No Gods No Masters

Why Atheism and Anarchism Are a Good Fit

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metaphysical level. Moreover, religious institutions have overwhelmingly functioned as allies of state and capital, rather than as consistent sources of resistance. For this reason, atheism offers a clearer and more consistent foundation for anarchism's anti-authoritarian ethos.

Atheism and anarchism are a good fit because both challenge structures of authority, emphasise autonomy, and seek to ground ethics in human solidarity rather than divine command. Historically, anarchists have recognised religion as a central prop of hierarchy and have advocated atheism as part of a broader emancipatory politics. Philosophically, atheism complements anarchism by eliminating metaphysical justifications for obedience; anarchism, in turn, provides atheism with a political framework for realising freedom in practice.

The compatibility of the two can be summarised in the slogan "No gods, no masters." This is not simply a rejection but a positive affirmation: that human beings can and must create a world of freedom, equality, and mutual aid without recourse to either divine or political rulers. By aligning atheism and anarchism, we find not only a critique of domination but also a vision for liberation grounded in human autonomy and collective self-determination.

holy wars, inquisitions, and persecution are revealed as political projects cloaked in theological language. An anarchist atheism thus provides an ethics that is both humanist and emancipatory.

No Gods, No Masters

When combined, atheism and anarchism articulate a radical vision for social transformation. Atheism without anarchism risks remaining a limited intellectual stance – disbelief in gods does not necessarily translate into opposition to earthly hierarchies. Conversely, anarchism without atheism risks inconsistency: rejecting earthly rulers while venerating divine authority. Taken together, however, they form a coherent worldview that opposes domination in all its forms.

The slogan "No gods, no masters" encapsulates this dual refusal. It also affirms the capacity of human beings to create meaning, values, and social organisation without recourse to transcendence. Liberation, on this view, cannot be deferred to an afterlife or entrusted to divine providence; it must be realised here and now through collective struggle.

Addressing Religious Anarchism

To acknowledge complexity, it must be noted that some anarchists have drawn inspiration from religious traditions. Christian anarchists such as Tolstoy emphasised Jesus' rejection of imperial power, and liberation theologians have connected anarchist principles with biblical calls for justice. These perspectives demonstrate that anarchism and religion are not always irreconcilable.

However, they remain problematic. Even non-authoritarian conceptions of God introduce an external standard to which believers must conform, reintroducing hierarchy at the

Atheism and anarchism are distinct positions, yet their intellectual and political trajectories have long intersected. Atheism, defined as the rejection of belief in gods or divine authority, represents a refusal to submit to transcendent powers. Anarchism, defined as the opposition to unjustified hierarchy and the advocacy of stateless, non-hierarchical social organisation, represents a refusal to submit to earthly rulers. Both challenge authority, obedience, and domination, albeit in different registers.

Atheism and anarchism are a natural fit because they share a critique of external authority, an emphasis on human autonomy, and a historical legacy of joint resistance to domination. Furthermore, their compatibility lies in their ethical orientation: both seek to ground morality in human solidarity and mutual aid rather than in divine command or state law. Their conceptual parallels, historical entanglements, and potential tensions, demonstrates why atheism strengthens anarchism's critique of hierarchy, and why anarchism offers atheism a political expression beyond mere disbelief.

Authority and the Critique of Hierarchy

At the heart of anarchism lies the rejection of illegitimate authority. For thinkers such as Bakunin, the state is not a neutral arbiter but an institution that entrenches domination. Similarly, atheism can be understood as the rejection of the supreme authority claimed by gods and their clerical representatives. In both cases, the critique targets the logic of hierarchy and the assumption that obedience to an external power is both natural and necessary.

Religious authority, particularly within monotheistic traditions, mirrors political sovereignty. The language of religion – "Lord," "King," "Father"- maps directly onto the structures of state rule. As Emma Goldman argued, religion sanctifies obe-

dience and habituates individuals to submission, thereby supporting political and economic hierarchies. Atheism disrupts this process by rejecting the premise of divine rule, while anarchism extends the same principle to earthly institutions. Their alignment can thus be seen as a double refusal of theocratic and statist authority.

Human Autonomy and Self-Determination

A second dimension of compatibility lies in the emphasis both traditions place on autonomy. For anarchists, freedom is not the absence of all order but the ability to participate in shaping the conditions of one's life without subordination to coercive power. For atheists, autonomy entails rejecting morality dictated by divine command.

Religious frameworks frequently situate morality in divine decree, demanding obedience irrespective of human reason or empathy. By contrast, atheism requires ethics to be constructed through human deliberation, solidarity, and practical experience. Anarchism mirrors this stance by rejecting laws imposed from above, instead emphasising collective self-determination and voluntary association. Both positions therefore converge on a vision of moral life rooted in autonomy rather than obedience.

Historical Traditions of Resistance

The historical record further supports the claim that atheism and anarchism are mutually reinforcing. Enlightenment critiques of religion, epitomised by figures such as Diderot and Voltaire, often coincided with early challenges to the political system. Later, anarchist thinkers explicitly linked atheism to their critique of authority.

Bakunin's dictum, "If God existed, it would be necessary to abolish Him," epitomises the anarchist suspicion that belief in God legitimises inequality by naturalising hierarchy. Emma Goldman's work consistently identified religion, alongside the state and capitalism, as one of the "three great enemies" of freedom. Historical movements also bear this out – the Paris Commune of 1871 expropriated church property and promoted secular education; Spanish anarchists of the 1930s opposed both fascism and the Catholic Church, recognising their mutual reinforcement of hierarchy.

Although there are currents of religious anarchism – Tolstoyan Christianity, liberation theology, or the Catholic Worker movement – these have been the exception rather than the rule. The dominant anarchist tradition has consistently seen atheism as a natural ally in dismantling hierarchical structures.

Ethics Without Divine Command

Critics often argue that atheism undermines morality by depriving it of divine foundation. However, anarchist theory provides a robust framework for ethics without gods. Instead of divine command, anarchists ground morality in solidarity, reciprocity, and mutual aid.

For Kropotkin, cooperation is not a moral ideal imposed from above but a principle rooted in evolutionary survival. Human beings flourish not through obedience to rulers or gods but through collective care. Anarchist ethics thus highlight practices of freedom and interdependence, in contrast to authoritarian frameworks that conflate morality with obedience.

Atheism strengthens this ethical framework by rejecting supernatural justification for violence, exclusion, or inequality. Without divine authority to sanctify them, practices such as