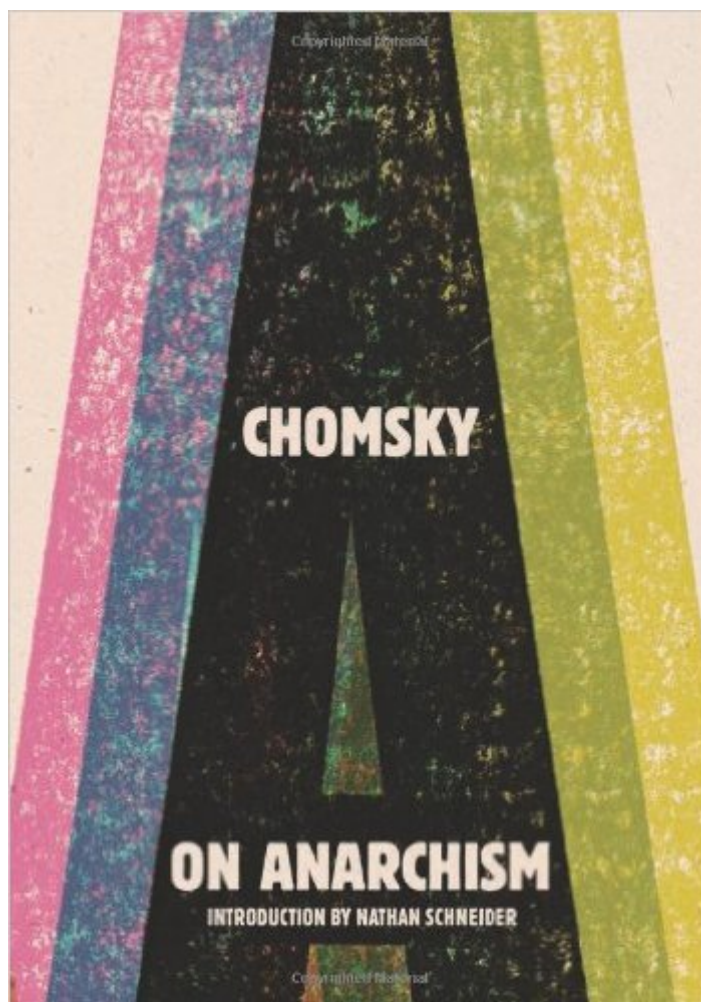


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On Anarchism



Synopsis

On Anarchism provides the reasoning behind Noam Chomsky's fearless lifelong questioning of the legitimacy of entrenched power. In these essays, Chomsky redeems one of the most maligned ideologies, anarchism, and places it at the foundation of his political thinking. Chomsky's anarchism is distinctly optimistic and egalitarian. Moreover, it is a living, evolving tradition that is situated in a historical lineage; Chomsky's anarchism emphasizes the power of collective, rather than individualist, action. The collection includes a revealing new introduction by journalist Nathan Schneider, who documented the Occupy movement for Harper's and The Nation, and who places Chomsky's ideas in the contemporary political moment. On Anarchism will be essential reading for a new generation of activists who are at the forefront of a resurgence of interest in anarchism and for anyone who struggles with what can be done to create a more just world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Unless your interest in this book is purely academic analysis of political systems, I assume you have some leanings in its direction. If so, you know that anarchy has a bad rep; I've seen it equated with 'chaos' in crossword puzzles. Chomsky acknowledges this early on and refutes it; he takes us back to the original goals of anarchy, devoid of people who riot and throw bricks through windows, the goals of individual freedom, economic equality and democracy built from the ground up. The book consists of five chapters; each taken from a previously published work. Although copyright 2013, the

earliest chapter is from 1969, the latest @2002. The first is an essay entitled 'Notes on Anarchism' and is just that; a wide variety of thoughts, with quotes from others, as to just what true anarchism is, and is not. The second chapter, excerpts from Understanding Power, is worth the price of the book. A question and answer session (Chomsky giving the answers) seemingly in a group setting with various people raising the essential questions of anarchism (tension of collectivism vs. individual freedom etc.) Chomsky gives a magnificent tour-de-force performance in replies. He also mentions the anarchy/chaos situation. The third chapter is one of very heavy reading. Stating that the Spanish Revolution, 1936-37, is of great historical significance, Chomsky not only reviews the history of the 'people's revolution' which was crushed by those in power, but, citing numerous historians, questions whether or not their views coincided with reality as to what was happening. If you're not familiar with the named historians or their works, this is a tough read.

This similarly titled book, from 2013 ("A" cover in colors; New Press), overlaps a lot with the AK Press "Chomsky On Anarchism." A spirited introduction by Nathan Schneider (see my reviews of his fine 2013 Occupy study "Thank You Anarchy") places this in context of events that in Schneider's view widened anarchism's range so many curious or hostile were confronted for a time with its presence downtown. As his book had advised, Schneider here suggests churches as examples of successful mutual aid independent of the state, and how the left might overcome its tendency to reject such models as part of a "functional resistance movement." He reaches out to the libertarian capitalists who briefly tried to find common ground with OWS activists and anarchists, and he encourages the "anarcho-curious" who found that movement intriguing to contemplate more efforts to expand their impact. Chomsky himself sums anarchism up: "people have the right to be free, and if there are constraints on that freedom, then you've got to justify them." (33) He wants no more wage slavery, but work as willed. As Schneider notes (and many of Chomsky's critics on the left, who find this inconsistent), Chomsky pragmatically or strategically accepts working within the system so as to prevent right-wing restrictions or for public safety (he uses an example of a rabid raccoon resisting humane traps so he and his neighbors agreed to call authorities to deal with it after local attempts had failed), "because by doing so you can help move to a situation where you can then challenge these structures.

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