

This post is an excerpt from a letter I recently sent to an anarchist friend. It touches on a few things I've wanted to put on this blog for awhile, and since it was already written (well, mostly — I paraphrased a lot)... voila. I hope you like it.

* * At the risk of alienating you, I have to say I take exception to one thing you wrote (in your anti-authoritarian zine, Cracks In The Concrete, from the Radical Rabbit Distro, at www.freewebs.com/radicalrabbitdistro): "It troubles me" you wrote, "that you feel that 'every human being' is 'deserving of respect'. What about murderers? Rapists?" Your comment makes me wonder; what is a "murderer" or a "rapist"? Surely not simply one who's been so convicted? Like most ppl, I have a sort of ingrained notion of what a real rapist or murderer is, what one must do to justify that label. But how can I ever know what was done by others, besides ~~my~~ ^{by my} own direct experiences with them? Even then I probably can't have sufficient context or knowledge to judge fairly. For instance, I may KNOW I was raped, or I may KNOW my friend was murdered, but without being inside the perpetrator's head, can I really know the extent to which condemnation is justified even by my own subjective standards? Mental illness may complicate things (I was thinking of the perpetrator's and not my own, but either way on second thought!), as might mistakes of fact or misunderstandings, and of course the basic experiences that color — and stress that clouds — anyone's judgement on any given day. It's complicated, and I truly believe in the saying "To understand all is to forgive all," but even complete understanding and its consequent sympathy and forgiveness doesn't require one to stand by and allow all acts to continue without criticism or resistance. I'd like to apply this same logic to cops as well as to other murderers and rapists, yet I can't help feeling that cops comprise a special category. I guess that's because few murderers and even fewer rapists do their deeds in order to feed their families. Cops, in contrast, whatever good they may believe they do, they ~~know~~ ^{accept jobs they} ~~know~~ involve hurting people, and not at all like dentists and surgeons, who only hurt people who willingly come to them for painful treatments. Cops hurt people in a brutal, callous, utterly non-consensual way — heads will be smashed, bodies will be chained and caged. Friendships will be destroyed, families torn apart. It's the nature of the "job".

A propos of these thoughts, I've experienced a challenging situation lately. In general, I will support and befriend any prisoner, even ones who admit to some truly heinous acts. I take the anarchist concept of solidarity seriously, ~~and~~ ^{and} I genuinely feel that whatever one did before we crossed paths, the fact is that we're now in the same boat, so I judge a person, another

prisoner, not on his ostensible past but on my own observations and experiences with him now. My treatment of other prisoners is based on what I personally learn of their character in this immediate context, not pre-poisoned opinions. That's the ideal, anyway. Then, a few months ago, a new guy shows up. A cop. Ex-cop. Killer cop, or so the story goes. The story, of course, is mostly irrelevant to me, since the "official version" of nearly every "crime" story is typically more fiction than fact, but with this guy, whatever his culpability in the death he's blamed for, I do know one irrefutable fact: he was a cop. He took money to cause or perpetuate the suffering of others. That... man, that's tough to forgive, understanding or not. It is, I believe, the worst possible crime, and maybe the only thing worthy of that label, "crime". I've struggled — I never wanted to see ~~violence~~ ~~be fall~~ ~~him~~, as happened to his two accused-killer-cop-co-defendants, but short of not wishing him brutalized (existing in a cage is more than punishment enough for anyone; in fact, it's too much!), I really didn't know how to deal with him myself, and I'm still not entirely sure. I'm conflicted. He's unremorseful for his coppism, but that's probably as it should be — I can appreciate a sincerity of convictions, you know? I generally chalk up remorselessness for truly ~~bad~~ ^{harmful} acts to an unenviable but also uncondemnable — call it a pitiabile — mixture of integrity and delusion. But this guy seems to be of the I-did-it-for-the-money school of coppism, which to my mind is the lowest, sleaziest, slimiest motive of all. It says: "I'll fuck people over every day, enthusiastically, regardless whether I believe it's helpful to anyone in any way, simply because it pays for my cars and concert tickets." Sick. Despicable. And that's what I hear from him, talk of overtime pay and health benefits, perks and pensions... it makes me want to puke. To smash his face and puke. YET... (conflict conflict conflict; cognitive dissonance)... and yet, see, I also find I like him. He's likable in many ways. True to my form, I've let myself get to ~~know~~ ^{know} this person a bit, and I can see, had he chosen an honorable vocation, been a firefighter or burger-flipper, a janitor or a Judo-coach, I can see we might've been real-world buddies.

It reminds me of actual friends I had in school. Some kids I knew weren't always entirely kind to animals. I'm not talking about major abusers, as I always abandoned people I knew to be really cruel — I even fought with them sometimes — but some kids I knew did cross lower-level lines I was uncomfortable with, yet we remained friends. I knew them well enough. I could overlook and forgive some behavior I ~~was~~ ^{normally} had no tolerance for. It's a complicated thing, this friendship and values deal, isn't it? * *

"The lenses through which we look at the social world let us focus on some issues especially sharply, but at the cost of blurring others."

-- Jacob T. Levy

You can write me!
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