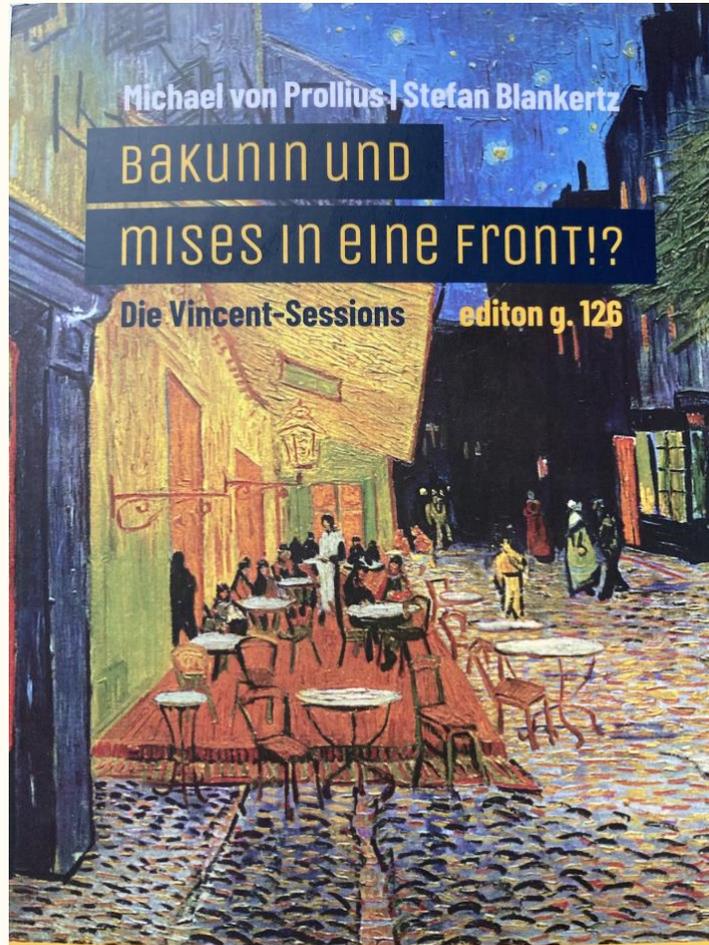


Bakunin and Mises on the same side?

The Vincent Sessions.

A Dialogue Between Liberalism and Anarchism



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One-Sentence Summary

This innovative dialogue between anarcho-capitalist and classical liberal perspectives explores whether the historical failure of anarchists and liberals to form an alliance represents a missed opportunity for advancing freedom, examining fundamental disagreements about the state while identifying common ground in defending individual liberty against collectivism and centralized power.

About This Book

Publication Details:

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Genesis and Methodology:

This book emerged from conversations between the authors at the Vincent café in Berlin, overlooking the Spree canal near Friedrichstraße station. Beginning in 2016, these "Vincent-Sessions" developed into extensive exchanges comparing anarcho-capitalist and classical liberal positions on fundamental questions of social organization, state power, and human freedom.

The dialogue format reflects genuine intellectual engagement rather than mere debate—both authors acknowledge strengths in the opposing position while defending their own framework. The structure deliberately mirrors musical composition, with "6 Strophes" presenting core theses, "Refrains" exploring recurring themes, a "Bridge" offering practical application, and "Contra-factual Sketches" imagining alternative historical outcomes.

Author's Note:

Michael von Prollius represents the classical liberal (minarchist) position, advocating for a minimal state limited to protecting life, liberty, and property. Stefan Blankertz articulates the anarcho-capitalist perspective, arguing that even minimal states inevitably expand and that voluntary market mechanisms can provide all necessary social coordination, including security and law.

Both authors emphasize that their disagreement occurs within a shared commitment to individual freedom, private property, and voluntary cooperation—making their dialogue fundamentally different from mainstream political discourse.

Bakunin und Mises in einer Front!?

The Vincent-Sessions: A Dialogue Between Anarchism and Liberalism

Introduction

The café Vincent in Berlin, decorated with van Gogh paintings, serves as setting for conversations between two thinkers exploring whether anarchists and liberals—natural allies in defending freedom—might overcome historical divisions. Over Jack Daniels and Cuba Libre, the authors exchange books (Proudhon, Hayek, Hazlitt) and debate whether the 19th-century failure to unite represents a tragedy for the cause of liberty.

The fundamental question: Can minimal-state liberalism and stateless anarcho-capitalism find common ground, or do irreconcilable differences about the necessity of political authority doom cooperation?

I. Core Theses: Sketching Fundamental Positions

The Classical Liberal Position (MvP)

The book opens with a description of the conversational setting of the “Vincent Sessions”, informal but sustained dialogues conducted over several years. These sessions revolve around political philosophy, liberalism, anarchism, and historical alternatives to centralized state power. The introductory reflections establish the guiding question of the book: whether the historically missed alliance between liberals and anarchists constituted a lost opportunity, and whether such an alliance could still be conceivable under contemporary conditions.

The introduction situates the discussion in a broader historical context, drawing attention to nineteenth-century debates on federalism, decentralization, and self-governing communities. Particular emphasis is placed on the critique of nationalism and centralism and their long-term consequences for European political development. The introductory chapter frames the book as an exploration of alternatives rather than a programmatic manifesto.

II. The Six Stanzas

This central part of the book is organized symmetrically and dialogically. Each subsection contrasts liberal and anarchist positions while following the same analytical steps.

1. Sketch of the Core Theses

Liberal Position

Classical liberalism is presented as the intellectual breakthrough that enabled the transition from hierarchical, birth-determined societies to open, dynamic orders based on individual freedom. Its core elements are private property, the rule of law, market coordination, and the limitation of political power. Liberalism is portrayed as the historical driver of mass prosperity, social mobility, and peaceful cooperation.

The liberal solution to the problem of power is the minimal state. Some coercive authority is considered unavoidable, but it must be strictly confined to the protection of life, liberty, and property. The state is to be visible, institutionally bounded, and subject to transparency and accountability. Liberalism does not aim at abolishing the state but at preventing its expansion beyond narrowly defined functions.

Anarchist / Anarcho-Capitalist Position

The anarchist position challenges the legitimacy of any territorial monopoly of power. State authority is regarded as structurally illegitimate because it rests on coercion rather than voluntary agreement. The idea of a consensual social contract is rejected as fictitious, since it cannot bind non-consenting individuals or future generations.

From this perspective, the state is not a neutral provider of order but a source of exploitation and domination. Social problems are seen as largely generated or aggravated by state intervention. Voluntary cooperation based on private property and decentralized arrangements is considered both morally superior and functionally more effective.

2. Strengths of the Opposing Position

From the liberal side, the anarchist critique of power is acknowledged as a powerful and necessary reminder of the corrupting tendencies of authority. The anarchist emphasis on voluntary cooperation, spontaneous order, and skepticism toward centralized institutions highlights vulnerabilities within liberal state theory.

From the anarchist side, liberalism's historical achievements are recognized. Legal stability, predictable rules, and the institutional protection of individual rights are seen as major accomplishments. The existence of a shared legal framework is acknowledged as providing social reassurance and facilitating peaceful coexistence in complex societies.

3. Weaknesses of One's Own Position

Weaknesses of Liberalism

The liberal tradition is criticized for underestimating the self-expanding dynamics of state power. Historically, minimal states have rarely remained minimal. Incentives inherent in political organization lead to growth in public spending, regulation, and centralization. Liberal reliance on constitutional safeguards and democratic procedures is shown to be insufficient to prevent this expansion.

Another weakness identified is the difficulty of communicating liberal ideas. Liberalism's emphasis on abstract principles, restraint, and impersonal rules lacks emotional appeal and struggles to mobilize political support.

Weaknesses of Anarchism

The anarchist position faces unresolved questions concerning the enforcement of law, protection against violence, and the regulation of conflicts in modern societies. The risk of private domination, fragmentation, or the emergence of feudal or oligarchic structures is treated as a serious concern. The lack of convincing large-scale empirical examples remains a central challenge.

4. Why Each Side Still Holds to Its Thesis

Liberals argue that abolishing the state ignores persistent human conflicts, power struggles, and the demand for collective security. The disappearance of the state does not eliminate domination but may merely shift it to less visible actors. The minimal state is therefore defended as an imperfect but necessary institutional compromise.

Anarchists counter that accepting the state as inevitable prematurely forecloses alternative forms of social organization. The persistence of injustice, war, and repression under state systems is cited as evidence that monopoly authority does not solve the problem of power but entrenches it.

5. Canon: Key Thinkers

Each position situates itself within a broader intellectual tradition. Liberalism references thinkers associated with constitutionalism, legal order, and limited government. Anarchism traces its lineage through critiques of authority, domination, and centralized power, culminating in attempts to combine anarchist political theory with market-based economic coordination.

6. First Steps Toward Realization

Rather than offering blueprints, the book discusses possible transitional principles. Emphasis is placed on decentralization, secession, political competition, and the

reduction of centralized authority. The idea emerges that privatization should proceed wherever feasible, without dogmatically fixing an irreducible core of state functions in advance.

III. Refrains

This section revisits central arguments of the book in a recurring, reflective manner. Rather than advancing new theses, the Refrains deepen and reframe earlier positions by examining them from different angles and under varying emphases. The structure mirrors musical refrains: familiar themes return, but each time with altered context and sharper contours.

One focus lies on Ludwig von Mises, who is portrayed as a central reference point for both liberal and anarchist thought, yet not as an unblemished authority. His insights into social cooperation, markets, and the limits of planning are acknowledged, while tensions and unresolved implications within his work are made explicit. Mises appears as a shared figure who connects the traditions without dissolving their differences.

Another recurring theme is the fragile boundary between liberalism and anarchism. The text emphasizes that the divide is not categorical but narrow and unstable. Small shifts in assumptions about legitimacy, feasibility, or human behavior can move a position from one camp to the other. This proximity explains both the intensity of disagreement and the persistent mutual attraction.

The Refrains also return to the question of violence and peace. Markets are contrasted as potential arenas for peaceful cooperation on the one hand and for organized violence on the other, depending on institutional framing. The section highlights that violence is not eliminated by institutional design alone, but that centralization tends to amplify its scale and consequences.

Finally, the idea of a “constitution of liberty” is revisited as an unfinished project. Rather than a settled achievement, liberty is presented as historically contingent and permanently at risk. Legal and constitutional frameworks are necessary but insufficient; without sustained skepticism toward power and ongoing resistance to centralization, even well-designed orders erode over time.

IV. Bridge: The City Council Conversation

This section introduces a dialogical scene situated in a fictional municipal setting, where liberal and anarchist perspectives are confronted with the realities of local political decision-making. The conversation serves as a bridge between abstract theory and practical governance by embedding philosophical disagreements in a

concrete institutional context. Participants debate issues of authority, responsibility, legitimacy, and feasibility as they arise in everyday political processes rather than in idealized models.

The dialogue exposes how political actors are constrained by existing legal frameworks, administrative routines, budgetary limits, and expectations of citizens. Liberal arguments for rule-based governance, gradual reform, and institutional stability encounter pressures to compromise, prioritize, and act under imperfect information. Anarchist critiques highlight how even local political bodies reproduce patterns of coercion, exclusion, and power concentration, despite their proximity to citizens.

Through the exchange, the section illustrates how theoretical positions change when translated into practice: principles collide with procedural requirements, moral clarity with political trade-offs, and long-term visions with short-term demands. The municipal setting underscores that conflicts over power, legitimacy, and freedom do not only arise at the level of the nation-state but are already embedded in local governance structures.

The Bridge does not resolve these tensions. Instead, it demonstrates how liberal and anarchist ideas are both tested, constrained, and partially transformed when confronted with institutional reality, preparing the ground for the subsequent counterfactual and critical sections of the book.

V. Counterfactual Sketches

“Could It Have Turned Out Differently?”

This section explicitly adopts a counterfactual perspective. It does not claim historical plausibility in the sense of prediction, but uses alternative trajectories to illuminate structural choices, missed options, and path dependencies. The guiding question is not what would have happened, but what might have been possible under different institutional and ideological constellations.

The counterfactuals are framed as analytical thought experiments intended to clarify the long-term consequences of centralization versus decentralization, and of state-centric versus liberty-oriented political orders.

1. A Classically Liberal and Peaceful Germany, 1849–1914

The first sketch explores an alternative German development following the failed revolution of 1848/49. Instead of the historical path toward a Prussian-dominated nation-state, the scenario assumes a decentralized, federal, and classically liberal order.

In this alternative trajectory, political unification does not occur through militarization and centralized authority, but through voluntary federal arrangements among self-governing political units. Power remains fragmented, with strong regional autonomy and institutional competition. The state is limited in scope, focused primarily on legal order and protection, rather than nation-building or social engineering.

The sketch emphasizes that such a Germany would likely have avoided the fusion of nationalism, militarism, and state power that characterized the late nineteenth century. Without a strong central state apparatus, large-scale military mobilization and imperial ambitions would have been structurally constrained. Economic development would still have occurred, driven by market processes and industrialization, but without the same degree of political centralization.

The broader implication is that a decentralized liberal order could have reduced the likelihood of large-scale interstate conflict by limiting both the capacity and the incentives for war. The scenario highlights how institutional structures shape not only domestic governance but also external behavior.

2. Ukrainian Anarchists Prevent the Second World War, 1920–1939

The second sketch moves to Eastern Europe and examines the interwar period. It focuses on anarchist movements in Ukraine and explores the possibility that a sustained anarchist-influenced social order might have altered the course of European history.

In this scenario, anarchist forms of organization—based on local autonomy, voluntary cooperation, and resistance to centralized authority—persist beyond their historical defeat. Instead of being crushed by emerging centralized regimes, decentralized structures remain viable and resilient.

The sketch suggests that such an order would have undermined the conditions necessary for totalitarian mass mobilization. Large-scale authoritarian systems depend on centralized control, bureaucratic coordination, and ideological homogenization. A society organized around decentralized, self-governing units would be structurally resistant to these dynamics.

As a result, the emergence of total war, ideological blocs, and expansionist regimes would have been far less likely. The counterfactual does not idealize anarchism but uses the scenario to demonstrate how decentralization limits the reach of political power and thereby constrains the scale of violence.

Function of the Counterfactuals

Both sketches serve the same analytical purpose: they illustrate that history was not predetermined. Centralization, nationalism, and total war are presented not as

inevitable outcomes, but as consequences of specific political and institutional choices.

The counterfactuals reinforce the book's broader argument that alliances between liberal and anarchist ideas—particularly around decentralization, federalism, and resistance to concentrated power—might have offered alternative paths with lower levels of systemic violence.

At the same time, the sketches remain deliberately open-ended. They do not claim that such alternatives would have been free of conflict, but they suggest that the *scale* and *intensity* of conflict would have been fundamentally different under less centralized orders.

VI. Register of Sins

The final substantive section catalogues errors and blind spots within both liberal and anarchist traditions. Liberalism is criticized for underestimating the expansionary logic of state power and for repeatedly seeking to realize freedom through the state, thereby strengthening the very institution meant to be restrained. Historical compromises with nationalism, militarism, and redistribution are identified as self-undermining. Anarchism, by contrast, is faulted for neglecting the persistence of power and domination beyond the state and for lacking stable institutional solutions for law, security, and conflict resolution in complex societies. Both traditions are shown to have failed in forming lasting alliances and in developing realistic strategies for transition, thereby weakening resistance to centralization.

Conclusion: The book concludes without resolving the tension between liberalism and anarchism. Instead, it frames their relationship as a productive and necessary conflict within the broader tradition of liberty. Freedom is presented not as a final institutional arrangement but as an ongoing process of limiting power, expanding voluntary cooperation, and maintaining permanent skepticism toward authority.

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About the Author

Michael von Prollius is a German historian, economist, and author specializing in the intersection of ideas, institutions, and historical development. He holds degrees in history and economics and has conducted extensive research spanning ancient history, economic thought, political philosophy, and contemporary policy analysis.

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