

OBSERVATIONS ON THE ANARCHO-CAPITALISM MOVEMENT

Why Anarcho-Capitalism (ancap) is Growing

The number of people in the ancap camp is growing. In my view, there are two reasons for this. The first is the growing population. There tend to be more people in every camp. The second is the conscious effort by the managers of the Mises Institute, backed by its contributors.

In the late 20th century, after Ludwig von Mises died, Murray Rothbard began to promote the fiction that he is the best interpreter of Mises. When Rothbard died, others began to promote a more vicious fiction that Rothbard was the brilliant successor to Mises. Rothbard, they claim, took Mises's understanding of freedom to new heights. At the moment, Llewellyn Rockwell seems to be the most vociferous proponent of this view, although he seems to have an army of lieutenants at the Mises Institute who follow his lead or who have their own independent reasons for promoting the fiction.

Rothbard was certainly not a dummy. However, he made glaring misinterpretations of Mises. As Mises himself recognized back in the 1960s, Rothbard's approach to freedom was not an advance but a contradiction of the concept that Mises used and promoted. This fact is reported in Guido Hülsmann's biography of Mises (Hülsmann, Jörg Guido. (2007) *Mises: The Last Knight of Liberalism*. Mises Institute, Auburn, Alabama.).

Rothbard did not identify this contradiction or deal with it. Instead, he pretended to carry the Mises torch to the next generation. But the torch carried by Rothbard was not the same as that of Mises. Now Rothbard's torch is being carried forward by minds that are less keen than that of Rothbard. Here is an example of Rockwell's promotion that is entitled [Read Rothbard](#).

Ancap as a Revolt against Reason

Let me now switch from (1) a discussion of the reasons for the growth of the ancap camp to (2) a discussion of the damage that I believe the people in this camp are doing. The ancaps are promoting ignorance. They claim that the fundamental way to achieve freedom is to acknowledge certain natural rights. That this is counterproductive can easily be seen by making an analogy. Suppose that you want to help others avoid the dangers due to a poison of which you are aware in your environment. One way is to teach that poison is unnatural. But this is counterproductive and is a revolt against reason. To employ reason, you would want to first learn about the effects of the poison and then teach about those effects. In this way, you can help people achieve progress in dealing with the problem of avoiding the harmful effects. In addition, you open the door to discoveries that substances that are initially regarded as poisons may have beneficial effects.

Analogously, suppose that you want to help others learn how to avoid the damage due to government intervention and to enjoy the benefits of freedom. To teach that government is unnatural

2 Anarcho-capitalism Movement

is also counterproductive. Such teaching distracts from the effort to achieve progress in dealing with the problem of learning how to control government and the use of coercion.

People like the ancaps lack the ability to recognize how private property rights and free enterprise contribute to freedom. They do not know how a government -- the monopoly over coercion and compulsion -- can be used to reinforce these and to facilitate the free market in other ways. In rejecting all government as unnatural (or for some other reason), they disregard the problem of controlling that monopoly over coercion through democratic means. They regard this problem as irrelevant to freedom.

The ancaps do not care how people can deter the agents hired to administer the government from manipulating coercion in a way that reduces freedom. Their vigor as advocates of a utopian society compares with that of the Marxists and extreme progressives. Their promotion of their views has the similar effect of drowning out the constructive voices. Thus, in my view, the ancaps are a destructive force.

One positive contribution of the ancaps is to direct the mainstream's attention to abuses by government agents. Most of these abuses entail favoring one business or pressure group over another. In this, their contribution is comparable to that of the Marxists. The Marxists point out abuses by businesses that use their financial power. These businesses entice government agents to use their power to benefit them at the expense of others.

These positive contributions by ancaps and Marxists by no means offset their dogged resistance to employing the unique human character of reason. Both are manifestations of what Mises calls the revolt against reason in his [chapter 3 of Human Action](#).

Whereas Marxism was mature at the time that Mises wrote about reason, the anarcho-capitalist philosophy was not. The growth of this movement is a new revolt. And it is a new, albeit benign, threat to peace and progress. The promotion of Rothbard and discouragement of Mises is more serious.