task involved? Do individuals have the “right” to undertake it—assuming we can make any sense, as anarchists, of the notion of *right*?

☞ At this point, the answers to the questions are of considerably less importance than the task of grappling with *anarchism* effectively enough to frame them. What follows in the rest of this post is an attempt to propose at least some of the questions we can expect to deal with in the coming months.

But that reference to « our own »—*en guillemets*, a French form of scare-quoting—is also a tip of the hat to the anarchist individualist E. Armand, who had the habit of wrapping up possessive pronouns in this way in his writings, generally at moments where there was some question whether they might involve some kind of overreach for a conscious egoist and serious student of Stirner. In my *Rambles in the Fields of Anarchist Individualism* (linked in the sidebar, for those

with too much time on their hands), I have appropriated the guillemets for instances where it seems important to underline questions of the *shareability* of concepts—a practice I will continue in this context.

To make *anarchism* « our own » in simple egoist sense might simply be to appropriate those elements of anarchist thought and tradition that are of use to us. In this task, we can perhaps take our cues from that conscious egoist Humpty Dumpty:

“When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

But even the egoist is likely to be troubled, eventually, by that question of shareability. And, despite considerable interest in Stirner and those who made wholesale appropriations of his thought, I’m not an egoist.

☞ Anyway, let’s say for the moment that the very existence of this collective endeavor, our proposed exploration of a shared anarchist heritage and our recognition of those existing anarchist milieus makes the question of sharing « our » anarchisms one that will be hard to avoid. So when you see a term bracketed *en guillemets* in one of *my* texts, treat it as a kind of *offering*—something I have constructed for my own personal use which might be of use in your own projects.

2.—The Anarchy in Anarchism(s)

There are arguably two constant concerns to address as we begin to ask our questions about anarchism. We should always hold ourselves to a relatively high standard when it comes to the matter of *asking the right questions*. A lot of wasted effort can be avoided by picking our battles and continuing to ask ourselves if the questions we have been asking in one phase of our exploration continue to be of use to us in those that follow. But we must also be concerned about something a bit more basic, trying our best to make sure that we really know *what question we are asking*—clarifying our concerns sufficiently that we can be fairly certain we are not just reacting to words or being guided by our preconceptions. And we may find that some of the more obvious questions actually break down into multiple questions before we are done with them.

For example, this might be the right time to backtrack just a bit and ask: *Is anarchism the kind of thing that we can construct or “make « our own »”?* But it is a hard question to answer at this stage, when defining *anarchism* is itself the task to which we expect to dedicate the next year. So we might instead ask: *What sort of “anarchism” might we construct—individually, in the context of this collective investigation, by defining a set of related concepts, etc.?* And we might also ask: *Is there any alternative to constructing an anarchism?*

Our answers to all of these questions can and probably will vary considerably. And different ideas about the kind of thing that anarchism is will necessarily lead, in the end, to different kinds

of *construction*. If you understand anarchism as fundamentally a *genre of thought* about social relations, then there is considerable latitude in constructing and reconstructing that thought, with potential projects bounded by little more than the need to make new constructions intelligible as instances of this particular genre. That requires some reference to the anarchist tradition, but perhaps only as a point of departure. If, on the other hand, you think of anarchism as fundamentally a historical movement, bought into being under particular conditions in the past and perpetuated through some kind of continuous action and development, your elaboration of concepts is going to be constrained by the particular history you want to describe.

Neither approach is “correct” or “incorrect,” at least for the purposes of our shared exploration. Nor is there any particular reason to approve or disapprove in advance of any of the varied philosophical perspectives that we are likely to bring to the project. The specific structure of the course and its final project should pose challenges for most approaches. With any luck, those structural challenges will be insuperable for any bad-faith actors or would-be entryists, while they serve as spurs for the rest of us to further clarify our positions. The aim is to present material that can be of use to the full range of even marginally consistent anarchists, communists and individualists, platformists and nihilists, etc.—but the actual use of the material is obviously up to individuals. In order to make the most of things, you might keep these two basic points in mind:

☞ My contributions will all come from an ongoing project to sketch out a “plain,” *shareable* anarchism, suitable for a kind of active, ongoing *anarchist synthesis*. If you’re having trouble making sense of what I’m saying or how to put it into use, the first step is probably to return to that premise and to see if perhaps that helps to clarify the sometimes idiosyncratic ways that I am defining and articulating concepts.

☞ But also recognize from the outset that an important part of the process we will be pursuing is an exposure of our existing anarchist thought to the kinds of uncertainty and conflict that the anarchist tradition can and usually does provide when we really allow ourselves to *explore*. If the particular materials with which we will be engaging don’t throw you a curve on a fairly regular basis, maybe you should consider with what degree of openness you are confronting them.

An experimental practice isn’t worth much if there is not a real question to be asked, a real uncertainty to be addressed. And that’s just as true when it comes to experiments regarding our identities and associations. The passage I’ve already quoted from Bonnano’s “The Anarchist Tension” is followed by this striking bit:

...the anarchist is someone who really puts themselves in doubt as such, as a person, and asks themselves: What is my life according to what I do and in relation to what I think? What connection do I manage to make each day in everything I do, a way of being an anarchist continually and not come to agreements, make little daily compromises, etc? Anarchism is not a concept that can be locked up in a word like a gravestone. It is not a political theory. It is a way of conceiving life, and life, young or old as we may be, whether we are old people or children, is not something final: it is a stake we must play day after day.

And I think we have to take that as one of the challenges to be accepted moving forward.



It should be clear, at this point, that one of the assumptions driving the project is that there is a sort of *anarchy within anarchism*, an *anarchy of anarchisms*, which prevents us from simply simply adopting a coherent and useful anarchism passed down to us from any particular set of pioneers. I have looked—and looked—for the fabled *anarchism as such*—in the historical record, in the secondary literatures and in daily interactions with anarchists of various tendencies —and come away convinced that it simply does not exist, except as a certain kind of avoidance of the problems we’re going to go out of our way to confront.

So, when we are asking ourselves a fairly basic question like “What is the relationship between *anarchy* and *anarchism*?” we might well break that question down into a question about *principles and manifestations* and another question about *the organization of relations within anarchism* (however we have defined that term.) And we, judging from conversations within the milieu about “unity,” respond very differently to *anarchy* in the different contexts.

Our search is for clarity, so that we can take up whatever practical projects *anarchism* suggests to us more effectively. But the material for our experiments is overwhelming and, in its way, *anarchic*—so one of the ways that we’ll achieve clarity is likely to be in our preparation for each new encounter and experiment.



The remainder of what follows addresses a few more key issues that have shaped the course:

3.—The Distinctiveness of Anarchist Thought

☞ Another premise: Our use of the language of *anarchy* and *anarchism* should matter in some substantive way. If some less extreme, contentious and unruly concept better describes the core of our projects, then perhaps we should run with that.

In exploring the anarchist tradition, we’ll certainly encounter a wide range of related concepts, aspects of *an-archy* and *archy*, constituent struggles, etc., which will perhaps provide us with some of the elements we use to construct our own anarchisms. Some of those elements will have been treated as synonyms for anarchy or anarchism in some expressions of anarchist thought, with some degree of sense and justice, perhaps, but without, I think, really illuminating what is distinct about the idea of *anarchy* or an *-ism* organized around it.

I would like to encourage participants to focus on what is really distinct about anarchy—what separates it from “good government” in the form of *pure democracy*, from *voluntary association* (with no consideration of the structures for which one volunteers), from *anti-statism* or *anti-monopolism*, from *socialism*, *individualism* and *communism* in their various forms, etc., etc. It seems clear that such distinction is possible. And, honestly, if this work of distinction and clarification convinces a few would-be anarchists that perhaps their particular interests and investments are elsewhere, that doesn’t seem like the worst of outcomes.

4.—The Scope of Application

While we are emphasizing the importance of *anarchy* in the construction of *anarchism*, paying close attention to both what anarchy is and what it is not, we'll also have to learn in what circumstances the body of thought we are constructing is specifically relevant. Anarchy is not the answer to every question, even if, for anarchists, it may never be far from our thoughts. Anarchy doesn't build bridges or bind books, although it may be a related concern. We tend to joke in social media circles about the constant questions about "anarchist methods" or "anarchist opinions" regarding subjects that seem very far removed from the subject of anarchy, but maybe there's room for us to be clearer about the connections of anarchist thought to the details of "everyday life."

We probably also need to be aware that different constructions of anarchism, drawing elements from different spheres of social relations, will almost certainly apply more or less easily to relations in other spheres. When we struggle over whether the etymology of *anarchy* is *an-arche* or *an-archos*, part of what is at stake is a question regarding the scope of application appropriate to the term. A commitment to opposing *rulers* (*an-archos*) is potentially quite different, in both theory and practice, from the broad form of opposition that might be implied by *an-arche*. In "The Pantarchy Defined—The Word and the Thing," Stephen Pearl Andrews captured the potential scope of *arche* quite nicely:

Arche is a Greek word (occurring in *mon-archy*, *olig-archy*, *hier-archy*, etc.), which curiously combines, in a subtle unity of meaning, the idea of *origin* or *beginning*, and hence of *elementary principle*, with that of *government* or *rule*.

Without some clarification about the scope of anarchism's application—without a clear designation of its targets—we're left without any very clear way to choose between the anarchism of those who champion the "no rulers, but not no rules" formula and that of those, like myself, who are inclined to think of anarchism as "lawless and unprincipled" (at least in some important senses.)

5.—Relations with the Non-Anarchist World

Related to the question of anarchism's possible scope of application, there are questions regarding its practical scope in a world that remains surprisingly full of people who have resisted all the charms of *anarchy*. With debates about various kinds of political "unity" a constant feature of so many anarchist milieus, it probably makes sense, as we are working to distinguish anarchism from other tendencies, to also pay at least some attention to the ways in which clarifying anarchism might also clarify its possible relations with other tendencies, whether radical or not.

6.—Conceptualizing and Constructing an Anarchism

When it finally comes time to try to "construct an anarchism," all of these preliminary concerns ought to help guide us in the choice of building materials. And different general concerns may suggest a mix of different kinds of concepts, with the definitions doing different kinds of work. For example, in my own preliminary exposition:

Anarchy, together with the related notion of *archy*, provides a focus around which both my conception of anarchism and my critique of the anarchist tradition can be organized. *Tradition* is an occasion to address longstanding conflicts among anarchists, explore the power of “origin stories” and make a distinction between the stories we tell and the raw events of the anarchist past. *Synthesis*, with a nod to Voline’s 1924 essay, is an opportunity to talk about individual method and theories of anarchist development. *Governmentalism*, the political target of anarchists prior to the emergence of anti-statism as an ideology, is one of those historical keywords that requires reintroduction for modern readers—and that reintroduction provides an opportunity to discuss a range of more familiar concepts (*authority, hierarchy, etc.*) as well as some specifically Proudhonian notions (“external constitution,” etc.) *Collective Force* was the concept at the heart of Proudhon’s sociology and it is perhaps one of the keys to working through an analysis of anarchy as a positive concept. *Contr’un, Encounter* and *Entente* are the heart of a three-part analysis including a theory of the anarchist subject, a theory of relations among anarchists and a theory of relations between anarchists and non-anarchists. And so, on to *Anarchism...*

I’m still working some of the ways in which all of those interconnecting elements really come together as a kind of theoretical *edifice*, but I don’t think that it’s hard to see that, as they do come together, the resulting *anarchism* will be something we can view from a variety of different sides and easily place within a variety of different contexts. The goal is ultimately not just the construction of “an anarchism,” but of at least the beginnings of a worldview in the context of which that anarchism might be fairly directly put to the work for which it is well suited.

— Shawn P. Wilbur

<https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/workshops/workshop-constructing-anarchisms/>