

## **Anarchy and anarchism**

### **What is anarchy?**

Anarchy is the absence of centralized authority or government.

The term was first formulated negatively  
by early modern political theorists  
such as Thomas Hobbes [question: who is hobbes?]  
who regarded it  
as a condition of chaos, terror, and  
violence.

In the nineteenth century, however,  
it came to be seen  
as an alternative to state coercion  
and economic exploitation.  
Historically, anarchism is based  
on the assertion that  
people are capable of harmony  
but are deformed and oppressed  
by political and economic institutions.

Its most active early promoter was  
Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865),  
whose influential "What is Property?" (1840)  
argued that "property is theft"  
and proposed that  
small associations of free producers  
replace capitalism and the state.

**question**      **how is proudhon's understanding of property tied to Marx's (surplus**  
**value...)?**

In the next generation,  
the more radical Mikhail Bakunin  
proposed the complete replacement  
of private property  
by collectivism.

Anarchism gradually lost ground to socialism  
and particularly communism  
during the late 19th and 20th centuries.

Revolutionary anarchism  
peaked in the West  
with a wave of assassinations around 1900.

Anarcho-syndicalism,  
which drew on Proudhon's ideas  
and advocated the devolution of power  
to workers' councils,  
played an important role  
in the short-lived Spanish republic  
of the 1930s.

Contemporary anarchism

plays a role in opposition to globalization  
and neoliberalism on the world stage.

## **Socialism**

### **question      what is socialism?**

A form of social organization  
that prioritizes the common ownership of property  
and the collective control  
of economic production.

Socialism emerged from a diverse array  
of social experiments and doctrines  
developed in the 1820s.

These reflected both excitement  
about the possibilities  
of a rational, ordered, industrial society...

and growing concern  
about the actual effects  
of industrialization  
under the conditions  
of private accumulation  
and market capitalism.

### **question      what are the ill effects of industrialization?**

During its first decades,  
socialism was pursued primarily by small,  
utopian communities.

The transformation of socialism into a political doctrine occurred in the 1850s-70s,  
especially as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels  
developed their own account of socialism  
as the outcome of a revolutionary class  
struggle between workers and  
capitalists.

By the late nineteenth century,  
socialism had developed  
into a political doctrine  
associated with  
--newly formed trade unions  
--mass political parties

(e.g., the Social Democratic Party in Germany and the Labour Party in Britain).

These groups supported diverse views of socialism,  
from the incremental and ameliorative goals of many trade unionists to  
the radical, revolutionary agendas  
of Marx, Engels, and the anarchists.

These divisions became increasingly pronounced over time.

Moderates [like Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein]  
advocated working for socialism  
within the democratic political process  
(a model increasingly known as social democracy).

Others, such as Lenin, advocated violent revolution.

**question      how would bakunin and kropotkin align with this?**

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917  
and the end of World War I  
marked the definitive split between moderates  
and revolutionaries.

Post 1945:      West, welfare state  
                    East, state socialism

Noncommunist socialist parties  
remain prominent in many countries in Europe  
and the rest of the world.

Most now pursue agendas  
associated with increasing social welfare  
rather than fundamental economic transformations.

**Bakunin, Mikhail (1814-1876)**

**question      what do you know about him?**

A Russian anarchist and revolutionary  
who developed an influential critique of the state  
and vied with Karl Marx  
for control  
of the First International (1864-1876).

**question      what was bakunin's problem with marx?**

Bakunin saw authoritarian tendencies  
in Marx's socialism  
and especially opposed Marx's emphasis  
on the need for  
a centralized proletarian regime.

**question      what were bakunin's problems with 'the state'?**

For Bakunin, the state in any form  
became a mechanism of mystified power,  
controlled by an elite.

In this respect it mirrored religion--  
indeed Bakunin saw the two  
as parallel historical developments.

**question      what is the alternative to the state?**

The alternative, Bakunin suggested,  
was a decentralized federation of communes  
that guaranteed relative autonomy  
and control  
over the means of production  
at the local level.

The State and Anarchism (1873)

Bakunin directed a similar critique  
against scientific elites,  
the social sciences,  
and the scientific pretensions of Marxism.

Bakunin also stressed  
that the destruction of the old order  
was a prerequisite for socialism...

and thus he strongly opposed Hegelian  
and liberal reformist notions of progress

**question      did you note any contradictions in his ideas?**

His theory of revolution was contradictory, however... sometimes leaning on the notion of  
spontaneous action and at other times  
emphasizing the need  
for conspiracy and careful direction.

The latter, in any event,  
better characterized his actions  
during the First International.

Ultimately, Bakunin's apocalyptic views  
and associations with nihilists  
such as Sergei Nechayev  
(accused of murdering a fellow conspirator)...

contributed to a gradual loss of credibility  
and to his eventual expulsion from the First Intl.  
Although Bakunin's split with Marx  
fragmented the revolutionary movement in Western Europe, he had  
a lasting effect on the anarchist movements  
in Russia, Italy, Switzerland, and Spain.

Throughout his career,  
he founded actual and sometimes imaginary  
revolutionary networks,  
whose varying degrees of political realism  
often perplexed his followers.

Among his more effective organizations was the  
International Alliance of Social Democracy,  
which he conceived  
as a forward-thinking movement

within the First International...

the alliance advocated the definitive abolition of classes  
and the political, economic, and social  
equalization of the sexes.

**Kropotkin, Peter** (1842-1921)

Russian nobleman, and main proponent of anarchocommunism.

He was a geographer who carried out explorations of Siberia, Finland, and Manchuria before devoting his life to political activities.

Modern Science and Anarchism (1903)

**question**      **did you pick up on his interest in darwin?**

Kropotkin believed that Darwin's theory of evolution, properly applied,  
showed that human beings  
are social creatures who flourish best  
in small communities  
cemented together by mutual aid  
and voluntary associations

The centralized state...  
with its apparatus of coercion...  
represents a backward step, or obstacle to the  
implementation of this ideal.

Reading question:

What is the flaw in Winnie Verloc's character?

MIT OpenCourseWare  
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21G.061 Advanced Topics: Plotting Terror in European Culture  
Spring 2004

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