

Anarcho-capitalism: Time for a rebranding

By Gary Greenberg

Anarcho-capitalism arose as a term in the early seventies among a small group of libertarians who followed Murray Rothbard's anti-government Free Market policies. This chocolate-cake-consuming, couch-sitting, fist-pumping mostly nerdy (myself among them) thought choosing one of the worst public relation terms imaginable, "anarchism", and melding it with capitalism made a strong radical statement that was somehow supposed to propel us into the intellectual astrosphere. What were we thinking? The good news is that we have been so unsuccessful, that a rebranding of our self-designation will do us zero harm in terms of growth and will open up new markets for our ideas.

Outside of this relatively small group, which has remained small and virtually uninfluential among the wider intellectual forces, anarcho-capitalism has been used by the handful of outsiders who actually knew the word, as a term of derision. Even among the vast bulk of mainstream libertarianism, often deeply influenced by Ayn Rand, the term is somewhat poisonous. Rand, of course, was even dismissive of government-worshipping libertarians, whom she dismissed as right-wing hippies.

Aside from the absolutely negative image the term projects to potential audiences, the description of the movement as anarcho-capitalism is something of an oxymoron. Traditional anarchism wasn't about abolishing government; it was about abolishing private ownership of property. ("Property is theft.") The traditional anarchist opposition to government was based on the idea that government protected property rights and the goal was to destroy property rights. So, to the extent government protected property, government had to be destroyed. Governments that stole property from the "others", the "rich," were fine, and anarchists saw themselves organizing institutions that would force people to live under a system that abolished private property and in which the anarchist ruling class, however selected, would make the rules everybody had to live with. An ultimate form of communism was the end vision.

There was in the United States, to the joy of some anarcho-capitalists, an insignificant crackpot movement of individualist anarchists who formed small communes that organized itself around the idiotic Marxist principle known as the "Labor Theory of Value," which struggled to find a way to equate six minutes of a clerk's time (including the time the customer chatted with the merchant during the transaction) selling a box of cereal to a customer in a general store to the amount of labor needed to produce say an ear of corn, and create some sort of currency based on time certificates (bit-clocks?) Can we finally admit that the labor theory of value has nothing to do with economic theory and recognize that it is nothing more than a political goal of those who don't understand how an economy and a country prosper? Anyhow, these communities were relatively small, with less political tension than say a bridge club or garden association. As a meaningful life-style, they quickly fell by the wayside.

Another problem with using the term "Anarcho"-capitalism is the implication that libertarians are against all forms of organization, government, and even social organizations. Many of the early

members of this faction objected to any effort by say a Libertarian Party chapter to having rules or spokespersons. The term Anarcho-capitalism and many of its adherents give the impression that it is an-every-person-for-themselves movement in a "dog eat dog" competition.

But that's not how a market system works. Almost everybody works cooperatively with almost everyone else because so many people share mutual goals across a variety of interests. Even if there were no sovereign government to foul things up, most people would seek cooperative organizations to solve various problems. Government-style services for whatever was wanted would be available through market arrangements and contractual agreements. That's what many people still do, even while sovereign governments exist. We have charitable services, mall cops, private detectives, arbitration courts, building co-op agreements, condo-organizations, street patrols, community streets in gated communities, non-government transportation systems. This tiny list isn't meant as a complete treatise on how free market government would work. This is a blog space, and not the place for book-length studies.

So, I propose changing the movement name from *Anarcho-capitalism* to *Agoranism* (from the Greek word *agora*, meaning *market*.) It has a morally neutral status with no negative baggage. It expresses what was intended by the term Anarcho-capitalism but does so in a positive way rather than a negative way. It suggests a positive approach to solving government problems as opposed to a negative approach. One doesn't have to wade through arguments over the meaning of anarchism before one gets to the capitalism part. Agoranistas are simply advocates of placing traditional sovereign government services into more efficient and better quality private market settings. I guess even limited government libertarians can adopt this term as they occasionally suggest replacing some government services with market-based services, although that more often than not translates into government-sanctioned *private* monopolies as opposed to *government* monopolies.

Over the course of time I hope to address many of the objections that libertarians and constitutionalists have to a true free market society. I suspect here and there, I'll receive accusations of heresy from both sides of the debate. That's where the fun begins.