

Political Ideas – Anarchism (non-core ideas)

Politics Edexcel and AQA – revision notes – based on Hodder Education revision guides

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- (1) The origins of anarchism.
- (2) The different types of anarchism.
- (3) Core ideas and principles.
- (4) Differing views and tensions.

(1) The origins of anarchism

Anarchism is an overarching concept incorporating various political movements that share the idea that **the state needs to be abolished**.

The reason: it is either unnecessary or at worst, it is exploitative and evil because of its coercive powers that deny the individual of its rights and freedom.

Anarchism as a political idea is rooted in philosophical anarchism in the 19th century. It argues that human beings are perfectly capable of moral perfection if society would be reformed and replaced by liberty.

Two key types

- (1) **Collectivist anarchism** = associated with communism, that is associated with socialism. The belief that humanity ought to return to natural self-governing communities; Marx and Engels, Peter Kropotkin. It is anchored in collectivism that is based on the assumption that human beings prefer, and are naturally inclined, to work together.
- (2) **Individual anarchism** = based on the assumption that mankind is not essentially social but rather, individuals naturally prefer to be free, and function as freely as possible as an individual. Thus, all forms of social and political arrangements are considered to be coercive and unnatural; Emma Goldman. Thinkers advocating individual anarchism call for violent resistance against oppressive entities, institutions and sociopolitical arrangements.

Peter-Joseph Proudhon = a libertarian socialist who is considered to be the first thinker to use the term 'anarchism' in a positive manner, because unlike other anarchist thinkers he advocated a peaceful transition, rather than a revolutionary violent resistance to oppression.

(2) Different types of anarchism

2.1: Collectivist forms.

2.2: Individualistic forms.

For anarchists, the state represents the concentration of coercive power in political institutions. The state is unnecessary and/or coercive and thereby it deprives the individual of its freedoms and liberties.

2.1: Collectivist forms

- **Human nature** is fundamentally social.
- Humans prefer to pursue goals collectively, in **collaboration**.
- **Common ownership** of wealth and goods.
- Society should be based on **equality** between individuals.
- **Mikhail Bakunin** = individuals are born with equal intelligence, moral sense and capacity for rationality. The state is a threat to individual liberties and natural inclinations; it distorts innate capabilities by its oppressive mechanisms.
- **Natural laws** are rooted in the sense of community, society is "the tree of freedom and liberty is its fruit".

Key thinker

Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876)

Key work: *God and the State* (1882)

Key concepts and ideas

- **Collectivist anarchism**.
- Famous also for his theories on federalism, close to Marxism until the split over ideas of anarchism.
- **Propaganda by the deed** = violent political action to trigger a revolution to overthrow the state.
- **Human sociability** = abolish private property to be replaced by collectivism.
- Power is oppressive and the state must be abolished with an immediate transition into a stateless society.
- **Power corrupts** those who exercise it.
- Natural law will dominate the **stateless society**.

- Advocated a **federal system** wherein people will divide themselves into communities with no private property and therefore equality.

Key quote

“Where the state begins, individual liberty ceases, and vice versa.”

Strands of collective anarchism

- **Anarcho-communism**

Key thinker

Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921)

Key work: *Fields, Factories and Workshops* (1912)

Key concepts and ideas

- Human beings are fundamentally social animals.
- **Communism** is the most natural form of economic society.
- Cooperation is considered as **‘mutual aid’** as a natural form that was oppressed by capitalist states.
- Similar to the final destination of Marxism = a stateless and classless society worldwide.

Key quote

“Where there is authority there is no freedom.”

- **Mutualism**

- Advocate small collective organisations, based on **similar crafts**.
- Organisations are based on **‘brotherhood’** grounded on working collectively.
- Goods exchanged based on the **value of labour** they require rather than their market value.

Key thinkers

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865)

Key work: *What is Property?* (1840)

Key concepts and ideas

- Considered to be the first to use the term ‘anarchism’, the founder of modern anarchism.
- Coined the slogan **“property is theft”**.
- Possessions are not property as they aren’t used for exploitation of others.
- Advocated a **peaceful transition** to anarchism; decentralised socialism without a state; positive and optimistic outlook.

- Workers in different communities engage in **free contracts** to exchange goods.

Key quote

“The possessions of the rich are stolen property.”

Emma Goldman (1869-1940)

Key work: *Anarchism and Other Essays* (1910)

Key concepts and ideas

- The state is a cold monster, an **immoral evil**.
- All forms of political participation in the state and society are **ineffective** and corrupting.
- **Revolution** rather than gradual reforms is the only solution.
- Anarchist, revolutionary, **feminist**.
- Advocated a **violent revolution** and assassination to abolish the state.
- Women will be emancipated only once the state is abolished.
- **Mutual love** will replace competitive and exploitative capitalism and be at the heart of stateless existence.

Key quote

“If voting changed anything, they’d make it illegal.”

- Anarcho-syndicalism

- Similar to mutualism.
- The state can be replaced by **federations** that are organised as trade unions.
- Solidarity of the working class would be reflected in **trade unionism**.
- Advocates **direct action** such as refusal to pay tax, strikes, disobedience, etc.
- **Solidarity** = a term used by socialists, collectivist anarchists and communists. It refers to the natural innate inclination of human beings to be gathered in close-knit groups for the purpose of a revolution that would lead for the establishment of new communities.
- **Direct action** = refers to individuals resorting to action aimed at undermining and abolishing the states. It is referred to as direct action when it implies the use of violent methods, civil disobedience and propaganda.

Arguments that anarchism is socialism without a state

Yes

- Both are against the capitalist state.
- Share optimistic and positive view of human nature.
- Most anarchists advocate economic equality and common ownership of property.

- Communism is the end goal of radical socialists and many anarchists.

No

- Socialism is predicated on social solidarity whereas anarchists seek to restore individual liberty.
- There are different perspectives within anarchism accepting private property.
- Socialism is a class-based doctrine while anarchists focus on individual sovereignty, free of any form of coercion.
- Anarchist communism seeks to establish small-scale pastoral collective communities whereas socialist communism is proposed to exist within industrial society.

2.2: Individualistic forms of anarchism

Both strands, egoism and anarcho-capitalism share:

- Human nature is innately individual rather than social.
- Any form of social organisations, including the state, are robbing individual sovereignty.
- Freedom and society are incompatible.
 - **Egoism**
- Individuals are naturally selfish and satisfying selfish interests is beneficial to all.
- Harmony will ensue when union of egoists will be formed.
- It is possibly the most extreme and thus controversial form of anarchism because it advocates the ultimate superiority of any self-serving action over any altruistic one.

Key thinker

Marx Stirner (1806-1856)

Key work: *The Ego and His Own* (1845)

Key concepts and ideas

- The self-centred and selfish individual is the centre of the moral universe and the state.
- The future society will be the '**union of egoism**'.
- Individuals are entitled to benefit and enjoy everything the world has to offer.
- Practising egoism will destroy state, religion and any other ideology.
- Common interests between egoist-based individuals will create some form of order and stability.
- The state should be abolished by **violent insurrection**.
- Stirner was also a key figure in **nihilism**.

Key quote

“The state calls its own violence, law; but that of the individual, crime.”

- Anarcho-capitalism
- Relatively a modern movement from the later 20th century.
- Advocating the idea of free-market capitalism, wherein the individual is free to fail or succeed.
- No state or a limited state if at all, should interfere in any shape and form in the economy.
- Competition creates wealth.

Key thinker

Robert Nozick (1938-2002)

A right-wing libertarian.

Key work: *Anarchy, State and Utopia (1974)*

Key concepts and ideas

- Natural justice = people should be allowed to make their own decisions, that is what's fair and just. The individual is sovereign.
- Libertarianism = based on Kant's idea that human beings cannot be treated as an object or be used against their own will as a resource.
- Self-ownership = individuals own their own body, abilities, skills and labour.
- The minimal of the minimal form of state.
- Disagreed with Hobbes, Burke and Oakeshott about the legitimacy of the state to interfere in society based on hierarchical social contract because it undermines individual freedom.
- The only legitimate role for the state is to protect property and to ensure contracts are fulfilled.
- Taxation as legalised theft.

Key quotes

“No state more extensive than the minimal state can be justified.”

“Taxation of earnings from labour is on a par with forced labour.”

Arguments that anarchism is extreme liberalism

Yes

- Both focus on individual liberty at the centre of their doctrine.
- Both consider the state to be an enemy of the individual.

- Both uphold an optimistic view of human nature that when free, can utilise its freedom for good causes.
- Anarcho-capitalism can be seen as an extreme form of liberalism.
- Both nurture the belief in social justice.

No

- Liberals consider the state to be the guardian of liberty whereas anarchists strive to abolish the state.
- Liberals broadly support free-market capitalism, while most anarchists oppose capitalist economy.
- Liberals consider property ownership as natural, whereas most anarchists adhere to collective forms of ownership.
- Most liberals consider inequality to be natural and inevitable, while most anarchists' beliefs are based on achieving ultimate equality.
- Individualist anarchists believe that the outcome of a free society is social justice.

(3) Core ideas and principles

1. Rejection of the state

- The state is evil; democratic states offer an illusion of freedom to dull the mind of its citizens.
- The state robbed sovereignty from the individual, and it employs coercion and punishment for disobedience.
- The state is oppressive and predicated on the restriction of freedom.
- Those who govern and hold power inevitably become corrupted by it.
- The state is unjust and based on exploitation and denial of liberty.

2. Liberty

- Liberty can be achieved only by abolishing the state.
- They differ on how they define liberty and how to guarantee it, based on its definition:
 - Proudhon, mutualism = liberty is a hybrid of socialism and individualism.
 - Bakunin, collectivist anarchism = human beings are born with innate equal intelligence, moral sense and capability for rational thinking; the state distorts human nature.
 - Kropotkin, mutual-aid/anarcho-communism = human nature is positive and predisposed for cooperation. Liberty is rooted in nature and the mutual characteristic of all in a society is solidarity.

3. Anarchy is order

- Anarchist societies are stateless.

- Order though is perceived differently:
 - Stirner = order is formed by rational individuals asserting themselves and their potential.
 - Proudhon = humans have an innate sense of justice and are predisposed for cooperation. The odd occurrence of disputes can be mitigated by a federal assembly.
 - Kropotkin = order will be established by mutual-aid communes that are organised around similar interests.
 - Bakunin = a federation of communes that are decentralised and balanced, so neither one will gain an authority over others.

4. Economic freedom

- Economic freedom means different things to collectivist versus individualist anarchists:
 - Proudhon = 'property is theft'; mutualism = the means of production are under collective ownership.
 - Anarcho-syndicalism argue that the means of production need to be controlled by the workers rather than by owners that exploit them.
 - Collectivists = abolishing private ownership for the sake of communal ownership.
 - Nozick, individual anarchists = support for a complete free-market capitalism.

5. Utopia

- All offer an idea of an ideal society.
- Because most share positive hopeful beliefs about human nature, this ideal society will be characterised by peace, equality, harmony, stability.
- Individuals who hold power are corrupted by exercising it, exploiting others, denying liberty and fostering inequality and conflict.
- Different views envisage a somewhat different 'form' of the utopia, based on their ideas on other dimensions such as order and liberty.

(4) Differing views and tensions

1. Human nature

- Stirner = people are egoistical and will cooperate with others only when it serves their own self-interests.
- Kropotkin = people are naturally sociable and altruistic.
- Bakunin = people are born without any basic nature, tabula-rasa (blank slate) that is shaped by society and external influences. Nurture rather than nature, acquired not innate.

- Proudhon = people are innately good, rational and social, and take into account others.
- Goldman = human beings have the capacity for good and morality but they need to be morally educated for this capacity to be materialised.

2. The state

While all anarchists seek to abolish the state, their rationalisations and motivations are different:

- Stirner, egoism = the state denies and inhibits individualism and ought to be abolished by a revolution.
- Proudhon, mutualism = the state supports capitalism and will be replaced preferably by peaceful means.
- Bakunin, collectivism = the state supports capitalism and will be abolished by a revolution.
- Kropotkin, anarcho-communism = the state supports capitalism and will be replaced by a communist revolution.
- Goldman, mutualism = the state is an oppressor including by its religion and private ownership, and it would be abolished by a violent insurrection.

Anarchists oppose democracy:

- Direct democracy is a tyranny of the majority.
- There is no justification for people to surrender any bit of sovereignty to the authority and power of the state.
- Government based on consent is unattainable as people cannot withdraw their consent.
- Representative democracy is unacceptable because it is unthinkable that people will transfer their will to others so that they will represent that will.

3. Society

All anarchists promote the idea of autonomy, the absence of any external constraints on the individual, although not necessarily the absence of internal ones. All human beings should be autonomous.

Differing on the form of society that would replace the state:

- Kropotkin, anarcho-communism = a society of free, voluntary communities that are self-governing, common ownership of property and economic equality.
- Bakunin, federalism = a society that is divided into communities that are organised around occupations and trade with each other on the basis of mutual benefit.

- Proudhon, mutual aid = a society that is based on individual craft workers that exchange goods on the basis of the value of labour rather than market purchase value.
- Goldman, mutual aid = a society free from external oppressive constraints of religion, politic and private property, and will be characterised instead by mutual aid and voluntarism organised in some federated social groups.
- Stirner, union of egoists = a society where all individuals operate independently based on their self-interests, and the balance created by that will foster peace and harmony.

4. The economy

All anarchists share the idea that economic freedom should be established.

Economic interactions between people should be based on free negotiation stripped of constraints, like in other forms of interactions.

The state should be abolished, no external and artificial regulation of trade or finance, no taxes and no public goods such as the police, transport and defence.

- Some, like Stirner and Proudhon, accept that personal property is still necessary.
- How goods need to be exchanged reflect the differing views.
- Individualist anarchists = people should be self-sufficient; trade should occur only if necessary.
- Egoism = individuals are entitled to all the earth can offer, and the competition will result in some economic balance.
- Anarcho-communism = membership in economic communities should be voluntary and people should be self-sufficient; trade when necessary is based on mutual benefits.
- Federalism = large economic federations are formed on the basis of occupational groups. Goods are prices based on their labour value rather than their market value.
- Syndicalism = social groups are based on trade union organisations, therefore on occupations and crafts; similar to federalism.
- Anarcho-capitalism = a modern form of egoism, economic activity should be free from state regulation, social harmony is achieved by natural harmony of the competition in the free-market economy.

Anarchism today

Elements of anarchism are not only part of past movements but are also reflected in contemporary politics:

- Anarcho-capitalism in the USA.
- Environmental movements: some consider themselves as part of the anarchist tradition.
- The anti-capitalist movement is inspired by radical Marxist and anarchist ideas.
- Some radical feminists consider themselves to be anarchist because the state is ultimately patriarchal and the abolishing the state is a prerequisite to abolish patriarchy.