ANARCHISM


Quine, Willard van Orman. From a Logical Point of View: 9 Logico-Philosophical Essays. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953. A collection which includes some of Quine’s early papers, especially “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” in which he launches his critique of analyticity.


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ANARCHISM. The term anarchy comes from an ancient Greek word meaning “without a leader or ruler.” However, proponents of anarchism have most often used the term to refer to a natural state of society in which people are not governed by submission to human-made laws or to any external authority. Anarchism is above all a moral doctrine concerned with maximizing the personal freedom of individuals in society. To achieve this end, leading anarchist social theorists have tended to offer critical analyses of (1) the state and its institutional framework; (2) economics; and (3) religion. Anarchist hostility to the state is reflected in the rejection of the view popularized by contract theorists that a government’s sovereignty is legitimated by the consent of its subjects. Anarchists contend that no contractual arrangement among human beings justifies the establishment of a ruling body (government) that subordinates individuals to its authority. From their observations of the historical development of the state, anarchist thinkers such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865) and Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921) concluded that all forms of government have been used as instruments for establishing monopolies that favor the propertyed and privileged. Anarchists also argue that the all-embracing authority of the state allows it to exercise undue influence over the lives of its citizens. It is further maintained by anarchists that the state, using laws and the organs of power at its disposal, can control not only citizens’ public and private behavior but also their economic lives. As such, the state, in all its forms, is condemned as an unnecessary evil.

From an economic standpoint, most anarchists have identified themselves as members of the anticapitalist socialist movement. In common with socialists, anarchists see capitalism as a system ruled by elites, one that exploits the working or productive members of society economically and represses them culturally and spiritually. Accordingly, anarchists argue
that the emancipation of the worker will only be achieved by completely destroying the pillars of capitalism.

Anarchists differ as to what form of economic arrangements should replace capitalism. Collectivists and mutualists insist that private ownership of the fruits of individuals’ labor is desirable, while anarchist communists maintain that individual freedom can only be achieved in a society where all material goods and natural resources are placed under common ownership. Still another group of anarchists known as individualists have advocated a system of “labor for labor” exchange, which they believe could operate in accordance with natural market forces.

Anticlericalism is another important dimension of anarchist thinking. Though most anarchists are materialists, they are not opposed to spirituality per se: indeed anarcho-pacifists such as Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) were self-identified as Christians. Rather, anarchists condemn organized religion, which they see as an agent of cultural repression. They have, for example, attacked the Catholic Church among other religious institutions on the grounds that it has historically served as a means of empowering church government and not of enriching the spiritual lives of its adherents. Anarchists further contend that the church has consistently acted as an ally of secular governments and therefore forms part of the general system of state repression that operates against the common person.

Because the heyday of anarchism as an ideological movement was during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the focus here will be on the core beliefs of key anarchist theorists in this period. Thus a discussion of other, less historically significant anarchist strands such as pacifism and individualism will be mentioned only in passing. The impact that classical anarchist theory has had on recent political and social movements will be summarized in the concluding section.

Anarchist Principles in Context
The ideas associated with modern anarchism can be traced to the period of the French Revolution (1789–1799), although they did not crystallize into a formal political doctrine until the middle part of the nineteenth century. The first book that offered the clearest intimation of the anarchist conception of society was William Godwin’s *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice and Its Influence upon General Virtue and Happiness* (London, 1793). In this, Godwin identifies the state as the main source of all social ills. In order for humans to live freely and harmoniously, Godwin advocates the establishment of a stateless society in which individuals are no longer subject to the economic exploitation of others. Despite its antistatist message, the ideas found in Godwin’s magnum opus belong to a tradition of British political radicalism that cannot be classified as anarchist. In fact his work had its greatest influence on the liberal thinkers of his age as well as on Robert Owen, John Gray, and other early socialist reformers.

Of far greater significance to the development of modern anarchist ideology is the French social philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, whose indictment of private property under capitalism was made famous in his book *What is Property?* (1840). Proudhon’s main contributions to the anarchist view of society lay in his theories of mutualism and federalism. In the former he argued that the exploitative capitalist system could be undermined by creating economic organizations such as the People’s Bank, an institution of mutual credit meant to restore the equilibrium between what individuals produce and what they consume. Because he believed that concentrating political power in the hands of the state militated against the economic forms he was proposing, Proudhon argued for a society in which power radiated from the bottom upward and was distributed along federal or regional lines.

Though he himself never belonged to any party or political organization, Proudhon’s writings inspired a substantial following among freethinkers, liberal intellectuals, and workers across Europe, particularly in France and Spain. One of his most famous disciples was the Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876). Like Proudhon, Bakunin was an eclectic thinker who was constantly revising and reformulating his views on society. More so than Proudhon, who did not believe that the transition to an anarchist society demanded violent and sweeping changes, Bakunin gave both physical and ideological expression to the view that revolutionary upheaval was a necessary and unavoidable process of social development, a view summed up in his oft-quoted dictum, “The urge to destroy is also a creative urge.” At the core of his creed was collective, by which he meant that the land and means of production should be collectively owned and that future society should be organized around voluntary associations—such as peasant communes or trade unions—that were not regulated or controlled by any form of government. Too impatient to set forth a systematic exegesis of his antiauthoritarian beliefs, Bakunin tended to express his concepts in tracts that could be used by revolutionary bodies (for example, the Alliance of Social Democracy) with which he was associated. Indeed Bakunin’s most enduring legacy to anarchism resides in his conception of revolutionary transformation. According to him, the dispossessed and most repressed elements of society—particularly the working classes and peasantry in economically backward countries such as Spain, Italy, and Russia—were by nature revolutionary and only needed proper leadership to rise up against their oppressors. Because he adamantly rejected the Marxian notion that conquering political power was a precondition for overthrowing capitalism, Bakunin was convinced that the exploited masses should be led into revolt by a small and dedicated group of individuals who were acting in their interests. It was his belief that revolution could not be achieved until the state was completely abolished, which brought him into conflict with Karl Marx and his followers, who insisted that a “dictatorship of the proletariat” was a necessary phase in the transition to a stateless society (communism).

Bakunin’s antipolitical conception of revolutionary change as well as his forceful repudiation of the authoritarian communist principles embodied in the Marxism of his day drove a wedge between his adherents in the First International (1864–1876) and those of Karl Marx, thus establishing a divide in the European socialist movement that would never be bridged.
However, not all anarchists were hostile toward the idea of communism. Another Russian aristocrat turned revolutionary, Peter Kropotkin, developed over the course of his lifetime a sociological theory of anarchism that combined the anti-authoritarian beliefs espoused by his predecessors in the anarchist movement with those of communism. Unlike Proudhon and Bakunin, both of whom believed in the right of individual possession of products produced from one’s labor, Kropotkin advocated an economic system based on the communal ownership of all goods and services that operated on the socialist principle “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.” By distributing society’s wealth and resources in this way, Kropotkin and other anarchist communists believed that everyone, including those who were unproductive, would be able to live in relative abundance.

Kropotkin’s greatest contributions to anarchist theory, however, were his attempts to present anarchism as an empirically verifiable worldview, one that was based on “a mechanical explanation of world phenomena, embracing the whole of nature.” Following in the positivist tradition laid down by Auguste Comte (1798–1857), Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), and other forerunners of modern social science, Kropotkin believed that the study of society was analogous to that of the world of nature. In *Modern Science and Anarchism* (1912), for example, Kropotkin contends that the anarchist method of sociological enquiry is that of the exact natural sciences. “Its aim,” he says, “is to construct a synthetic philosophy comprehending in one generalization all the phenomena of nature—and therefore also the life of societies.” In developing his views on human nature, Kropotkin went far in extending the analogy between society and the natural world. Like the Social Darwinists of his era, Kropotkin maintained that all human behavior was a reflection of our biological condition. But while most Social Darwinists argued that a “tooth and nail” impulse in the struggle for existence was the dominant natural law governing the evolution of human behavior, Kropotkin insisted that the instinct of cooperation was an even more important factor in this process. According to him, it is the species in nature that shows the greatest tendency toward mutual aid—not cutthroat competition—that is the one most likely to survive and flourish over time. By arguing in this way, Kropotkin was attempting to demonstrate that anarchism was a highly evolved state of human nature but one that could not be obtained until the state and other coercive institutions were completely abolished.

The relationship between anarchism and violence. The efforts of Kropotkin and other anarchist thinkers to define anarchism as a rational and practicable doctrine were overshadowed by the negative publicity generated by the violence-prone elements of the movement. Beginning with the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 and continuing up to the turn of the century, when the American president William McKinley was murdered in 1901 by a lone gunman, anarchists everywhere were viewed as sociopaths who terrorized society by throwing bombs and assassinating heads of state. The fact that not all of these public outrages were committed by anarchists (Alexander II was killed by nihilists) or individuals who were representative of the movement as a whole did little to dispel the exceedingly negative image of anarchists that was being projected by the popular press and government authorities.

The violent practices that were now associated with anarchism were largely the product of an ill-defined tactic known as “propaganda by the deed,” a direct-action policy advocated by some anarchists from the late 1870s on. That violent and even criminal deeds were necessary to advance the anarchist movement appealed especially to a small number of disaffected idealists who were convinced that the only way to intimidate the ruling classes and overturn the capitalist system was to disrupt the daily routines of bourgeois society. Killing public figures close to the centers of political and religious power was one way of doing this. Bombing cafés, robbing banks, and destroying churches and similar hierarchical institutions were also seen as justifiable means to a revolutionary end.

A number of the perpetrators of “propaganda by the deed” were influenced by a highly individualistic strain of anarchist thought that became popular among déclassé intellectuals and artists around the turn of the twentieth century. A seminal figure in the individualist branch of anarchist thinking was the German philosopher Max Stirner (1806–1856). In his *The Ego and His Own* (1845), Stirner espoused a philosophy that was premised on the belief that all freedom is essentially derived from self-liberation. Because he identified the “ego” or “self” as the sole moral compass of humankind, he condemned government, religion, and any other formal institution that threatened one’s personal freedom. It was his abiding concern with the individual’s uniqueness and not his views as a social reformer that made Stirner attractive to certain segments of the anarchist community at the end of the nineteenth century. This was particularly true not just of the devotees of violence in Europe but also of the nonrevolutionary individualist anarchists in the United States. For example, the foremost representative of this strand of anarchism in the United States, Benjamin R. Tucker (1854–1939), took from Stirner’s philosophy the view that self-interest or egoistic desire was needed to preserve the “sovereignty of the individual.”

**Spiritual anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism.** Parallel to the terrorist acts committed at this time, the Christian pacifist Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) was developing an antiauthoritarian current of thinking that, in its broadest sense, can be regarded as belonging to the anarchist tradition. Tolstoy promoted a form of religious anarchism that was based on the “law of supreme love” as defined by his personal (anti-doctrinal) reading of the Scriptures. Though he did not see himself as an anarchist, he nevertheless believed that in order for men and women to live in a morally coherent world it was necessary to destroy the state and its institutions. Because of his rejection of the use of force and violence, Tolstoy and his followers advocated civil disobedience, or nonviolent resistance, as a means of achieving the stateless and communally based society they envisioned.

It was also around this time that anarchist doctrine experienced another significant metamorphosis. From the late 1890s until the 1930s, anarchist activity was increasingly centered in working-class cultural and economic organizations,
and the tactics and strategy of the movement were grounded in the theory of revolutionary syndicalism. While not wholly abandoning the use of violence, the anarcho-syndicalists believed that, against the organized forces of big government and monopoly capitalism, the revolutionary clan of the workers could be most effectively channeled through trade union organizations. Using tactics such as the general strike, which was meant to paralyze the economy by linking shutdowns in different industries, the anarcho-syndicalists believed that it would be possible to create the general conditions for a complete collapse of capitalism and the state. Anarcho-syndicalism became an important force in the labor movements in parts of Latin America (Mexico, Argentina) and in European countries such as Italy, France, and Spain. Its greatest impact was felt in Spain. During the Second Republic (1931–1936) and continuing through the civil war period (1936–1939), anarcho-syndicalism developed into a powerful mass movement. At its peak the anarcho-syndicalist organizations known as the CNT-FAI (National Confederation of Workers and Federation of Iberian Anarchists) counted more than 1.5 million adherents. Their influence over the course of events during the civil war was most dramatically illustrated by the fact that they set up and ran thousands of industrial and agricultural collectives throughout the Republican zone. The triumph of Franco’s Nationalist forces in 1939, followed by the outbreak of another global war that same year, sounded the death knell for anarcho-syndicalism not only in Spain but in other Western European countries as well.

It deserves mention here that, by the time World War II began, anarchism’s reach extended across the globe. Besides taking root in the Americas, the doctrine had penetrated parts of East Asia and even the subcontinent. In both China and Japan, for example, Western anarchist ideas influenced leading social thinkers such as Mao Zedong and labor organizers who were seeking to establish socialism in those countries. However, the emergence of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes of both the right and left in the 1930s and late 1940s effectively quashed the libertarian tendencies that had been developing up to then. It would take another forty years before anarchist ideas would be resurrected by tiny protest groups (mostly in Japan) that wanted to express their cultural and intellectual dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Contemporary Anarchism
While the Spanish Civil War, World War II (1939–1945), and the rise of totalitarian communist regimes after 1949 were events that effectively ended the further development of the historical anarchist movement, anarchist ideas and sensibilities were not as easily repressed. The political and cultural protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s in Europe and the Americas saw a resurgence of interest in anarchism. Feminists, ecologists, student radicals, pacifists, and others who were eager to question the prevailing social and moral preconceptions of modern society held by both the left and the right were drawn above all to the doctrine’s iconoclasm. At this time, elements from a variety of nonlibertarian groups—the Situationists in France, for example—freely borrowed anarchist ideas in developing their own ideological positions.

Anarchism has also been enriched by the thinking of some of the twentieth century’s leading philosophers, political activists, artists, and intellectuals. Bertrand Russell, Herbert Read, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Buber, Albert Camus, Michel Foucault, Paul Goodman, Lewis Mumford, and Noam Chomsky are among the notable figures who have been associated with anarchist beliefs and values.

From the late twentieth century on, anarchism has continued to branch out in different directions. Anarchist ideas have been influential in the development of radical feminism and the Green and antiglobalist movements that have spread across Europe and the Americas. Contemporary anarchofeminism has its roots in the writings and activism of historically important figures like Emma Goldman, Voltairine de Cleyre, and Federica Montseny. Goldman was among the first female anarchists to emphasize that the emancipation of women in society must begin with psychological change within women themselves. By calling on women to struggle against the repressive and hierarchical structures that dominated their personal lives, Goldman anticipated late-twentieth-century anarchofeminists, who have insisted that the “personal is political” and have developed a radical critique of everyday life. Anarchist principles also have been adopted by some of the more radical ecological movements of postindustrial societies. Libertarian social ecologists such as Murray Bookchin have attempted to extend the traditional anarchist demand to emancipate society from government rule to our natural environment, calling for an end to human beings’ dominating and exploitative relationship with nature.

Perhaps because of its shock value in an age crowded by political neologisms, the anarchist label has also been applied to groups that do not properly belong to the anarchist tradition. For example, the term “anarcho-capitalism” is sometimes used to refer to libertarian economic and social thinkers such as Ayn Rand, David Friedman, and other pro-capitalists who hold strong antistatist views. But even though they share the anarchist’s contempt for state authority, their commitment to free enterprise and laissez-faire principles places them completely at odds with classical anarchist thinking and practice.

Ever since the Cold War ended in 1991, small groups of anarchists around the world have been in the forefront of the antiglobalization movement. Like their predecessors, modern anarchist activists seek to expose the adverse power relationships that affect our daily lives. They are particularly concerned with the impact that the global expansion of corporate leviathans has had on society, not least because of the seemingly unlimited ways in which this advanced form of capitalism can manipulate and control the lives of individuals. While a few anarchist groups still resort to direct-action methods to get their revolutionary message across, a growing number are turning to advanced technologies like the Internet to promote their cause. In short, whether one admires or abhors anarchist principles, it cannot be denied that anarchism offers a critical perspective of authority that appears to be endlessly relevant to those who want to sharpen their awareness of the boundaries of personal freedom.

See also Communism; Feminism; Marxism; Protest, Political; Social Darwinism; Socialism.
ANCESTOR WORSHIP

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES


SECONDARY SOURCES


George Esenwein

ANCESTOR WORSHIP. Ancestor worship is the reverent devotion expressed by descendants for their deceased forebears through a culturally prescribed set of rituals and observances. The prominence of ancestors as a focus of worship within a broader religious tradition is common in many parts of the world, including Asia, Africa, and Native America, but there are few unifying characteristics cross-culturally. Commonalities include:

Only those deceased of appropriate relationship to the living and who have undergone the necessary rites de passage are worshiped.

Those that are worshiped usually are recognized by name or title, often a special posthumous one.

Services to the ancestors frequently include offerings and libations.

That ancestor worship is related to the animistic belief in a spirit or soul surviving the body after death, as proposed by early anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917), is reasonable, since it is this spirit essence of the ancestor that is believed to continue its relationship with descendants. That ancestor worship is related to the earliest stage of religious expression among humans, however, as Tylor’s theory further suggested, is certainly debatable. Other controversies in the study of ancestor worship include whether practices in honor of the deceased constitute actual worship; the extent to which linear versus collateral relatives comprise the worshiping group; the ways in which the living are influenced by the dead; and the individual, family, kin group, or regional variability in practice that can be present in a single cultural tradition.

Ancestors in Africa and Asia

In his work among the Tallensi of Ghana, Meyer Fortes emphasizes the significance of ancestor worship to patrilineage unification and lineage or segment differentiation. In particular, the father–oldest surviving son relationship is emphasized, the latter having the primary responsibility for performing the appropriate rituals and service. In general, placement of an African ancestral shrine and the performance of its services can also relate to and influence descendants’ genealogical position and seniority.

In China, Daoist, Confucian, Buddhist, and folk concepts have contributed to the practice of ancestor worship in which heads of patrilineages are emphasized but other patrilineal relatives are included. There are three prominent sites for ancestor worship: family shrines, lineage halls, and tombs or graveyards of relatives. Proper placement and orientation of the latter will take geomancy (feng-shui) into account. Physical remains of the deceased are laid to rest in the tomb/graveyard, which serves as the site of public rituals; ancestral tablets represent the deceased in shrine and temple, in which their spirits are housed, and for which more private and personal observances are made. While the ancestors wield significant authority and influence in the lives of their living descendants, the latter care for and look after their ancestors—for example, by burning paper money at New Year’s to contribute to their ancestors’ bounty or prosperity.