

# INTRODUCTION: ANARCHISM

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## Core Anarchism

All philosophical anarchists agree on a central claim:

**Anarchism.** All exercise of non-consensual, coercive power is morally wrong.

Some clarifications:

1. Anarchists do not oppose power if it is consensual. Indeed, most anarchists propose alternative forms of social order where everyone freely consents.
2. Anarchists are not against order; they oppose *coerced* order. Similarly, anarchists do not normally favour violence—indeed, often they think that anarchy will be more peaceful than government.
3. What is *coercive* power? That's not easy to say. What about soft power (e.g., the power of priests)? On the other hand, is really all kind of power wrong (e.g., the power of parents over children)?
4. Normally, anarchism is concerned with the state. But there are other types of political institutions (e.g., the EU) which are not states. Anarchists are opposed to them just as much.
5. Anarchism entails that it is wrong for you to rule, and that if you are ruled over, then you have been wronged. It does not yet say, however, whether you should fight or oppose those who rule. Some anarchists will favour active opposition; others will be fine with passive resistance, or even acquiescence.

## Types of Anarchism

Beyond this core central belief, anarchists disagree about a wide array of ideas. In particular, there is disagreement about the following questions:

### WHY IS GOVERNMENT WRONG?

We can distinguish three broad types of approaches:

According to a **consequentialist approach**, states and political institutions make our lives go worse than an anarchic state would do. On this approach, we cannot say *a priori* that states are wrong; we must make an empirical argument. We can then further distinguish views according to what the relevant consequences are: economic wealth, peace, well-being, individual perfection, justice, etc.

According to (what I'll call) the **semi-consequentialist approach**, anarchy is preferable as an empirical matter. However, there are *deep-seated facts* about human nature that make anarchy generally preferable. Unless human nature radically changes, we can expect government to be worse than no government.

According to a **deontological approach**, there is something wrong about non-consensual coercion/authority, even without knowing the consequences. On this approach, we can say *a priori* that (certain forms of) states are wrong. (What might be problems with this argument?)

## WHAT WOULD/SHOULD ANARCHY LOOK LIKE?

Most anarchists do not only give negative arguments against government, but also have a positive anarchist vision.

**Left-anarchists** think that anarchy would be a form of society in which resources are distributed according to each other's needs. There either is no private property, or such property is organised in some non-capitalist way.

**Right-anarchists** believe that anarchy would be a form of society characterized by strong property rights (and other rights). People will voluntarily cooperate, and a free market will produce gains for everyone.

**Individualist anarchists** emphasise that anarchy would be a state in which individuals could most fully realise themselves, unconstrained by states and other constraining social institutions. Anarchic society will take a multitude of (unpredictable) forms.

## WHAT GUARANTEES THAT ANARCHY WORKS?

In the absence of government, there need to be some mechanisms that resolve certain problems. Most anarchists have some account of human nature, and sketch how order without government would work on this basis.

A huge variety of answers are possible here. But we can distinguish at least two extremes:

- *Egoistic Motivation.* Anarchic society will work because people are motivated by self-interest, and sympathy for their immediate friends and family.
- *Altruistic Motivation.* Anarchic society will work because people are motivated by solidarity with others, even those far away, and ideas about what we owe to them.

## WHAT ELSE SHOULD ANARCHISTS REJECT?

In this seminar, we focus on political anarchism, but anarchists have generally not stopped just at opposing government. Some other entities anarchists have often opposed are:

- **Organised religion, or religion in general.** This was an important theme for many early anarchists. God and the church ask for our obedience, and it is such obedience anarchists are opposed to.
- **Capitalism.** For left-anarchists, the opposition to the state was closely linked to opposition to capitalism. On their view, both are closely linked, and both are an equally immoral source of oppression.
- **Patriarchy,** or the rule of men over women. This is why anarchism has often been seen as attractive to feminists.
- **War.** If you oppose coercion, what could be more wrong than war? Consequently, a number of anarchists oppose any form of violence, even engaging in a just war.
- **Civilisation.** Some anarchists go even further: the problem with society is modern civilisation/modern technology. We should, in some way, return to more primitive ways of living.
- **Established Morality.** Anarchists might also think that established moral norms are oppressive or otherwise wrong. E.g., anarchists have often tended to sympathise with ideals of “free love”, or ideas about non-hierarchical education.

## Why Study Anarchism?

1. It's **inherently interesting**. Many anarchist thinkers and ideas are challenging, break from the mainstream, and are rarely voiced in public.
2. If the anarchists are right, **then our current form of society is deeply wrong**. You might think the probability that the anarchists are right is tiny, but you should be concerned about the chances.
3. Understanding anarchism is a good way to **find unquestioned assumptions** in your own position. Answering the anarchist will make clear what you have taken for granted.
4. Anarchism is an **interdisciplinary topic** that lies at the intersection of a variety of disciplines (see below).

## Topics in Anarchism

In this seminar, we will look at the topic of anarchism through the lenses of five different disciplines.

- **History of Political Thought.** What have big thinkers in the past said about anarchism? Why were they anarchists? What are common themes amongst these thinkers?
- **Contemporary Philosophy.** How do contemporary (analytic) philosophers approach the issue? What forms of anarchism are still alive, and why?
- **Economics.** How would economic order without government arise? Would it be stable? Would it be efficient?
- **Experiment.** What are the outcomes if we simulate an anarchic society? What can be learned from such simulation?
- **History.** Are there examples of anarchy in history? What do they tell us about the realities of anarchy?