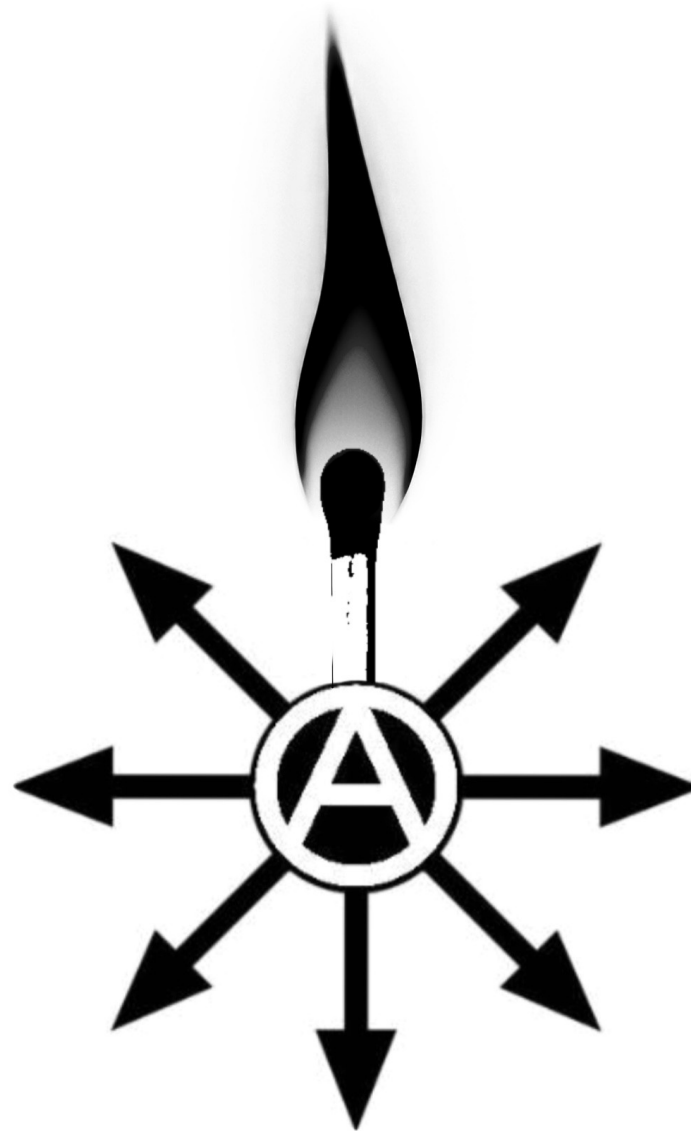


"Authority subjugates the individual,  
instilling in him a selfless ideal. An  
egoist, under any authority, is a  
dissident, a free-thinker who refuses to  
follow authority based on his self-  
interests." -Max Stirner



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# Black Flame

Self-Liberation Against Societal Conformity

In the text “My Iconoclastic Individualism”, Renzo Novatore - an Italian individualist anarchist, illegalist, and anti-fascist - also responds to the notions of egoist-communism:

*...But when we are condemned to hear socialists more or less theorizing in order to impudently and ignorantly state that there is no incompatibility between Individualist and collectivist ideas, when we hear someone stupidly try to make a titanic poet of heroic strength, a dominator of human, moral and divine phantoms, who quivers and throbs, rejoices and expands himself beyond the good and evil of Church and State, Peoples and Humanity, in the strange flickering of a new blaze of unacknowledged love, like Zarathustra's lyrical creator, pass as a poor and vulgar prophet of socialism, when we hear someone try to make an invincible and unsurpassable iconoclast like Max Stirner out to be some tool for the use of frantic proponents of communism, then we may certainly have an ironic smirk on our lips. But then it is necessary to resolutely rise up to defend ourselves and to attack, since anyone who feels that he is truly individualist in principle, means and ends cannot tolerate being at all confused with the unconscious mobs of a morbid, bleating flock.*

"The most disheartening tendency common among readers is to tear out one sentence from a work, as a criterion of the writer's ideas or personality [...] It is the same narrow attitude which sees in Max Stirner naught but the apostle of the theory 'each for himself, the devil take the hind one.' That Stirner's individualism contains the greatest social possibilities is utterly ignored. Yet, it is nevertheless true that if society is ever to become free, it will be so through liberated individuals, whose free efforts make society". - Emma Goldman

### In Essence

Anarcho-egoism encourages individuals to assert their own uniqueness and pursue their goals without being limited by any external "should" or "ought". This includes the societal role and behavioral expectations of race, gender, and other forms of assigned identity which often serve to limit the perception of one's self. Instead of sacrificing for society, the Movement, culture, or tradition, individuals are encouraged to recognize and respect the inherent subjectivity and desires of others as a basis for their own spontaneous and ego-focused interactions.



“Anarchists are opposed to authority both from below and from above. They do not demand power for the masses, but seek to destroy all power and to decompose these masses into individuals who are masters of their own lives. Therefore anarchists are the most decisive enemies of all types of communism and those who profess to be communists or socialist cannot possibly be anarchists.” - Enzo Martucci

**Post-left anarchism:** This current of thought, which emerged in the United States, uses Stirner's critique of ideology to question all anarchist systems.

**Anarcha-feminism:** Thinkers like Emma Goldman were influenced by Stirner to reject social constraints. Anarcha-feminist Emma Goldman was influenced by both *Stirner* and *Peter Kropotkin* as well as the Russian tendency of individualist anarchism and blended these philosophies together in her own as shown in books of hers such as *Anarchism And Other Essays*. There she defends both Stirner and Nietzsche.

**Insurrectionary anarchism:** The focus on individual revolt over organized revolution is a key aspect of this school of thought. Examples of this include Conspiracy Cells or Fire, Animal Liberation Front, etc.

### The Self-Contradiction of Egoist-Communism

In response to the confrontational nature of anarcho-egoism, there have been attempts throughout history to soften its image for the purpose of wider public appeal. Egoist-communists generally assume that all people – in particular self-identified anarchists, desire communism as an alternative to capitalist society, and therefore advocate for empowered individuals against capitalism – as long as those same individuals are willing to become future subordinates to communism.

In the text “The Relevance of Max Stirner to Anarcho-Communists” by Matty Thomas, the author states:

*Egoism encourages individuals to no longer die slowly giving presents to those who give nothing in return, and from this idea flows the egoist communist desire for insurrection and expropriation.*

In the text “Max Stirner, Individualist Anarchy, and A Critical Look at Egoist Communism” by Renzo Connors, the author responds to this directly:

*For me, egoist communism is a contradiction. By implying “egoist-communism” is implying a system, a spook, something sacred to chase after.*

*Egoism is a philosophy for individuation. A weapon for self-liberation. Communism, on the other hand, is a herd philosophy which consumes the individual as an autonomous being, domesticating her for the role of worker, producer, and consumer not that different from capitalism. Although communism may offer some better privileges for her subordination to the system, ultimately the individual will still be a captive prisoner to the collective system.*



Anarcho-egoism (often referred to as individualist anarchy) places emphasis on individual empowerment, rejecting all external authorities and "spooks" (societal constructs) like morality, the state, assigned identity, and even humanism (or human supremacy) in order to achieve total personal liberation and self-fulfillment. Rooted in the 19th-century philosophy of Max Stirner, egoism promotes living according to one's desires and interests without being bound by the authority of laws or social codes of capitalist, industrial society.

### Core tenets of anarcho-egoism

- **The Unique One (The Ego):** The "Unique One," or the individual being, is the core tenet of Stirner's philosophy. The Unique One is not a higher or spiritual self, but the acting individual who exists beyond all concepts or categories. The Unique One is a creative, dynamic individual who cannot be fully defined or comprehended by any external system or concept. The ego is the ultimate source of its own existence and value.
- **Rejection of "spooks":** Anarcho-egoists use the term "spooks" (a translation of the German *Gesperster*) to refer to abstract, non-material concepts that people believe are sacred or real - illusions that individuals have created and then become haunted by. These include social institutions like the state, capitalism, religion, and property, as well as abstract ideas like "rights" (in particular those invented by the State), assigned identity, duty, and justice. Anarcho-egoists believe these are illusions or "spooks" or "phantasms" that are given undue authority with the primary purpose of oppressing the individual. Anarcho-egoists generally oppose assigned identity constructs like race, gender, species, etc - viewing them as instruments of domesticating control designed to both uphold hierarchies within industrial society and alienate individuals from themselves.
- **Insurrection, not revolution:** Anarcho-egoism promotes insurrection over revolution. A revolution aims to establish a new order or institution, which would just be a new set of "spooks" to replace the old ones. An insurrection, by contrast, is a personal rising up of the individual against what is established, without a grand plan for what follows. Anarcho-egoists object to the idea of creating a *new society* as such a society would inevitably be at odds with the freedom of choice for those who would be born into it down the line.

- **Union of Egoists:** Instead of structuring a new society, Stirner proposed a "Union of Egoists"—a voluntary, non-systematic association where individuals cooperate only when it serves their own conscious self-interest. This union is not an authority above the individual but is continually renewed by the will of each individual involved. This contrasts with a society – a mass population within which an individual is born into and expected to surrender to.

### Union of Egoists vs. Society

Stirner drew a sharp contrast between a union of egoists and the concept of society:

	Union of Egoists	Society
<b>Membership</b>	Voluntary and temporary based on individual will.	Compulsory; individuals are born into it and bound by duty.
<b>Authority</b>	Subordinate to the wills of its members; no authority exists above the individual.	Has authority over the individual, demanding adherence to rules and sacrifices.
<b>Purpose</b>	Used by individuals to amplify their own power for their own ends.	Uses individuals as working components to serve its own ends.
<b>Outcome</b>	Flexible and ever-changing based on the needs and desires of individuals.	Fixed and stagnant; it is the "corpse" of a union that has come to a standstill.

**Anarcho-Egoism (Individualist anarchy)**  
vs.  
**Anarcho-Communism (Social anarchism)**

Anarcho-egoism is a form of *Post-left anarchy*. *Post-left anarchy* is a critique and departure from traditional anarchist theories, arguing that past anarchist traditions have become too dogmatic, moralistic, and focused on organized movements and specific leftist ideologies, like Marxism or socialism. It emphasizes individual freedom and a strong critique of industrial civilization.

**Focus:** While social anarchists aim to create a better society, anarcho-egoism is concerned solely with individual liberation. The goal is not a social revolution based on organizing a new socio-economic system, but individual insurrection—a personal refusal to be *organized* by anyone at all.

Anarcho-egoism asserts the absolute autonomy of the individual, while fascism demands the individual's total subordination to the state. White supremacy (or any form of racial nationalism for that matter) demands the individual's total subordination to both the social construct or "spook" of race, and to the idea that any particular race is superior (or inferior) to other races.

### The individual versus the state

A central point of conflict is the value placed on the individual versus the collective:

Anarcho-egoism centers on the "Unique": a sovereign and self-interested individual who rejects all external authority. It views the state, religion, and society itself as forms of authority designed to constrain the ego.

Fascism, in contrast, is an ultranationalist ideology that glorifies the state as the highest entity and a "spiritual and moral fact". Under fascism, individuals' freedom and desires are meaningless outside of their complete service to the nation and the state.

### Self-interest versus self-sacrifice

The ethical frameworks of anarcho-egoism and fascism are direct opposites:

Egoists reject all forms of altruism and self-sacrifice for a higher cause. The ultimate goal is personal liberation and the priority of self-interest, with no moral obligation to serve others.

Fascism insists on an individual's confidence in the supposed superior race and nation, and therefore a complete lack of selfishness and individualism in order to uphold the continuity of the fascist order. The ideal fascist citizen is ready to sacrifice everything, including their life, for the glory of the nation.

While it is important to note that some interpretations of Stirner were co-opted by some proto-fascist groups, this intellectual influence is not the same as a direct link. These figures quickly abandoned any pretense of individualism upon gaining power; for example, Mussolini denouncing "individualism" and "selfishness" in favor of the absolute state. The core philosophies themselves remain incompatible.

### Influence

While Anarcho-Egoism is controversial and often misunderstood, it has significantly influenced various streams of anarchist thought, including:

external forces. They do not follow rules based on a "higher calling" but instead craft their own values based on what serves their unique self.

- **Empathetic self-interest:** An egoist (or nihilist) might find it in their self-interest to be kind and empathetic because it brings them pleasure or strengthens relationships. It is not a selfless act but one that still benefits one's life.
- **Rejection of a "fixed idea" of good:** The egoist/nihilist doesn't follow a prescriptive "should" in their actions. They are aware of their own desires and consequences, and are free to change their own values if they become an oppressive quality in their life.

#### 4. Egoists cannot have genuine relationships.

An egoist can have meaningful relationships and be kind to others, because these social bonds are a source of happiness and support. An egoist values relationships for the companionship and mutual benefit they provide.

#### 5. Egoism is identical to narcissism.

Egoism is a philosophy, whereas Narcissism is a personality trait. A rational egoist has a realistic self-perception and can handle criticism, while a narcissist has an inflated sense of self-worth that is often masking deep-seated insecurity.

#### 6. Egoism promotes a "might is right" mentality.

Egoists generally reject the use of violence or aggression to get what they want, recognizing that such actions would undermine their own self-interest by inviting retaliation and stress into their life.

#### 7. Egoists only care about immediate gratification.

Rational egoists focus on their **long-term happiness and well-being**, not just momentary pleasure. For example, investing in understanding the world around them and maintaining good health are in their ultimate best interest, even if these things require sacrifice in the short term.

#### 8. Anarcho-egoism is a form of fascism and white supremacy

This myth is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of how fascism and white supremacy operate. Anarcho-egoism and fascism are fundamentally opposed in their core philosophies, diverging sharply on the role of the individual, the concept of the state, and the nature of social organization.

**Morality:** Most anarchist schools of thought are built upon a moral foundation, such as the inherent goodness of humanity or the justice of mutual aid. In contrast, anarcho-egoism is amoral and rejects these foundations as spooks that merely subordinate the individual (see 'nihilism' below).

**Praxis:** Historically, many egoist anarchists engaged in "illegalism," or openly embracing criminality to satisfy personal desires or commit sabotage and violence against authoritarian individuals or institutions - practices sometimes condemned by many social anarchists.

### Anarcho-egoism and Nihilism

Nihilism is another concept strongly associated with Max Stirner, which combines egoism (self-liberation) and nihilism (rejection of universal meaning and morals) by prioritizing the individual's self and rejecting claims of any objective morality or social values. The "nihilistic egoist" sees the world as meaningless, but rather than surrendering to existential depression (or seeking to overcome this reality through constructing a new moral system), actively embraces the void, understanding everything as a limitless possibility toward self-creation and joy.

**Rejection of Sacredness:** Stirner argued that anything considered "sacred"—like moral laws, societal rules, or religious beliefs—is simply a concept invented by humans to bind and control the self. Throughout the history of Western colonization, morality has been used in a variety of ways by many different people. Nihilism embraces the reality that no one true moral claim or law can be agreed on by everyone. Therefore, asserting moralist claims on what is "good" or "bad" will forever be up for debate depending on who hears the claim. For example, the claim that consuming animals is "bad" because doing so upholds human supremacy might make sense for anti-authoritarian individuals who oppose human supremacy, but not for those who enjoy authoritarian control and power over others. Therefore, as a strategy, moralism is functionally useless when attempting to dissuade those firmly committed to dominating and consuming animals.

**Embracing the "Nothingness":** For Stirner, the nihilistic egoist doesn't try to create a new moral order or find objective meaning. Instead, they embrace the fundamental "nothingness" of existence, maximizing creative potential and allowing for a lifelong adventure of possibilities explored with every self-determined decision and action.

### Popular Misconceptions

Several misconceptions surround egoism, partially due to a history of intentional efforts to suppress anarcho-egoist narratives and literature, as well as due to its

perceived support of selfishness and arrogance.

### Egoism vs. Egotism

This is a source of frequent confusion, but the two terms refer to different concepts.

Here is a simple breakdown of the differences:

	Egoism	Egotism
<b>What it is</b>	A philosophical concept.	A personality trait.
<b>Focus</b>	Self-interest is the primary motivation for all actions.	Excessive self-importance and arrogance.
<b>How it acts</b>	An egoist acts to benefit themselves, but they don't necessarily show off about it.	An egotist talks about themselves constantly, brags, and seeks attention.
<b>Example</b>	An egoist gives to charity because it makes them feel good.	An egotist boasts publicly about their charitable donations.
<b>The "I"</b>	The egoist's motto is "What's in it for me?".	The egotist's motto is "I'm the best, look at me!".

### Egoism is not the same as selfishness

While a selfish person could be an egoist, the two concepts are not identical. A "thoughtful" egoist may realize that kindness and social relationships are in their long-term best interest.

- **An egoist** considers their own interests in all actions but understands that these interests can be complex and long-term.
- **A selfish person**, by contrast, often acts with a short-sighted, narrow-minded focus on their own gain, which can lead to self-destruction. A selfish action (e.g., lying to a friend) may bring short-term benefit but often leads to long-term harm, such as losing trust with friends or limiting one's potential for social connectivity.

Egoism doesn't imply a disregard for others. While egoism can sometimes be antisocial, many forms of it recognize that healthy relationships and cooperative behavior can be in one's self-interest.

## Popular Myths

### 1. Anarcho-egoism means "everyone for themselves"

A common misreading of Max Stirner is that his philosophy leads to an atomistic society of isolated individuals, a "war of all against all." In this view, egoists would be selfish monsters who never cooperate.

The reality is that:

Egoists recognize that cooperation, friendship, and even love can be in one's self-interest. A person who is "always selfish" in a narrow, antisocial sense will quickly find themselves without friends and without the benefits of mutual aid.

Upon developing anarcho-egoism, Stirner's focus was not on a rejection of all interaction, but on the rejection of any cooperation that is based on coercion or subordination to a "spook"—a collective idea like "the nation" or "morality".

### 2. It is simply another form of capitalism

Anarcho-egoism is sometimes conflated with "anarcho-capitalism," a system where a free market is the only rule and individuals act solely in their financial self-interest. However, Stirner's philosophy is anti-capitalistic.

Stirner saw all forms of the state, including capitalist ones, as oppressive "spooks".

His concept of "egoistic property" is based on one's power to take and defend what one desires, not on the moral or legal rights that underpin capitalist property ownership. In Stirner's view, capitalism relies on fixed ideas about rights and contracts, which ultimately oppress the individual.

Anarcho-egoists reject the idea of private property enforced by a state or any other external authority.

### 3. Anarcho-egoists are nihilists, therefore have no values or ethics

Because anarcho-egoism rejects universal moral rules and obligations, critics often assume that egoists (and nihilists for that matter) behave without any regard for the well-being of others. This, however, misunderstands both the egoist and nihilist position.

- **Rejection of prescribed morality:** Egoists (or nihilists) do not reject values per se, but rather the *idea* of a *fixed moral code* imposed by