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Anarchism

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Etymologically, the term *anarchism* derives from two ancient Greek words: $\alpha\nu$, meaning “absence of,” and $\rho\chi\eta$, meaning “authority,” “government,” “ruler,” or “war chief.” Anarchism thus carries a negative charge: the negation of authority, the absence of rulers. *Anarchism* is opposed to all forms of hierarchy, including the state, capitalism, religious institutions, patriarchy, and racism. Yet the term also conveys a positive political project of justice, liberty, equality, and solidarity. According to the basic principles of [p. 73 ↓] anarchism, genuine freedom, equality, and solidarity are logical and political impossibilities in a system or a regime where some rule and others are ruled. All political regimes except anarchy are oppressive and tyrannical, even those claiming to embody the nation or the sovereign people. That is why anarchism can be seen as the ultimate revolutionary ideology and social movement. From the perspective of all elitist ideologies, including liberalism, anarchism is fundamentally flawed because, the argument goes, human beings cannot find satisfaction unless they are under the authority of rulers, be they warlords, priests, nobles, property owners, or elected representatives.

As a political ideology or philosophy, anarchism involves three elements: (1) a positive ideal (anarchy), (2) a critical discourse (opposition to hierarchies and oppression), and (3) the means to achieve this ideal (evolution or revolution, nonviolence or violence, mass movement, or affinity groups). In some cases, it may also involve an ontological conception of human nature. By and large, anarchism adopts a neutral sociological outlook posited on a binary human nature with a positive and a negative pole. The positive pole is the ability to live with others in a spirit of equality and solidarity, while the negative pole is the selfish drive for domination. As demonstrated by Peter Kropotkin and élisée Reclus, it is the social structure that determines which pole prevails. If the structure is hierarchical, then people in a position of authority will become self-indulgent and arrogant and abuse their authority. Only a social environment where no one is in a position to exert power over others can ensure that people's goodness will prevail.

This entry describes the evolution of anarchism from its early roots to its development during the “anarchist century” from the mid-19th century to 1939. It also examines the resurgence of anarchism in the latter part of the 20th century, influenced by postmaterialist thought.

Historical Development of Anarchism

Some commentators assert that anarchism as a political ideology or philosophy has existed since the dawn of humanity and can be found, at least to a degree, in Taoism, stoicism, the works of Zeno, and the concrete experiences of communities on every continent that practiced egalitarianism (among adult males, at any rate). Kropotkin's book *Mutual Aid* is instructive in this connection. Others consider anarchism as belonging essentially to European modernity, with its forerunners emerging in religious social uprisings (the Anabaptists), the English Revolution (the diggers), and the French Revolution (the *enragés*). William Godwin (1756–1836) is generally regarded as the first true anarchist philosopher (*Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 1793). The Frenchmen Anselme Bellegarrigue, editor of *L'anarchie—Journal de L'ordre* (of which only two issues appeared, in 1850), and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon were among the first to call themselves “anarchists.” They were followed by Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876), Louise Michel (1830–1905), Voltairine de Cleyre (1866–1912), Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921), élisée Reclus (1830–1905), Emma Goldman (1869–1940), and Errico Malatesta (1853–1932).

In its early days, anarchism attracted several prestigious fellow travelers, such as the painters Gustave Courbet and Camille Pissarro, the playwright Henrik Ibsen, the literary critic Herbert Read, and the philosophers Emmanuel Mounier and Bertrand Russell. Some famous anarchists, like the geographers Kropotkin and Reclus, were eminent scientists. Contemporary scholars identified with anarchism include Allan Antliff (art history), Normand Baillargeon (education science), Harold Barclay (anthropology), Susan Brown (political philosophy), John Clark (philosophy), David Colson (sociology), Ronald Creagh (sociology), Uri Gordon (social ecology), David Graeber (anthropology), John Holloway (political philosophy), Ruth Kinna (political science), and Robert Wolff (political philosophy).

There is an anarchist studies network linked with the Political Science Association in Britain and a number of scholarly anarchist journals, such as *Anarchist Studies*, *Réfractions*, and *Social Anarchism*. Yet it is in the nature of anarchism to expect intellectual and political activities to go hand in hand (*praxis*), and any division of labor between theorists or scholars and activists is viewed with suspicion. Bakunin held that anarchism acknowledges that some people may be more talented or skilled in a specific area, including theorization. However, there must be no monopoly of expertise. To be free, the people dealing with any expert should have the following: first, [p. 74 ↓] access to other experts in the same field; second, the right to ignore the advice of experts; and, finally, the opportunity to become experts themselves through education and practice. In other words, while expertise may confer influence on its possessor, it should be available to all and not be used to wield power over others. Anarchist ideas are for the most part expressed and disseminated anonymously in self-published independent journals, zines, and websites (see Infoshop) or in the publications of anarchist groups and organizations (e.g., Fédération Anarchiste and Alternative Libertaire in France, Anarchist Black Cross and Northeastern Federation of Anarchist-Communists in the United States, Class War in Great Britain, and Union Communiste Libertaire au Québec in Canada). Individual artists, like the composer John Cage, or trends, such as the punk movement (e.g., Bérurier Noir, Crass), are also identified with anarchism.

Central Elements of Anarchism

The Classical Age of Anarchism

From a historical perspective, there are two distinct moments of anarchism as a social and political movement. First, the classical age of anarchism—or the “anarchist century”—began with the first texts of Proudhon (who in 1840 famously stated, “Property is theft”) and ended with the defeat of the Spanish Revolution in 1939. The period was characterized primarily by the working-class's expression and experience of anarchism, although some activists were already concerned with issues such as women's emancipation (abortion, birth control), free love and bi- or homosexuality,

war and peace, racism and anticolonialism, free education, and vegetarianism. This epoch encompasses the Paris Commune of 1871, the Industrial Workers of the World in the United States, the Makhnovist rebellion during the Russian civil war, and the Spanish Revolution (1936–1939). During this time, anarchism was influential in Central and Latin America, especially in Argentina from the late 1800s through the 1920s. Of note is the year 1919, particularly the “bloody week,” when about 1,000 people were killed and 50,000 arrested during a strike, including many anarchists. In Chile, anarchist organizations boasted 50,000 members in 1910 out of a total population of 3 million. In Mexico, anarchism was known through popular figures such as Ricardo Flores Magon (1874–1922), while in Cuba there were tens of thousands of activists in the 1920s. Anarchist activists and propagandists were very often at the forefront of social struggles and strike movements, such as the campaign for the 8-hour working day. In other parts of the world, anarchism was limited to small groups, active only for short periods of time but nevertheless subjected on occasion to bloody repression. Examples include the Philippines anti-colonialist movement around 1900 as well as the Japanese anarchist and antiwar activist Osugi Sakae (1885–1923) and the anarcha-feminist Itô Noe (1895–1923).

The classical age of anarchism is still widely associated with illegalism (social banditism) and terrorism (“propaganda by deeds”). Around 1900, terrorists assassinated several heads of state (French President Sadi Carnot, 1897; William McKinley, president of the United States, 1901; Russian Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin, 1911; Spanish Prime Minister José Canalejas, 1919; King George I of Greece, 1913), property owners, and military officers, very often in response to the bloody repression of the workers' movement. But at no time did so-called anarchist violence even come close to the level of violence (imprisonment, torture, death penalty, mass murders, etc.) perpetrated against anarchists by agents of the state, private paramilitary units and death squads, nationalist and fascist militias, and authoritarian Marxist militants. Anarchists were targeted by special repressive laws in almost all Western states in the closing decade of the 19th century. Thousands were killed by their former allies in Russia (Leninists) and Spain (Stalinists), and they were among the first political prisoners to enter the Nazi concentration camps in Germany. Violent repression, in conjunction with the heightened popularity and power of authoritarian Marxists following the 1917 Russian Revolution and the Red Army resistance and victory against the

Nazi armies in 1941 to 1945, accounts for anarchism's declining influence within the progressive and revolutionary movements during the first half of the 20th century.

Postmaterialism and the Revival of Anarchism

The second moment of anarchism relates to the so-called postmaterialist context of the 1960s. [p. 75 ↓] With spectacular events such as May 1968 in Paris, anarchism experienced a revival, although authoritarian Marxists (Leninists, Maoists, Trotskists, Guevarists, etc.) remained very influential among radicals. The anarchist resurgence was also connected with environmentalism, feminism, and pacifism, which embodied anarchism not only by advocating the abolition of capitalism, patriarchy, and the state but also by organizing their militant activities with neither formal leaders nor hierarchy, through a strictly egalitarian, participative, and deliberative decision-making process.

The contemporary resurgence of anarchism as a major tendency among radical progressive forces came with the collapse of the Soviet empire, the intellectual crisis of Marxism, and a series of events at the turn of the 21st century that signaled the rise of the so-called antiglobalization movement and resulted in part from anarchist mobilization: the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil (2001) and the mass protests in Seattle, Washington, in 1999; Washington, D.C., and Prague, Czech Republic, in 2000; and Québec, Canada, and Genoa, Italy, in 2001. Many commentators saw this as a “new anarchism,” characterized by (a) the innovative tactics of direct action, (b) the horizontal structure of militant organizations, and (c) the inclusion of pluralist concerns. The direct action tactics were exemplified by the Black Blocs, a street tactic originating in the German *Autonomen* movement of the 1980s; Reclaim the Streets in the United Kingdom; and carnivalesque actions such as the Pink Blocs or the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army. The horizontal structures were inherited from the previous generation of radical ecologists, feminists, and pacifists. Finally, the pluralist concerns, emphasizing cultural and sexual diversity, were clearly due to the influence of the feminist and gay and lesbian movements, although some anarchists were still based in the labor movement or were actively involved in labor issues and anticapitalist mobilizations. In principle, the neo-anarchists

(or “postanarchists”—Hakim Bey, Lewis Call, Todd May, and Saul Newman) regard as equally important the need to oppose the state, war, capitalism and neoliberalism, racism, sexism and heteronormativity, ageism, and specism. This opposition must furthermore take place globally as well as locally and in everyday life. Indigenous movements of resistance, such as the 1994 Zapatista insurrection in Chiapas, Mexico, are viewed as stimulating examples of anarchism in practice, mainly because they are self-organized through participative and deliberative popular assemblies (the Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred has coined the term *anarcho-indigenism*).

Currents in Anarchist Thought

Historically, there have been several anarchist currents, each with its particular position on what is primary (the individual or the community, liberty or equality), its priorities (the emancipation of workers or women, the environment), and its organizational structure (mass movements, unions or communes, affinity groups). Very often, they have collaborated in solidarity, at times they have engaged in intense debates, and sometimes they have clashed.

Individual(ist) Anarchism

Individualist anarchism, according to Max Stirner, 1806–1856; Lysander Spooner, 1808–1887; and Benjamin Tucker, 1854–1939, emphasizes liberty and autonomy and denies that there is something other than individuals to which an individual must submit (e.g., nation/motherland, class/proletariat). However, such anarchists are as a rule deeply concerned by the exploitation of the working class and the oppression of women and may very well take part in social struggles, but through affinity groups rather than mass movements. They generally believe that free association can be beneficial for the individual's happiness and interests, and through the years they have been involved in rural or urban communes and in squats. However, membership in an association must be totally voluntary, with the freedom to join or leave at any time.

Libertarianism and *anarcho-capitalism* are sometimes used as synonyms of individual anarchism, although the latter is in fact a kind of radical liberalism, advocating free

market capitalism for property [p. 76 ↓] owners and wagedworkers, under the protection of either a state whose function is strictly limited to the enforcement of law and order or, in the absence of a state, of private security agencies. These views imply that property owners are in a position of authority and power over their employees, an idea inconsistent with individual as well as collective anarchism. *Proprietarian* is the term coined by Murray Bookchin to describe libertarianism.

Like Marxism, anarchism views capitalism as an exploitative system, protected by the state, which also exploits workers to sustain itself. This said, anarchism offers a variety of economic proposals for abolishing capitalism and reorganizing the production of goods and services.

Collectivist Anarchism

Proudhon proposed mutualism (from the Mutualists, a 19th-century secret society of weavers in Lyon, France). He suggested that just as the hive belongs to all bees, the means of production and exchange must be collective. However, each member of the collective—a free association—should share to some degree in the worst tasks. This job rotation would provide everyone with a better knowledge and understanding of the whole working process. Higher functionaries, such as architects and engineers, would be assigned through election, but decisions and working rules would be made collectively through a participative deliberative process. The exchange value would be assessed and then converted into tickets of hours of work under the supervision of a People's Bank, which would also offer interest-free credit. Consequently, there is no need for a violent revolution; workers need only organize among themselves to be free.

Some anarchists have identified serious issues arising from Proudhon's economic proposal: Should the evaluation of hours of works take into account job intensity and risk, required training and skills, and the worker's social responsibilities (such as dependents)? Moreover, this remains a very individualistic model of work organization, which draws on a bygone tradition of craftsmanship that values the artisan's self-reliance and personal pride. Finally, according to some, Proudhon is not a true anarchist, because he devotes considerable energy to demonstrating the physical, intellectual, moral, and political superiority of men over women, as evidenced by the

more than 500 pages of blatant misogyny and antifeminism in his *De la Justice dans la Révolution et l'église* (1860).

Anarcho-Syndicalist Anarchism

Anarcho-syndicalists, identified with Rudolf Rocker (1873–1958), see labor unions (*syndicats* in French) as the spearhead of social emancipation and revolution and the seed of the future anarchist society. Property owners—the bourgeoisie—and the state create nothing; they are mere parasites of workers' productive activity. Hence, if workers unite and stop working for their exploiters, the system will collapse and revolution will ensue. The general strike is therefore the main instrument for the realization of anarchy. Thereafter, global production will be structured according to “industrial groups” in each sector of production and integrated in an “economic federation.” However, collective decision making would remain a bottom-up process centered on the general assembly of every place of work. Economic production based on human needs will ensure that all receive the goods and services they require.

Anarcho-Communism

With anarcho-communism, identified with Peter Kropotkin and Alexander Berkman (1870–1936), among others, the state becomes the direct target of a revolutionary mass movement. Although anarcho-communism often stresses the importance of the workers' movement, it is more open than many other anarchist trends to peasants, women, and the *lumpenproletariat*. Adopting a geographical perspective, anarcho-communism regards the urban or rural commune as the center of the new society. After the revolution, the communes may join in a federation, although the decision-making function will be situated at the local level, in keeping with a bottom-up process. In the absence of exploiters, such as the bourgeoisie and state agents, production output will necessarily surpass society's needs. Anarchy will therefore lead to a situation of abundance where all will receive whatever goods and services they need and want.

Working inside Versus outside the Political System

“Libertarian municipalism” is a contemporary version of anarchism, primarily developed in the 1980s by Janet Biehl and Murray Bookchin. Libertarian municipalism lays special emphasis on [p. 77 ↓] ecological issues, contending that these could be dealt with more effectively at the local level but only if municipal institutions were deliberative and participative. Bookchin even suggests that anarchists get involved in municipal politics, a view that has been criticized by other anarchists as obviously inconsistent with the antistate anarchist principle.

Bookchin is not the only self-proclaimed anarchist calling for some sort of involvement in official politics. Authors and activists like Colin Ward and Paul Goodman, or Philippe Corcuff, in France, who coined the term *libertarian social democracy*, argue that some anarchism in the official system is better than no anarchism at all. They advocate reforms with regard to issues, laws and regulations concerning individual freedom, free education, free sexuality, and so on. According to Noam Chomsky, it is the duty of today's anarchists to support the state and its welfare programs against neoliberalism and capitalism, or what he calls “private tyrannies.” Chomsky is even in favor of voting for the Democratic Party in the United States, though he admits that mass social movements are still necessary to push the political elite in the right direction.

Others argue that it is possible to have anarchy here and now but outside the official system. For instance, the green anarchist Clark advocates “microcommunities.” In today's network of squats, for instance, activists who align themselves with anarchism take over unoccupied buildings or land and try to live outside capitalism as much as possible, offering free meals and rooms to travelers and traveling to participate in campaigns of solidarity with immigrants or with antiwar and anti-capitalist movements.

Feminism and Anarchism

The distinctions between various forms of anarchism are not as schematic in reality as what is generally presented in books, articles, and encyclopedias. Other strands of anarchism do not fit perfectly within the classical economic and political framework. Anarcha-feminism—for instance, is a feminist version of anarchism, devoted to fighting patriarchy both in society at large and within the Marxist and anarchist networks, where misogynistic and antifeminist attitudes are not uncommon (witness the term *manarchy*, recently coined by U.S. activists to describe inequalities among anarchist men and women). In the 19th century, authors and militants like Goldman and de Cleyre denounced the “sex slavery” of marriage and promoted free love. In the 1930s, the anarcha-feminist autonomous association *Mujeres Libres* boasted some 30,000 members in Spain and was an active force during the Revolution. It focused on education for girls and women, combat training for women, medical help for wounded fighters, and the emancipation of prostitutes through psychological and material support and the assassination of certain pimps. From the 1960s onward, Peggy Kornegger and Susan Brown, among others, highlighted the similarities between anarchism and feminism, arguing that, to be consistent, anarchists should be feminists (although some feminists, such as the liberal or Marxist statist feminists, may not be anarchists, i.e., opposing all forms of hierarchy and inequality). “Third-wave” feminism, with its emphasis on individual sexual choice and *queer* identities, is sometimes identified with anarchism. Nevertheless, the anarcha-feminist Claire Snyder warns “choice feminists” that under patriarchy, women's sexual life may not be totally free from the external control of men or from “internal tyrants,” the name given by Goldman to the socialization—internal fears and false beliefs—that undermines women's freedom of will and choice. Finally, with regard to economic production, the anarchist and feminist Carol Ehrlich notes that it is not only the bourgeoisie as a class that exploits waged workers but also men who exploit women's work, which is often undertaken with no monetary compensation.

Anarchism in the 21st Century

Today, a large number of principles closely linked to anarchism for the past 150 years have become, for many people, ordinary moral and political liberalism: the 8-hour working day; education for all, boys and girls alike; women's freedom of choice with regard to matters such as contraception and abortion; freedom in sexuality and love, including bi- and homosexual rights and the right to divorce or to cohabit without marrying; freedom of consciousness with respect to religion and state dogma; and freedom to refuse military service. While not self-identifying with anarchism, several influential [p. 78 ↓] contemporary scholars, especially in France and Italy, have adopted an anarchist approach in their work on state power (Giorgi Agamben), political representation (Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard), micropolitics and resistance (Gilles Deleuze), and the reorganization of production and resistance based on egalitarian principles (Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri). Others, such as Donatella della Porta, are investigating new social movements that practice “direct democracy,” which in fact amounts to studying anarchism in action.

This implicitly or explicitly anarchist activism within the “movement for global justice” is the target of state repression, even though anarchism does not represent a significant threat to social, political, and economic liberalism, as might have been the case at the turn of the 20th century. Thus, there were legitimate grounds for former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's jibe about the summit-hopping “anarchist traveling circus.” Nevertheless, anarchism provides the most vocal and radical left-wing criticism of liberalism. During the 2001 G8 (Group of Eight) Summit in Genoa, after violent clashes between police officers and protesters—one of whom was shot dead at point-blank range—Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien warned about the “anarchists who want to destroy democracy.” In Greece and Italy, anarchist networks have been targeted by the police in recent years: Many have been arrested, and in Greece, one person was killed in 2008. The Federal Bureau of Investigation and Scotland Yard have also been preoccupied since the late 1990s with anarchists reputedly training for terrorist actions (which never occurred). Even certain political scientists, such as Tim Dunne of Exeter University, claim that anarchist activists and Al Qaeda militants are very similar in nature. In sum, anarchism said goodbye to the 20th century much as it had welcomed

it—that is, cast in the role of a potential “terrorist” threat, the number one internal public enemy.

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See also:

- [Anarchy](#)
- [Capitalism](#)
- [Democracy, Direct](#)
- [Libertarianism](#)
- [Power](#)
- [State](#)
- [Terrorism, International](#)

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