AN OPEN LETTER TO AYN RAND: OBJECTIVISM AND THE STATE

By R.A. Childs, Jr.

PREFACE BY JARRET B. WOLLSTEIN

Careful readers of The Rational Individualist *will have noted a recent change in SRI's Declaration of Principle. Item 6 formerly read "... the only form of society consistent with man's rights is laissez-faire capitalism* under a constitutional republic" [*emphasis added*]. *It now simply reads "... the only form of society consistent with m man's rights is laissez-faire capitalism," period. This modification reflects a fundamental change in the political position of the National Office of SRI. As a consequence of nearly a year of correspondence with Mr. R. A. Childs, we have concluded that* any government *(other than that of a proprietary community) which attempts to outlaw competition with its agencies of retaliatory force is* by that fact *inherently immoral. Our political position therefore technically falls in the category of what others term* anarchy, *defined as "that social state in which there is an absence of political rule or government".*

However, since "anarchy" is only a political *position, one which we are now certain is fully and uniquely consistent with the fundamental principles of Objectivism, we are still first and foremost* Rational Individualists. *Further the deletion of the phrase "under a constitutional republic" from item 6 of our Declaration of Principle represents a broadening rather than a narowing of the political position which is a requirement for membership in SRI. Those objectivists who still believe in "limited government" are necessarily* also *advocates of laissez-faire capitalism, which is the only socio-political position that is now required for membership in SRI. Although we are now epistemologically certain that "anarchy" is the only political position consistent with laissez-faire capitalism, we can nevertheless understand why it might take some time for others to realize the validity of this position -- it took me six months.*

Now should we term our position anarchy? Actually, we reject this term (although Mr. Childs does not) for the following reason: "Anarchy" literally means only "no rule." Therefore, the term does not designate those positive social institutions which we do advocate. Since it is a negative term, we therefore reject it. In addition, the popular connotations of the term "anarchy," some of which have found their way into "descriptive dictionaries," are chaos, disorder and violent revolution. None of these are either the necessary consequences of the absence of government or advocated by SRI. However, they are nonetheless the popular connotations of the term "anarchy," thereby making that term of negative value *in communicating our socio-economic position to many persons. What term are we then to use to designate "a society without coercion in which men act according to objective morality and deal with each other through voluntary association"? Unfortunately no single term for such a society exists. We therefore resort to such designations as "free society" (or voluntarism), and "anarcho-capitalism" until we come up with a better term.*

Voluntarism or anarcho-capitalism does not mean that there are no agencies of retaliatory force, e.g., police forces, court systems and armed forces, but merely that no single conglomeration of such agencies, calling itself the "state," can prevent other such agencies from arising. The Encyclopedia Americana *expresses this fact well (although it is inconsistent and incorrect in many of the other things which it says about anarchism). We here quote the relevant and consistent passages.*

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"ANARCHISM, a theory of social organization. Its doctrines represent the extreme of individualism . . . Anarchists do not conceive of a society without order [and we would add here that that is metaphysically impossible], but of an order arising out of law of association, preferably through self-governing groups . . . Anarchists do not ignore the economies resulting from the law of association, but insist that the law will be better served in a state of freedom and in the absence of all compulsion. They believe that everything now done by the state can be better done by voluntary or associative effort . . . " ("Anarchism," The Encyclopedia Americana, pp. 623–624.)

The exact manner in which an anarcho-capitalist society would create social order and deal with conflict is best described in my article "Society without Coercion," which should be published by the time that this issue of The Rational Individualist *reaches you. Since most subscribers have already purchased this essay, they will be receiving it also.*

Following is an open letter from Mr. R. A. Childs to Ayn Rand on "Objectivism and The State." Here Mr. Childs brilliantly presents the essential moral *arguments against "limited government." Before reading this letter readers must be cautioned not to consider rejecting these arguments on the grounds that they "are not practical." As any Objectivist should know, the moral* determines *the practical. Anarcho-capitalism is practical because it is moral. It is not immoral because it is "impractical." For the practical case for anarcho-capitalism I refer you to my "Society without Coercion."*

Before presenting this letter, it must also be pointed out that there are several semantic issues which it raises on which we disagree with Mr. Childs. First, as explained above, we do not like the term anarchism. Secondly, we believe his sharp manner of expression, though rational, was nevertheless a poor choice in a letter to Miss Rand who, unfortunately, is extremely sensitive on such issues. We were therefore not surprised by the letter which he received from The Objectivist *office, quoted in full as a postscript to Mr. Childs' letter.*

Despite these faults, Mr. Childs' letter stands as a bright beacon of truth for all those who are not so blind that they will not see. As always, your comments and criticism are welcomed.

Dear Miss Rand:

The purpose of this letter is to convert you to free market anarchism. As far as I can determine, no one has ever pointed out to you in detail the errors in your political philosophy. That is my intention here. I attempted this task once before, in my essay *"The Contradiction in Objectivism,"* in the March 1968 issue of the *Rampart Journal,* but I now think that my argument was ineffective and weak, not emphasizing the essentials of the matter. I will remedy that here.

Why am I making such an attempt to convert you to a point of view which you have, repeatedly, publicly condemned as a floating abstraction? Because you are wrong. I suggest that your political philosophy cannot be maintained without contradiction, that, in fact, you are advocating the maintenance of an institution – the state – which is a *moral evil.* To a person of self esteem, these are reasons enough.

There is a battle shaping up in the world – – a battle between the forces of archy – of statism, of political rule and authority – and its only alternative – anarchy, the absence of political rule. This battle is the necessary and logical consequence of the battle between individualism and collectivism, between liberty and the state, between freedom and slavery. As in ethics there are only two logical sides to the political question of the state: either you are for it, or you are against it. Any attempt at a middle ground is doomed to failure, and the adherents of any middle course are doomed likewise to failure and frustration – or the blackness of psychological destruction, should they blank out and refuse to identify the causes of such failure, or the nature of reality as it is.

There are, by your framework, three alternatives in political organization: statism which is a governmental system wherein the government initiates force to attain its ends, limited government, which holds a monopoly on retaliation but does *not* initiate the use of threat of physical force, and anarchy, a society wherein there is no government, government being defined by you as "an institution that holds the exclusive power to *enforce* certain rules of social conduct in a given geographical area." You support a limited government, one which does not initiate the use or threat of physical force against others.

It is my contention that *limited government is a floating abstraction which has never been concretized by anyone; that a limited government must either initiate force or cease being a government; that the very concept of limited government is an unsuccessful attempt to integrate two mutually contradictory elements: statism and voluntarism.* Hence, if this can be shown, epistemological clarity and moral consistency demands the rejection of the institution of government totally, resulting in free market anarchism, or a purely voluntary society.

Why is a limited government a floating abstraction? Because it must either initiate force or stop being a government. Let me present a brief proof of this.

Although I do not agree with your definition of government and think that it is epistemologically mistaken (i.e. you are not identifying its fundamental, and hence essential, characteristics), I shall accept it for the purpose of this critique. One of the major characteristics of your concep-

tion of government is that it holds a monopoly on the use of retliatory force in a given geographical area. Now, there are only two possible kinds of monopolies: a coercive monopoly, which initiates force to keep its monopoly, or a non-coercive monopoly, which is always open to competition. In an Objectivist society, the government is not open to competition, and hence is a coercive monopoly.

The quickest way of showing why it must either initiate force or cease being a government is the following. Suppose that I were distraught with the service of a government in an Objectivist society. Suppose that I judged, being as rational as I possibly could, that I could secure the protection of my contracts, and the retrieval of stolen goods at a cheaper price and with more efficiency. Suppose I either decide to set up an institution to attain these ends, or patronize one which a friend or business colleague has established. Now, if he succeeds in setting up the agency, which provides all the services of the Objectivist government, and restricts his *more efficient* activities to the use of retaliation against aggressors, there are only two alternatives as far as the "government" is concerned: (a) It can use force or the threat of it against the new institution, in order to keep its monopoly status in the given territory, *thus initiating the use or threat of physical force against one who has not himself initiated force*. Obviosly, then, if it should choose this alternative, it would have initiated force. E.D. Or: (b) It can refrain from initiating force, and allow the new institution to carry on its activities without interference. If it did this, then the Objectivist "government" would become a truly market-place institution, and not a "government" at all. There would be competing agencies of protection, defense and retaliation – in short, free market anarchism.

If the former should occur, the result would be statism. It is important to remember in this context that statism exists whenever there is a government which initiates force. The *degree* of statism, once the government has done so, is all that is in question. Once the *principle* of the initiation of force has been accepted, we have granted the premise of statists of all breeds, and the rest, as you have said so eloquently, is just a matter of time.

If the latter case should occur, we would no longer have a government, properly speaking. This is, again, called free market anarchism. Note that what is in question is not whether or not, *in fact*, any free market agency of protection, defense or retaliation is more efficient than the former "government." The point is that whether it is more efficient or not can only be decided by individuals acting according to their rational self-interest and on the basis of their rational judgement. And if they do not initiate force in this pursuit, then they are within their rights. If the Objectivist government, *for whatever reason,* moves to threaten or physically prevent these individuals from pursuing their rational self-interest, it is, whether you like it or not, *initiating the use of physical force against another, peaceful, non-aggressive human being*. To advocate such a thing is, as you have said, "to evict oneself automatically from the realm of rights, of morality, and of the intellect." Surely then, you cannot be guilty of such a thing.

Now, if the new agency should in fact initiate the use of force, then the former "government" – turned-market-place-agency would of course have the right to retaliate against those *individuals* who performed the act. But, likewise, so would the new institution be able to use retaliation against the former "government" if that should initiate force.

I shall cover some of your major "justifications" for government, pointing out your logical flaws, but first let us get one thing very clear: as far as I can determine, I have absolutely and irrefutably shown that government cannot exist without initiating force, or at least threatening to do so, against dissenters. If this is true, and if sanctioning any institution which initiates force is a moral evil, then you should morally withdraw all sanction from the U.S. government, in fact, from the very concept of government itself. One does not have an obligation to oppose all evils in the world, since life rationally consists of a pursuit of positives, not merely a negation of negatives. But one does, I submit, have a moral obligation to oppose a major evil such as government, especially when one had previously come out in favor of such an evil.

Note also that the question of how free market anarchism would work is secondary to establishing the evil of government. If a limited government, i.e. – a non-statist government, is a contradiction in terms, then it cannot be advocated – period. But since there is no conflict between the moral and the practical, I am obligated to briefly sketch how your objections to free market anarchism are in error.

I do not intend to undertake a full "model" of a free market anarchist society, since I like yourself, do not spend my time inventing Utopias. I am talking about principles whose practical applications should be clear. In any case, a much fuller discussion of the technical aspects of the operation of a fully voluntary, nonstatist society is forthcoming, in the opening chapter of Murray N. Rothbard's follow-up volume to his masterly two volume economic treatise, *Man, Economy and State,* to be entitled *Power and Market,* and in Morris and Linda Tannehill's book, which will hopefully be published soon, to be entitled *The Market for Liberty*. The latter takes up the problem where Murray Rothbard leaves off, and discusses the possibilities in detail. A chapter from this book, incidently, entitled "Warring Defense Agencies and Organized Crime," will appear in the *Libertarian Connection no. 5,* and a short statement of the authors' position is presented in their pamphlet "Liberty via the Market."

To make consideration of your errors easier, I shall number them and present the outline of possible replies to your major, and hence essen-

tial, points, as presented in your essay "The Nature of Government."

> 1. "If a society provided no organized protection against force, it would compel every citizen to go about armed, to turn his home into a fortress, to shoot any strangers approaching his door," etc.

This is a bad argument. One could just as easily assert that if "society" (*subsuming whom?*) provided no organized way of raising food, it would compel every citizen to go out and raise vegetables in his own backyard, or to starve. This is illogical. The alternative is most empatically *not EITHER* we have a single, monopolistic governmental food-growing program *OR* we have each man growing his own food, or starving. There is such a thing as the division of labor, the free market – and that can provide all the food man needs. So too with protection against aggression.

> 2. "The use of physical force – even its retaliatory use – cannot be left at the discretion of individual citizens."

This contradicts your epistemological and ethical position. Man's mind – which means: the mind of the individual human being – is capable able of coming to conclusions on the basis of his rational judgement and acting on the basis of his rational self-interest. You imply, without stating it, that if an individual decides to use retaliation, that that decision is somehow subjective and arbitrary. Rather, supposedly, the individual should leave such a decision up to government, which is -- *what?* Collective and *therefore objective?* This is illogical. If man is not capable of making these decisions, *then he isn't capable of making them,* and no government made up of men is capable of making them either. By what epistemological criterion is an individual's action classified as "arbitrary," while that of a *group* of individuals is somehow "objective?"

Rather, I assert that an individual *must* judge, and evaluate the facts of reality in accordance with logic and by the standard of his own rational self-interest. Are you here claiming that man's mind is not capable of knowing reality? That men must not judge, or act on the basis of their rational self-interest and perception of the facts of reality? To claim this is to smash the root of the Objectivist philosophy: the validity of reason, and the ability *and right* of man to think and judge for himself.

I am not, of course, claiming that man must always *personally* use retaliation against those who initiate such against him – he has the *right,* though not the *obligation,* to delegate that right to any legitimate agency. I am merely criticising your faulty logic.

> 3 "The retaliatory use of force requires *objective* rules of evidence to establish that a crime has been committed and to *prove* who committed it, as well as *objective* rules to define punishments and enforcement procedures."

There is indeed a need for such objective rules. But look at the problem this way: there is *also* a need for objective rules in order to produce a ton of steel, an automobile, an acre of wheat. Must these activities *too* therefore be made into a coercive monopoly? I think not. By what twist of logic are you suggesting that a free market would not be able to provide such objective rules, while a coercive government would? It seems obvious that man needs objective rules *in every activity of his life, not merely in relation to the use of retaliation.* But, strange as it may seem, the free market *is* capable of providing such rules. You are, it seems to me, blithely assuming that free market agencies *would not* have objective rules, etc., and this without proof. If you believe this to be the case, yet have no rational grounds for believing such, what epistemological practice have you smuggled into your consciousness?

> 4. "All laws must be *objective* (and objectively justifiable): men must know clearly, and in advance of taking an action, what the law forbids them to do (and why), what constitutes a crime and what penalty they will incur if they commit it."

This is not, properly speaking, an objection to anarchism. The answer to this problem of "objective laws" is quite easy: all that would be forbidden in any voluntary society would be the initiation of physical force, or the gaining of a value by any substitute thereof, such as fraud. If a person chooses to initiate force in order to gain a value, then by his act of aggression, he creates a debt which he must repay *to the victim,* plus damages. There is nothing particularly difficult about this, and no reason why the free market could could not evolve institutions around this concept of justice.

> 5. We come to the main thrust of your attack on free market anarchism on pages 112–113 of the paperback edition of *The Virtue of Selfishiness,* and I will not quote the relevant paragraph here.

Suffice it to say that you have not proven that anarchy is a naive floating abstraction, that a society without government would be at the mercy of the first criminal to appear (which is false, since market protection agencies could perform more efficiently the same service as is supposedly provided by "government"), and that objective rules could not be observed by such agencies. You would not argue that since there are needs for objective laws in the production of steel, *therefore* the government should take over that activity. Why do you argue it in the case of protection, defense and retaliation? And if it is the need for objective

laws which necessitates government, and that alone, we can conclude that if a market place agency can observe objective laws, as can, say, market place steel producers, then there is, in fact, fact, really no need for government at all.

We "younger advocates of freedom," incidently, are not "befudled" by our anarchist theory. The theory which we advocate is *not* called "competing governments," ofcourse, since a government is a coercive monopoly. We advocate competing agencies of protection, defense and retaliation; in short, we claim that the free market can supply *all* of man's needs – including the protection and defense of his values. We most emphatically do *not* accept the basic premise of modern statists, and do not confuse force and production. We merely recognize protection, defense and retaliation for what they are: namely, scarce services which, because they are scarce, can be offered on a market at a price. We see it as immoral to initiate force against another to prevent him from patronizing his own court system, etc. The remainder of your remarks in this area are unworthy of you. You misrepresent the arguments of Murray Rothbard and others, without even identifying them by name so that those who are interested can judge their arguments by going to their source. Since we understand the nature of government, we advocate no such thing as competing government; rather, we advocate the *destruction or abolition of the state,* which, since it regularly initiates force, is a criminal organization. And, incidently, the case for competing courts and police *has* been concretized – by the individualist anarchist Benjamin R Tucker, over 80 years ago, by Murray Rothbard, and by a host of other less prominent theorists.

Let us take up your example of why competing courts and police supposedly cannot function.

> "Suppose Mr. Smith, a customer of Government A, suspects that his nextdoor neighbor, Mr. Jones, a customer of Government B, has robbed him; a squad of Police A proceeds to Mr. Jones' house and is met at the door by a squad of Police B, who declare that they do not accept the validity of Mr. Smith's complaint and do not recognize the authority of Government A. What happens then? You take it from there."

Unfortunately, though this poses as a convincing argument, it is a straw man, and is about as accurate a picture of the institutions pictured by free market anarchists as would be my setting up Nazi Germany as an historical example of an Objectivist society.

The main question to ask at this point is this: do you think that it would be in the *rational self-interest* of either agency to allow this to happen, this fighting out conflicts in the streets, which is what you imply? No? *Then what view of human nature does it presuppose to assume that such would happen anyway?*

One legitimate answer to your allegations is this: since you are, in effect asking "what happens when the agencies decide to act irrationally?" allow me to ask the far more potent question: "what happens when your government acts irrationally?" – which is at least *possible.* And which is more likely, in addition, to occur: the violation of rights by a bureaucrat or politician who got his job by fooling people in elections, which are nothing but community–wide opinion mongering contests (which are, presumably, a rational and objective manner of selecting the best people for a job), or the violation of rights by a hard–nosed businessman, who has had to *earn* his position? So your objection against competing agencies is even more effective against your own "limited government."

Obviously, there are a number of ways in which such ferocious confrontations can be avoided by rational businessmen: there could be contracts or "treaties" between the competing agencies providing for the peaceful ironing out of disputes, etc., just to mention one simplistic way. Do you see people as being so blind that this would not occur to them?

Another interesting argument against your position is this: there is now *anarchy between citizens of different countries,* i.e. – between say, a Canadian citizen on one side of the Canadian–American border and an American citizen on the other. There is, to be more precise, no single government which presides over both of them. If there is a need for government to settle disputes among individuals, as you state, then you should look at the logical implications of your argument: is there not then a need for a super–government to resolve disputes among governments? Of course the implications of this are obvious: Theoretically, the ultimate end ofthis process of piling government on top of government is a government for the entire universe. And the practical end, for the moment, is at the very least world government.

Also, you should be aware of the fact that just as conflicts could conceivably arise between such market agencies, so could they arise between governments – which is called WAR, and is a thousand times more terrible. Making a defense agency a monopoly in a certain area doesn't do *anything* to eliminate such conflicts, of course. It merely makes them more awesome, more destructive, and increases the number of inocent bystanders who are harmed immensely. Is this desirable?

Suffice it to say that all of your arguments against free market anarchism are invalid; and hence you are under the moral obligation, since it has been shown that government cannot exist without initiating force, to adopt it. Questions of how competing courts could function are technical questions, not specifically moral ones. Hence, I refer you to Murray Rothbard and Morris G Tannehill, who have both solved the problem.

In the future, if you are interested, I will take up several other issues surrounding your political philosophy, such as a discussion of the epistemological problems of definition and concept formation in issues concerning the state, a discussion

of the nature of the U.S. Constitution, both ethically and historically, and a discussion of the nature of the Cold War. I believe that your historical misunderstanding of these last two is responsible for many errors in judgement, and is increasingly expressed in your commentaries on contemporary events.

Finally, I want to take up a major question: why should you adopt free market anarchism after having endorsed the political state for so many years? Fundamentally, for the same reason you gave for withdrawing your sanction from Nathaniel Branden in an issue of The Objectivist: namely, you do not fake reality and never have. If your reputation should suffer with you becoming a total voluntarist, a free market anarchist, what is that compared with the pride of being consistent – of knowing that you have correctly identified the facts of reality, and are acting accordingly? A path of expedience taken by a person of self–esteem is psychologically destructive, and such a person will find himself either losing his pride, or committing that act of philosophical treason and psychological suicide, which is blanking out, the willful refusal to consider an issue, or to integrate one's knowledge. Objectivism is a completely consistent philosophical system, you say – and I agree that it is potentially such. But it will be an Objectivism without the state.

And there is the major issue of the destructiveness of the state itself. No one can evade the fact that, historically, the state is a blood–thirsty monster, which has been responsible for more violence, bloodshed and hatred than any other institution known to man. Your approach to the matter is not yet radical, not yet fundamental: it is *the existence of the state itself which must be challenged* by the new radicals. It must be understood that the state is an *unnecessary evil,* that it regularly initiates force, and in fact attempts to gain what must rationally be called a monopoly of crime in a given territory. Hence, government is little more, and has never been more, than a gang of professional criminals. If, than, government has been the most tangible cause of most of man's inhumanity to man, let us, as Morris Tannehill has said, "identify it *for what it is* instead of attempting to clean it up, thus *helping the statists* to keep it by preventing the idea that government is inherently evil from becoming known . . . The 'sacred cow' regard for government (which most people have) *must* be broken! That instrument of sophisticated savagery has no redeeming qualities. The free market *does*; let's redeem *it* by identifying its greatest enemy – the idea of government (and its ramifications)."

This is the only alternative to continuing centuries of statism, with all quibbling only over the degree of the evil we will tolerate. I believe that evils should not be tolerated – period. There are only two alternatives, in reality: political rule, or archy, which means: the condition of social existence wherein some men use aggression to dominate or rule another, and anarchy, which is the absence of the initiation of force, the absence of political rule, the absence of the state. We shall replace the state with the free market, and men shall for the first time in their history be able to walk and live without fear of destruction being unleashed upon them at any moment – especially the obscenity of such destruction being unleashed by a looter armed with nuclear weapons and nerve gasses. We shall replace statism with *voluntarism:* a society wherein all man's relationships with others are voluntary and uncoerced. Where men are free to act according to their rational self–interest, even if it means the establishment of competing agencies of defence.

Let me then halt this letter by repeating to you those glorious words with which you had John Galt address his collapsing world: "Such is the future you are capable of winning. It requires a struggle; so does any human value. All life is a purposeful struggle, and your only choice is the choice of a goal. Do you wish to continue the battle of your present, or do you wish to fight for my world? . . . Such is the choice before you. Let your mind and your love of existence decide."

Let us walk forward into the sunlight, Miss Rand. You belong with us.

Yours in liberty,

R. A. Childs, Jr.

cc: Nathaniel Branden
Leonard Peikoff
Robert Hessen
Murray N. Rothbard

P.S. I would like to thank Murray, Morris and Joe Hofman for their advice and suggestions.
–R.A.C., Jr.

Editors Note: On July 29, 1969 Mr Childs received the following letter from The Objectivist:

"In view of your letter of July 4 to Miss Rand, our attorney has instructed me to cancel your subscription and remove your name from our mailing list. A refund for the unused portion of your subscription is enclosed."

Elaine Kalberman