ANARCHISM

Anarchism is a term derived from the Greek *anarkhia*, meaning “contrary to authority” or “without a ruler.” Anarchism narrowly refers to a theory of society without state rule, and generally to a social and political ideology advocating a society that does not use coercive forms of authority. Many advocates trace its roots to the Greek Stoics. William Godwin’s *An Inquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (1793) is widely recognized as the first work to present a full articulation of the idea of anarchism. The term was considered derisory until the French social philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon used it in 1840 to describe his political program. Proudhon is credited as the first to call himself an anarchist. The Russian revolutionary Michael Bakunin (1814-76), a key figure in anarchism, sought the violent overthrow of the state in order to replace it with a federation built on the basis of voluntary associations. Bakunin was a proponent of what would become anarcho-syndicalism, a term not coined until the early twentieth century by Sam Mainwaring in Britain and Georges Sorel in France. Anarcho-syndicalism focused on trade unions as the transformative agent of social change, because they championed workers and could serve as a foundation for a new social organization after the successful overthrow of the existing state. During the First International (1864-1876), the Marxian (communist) wing was increasingly at odds with the Proudhon-Bakunin (anarchist wing); at the Hague conference of 1872, the anarchists were expelled from the broader worker’s movement in Europe. Bakunin presciently maintained that Marxian methods would only produce another sort of authoritarian state. Peter Kropotkin (1842– 1921), a Russian from aristocratic origins, was an influential anarchist thinker and a proponent of anarchist-communism. He argued the individual is a social being that must develop in a communist society that precludes authoritarian rule and the special interests of privileged groups. Kropotkin thought the commune to be the basic social unit, and his work presciently linked anarchism to social ecology. There were also several traditions of individualist anarchism, the major one deriving from the German writer Max Stirner (1806-56), who critiqued American capitalism and free market liberalism.

There is no single defining position that anarchists hold, but most affirm freedom, justice, and equality as basic values, and position the state or other forms of external authority as inconsistent with those basic values. Most also propose alternative paradigms for structuring society without the injustices of state or hierarchical forms of government. Anarchism has endured to the present day in figures such as Noam Chomsky and movements such as “Occupy!” but was most prominent in the European revolutions of the nineteenth century. Yet every society in Europe, North and South America, and Asia has had anarchist proponents. Spain has historically been particularly rich with anarchist activity. In the 1930s it had both a mass anarcho-syndicalist trade union, CNT, and an underground anarchist body, the FAI, which emerged periodically to seize state-owned land and services, and to fight against Francisco Franco’s authoritarian-revolutionary regime.

Anarchism also played a role in the twentieth-century women’s movement. Emma Goldman, a leading pioneer and popular public speaker, wrote *The Tragedy of Women’s Emancipation* (1911) arguing that the power to vote alone would not liberate women, but that women must seek emancipation by refusing to acquiesce to patriarchal institutions. In the 1960s and early 1970s, anarchism enjoyed a renaissance thanks largely to Paul Goodman and Daniel Guérin, who developed a communitarian form of anarchism that built upon the anarcho-syndicalism of the nineteenth century. As a political ideology, anarchism today is not widely held, but it continues to function as a critique of authoritarianism and institutional power, and to shape recent emergent forms such as green anarchism and anarcha-feminism.

Bibliography: Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*,

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