



No Gods, No Masters: Live the Golden Rule

by

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on

[Dissident Voice](#)



Deep inside anyone who's capable of thinking for themselves beats the heart of an anarchist. Robb Johnson, arguably the greatest political songwriter working today, [wrote](#) a line that goes "Each child born, is born an anarchist". Quite so.

Anarchism is one of the many words that's routinely misused and abused by the mainstream media. If asked what an anarchist is, most people would reflect this misinformation by replying with words suggesting some sort of violent terrorist. This is the image that's been carefully crafted, polished and maintained by the media. Even highly educated people, who really should know better, routinely misuse the word "anarchy" to mean chaos and disorder. It is, of course, nothing of the kind. Derived from the Greek word anarkhos, meaning "without chiefs"¹, anarchism could reasonably be defined as meaning a society without leaders. It does not deny the need for society, it denies the need for leaders.

The hard proof of this can be easily found by anyone who can read. It's there in black and white



in the actual words written by real anarchists – people like Bakunin, Kropotkin, Goldman and Chomsky. And although he wasn't known as an anarchist, possibly because he was active before the word was in common use, the writing of Tom Paine resonates with anarchist values on almost every page. Some people even claim that Jesus Christ was an anarchist because of his allegedly pacifist teaching, but given that no one really knows what he actually taught, that's impossible to confirm. However, most words written by known anarchists express values that are the diametric opposite of the interpretation routinely used by the media.

No doubt every real anarchist has their own personalised concept of anarchism. Most of my clothing is black or black and red – the widely-used colours of anarchism – and much of it has a circled "A", anarchism's unofficial logo: my work-clothes, I call them. I do this not to show-off that I'm an anarchist, but to promote anarchism, to encourage others to wonder what the "A" means. When they ask me, which sometimes happens, I like to have a quick and easy explanation of anarchism to hand – because few people want to know about the writing of Kropotkin, for example, in reply to a casual half-interested question. So I have a quick one-sentence line patiently waiting in the wings: "No gods, no masters, live the Golden Rule". Like all slogans, it's far from perfect, but I think it captures enough of the important essence of anarchism to be pretty useful.

The "no gods" component carries enormous significance in those two little words. They burst with confrontational iconoclasm. There have been many times in our history when uttering those words could have been a death sentence. In parts of the world today, they still could be. The notion that we should have a society where all religion has been consigned to the scrapbook of history (along with all the other dead myths and superstitions that once ruled over different people but which are now rightly known to be complete nonsense) is still a powerful, radical concept. Religion is still a dominant force in most parts of the world, and is still used – as it always has been – as a highly effective controlling mechanism, supplying supposedly divine approval for the criminal actions of secular rulers. Shattering the right of priests to exert this power, as the words "no gods" do, is an important component of anarchism. It demands liberation from control by any and all religion and dares any priest to prove it wrong – if they can.

Religions are most actively practised, and widely believed, in the poorest communities. There's a good reason for this. The people who are the most oppressed and the most likely to rebel against their oppression need to be convinced that their suffering is part of some divine plan: the more they suffer, the greater their rewards in heaven will be. As the great Joe Hill song goes, "You'll get pie in the sky when you die". Often this is the easiest and most comfortable option for oppressed people, permitting them to meekly accept, instead of openly resist. Priests are, of course, the people most responsible for this particularly powerful and effective brainwashing, and with very few exceptions priests have always allowed themselves to be exploited by the super-rich and powerful to continually maintain the lie.

Confronting the lie, as most anarchists do, making people begin to ask important questions about their cherished religious beliefs, is deeply subversive. It makes people realise that the desperate lives they're living is all there is for them; that those lives are not pre-ordained by some old guy living in the clouds who nobody's ever seen. They're pre-ordained by human beings who are no different to them – except in their ability to wield awesome power. Confronting the lie sews the essential seeds of rebellion – the vital sense of injustice, the powerful motivating force to rise up and make things right. During the Spanish Civil War, priests, allies of Franco's fascism, were rightly targeted by anarchists for the essential role they played in keeping the people oppressed. I don't suggest that priests should be murdered – as they were in Spain – but their ideologies must be continually confronted.

"No masters" is arguably even more confrontational and challenging. Most societies have always been ruled by masters. Few of these people have been selected by the free choice of those they control. Historically, the masters were often warlords who attained their status through bloodshed and terror, ruthlessly crushing all opposition. The hierarchical structures of lesser masters they established below them, to rule in their name, are reflected today in almost every institution and organisation in most parts of the world – hierarchies of junior masters overseen by some supreme master. Suggesting that all these people are unnecessary, should not exist at all – as the words "no



masters" clearly does suggest – is obviously the same as suggesting that our whole model of society is fundamentally flawed, and the very glue that keeps the model together should be scrapped.

The last part of the slogan, "live the Golden Rule", is vital. The first two parts are negative, iconoclastic and destructive, calling for the complete breakdown of everything we recognise as "normal" society. "Live the Golden Rule" is positive, constructive, and proposes how a new society should be fashioned. That one sentence is more than sufficient to replace any religion, and also suggests a basis for remodelling the hierarchical structures no one really needs.

The Golden Rule is a simple basic philosophy that's so old it appears in one form or another in almost every ancient civilisation. Repeated in the work of Kropotkin, for example, who wrote: "Treat others as you would like them to treat you in similar circumstances"², the Golden Rule is arguably the most positive contribution anarchism makes to society. It doesn't promise the perfect society, but it's quite easy to see that if everyone lived by the maxim, the world would be an infinitely happier place than it is today. Anarchism rightly confronts and opposes just about every core principle and feature of modern society – an obviously destructive position; and with its support for the Golden Rule it proposes a simple solution for replacing our existing cruel and oppressive system.

Many anarchists embrace the Golden Rule so closely that they live vegan lifestyles, in recognition of the fact that animals too should be included in interpreting the rule. Voluntarily bound by the Golden Rule, as most anarchists are, it's very clear to see that far from being dangerous terrorists, as the media routinely portray them, real anarchists are peace-loving humanitarians who disdain violence against all living things. They may destroy property, when they think it's necessary, but they usually go to great lengths to avoid harming any living creature.

Our societies are not plagued by war, hunger, misery and oppression because we the 99% like to live that way. We have those things because our leaders, the 1%, deliberately choose to inflict them on us. Anarchism rightly identifies two of the biggest problems society has, and which must be overcome – a deep existential belief in gods and masters; and it offers the simplest almost perfect solution upon which society could and should remodel itself: the Golden Rule.