



No Gods No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism

Daniel Guérin (Editor), Paul Sharkey (Translator)

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The first English translation of Guérin's monumental anthology of anarchism, published here in one volume. It details a vast array of unpublished documents, letters, debates, manifestos, reports, impassioned calls-to-arms and reasoned analysis; the history, organization and practice of the movement—its theorists, advocates and activists; the great names and the obscure, towering legends and unsung heroes.

This definitive anthology portrays anarchism as a sophisticated ideology whose nuances and complexities highlight the natural desire for freedom in all of us. The classical texts will re-establish anarchism as both an intellectual and practical force to be reckoned with. Includes writings by Emma Goldman, Kropotkin, Berkman, Bakunin, Proudhon, and Malatesta.

Daniel Guérin was the author of *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*.

In Oakland, California on March 24, 2015 a fire destroyed the AK Press warehouse along with several other businesses. Please consider visiting the AK Press website to learn more about the fundraiser to help them and their neighbors.

No Gods No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism Details

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From Reader Review No Gods No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism for online ebook

Mikey says

I am setting this book aside for the moment because my brain is going to explode if i read anymore dry-ass anarchy essays. But it is pretty sweet.

Jake says

This is an anthology of anarchist writing from around the 1830s to WWII and the quality of the selections in it vary greatly. Hodge-podged together you get a pretty good idea of early anarchist theory and also how the anarchists included hardly agreed on what anarchism is, not unlike republicans, democrats, communists, socialists, libertarians, etc... The book starts with Nietzsche's contemporary Max Stirner an interesting dude with a whiff of Ayn Rand in him who was all about the individual, (trivia: Nietzsche worried that people would think he was ripping off Stirner's ideas). There are also writers who are pretty much straight up commies, even justifying the dictatorship of the proletariat. Others predicted the disaster of the USSR in the early days of the revolution. The selections by Emma Goldman and Mikhail Bakunin were enjoyable. Aside from the political philosophy, there is some super interesting and not well known history in here as well. Anarchists rebelling against Lenin and Trotsky in Kronstadt and the Ukraine, anarchists taking part in government to fight the fascists in Spain, and other events that aren't in most textbooks are included. I wish the theory sections weren't so utopian and got down to how anarchism in practice could actually function since the history sections show that it hasn't yet ended well in practice (lots of martyred anarchists). Overall, it was a pretty dry read with occasion bright spots, but worth your time if you are into flying the black flag.

Ollie says

Being a fan of anarchist history and theory, I've always looked for the all-encompassing go-to book on the subject. The anarchist bible, if you pardon the blasphemy. I think I might have found it in No God No Masters.

Now this book is no obscure collection either. I think it ranks high on lists of must-reads for those interested in Anarchism, so I don't know why I'm just now picking up this book. I'm a slow learner I guess.

In this book, Guerin proceeds to not just collect the essential writings of who's who in anarchist history, but also puts events affecting the anarchism into perspective. In other words, No Gods No Masters doesn't just deliver the writers (mostly men, go figure), but also the events that shaped the movement.

There are so many familiar figures and people I've wanted to read that this massive volume became actually quite enjoyable once I committed to reading its almost-700 pages. Here Guerin collects Stirner, Proudhon, Bakunin, Guillaume, Kropotkin, Malatesta, and even Durruti , just to name a few. Some make perfect sense as they help develop the political thought behind anarchism, others focus more on their experiences and military approach, and others I'm unsure as to why they're included (they seem a bit redundant). Also, I just want to say that Proudhon is as impossible to read as ever (relax, Colin Ward thinks the same), with long complex paragraphs that just plain ramble on. How anyone made sense of him who isn't a hardcore political theories I'll never know.

As if that wasn't enough, there are the major events discussed like the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolution, the Ukrainian revolution, Kronstadt, and the Spanish Revolution. All essential if we are to understand what makes anarchism tick.

Like I said, some of these writings are tedious and repetitive, but maybe that's the point. Anarchism itself aims to improve itself as much as it can. No Gods No Masters isn't perfect. But it's pretty damn close.

Tanuja says

Yes. This book thrills me on so many levels. I go back to it again and again for hope.

Josiah Miller says

A great anthology of some unpublished and smaller pieces from early anarchism. This is not a good anthology for someone trying to start or get into anarchism as this is better as a companion guide through history and particular instances and feelings in anarchism at the early points in time of anarchism. A lot of focus on communism and communist ideas on anarchism as Guerin was an Anarcho-communist. Again this is a great supplemental guide through some of the most important figures in anarchism. If you need a place to stay with anarchism, go straight to the main texts of anarchism such as Emma Goldman, The Conquest of Bread, Mutual Aid etc.

Ty says

the pieces in this book are certainly worth reading for their historical value. but how useful are they for current struggles or understanding the contemporary world? i'm not so sure kropotkin has anything to teach us. the critique of state & authoritarian & parliamentary socialism is of course still valid even if these tendencies themselves are in history's dustbin.

have these pieces aged well? to be honest, they're a bit dry and not at all super-inspiring. but i read this anthology to gain a general historical overview of "anarchism" and it served the purpose fairly well. i learned about kronstadt and the spanish revolution and the general ideas of the classics: proudhon, bakunin, kropotkin, malatesta, etc. ie., things i should know for further study and thinking, even if they're not that useful in and of themselves.

this review only focuses on the actual texts themselves and ignores the problematic selection of materials and the reduction of anarchism to particular trajectories (like in black flame).

Mohammed Khogir says

A prodigious work detailing the evolution of anarchism. I have always been interested in the question of social justice and felt a kindred spirit with Marxism but i could not bring myself to accept its authoritarian

principle. Then I fell upon some of Peter Kropotkin's books on anarchy and I was deeply enamoured by the spirit of comradery and fraternity explicit in anarchist thoughts. This anthology of anarchism by Guérin served to deepen my respect for anarchists and their endeavour towards the liberation of the masses from all forms of oppression. This book is not a historical record of anarchy but rather a record of anarchism as a school of moral, economical, political, and social philosophy as seen through the writings of its most prolific thinkers. The book delineates the progression of anarchist thought and its different hues of collectivism, syndicalism and communism. In addition, in volume's 3 and 4 Guérin lists examples of anarchy in practice to vindicate anarchism of its critiques claims of non-applicability, utopianism, and disorganization.

g says

Reading this anthology together with Carl Schmitt's Political Theology dramatically changed my experience with anarchist authors of 19th and 20th century. Proudhon, very much like Schmitt, recognizes the legal paradoxes of liberalism and puts together a thorough criticism that reminds one of Schmitt's comments on democracy. Given the opposing assumptions that Proudhon and Schmitt begin with in their understanding of human nature -Schmitt follows Hobbes and believes that human nature is evil, whereas Proudhon would like to believe that humans are naturally good, and would be able to cooperate- they reach two very different conclusions as to what the best method of governance would be - dictatorship or anarchy?

While anarchy is strictly opposed to the transcendentalization of any figure, and calls for an immanent system of governance where everyone will be equal (could be argued that equality becomes the transcendent value in this case) Schmitt argues that what we should strive for is a new transcendental figure, a God with human qualities.

Jan says

Oof! A gratifyingly chunky tome containing some great stuff from Bakunin and Proudhon (which was why I bought it), and introducing me to some writers that I really enjoyed: Voline, Goldman and Guillame. But the anthology isn't well put together- for example, very little from Voline's own pen, but stacks of stuff written about Voline's imprisonment by lesser lights. Guerin's commentary is also a bit sloppily written, but I'm not sure if this is him or the translation.

A useful pick'n'mix if you know what you're looking for, but patchy if you're looking to read a whole anthology.

Papilina Jefferson says

I LOVE this book

Lola says

Good selection of articles. But a bit strange. Some important Anarchist papers are missing while others are just not relevant....

Dave says

I can't honestly say that I liked reading this. I actually really hate reading stuff like this but that's my own fault because I should've known better. Anthologies are always mind-numbingly repetitive with little more than a bunch of vague generalizations and inspirational speeches and shit. Probably should have gone with something like Demanding the Impossible instead. Some stuff is still interesting though like the arguments between advocates of a "workers' state" and those advocating a "federation of communes" and using socialism as a transitional phase or just diving head first straight into anarchism. It's also kind of interesting to see how all these people influenced each other, how the ideas evolved, the mistakes they made, and the lack of corrections made to those mistakes (if you follow modern anarchism at least. The book only goes up to the 1930's). It seems like nobody could ever really agree on what "true" anarchism is. Today most people treat it as a synonym for things like chaos, violence, individualism, disorder, nihilism, etc. But most people who explicitly label themselves as anarchists actually advocate something closer to what everyone else generally associates with socialism, just more decentralized, sometimes pushing the idea of commons too far even, at least in my opinion, due to their wariness of private property. Technically it's just egalitarian, non-hierarchical living arrangements with no official authority, which should lead to a criticism of the level of technology and scale of modern societies but somehow people keep missing that. It doesn't make sense to me how so many self-proclaimed anarchists can expect to achieve their goals without smaller-scale and simpler societies. When you look at where these technologies come from and the coordination and coercion required for so much industry and long distance trade it should be obvious that we can't get rid of hierarchies, inequalities and injustices without also getting rid of cellphones, the internet and chocolate mocha lattes in New York. This is all more of a criticism of "anarchists" I've dealt with than of this book though. This isn't the type of book you should rate based on how much you agree with the contributors. As a collection of some early writings from the big names in the anarchist movement there's not really much to complain about.

Broadsnark says

It is an anthology, so the writing quality varies a lot between parts and some of it is a chore to get through. However, this is a really good intro to the anarchist history and thought. And I learned about some things I knew nothing about before. I also marked the hell out of the book, especially the Proudhoun and Bakunin parts.

Ietrio says

A weird personal book. Somebody (Guerin) decided he likes anarchy so much that he needs to make a book about it. Inside there is a strange mix of biographies and excerpts of the most important books of certain authors. The text is not well referenced. And in the end you get a good inside into what Guerin feels of anarchy and almost nothing about the anarchist movement. The same way some have tried to make a coherent system of gods out of the anarchic (pun intended) set of cults and temples in ancient Rome or Greece, the same way Guerin tries to give a direction to a group of people that stood for extremely different goals and paths. And only the need for a short text makes this hagiographies look like biographies.

Guerin seems to be interesting because of a shortage of authors to cover this part of political theory.

Otherwise he is unclear at places. And has the bad habit of using and abusing page notes. This way important information is delegated to the small text area. And that's not enough for him. Important references are given late in the text and only a see page XX before that.

Back in 1970 it might have been hard to gather all these books and biographies. In 2015 you are better off reading the originals and checking out the biographies that are online.

I am also in the presence of a badly executed copy (editions la decouverte) with references that go to the wrong pages.

Sean says

An excellent anthology of writings on anarchism by Stirner, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta (a personal favorite), Voline, Goldman, Makhno, and others. This is libertarian socialism in its various incarnations being described by its most eloquent defenders. I think the major power of a work like this is to help understand the discourse on anarchism in its historical context. Seeing the relation of the development of ideas like collectivism, anarcho-communism, and revolutionary syndicalism with real-world events happening concurrently has helped me to better understand both the significance and value of the various strains, as well as why it's idiotic to propose late 19th/early 20th c. programmes for a post-industrial, post-modern, post-deconstructivist, post-everything world.

I'll say also that I don't believe I had fully grasped the weight of ideas like revolutionary self-organization and mutual aid before hearing them outlined by Kropotkin, Malatesta, and Voline. I particularly enjoyed reading Makhno's account of his meeting with Lenin, and Voline's "The Unknown Revolution".

Not a quick or a necessarily easy read, but the rewards for plodding through this tome are pretty outstanding.
