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**ONLINE BOOK REVIEW**

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***Two Cheers for Anarchism:***

***Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play***

James C. Scott (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012)

Picture yourself starting on a 300-mile trip on Highway 101. The freeway speed limit is posted as 55 miles per hour. You do 56 miles, per hour, or perhaps 57 or even 60. Will you be stopped and issued a ticket for speeding? Not likely. Now, what if everyone around you drives at the same speed range? Some drivers may even be passing you. Chances are, you're safe at any speed within 55 to, say, 65 per hour. Even the cops are passing you and stopping nobody. Sooner or later, the Department of Highways gets the message from the thousands of anonymous drivers "violating" this traffic law and raises the speed limit to 65.

This represents the kind of anarchism that James C. Scott has in mind in *Two Cheers for Anarchism*. He does not urge the readers to adopt anarchism wholesale, but rather offers a squint at his version of the idea. Hence two cheers for anarchism rather than three, much like E.M. Forster's *Two Cheers for Democracy*. Anarchism to him is not about tossing bombs or breaking windows. Even the street demonstrations against wars or globalization do not qualify: too ritualistic, too organized, and too easily co-opted.

No, for Scott, the real anarchists crave not public or official attention but rather anonymity. Many individuals who resist the state may not even call themselves anarchists. They include the poachers and land squatters from medieval times to the present. They include deserters or draft dodgers knowing they might be shot during the war *du jour*. They include wage workers resisting, by sabotage or working to rule, the oppressive bosses of assembly lines at GM or Ford. Even the trivial acts of jaywalking or taking shortcuts on forbidden lawns count as anarchism. Who are the anarchists, one might ask Scott? We all are, he might reply.

There is nothing substantively new about *Two Cheers*. Knowledgeable readers will recognize his arguments in *Seeing Like a State* or *The Art of Not Being Governed*. Rather, the book presents 29 breezy, easy-to-understand vignettes of anarchism in action and the principles driving these actions. The premise of this book and their more elaborated predecessors is that planners, analysts, and

other so-called experts backed by state power—whether people’s socialist or corporate capitalist—have historically made a hash of things in imposing their programs on what they consider their people. They do so by oversimplifying the complexities of natural and social reality into legible components—models, charts, mathematical algorithms—that are readily manipulated to suit the aims of the power elite. The people who receive the directives from on high know more about the real world, whether natural, technical, or social, than the bureaucrats and putative experts who generate and issue these directives.

Where does change, or calls for change, come from? According to the vignettes organized into six fragments of *Two Cheers*, they come not from activist organizers or philosophical musings of a would-be vanguard but from the lived experience of racial minorities experiencing discrimination day to day, from the residents displaced from districts which urban planners claim to be afflicted by urban blight and so target for renewal, from the teachers forced to teach to the test designed by some Student Learning Outcome expert. Indeed, the examples are endless. There are international examples as well, such as pastoralists in Tanzania forced onto *ujamaas*, settlements created by bureaucrats attempting to control the herders’ mobility, or the gardens of Guatemalan Mayan peasants compelled by agricultural extension agents to cultivate their plots into neat rows, even though the gardens were highly productive in the first place because the original cultivators knew exactly what they were doing.

How do the masses resist, and how can they do so anonymously? The actions vary from quiet resistance to strikes or riots when conditions become intolerable. Some may squat in unused land or housing, others may poach to feed their families, or still others may, as petty bourgeois entrepreneurs, start businesses that fill the demand of their neighbors for a local restaurant or general store. Or consider a case which put many at risk: during the Nazi era, residents of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in Vichy France, were asked by the wives of two imprisoned Huguenot pastors, to shelter, feed, and send to safety 5,000 Jewish refugees. Initially reluctant to do so, farmers, when facing an elder shivering in the cold or a real family with small children, agreed to accommodate them despite great personal risk (pp. 129-131). These and similar stories form the core of *Two Cheers for Anarchism*.

Throughout his 29 vignettes, Scott addresses the recurring theme opposing the vernacular with the universal, the spontaneous versus the planned and the measured. How, then, to evaluate *Two Cheers for Anarchism*? Scott’s book is hardly original, yet it presents the principles and case studies in a readable and indeed compelling way. One may argue against some of his notions. Do the much-maligned petty bourgeoisie deserve the venom they receive from the Marxist and corporate elite alike as being anachronistic? Scott thinks not. Entrepreneurs are as creative as any other anarchist in their provision of new goods and services that people want and need—far better than any Five-Year

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Plan or production quota. He eschews the vanguard so romanticized by most Marxists and even non-Marxist socialists, let alone corporate experts.

By writing a volume that many purists will denounce as popularization, Scott has recast an interesting take on the body of anarchist thought while giving due credit to Bakunin, Kropotkin, Proudhon, and Malatesta without a painful cataloguing of their efforts. It is a primer for those too lazy—or too busy—to read his more detailed and nuanced works. Perhaps this 140-page book may convince the reader that we all are anarchists indeed.