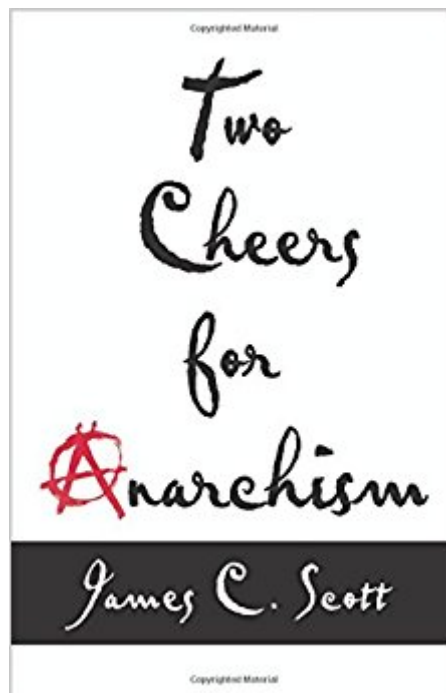




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# Two Cheers For Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces On Autonomy, Dignity, And Meaningful Work And Play



## 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"In a new book, *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, James C. Scott, a highly regarded professor of anthropology and political science at Yale, commends anarchism precisely for its 'tolerance for confusion and improvisation.' . . . *Two Cheers for Anarchism* conducts a brief and digressive seminar in political philosophy, starting from the perspective of the disillusioned leftist."--Kelefa Sanneh, *New Yorker*"With the 'A' on its cover circled in red, *Two Cheers* might at first appear to be preaching to the converted, but in fact it's an attempt to explain and advocate for an anarchist perspective to a readership not already disposed to smash the state. . . . Touching all the familiar progressive touchstones along the way, Scott makes the case for everyday insubordination and disregard for the rules in pursuit of freedom and justice."--Malcolm Harris, *Los Angeles Review of Books*"[I]ntriguing."--Michael Weiss, *Wall Street Journal*"Alternately insightful, inciteful, and insulting, Scott makes an idiosyncratically intellectual case that technocratic elites aren't to be trusted, and insubordination is a virtue to be cherished. . . . *Two Cheers for Anarchism* deserves more than two cheers in review because Scott usefully expands the vocabularies that leaders and managers need to have around the critical issues of power, control, and resistance. Every effective leader I know loses sleep over how best to empower their talent and constructively align their people. And all the successful leaders I know--especially the entrepreneurs--have at least a little streak of anarchism--of creative destruction--inside of them. For this reason alone, they will find Scott's insights and incites worth their time."--Michael Schrage, *Fortune*"Scott selects wonderful anecdotes to illustrate his tribute to the anarchist way of seeing the world, his prose is always on the verge of breaking into a smile. Political theory rarely offers so much wry laughter."--Chris Walters, *Acres USA*"[E]ngaging. . . . Scott's eye for spontaneous order in action demonstrates that anarchy is all around us: that it's no abstract philosophy but an essential part of all our lives."--Reason"James C. Scott . . . has a new book just out: *Two Cheers for Anarchism*. I've just started reading it, but bits of it are so good that I just can't hold off blogging about them."--Bleeding Heart Libertarians blog"Yale professor James C. Scott and Princeton University Press have recently published *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, an easy to read book that will help illuminate the concept of anarchism for anyone under misconceptions about the sophisticated ideology of anarchy. Rather than attempt to convince readers to join their local anarchist party, Scott's goal in writing *Two Cheers for Anarchism* is to make 'a case for a sort of anarchist squint' by relating anecdotes that demonstrate the fundamental ideas of anarchism."--Coffin Factory"In *Two Cheers for Anarchism* James C. Scott . . . [makes the case] for a kinder, gentler form of rebellion than the sort of bomb-throwing, street-fighting revolution typically associated with anarchism."--Nick Gillespie, *Wilson Quarterly*"The aspects of Scott's work

that I have been able to examine . . . demonstrate that the typical left-right axis by which political positions are classified is seriously inadequate to the task of handling a thinker like Scott. His case against big government is going to appeal to libertarians. His demonstrations of the wisdom often contained in traditions and customs will be attractive to conservatives. And his concerns with lessening inequalities of wealth and power will be congenial to progressives. So where does he fit on the left-right axis? Nowhere, I'd say: he is his own man. And, setting aside its many other virtues, that alone makes this a book worth reading."--Gene Callahan, *American Conservative*

"In *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, James C. Scott, a professor of political science at Yale, takes a fresh and often bracing look at the philosophy espoused by (the Russian philosopher Mikhail) Bakunin and asks whether it may afford some clues as to how to proceed in the 21st century."--Richard King, *Australian*

"Written in a highly engaging series of what he calls 'fragments,' Scott's work links together a series of brief reflections on social cooperation in the absences of (or despite opposition from) hierarchy, tying such cooperation to a sense of autonomy, freedom, and human flourishing. . . . There is much of value in this short book and, hopefully, much that is inspirational."--Choice

"The book taken as a whole is a great leap forward and will form the basis of current and future engagements in political philosophy. In my own view, the book answers Noam Chomsky call for 'intellectual responsibility'; the responsibility to speak the truth and insist upon it."--Tawanda Sydesky Nyawasha, *Symbolic Interaction*

"Though Scott's kaleidoscope of touching stories, challenging thoughts and well-chosen examples is at all times diverting and often mind-blowing, this panoply of loose ideas remains connected to a strong underlying argument. He is radical but hardly polemical, utopian but deeply rooted to the ground."--Pascale Siegrist, *Cambridge Humanities Review*

"[A]ll readers, even those sympathetic to Scott's anarchist theme, will find themselves unsettlingly but usefully challenged by this beautifully written and argued book, especially by his call to pay more attention to the beliefs and actions of ordinary people and to avoid overly abstract theorizing that serves to aid centralized hierarchies and technocratic elites."--John A. Rapp, *Review of Politics*

"*Two Cheers for Anarchism* is an insightful contemplation of the everydayness of anarchism. . . . I can still recommend the book insofar as it casts some much needed light on the everydayness of anarchism, which is particularly important owing to the weight of Scott's name and the of clarity of his pen. Few authors are better positioned than Scott to render anarchist ideas more luminous and less threatening in the wider social sciences."--Simon Springer, *Antipode*

"*Two Cheers for Anarchism* is an unusual, affecting, and useful book. . . . The insights contained in this small volume are useful in addressing contemporary concerns about the post-political landscape as well as connecting with recent calls for autonomous geographies including alternative practices in

organizing households, economies, and engagements with ecologies."--Stephen Healy, *Antipode*

"James Scott is one of the great political thinkers of our time. No one else has the same ability to pursue a simple, surprising idea, kindly but relentlessly, until the entire world looks different. In this book, he also demonstrates a skill shared by the greatest radical thinkers: to reveal positions we've been taught to think of as extremism to be emanations of simple human decency and common sense."--David Graeber, author of *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*

"Building on the insights of his masterful *Seeing Like a State*, James Scott has written a powerful and important argument for social organization that resists the twin poles of Big Corporations and Big Governments. In an age increasingly shaped by decentralized, bottom-up networks, *Two Cheers for Anarchism* gives timely new life to a rich tradition of political thought."--Steven Johnson, author of *Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation* and *Future Perfect: The Case for Progress in a Networked Age*

"I am a big fan of James Scott. In this highly readable and thought-provoking book, he reveals the meaning of his 'anarchist' sensibility through a series of wonderful personal stories, staking out an important position and defending it in a variety of contexts, from urban planning to school evaluation. I don't know of anyone else who has defined this viewpoint so successfully."--Francis Fukuyama, author of *The Origins of Political Order*

"The ambition of this book is compelling and contagious. Combining the populist rhetoric of Thomas Paine with the ferocious satire of Jonathan Swift, James Scott makes a wonderfully simple and potent argument in favor of mutualism, creativity, local knowledge, and freedom. I predict that this will become one of the most influential books in political theory and public debate for the twenty-first century."--Georgi Derluguian, author of *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus*

"*Two Cheers for Anarchism*" is a thoughtful book of loosely-connected essays on a common theme: namely, that big hierarchical institutions invariably end up warping human values and diminishing human beings. Whether the institution is a public agency, a school, a big capitalist firm, the military, a centrally planned economy, or whatever, if it is run like a dictatorship, then it will produce cautious, deferential conformists, who will exercise autonomy, if at all, mainly through acts of quiet sabotage. The book ranges widely -- topics include city planning, military desertion, shirking, the petite bourgeoisie, and the SAT -- and the discussion is lively and well-informed. All small-"a" anarchists will enjoy it.

The author makes a few simple points - reality is messier than its representation, rulers like to

control their subjects -- with amusing examples. The author then implies that this is all a plot by evil authorities (authority being inherently evil), taking himself the role of simplifying, ordering authority for his own benefit.

Challenging ideas in a short, accessible format! Four stars for the accessible and pleasant way the author challenged my world view. I recommend this book for anyone interested in historical narratives, organization of governance from smallest communities to largest states and those trying to make sense of the meta narratives being wielded like broadswords this and every political seasons. I will not think about social and political change in the same way from this point forward! Five stars would have required suggested prescriptions for addressing some of the issues raised. Nevertheless, I heartily recommend this book to all those whose curiosity for how social order proceeds ( or not).

Scott is an amazing original. This is probably his most accessible non-academic book. As he quickly points out it is not really about anarchism, certainly not anarchist political thought or philosophy. It is a series of personal reflections on independence and its enemies based on the author's life experiences, history, and knowledge about agrarian peasants/subsistence agriculture-based communities. It reads like another angle on the same insights of countless other wise men, from Ivan Illich to Wendell Berry. If you're familiar with thinkers like that, you may not learn much that is "new" to you here, but it will give you another wise man's personal perspective on simple wisdom we need to be reminded of more than to learn as bits of information or knowledge.

James Scott has written what by his own admission in this book are weighty tomes on the peasant in SE Asia and other areas where anarchy has prevailed. But this book he took a friends advice and went the other way. These are essay fragments. The first half of the book is an introduction to anarchy thinking. The second half of the book is a rant against quantifying that which is not quantifiable. Scott rails against the SAT test and things like it. Scott rails against an education system that measures everything, and tries to put numbers on ever aspect of intelligence and learning. The chapter on native gardens is a masterpiece on how the apparently chaotic garden of the native peoples produces more than a third more than the traditional straight rows of separate plants. For an intro to anarchy this is an excellent place to start. The book is readable, humorous, serious, has short fragments instead of heavy chapters. History is glossed over and replaced with concepts well presented. A good book to read to learn about anarchy in the modern world.

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 and were 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. Largely, it was a meditation on current educational methods, focused on centralized design of educational experience, testing in a way that privileges the quantifiable, and (inadvertently?) teaching folks not to take charge of their own educational experiences, but to jump through the hoops others have crafted. In a way, this has a very individuality-reducing effect such that we are not 'creating' people so much as certain kinds of people. Scott doesn't get into any alternative vision of what schools or education should be - and this is one fault of the book; Scott does a lot of critique but doesn't develop many positive alternative visions - but I have a feeling that his educational views might align with those of Paul Goodman (*Compulsory mis-education*) or Ivan Illich (*Deschooling Society*). The fourth essay celebrating the "petite bourgeois" was very interesting. Scott's "thesis" is that anarchists (particularly those leaning toward some view of socialism) unjustly ignore the petite bourgeois - the independent artisan, small business owner, etc - and focus exclusively on the proletariat - the worker or day laborer. Why is this important? If the anarchist is concerned about people being independent and taking control of their lives, the petite bourgeois are those who are trying to find space to do just that. Yes, they may be part of the capitalist system that many anarchists (again, of the socialist-leaning kind) want to usher out, but the petite bourgeois are the ones best situated to wrestle power from the corporations that many

believe have exacerbated inequality and created (employer/employee or producer/consumer) dependencies. (Again, Paul Goodman's writings, like *Drawing the Line Once Again: Paul Goodman's Anarchist Writings* are instructive here.) I've already noted that Scott is more keen on critiquing existing structures than giving ideas about possible alternative structures. Some of that, I think, is inevitable when one's argument is that decentralization is preferable to centralization (as it is hard to argue a plan when one is arguing against central planning). An areas where I was definitely frustrated with Scott's vagueness is in his seeming ambivalence toward states. On one hand, he sees the state as having little or no role in social (planning, but on another, I wonder how comfortable Scott would be, say, with deregulating markets (such that government no longer mandates a minimum wage, regulates workplace safety standards or product standards), etc. He already tells us that while he is against state intrusion into individual affairs, he is also quite skeptical of the free-market anarchism of those like Murray Rothbard *For a New Liberty* or (today) Gary Chartier *Markets Not Capitalism: Individualist Anarchism Against Bosses, Inequality, Corporate Power, and Structural Poverty*). If one is skeptical of governments, but equally skeptical of markets sans government, then one must be confident that removing governments will result in something other than distribution of goods and services by unregulated markets. Scott doesn't, in this book, make an argument as to what he sees that 'third way' as being. In that way, I see this book as a really interesting, but very incomplete case. Against governments, okay; but now what?

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