

The State and Longing for Arcadia

Review

Walker Lane (Peter Werbe)

2006

reviewed here:

The State, Harold Barclay, Freedom Press, London, 2003, 109 pp.

Longing for Arcadia: Memoirs of an AnarchoCynicalist Anthropologist, Harold B. Barclay, Trafford, 2005, Victoria, BC, 362 pp.

Harold Barclay's thin volume on the political state packs into its pages everything we need to know to realize that there is nothing eternal about this inherently oppressive institution. A relatively recent phenomenon in human affairs, Barclay traces its origins to a few thousand years ago based on the desire of a few men to control others by establishing hierarchical societies in place of the egalitarian ones that preceded them.

Essentially, the state is a racket that gained control of emerging systems of agriculture, warfare, trade, and labor to benefit an elite, and employed institutionalized mysticism to declare its rule divinely ordained.

However, the history of resistance to the state over the last couple of centuries has only been an attempt to reform its worst abuses, something Barclay avers has no possibility of success. It is only the philosophy of anarchism which holds out a perspective of returning humankind to the forms of association which succored our species for most of our time on the planet.

Though one reviewer criticized the book for "not having recommendations for resisting the state," for that we can only thank Barclay. Big strategic plans for revolution have a poor track record, and the author only suggests small ways in which individuals can withdraw their cooperation with the state. Large scale resistance will define itself without the need for it to be predetermined.

It's always good, and often inspiring, to get a memoir of a respected elder of our movement. Barclay had a distinguished academic career before retirement and in his look back at his life we share his travels and field of study which focused on rural society in modern Egypt and the northern Arab Sudan as well as political anthropology and religion. Included are his observations about university life and his political development. Worth a read.

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