

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?