

HIST BC 3692  
T 12:10pm-2:00 PM, 502 Diana Center  
Off. Hours: T 10 AM-12 Noon, 903 Milstein

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## ANARCHISM: A GLOBAL HISTORY

Anarchism was the world's first and most widespread transnational movement organized from below and without formal political parties. During its belle époque heyday (1890-1914), workers, students, and artists—the vast majority quite young—spread it throughout Europe its diaspora in the Americas, Northern Africa, and Australasia, and through parts of the Middle East, India, China, and Japan. It was then one of the two most important working-class ideologies, along with socialism, and the most important among Western artists and bohemians. Anarchism has continued to spread, proving to be, as a *New York Times*'s headline once put it, “the creed that won't stay dead.” It has greatly influenced movements as diverse as the beatniks in the 1950s, the student movements of the 1960s, Christian liberation theology and punk rock in the 1970s, and continues to be one of the most important epistemological and ethical sources for radical feminism and environmentalism, the so-called anti-globalization movement, and various forms of poststructuralist arts and cultural studies.

Explaining such resilience and diffusion is a challenging exercise that will test, and hopefully enhance, our analytical skills. After all, anarchism's principal positions and practices seemed tailor-made to generate a geographically small and ephemeral movement at best. It questioned most received wisdom and denounced as mechanisms of domination the most revered trilogy of modern societies (god, family, and country). It demanded, often with a sense of exasperating moral purity, the apparently contradictory goals of libertarianism (unfettered individual freedom) and communism (thorough social equality based on the principle of to each according to their needs). Swimming against the historical current, it proposed decentralization and small, grass-root organization at a time when political, bureaucratic, and economic power was becoming more concentrated and centralized just about everywhere. Its distaste for hierarchies of any sort seemed to undermine organization and institutional development. Unlike most other political movements, from socialists to tea partiers, it never had the backing of nation-states, organized religion, commercial interests, or even political parties. And more than most other movements, it was often denounced as terrorist and persecuted by governments ranging from communist regimes to liberal democracies.

Our efforts to explain how such an ideology and movement could spread so far and thrive for so long will necessarily tackle some of the most primary and critical questions in historical, political, and social studies: Are individual liberty and social equality complimentary or at odds with each other? How can competition and solidarity coexist? How can social organization function without hierarchies? What are the possibilities and limitations of utopian thinking and grassroots organization in bringing about social change? How do ideas that radically question the status quo and hegemonic discourses diffuse? Do all ideologies, no matter how iconoclastic, end up creating dogmas and orthodoxies, and if so, how important is the question of degree in this process? How can humanist, internationalist movements transcend national, ethno-racial, and gender identities and divisions?

We will address these and other questions through an approach that combines exegesis (careful reading and interpretation of texts) and empirical--even quantitative when appropriate--research. So if the topic of the class (an ideology with a particular bent for challenging established beliefs) can help us question our own categories and assumptions, a systematic scholarly approach can help us move to the next stage: an enhanced understanding of historical and socio-cultural processes.

### Student learning outcomes

The last two paragraphs discuss the learning goals of the class but they are listed below as bullet points. At the end of this class you will have greater...

- Knowledge of the historical development of anarchism as a radical ideology and theory.
- Familiarity with some of the most critical questions in historical, political, and social studies.
- Exposure to global historical approaches
- Experience in a research methodology that fuses approaches from the humanities and the social sciences.
- A scholarly paper developed from your own primary research that hopefully will be good enough to submit to a student scholarly journal for publication.

### Readings and Assignments

You should purchase Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), available at Book Culture, W. 112 St. btw Broadway and Amsterdam Ave. Other assigned readings, listed in the schedule of topics and classes, will be posted on coursework or available on reserve. They include original texts by anarchists and scholarly works about the movement.

The written requirement for the class is a 12-15 research page paper on a topic agreed with the instructor and based on secondary sources (scholarly articles, books, and other publications) and primary sources (e.g. contemporary newspapers, magazines, photographs, illustrations and art, plays, literature, diaries and memoirs, oral interviews).

Assignments are due on the following dates:

Research prospectus with annotated bibliography (3-4 pages)	Week 3, February 1
Oral presentation of progress report on your research project	Weeks 4-6 (Feb. 8 to 22)
Draft of research paper	Week 10, March 22
Final oral presentation of your research project	Weeks 12-15, April 5 & 26
Research paper	Monday, May 2

**GRADE**

The grade breakdown is as follows:

Participation in class discussions	15%
3-4 page research prospectus with annotated bibliography	05%
Oral 7-10 minute presentation of progress report on your research	10%
Oral 10 minute presentation of your research	10%
Draft of research paper	20%
Final research paper	40%

**SCHEDULE OF TOPICS & READINGS****Week 1. January 18. Introduction**

First class. No reading

**Part I. The Development of an Ideology and Praxis****Week 2, January 25. The First Anarchists?**

Anarchism, according to many of its followers, represented in its essence an innate human desire for freedom and solidarity rather than a historical development. Others attempted to provide the ideology with an intellectual history that found predecessors in groups as dissimilar as the Cynics of ancient Greece (because of their disdain for social conventions and stress on individual autonomy) and the pacifist and egalitarian Christian teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi.

This week's session will discuss this question of intellectual genealogy and putative origins ranging from Taoism to the European Enlightenment.

Readings:

Jose C. Moya, "Anarchism," *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); and "Transference, Culture, and Critique: The Circulation of Anarchist Ideas and Practices."

Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*, pgs. ix-139

**Week 3, February 1. The Forefather of Philosophical Anarchism**

The title has been usually conferred on the English rationalist and utilitarian philosopher William Godwin (1756-1836), who today is better known for his family relations as the husband of the pioneering feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, the father of Mary Shelly, author of *Frankenstein*, and the father-in-law of the Romantic poet Percy Shelly. In *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) Godwin portrayed government as a corrupting entity that, by relying on imposition, hindered the advancement of private judgment and perpetuated dependence and ignorance. Some of the questions we should enquire from the *Enquiry* are: what does its author argue about

liberty, law and the justice system, war, morality, marriage and family, literature, education, and rights.

Readings:

Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, pgs. 191-219

“Rereading the Anarchism of William Godwin’s *Political Justice*” in courseworks

#### **Week 4. February 8. The Egoists: Stirner and Nietzsche**

Although the most common forms of anarchism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were either collectivist or communist, individualism played a much more important role than in any other contemporary ideology. Most anarchists struggled to fuse these, seemingly contradictory, socialist and libertarian tendencies. Others were uncompromising in their individualism and the most important influences for these were the works of two German philosophers who have often been called the literary fathers of individualist anarchism (and also of existentialism and postmodernism)

Readings:

Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, chapter 16

Book reviews on Nietzsche and anarchism in courseworks

#### **Week 5. February 15. The Mutualist and the Revolutionary: Proudhon & Bakunin**

Pierre Proudhon, a French printer, was the first writer to use, during the mid nineteenth century, the term anarchism to describe a philosophical position and also the first to try to connect that position to working-class collective action. Mikhail Bakunin, an exiled Russian aristocrat, did much to infuse anarchism with an intransigent, revolutionary ethos.

Readings:

Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, chapters 17 and 18.

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What is Property?* Excerpt.

Mikhail Bakunin, excerpt from *Statism and Anarchy* and *God and the State*

#### **Week 6. February 22. Anarcho-Communism: Pyotr Kropotkin, Emma Goldman & others**

By the end of the nineteenth century, anarchism had evolved into a broad critique of hierarchical systems in general—including the state, industrial capitalism, the “bourgeois family,” and organized religion. It had also combined its libertarian and socialist tendencies into what became known at the time as anarcho-communism.

Readings:

Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 309-430

Pyotr Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid* (1902) Introduction in courseworks

Emma Goldman, “Anarchism: What it really stands for” in courseworks

Alan Ritter, *Anarchism: A Theoretical Analysis* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980), chapter 3

**Week 7. March 1. Sexuality & Religion**

Most anarchists opposed mainstream feminism as a “particularist” movement, that is one that advocated for the interests of just a particular group (middle-class women in this case), rather than the “oppressed” in general. At the same time, anarchists developed arguably the first form of radical feminism and sexual liberationist discourses and practice. Similarly, anarchists consistently denounced organized religion as obscurantist and repressive but their idealism and ethics resembled faith and religious morality in many respects.

## Readings:

Emma Goldman, “The Tragedy of Woman’s Emancipation” (1911)

Jose C. Moya, “Italians in Buenos Aires’ Anarchist Movement: Gender Ideology and Women’s Participation,” in Donna Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta eds., *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives: Italian Women around the World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

Sharif Gamie “Anarchism and Feminism: A Historical Survey,” *Women’s History Review*, 5:3 (1996): 417-44.

Richard Cleminson, “Anarchism and Feminism” *Women’s History Review*, 7:1 (1998):135-37, comments on Gamie’s article above.

Homosexuality and the Left, encyclopedia article

**Part II: Anarchism’s Local Practices and Global Spread****Week 8. March 8. France & Great Britain**

## Readings:

Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, chapters 27 and 31  
Anarchist terrorism France 1880-1900 encyclopedia entry.

**Week 9. March 15. SPRING BREAK****Week 10. March 22. Spain and Italy**

## Readings:

Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, chapters 28, 29

**Week 11. March 29. Eastern Europe**

Readings: Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, chapter 30

**Week 12. April 5. Lands of Immigrants: the U.S. and Argentina**

Readings:

Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, chapters 32, 33.

Jose C. Moya, "The Positive Side of Stereotypes: Jewish Anarchists in Early-Twentieth-Century Buenos Aires," *Jewish History* 18 (2004):19-48.

Tom Goyens, *Beer and Revolution: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880–1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), chapter 1, 6.

**Week 14. April 19. India, Japan, and China**

Readings:

Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, chapter 34.

Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley, 1993), chapters 2, 3, 8.

**Week 15. April 26. The Present**

Readings: Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 539-706.

**Research paper due Monday, May 2**