

# An Anarchist Replies to Schmookler's Reply to the Anarchists

by Christoph Manes

Schmookler's response to the various arguments put forward by anarchists against his critique of anarchy is both reasonable and eloquent. It also misses the point. Basically, Schmookler is arguing that anarchy cannot insure "social justice." For the moment let's concede the point (which isn't hard to do since no human condition can insure anything) and assume that his system of representative democracy is a better way to keep outlaws and outlaw communities from abusing others. The problem with this line of thinking is that anarchy, at least as I conceive it, is not so much concerned with social justice as it is with preventing the despoliation of Earth which inevitably follows the establishment of any centralized power, representative or otherwise. The difference in perspectives here is enormous. Schmookler assumes that by creating a system that protects people's rights, the environment will be protected as a consequence. I would argue, conversely, that by protecting the environment (and this can only mean returning to a state of pervasive wilderness free from centralized power) humans will have the maximum amount of freedom and "rights" possible in this contingent world of ours. Moreover, I think it can be shown that any system dedicated to social justice through political power not only does not guarantee the protection of the environment; it absolutely depends on its degradation (how else can Schmookler explain the fact that the US, his paradigm for responsible polity, is also the worst threat to natural diversity in the history of nation-states?).

The essential flaw in Schmookler's position is his inadequate critique of power. Schmookler concerns himself mainly with the power relations among people and communities. Yet there is a more basic dimension to power: the power relation between humans and nature. The power to control the lives of others, even for "beneficial" ends as Schmookler desires, derives ultimately from the exploitation of nature. To sustain the kind of society Schmookler envisions would require the continuation of some form of technological domination, which brought on the environmental crisis.

This is an important point: Schmookler's vision relies entirely on the optics of mass, technological society. That's why I can claim — without giving him a "bum rap" as he says — that his thinking remains within the universe of discourse technological culture uses to

propagate itself. He argues that since citizens can't be informed about everything, we need specialists to run things. He's right — we do need specialists to keep our nuclear arsenal intact, to keep our factories producing. But Schmookler fails to ask the more fundamental question which anarchists posit: do we really want to keep things running? The question is not, as he claims, how to "control" polluters and despoilers of nature, but rather how to disintegrate the power relations which make this exploitation possible — namely, a centralized state. Despite Schmookler's claim that I am being ahistorical, pre-Columbian Indians and Germanic tribesmen didn't have to regulate chemical dumping and auto emissions. They may have been anxious about revenge-killing, marauding enemies, many human problems, but not about their world being poisoned. Why? They had no central power to make possible the wholesale destruction of the environment.

To return to my original criticism of his position: what are the concrete implications of having a "world order" or any central form of government? It means communication technologies, roads, weapons, factories to produce these "necessities" of government, institutions to train and regulate people, a hierarchy of responsibility and power. In short, it means something like an industrial society.

Schmookler cannot escape this conclusion, yet he did not address this aspect of my article (which was its main point). If his position is to have intellectual integrity he must confront this problem specifically. From his writings, one gets the impression that he would be satisfied with a "rational" exploitation of resources, a "rational" abatement of pollution, a "rational" system of production. I hope this is a false impression, because it is exactly the insane rationality of technology based on humanity's desire for power, which has despoiled our world and enslaved mankind to a way of thinking which is alien to our animal nature.

Of course, Schmookler is right when he says anarchy can't guarantee freedom and justice. Nothing can. But any government guarantees we will not have freedom and justice, because it is based on the destruction of the wilderness which is our home. Schmookler's insistence on the essential benevolence of US polity is naive. What does "freedom" mean within the context of a society where inconceivable amounts of power (in the form of capital) are concentrated in a few institutions and corpora-

tions. It means, to borrow Samuel Johnson's phrase, we are "free" to work for these institutions in one form or another or starve, to have our lives determined by their projects, which generally involve the devastation of ecosystems. In a technological culture, the terms "freedom" and "justice" have been corrupted to propagate a particular set of power relations. It is surprising Schmookler is so taken in by the pretense of liberty industrial society promotes.

One could write a book about the way technological culture uses "freedom" to enslave its members (Marcuse already has). It is not useful to vindicate our form of power relations, as Schmookler does, on the grounds that life is better in the US than in the USSR or some other totalitarian state. This is like condoning slavery by showing that slavery in Iron Age Scandinavia was better than slavery in Biblical Egypt. The choice is odious and must be rejected. Anarchy offers the possibility of freedom, nothing more. We have the responsibility to seize that possibility because it is the only course consistent with nature and human nature.

Schmookler is also right when he calls our solution utopian. But what does utopian mean within the context of a technological society? It means that anarchists' thinking is truly critical, that it opposes technological culture in its totality, not just its particulars. It means that we have broken out of the universe of discourse it has established to propagate itself and its mad assault upon Earth.

Can Schmookler truly say this of his own thinking? And if he cannot, in what way does his cure differ from the disease?

*Christoph, scholar of deep ecology and Norse literature, plans to compile occasional philosophical deep ecology supplements, entitled Nerthus, for future issues of EF!*

