Reader Abstract: This reader serves two general purposes. First, to introduce students to the concept and theories of anarchism as a political or ethical ideology. Second, to encourage students to think critically about the role of the state and the challenges of social organization.

Session 1: First Shot – The Case for Anarchism (31 pages)


Session Abstract: These readings establish the basic idea that anarchy, as an alternative system of social organization, is plausible. They do not make an overt argument in favor of anarchy, but by establishing it as a plausible idea, these readings can help frame the subsequent sessions as to whether or not anarchy is desirable. The Hasnas piece covers many of the common objections to anarchy in brief, with particular emphasis on the arbitration question, since Hasnas is a legal philosopher. The Leeson piece offers thought-provoking examples of stateless societies that have existed in history.

Session 2: Reply On Behalf of the State (23 pages)


Session Abstract: The Engels piece offers the Marxist critique of anarchists within the socialist movement at his time. Douglass’ paper responds directly to the anarchist thinkers within the slave abolitionist movement prior to the civil war. The Holcombe piece argues a common objection that regardless of the desirability of anarchy, individual self-interest makes the establishment of a state inevitable, and positive attempts to establish a state allow people the freedom to establish one more to their liking.
Session 3: Anarchism Strikes Back (33 pages)


Session Abstract: The Huemer piece argues against political authority as an ethical matter. Then, Emma Goldman rejects both property and religion with her case for anarchy that resembles a different form of anarchist theory: anarcho-communism and “thick” anarchism. Through doing so, Goldman offers a foil to both the session two anti-anarchism readings and Huemer’s relatively pro-capitalism piece. Leeson and Stringham’s writing offers a direct response to Holcombe—furthering the conversation of anarchist thought within classical liberal political theory.

Session 4: The Economics of Anarchism (29 pages)


Session Abstract: These readings naturally feed off of each other as each one is a direct response to the one before it (the first Cowen reading is a direct response to an unassigned David Friedman writing). They deal predominantly with a specific economic objection to anarchism, being the “public goods” question applied to the provision of security. Both perspectives deal more with the theoretical possibility of private security, rather than the subjective desirability of it.