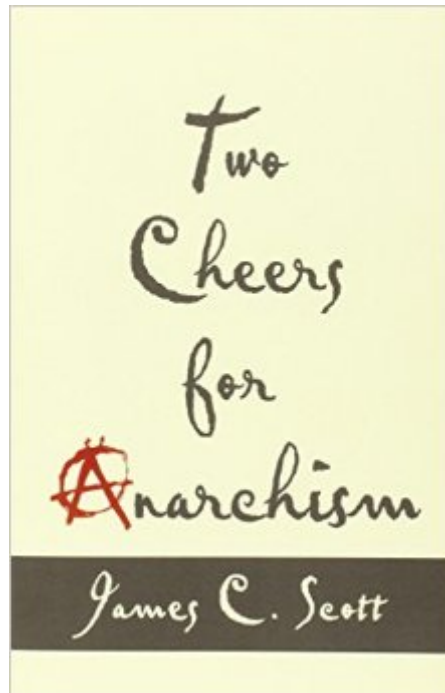


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Two Cheers For Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces On Autonomy, Dignity, And Meaningful Work And Play



Synopsis

James Scott taught us what's wrong with seeing like a state. Now, in his most accessible and personal book to date, the acclaimed social scientist makes the case for seeing like an anarchist. Inspired by the core anarchist faith in the possibilities of voluntary cooperation without hierarchy, *Two Cheers for Anarchism* is an engaging, high-spirited, and often very funny defense of an anarchist way of seeing--one that provides a unique and powerful perspective on everything from everyday social and political interactions to mass protests and revolutions. Through a wide-ranging series of memorable anecdotes and examples, the book describes an anarchist sensibility that celebrates the local knowledge, common sense, and creativity of ordinary people. The result is a kind of handbook on constructive anarchism that challenges us to radically reconsider the value of hierarchy in public and private life, from schools and workplaces to retirement homes and government itself. Beginning with what Scott calls "the law of anarchist calisthenics," an argument for law-breaking inspired by an East German pedestrian crossing, each chapter opens with a story that captures an essential anarchist truth. In the course of telling these stories, Scott touches on a wide variety of subjects: public disorder and riots, desertion, poaching, vernacular knowledge, assembly-line production, globalization, the petty bourgeoisie, school testing, playgrounds, and the practice of historical explanation. Far from a dogmatic manifesto, *Two Cheers for Anarchism* celebrates the anarchist confidence in the inventiveness and judgment of people who are free to exercise their creative and moral capacities.

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Customer Reviews

Two Cheers for Anarchism is a book of "Six Easy Pieces" relating to the relation between human beings and the state. While Scott is quite a famous anthropologist for books like *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (The Institution for Social and Policy Studies at Yale University), these essays are more reflective and philosophical in nature. While there is certainly ideational overlap between SLaS and Two Cheers, the latter is mostly personal reflection that might best be called social criticism. The first essay, one of my favorites, discusses the role of disobedience and working around rules as a method for social change. After all, a rule is only as good as people's willingness to abide by it (especially the fewer 'rulers' there are in relation to the 'ruled'). Scott starts with an example we all know: traffic lights and pedestrian crosswalks. When there are no cars coming, it is often normal to disregard the "don't walk" signal and walk across the road; we don't often think twice (or at least a third time) about that. And while rules do have a place (if we all went whenever we felt like, driving or crossing the street could be a nastier experience; particularly the busier the street), rule-breaking often has its place; rules, as rules, often leave no room for judgment or discretion, and sometimes, good judgment tells us not to follow a particular rule that we know is either needless, redundant, or immoral.). As an educator, the chapter on The Production of Human Beings was particularly interesting.

"[T]he great emancipatory gains for human freedom have not been the result of orderly, institutional procedures but of disorderly, unpredictable, spontaneous action cracking open the social order from below." Thus concludes James C. Scott's brief celebration of the joy and necessity of anarchism, *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2012). Of course, Scott is right. Who foresaw the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the Arab Spring, the Occupy protests, or, most recently, the groundswell of popular protest in Brazil? When, one wonders, will the dam of restraint break in the United States to shatter what is rapidly becoming an economic caste system? Scott is an unlikely proponent of anarchism. He's a tenured professor of political science and anthropology at Yale University. There's something counterintuitive about an academic preaching chaos. Isn't he the intellectual equivalent of a trust-fund baby - living free and easy off the unearned income of his university's generous endowment? Such thinking reflects a misunderstanding of anarchism. Anarchism is not disorder for disorder's sake. It is a rejection of the status quo as inadequate to meet the necessities of the time. It is the outcast forever and always challenging the orthodoxies of his time. It is the outsider saying to those confidently sharing the glow of inclusion: "Not so fast."

There are things your ideals do not explain. Your rhetoric doesn't match the reality of my life." Anarchism is David saying to Goliath, "Do you feel my pain? No? Then feel this rock." The great enemies of human freedom are the ideals and ideologies that seek to blind men and women to what they see all around them.

I bought *Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play* the second I heard about it, as I have REALLY enjoyed James C. Scott's previous books (*Seeing Like a State* and *Weapons of the Weak*). The title sets out Scott's view: some anarchistic ideas are useful (hence two instead of three cheers), and we can benefit from more decentralized thinking and action. I took many notes and had many !! while reading the book, and I'll set down my reactions in the order they appeared, to give you an idea of the insights of the book: Most revolutions have led to more, not less control of the population "Freedom without socialism is privilege and injustice; socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality" -- Mikhail Bakunin Anarchism is not about blowing things up; it's about cooperation without hierarchy and a tolerance for the confusion that accompanies social learning, cooperation and reciprocity All Utopian ideals fail; we must be pragmatic "There is no authentic freedom where huge differences make voluntary agreements or exchanges nothing more than legalized plunder." This view explains the crisis of 2008 and why democracy has failed. It's been sold to the highest bidders (=bankers) Opposition institutions can be part of the problem, since they exist within a system they want to control Decentralized opposition may be missed by those who prefer simple models and messages (=the media) Most of our interactions are decentralized, peer-to-peer (e.g., moving through a crowd, buying bread, talking to strangers, etc.).

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