



At the Cafe: Conversations on Anarchism

Errico Malatesta , Paul Nursey-Bray (Translator)

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While Malatesta was hiding from the police he regularly went to a cafe in Ancona, Italy. He had shaved off his usual beard but he was still taking a risk. Especially as this wasn't an anarchist cafe, but had a variety of customers including the local policeman. The conversations he had in this cafe became the basis for the dialogues that make up this book.

For the first time in English, Malatesta, in his usual commonsense and matter-of-fact style, sets out and critically analyses the arguments for and against anarchism. Translated by Paul Nursey-Bray, this is a classic defence of anarchism that anticipates the rise of nationalism, fascism and communism.

At the Cafe: Conversations on Anarchism Details

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Lee says

This is a series of dialogues written while Malatesta was "incognito", a shaved beard, in Italy during the late 19th century. He frequented a cafe that was not exclusively anarchist and where the patrons took several different positions that contrasted his. Also, a lot of his discussions were with an agent of the state, and if the guy knew that he had an anarchist agitator on his hands, Malatesta surely would have been arrested.

Of course, if the reader is familiar with Malatesta's works, this book is nothing surprising since the discussions in the book offer the same arguments that anarchists have been debating for the past 150+ years now, but the method Malatesta used during these discussions show how he mastered the art of communication and persuasion. In addition, Malatesta does discuss the role of women and gender inequality which was somehow disregarded in the late 19th century even among the anarchists. Furthermore, the content of the discussion within this book are so valuable because of the variety of positions for and against anarchist-communism, and in Malatesta's usual persuasive method of argumentation, he proves his points and does very well rejecting liberal republicanism, the state, and capitalism.

I enjoyed this book very much. One of the people in the book whose name I forget but is an advocate of "the ideal" suggest that there are no such thing as old arguments, just good and bad ones. Very true.

Parappadarappa says

Great discussion of anarchism in Malatesta's socratic method. Everything explained, even why capitalism fails as a theory

Carlos Panhoca Da silva says

Meio introdutório demais, mas ainda assim interessante.

Mia says

At the Cafe by Errico Malatesta, which I carried in my bag for over a year, has finally been read although, I must say, it is the kind of book I have to discuss, think about, and read again sometime. Its position on anarchy is something to consider, although not to be taken entirely as it is.

Jason Crane says

An extremely clear and persuasive series of conversations about anarchism. Highly recommended.

Oznerollorenzo says

If you're never heard of anarchism before this is a good introductory book. This is not a novel though, the dialogue is crude and simple, only serving to guide the conversation forward and clear misconceptions that a typical person might have. If you already delve in anarchist literature before i suggest you read his other book on anarchy and learn more about the history of this man. He traveled around the world, meeting some great figures like Kropotkin and Bakunin, fighting and inspiring people to the point of being a celebrity in some places. He's a cool guy.

Javier says

Introductory text to the ideas of anarchist-communism as espoused by E. Malatesta.

Andrea says

This is quite a good exposition of what could be, and how we could get there...it is rather theoretical of course but in simple language. And I liked the format of question and answer, although I do doubt that anyone sitting in an Italian cafe would have such a courteous and expository dialog. It certainly makes it easier to read and highlights the common questions that come up in any discussion of a better future. The fundamental one being human nature of course, but surrounding that the need for a government (or not), the need for police and soldiers, the meaning of patriotism, the nature of private property and its role in producing inequality, the meaning of freedom...and there is a wee bit in there about how we can get to the world we want, the role of organizers in preparing the way to a better future. And it touches on the role of violence as well, but only a little which is not surprising given when and where Malatesta was writing and publishing this. It's a quick and very clear read that is thought provoking and which I found incredibly interesting and useful in thinking about social change.
