

Green Market Agorism

White Market Agorism

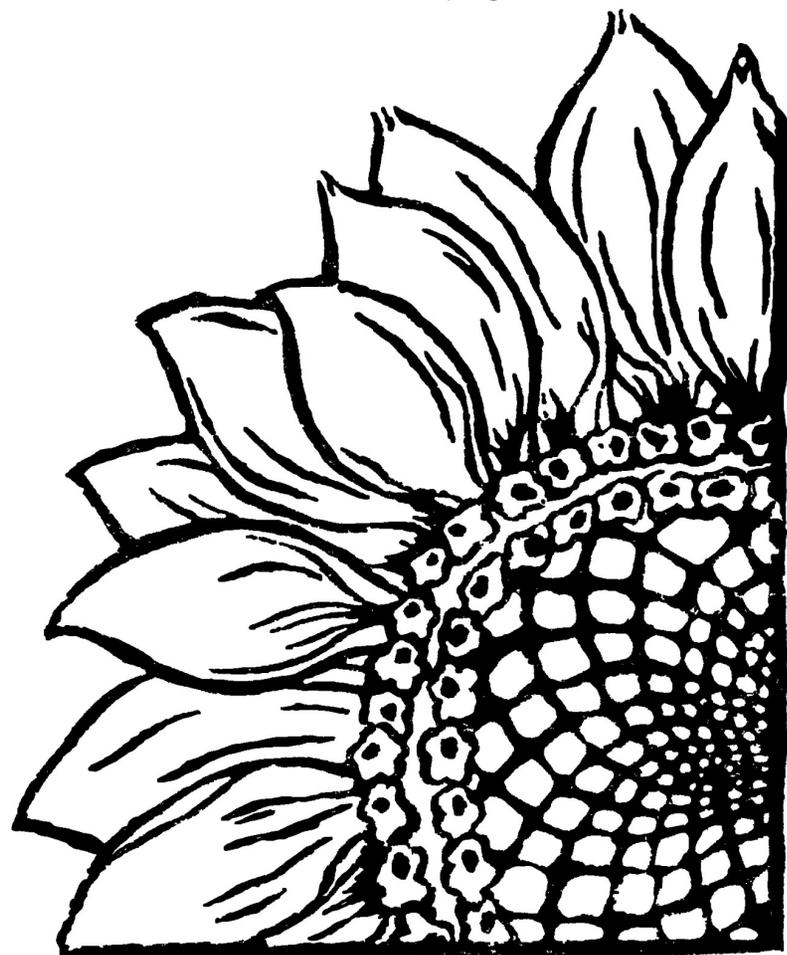
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Five Essays On AGORISM

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operate just as any voluntary association and groups like the IWW show us a way to unionize without appealing to the state for favors.

Having an established local agora, no matter how small, can also provide comfort to union organizers who regularly fear losing their jobs because of their organizing activities. But the agora provides organizers the comfort of knowing that if they are fired for organizing on the job they can make a living outside of the corporate-capitalist structure. This will allow for organizers to be more daring in their actions, further challenging corporatist domination. Agorists who are excited by the ideas of direct action and civil disobedience may even decide to take corporate jobs in order to ‘salt’ them and help bring them down from the inside, which unlike in the dreaded political game doesn’t involve taking a position of authority in contradiction to libertarian principles.

In the words of the late SEK3:

“Sometimes the terms “free enterprise” and “capitalism” are used to mean “free market.” Capitalism means the ideology (ism) of capital or capitalists. Before Marx came along, the pure free-marketeer Thomas Hodgskin had already used the term capitalism as a pejorative; capitalists were trying to use coercion — the State — to restrict the market. Capitalism, then, does not describe a free market but a form of statism...”^[3]

So then why not openly challenge capitalism and the state? Why not draw from the combined examples of Rothbard, Konkin, and Hess for inspiration in how to make agorism more appealing to “the great bulk of wage earners in this and other countries”? Why not reach out and form an agorist-syndicalist alliance?

^[1] Rothbard, Murray, *Konkin on Libertarian Strategy*

^[2] Konkin, Samuel, *New Libertarian Manifesto*

^[3] Konkin, Samuel, *An Agorist Primer*

Green Market Agorism

Agorist theory has been enriched a lot since Samuel Edward Konkin III introduced the initial theory. Through the writings and work of visionaries such as Karl Hess, Ross Ulbricht, Satoshi Nakamoto, Defense Distributed, and Derrick Broze, we have seen agorism grow and expand in ways never thought possible both intellectually and in practice. And the practice will continue to grow and adapt as time goes on, circumstances change, new technologies emerge, etc., as it should.

While Samuel Konkin focused specifically on the black and grey markets, Hess focused on localization, appropriate technology, and sustainability. Broze has expanded upon this in recent years, referring to the concepts of horizontal and vertical agorism. Horizontal agorism is the traditional illegalist Konkian agorism we all know and love. That includes tax strikes, drug dealing, sex work, gun running, contraband smuggling, hiding undocumented immigrants, etc. Vertical agorism is typically more focused on white and grey markets and includes things like farmers markets, worker cooperatives, environmental technology, grassroots labor organizing, etc.

It is in the vertical agorist tradition that we tend to have the most concern for the environment. Karl Hess’ experiments into community sustainability led him to champion such things as aquaponics, rooftop gardening, basement fish farming, solar and wind power, community workshops, warehouses, share sheds, tool libraries, and more. Particularly expanding upon the last bit, the sharing economy has sprung up around the idea of sharing goods that would otherwise not be used to full capacity by an individual owner. Broze has emphasized the 7th generation principle and concepts such as zero waste living in his teachings on agorism and he promotes community gardening, permaculture, minimalism, and the like. With

environmental devastation an increasing concern, this emphasis will become more and more necessary.

Following the inspiration of Broze, if one is to look at agorism holistically, then we cannot just focus on the point of consumption but instead must focus on the entire cycle of a product's life. As pointed out in *The Story of Stuff*, that chain goes from extraction to production to distribution and then consumption before finally ending with disposal. Through this holistic lens, we see that we must make the switch to a circular economy. Most agorists are already on this path of thinking in regards to food production, promoting local organic sustainable food production and distribution via home gardens, community gardens, guerrilla gardens, rooftop gardens, small farms, permaculture, farmers markets, CSAs, composting, and the like but, we as a movement need to think of the other products we consume in our lives.

The old saying goes, "There's no ethical consumption under capitalism," and the truth is that in our current rigged market, we as consumers are largely and purposely kept uninformed about the products we consume. Agorism, specifically with an emphasis on localism, gives us a more effective alternative to ethical consumption. Buying local goods from your neighbors makes it somewhat easier to know the history of those goods thus making one a more informed consumer who can make more informed decisions. However, not all items can be found via a local source and even those local sources are often utilizing products in the production process. For instance, your local screen printer may do it themselves but they're still printing on shirts they bought from some chain corporation that are made in sweatshops by child laborers from synthetic fibers and plant fibers grown and harvested by prison slaves and dyed with harmful synthetic dyes that run off into the nearby waters causing pollution and death of the local sea life. Even if they do manage to find sources which claim ethical

aside from Hess have made such alliances with alt labor organizations and unions.

Consciously moving forward in building such alliances could prove to be quite advantageous. While agorists build alternatives to the white market within the black and grey markets, syndicalists could focus on challenging existing white market entities from the inside, eventually taking them over as Rothbard advocated. But it doesn't have to stop there. Agorists should indeed advocate that syndicalists go even further. Once a white market business is successfully syndicalized, agorist-syndicalists should help transition the business into the agora. The newly collectivized business should eventually do what all good agorist businesses do: ignore state licensing regimes, refuse to pay taxes, engage in the use of alternative currencies, and generally disregard statist interference with their business dealings. They just successfully ousted the boss, why submit to yet another authority? They just got rid of the corporate cronies who became rich by stealing the fruits of their labor so then why let the state do the same through taxes?

For those who object to such claims and scream #notallbosses, I offer the following quote from Konkin:

"In an agorist society, division of labor and self-respect of each worker...will probably eliminate the traditional business organization – especially the corporate hierarchy, an imitation of the State and not the Market. Most companies will be associations of independent contractors, consultants, and other companies. Many may be just one entrepreneur and all his services, computers, suppliers and customers."^[2]

Even Konkin couldn't help but notice the exploitative nature of corporate hierarchy, believing it to be some of the lasting remains of feudalism and that if the individual were truly respected, bosses would slowly become a thing of the past. In the truly freed-market, labor unions would be allowed to

Karl Hess' *Community Power*. Such practice includes buying goods from farmers markets and community farms, rooftop gardening, personal and community use of solar power and aquaponic systems, community toolshares and skillshares, homesteading, urban farming, community protection networks, and free schools. While not all vertical tactics are strictly black or grey market activities (such as free schools and farmers markets), they are counter-economic nonetheless in that they challenge corporate and government monopolies and provide working alternatives that are much more libertarian in comparison.

So if not all activities have to strictly be black or grey to be considered counter-economic, then where does that leave such things as worker cooperatives and collectives or even classical wildcat unionism and newer forms of alt labor? Do these not challenge state and corporate power in significant ways, placing more power in the hands of the individual instead of coercive authorities? Rothbard himself pointed out that most, if not every, corporation rested on illegitimate property claims and therefore should be homesteaded by the workers – the wage earners whom Rothbard claimed that agorism could do nothing for – who invested their time, labor, and energy into running the day-to-day operations but is this not just a form of syndicalism?

Karl Hess advocated a combination of such tactics as a practicing agorist, both vertically and horizontally, and a member of the Industrial Workers of the World, a 100+ year old labor union that offers a refreshing challenger to the exploitative business union model of groups like the AFL-CIO while advocating syndicalist tactics. And such tactics do seem to compliment each other in theory and in practice, offering a significant challenge to state and corporate power, while also crossing ideological boundaries between free-market anarchists and social anarchists. In fact, many free-market libertarians

grounds because of various aspects of their production (organic, fair trade, union-made, etc.) there are always other issues (wage theft, monocropping, lobbying). But there's a solution to getting most everything you need that you can't buy from an ethical producer without contributing a dime to these corporations.

As agorists, we talk often talk of the white, black, grey, and red markets but there is one market that is surprisingly absent yet increasingly relevant to the conversation: green markets. Now by green market, I don't mean cannabis, alternative energies, or deceptive greenwashed consumerism. Rather green markets include all white, grey, and black market transactions involving resold goods, meaning goods that have been previously owned, repaired, refurbished, and/or recycled. This includes thrift stores, clothing swaps, repair shops, fix-it fairs, the Right to Repair movement, used car parts, redistributing dumpstered goods in the vain of Food Not Bombs, and so much more.

Repairing things, buying or trading with friends, buying from local thrift stores and flea markets, effective recycling programs, and reusing and repurposing items are all examples of green market agorism. Now granted, this still only focuses on the distribution, consumption, and sometimes disposal aspects of a product's life while not directly addressing the extraction and production aspects, however getting your goods from the green market lowers demand for extraction and production of new goods. Scaling down our current modes of production in general is necessary for curbing environment damage and thus a move towards reducing, reusing, repairing, repurposing, and recycling is a must. Moving to green markets allows us a chance to analyze our consumption and realize how much we can rely on what is already available instead of needing to constantly produce. Of course there will always be items which one will need to buy new such as hygiene products and new technology but relying mostly on green market goods allows us to scale

back the problem of the question of ethical extraction and production methods to a smaller more manageable level. Instead of having to focus on how to ethically produce every product, we only have to focus on how to ethically extract and produce necessities.

All of the sudden these questions become easier to answer and we can begin focusing on how to produce those necessities. We can start making our own hygiene products from locally grown plant materials, 3D printing toothbrushes and combs using fiber made via scrap plastic and the open source machine designs from Precious Plastic, fighting for the labor rights of the miners of the precious metals that go into our those 3D printers and form worker collectives to assemble the parts, creating more effective recycling programs for the waste we still do create, and so much more. We can get extremely creative about it. But first, we must scale back the problem by scaling back our consumption of new items. We must become green market agorists.

Toward an Agorist-Syndicalist Alliance

“Konkin’s entire theory speaks only to the interests and concerns of the marginal classes who are self-employed. The great bulk of the people are full-time wage workers; they are people with steady jobs. Konkinism has nothing whatsoever to say to these people. To adopt Konkin’s strategy, then, would on this ground alone, serve up as a dead end for the libertarian movement. We cannot win if there is no possibility of speaking to the concerns of the great bulk of wage earners in this and other countries.”^[1]

And so goes Murray Rothbard’s criticism of the philosophy of agorism to which SEK3 had a good chuckle before pointing out that many of those in the working class are already taking part in counter-economic activities from not reporting all of their income on their tax forms to paying someone under the table to mow their lawn. Despite this, Rothbard’s criticisms are echoed still to this day by some, especially within anti-capitalist circles. Ironic since many in anti-capitalist anarchist circles also take part in counter-economic activity in practice. However, these criticisms are not without some kernel of truth, which leads some agorists to wonder if agorism isn’t in need of some updating. After all, Konkin himself believed agorism to be a living philosophy.

Agorist and journalist Derrick Broze speaks often of the concepts of ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal agorism’. Horizontal agorism is what most of us understand, traditionally, as agorism. It is the use of black and grey markets to out compete the state as outlined in SEK3’s *The New Libertarian Manifesto* and *The Agorist Primer*. Examples of such include unlicensed businesses, tax evasion, smuggling, drug dealing, harboring undocumented immigrants, gun running, squatting, and alternative currencies. Vertical agorism is focused on localism and self-sufficiency and is inspired by such books as

success, they are not exclusive to the philosophy of ethical consumerism. All in all agorism seems both more realistic and better equipped to significantly challenge our current capitalist economy from the outside. Remember that there is no such thing as ethical consumerism under capitalism and the state market!

White Market Agorism

Within any political movement set on radically changing society, there always comes a debate on how best to achieve those goals. Should we unionize towards a general strike? Should we withdraw from the prevailing system by living on scavenged, stolen, and scammed resources in the fashion of classic CrimethInc. propaganda? Should we build cooperatives and collectives in the spirit of venture communism? Should we go the route of propaganda of the deed and start blowing up government buildings and assassinating politicians? How about some combination of the above?

Well agorism seems to be just such a combination. Combining elements of illegalism, dual power theory, economic secession, syndicalism, and freed market anti-capitalism (but without many of the extremes of propaganda of the deed), agorism proposes a strategy of utilizing counter-economics as a way of achieving an anarchist society. But what is counter-economics?

Samuel Edward Konkin III, the founder of agorism, defines counter-economics in his work *Counter-Economics: what it is, how it works*:

The Counter-Economy is the sum of all non-aggressive Human Action which is forbidden by the State. Counter-economics is the study of the Counter-Economy and its practices. The Counter-Economy includes the free market, the Black Market, the “underground economy,” all acts of civil and social disobedience, all acts of forbidden association (sexual, racial, cross-religious), and anything else the State, at any place or time, chooses to prohibit, control, regulate, tax, or tariff. The Counter-Economy excludes all State-approved action (the “White Market”) and the Red Market

(violence and theft not approved by the State).

This is the basic definition agorists have worked with ever since and thus agorism has always been tied to the black and gray markets to the exclusion of the white, red, and pink (violence and theft approved by the state) markets. Or has it? Because in the reality of things, it seems that “white market agorism” is a lot more common and less contradictory than one might think.

To quote Konkin once more:

As more people reject the State’s mystifications — nationalism, pseudo-Economics, false threats, and betrayed political promises — the Counter-Economy grows both vertically and horizontally. Horizontally, it involves more and more people who turn more and more of their activities toward the counter-economic; vertically, it means new structures (businesses and services) grow specifically to serve the Counter-Economy (safe communication links, arbitrators, insurance for specifically “illegal” activities, early forms of protection technology, and even guards and protectors).

Derrick Broze defines the concepts of horizontal and vertical agorism in more detail in his essay, aptly titled *Vertical and Horizontal Agorism*. In that essay, he explains that horizontal agorism, “is related to the bold choice to pursue action that the State considers to be illegal or immoral. By venturing into this territory you are joining the ranks of the bootlegger, the moonshiner, the cannabis dealer, the guerilla gardener, the unlicensed lawn mower, food vendor or barber, the weapons dealer, and the crypto-anarchists.” This is essentially agorism as Konkin defined it but since then it has become so much more.

other “ethical” products that capitalism can be saved and made more ethical.

Agorism by contrast does not see the white market state economy as ethical at all and chooses not to work within it to the largest extent in ways that sabotage it or decentralize it further. It does not shame those for their white market purchases, their lack of economic voting power, or their “unethical” purchases. There are no gatekeeper organizations such as fair trade certifiers which keep producers from participating. Best of all, agorism is a tactic accessible to everyone to varying degrees.

Unlike ethical consumerism which paints everything in a very black and white fashion, agorists see their tactics working in stages. Thus it is not necessary to be steadfastly and unswervingly “ethical” by means of only participating in the black and grey markets to the exclusion of white markets. Instead individual agorists strive to move as much of their economic activity as possible to the underground economy while navigating survival in the real world. Even the poorest person with no real white market voting power can avoid paying taxes, work under the table, utilize alternative currencies or the cashless economy, sell drugs, start unlicensed businesses, etc. And whereas many in the early stages of the agorist movement will only carry out a few of their daily activities through the underground economy, as the black and grey markets grow and develop, they will become both safer and encompass more and more products and services thus allowing more people to participate with less cost both financially and safety-wise.

While it is important to factor in personal ethics when engaging in the underground economy lest it become a haven for cartels, violence, and other unjust practices, ethical consumption on the white market is at best ineffective and at worst impossible. While tactics such as boycotts do have some

consumers have a difficult enough time utilizing the democratic potential of markets as is, let alone in ethically sound ways. Therefore ethical consumerism becomes a basis for shifting the blame from unethical corporations to unethical consumers and can lead to poor shaming.

Living in a hierarchical society where businesses are mostly structured top-down means that information is also dispersed asymmetrically. Because of this many of us are so far removed from the reality of the products we consume. This knowledge problem leads us as consumers to make unethical choices in what we buy out of ignorance and lack of information. Certification groups such as Fairtrade International have sprung up to help supplement our personal knowledge by supposedly making sure that companies adhere to strict ethical standards laid out by each certification group in order to receive their seal of approval. However not only have some of these groups been discovered to be selling certifications without inspection, but have also been criticized for pushing western ethics onto other cultures where certain views on ethics may differ. Such non-western farmers and producers who wish to gain or maintain fair trade status are forced to adopt foreign ethical standards in order to maintain business, thus making the movement appear to be more of a form of ethical colonialism rather than an ethical system built on autonomy or freedom.

The reality of ethical consumerism is that it fails to fundamentally challenge the current capitalist economic system in any substantial way, instead opting to work within the system. As with most economic activity, capitalists usually find a way to incorporate and market movements like this in such forms as consumer trends, cause marketing, green capitalism, and other niche markets. Instead of freed markets where the consumer has more control we are instead left with false promises from Energy Star appliances, fair trade foods, and

It is in vertical agorism that we discover a departure from the traditional agorist rejections of the white market. Vertical agorism is heavily inspired by the work of Karl Hess, such as his experiments in sustainability on the neighborhood level and his books summarizing those experiences, *Community Technology* and *Neighborhood Power*. As such, the focus is on sustainability and community self-reliance and is not restricted to only the black and grey markets.

Later in his essay, Broze goes on to explain that:

Vertical agorism would include participating in and creating community exchange networks, urban farming, backyard gardening, farmers market, supporting alternatives to the police, and supporting peer to peer decentralized technologies. While these vertical steps could potentially involve the use of the state's currency (and therefore not completely counter-economic) they are still significant for challenging the dependency on the state and corporate classes.

Now I venture to disagree with Broze that these actions are not counter-economic merely because they do not utilize the black and gray markets as he states earlier in his essay. Of course, he clarifies that even if not counter-economic, "vertical actions are extremely valuable and necessary." But if these tactics directly challenge state and corporate power than how are they not counter-economic?

So what is "white market agorism" then?

Well, it includes many of the things Broze already listed when describing vertical agorism: community exchange networks, urban farming, backyard gardening, farmers markets, alternatives to the police, and p2p decentralized technologies. But it is so much more than that.

Agorism vs Ethical Consumerism: What's Worth Your Money?

Cryptocurrency is largely a white market venture and yet it is championed as a prime example of agorism. The Industrial Workers of the World is lauded by Konkin himself as a perfect example of an agorist labor union and yet they are legally registered with the state and more often than not organize within the law. Decentralized social networking sites such as Minds and Steemit, decentralized renewable energy sources, biohacking, permaculture, hacker/makerspaces, community sharing programs, alternative models of exchange including gift economies, local exchange trading systems (LETS), mutual banking, labor notes, and precious metals, alternative and complementary medicines, unschooling/homeschooling, Tor, free stores, alternative media, and worker-owned businesses are all examples of white market agorism.

And yes, some forms of white market agorism can overlap with gray market agorism and can help to facilitate black market agorism. After all, the counter-economy must work together to overthrow the state and corporate control. In fact, we should push many of these white market ventures towards grey and black market actions where appropriate, such as promoting those ventures to go unpermitted or to not report all income made to the state, but we shouldn't exclude these actions as counter-economic when they fail to do so.

Counter-economics is about running counter to the power structures at hand. So in an economic system of bosses and wage slavery, worker-run businesses and grassroots democratic labor unions are counter-economic. In a food system largely monopolized by a handful of corporations who utilize harmful practices associated with factory farming and industrial agriculture, growing your own food or buying from local farmers is counter-economic. In a media landscape largely dominated by a handful of news corporations, independent media is counter-economic. In a technological landscape dominated by only a few tech businesses, free and open source

Utilizing markets to combat unethical business practices is a long tradition amongst activists from various ideologies. Whereas agorism seeks to combat cronyist practices of utilizing corporate welfare, tax breaks, lobbying, intellectual property laws, and other special government granted privileges to maintain economic status and even monopoly over certain products or ideas as well as other bad business practices by shifting more and more of our activity to agorist or free black and grey markets, ethical consumerism, on the other hand, seeks to combat unjust business practices by being conscious consumers on the white market, utilizing tactics of boycotting and boycotting.

Ethical consumerism is what's traditionally known as voting with your money within the mainstream economy. It's simply the idea of buying products and services that one deems ethical and not buying those one views as unethical in order to promote ethical market activity through demand. Don't like Monsanto? Don't buy food products supplied by them. Don't like Chick-fil-A because of your stance on gay rights? Don't buy from them. This is a tactic as old as markets themselves. However it fails to take into account multiple external factors which make this tactic wildly ineffective on a large scale.

In a truly freed market, ethical consumerism makes total sense but sadly our economy is anything but a freed market. Our market is so skewed in favor of certain actors that it is hard to effectively wage such battles against them on a large enough scale to affect them substantially. Poverty and unjust wealth distribution make it nearly impossible for some to survive as "ethical" consumers as the cost of such products tends to be much higher priced. Thus poorer consumers are forced to buy unethically produced lower-cost items out of necessity. Poorer

original owner of such stolen property cannot be determined or found, then it should be reclaimed by others who can offer a more just claim to the property. Is this not a call for reappropriation of sorts?

So it seems that agorism is compatible with illegalism but illegalism is an uncomfortable fit at best within agorism. Despite this uneasy relationship at times, the two philosophies can indeed learn a lot from each other. Both of these philosophies defiantly spit in Marx's face and show the true revolutionary potential of the lumpenproletariat as both criminals and entrepreneurs. It's time for the underclasses to rise up and take what is rightfully theirs.

technology is counter-economic.

Just because it isn't gray or black market, doesn't mean it isn't counter-economic and it damn sure doesn't mean it's not agorist. It is about time we openly embrace and discuss the potential that white market agorism has to aid our cause.

Entrepreneurs and the Lumpenproletariat: Comparing Agorism and Illegalism

Karl Marx considered the lumpenproletariat to be the segment of the working class with the least revolutionary potential and in fact went as far as to deem them as potentially counter-revolutionary. However, this class of “beggars, prostitutes, gangsters, racketeers, swindlers, petty criminals, tramps, chronic unemployed or unemployables, persons who have been cast out by industry, and all sorts of declassed, degraded or degenerated elements” was considered by Bakunin to be the class with the most likely revolutionary potential, believing that wage workers were far too integrated within capitalism to be able to truly challenge it.

Illegalism sprung up as an anarchist philosophy of the lumpenproletariat. Championed by individualists such as Ravachol, Émile Henry, Auguste Vaillant, and Caserio and others influenced by Max Stirner’s brand of egoism, illegalism promoted the criminal lifestyle as the archetype for the revolutionary, believing that through individual criminal actions done in pursuit of individual desires and survival under capitalist oppression, they could eventually inspire mass insurrection leading to a revolution. Theft and burglary were seen as a means of individual and mass reappropriation of capitalist property, counterfeiting and smuggling were used as a means of survival, and most controversially, political bombings and assassinations were labeled as “propaganda of the deed.” Criminals were cheered on for their general disregard of statist authority and their use of crime as a survival tactic.

Agorists similarly champion so-called criminals who make their livings in the black and grey markets. Smuggling, drug dealing, gun running, civil disobedience, prostitution, and unlicensed business practices are promoted as a means of

countering state power. As more and more economic activity is moved from the white market to the underground economy, the state loses more and more control over such economic dealings. Along with this, agorists advocate tax evasion which helps to drain the state’s monetary supply thus making it difficult for it to function. While both deal with daily survival under a state-capitalist system, illegalism merely places hope in one day inspiring revolution while agorism lays out a clear path. Agorism puts an entrepreneurial spin on lumpenproletariat activity.

Now at first glance these tactics have much in common. Harboring undocumented immigrants, dealing in illegal drugs and weaponry, smuggling, squatting, prostitution, tax evasion, and even counterfeiting are illegalist actions that are also counter-economic and have been advocated by anarchists in both camps. However major differences in opinion come about when so-called red market activity comes into question. While not strictly entrepreneurial activity, political assassinations, bombings, and even theft are considered antithetical to agorism as they violate the rights of other persons and their property. Sometimes such things as political assassinations have been justified by individuals on the grounds of self-defense but many agorists believe self-defense can only be claimed if one is under immediate threat of violence which would therefore exclude political assassination outright.

While some agorists would likely argue that individual reappropriation is a violation of property rights like any form of robbery or theft, illegalists would argue that the capitalist has no legitimate property rights to begin with as they made their fortunes by stealing the fruits of others’ labor. This sentiment is actually echoed by many on the libertarian left who point out that most capitalist property was gained through means of state seizure and corporate welfare, thus making their claims to such property illegitimate. In the Rothbardian tradition, if the