

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)  
Anti-Copyright



# Exploring the Intersection of Anarchism and Buddhist Ontology

Gayr Neşriyatı

Gayr Neşriyatı  
Exploring the Intersection of Anarchism and Buddhist Ontology  
9 March 2023

Retrieved on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023 from [gayrnesriyat.substack.com](http://gayrnesriyat.substack.com)

[usa.anarchistlibraries.net](http://usa.anarchistlibraries.net)

9 March 2023



phasis on individual autonomy and self-rule resonates with the Buddhist principle of anatta, or the absence of a fixed self. According to Buddhist ontology, the self is viewed as a construct in a state of constant flux and transformation. This concept is consistent with anarchist ideology, which similarly denounces fixed identities and hierarchical power structures that are based on inherent characteristics. By rejecting fixed identities and hierarchies, both the Sangha and anarchist philosophy promote individual agency and liberation from oppressive societal norms. The Sangha operates under a communal structure, where resources are shared and communal goals are prioritized over individual interests. This emphasis on collectivism and rejection of individualism is in line with anarchist principles of communal ownership and the repudiation of private property.

## Contents

Introduction . . . . .	5
Anarchism, and the notion of the State . . . . .	5
Buddhist Ontology . . . . .	7
Four Noble Truths . . . . .	7
Dependent Origination . . . . .	9
The Three Universal Truths . . . . .	9
The Role of the Self in Both Philosophies . . . . .	11
Anarchist practices in relation to Buddhist Ontolog	12
Thich Nhat Hanh . . . . .	12
The Sangha . . . . .	13

## **The Sangha**

The term "Sangha" in the Sanskrit language refers to a community of practitioners who have committed themselves to the pursuit of spiritual development. This community operates independently of political authority and adheres to principles that are consistent with the tenets of anarchist philosophy. The Sangha is a social grouping of individuals who have voluntarily chosen to embark on a journey of spiritual development and pursue enlightenment, separate from political governance. This grouping serves as a space where like-minded individuals can come together to engage in spiritual practices, which are in alignment with the principles of Buddhist ontology, and anarchism as well.

Structures and organizations may vary across the world and these may not necessarily conflict with anarchist principles, and can even prove anarchism to be the right way. As anarchists hold that individuals should have the ability to freely organize and govern themselves according to their own, without the requirement of centralized authority. This philosophy shares similarities with the Sangha, which is grounded on the principle of self-governance and autonomy.

The Sangha's focus on self-governance and voluntary association allows for a space where individuals can exercise agency and work towards the common goal of spiritual development without the interference of external authority.

The Sangha is characterized by a practice of mutual aid, wherein individuals offer assistance to one another in their pursuit of spiritual development. This aid is provided without the expectation of reciprocation or personal gain, reflecting the principles of mutual aid and collective action espoused by anarchists. Additionally, the Sangha operates through a system of direct democracy, wherein decisions are reached by consensus rather than being dictated by a centralized authority. This rejection of hierarchical power structures aligns with the core tenets of anarchist philosophy. The em-

ontology acknowledges the presence of an intrinsic Buddha-nature or potential for illumination among all living beings. Both viewpoints emphasize the role of individual agency in shaping human nature and facilitating personal and societal liberation.

### **Anarchist practices in relation to Buddhist Ontology**

Anarchist practices can be interpreted as a pragmatic manifestation of Buddhist ontology in the realm of societal and political liberation. Anarchist ideology emphasizes the establishment of a society based on individual autonomy and mutual cooperation, which resonates with the Buddhist doctrine of non-attachment and the recognition of the innate Buddha-nature in all sentient beings. Anarchist practices, including mutual aid and community organizing, further highlight the significance of individual agency and personal transformation, which are parallel to the Buddhist principles of mindfulness and introspection.

### **Thich Nhat Hanh**

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, demonstrated an amalgamation of Anarchism and Buddhist ontology in his life and teachings. He played a pivotal role in the Buddhist peace movement during the Vietnam War and advocated for non-violent resistance. His emphasis on community and solidarity was evident through the establishment of Plum Village, a monastic community in France that focused on mindfulness and social activism. Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings on mindfulness and non-violence were in consonance with Anarchist principles, particularly the renunciation of hierarchical structures and the conviction that change is instigated from the grassroots level.

## **Introduction**

This essay aims to investigate the potential for mutual enrichment between anarchist political philosophy and Buddhist ontology. Anarchism advocates for the elimination of hierarchical power structures and prioritizes individual liberty, whereas Buddhist ontology aims to comprehend the nature of reality and the self. By exploring the intersections between these two philosophies, one might identify how they may come to complement each other in one sense and lead to a more nuanced understanding of the human experience, and the way humans come together to form decision-making structures. The divergent manifestations of anarchism and its teachings across various regions of the world signify its adaptability to distinct cultural and historical contexts. This article does not assert that Buddhism and anarchism are inherently intertwined due to their perceived similarities. Rather, it highlights the capacity of anarchism as a mechanism for autonomous decision-making within communities of diverse backgrounds, which is integrated with their respective cultural and historical narratives. Furthermore, the approach of Buddhism towards the reality of the world may exhibit compatibility with the principles of anarchism, which resist certain aspects of societal norms.

## **Anarchism, and the notion of the State**

Anarchist theorists often posit that the concept of the state is an abstract construction that lacks a solid foundation in reality. According to this view, the state has historically served as a tool for exerting control and suppressing individuals and communities. In opposition to the conventional belief that the state is indispensable for preserving stability and safeguarding society, anarchists contest that it is the primary cause of violence and subjugation. The

state originates from the actions of individuals who aspire to exercise power over others. This power dynamic is sustained by the prevalent notion that the state is crucial to ensuring the smooth functioning of society. Anarchists, however, disavow this perspective and advocate for self-governance, promoting the idea that individuals should have the autonomy to organize their affairs without the imposition of state intervention.

One must contest the notion of the state possessing any innate metaphysical essence. Rather, contend that the state is a man-made construct lacking ontological substance beyond the socially and culturally generated constructs that uphold it. Anarchists espouse the position that the state is a byproduct of human volition and possesses no objective existence independent of the cognitive faculties of individuals who subscribe to its existence. Hence, I disavow any ascription of metaphysical potency or dominion to the state, positing that the state's power is entirely contingent upon the acquiescence of its constituents, who reserve the prerogative to rescind their consent at their discretion. Thus, the notion of the state wielding any inherent metaphysical authority to enforce edicts or regulate conduct, and instead advocate for the liberty of individuals to govern themselves autonomously in consonance with their own personal convictions and standards. Therefore, one must contest the concept of the state possessing any inherent metaphysical puissance or supremacy. Rather, must contend that the state's power emanates solely from the concurrence of the governed, who retain the privilege to rescind their agreement at any juncture. Anarchists repudiate the notion of the state possessing any intrinsic metaphysical authorization to promulgate laws or regulate behavior, and instead espouse the principle of individual self-determination, wherein people are free to govern themselves in consonance with their own ethical and epistemological outlooks, which is likely to paw the way towards a society devoid of hierarchical power structures, which facilitates individual self-determination in accordance

## The Role of the Self in Both Philosophies

Anarchism is a political ideology that strives to eradicate power structures arranged in hierarchical order, and advance a society grounded on the principles of self-governance and communal harmony. The fundamental tenet of anarchistic philosophy is rooted in the conviction of the inherent value and meritoriousness of every person. Analogously, in Buddhist ontology, it is posited that all sentient beings possess an intrinsic Buddha-nature or the capacity to attain enlightenment.

Both philosophical traditions acknowledge the significance of the self in shaping human nature. Anarchist thought espouses the notion of individual autonomy and self-determination, whereby individuals are capable of making their own decisions and living their lives according to their own values and desires, thereby rejecting external authority and hierarchical structures. Similarly, Buddhist ontology underscores the importance of individual agency in the pursuit of enlightenment, wherein the recognition of the impermanence and interconnectedness of all phenomena enables individuals to develop a deeper comprehension of the self and its relationship with the world.

When it comes to the nature of reality, both Anarchism and Buddhist ontology challenge conventional notions of static and immutable power structures. Anarchists repudiate external authority and advocate for the decentralization of power within society. This closely aligns with the Buddhist concept of dependent origination, which highlights the interconnectedness and transience of all things. Both traditions acknowledge the fundamental role of causality in the emergence and cessation of all phenomena.

Anarchism and Buddhist ontology converge in their perspective of human nature as inherently virtuous and possessing the capacity for self-rule. The anarchist school of thought advocates for individual autonomy and personal value-based decision-making while rejecting the notion of external authority. Similarly, Buddhist

phenomena, oblivious to their transient nature, inevitably engenders pain and misery.

The second Universal Truth posits that the inherent impermanence of reality engenders suffering and introduces flaws into life's fabric. It acknowledges that our cravings and attachments give rise to feelings of incompleteness, thereby inducing suffering. This Truth refutes the notion that external factors such as wealth, status, or relationships can guarantee our well-being and asserts that genuine happiness and freedom can only arise from acknowledging the fleetingness of all phenomena and relinquishing our emotional dependencies.

The third Universal Truth postulates that the self is a dynamic process that is constantly evolving in response to changing conditions. It eschews the notion of a static and essential self, acknowledging that any conception of selfhood is dependent on a variety of factors. By recognizing the impermanent and contingent nature of the self, this Truth challenges the idea of any inherent or unchanging essence of the self, which can lead to suffering when clung to.

Regarding the intersection of the Three Universal Truths and anarchism, the former possess relevance in questioning the notion of rigid power and authority structures that anarchism seeks to eliminate. Anarchism aims to establish a society that values self-determination, autonomy, and cooperation by dismantling hierarchical structures. The Three Universal Truths challenge the idea of fixed and immutable power structures by emphasizing the impermanence and interconnectedness of all phenomena, including societal and political structures. Consequently, these Truths lend support to the anarchist ideal of a society founded on individual self-reliance and mutual cooperation.

with their own axiological and epistemological convictions by renouncing the state concept.

## **Buddhist Ontology**

Buddhist ontological postulates assert that the nature of reality is characterized by impermanence, interdependence, and ceaseless flux. In accordance with Buddhist doctrine, all phenomena are held to be subject to the universal principle of impermanence, signifying that every existent entity will inevitably undergo cessation. The conception of transience, denoting a sense of continual change and instability, represents a core tenet of Buddhist ontology. Moreover, Buddhist ontology posits that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence, signifying the absence of an essential nature or independent being. This ontological position is rooted in the philosophical concept of emptiness (shunyata), which maintains that all phenomena lack inherent existence and instead are interdependently arisen. This implies that nothing can exist autonomously, and all existents are intricately interwoven in a web of mutual dependence. Also, Buddhist ontology espouses the principle of interconnection and interdependence between all phenomena. According to this view, all existents emerge as a result of complex, multifaceted causal factors and conditions, and cannot be understood in isolation. This perspective subverts the traditional understanding of a self-sufficient, independent reality and posits that every entity is embedded within a broader system.

## **Four Noble Truths**

The Four Noble Truths are a fundamental tenet in Buddhist philosophy, elucidating the nature of suffering and the means to alleviate it. This discourse endeavors to examine the Four Noble Truths through the lens of their interrelation to ontological concepts, metaphysical principles, and anarchistic ideology.

The initial Noble Truth in Buddhism concerns the presence of suffering in human existence. It recognizes the veracity of human anguish and the inescapable nature of discomfort, infirmity, aging, and mortality. This Truth is based on the fundamental Buddhist tenet that the world is transitory and continuously evolving. All phenomena, including our own experiences of contentment and distress, emerge and dissolve.

The second Noble Truth is grounded in the acknowledgement of the causal relationship between craving and attachment and the experience of suffering. According to this Truth, the existential dissatisfaction and discomfort we experience can be attributed to our yearning for external circumstances or states of being, which invariably gives rise to unfulfilled desires and perpetual discontentment. It urges us to transcend the dependence on external stimuli as a means to attain contentment and instead highlights the necessity of overcoming the inner impulses that drive us towards craving and attachment.

The third Noble Truth postulates the potential cessation of suffering, acknowledging that the psychological distress we undergo is not an innate and unalterable component of existence but rather a construction of our own cognition. This Truth is intended to inspire aspirants to pursue freedom from affliction.

The fourth Noble Truth is the truth that presents the path towards the cessation of suffering. This truth expounds the Eightfold Path, which lays out a comprehensive set of principles for ethical and mental development. The Eightfold Path encompasses eight interconnected components: right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. It emphasizes the importance of individual agency and determination in the pursuit of freedom from suffering.

## **Dependent Origination**

According to the concept of dependent origination in Buddhism, every dharma is dependent on and conditioned by other dharma for its arising and ceasing. This view recognizes the transient and interdependent nature of all things and refutes the existence of a permanent and self-sufficient entity or essence. It highlights the fact that everything is in a perpetual state of flux and evolution, thus challenging the concept of a fixed and immutable reality.

The concept of an inherent existence or self-nature is dismissed, as everything is believed to be interdependent, with individual phenomena arising based on multiple causes and conditions. This view of reality is in stark contrast to the dualistic and essentialist modes of thinking found in many Western philosophies, instead highlighting the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of all phenomena.

The ontology of dependent origination may have implications for anarchism, a political philosophy that strives to eradicate hierarchical structures and power imbalances. Through its emphasis on the interrelatedness of all phenomena, dependent origination challenges the concept of individual self-sufficiency and autonomy that often serves as the basis for hierarchical systems. It acknowledges the interdependence of beings and phenomena and recognizes the consequences of individual actions on the broader world.

## **The Three Universal Truths**

The first Universal Truth asserts the transitory and mutable nature of all phenomena. It posits that everything undergoes constant change, reflecting the inexorable operation of natural laws. The Truth eschews the notion of any immutable or fixed component of reality, recognizing that all things are susceptible to transformation. Furthermore, the Truth contends that grasping onto fleeting