

# **An Anarchist FAQ**

## **Replies to Some Errors and Distortions in Bryan Caplan's "Anarchist Theory FAQ" version 5.2**

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## Introduction

Bryan Caplan's "Anarchist Theory FAQ", as we show in this appendix, unsurprisingly shares the right-"libertarian" (i.e., propertarian) assumptions and perspectives of its author. It claims to present a balanced account of "anarchism" which presents "anarcho"-capitalism as a school of anarchism and, moreover, American Individualist Anarchism as its precursor. Here we show the weaknesses of the attempt, noting how much Caplan is forced to ignore to maintain his claims. Needless to say, this debunking should be considered as a supplement to both [section F](#) (on "anarcho"-capitalism) and [section G](#) (on Individualist Anarchism).

What becomes clear when researching anarchist history is that, within the Anglo-American movement at least, there was the occasional engagement with those elements of the "classical liberal" tendency which "anarcho"-capitalists point to as their ancestors. While this was more marked in Individualist Anarchist circles, unsurprisingly given that this anarchist school was closest to it, social anarchists in Britain sometimes felt the need to critique those thinkers (Kropotkin, for example, often critiqued Herbert Spencer's ideas). Yet it was clear that they were not doing so from a perspective of having similar goals or being part of the same movement. Rather, it was a critical engagement in which aimed to expose how any ideas which appear to be in common were undermined by those -- particularly economic ones -- which were not. The underlying awareness was that these "liberals" were defending the power of property owners over the working class as one British anarchist clearly saw in 1896:

*"The Property-Tyrant may cease to call himself a ruler and law-maker. A sect of Mammonites, which would be a pestiferous sect if it could, is now in the world, declaiming against the government, not of man by man, but of the propertyist by the politician, and sometimes assuming the name of Anarchist -- but demanding, under all disguises, Absolute rule by the Property-holder."* [Louisa Sarah Bevington, "Anarchism and Violence", **A Libertarian Reader**, vol. 1, p. 446]

As such, this appendix can be considered as a part of a long history of anarchist critiques of capitalism and its supporting ideologies. Needless to say, any suggestion that we should "teach the controversy" should be rejected for the same reason that it is rejected in science when raised by creationists. There is no "controversy" in anarchist eyes as anarchism is and has always been anti-capitalist (both actually existing -- i.e., real -- capitalism and ideological -- i.e., fictional -- capitalism). Or, if you like, anarchists see capitalism, after Proudhon, as a *System of Economic Contradictions* while "anarcho"-capitalists, after Bastiat, view it as expressing *Economic Harmonies* -- whilst defending the outcomes and actions which show, in practice, that Proudhon was right.

What this appendix shows is the selectivity and narrowness of Caplan's FAQ.

The first is understandable, as a full account of anarchist ideas would show how alien "anarcho"-capitalism is to the anarchist tradition. He stresses certain aspects of individualist anarchism -- those which use similar words to those used by right-"libertarianism" even if used in different ways and contexts -- whilst ignoring those which show the links to the wider socialist perspectives they championed. This allows him to "adopt" the likes of Tucker even if a fuller account of their ideas would show the problems of such an attempt.

Anarchists, for some reason, seems particularly inflicted by this sort of thing. For example, before the First World War French monarchists took it upon themselves to appropriate Proudhon (during his lifetime, the right demonised him as a man of the left). As Benjamin Tucker argued:

*"One of the methods of propagandism practised by these agitators is the attempt to enroll among their apostles all the great dead who, if living, would look with scorn upon their ways and works. Every great writer who has criticised democracy and who, being in his grave, cannot enter protest, is listed as a royalist, a nationalist, and an anti-Dreyfusard. Chief among these helpless victims is the foremost of all Anarchists, to whom these impudent young rascals constantly refer as **notre grand Proudhon**. Indeed, they have formed a **Cercle Proudhon** . . . Of course democracy is an easy mark for this new party, and it finds its chief delight in pounding the philosopher of democracy, Rousseau. Now, nobody ever pounded Rousseau as effectively as Proudhon did, and in that fact the **Cercle Proudhon** finds its excuse. But it is not to be inferred that, because Proudhon destroyed Rousseau's theory of the social contract, he did not believe in the advisability of a social contract, or would uphold a monarch in exacting an oath of allegiance. On the contrary, after demonstrating the falsity of Rousseau's claim that existing society is founded on contract, he proceeded to find fault with existing society for the very reason that it is not so founded, and endeavoured to substitute for existing society, or to develop out of it, or to dissolve it in, a society having voluntary contract for its base. All this, however, is carefully concealed by the **Cercle Proudhon**. It freely quotes and prints Proudhon's attacks on Rousseau, but utterly ignores the affirmative statements of its stolen hero." ["Proudhon and Royalism", **The New Freewoman: An Individualist Review**, Vol. 1 No. 8 (10 October 1913)]*

Indeed, whenever Caplan mentions affirmative statements of the likes of Proudhon, Tucker and others, they are dismissed and the totality of their position ignored in favour of cherry-picking a few points. Yet these points existed within an expected socio-economic regime and without that basis they make little sense -- and undoubtedly would have the opposite effect desired. And it is the desired end which matters. Yes, the individualist anarchists wished a free market because they thought that this would end the exploitation of labour by capital. Caplan, like other propertarians, want us to remember the first part of this argument and forget (and generally fail to mention) the second part. Yes, indeed, the individualist anarchists wanted a free market -- but they did not think that capitalism was that for the capitalist had used their State to abolish it. Moreover, given that the propertarians reject the individualist anarchist views on, for example, the land and money monopolies in favour of (extreme) capitalist ones (for example, the gold standard and landlordism) then it logically means that, for the individualist anarchists, the "anarcho"-capitalists likewise abolish "the free market" which Caplan seeks to suggest they shared as a goal.

Interestingly, leading "anarcho"-capitalist Murray Rothbard in an -- at times extremely inaccurate -- article written around the same time he stole the term "*libertarian*" in the 1950s (but published decades later) stated that we must "*conclude that we are **not** anarchists, and that those who call us anarchists are not on firm etymological ground and are being completely unhistorical.*" For anarchism "*arose in the nineteenth century, and since then the most active and dominant anarchist doctrine has been that of 'anarchist communism'*" an "*apt term*" for "*a doctrine which has also been called 'collectivist anarchism,' 'anarcho-syndicalism,' and 'libertarian communism'*" and so "*it is obvious that the question 'are*

*libertarians anarchists?' must be answered unhesitatingly in the negative. We are at completely opposite poles." As for the individualist anarchists, they "possessed socialistic economic doctrines in common" with the others. This was "probably the main reason" why the "genuine libertarians" of this era "never referred to themselves as anarchists" -- not that they referred to themselves as libertarians either, unlike the communist and individualist anarchists. ["Are Libertarians 'Anarchists'?", **Strictly Confidential: The Private Volker Fund Memos of Murray N. Rothbard**, p. 32, p. 27, p. 30, p. 31]*

And, as we will see, Tucker repeatedly stressed his socialism, arguing that the *"Laborer's Deficit is precisely equal to the Capitalist's Efficit. Socialism wants to change all this. Socialism says . . . that no man shall be able to add to his riches except by labor; that in adding to his riches by labor alone no man makes another man poorer . . . and that this fact means the physical, mental, and moral perfecting of mankind, and the realization of human fraternity. Is not that glorious? Shall a word that means all that be cast aside simply because some have tried to wed it with authority? By no means."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 362]

Caplan's FAQ is aided by a more general problem, namely that many who decide to comment on anarchism often know little about it and even within anarchism members of different schools often misunderstand, or repeat misunderstandings by others, about other schools. Even generally true comments -- such as Tucker following Proudhon's economic theories -- can be partial (for Tucker ignored many aspects of Proudhon's ideas whilst championing others). This makes using generalist accounts problematic, particularly by non-anarchists. Likewise, many are unaware of the nuances taken for granted by writers within a school. Individualist Anarchist Victor Yarros was right when he wrote against critics:

*"Individualism is impossible in the absence of perfect equality of opportunity, which equality is denied by the State-created monopolies of land and credit. A landless and moneyless labourer does not possess any liberty. The right to life and to seeking of happiness in one's own way is meaningless without the access to the means of life . . . In our forecast of the results of freedom in money and land-occupation we may be altogether mistaken. Perhaps the labourer will be as much the slave of the owner of machinery then as he is now, and perhaps our economic views are false and unscientific. I am entirely willing to allow that this is not impossible. But at least let State Socialists and other critics understand our exact position, and, instead of fighting men of straw, let them examine our contentions and attempt to meet them. As long as this is not done, as long as the Socialists refrain from a careful analysis of our economic theories . . . they have no right to invidiously characterise our conception of Individualism, our idea of free competition and our attitude toward the proletariat."* ["**Anarchistic Socialism**", **A Libertarian Reader**, vol. 1, pp. 341-2]

Ultimately, the reasons **why** a certain theory opposes something matters. Fascism, after all, opposes the democratic state as does Anarchism -- but for radically different reasons. To claim, based on just this opposition and ignoring the reasons for it as well as the alternative aimed for, that Anarchism and Fascism were similar would be a travesty (sadly, we cannot say that we are sure this has never been done given the nonsense written about anarchism). Yet, with "anarcho"-capitalism this is done, presumably because they proclaim themselves "anarchists" -- while distancing themselves from pretty much everything anarchists of every tendency advocated and opposed. Indeed, any FAQ which took "anarcho"-capitalist claims seriously would soon show how alien it is to the anarchist tradition: every answer would have a paragraph or two explaining how "anarcho"-capitalism rejects the anarchist analysis -- even

any on opposition to the State (the one thing which is meant to be shared) as the **reasons** for this opposition would differ (anarchists because it exists to defend the owning class, the "anarcho"-capitalists because it does not actually do this as well as they would like). Likewise with claims on "the free market", with any honest FAQ having to stress that the individualist anarchist definition of it would not be shared by the "anarcho"-capitalist and visa versa.

In terms of narrowness, Caplan seeks to limit anarchism is simply opposition to the State. This, again, is understandable for it is the only thing which "anarcho"-capitalism and anarchism appear to have in common (even if, as noted, the reasons for this opposition differ radically). Yet, as soon becomes clear if you actually read anarchist thinkers or the publications of the movement, anarchism has **never** been limited to just opposition to the State and even that was driven by class analysis as well as a clear understanding of its role in society and history as an instrument of the economically dominant class. This was shared by both social **and** individualist anarchism. To try to do so, as "anarcho"-capitalism does, is to impoverish anarchism and deny the history of anarchism as both a theory and as a movement.

Ironically, for all their rabid anti-socialism, the "anarcho"-capitalist in this joins hands with many Marxists who, likewise, are keen to excommunicate anarchism from the socialist movement. Suffice to say, anarchists are not willing to let others define our ideas and tradition.

## **1 - Individualist Anarchists and the socialist movement.**

Caplan, in his FAQ, attempts to rewrite anarchist history by trying to claim that the individualist anarchists were forerunners of the "anarcho"-capitalist school. However, as is so often the case with Caplan's FAQ, nothing could be further from the truth.

In section 5 (What major subdivisions may be made among anarchists?), Caplan writes that:

*"A large segment of left-anarchists is extremely sceptical about the anarchist credentials of anarcho-capitalists, arguing that the anarchist movement has historically been clearly leftist. In my own view, it is necessary to re-write a great deal of history to maintain this claim."*

He quotes Carl Landauer's **European Socialism: A History of Ideas and Movements** as evidence:

*"To be sure, there is a difference between individualistic anarchism and collectivistic or communistic anarchism; Bakunin called himself a communist anarchist. But the communist anarchists also do not acknowledge any right to society to force the individual. They differ from the anarchistic individualists in their belief that men, if freed from coercion, will enter into voluntary associations of a communistic type, while the other wing believes that the free person will prefer a high degree of isolation. The communist anarchists repudiate the right of private property which is maintained through the power of the state. The individualist anarchists are inclined to maintain private property as a necessary condition of individual independence, without fully answering the question of how property could be maintained without courts and police."*

Caplan goes on to state that *"the interesting point is that before the emergence of modern anarcho-capitalism Landauer found it necessary to distinguish two strands of anarchism, only one of which he considered to be within the broad socialist tradition."*

Caplan suggests that Landauer's non-discussion of the individualist anarchists is somehow "evidence" that their ideas are not socialistic. Firstly, Landauer's book is about **European Socialism**. Individualist anarchism was almost exclusively based in America and so hardly falls within the book's subject area. Secondly, from the index Kropotkin is mentioned on **two** pages (one of which a footnote). Does that mean Kropotkin was not a socialist? Of course not. It seems likely, therefore, that Landauer is using the common Marxist terminology of defining Marxism as Socialism, while calling other parts of the wider socialist movement by their self-proclaimed names of anarchism, syndicalism and so on. Hardly surprising, then, that Kropotkin is hardly mentioned in a history of "Socialism" (i.e. Marxism) and that Individualist Anarchism is, likewise, not dwelt upon.

Moreover, Caplan ignores that both individualist and social anarchists agree that there **is** a difference between the two schools of anarchist thought. Kropotkin and Tucker, for example, both distinguished between two types of anarchism as well as two types of socialism. Thus Caplan's *"interesting point"* is just a banality, a common fact which anyone with a basic familiarity of anarchist history would know. Kropotkin in his justly famous essay on Anarchism for **The Encyclopaedia Britannica** also *"found it necessary to distinguish two strands of anarchism"*, as he did in **Modern Science and Anarchy**.

As regards Caplan's claims that only one of these strands of anarchism is *"within the broad socialist tradition"* all we can say is that both Kropotkin **and** Tucker considered their ideas and movement to be part of the wider socialist tradition. According to an expert on Individualist Anarchism, Tucker *"looked upon anarchism as a branch of the general socialist movement"* [James J. Martin, **Men Against the State**, pp. 226-7]. Other writers on Individualist Anarchism have noted the same fact (for example, Tucker *"definitely thought of himself a socialist"* [William O. Reichart, **Partisans of Freedom: A Study in American Anarchism**, p. 156]). As evidence of the anti-socialist nature of individualist anarchism, Caplan's interpretation of Landauer's words is fundamentally nonsense. If you look at the writings of people like Tucker you will see that they called themselves socialists and considered themselves part of the wider socialist movement. No one familiar with Tucker's works could overlook this fact as can be seen from probably his most famous essay:

*"Probably no agitation has ever attained the magnitude, either in the number of its recruits or the area of its influence, which has been attained by Modern Socialism . . . the two extremes of the vast army now under consideration, though united . . . by the common claim that labor shall be put in possession of its own, are more diametrically opposed to each other in their fundamental principles of social action and their methods of reaching the ends aimed at than either is to their common enemy, the existing society. They are based on two principles . . . **Authority and Liberty**, and the names of the two schools of Socialistic thought which fully and unreservedly represent one or the other of them are, respectively, State Socialism and Anarchism." ["State Socialism and Anarchism: how far they agree, and wherein they differ", **Individual Liberty**, pp. 1-3]*

Interestingly, Landauer includes Proudhon in his history and states that he was *"the most profound thinker among pre-Marxian socialists."* Given that Caplan elsewhere in his FAQ

tries to co-opt Proudhon into the "anarcho"-capitalist school as well as Tucker, his citing of Landauer seems particularly dishonest. Landauer presents Proudhon's ideas in some depth in his work within a chapter headed "*The three Anticapitalistic Movements.*" Indeed, he starts his discussion of Proudhon's ideas with the words "[i]n France, post-Utopian socialism begins with Peter Joseph Proudhon." [**European Socialism: A History of Ideas and Movements**, vol. 1, p. 67 and p. 59]

Tucker and the other individualist anarchists considered themselves as followers of Proudhon's ideas as did Bakunin and Kropotkin. For example, Tucker stated in his journal **Liberty** that it was "*brought into existence almost as a direct consequence of the teachings of Proudhon*" and "*lives principally to emphasize and spread them.*" [quoted by Paul Avrich, "*Proudhon and America*", **Anarchist Portraits**, p. 141] If Landauer considered Proudhon a socialist and if Individualist Anarchism follows Proudhon's ideas then it, too, must be socialist.

Unsurprisingly, then, Tucker also considered himself a socialist. To state the obvious, Tucker and Bakunin both shared Proudhon's opposition to **private** property (in the capitalist sense of the word), although Tucker confused this opposition (and possibly the casual reader) by talking about possession as "property." This is not to suggest that Tucker and Bakunin took the same ideas on all subjects from Proudhon, far from it. Both were selective in what they championed but this does not stop the shared **socialist** origin of both schools of anarchism.

So, it appears that Caplan is the one trying to rewrite history.

Needless to say, Caplan fails to mention that Marxists often tried to excommunicate even communist-anarchism and other schools of social anarchism from socialism. As such, relying upon non-anarchist socialists for evidence of a claim which goes in the face of the views of anarchists themselves is a brave decision. Particularly when the author used undermines the claim being made.

## 2 - Why is Caplan's definition of socialism wrong?

Perhaps the problem lies with Caplan's definition of socialism. In section 7 (Is anarchism the same thing as socialism?) he states:

*"If we accept one traditional definition of socialism -- 'advocacy of government ownership of the means of production' -- it seems that anarchists are not socialists by definition. But if by socialism we mean something more inclusive, such as 'advocacy of the strong restriction or abolition of private property,' then the question becomes more complex."*

Which are hardly traditional definitions of socialism unless you are ignorant of socialist ideas. By definition one, Bakunin and Kropotkin are not socialists. As far as definition two goes, all anarchists were opposed to (capitalist) private property and argued for its abolition and its replacement with possession. The actual forms of possession differed from between anarchist schools of thought, but the common aim to end private property (capitalism) was still there. To quote Charles A. Dana, Proudhon desired to "*destroy the tyranny of capital -- that is, of property*". [Charles A. Dana, **Proudhon and his "Bank of the People"**, p. 46] Benjamin Tucker, a leading individualist anarchist reissued Dana's pamphlet, calling it "a

*really intelligent, forceful, and sympathetic account of mutual banking". [quoted by Avrigh, Op. Cit., p. 143]*

Interestingly, the second definition of socialism brings to light a contradiction in Caplan's account. Elsewhere in his FAQ he notes that Proudhon had *"ideas on the desirability of a modified form of private property."* In fact, Proudhon did desire to restrict private property to that of possession, as Caplan himself seems aware. In other words, even taking his own definitions we find that Proudhon would be considered a socialist. Indeed, according to Proudhon, *"all accumulated capital is collective property, no one may be its exclusive owner."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 44]

Thus Jeremy Jennings' summary of the anarchist position on private property that the *"point to stress is that all anarchists, and not only those wedded to the predominant twentieth-century strain of anarchist communism have been critical of private property to the extent that it was a source of hierarchy and privilege."* Anarchists like Tucker and Spooner *"agreed with the proposition that property was legitimate only insofar as it embraced no more than the total product of individual labour."* [*"Anarchism"*, Roger Eatwell and Anthony Wright (eds.), **Contemporary Political Ideologies**, p. 132]

The idea that socialism can be defined as state ownership or even opposition to, or "abolition" of, all forms of property is not one which is historically accurate for all forms of socialism. Obviously communist-anarchists and syndicalists would dismiss out of hand the identification of socialism as state ownership, as would Individualist Anarchists like Tucker and Joseph Labadie. As for opposition or abolition of all forms of "private property" as defining socialism, such a position would have surprised communist-anarchists like Kropotkin as well as such self-proclaimed socialists as Tucker and Labadie. For example, Kropotkin explicitly states that a peasant *"who is in possession of just the amount of land he can cultivate"* would not be expropriated in an anarchist revolution. Similarly for the family *"inhabiting a house which affords them just enough space . . . considered necessary for that number of people"* and the artisan *"working with their own tools or handloom"* would be left alone. [**Act for Yourselves** pp. 104-5] Thus, like Proudhon, Kropotkin replaces **private property** with **possession** as the former is *theft* (i.e. it allows exploitation) which *"indicate[s] the scope of Expropriation"* namely *"to everything that enables any man [or woman] . . . to appropriate the product of other's toil"*. [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 61]

Even Marx and Engels did not define socialism in terms of the abolition of all forms of "private property." Like anarchists, they distinguished between that property which allows exploitation to occur and that which did not. Looking at the **Communist Manifesto** we find them arguing that the *"distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property"* and that *"Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation."* Moreover, they correctly note that "property" has meant different things at different times and that the *"abolition of existing property relations is not at all a distinctive feature of Communism"* as *"[a]ll property relations in the past have continually been subject to historical change consequent upon the change in historical conditions."* As an example, they note that the French Revolution *"abolished feudal property in favour of bourgeois property."* [**The Manifesto of the Communist Party**, p.47, p. 49 and p. 47] In this they echoed Proudhon:

*"property . . . is subject to the law of development. Thus we see it by turns as a simple right of use and habitation, as amongst the Germans and the Arabs; patrimonial possession, inalienable in perpetuity, as amongst the Jews; feudal and emphyteutic, as in the Middle Ages; absolute and transferable at the will of the proprietor, more or less as the Romans knew it, and as we have it today. But property, having already reached its peak, turns towards its decline . . . the moment approaches when it will no longer be anything but the shadow of itself. . . . What we . . . are **pursuing** is no longer property; it is a new form of possession, without example in the past" [Système des contradictions économiques, vol. 2, pp. 306-309]*

Which means that the idea that socialism means abolishing "private property" is **only** true for those kinds of property that are used to exploit the labour of others. Nicholas Walter sums up the anarchist position when he wrote that anarchists *"are in favour of the private property which cannot be used by one person to exploit another."* [About Anarchism, p. 40] In other words, property which is no longer truly **private** as it is used by those who do not own it. In effect, the key point of Proudhon's **What is Property?**, namely the difference between possession and property. Which means that rather than desire the abolition of all forms of "private property," socialists (of all kinds, libertarian and authoritarian) desire the abolition of a specific kind of property, namely that kind which allows the exploitation and domination of others. To ignore this distinction is to paint a very misleading picture of what socialism stands for.

This leaves the *"the strong restriction . . . of private property"* definition of socialism. Here Caplan is on stronger ground. Unfortunately, by using that definition the Individualist Anarchists, like the Social Anarchists, are included in socialist camp, the very conclusion he is trying to avoid. As **every** anarchist shares Proudhon's analysis that *"property is theft"* and that **possession** would be the basis of anarchism, it means that every anarchist is a socialist even if every socialist is not an anarchist (as many anarchists, both social and individualist, have noted).

This includes Tucker and the other Individualist Anarchists. For example, Joseph Labadie stated that *"the two great sub-divisions of Socialists"* (anarchists and State Socialists) both *"agree that the resources of nature -- land, mines, and so forth -- should not be held as private property and subject to being held by the individual for speculative purposes, that use of these things shall be the only valid title, and that each person has an equal right to the use of all these things. They all agree that the present social system is one composed of a class of slaves and a class of masters, and that justice is impossible under such conditions."* [What is Socialism?] Tucker himself argued that the anarchists' *"occupancy and use"* title to land and other scarce material would involve a change (and, in effect, *"restriction"*) of current (i.e. capitalist) property rights:

*"It will be seen from this definition that Anarchistic property concerns only products. But anything is a product upon which human labour has been expended. It should be stated, however, that in the case of land, or of any other material the supply of which is so limited that all cannot hold it in unlimited quantities, Anarchism undertakes to protect no titles except such as are based on actual occupancy and use." [Instead of a Book, p. 61]*

So it was a case of "*the Anarchistic view that occupancy and use should condition and limit landholding becom[ing] the prevailing view.*" [Op. Cit., p. 311] In short, a transformation in what counts as valid "property" from its current (and legally enforced) capitalist definition:

*"Now, no advocate of occupancy-and-use tenure of land believes that it can be put in force, until as a theory it has been as generally, or almost as generally, seen and accepted as is the prevailing theory of ordinary private property."* ["Occupancy and Use versus the Single Tax", **Individual Liberty**, p. 235]

So, as can be seen, Individualist Anarchism rejected important aspects of capitalist property rights. Given that the Individualist Anarchists were writing at a time when agriculture was still the largest source of employment in the USA, this position on land is much more significant than it first appears. In effect, Tucker and the other American Anarchists were advocating a **massive** and **fundamental** change in property-rights, in the social relationships they generated and in American society. This is, in other words, a very "*strong restriction*" in capitalist property rights (and it is **this** type of property Caplan is referring to, rather than "property" in the abstract). As one "anarcho"-capitalist guru noted:

*"The thesis of the individualist anarchists . . . was that private ownership of land should be recognized only in those who themselves are using the specific areas of land. Such a theory of property would automatically abolish all rent payments for land, since only the direct user of a piece of land would be recognized as its owner . . . I strongly disagree with this doctrine . . . [It is] an invasion of . . . freedom of contract and . . . justly-acquired private property. In contrast, I can see no rational grounds whatever for the principle that no man can ever get off or rent out his justly acquired property."* [Murray N. Rothbard, "*The Spooner-Tucker Doctrine: An Economist's View*", **Journal of Libertarian Studies**, vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 8-9]

As an aside, Rothbard's comment on "*no rational grounds*" is significant. After all, the Individualist Anarchists explained repeatedly why they advocated such a property-rights regime and opposed the current, capitalist, one which Rothbard supported. Thus "*under the system of land monopoly, certain individuals get, in the form of rent, a great deal that they never earned by their labor*" and "*the abolition of the money monopoly, and the refusal of protection to all land titles except those of occupiers, would, by the emancipation of the workingman from his present slavery to capital.*" However, workers needed tools and so "*[m]ake capital free by organizing credit on a mutual plan, and then these vacant lands will come into use, and then industry will be stimulated, and then operatives will be able to buy axes and rakes and hoes, and then they will be independent of their employers, and then the labor problem will be solved.*" it is hardly irrational to aim to "*abolish the exploitation of labor*" and to "*abolish all means whereby any laborer can be deprived of any of his product*". [Tucker, **Individual Liberty**, p. 198, p. 197, p. 190] Rothbard, of course, rejects the notion that workers should receive their product and considers rent, interest and profits all legitimate -- which simply shows how alien his ideology is from the Individualist Anarchists and their obviously socialist, presumably irrational, concerns.

So a "definition" of socialism as "restricting" private property is flawed as it does not really reflect anarchist ideas on the subject. Anarchists, in effect, reject the simplistic analysis that because a society (or thinker) accepts "property" that it (or he/she) is capitalistic. This is for two reasons. Firstly, the term "property" has been used to describe a wide range of situations and institutions. Thus Tucker used the term "property" to describe a society in which

capitalist property rights were **not** enforced. Secondly, and far more importantly, concentrating on "property" rights in the abstract ignores the social relationships it generates. Freedom is product of social interaction, not one of isolation. This means that the social relationships generated in a given society are the key to evaluating it -- not whether it has "property" or not. To quote Marx:

*"Political economy confuses, on principle, two very different kinds of private property, one of which rests on the labour of the producer himself, and the other on the exploitation of the labour of others. It forgets that the latter is not only the direct antithesis of the former, but grows on the former's tomb and nowhere else.*

*"In Western Europe, the homeland of political economy, the process of primitive accumulation is more or less accomplished . . .*

*"It is otherwise in the colonies. There the capitalist regime constantly comes up against the obstacle presented by the producer, who, as owner of his own conditions of labour, employs that labour to enrich himself instead of the capitalist. The contradiction of these two diametrically opposed economic systems has its practical manifestation here in the struggle between them." [Capital, vol. 1, p. 931]*

To look at "property" in the abstract is to ignore people and the relationships they create between each other. And it is these relationships which determine whether they are free or not (and so exploited or not). Caplan's use of the anti-property rights "definition" of socialism avoids the central issue of freedom, of whether a given society generates oppression and exploitation or not. By looking at "property" Caplan ignores liberty, a strange but unsurprising position for a self-proclaimed "libertarian" to take.

Thus both of Caplan's "definitions" of socialism are lacking. A "traditional" one of government ownership is hardly that and the one based on "property" rights avoids the key issue while, in its own way, includes **all** the anarchists in the socialist camp (something Caplan, we are sure, did not intend).

So what would be a useful definition of socialism? From our discussion on property we can instantly reject Caplan's biased and simplistic starting point. In fact, a definition of socialism which most socialists would agree with would be one that stated that *"the whole produce of labour ought to belong to the labourer"* (to use words Thomas Hodgskin, an early English socialist, from his essay **Labour Defended against the Claims of Capital**). Tucker stated that *"the bottom claim of Socialism [is] that labor should be put in possession of its own,"* that *"the natural wage of labour is its product"* ["State Socialism and Anarchism", **Op. Cit.**, p. 2 and p. 4] This definition also found favour with Kropotkin who stated that socialism *"in its wide, generic, and true sense"* was an *"effort to abolish the exploitation of labour by capital."* [**Anarchism**, p. 169]

The differences in socialist schools in terms of the economy they aim for are based on how best to achieve that goal and whether it should be considered from an individual or from a social perspective. Hence Kropotkin:

*"Proudhon . . . understood that what makes the capitalist strong is the mass of the poor, forced to sell their labour and their intelligence at any price. So, he dreamt of an organisation that would allow everyone to produce and receive **the full product of***

*their labour . . . [This] essential idea, quite right, from which Proudhon's plan was born -- that exploitation will last as long as the workers have no other means of working without being exploited by the capitalist -- that the revolution must enable them to live, without their selling their labour power to the exploiter.*

*"But communism also provides this situation; only it does not seek to arrive there by the roundabout . . . means that Proudhon proposed. It claims to create this situation by proclaiming the right of the whole of society to all the wealth it possesses; not by surprising the vigilance of the capitalists, but by promising to oppose force to the force that today maintains private property. It seeks to achieve this through the communist revolution."* [The New Times: A Lecture Given in London, pp. 64-70]

From the aim of ending the exploitation of labour, most socialists soon realised that (to again quote Kropotkin) *"the only guarantee not to be robbed of the fruits of your labour is to possess the instruments of labour."* [The Conquest of Bread, p. 145] Because of this socialism could also be defined as "the workers shall own the means of production," as this automatically meant that the product would go to the producer, and, in fact, this could also be a definition of socialism most socialists would agree with (this also explains why, as we discuss in [section G.4](#), social anarchists argue that Tucker toleration for wage-labour ensures he cannot achieve the socialist goal). Perhaps needless to say, socialists disagreed on how this ownership should be expressed -- with authoritarian socialists placing it in the hands of the State, a position anarchists rejected as simply replacing the boss by the bureaucrat: *"We do not believe in the government of man by man, and we do not conceive that self-respecting people will consent to be drilled, ordered about, and disciplined by anybody, whether the somebody is called master or public servant."* [Victor Yarros, "Anarchistic Socialism", A Libertarian Reader, vol. 1, p. 343]

So the form of this ownership differed from socialist tendency to socialist tendency (some, like Proudhon, proposed federations of co-operative associations, others like Kropotkin communal ownership, others like the Social Democrats state ownership and so on). Moreover, as the economy changed in the 19th century, so did socialist ideas. Murray Bookchin gives a good summary of this process:

*"Th[e] growing shift from artisanal to an industrial economy gave rise to a gradual but major shift in socialism itself. For the artisan, socialism meant producers' co-operatives composed of men who worked together in small shared collectivist associations . . . For the industrial proletarian, by contrast, socialism came to mean the formation of a mass organisation that gave factory workers the collective power to expropriate a plant that no single worker could properly own . . . They advocated public ownership of the means of production, whether by the state or by the working class organised in trade unions."* [The Third Revolution, vol. 2, p. 262]

In this evolution of socialism we can place the various tendencies of anarchism. Individualist anarchism is clearly a form of artisanal socialism (which reflects its American roots) while collectivist, communist and syndicalist anarchism are forms of industrial (or proletarian) socialism (which reflects its roots in Europe). Proudhon's mutualism bridges these extremes, advocating as it does artisan socialism for craftworkers and peasants with co-operative associations for large-scale industry, reflecting the state of the French economy in the 1840s to 1860s (*"Proudhon would individualise and associate" the "productive and distributive forces"* in society, as Tucker put it. [Instead of a Book, p. 480]). Even this classification has

its issues as collectivist, communist and syndicalist anarchism are based on free association, meaning they share with mutualism a defence of artisan and peasant production even if the relative importance of that sector would be less given developments in the economy. This, however, should not blind us to the common feature of all these forms of anarchism have, namely opposition the exploitation of labour (with disagreements rooted in whether any particular type actually would achieve that common aim).

Hence Proudhon's aim for the "*abolition of the proletariat*" for "*Industrial Democracy must . . . succeed Industrial Feudalism*," [Op. Cit., p. 179 and p. 167] His support for "*association*" (or "*associative socialism*") "*anticipated all those later movements*" which demanded "*that the economy be controlled neither by private enterprise nor by the state . . . but by the producers*" such as "*the revolutionary syndicalists*" and "*the students of 1968*." [K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 165] As Kropotkin noted as regards Proudhon's reformist mutualist-socialism:

*"When he proclaimed in his first memoir on property that 'Property is theft', he meant only property in its present, Roman-law, sense of 'right of use and abuse'; in property-rights, on the other hand, understood in the limited sense of possession, he saw the best protection against the encroachments of the state. At the same time he did not want violently to dispossess the present owners of land, dwelling-houses, mines, factories and so on. He preferred to attain the same end by rendering capital incapable of earning interest."* [Anarchism, pp. 290-1]

Proudhon was echoed by, of course, Bakunin and Kropotkin but also Tucker:

*"the fact that one class of men are dependent for their living upon the sale of their labour, while another class of men are relieved of the necessity of labour by being legally privileged to sell something that is not labour . . . And to such a state of things I am as much opposed as any one. But the minute you remove privilege . . . every man will be a labourer exchanging with fellow-labourers . . . What Anarchistic-Socialism aims to abolish is usury . . . it wants to deprive capital of its reward."* [Instead of a Book, p. 404]

Or, in the words of Ernest Lesigne, quoted favourably by Tucker as part of his "*summary exposition of Socialism from the standpoint of Anarchism*", anarchism would ensure "*The land to the cultivator. The mine to the miner. The tool to the labourer. The product to the producer*", "*everyone [would] be a proprietor*" and "*there should be no more proletaires*" for there "*are two Socialisms . . . One is dictatorial, the other libertarian.*" ["State Socialism and Anarchism", Op. Cit., pp. 16-7]

Given all this, it is strange for an anarchist to see Caplan stating that the "*United States has been an even more fertile ground for individualist anarchism: during the 19th-century, such figures as Josiah Warren, Lysander Spooner, and Benjamin Tucker gained prominence for their vision of an anarchism based upon freedom of contract and private property.*" As indicated, Warren, Tucker and Spooner did **not** support private property in the capitalist sense of the word and Kropotkin and Bakunin, no less than Warren, Tucker and Spooner, supported free agreement between individuals and groups. Moreover, as well as ignoring vast swathes of their ideas, Caplan ignores the socio-economic context within which they developed and sought to apply their ideas. A predominantly agrarian in the early stages of industrialisation rests upon, as Marx noted, a radically different form of "private property"

and so the Individualist Anarchists, as Wm. Gary Kline correctly points out, "expected a society of largely self-employed workmen with no significant disparity of wealth between any of them." [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 104] Applying whatever parts of their ideas which are deemed to be "rational" in a radically different socio-economic context would produce radically different outcomes.

What does that prove? That Caplan seems more interested in the words Tucker used rather than the meanings **they** attached to them. Hardly convincing.

Perhaps Caplan should consider Proudhon's words on the subject of socialism: "Modern Socialism was not founded as a sect or church; it has seen a number of different schools." [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 177] If he did perhaps he would see that the Individualist Anarchists were a school of socialism, given their opposition to exploitation and the desire to see its end via their political, economic and social ideas.

### 3 - Was Proudhon a socialist or a capitalist?

In section 8 (Who are the major anarchist thinkers?), Caplan tries his best to claim that Proudhon was not really a socialist at all: "*Pierre[-Joseph] Proudhon is also often included [as a "left anarchist"] although his ideas on the desirability of a modified form of private property would lead some to exclude him from the leftist camp altogether.*"

"Some" of which group? Other anarchists, like Bakunin and Kropotkin? Obviously not -- Bakunin proclaimed "*Proudhon is the master of us all*". [quoted by George Woodcock, "*On Proudhon's 'What is Property?'*", **The Raven**, Vol. 8, No. 3, p. 203] There was no doubt in his mind that Proudhon was a socialist:

*"Proudhon: the son of a peasant, and, his works and instinct, a hundred times more revolutionary than all doctrinaire and bourgeois Socialists, he equipped himself with a point of view, as ruthless as it was profound and penetrating, in order to destroy all their systems. Opposing liberty to authority, he boldly proclaimed himself an Anarchist by way of setting forth his ideas in contradistinction to those of the State Socialists . . . Proudhon's Socialism, based upon individual and collective freedom and upon the spontaneous actions of free associations, and obeying no other laws but the general laws of the social economy, those that already had been discovered or would be discovered in the future; a Socialism functioning outside of any governmental regulation and all State protection, and subordinating politics to the economic, intellectual, and moral interests of society" that kind of Socialism was bound in the course of time to arrive at Federalism.*" [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, pp. 278-9]

According to George Woodcock Kropotkin was one of Proudhon's "*confessed disciples*." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 204] Unsurprisingly, Kropotkin included Proudhon amongst "*numerous thinkers*" who had (along with Bakunin and Marx) "*[i]n the middle of the nineteenth century*" had begun to develop "*socialistic ideas*" and had with "*their followers bent their efforts either to the spreading of socialistic ideas in understandable form, or to putting them upon a scientific basis*". He had no qualms about considering Proudhon as one "*of the first theorists of socialism*". "*Among the socialists*," he noted, Proudhon "*approached nearer than any other the interpretation of justice as the basis of morality*." [**Ethics**, pp. 267-8]

Perhaps that makes Bakunin and Kropotkin proto-capitalists? Obviously not. What about Tucker? He called Proudhon "*the father of the Anarchistic school of Socialism.*" [**Instead of a Book**, p. 381] As for Proudhon himself: "*I am socialist.*" [**Selected Writing of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 195]

The socialist historian Carl Lauderdale whom Caplan quotes in an attempt to dispute the ideas that the Individualist Anarchists can be considered socialists, proclaims that he was "*the most profound thinker among pre-Marxian socialists*" and starts his discussion of Proudhon's ideas with the words "*[i]n France, post-Utopian socialism begins with Peter Joseph Proudhon.*" [**European Socialism: A History of Ideas and Movements**, vol. 1, p. 67 and p. 59] The noted British socialist G.D.H. Cole (and a leading Guild Socialist) likewise included Proudhon in his multi-volume history of socialism, proclaiming him as being "*among the major prophets of Socialism.*" [**History of Socialist Thought**, vol. 1, p. 201] What about Marx and Engels, surely they would be able to say if Proudhon was a socialist or not? According to Engels, Proudhon was "*the Socialist of the small peasant and master-craftsman.*" [Marx and Engels, **Selected Works**, p. 260]

The only grouping which regularly attempts to excommunicate Proudhon from socialism are, of course, Marxists, usually in their attempts to either monopolise the term "socialist", to distance themselves from anarchists or to combat growing anarchist influence in social movements (and, perhaps, recruit anarchists to their party) by "exposing" its "secrets". They use Proudhon as the means of rejecting **all** schools of anarchism from socialism, even communist-anarchism. Needless to say, such writings are as well-informed and objective as Caplan's FAQ and can be ignored.

In fact, the only "left" (i.e. social) anarchist of note who seems to place Proudhon outside of the "leftist" (i.e. anarchist) camp is Murray Bookchin. In a work written as he was in the process of breaking with anarchism shortly before his death, Bookchin argued that "*Proudhon was no socialist*" simply because he favoured "*private property.*" However, he does note the "*one moral provision [that] distinguished the Proudhonist contract from the capitalist contract*" namely "*it abjured profit and exploitation.*" [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 39 and pp. 40-41] Which, of course, places Proudhon in the socialist tradition (see [last section](#)).

Unfortunately, Bookchin fails to acknowledge this or that Proudhon was totally opposed to that specifically "*capitalist contract*", namely wage labour. In a work Bookchin quoted from, the Frenchman repeatedly opposed wage-labour and advocated workers' companies to replace capitalist firms. [**General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 98, pp. 215-6 and pp. 221-2] Bookchin, strangely, indicated he was somewhat aware of this for he quoted Proudhon as arguing that "*association*" was "*a protest against the wage system*". This also suggests that Bookchin's claims that Proudhonian "*analysis minimised the social relations embodied in the capitalist market and industry*" is false. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 78 and p. 180] Given that wage labour is **the** unique social relationship within capitalism, it is clear from Proudhon's works that he did not "minimise" the social relations created by capitalism, rather the opposite. Proudhon's opposition to wage labour clearly shows that he focused on the **key** social relation which capitalism creates -- namely the one of domination and exploitation of the worker by the capitalist.

Bookchin suggested that Proudhon was "*obliged in 1851, in the wake of the associationist ferment of 1848 and after, to acknowledge that association of some sort was unavoidable for*

large-scale enterprises." [Op. Cit., p. 78] However, Proudhon's support of association (industrial democracy) pre-dates 1851 by some 11 years. He stated in **What is Property?** that he aimed for "*equality of conditions and universal association*" and that "*neither a commercial, nor an industrial, nor an agricultural association can be conceived of in the absence of equality*". Moreover, "*all property becomes . . . collective and undivided*" and "*not one if proprietor of the means of production*" while "*leaders*" within industry "*must be chosen from the workers by the workers themselves*." [**Property is Theft!**, p. 109, p. 129, p. 137 p. 122 and p. 119]

It is significant that the first work to call itself anarchist opposed property along with the state, exploitation along with oppression and supported self-management against hierarchical relationships within production ("anarcho"-capitalists take note!). The following year Proudhon said that he "*preach[ed] emancipation to the proletariat; association to the workers*". He aimed at the "*non-appropriation of the instruments of production*", which would be "*a destruction of property*" for "*without the appropriation of instruments, property is nothing*." This was termed "**association**, which is the annihilation of property." In short, we must "*organise industry, associate workers and their functions . . . We must apply on a large scale the principle of collective production*". [Op. Cit., p. 157, p. 149, p. 148 and p. 140]

In 1846's **System of Economic Contradictions** he argued that "*to unfold the system of economic contradictions is to lay the foundations of universal association*", "*a solution based upon equality - in other words, the organisation of labour, which involves the negation of political economy and the end of property*." So "*in order that competition may be universal, it is necessary to procure for all the means of competing; it is necessary to destroy or modify the predominance of capital over labour, to change the relations between employer and worker, to solve, in a word, the antinomy of division and that of machinery; it is necessary to ORGANISE LABOUR*". [Op. Cit., p. 179, p. 202 and p. 201] Again he called for workers' self-management:

*"In order that association may be real, he who participates in it must do so . . . as an active factor; he must have a deliberative voice in the council . . . everything regarding him, in short, should be regulated in accordance with equality. But these conditions are precisely those of the organisation of labour"* [Op. Cit., p. 215]

To "*become a capitalist, [was] to become a tyrant*" and property "*degrades us, by making us servants and tyrants to one another*." To "*be a wage-worker*" was to "*work under a master*" and "*whose share of the collective product is constantly confiscated by the entrepreneur*" and so "*[u]nder the regime of property, the surplus of labour, essentially collective, passes entirely . . . to the proprietor*". Perhaps needless to say, "*political economy, which upholds and advocates that regime, is the theory of theft*" [Op. Cit., p. 248 and pp. 253-4]

So long before the outbreak of the February Revolution of 1848, Proudhon had been calling for "*association*" or the "*organisation of labour*". In 1848 and after, he simply repeated the call -- for example, in a manifesto he called for "*democratically organised workers' associations*" with these being "*models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic and social Republic*." Moreover, "*under universal association, ownership of the land and of the instruments of labour is **social** ownership*". [Op. Cit., pp. 377-8]

Now, given that Bookchin considered as "*authentic artisanal socialists*" those who called for **collective** ownership of the means of production, but "*exempted from collectivisation the peasantry*", we have to conclude that Proudhon was such an authentic artisanal socialist. Indeed, at one point Bookchin mentions the "*individualistic artisanal socialism of Proudhon*" which suggests a somewhat confused approach to Proudhon's ideas! [**Op. Cit.**, p. 4 and p. 258]

In effect, Bookchin makes a similar mistake as Caplan; but, unlike Caplan, he should have known better. Rather than not being a socialist, Proudhon is obviously an example of what Bookchin himself calls "*artisanal socialism*" (as Marx and Engels recognised). Indeed, he noted that Proudhon was its "*most famous advocate*" and that "*nearly all so-called 'utopian' socialists, even [Robert] Owen - the most labour-orientated - as well as Proudhon - essentially sought the equitable distribution of property.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 258 and p. 273] Given Proudhon's opposition to wage labour and capitalist property and his support for industrial democracy as an alternative, Bookchin's position is untenable -- he confuses socialism with communism, rejecting as socialist all views which are not communism (a position he shares with right-"libertarians").

Bookchin did not always hold this position:

*"Proudhon envisions a free society as one in which small craftsmen, peasants, and collectively owned industrial enterprises negotiate and contract with each other to satisfy their material needs. Exploitation is brought to an end, and people simply claim the rewards of their labor, freely working and exchanging their produce without any compulsion to compete or seek profit. Although these views involve a break with capitalism, by no means can they be regarded as communist ideas, a body of views emphasizing publicly owned property and a goal in which human needs are satisfied without regard to the contribution of each individual's labor . . . As 'cooperativists,' the mutualists were to seek a peaceful and piecemeal erosion of capitalism."* [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 18]

It is a far cry from not being a communist to not being a socialist and Bookchin does not provide any reason to deny his earlier comments in his later (mis)reading of Proudhon. In contrast, one expert on Proudhon shows that, for Proudhon, justice "*applied to the economy was associative socialism*" and so Proudhon was squarely in the socialist camp. [K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, p. 228]

However, perhaps all this can be ignored. Perhaps all who came before Caplan simply just did not understand what socialism actually is (and as he described himself as a socialist repeatedly, this also applies to Proudhon himself!). So the question arises, did Proudhon support private property in the capitalist sense of the word? The answer is obviously no. To quote George Woodcock's summary of Proudhon's ideas on this subject we find:

*"He [Proudhon] was denouncing the property of a man who uses it to exploit the labour of others, without an effort on his own part, property distinguished by interest and rent, by the impositions of the non-producer on the producer. Towards property regarded as 'possession,' the right of a man to control his dwelling and the land and tools he needs to live, Proudhon had no hostility; indeed he regarded it as the cornerstone of liberty."* ["On Proudhon's 'What is Property?'", **The Raven** No. 31, pp. 208-9]

George Crowder makes the same point:

*"The ownership he opposes is basically that which is unearned . . . including such things as interest on loans and income from rent. This is contrasted with ownership rights in those goods either produced by the work of the owner or necessary for that work, for example his dwelling-house, land and tools. Proudhon initially refers to legitimate rights of ownership of these goods as 'possession,' and although in his latter work he calls **this** 'property,' the conceptual distinction remains the same."*  
[**Classical Anarchism**, pp. 85-86]

According to Proudhon himself, the *"accumulation of capital and instrument is what the capitalist owes to the producer, but he never pays him for it. It is this fraudulent deprivation which causes the poverty of the worker, the opulence of the idle and the inequality of their conditions. And it is this, above all, which has so aptly been called the exploitation of man by man."* He considered the aim of his economic reforms *"was to rescue the working masses from capitalist exploitation."* [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 43 and p. 80]

Proudhon, as can be seen, considered capitalist property to be the source of exploitation and oppression and he opposed it. He explicitly contrasts his ideas to that of capitalist property and **rejects** it as a means of ensuring liberty. The notion that the person who first declared *"I am an anarchist"* in the context of an extended critique of capitalist property, how it produces exploitation (*"property is theft"*) and who concluded that it needed to be abolished could be considered a defender of capitalism is risible.

Caplan goes on to claim that *"[s]ome of Proudhon's other heterodoxies include his defence of the right of inheritance and his emphasis on the genuine antagonism between state power and property rights."*

Taking Proudhon's views on inheritance first, two points need to be made. First, his views on this subject cannot be separated from his wider politics. As he put it in 1846: *"I see what offends you about inheritance: inheritance, according to you, is only good to maintain inequality. But inequality does not come from inheritance; it results from economic conflicts. Inheritance takes things as it finds them: create equality, and inheritance will render equality to you."* [**Système des contradictions économiques**, vol. 2, p. 258] Second, he explicitly excluded the means of production from his "defence" of said right:

*"Under the law of association, transmission of wealth does not apply to the instruments of labour, so cannot become a cause of inequality. So, let the assets of the deceased proprietor pass to his most distant and often his most impoverished relative. We are socialists, not stealers of inheritances . . . under universal association, ownership of the land and of the instruments of labour is **social** ownership . . . We want property, but property restored to its proper limits, that is to say, free disposition of the fruits of labour, property MINUS USURY!..."* [*Election Manifesto of Le Peuple*", **Property is Theft!**, pp. 377-9]

It is significant that a subject upon which Proudhon spent very little time on is Caplan's first unorthodoxy and, moreover, his position can only be understood within the context of his wider views, a context which is not provided.

What of the "antagonism" of property rights and the State? Well, this is a common anarchist position. Anarchists are well aware that possession is a source of independence within capitalism and so should be supported. As Albert Meltzer put it:

*"All present systems of ownership mean that some are deprived of the fruits of their labour. It is true that, in a competitive society, only the possession of independent means enables one to be free of the economy (that is what Proudhon meant when, addressing himself to the self-employed artisan, he said 'property is liberty', which seems at first sight a contradiction with his dictum that it was theft)" [Anarchism: Arguments For and Against, pp. 12-13]*

Malatesta made the same point:

*"Our opponents . . . are in the habit of justifying the right to private property by stating that property is the condition and guarantee of liberty.*

*"And we agree with them. Do we not say repeatedly that poverty is slavery?"*

*"But then why do we oppose them?"*

*"The reason is clear: in reality the property that they defend is capitalist property . . . which therefore depends on the existence of a class of the disinherited and dispossessed, forced to sell their labour to the property owners for a wage below its real value . . . This means that workers are subjected to a kind of slavery." [The Anarchist Revolution, p. 113]*

As did Kropotkin:

*"the only guarantee not to be robbed of the fruits of your labour is to possess the instruments of labour . . . man really produces most when he works in freedom, when he has a certain choice in his occupations, when he has no overseer to impede him, and lastly, when he sees his work bringing profit to him and to others who work like him, but bringing in little to idlers." [The Conquest of Bread, p. 145]*

Perhaps this makes these three well known anarcho-communists "really" proto-"anarcho"-capitalists as well? Obviously not. Instead of wondering if his ideas on what socialism is are wrong, he tries to rewrite history to fit the anarchist movement into his capitalist ideas of what anarchism, socialism and whatever are actually like.

In addition, we must point out that Proudhon's "emphasis on the genuine antagonism between state power and property rights" came from his later writings, in which he argued that property rights were required to reduce state power. In other words, this "heterodoxy" came from a period in which Proudhon did not think that state could be abolished and so "property is the only power that can act as a counterweight to the State." Of course, this "later" Proudhon also acknowledged that property was "an absolutism within an absolutism," "by nature autocratic" and that its "politics could be summed up in a single word: exploitation." [Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, p. 140, p. 141, p. 140 and p. 134]

Strangely, Caplan fails to note that Proudhon argued that "spread[ing] it more equally and establish[ing] it more firmly in society" is the means by which property "becomes a

guarantee of liberty and keeps the State on an even keel." [Op. Cit., p. 133] In other words, rather than property **as such** limiting the state, it is property divided more equally through society which is the key, without concentrations of economic power and inequality which would result in exploitation and oppression. He was clear that the *"equilibrium of property still requires some political and economic guarantees"* which include *"guarantees of property against itself"* (for example, *"Industrial and agricultural association"* and *"Organisation of public services"*) while the *"State is composed: 1) of the federation of proprietors, grouped by districts, departments, and provinces; 2) of the industrial associations, small worker republics; 3) of public services (at cost-price); 4) of artisans and free merchants."* [Property is Theft!, pp. 779-80] Hardly a capitalist economy, even if there are people who own the tools, land and houses they use.

As Woodcock points out, in Proudhon's *"picture of the ideal society of the ideal society it is this predominance of the small proprietor, the peasant or artisan, that immediately impresses one"* with *"the creation of co-operative associations for the running of factories and railways."* ["On Proudhon's 'What is Property?'", Op. Cit., p. 209, p. 210] As Proudhon put it: *"In democratising us, revolution has launched us on the path of industrial democracy."* [Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, p. 63]

Of course, how effective property is in limiting state power is a moot point. Anarchist groups and syndicalist unions owning their own social centres and newspaper presses never stopped the state from closing them down to protect the capitalist regime when it was deemed required, to take an obvious example. Ultimately, whether specific property rights -- or those of specific groups or classes -- are respected is very much the gift of the state itself, subject to social pressure to defend it like any other right.

All of which hardly supports Caplan's attempts to portray Proudhon as "really" a capitalist all along. Therefore his attempt to claim (co-opt) Proudhon for "anarcho"-capitalism indicates how far Caplan will twist (or ignore) the evidence. In short, and as would quickly become obvious when reading his writings, Proudhon would be amongst those who (to use Caplan's words) *"normally classify government, property, hierarchical organisations . . . as 'rulership.'" But, then, as Kropotkin noted: "Economists [have] represented the enforced contract (under the threat of hunger) between master and workingman as a state of freedom."* [Direct Struggle Against Capital, p. 638]

To summarise, Proudhon was a socialist and Caplan's attempts to rewrite anarchist and socialist history fails. Proudhon was the fountainhead for both wings of the anarchist movement and **What is Property?** *"embraces the core of nineteenth century anarchism . . . [bar support for revolution] all the rest of later anarchism is there, spoken or implied: the conception of a free society united by association, of workers controlling the means of production. . . [this book] remains the foundation on which the whole edifice of nineteenth century anarchist theory was to be constructed."* [Woodcock, Op. Cit., p. 210] Little wonder Bakunin stated that his ideas were Proudhonism *"widely developed and pushed to these, its final consequences."* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 198]

## 4 - Tucker on Property, Communism and Socialism.

That Tucker called himself a socialist is quickly seen from **Instead of A Book** or any of the books written about Tucker and his ideas (at least those whose authors do not wish to claim

him for propertarianism). That Caplan seeks to deny this means that either Caplan has not looked at either **Instead of a Book** or the secondary literature (with obvious implications for the accuracy of his FAQ) or he decided to ignore these facts in favour of his own ideologically tainted version of history (again with obvious implications for the accuracy and objectivity of his FAQ).

Caplan, in an attempt to deny the obvious, quotes Tucker from 1887 in section 14 (What are the major debates between anarchists? What are the recurring arguments?):

*"It will probably surprise many who know nothing of Proudhon save his declaration that 'property is robbery' to learn that he was perhaps the most vigorous hater of Communism that ever lived on this planet. But the apparent inconsistency vanishes when you read his book and find that by property he means simply legally privileged wealth or the power of usury, and not at all the possession by the labourer of his products."*

You will instantly notice that Proudhon does not mean by property *"the possession of the labourer of his products."* Moreover, he argued that ownership of property allowed the hiring of workers and this, in turn, ensured that the worker no longer received his product. So Proudhon did include in his definition of property the capitalist stealing the surplus value produced by the worker. As is clear from the quote, Tucker and Proudhon were opposed to capitalist property (*"the power of usury"*). From Caplan's own evidence he proves that Tucker was not a capitalist.

Let us quote Tucker on what he meant by usury:

*"There are three forms of usury, interest on money, rent on land and houses, and profit in exchange. Whoever is in receipt of any of these is a usurer . . . The banker is a usurer; the manufacturer is a usurer; the merchant is a usurer; the landlord is a usurer . . . Those are the Somebodies who swallow up the surplus wealth [produced by labour] . . . The usurer is the Somebody, and the State is his protector." [Instead of a Book, p. 178]*

Which can hardly be claimed as being the words of a person who supports capitalism.

We should note that Tucker considered both government and capital oppressive. He argued that anarchism meant *"the restriction of power to self and the abolition of power over others. Government makes itself felt alike in country and in city, capital has its usurious grip on the farm as surely as on the workshop and the oppressions and exactions of neither government nor capital can be avoided by migration."* [Op. Cit., p. 114]

Moreover, since when was socialism identical to communism? Tucker, like Proudhon, was well aware that communism and socialism are not the same thing, that the former is one of the schools of the latter (and, we may add, there are different forms of both, libertarian and authoritarian). We have indicated Proudhon's ideas in the [previous section](#) and will not repeat ourselves but it is interesting that this passes as "evidence" of anti-socialism for Caplan, indicating that he seems not know what socialism or anarchism actually is. To state the obvious, you can be a hater of "communism" and still be a socialist -- indeed, Kropotkin argued in 1888 that *"forty years ago, before and in 1848, the theory [of communism] was put forward in such a shape as to fully account for Proudhon's distrust as to its effect upon*

*liberty . . . But this old idea has completely faded before the practical experience of the revolutionary movement.*" [Act for Yourselves, p. 98]

So this, his one attempt to prove that Tucker, Spooner and even Proudhon were really capitalists by quoting the actual people involved is a failure.

Caplan asserts that for any claim that "anarcho"-capitalism is not anarchist is wrong because *"the factual supporting arguments are often incorrect. For example, despite a popular claim that socialism and anarchism have been inextricably linked since the inception of the anarchist movement, many 19th-century anarchists, not only Americans such as Tucker and Spooner, but even Europeans like Proudhon, were ardently in favour of private property (merely believing that some existing sorts of property were illegitimate, without opposing private property as such)."*

Ignoring the awkward fact that Caplan admits Proudhon and Tucker opposed **capitalist** property rights, the facts supporting the claim of anarchists being socialists are not "incorrect." It is Caplan's assumption that socialism is against all forms of "property" which is wrong. To state the obvious, socialism does not equal communism (and anarcho-communists support the rights of workers to own their own means of production if they do not wish to join communist communes). Thus Proudhon was renown as the leading French Socialist theorist when he was alive.

Tucker called himself a socialist on many different occasions and stated that there were *"two schools of Socialistic thought . . . State Socialism and Anarchism"*. He was very clear that *"Liberty insists on Socialism . . . true Socialism, Anarchistic Socialism: the prevalence on earth of Liberty, Equality, and Solidarity."* [Op. Cit., p. 4 and p. 363]

Caplan, of course, is well aware of Tucker's opinions on the subject of capitalism and private property. In section 13 (What moral justifications have been offered for anarchism?) he writes:

*"Still other anarchists, such as Lysander Spooner and Benjamin Tucker as well as Proudhon, have argued that anarchism would abolish the exploitation inherent in interest and rent simply by means of free competition. In their view, only labour income is legitimate, and an important piece of the case for anarchism is that without government-imposed monopolies, non-labour income would be driven to zero by market forces. It is unclear, however, if they regard this as merely a desirable side effect, or if they would reject anarchism if they learned that the predicted economic effect thereof would not actually occur."*

First, we must point that Proudhon, Tucker and Spooner considered **profits** to be exploitative as well as interest and rent. Hence we find Tucker arguing that a *"just distribution of the products of labour is to be obtained by destroying all sources of income except labour. These sources may be summed up in one word, -- usury; and the three principle forms of usury are interest, rent and profit."* [Op. Cit., p. 474] To ignore this fact seems strange, to say the least, when presenting an account of his ideas.

Second, Caplan, again, is being disingenuous, for he knows full-well that Proudhon and the Individualist Anarchists saw competition as reforming capitalism away within the context of a transformed socio-economic environment, one which had been seen transformations in, for

example, banking regulations (ending the gold-standard to allow mutual banking) and land rights (ending capitalist norms with "occupancy and use"). As one expert on Proudhon suggests, "*Proudhon viewed monetary reforms in the context of the institution of producers' associations*" and so he "*was not promoting a simple 'bankism', but rather advancing this as one element in a larger social transformation.*" [K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, pp. 172-3] As such, it is hardly a case of competition "*simply*" reforming capitalism away but rather competition within the context of a wider change of institutions, attitudes and rights which rejected the current (capitalist) ones.

Third, rather than it being "*unclear*" whether the end of usury was "*merely a desirable side effect*" of anarchism, the opposite is the case. Anyone reading Tucker (or Proudhon) would quickly see that their politics were formulated with the express aim of ending usury. Just one example:

*"Liberty will abolish interest; it will abolish profit; it will abolish monopolistic rent; it will abolish taxation; it will abolish the exploitation of labour; it will abolish all means whereby any labourer can be deprived of any of his product."* [Op. Cit., p. 347]

While it is fair to wonder whether these economic effects would result from the application of Tucker's ideas, it **is** distinctly incorrect to claim that the end of usury was considered in any way as a "*desirable side effect*" of them. Rather, in **their** eyes, the end of usury was one of **the** aims of Individualist Anarchism, as can be clearly seen. As Wm. Gary Kline points out in his excellent account of Individualist Anarchism:

*"the American anarchists exposed the tension existing in liberal thought between private property and the ideal of equal access. The Individualist Anarchists were, at least, aware that existing conditions were far from ideal, that the system itself worked against the majority of individuals in their efforts to attain its promises. Lack of capital, the means to creation and accumulation of wealth, usually doomed a labourer to a life of exploitation. This the anarchists knew and they abhorred such a system."* [The Individualist Anarchists, p. 102]

This is part of the reason why they considered themselves socialists and, equally as important, they were considered socialists by **other** socialists such as Kropotkin and Rocker. The Individualist Anarchists, as can be seen, fit very easily into Kropotkin's comments that "*the anarchists, in common with all socialists . . . maintain that the now prevailing system of private ownership in land, and our capitalist production for the sake of profits, represent a monopoly which runs against both the principles of justice and the dictates of utility.*" [Anarchism, p. 285] Given that they considered profits as usury and proposed "*occupancy and use*" in place of the prevailing land ownership rights they are obviously socialists.

That the end of usury was considered a clear aim of his politics explains Tucker's 1926 postscript to his famous essay "*State Socialism and Anarchism*" in which he argues that "*concentrated capital*" **itself** was a barrier towards anarchy. He argued that the "*trust is now a monster which . . . even the freest competition, could it be instituted, would be unable to destroy.*" While, in an earlier period, big business "*needed the money monopoly for its sustenance and its growth*" its size now ensured that it "*sees in the money monopoly a convenience, to be sure, but no longer a necessity. It can do without it.*" This meant that the

way was now *"not so clear."* Indeed, he argued that the problem of the trusts *"must be grappled with for a time solely by forces political or revolutionary"* as the trust had moved beyond the reach of *"economic forces"* simply due to the concentration of resources in its hands. [*Postscript to State Socialism and Anarchism*, **Individual Liberty**, p. 18] Another leading Individualist Anarchist, Victor Yarros, became a social-democrat and noted that the continued concentration of wealth played a key role in the decline of Individualist Anarchism:

*"In the first place, the amazing growth of trusts and syndicates, of holding companies and huge corporations, of chain banks and chainstores, gradually and insiduously shook the faith of many in the efficacy of mutual banks, co-operative associations of producers and consumers, and the competition of little fellows. Proudhon's plan for a bank of the people to make industrial loans without interest to workers' co-operatives, or other members, seemed extremely remote and inapplicable to an age of mass production, mechanization, continental and international markets."* [*Philosophical Anarchism: Its Rise, Decline, and Eclipse*, **American Journal of Sociology**, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Jan., 1936), p. 481]

If the end of *"usury"* **was** considered a *"side-effect"* rather than an objective, then the problems of the trusts and economic inequality/power (*"enormous concentration of wealth"*) would not have been an issue. That the fact of economic power **was** obviously considered a hindrance to anarchy suggests the end of usury was a key aim, an aim which "free competition" in the abstract could not achieve. Rather than take the "anarcho"-capitalist position that massive inequality did not affect "free competition" or individual liberty, Tucker obviously thought it did and, therefore, "free competition" (and so the abolition of the public state) in conditions of massive inequality would not create an anarchist society. As Tucker put it:

*"nature furnishes man immense forces with which to work in the shape of land and capital, that in a state of freedom these forces benefit each individual to the extent that he avails himself of them, and that any man or class getting a monopoly of either or both will put all other men in subjection and live in luxury on the products of their labor."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 205]

By trying to relegate an aim to a *"side-effect"*, Caplan distorts the ideas of Tucker. Indeed, his comments on trusts, *"concentrated capital"* and the *"enormous concentration of wealth"* indicates how far Individualist Anarchism is from "anarcho"-capitalism (which dismisses the question of economic power out of hand). It also indicates the unity of political and economic ideas, with Tucker being aware that without a suitable economic basis individual freedom was meaningless. That an economy (like capitalism) with massive inequalities in wealth and so power was not such a basis is obvious from Tucker's comments.

Fourth, what did Tucker consider as a government-imposed monopoly? Private property, particularly in land. As he states *"Anarchism undertakes to protect no titles except such as are based upon actual occupancy and use"* and that anarchism *"means the abolition of landlordism and the annihilation of rent."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 61, p. 300] This, to state the obvious, is a restriction on "private property" (in the capitalist sense), which, if we use Caplan's definition of socialism, means that Tucker was obviously part of the "Leftist camp" (i.e. socialist camp). In other words, Tucker considered capitalism as the product of statism while socialism (libertarian of course) would be the product of anarchy. Thus what is meant by a

"free market" cannot be assumed to be the same if used by people with radically different notions on, say, property rights.

Tucker pointed to four monopolies by which labour was exploited -- *"the banking monopoly, the land monopoly, the tariff monopoly, and the patent and copyright monopoly"*. [**Individual Liberty**, p. 252] Of these, "anarcho"-capitalism keeps three -- the credit monopoly (banking based on the gold standard and 100% reserves), the land monopoly (*"the establishment in North America of a truly libertarian land system"*) and the copyright monopoly (*"our theory of property rights includes the inviolability of contractual copyright"*). That these monopolies would be based on a *"basic libertarian law code"* does not change the fact that these are legally imposed. [Rothbard, **The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 73, p. 123 and p. 234] If, as Tucker argued, *"the only reason why the banker, the stockholder, the landlord, the manufacturer, and the merchant are able to exact usury from labor lies in the fact that they are backed by legal privilege, or monopoly"*, then this applies to "anarcho"-capitalism just as much as "actually existing" capitalism. [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 4-5] It would be doubtful that having private police and judges impose these monopolies would have been considered as any significant improvement. Tucker -- like Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Goldman and Tolstoy -- would be considered (natural?) outlaws under "anarcho"-capitalism if they sought to apply their ideas by ignoring these law-enforced monopolies.

So even things they are ostensibly meant to be in agreement on (such as "free markets" and "property") when looked at closely are found to differ on. Thus the Individualist Anarchist definition of "free market" and the "anarcho"-capitalist one differ and neither would agree that the other actually advocated it. Likewise with "property", with the "anarcho"-capitalist rejecting the Individualist Anarchist "occupancy and use" system as being an unfair and unjust limitation of (capitalist) property rights.

Fifth, Tucker and his colleagues were well aware of the various attempts by bourgeois economists to justify, rationalise and excuse the exploitation of labour and rejected them. Instead, they agreed with Proudhon's comment in **What is Property?**:

*"Whoever labours becomes a proprietor -- this is an inevitable deduction from the acknowledged principles of political economy and jurisprudence. And when I say proprietor, I do not mean simply (as do our hypocritical economists) proprietor of his allowance, his salary, his wages -- I mean proprietor of the value which he creates, and by which the master alone profits."* [**Property is Theft!**, p. 114)

It does a disservice to the Individualist Anarchists to imply that they were unaware of capitalist economics and that if they had simply had a better education (taking lessons at the "Austrian School", perhaps?) they would have seen the errors of their ways. In reality, Tucker and his colleagues rejected bourgeois economics in an informed way -- indeed, much of Tucker's **Instead of a Book** contains replies to capitalist individualists explaining what "anarcho"-capitalists would view as sound (or at least sounder) economics to him. This does not mean that their solution to the social question would have worked as intended but it does mean that their socialist perspective was informed and cannot be dismissed, downplayed or ignored.

So, Caplan's historical argument to support his notion that anarchism is simply anti-government fails. Anarchism, in all its many forms, have distinct economic as well as political ideas and these cannot be parted without losing what makes anarchism unique. In

particular, Caplan's attempt to portray Proudhon as an example of a "pure" anti-government anarchism also fails, and so his attempt to co-opt Tucker and Spooner also fails (as noted, Tucker cannot be classed as a "pure" anti-government anarchist either). If Proudhon was a socialist, then it follows that his self-proclaimed followers will also be socialists -- and, unsurprisingly, Tucker called himself a socialist and considered anarchism as part of the wider socialist movement. In short: *"Like Proudhon, Tucker was an 'un-marxian socialist'"* [William O. Reichart, **Partisans of Freedom**, p. 157]

## 5 - Anarchism and "anarcho"-capitalism

Caplan tries to build upon the non-existent foundation of Tucker's and Proudhon's "capitalism" by stating that:

*"Nor did an ardent anarcho-communist like Kropotkin deny Proudhon or even Tucker the title of 'anarchist.' In his **Modern Science and Anarchism**, Kropotkin discusses not only Proudhon but 'the American anarchist individualists who were represented in the fifties by S.P. Andrews and W. Greene, later on by Lysander Spooner, and now are represented by Benjamin Tucker, the well-known editor of the New York **Liberty**.' Similarly in his article on anarchism for the 1910 edition of the **Encyclopedia Britannica**, Kropotkin again freely mentions the American individualist anarchists, including 'Benjamin Tucker, whose journal **Liberty** was started in 1881 and whose conceptions are a combination of those of Proudhon with those of Herbert Spencer.'"*

There is a nice historical irony in Caplan's attempts to use Kropotkin to prove the historical validity of "anarcho"-capitalism. This is because while Kropotkin was happy to include Tucker into the anarchist movement, Tucker often claimed that an anarchist could not be a communist. In **State Socialism and Anarchism** he argued that anarchism was *"an ideal utterly inconsistent with that of those Communists who falsely call themselves Anarchists while at the same time advocating a regime of Archism fully as despotic as that of the State Socialists themselves."* [**Instead of a Book**, pp. 15-16]

While modern social anarchists follow Kropotkin in not denying Proudhon or Tucker as anarchists, we do deny the anarchist title to supporters of capitalism. Why? Simply because anarchism as a **political** movement (as opposed to a dictionary definition) has always been anti-capitalist and against capitalist exploitation and oppression. In other words, anarchism (in all its forms) has always been associated with specific political **and** economic ideas. Both Tucker and Kropotkin defined their anarchism as an opposition to both state and capitalism. To quote Tucker on the subject:

*"Liberty insists . . . [on] the abolition of the State and the abolition of usury; on no more government of man by man, and no more exploitation of man by man."* [quoted by Eunice Schuster **Native American Anarchism - A Study of Left-Wing American Individualism**, p. 140]

In this he followed Proudhon, who had argued during the 1848 Revolution that *"the capitalist principle" and "the governmental principle" as "one and the same principle . . . the abolition of the exploitation of man by man, and the abolition of the government of man by man, are one and the same formula."* [quoted by Wayne Thorpe, **"The Workers Themselves": Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour, 1913-1923**, p. 279] Kropotkin,

likewise, defined anarchism as *"the no-government system of socialism"* and aimed at the *"enfranchisement of man from the bonds of the state as well as from those of capitalism."* [Anarchism, p. 46 and p. 300] Malatesta argued that *"when [people] sought to overthrow both State and property -- then it was anarchy was born"* and aimed for *"the complete destruction of the domination and exploitation of man by man."* [Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas, p. 19, pp. 22-28] Indeed **every** leading anarchist theorist defined anarchism as opposition to government **and** exploitation. Thus the excellent summary by Brain Morris:

*"Another criticism of anarchism is that it has a narrow view of politics: that it sees the state as the fount of all evil, ignoring other aspects of social and economic life. This is a misrepresentation of anarchism. It partly derives from the way anarchism has been defined [in dictionaries, for example], and partly because Marxist historians have tried to exclude anarchism from the broader socialist movement. But when one examines the writings of classical anarchists . . . as well as the character of anarchist movements . . . it is clearly evident that it has never had this limited vision. It has always challenged all forms of authority and exploitation, and has been equally critical of capitalism and religion as it has been of the state."* ["Anthropology and Anarchism," **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed**, no. 45, p. 40]

Therefore anarchism was never purely a political concept, but always combined an opposition to oppression with an opposition to exploitation. Little wonder, then, that both strands of anarchism have declared themselves "socialist" and so it is *"conceptually and historically misleading"* to *"create a dichotomy between socialism and anarchism."* [Morris, **Op. Cit.**, p. 39] Needless to say, anarchists oppose **state** socialism just as much as they oppose capitalism. All of which means that anarchism and capitalism are two **different** political ideas with specific (and opposed) meanings -- to deny these meanings by uniting the two terms creates an oxymoron, one that denies the history and the development of ideas as well as the whole history of the anarchist movement itself.

Again, Caplan's attempt to provide historical evidence for a "right-wing" anarchism fails -- although there is a certain irony that the followers of Kropotkin are now defending individualist anarchism from the attempted "adoption" by supporters of capitalism. That in itself should be enough to indicate Caplan's attempt to use Kropotkin to give credence to "anarcho"-capitalist co-option of Proudhon, Tucker and Spooner fails.

Interestingly, Caplan admits that "anarcho"-capitalism has recent origins. In section 8 (Who are the major anarchist thinkers?) he states:

*"Anarcho-capitalism has a much more recent origin in the latter half of the 20th century. The two most famous advocates of anarcho-capitalism are probably Murray Rothbard and David Friedman. There were however some interesting earlier precursors, notably the Belgian economist Gustave de Molinari. Two other 19th-century anarchists who have been adopted by modern anarcho-capitalists with a few caveats are Benjamin Tucker and Lysander Spooner. (Some left-anarchists contest the adoption, but overall Tucker and Spooner probably have much more in common with anarcho-capitalists than with left-anarchists.)"*

First, as Caplan states, Tucker and Spooner have been *"adopted"* by the "anarcho"-capitalist school. Being dead they have little chance to protest, but it is clear that they considered themselves as socialists, against capitalism (it may be claimed that Spooner never called

himself a socialist, but then again he never called himself an anarchist either; it is his strong opposition to wage labour that places him in the socialist camp). Secondly, Caplan lets the cat out the bag by noting that this "adoption" involved a few warnings -- more specifically, the attempt to rubbish or ignore the underlying socio-economic ideas of Tucker and Spooner and the obvious anti-capitalist nature of their vision of a free society.

Second, as noted in [section F.7.1](#), Molinari made no attempt to link himself to the flourishing anarchist movement in Europe at the time nor did that movement express any interest in his ideas. Indeed, Kropotkin appears to have mentioned him in passing once: "*At bottom, the liberal economists, from Adam Smith up to M. Molinari, have never wanted this -- their ideal having never been **laissez-faire**, never **laissez-passe**, but on the contrary, to do much in favour of the capitalist. Carte blanche for exploitation, guaranteed by the State -- have they ever had another ideal? . . . The State is the force that perpetuates what exists, by guaranteeing possession and monopoly to the one who owns.*" [**The New Times**, pp. 97-8] Unsurprisingly, the notion that strikes should be crushed by private troops rather than ones funded by taxation was not considered as a major improvement nor a step towards anarchy.

Third, individualist anarchists are, indeed, more similar to classical liberals than social anarchists. Similarly, social anarchists are more similar to Marxists than Individualist anarchists. But neither statement means that Individualist anarchists are capitalists, or social anarchists are state socialists. It just means some of their ideas overlap -- and we must point out that Individualist anarchist ideas overlap with Marxist ones, and social anarchist ones with liberal ones. Indeed, one interesting overlap between Marxism and Individualist Anarchism can be seen from Marx's comment that abolishing interest and interest-bearing capital "*means the abolition of capital and of capitalist production itself.*" [**Theories of Surplus Value**, vol. 3, p. 472] Given that Individualist Anarchism aimed to abolish interest (along with rent and profit) it would suggest, from a Marxist position, that it is a socialist theory. Another is their view, shared with social anarchists, that the State is an instrument of the capitalist class -- or, as Victor Yarros put it: "*The Marx-Proudhon contention that the state is merely the tool of the class in power economically and financially, the protector of privilege and ill-gotten property.*" ["*Philosophical Anarchism: Its Rise, Decline, and Eclipse*", **American Journal of Sociology**, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Jan., 1936), p. 482]

So, if we accept Kropotkin's summary that Individualist Anarchism ideas are "*partly those of Proudhon, but party those of Herbert Spencer*", what the "anarcho"-capitalist school is trying to is to ignore the Proudhonian (i.e. socialist) aspect of their theories. [**Anarchism**, p. 173] However, that just leaves Spencer and Spencer was not an anarchist, but a classical liberal, a precursor of "libertarianism" (i.e., propertarianism) -- and a "*champion of the capitalistic class*" as Tucker put it. [**Instead of a Books**, p. 370] And as Kropotkin argued, Spencer's politics could not achieve a free society:

*"When a workman sells his labour to an employer, and knows perfectly well that some part of the value of his produce will be unjustly taken by the employer; when he sells it without even the slightest guarantee of being employed so much as six consecutive months -- and he is compelled to do so because he and his family would otherwise starve next week -- it is a sad mockery to call that a free contract. Modern economists may call it free, but the father of political economy -- Adam Smith -- was never guilty of such a misrepresentation. As long as three-quarters of humanity are compelled to enter into agreements of that description, force is, of course, necessary, both to enforce the supposed agreements and to maintain such a state of things. Force*

-- and a good deal of force -- is necessary for preventing the labourers from taking possession of what they consider unjustly appropriated by the few; and force is necessary to continually bring new 'uncivilised nations' under the same conditions. The Spencerian no-force party perfectly well understand that; and while they advocate no force for changing the existing conditions, they advocate still more force than is now used for maintaining them." ["Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles", **Anarchism and Anarchist Communism**, pp. 52-53]

Elsewhere, Kropotkin noted -- in words applicable to "anarcho"-capitalists and other modern proprietarians -- that Spencer "completely forgets the inability of the great mass of men to procure the necessities of life -- an inability developed in our societies through the usurpation of power and through class legislation" and so "passed over lightly the fundamental facts [of] modern civilized societies" that the few "reap the benefits of the toil of propertyless men, compelled to sell their labour and themselves in order to maintain their children and household." [**Ethics**, p. 320, pp. 318-319] This meant that Spencer's "practical solution of the social problem is miserable -- so miserable as to lead us to inquire if the talk of 'No force be merely an excuse for supporting landlord and capitalist domination.'" [**Act for Yourselves**, p. 98]

In short, to ignore the socialist aspect of Individualist Anarchism is to reduce it to liberalism, an extreme version of liberalism, but liberalism nevertheless -- and liberalism is not anarchism. To reduce anarchism so is to destroy what makes anarchism a unique political theory and movement: "anarchism does derive from liberalism and socialism both historically and ideologically. . . . In a sense, anarchists always remain liberals and socialists, and whenever they reject what is good in either they betray anarchism itself. . . . We are liberals but more so, and socialists but more so. . . . [yet] anarchism is not just a mixture of liberalism and socialism". [Nicholas Walter, **About Anarchism**, p. 31]

This means that "anarcho"-capitalism is a development of ideas which have little in common with anarchism. Jeremy Jennings, in his overview of anarchist theory and history, agrees:

*"It is hard not to conclude that these ideas ["anarcho"-capitalism] -- with roots deep in classical liberalism -- are described as anarchist only on the basis of a misunderstanding of what anarchism is."* [Roger Eatwell and Anthony Wright (eds.), **Contemporary Political Ideologies**, p. 142]

Barbara Goodwin also agrees that the "anarcho"-capitalists' "true place is in the group of right-wing libertarians" not in anarchism [**Using Political Ideas**, p. 148]. Indeed, that "anarcho"-capitalism is an off-shoot of classical liberalism is a position Murray Rothbard would agree with, as he states that right-wing "libertarians" constitute "the vanguard of classical liberalism." [quoted by Ulrike Heider, **Anarchism: Left, Right and Green**, p. 95] Unfortunately for this perspective anarchism is not liberalism and liberalism is not anarchism. And equally as unfortunate (this time for the anarchist movement!) "anarcho"-capitalism "is judged to be anarchism largely because some anarcho-capitalists say they are 'anarchists' and because they criticise the State." [Peter Sabatini, **Social Anarchism**, no. 23, p. 100] However, being opposed to the state is a necessary but not sufficient condition for being an anarchist (as can be seen from the history of the anarchist movement). Brian Morris puts it well:

*"The term anarchy comes from the Greek, and essentially means 'no ruler.' Anarchists are people who reject all forms of government or coercive authority, all forms of hierarchy and domination. They are therefore opposed to what the Mexican anarchist Flores Magon called the 'sombre trinity' -- state, capital and the church. Anarchists are thus opposed to both capitalism and to the state, as well as to all forms of religious authority. But anarchists also seek to establish or bring about by varying means, a condition of anarchy, that is, a decentralised society without coercive institutions, a society organised through a federation of voluntary associations. Contemporary 'right-wing' libertarians . . . who are often described as 'anarchocapitalists' and who fervently defend capitalism, are not in any real sense anarchists." [Op. Cit., p. 38]*

Proudhon, it should be stressed, likewise argued that "**Capital** . . . in the political field is analogous to **government** . . . The economic idea of capitalism, the politics of government or of authority, and the theological idea of the Church are three identical ideas, linked in various ways. To attack one of them is equivalent to attacking all of them . . . What capital does to labour, and the State to liberty, the Church does to the spirit. This trinity of absolutism is as baneful in practice as it is in philosophy. The most effective means for oppressing the people would be simultaneously to enslave its body, its will and its reason." [quoted by Max Nettlau, **A Short History of Anarchism**, pp. 43-44]

Rather than call themselves by a name which reflects their origins in liberalism (and **not** anarchism), the "anarcho"-capitalists have instead seen fit to try and appropriate the name of anarchism and, in order to do so, ignore key aspects of anarchist theory in the process. Little wonder, then, they try and prove their anarchist credentials via dictionary definitions rather than from the anarchist movement itself (see [next section](#)).

Caplan's attempt in his FAQ is an example to ignore individualist anarchist theory and history. Ignored is any attempt to understand their ideas on property along with:

- their many statements on being socialists and part of the wider socialist movement.
- their opposition to capitalist property-rights in land and other scarce resources.
- their recognition that capitalism was based on usury and that it was exploitation.
- their attacks on government **and** capital, rather than just government.
- their support for strikes and other forms of direct action by workers to secure the full product of their labour.

In fact, the only things considered useful seems to be the individualist anarchist's support for free agreement (something Kropotkin also agreed with) and their use of the word "property." But even a cursory investigation indicates the non-capitalist nature of their ideas on property and the socialistic nature of their theories.

Perhaps Caplan should ponder these words of Kropotkin that supporters of the "*individualist anarchism of the American Proudhonians* . . . soon realise that the individualisation they so highly praise is not attainable by individual efforts, and . . . abandon the ranks of the anarchists, and are driven into the liberal individualism of the classical economist." [Anarchism , p. 297] For he seems to confuse the end place of ex-anarchists with their starting point.

## 6 - Appendix: Defining Anarchism

In his Appendix "*Defining Anarchism*" we find that Caplan attempts to defend his dictionary definition of anarchism. He does this by attempting to refute two arguments, The Philological Argument and the Historical Argument.

Caplan's definition of "*The Philological Argument*" is as follows:

*"Several critics have noted the origin of the term 'anarchy,' which derives from the Greek 'arkhos,' meaning 'ruler,' and the prefix an-, 'meaning 'without.' It is therefore suggested that in my definition the word 'government' should be replaced with the word 'domination' or 'rulership'; thus re-written, it would then read: 'The theory or doctrine that all forms of rulership are unnecessary, oppressive, and undesirable and should be abolished.'"*

Caplan replies by stating that:

*"This is all good and well, so long as we realise that various groups of anarchists will radically disagree about what is or is not an instance of 'rulership.'"*

However, in order to refute this argument by this method, he has to ignore his own methodology. A dictionary definition of ruler is "*a person who rules by authority.*" and "*rule*" is defined as "*to have authoritative control over people*" or "*to keep (a person or feeling etc.) under control, to dominate*" [**The Oxford Study Dictionary**]

Hierarchy by its very nature is a form of rulership (hier-*archy*) and so is opposed by anarchists. Capitalism is based upon wage labour, in which a worker follows the rules of their boss. This is obviously a form of hierarchy, of domination. Almost all people (excluding die-hard supporters of capitalism) would agree that being told what to do, when to do and how to do by a boss is a form of rulership. Anarchists, therefore, argue that "*economic exploitation and political domination*" are "*two continually interacting aspects of the same thing -- the subjection of man by man.*" [Errico Malatesta, **Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, p. 147] Rucker made the same point, arguing that the "*exploitation of man by man and the domination of man over man are inseparable, and each is the condition of the other.*" [**Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 18]

The recognition of this very obvious fact can be found in the very work which saw the use of "anarchist" in its modern sense, namely Proudhon's **What is Property?**. It noted that the worker "*has sold and surrendered his liberty*" to the property-owner who acquires "*the products of his employees' labour*" and "*unjustly*" profits from their collective toil, and so "*property is theft*". Less well known is the second conclusion, that "*property is despotism.*" Property "*violates equality by the rights of exclusion and increase, and freedom by despotism.*" Proprietor was "*synonymous*" with "*sovereign*" for he "*imposes his will as law, and suffers neither contradiction nor control*" for "*each proprietor is sovereign lord within the sphere of his property*". Anarchy, in contrast, was "*the absence of a master, of a sovereign*". [**Property is Theft!**, pp. 117-8, p. 133, p. 132, p. 135]

Thus Caplan is ignoring the meaning of words to state that *"on its own terms this argument fails to exclude anarcho-capitalists"* because they define rulership to exclude most forms of archy. Hardly convincing.

Strangely enough, "anarcho"-capitalist icon Murray Rothbard actually provided evidence that the anarchist position **is** correct. He argued that the state *"arrogates to itself a monopoly of force, of ultimate decision-making power, over a given area territorial area."* This is obviously a form of rulership. However, he also argues that *"[o]bviously, in a free society, Smith has the ultimate decision-making power over his own just property, Jones over his, etc."* [**The Ethics of Liberty**, p. 170 and p. 173] Which, to state the obvious, means that **both** the state and property is marked by an *"ultimate decision-making power"* over a given territory. The only alleged difference is that Rothbard claims the former is "just" (i.e. "justly" acquired) and the other is "unjust" (i.e. acquired by force). In reality of course, the modern distribution of property is just as much a product of past force as is the modern state. In other words, the current property owners have acquired their property in the same unjust fashion as the state has its. If one is valid, so is the other. Rothbard is trying to have it both ways.

Ironically, Rothbard went on to show why statism and private property are essentially the same thing:

*"If the State may be said too properly own its territory, then it is proper for it to make rules for everyone who presumes to live in that area. It can legitimately seize or control private property because there is no private property in its area, because it really owns the entire land surface. So long as the State permits its subjects to leave its territory, then, it can be said to act as does any other owner who sets down rules for people living on his property."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 170]

Of course Rothbard does not draw the obvious conclusion. He wants to maintain that the state is bad and property is good while drawing attention to their obvious similarities. Ultimately Rothbard is exposing the bankruptcy of his own politics and analysis. According to Rothbard, something can look like a state (i.e. have the *"ultimate decision-making power"* over an area) and act like a state (i.e. *"make rules for everyone"* who lives in an area, i.e. govern them) but not be a state. This not a viable position for obvious reasons. Errico Malatesta simply stated the obvious:

*"organisation, that is to say, association for a specific purpose and with the structure and means required to attain it, is a necessary aspect of social life. A man in isolation cannot even live the life of a beast . . . Having therefore to join with other humans . . . he must submit to the will of others (be enslaved) or subject others to his will (be in authority) or live with others in fraternal agreement in the interests of the greatest good of all (be an associate). Nobody can escape from this necessity."* [**Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas**, pp. 84-5]

Thus to claim, as Caplan does, that property does not generate "rulership" is obvious nonsense. Not only does it ignore the dictionary definition of rulership (which, let us not forget, is Caplan's **own** methodology) as well as commonsense, it obviously ignores what the two institutions have in common. **If** the state is to be condemned as "rulership" then so must property -- for reasons, ironically enough, Rothbard himself makes clear.

Caplan's critique of the "*Philological Argument*" fails because he tries to deny that the social relationship between worker and capitalist and tenant and landlord is based upon **archy**, when it obviously is. To quote Proudhon, considered by Tucker as "*the Anarchist par excellence*," the employee "*is subordinated, exploited: his permanent condition is one of obedience.*" Without "*association*" (i.e. co-operative workplaces, workers' self-management) there would be "*two industrial castes of masters and wage-workers which is repugnant to a free and democratic society,*" castes "*related as subordinates and superiors.*" [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 216]

Moving on, Caplan defines the Historical Argument as:

*"A second popular argument states that historically, the term 'anarchism' has been clearly linked with anarcho-socialists, anarcho-communists, anarcho-syndicalists, and other enemies of the capitalist system. Hence, the term 'anarcho-capitalism' is a strange oxymoron which only demonstrates ignorance of the anarchist tradition."*

He argues that "*even if we were to accept the premise of this argument -- to wit, that the meaning of a word is somehow determined by its historical usage -- the conclusion would not follow because the minor premise is wrong. It is simply not true that from its earliest history, all anarchists were opponents of private property, free markets, and so on.*"

First, note that Caplan equates **capitalism** (actual socio-economic systems and related ideologies) with "*private property, free markets, and so on*" (the "*and so on*" leaves much to the imagination!). In terms of the two features he explicitly references, both have a wide-range of meanings both historically and ideologically. As socialists like Proudhon and Marx noted, the forms of property have changed considerably over the ages and would undoubtedly change in the future. Thus Tucker aimed to replace capitalist property rights in land with "occupancy and use" ("*Today the occupant of land is its **possessor**, in right and in fact. The aim of the occupancy-and-use agitation is not to secure for the occupant a possession which is already his, but an ownership and control which in most cases is not his, but his landlord's*" [**Individual Liberty**, p. 231]). In short, Caplan seeks to equate two very different forms of "*private property*" and both with capitalism. Likewise with "*free markets*", which can mean very different things depending upon the rights (and monopolies) it is based upon:

*"What are the normal earnings of other men? Evidently what they can produce with all the tools and advantages which they can procure **in a free market** without force or fraud. If, then, the capitalist, by abolishing the free market, compels other men to procure their tools and advantages of him on less favorable terms than they could get before, while it may be better for them to come to his terms than to go without the capital, does he not deduct from their earnings?"* [Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, p. 202]

Given that "anarcho"-capitalism aims to retain three of the monopolies Tucker decried (the land, credit and copyright monopolies), it is logical to conclude that for Tucker "anarcho"-capitalism would likewise be "*abolishing the free market*". Thus advocating "*free markets*" is consistent with being "*opponents*" of capitalism, even the mythical capitalism of propertarian ideology. As Individualist Anarchist Victor Yarros put it: "*Though we favour the laissez-faire policy, we do not understand it in the sense in which the bourgeois economists have understood it.*" [*Anarchistic Socialism*, **A Libertarian Reader**, vol. 1, p. 342]

So it is true that anarchists like Tucker were not against the free market, but they did not consider capitalism to be defined by the free market but by exploitation (as do all socialists). In this they share a common ground with Market Socialists who, like Tucker and Proudhon, do not equate socialism with opposition to the market or capitalism with the "free market." The idea that socialists oppose "*private property, free markets, and so on*" is just an assumption by Caplan. Proudhon, for example, was not opposed to competition, "property" (in the sense of possession) and markets but during his lifetime and up to the present date he is acknowledged as a socialist, indeed one of the greatest in French (if not European) history. Similarly we find leading anarcho-syndicalist Rudolf Rocker writing that the Individualist Anarchists "*all agree on the point that man be given the full reward of his labour and recognised in this right the economic basis of all personal liberty. They regard free competition . . . as something inherent in human nature . . . They answered the socialists of other schools who saw in **free competition** one of the destructive elements of capitalistic society that the evil lies in the fact that today we have too little rather than too much competition.*" [**Pioneers of American Freedom**, p. 160] Rocker obviously considered support for markets as compatible with socialism.

In other words, Caplan's assumption that all socialists oppose markets, competition and so on is simply false -- as can be seen from the history of the socialist movement. What socialists **do** oppose is capitalist exploitation -- socialism "*in its wide, generic, and true sense*" was an "*effort to **abolish** the exploitation of labour by capital.*" [Kropotkin, **Anarchism**, p. 169] In this sense the Individualist Anarchists are obviously socialists, as Tucker and Labadie constantly pointed out.

Thus Caplan's attempt to judge the historical argument on its own merits fails because he has to rewrite history to do so.

Second, anarchism is not just a word, but a political idea and movement and so associated with a given body of ideas. You cannot use the word to describe something which has little or nothing in common with that body of ideas. You cannot call Marxism "anarchism" simply because they share the anarchist opposition to capitalist exploitation and aim for a stateless society, for example.

Caplan is right to state that the meaning of words change over time, but this does not mean we should run to use dictionary definitions. Dictionaries rarely express political ideas well - for example, most dictionaries define the word "anarchy" as "chaos" and "disorder." Does that mean anarchists aim to create chaos? Of course not. Therefore, Caplan's attempt to use dictionary definitions is selective and ultimately useless -- anarchism as a political movement cannot be expressed by dictionary definitions and any attempt to do so means to ignore history.

The problems in using dictionary definitions to describe political ideas can best be seen from the definition of the word "Socialism." According to the **Oxford Study Dictionary** Socialism is "*a political and economic theory advocating that land, resources, and the chief industries should be owned and managed by the State.*" The **Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary**, conversely, defines socialism as "*any of various economic and political theories advocating collective or government ownership and administration of the means of production and distribution of goods.*"

Clearly the latter source has a more accurate definition of socialism than the former, by allowing for "collective" versus solely "State" control of productive means. Which definition would be better? It depends on the person involved. A Marxist, for example, could prefer the first one simply to exclude anarchism from the socialist movement, something they have continually tried to do. A right-"libertarian" could, again, prefer the first, for equally obvious reasons. Anarchists would prefer the second, again for obvious reasons. However neither definition does justice to the wide range of ideas that have described themselves as socialist.

Using dictionaries as the basis of defining political movements ensures that one's views depend on **which** dictionary one uses, **when** it was written, and so on. This is why they are not the best means of resolving disputes -- if resolution of disputes is, in fact, your goal.

Both Kropotkin and Tucker stated that they were socialists and that anarchism was socialistic. If we take the common modern meaning of the word as state ownership as the valid one then Tucker and Kropotkin are **not** socialists and no form of anarchism is socialist. This is obviously nonsense and it shows the limitations of using dictionary definitions on political theories.

Therefore Caplan's attempt to justify using the dictionary definition fails. Firstly, because the definitions used would depend which dictionary you use. Secondly, dictionary definitions cannot capture the ins and outs of a **political** theory or its ideas on wider subjects.

Ironically enough, Caplan is repeating an attempt made by State Socialists to deny Individualist Anarchism its socialist title. In reply to this attempt, Tucker argued as follows:

*"The makers of dictionaries are dependent upon specialists for their definitions. A specialist's definition may be true or it may be erroneous. But its truth cannot be increased or its error diminished by its acceptance by the lexicographer. Each definition must stand on its own merits."* ["Socialism and the Lexicographers", **Instead of a Book**, p. 369]

Tucker provided many quotes from **other** dictionaries to refute the attempt by the State Socialists to define Individualist Anarchism outside the Socialist movement. He also notes that any person trying such a method will *"find that the Anarchistic Socialists are not to be stripped of one half of their title by the mere dictum of the last lexicographer."* [Op. Cit., p. 365]

Caplan should take note. His technique been tried before, it failed then and it will fail again for the same reasons.

As far as his case against the Historical Argument goes, this is equally as flawed. Caplan states that:

*"Before the Protestant Reformation, the word 'Christian,' had referred almost entirely to Catholics (as well as adherents of the Orthodox Church) for about one thousand years. Does this reveal any linguistic confusion on the part of Lutherans, Calvinists, and so on, when they called themselves 'Christians'? Of course not. It merely reveals that a word's historical usage does not determine its meaning."*

However, as analogies go this is pretty pathetic. Both the Protestants and Catholics followed the teachings of Christ but had different interpretations of it. As such they could both be considered Christians -- followers of the Bible. In the case of anarchism, there are two main groupings -- individualist and social. Both Tucker and Bakunin claimed to follow, apply and develop Proudhon's ideas (and share his opposition to both state and capitalism) and so are part of the anarchist tradition.

The anarchist movement was based upon applying the core ideas of Proudhon (his anti-statism and anti-capitalism) and developing them in the same spirit, and these ideas find their roots in **socialist** history and theory. For example, William Godwin was claimed as an anarchist after his death by the movement because of his opposition to both state and private property, something all anarchists oppose. Similarly, Max Stirner's opposition to both state and capitalist property places him within the anarchist tradition. Neither called themselves anarchists and both had radically different perspectives on a range of subjects, but both critiqued capitalism and the State.

Given that we find fascists and Nazis calling themselves "republicans," "democrats," even "liberals" it is worthwhile remembering that the names of political theories are defined not by who use them, but by the ideas associated with the name. In other words, a fascist cannot call themselves a "liberal" any more than a capitalist can call themselves an "anarchist." To state, as Caplan does, that the historical usage of a word does not determine its meaning results in utter confusion and the end of meaningful political debate. If the historical usage of a name is meaningless will we soon see fascists as well as capitalists calling themselves anarchists? In other words, the label "anarcho-capitalism" is a misnomer, pure and simple, as **all** anarchists have opposed capitalism as an authoritarian system based upon exploitation -- even if they disagreed over how and with what to replace it.

To ignore the historical usage of a word means to ignore what the movement that used that word stood for. Thus, if Caplan is correct, an organisation calling itself the "Libertarian National Socialist Party," for example, can rightly call itself libertarian for "*a word's historical usage does not determine its meaning.*" Given that right-"libertarians" in the USA have tried to steal the name "libertarian" from anarchists and anarchist influenced socialists, such a perspective on Caplan's part makes perfect sense.

Perhaps a better analogy for the conflict between anarchism and "anarcho"-capitalism would be between Satanists and Christians. Would we consider as Christian a Satanist grouping claiming to be Christian? A grouping that rejects everything that Christians believe -- bar a belief in God and Satan -- but who like the name? Of course not. Neither would we consider as a right-"libertarian" someone who is against the capitalist free market or someone as a Marxist who supports capitalism. Yet this is what Caplan and other "anarcho"-capitalists want us to do with anarchism. After all, it is what a leading "anarcho"-capitalist ideologue admitted happened with the term "libertarian":

*"One gratifying aspect of our rise to some prominence [in the late 1950s] is that, for the first time in my memory, we, 'our side,' had captured a crucial word from the enemy . . . 'Libertarians' . . . had long been simply a polite word for left-wing [sic!] anarchists, that is for anti-private property anarchists, either of the communist or syndicalist variety. But now we had taken it over, and more properly from the view of etymology; since we were proponents of individual liberty and therefore of the*

*individual's right to his property.*" [Murray Rothbard, **The Betrayal of the American Right**, p. 83]

How ironic that a movement that defends private property so strongly continually tries to steal names from other political tendencies.

Ultimately, a movement's economic ideas are just as much a part of its theories as its political ideas. Any attempt to consider one in isolation from the other kills what defines the theory and makes it unique. And, ultimately, any such attempt is becomes unstuck by its contradictions:

*"the so-called liberal . . . relies on free individual enterprise and proclaims, if not the abolition, at least the reduction of governmental functions to an absolute minimum; but because it respects private property and is entirely based on the principle of each for himself and therefore of competition between men, the liberty it espouses is for the strong and for the property owners to oppress and exploit the weak, those who have nothing; and far from producing harmony, tends to increase even more the gap between rich and poor and it too leads to exploitation and domination, in other words, to authority. This . . . is in theory a kind of anarchy without socialism, and therefore simply a lie, for freedom is impossible without equality, and real anarchy cannot exist without solidarity, without socialism. The criticism liberals direct at government consists of wanting to deprive it of some of its functions and to call upon the capitalists to fight it out among themselves, but it cannot attack the repressive functions which are of its essence: for without the **gendarme** the property owner could not exist, indeed the government's powers of repression must perforce increase as free competition results in more discord and inequality."* [Errico Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 47]

Therefore Caplan's case against the Historical Argument also fails -- "anarcho-capitalism" is a misnomer because anarchism has always, in all its forms, opposed capitalism. Denying and re-writing history is hardly a means of refuting the historical argument.

Caplan ends by stating: *"Let us designate anarchism (1) anarchism as you define it. Let us designate anarchism (2) anarchism as I and the American Heritage College Dictionary define it. This is a FAQ about anarchism (2)."*

Note that here we see again how the dictionary is a very poor foundation upon to base an argument. Using **Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary**, we find under "anarchist": *"one who rebels against any authority, established order, or ruling power."* This definition is very close to that which "traditional" anarchists have -- which is the basis for our own opposition to the notion that anarchism is merely rebellion against **State** authority. Yet it hardly covers the breath of anarchist theory nor **why** we rebel against authority.

Clearly this definition is at odds with Caplan's own view; is Webster's then wrong, and Caplan's view right? Which view is backed by the theory and history of the movement? Surely that should be the basis of who is part of the anarchist tradition and who is not? Rather than do this, Caplan and other "anarcho"-capitalists rush to the dictionary (well, those that do not define anarchy as "disorder"). This is for a reason as anarchism as a political movement as always been explicitly anti-capitalist and so the term "anarcho"-capitalism is an oxymoron.

What Caplan fails to even comprehend is that his choices are false. Anarchism can be designated in two ways:

- (1). Anarchism as you define it
- (2). Anarchism as the anarchist movement defines it and finds expression in the theories developed by that movement.

Caplan chooses anarchism (1) and so denies the whole history of the anarchist movement. Anarchism is not a word, it is a political theory and movement with a long history which dictionaries cannot cover. Therefore any attempt to define anarchism by such means is deeply flawed and ultimately fails.

That Caplan's position is ultimately false can be seen from the "anarcho"-capitalists themselves. In many dictionaries anarchy is defined as "*disorder,*" "*a state of lawlessness*" and so on. Strangely enough, no "anarcho"-capitalist ever uses **these** dictionary definitions of "anarchy". Thus appeals to dictionaries are just as much a case of defining anarchism as you desire as not using dictionaries. Far better to look at the history and traditions of the anarchist movement itself, seek out its common features and apply **those** as criteria to those seeking to include themselves in the movement. As can be seen, "anarcho"-capitalism fails this test and, therefore, are not part of the anarchist movement. Far better for us all if they pick a new label to call themselves rather than steal our name.

Although most anarchists disagree on many things, the denial of our history is not one of them.