2 Anarchism and human nature

As we saw in Chapter 1, many of the criticisms of anarchism as a viable political ideology and thus as a sound philosophical base for constructing ideas on education, hinge on the concept of human nature. This chapter, therefore, offers an exploration of the anarchist position on human nature, with a view to both addressing these criticisms and beginning to grasp the role of education in anarchist thought.

Many critics have dismissed anarchism as a coherent or serious political theory precisely on the basis that its view of human nature is, they argue, unrealistic or naive. Thus for example, Max Beloff (1975) states that the case for anarchism

> is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of human nature, on the unproven supposition that given total absence of constraints, or alternatively material abundance secured by communism, human societies could exist with no coercive element at all, the freedom of each being recognized as compatible with the freedom of all.

Similarly, Jonathan Wolff, in his account of anarchism in his *Introduction to Political Philosophy*, states that 'to rely on the natural goodness of human beings to such an extent seems utopian in the extreme' (Wolff 1996: 34).

As we shall see, statements such as these are based on a misconception of the anarchist view of human nature and its consequences for the anarchist social ideal. In order to proceed with this analysis, then, it is important to establish exactly what the anarchist account of human nature consists of, what its role is within anarchist theory, how it compares with connected ideas within the liberal tradition and the educational implications of this account.

In general, the focus here will be on the way the construct of human nature is put forth in order to support a particular idea. Bikhu Parekh has remarked that, although the concept of human nature 'is one of the oldest and most influential concepts in Western philosophy' (Parekh 1997: 16), there has been little agreement, throughout the history of philosophy, on what the term actually means. Parekh ultimately offers a defence of a minimalist definition of human nature, emphasizing not only the universal constants of

human existence but the 'ways in which they are creatively interpreted and incorporated into the process of human self-articulation and self-understanding' (ibid.: 26). As such, his definition challenges the underlying assumption, common to all classic accounts of human nature, that there is a fairly clear distinction between nature and culture – between 'what is inherent in humans and what is created by them' (ibid.: 17). I tend to agree with Parekh that the concept of human nature is inherently problematic and that relying on it in philosophical discussions can have undesirable implications due to its tendency to assume an ahistorical position and to deny the cultural imbeddedness of human experience and character. However, what is important in the present context is the methodological role which the concept of human nature has played within philosophical positions. As Parekh notes, philosophers have used it to serve three purposes: 'to identify or demarcate human beings; to explain human behaviour; and to prescribe how human beings should live and conduct themselves.' It is the second and third purposes which are of central concern to us here.

In the context of philosophy of education, Anthony O'Hear has articulated a view similar to that of Parekh in stating that 'human nature is not something that is just given. It is something we can make something of, in the light of how we conceive ourselves and others'. Given O' Hear's understanding of philosophy of education as essentially involving a reflection on 'one's values and concept of what men [*sic*] ought to be' (O'Hear 1981: 1) and one's 'ideals for society as whole', it is thus clear that the notion of a common human nature can be a useful conceptual tool in that emphasizing particular traits, virtues or potentialities as uniquely and essentially human often plays an important methodological role in philosophically evaluating particular normative positions on education.

In anarchist theory, where the central animating ideal is that of the free society, based on mutual cooperation, decentralization and self-government, the concept of a common human nature is employed in order to demonstrate the feasibility of this social ideal. However, contrary to the opinion of many critics (see, for example, May 1994) the anarchists, in the same way as they did not believe that the future anarchist society would be free from all social conflict, did not in fact subscribe to a simplistic, naively optimistic view of human tendencies and characteristics. Nor, so I shall argue, were they unaware of the philosophical complexities involved in the idea of a common human nature.

Human nature in social-anarchist theory

In his detailed study of anarchist views on human nature, Morland (1997) notes that both Proudhon and Bakunin, two of the leading social-anarchist theorists, acknowledged human nature to be innately twofold, involving both an essentially egotistical potential and a sociable, or altruistic potential. As Bakunin picturesquely expressed this idea: 'Man has two opposed

instincts, egoism and sociability. He is both more ferocious in his egoism than the most ferocious beasts and more sociable than the bees and ants' (Bakunin, in Maximoff 1953: 147).

A similar perspective arises from the work of Kropotkin, the social-anarchist theorist, who, more than any other theorist within the tradition, devoted considerable energy to developing a systematic theory of human nature. Much of Kropotkin's work – primarily his monumental treatise, *Mutual Aid*, which he wrote before becoming identified with the anarchist movement – can be interpreted as an attempt to counter the extreme version of social Darwinism often put forward by theorists such as Huxley as a justification of the capitalist system, elevating free competition amongst individuals to a positive virtue (see Hewetson 1965). Kropotkin was anxious to show that the simplistic notion of 'survival of the fittest' was a misleading interpretation of evolutionary theory, and that Darwin himself had noted man's social qualities as an essential factor in his evolutionary survival. As contemporary theorists have noted, 'for most of us, Darwinism suggests anything but communality and cooperativeness in nature' (Nisbet 1976: 364). Yet *The Origin of Species* is full of references to man's 'social nature', which, Darwin argues, has 'from the beginning prompted him to live in tightly knit communities, with the individual's communal impulse often higher indeed than his purely self-preservative instinct' and without which it is highly probable that 'the evolution of man, as we know it, would never have taken place' (ibid.: 368). By ignoring this clear emphasis in Darwin's work, the position referred to as 'social Darwinism' amounts to, as Nisbet notes, 'scarcely more than a celebration of the necessity of competition and conflict in the social sphere' (ibid.: 364). Accordingly, one can see the logic of trying to establish cooperation as a fundamental principle of nature in order to celebrate and promote the anarchist ideal of a society based on cooperation and communalism.[1]

However, it is on Darwin's earlier work, *The Descent of Man*, from which Kropotkin draws most heavily in his own work, adopting Darwin's basic account of how

> in numberless animal societies, the struggle between separate individuals for the means of existence disappears, how struggle is replaced by cooperation, and how that substitution results in the development of intellectual and moral faculties which secure to the species the best conditions for survival.
>
> (Kropotkin 1972: 28)

Kropotkin's position was based not only on his reading of Darwin but on his own extensive research into animal behaviour which he conducted with a zoologist colleague and which culminated in the publication of *Mutual Aid* in 1902. Although some critics have questioned aspects of Kropotkin's methodology, contemporary anthropological research seems to support his basic thesis that the principle of social cooperation has been a characteristic

of human and other species since earliest times – predating, apparently, the primacy of the family unit. The paradigm case of the prominence of 'mutual aid' (a term derived from the biologist Karl Kessler – see Morland 1997: 132) as a factor in the evolution of animal species is that of ants. The important conclusion here is that while there may be aggressive fighting for survival between species, within the ant community, mutual aid and cooperation prevail. As Kropotkin puts it, 'The ants and termites have renounced the "Hobbesian war", and they are the better for it' (Kropotkin 1972: 36).

Kropotkin does not deny the Darwinian idea of the principle of struggle as the main impetus for evolution. But he emphasized that there are two forms which this struggle can take: the struggle of organism against organism for limited resources (the aspect of evolution emphasized by Huxley) and the kind of struggle that Darwin referred to as metaphorical: the struggle of the organism for survival in an often hostile environment. As Gould puts it,

> Organisms must struggle to keep warm, to survive the sudden and unpredictable dangers of fire and storm, to persevere through harsh periods of drought, snow, or pestilence. These forms of struggle between organism and environment are best waged by cooperation among members of the same species-by mutual aid.
>
> (Gould 1988: 4)

In terms of these two aspects of the struggle for existence, Kropotkin ultimately regards the principle of mutual aid as more important from an evolutionary point of view, as it is this principle which 'favours the development of such habits and characters as insure the maintenance and further development of the species, together with the greatest amount of welfare and enjoyment of life for the individual, with the least waste of energy' (Kropotkin 1972: 30–31). As Morland sums up Kropotkin's conclusions from the wealth of evidence collected from observations of the animal world: 'Put quite simply, life in societies ensures survival' (Morland 1997: 135).

Of course it is highly problematic to attempt to draw conclusions for human behaviour from evidence from the animal kingdom. However Darwin himself, whose methods Kropotkin obviously sought to emulate, argued that 'what is so often to be found among animals is [...] utterly universal among human beings' (Nisbet 1976: 368). Furthermore, Kropotkin assembled a wealth of evidence, which he often cited later in his various anarchist writings, of the presence of a propensity for spontaneous cooperation and mutual aid within human society. Indeed, anarchist writers today are fond of referring to cases such as that of the life-guard association, the European railway system, or the international postal service, as instances of mutual aid and voluntary cooperation in action. Even given the limitations of such examples, it seems that the point Kropotkin is making is a purely methodological one: if one wants to argue for the feasibility of an anarchist society, it is sufficient to indicate that the propensity for voluntary cooperation has some historical

and evolutionary evidence in order to render such a society not completely unfeasible. Furthermore, as Barclay points out, 'Some criticise anarchism because its only cement is something of the order of moral obligation or voluntary co-operation. But democracy, too, ultimately works in part because of the same cement' (Barclay 1990: 130). I shall discuss, later, the question of the extent to which Kropotkin and other anarchist theorists relied on this 'cement' as the principal force in shaping and maintaining anarchist society, and to what extent they acknowledged the need for institutional frameworks and social reform.

The question remains as to whether Kropotkin saw the principle of mutual aid as simply an essential aspect of the human psyche. Morland suggests that, through the evolutionary process, mutual aid has indeed become a kind of 'psychological drive', basic to our consciousness of ourselves as social beings. Indeed, Kropotkin makes use of the notion of an instinct in his insistence that he is referring to something far more basic than feelings of love and sympathy in his discussion of sociability as a general principle of evolution. 'It is', he writes,

> not love to my neighbour – whom I often do not know at all – which induces me to seize a pail of water and rush towards his house when I see it on fire; it is a far wider, even though more vague feeling or instinct of human solidarity and sociability which moves me.
>
> (Kropotkin 1972: 21)

But DeHaan (1965) has argued that while Kropotkin's theory can be described as an 'instinct theory', the 'tendencies' he mentions do not have ontological status but rather should be regarded as a hypothesis. 'Natural laws', he argues, 'are not imbedded in reality; they are human constructs to help us understand nature' (DeHaan 1965: 276). It is important to bear this in mind when discussing the next step in Kropotkin's thesis, which is the argument that mutual aid is the basis for morality, and that without it, 'human society itself could not be maintained'. As Morland notes, it is only through the medium of consciousness that the propensity for mutual aid can surface and flourish – a view which clearly contradicts the Rousseauian notion of a pre-social human nature, to which Kroptokin was vehemently opposed. Indeed, in acknowledging human nature to be essentially contextualist, in the sense that they regarded it as determined not by any human essence but by social and cultural context, Kropotkin and other anarchist theorists seemed to be aware of the pitfalls of assuming what Parekh refers to as the dichotomy between culture and nature. In this sense, they were indeed far from Rousseau's romanticization of the 'state of nature' and indictment of modern civilization. Bakunin's view of human nature was also, as both Morland and Ritter note, a contextualist one, in that it rejected essentialistic notions of human nature and assumed humans to be at the same time individuals and social beings. Which of these two strands of human nature comes to the fore at any given time is, the social anarchists believed, dependent on

the social and cultural environment. Bakunin puts forth this view as part of his famous critique of the state, implying at the same time an outright rejection of the religious notion of original sin, the Rousseauian view of pre-social human nature, and the idea of the social contract:

> Failing to understand the sociability of human nature, metaphysics regarded society as a mechanical and purely artificial aggregate of individuals, abruptly brought together under the blessing of some formal and secret treaty, concluded either freely or under the influence of some superior power. Before entering into society, these individuals, endowed with some sort of immortal soul, enjoyed total freedom...
>
> (Bakunin, in Woodcock 1977: 83)

Accepting the theoretical assumption that man is born free implies an antithesis between the free individual and society – a position which, Bakunin argues, 'utterly ignores human society, the real starting point of all human civilization and the only medium in which the personality and liberty of man can really be born and grow' (Bakunin, in Morris 1993: 87–88).

Even Godwin, an earlier anarchist thinker generally regarded as being more on the individualist than the social side of the continuum, shared this rejection of a pre-social or innate concept of human nature. 'The actions and dispositions of men', he wrote in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*,

> are not the off-spring of any original bias that they bring into the world in favour of one sentiment or character rather than another, but flow entirely from the operation of circumstances and events acting upon a faculty of receiving sensible impressions.
>
> (Godwin 1946: 26–27)

In the light of this discussion, it is clear that theorists who argue, with Tony Kemp-Welch, that the origins of anarchist thought 'can be traced to Rousseau's idea of man being born free and that political institutions have corrupted an otherwise innocent and pure human nature' (Kemp-Welch 1996: 26) are fundamentally mistaken, and are thereby contributing to the misconceptions surrounding anarchism.

Human nature and the capitalist state

The anarchist position, then, does not involve a simple, naive view of human nature as essentially altruistic. Kropotkin especially acknowledged, with Darwin, the presence of a drive for domination, and the theme constantly running through his thought is a dialectic conception of the tension between the principle of the struggle for existence and that of mutual aid. Unlike Proudhon and Fourier, whose economic theories clearly influenced him, Kropotkin attempts to place his anarchist ideas in a broader historical context.

He writes: 'All through the history of our civilization two contrary traditions, two trends have faced one another; the Roman tradition and the national tradition; the imperial and the federal; the authoritarian and the libertarian...' (quoted in Ward 1991: 85).

He goes on to identify the state with the coercive, authoritarian tradition, the antithesis of which is the kind of voluntary forms of social organization such as guilds, workers' cooperatives and parishes. Martin Buber, who had considerable sympathy for the social philosophy of anarchist thinkers such as Kropotkin and Proudhon, developed this implicit distinction between the social and political order, believing that the way forward lay in a gradual restructuring of the relationship between them. Of course, as Buber acknowledged, Kropotkin's conception of the state is too narrow, for 'in history there is not merely the State as a clamp that strangles the individuality of small associations; there is also the State as a framework within which they may consolidate' (Buber 1958: 39). Given modern conceptions such as Nozick's of the minimal, liberal democratic state, the narrowness of Kropotkin's definition is even more glaring. Yet, as Buber goes on to argue, Kropotkin was right to draw attention to the fact that the historical rise of the centralist state signalled a fundamental change in our conception of the nature of social relations – the idea of the sovereign state displacing the primacy of the idea of the free city or various forms of free contract and confederacy. Buber himself remained optimistic as to the possibility of 'a socialist rebuilding of the state as a community of communities' (ibid.: 40), but Kropotkin saw the principle of decentralization and voluntary association as fundamental to revolutionary change and any state structure as necessarily antithetical to this principle.

Kropotkin's talk of these two contrary historical 'tendencies' is intertwined with his talk of the two aspects of human nature, reflecting what Morland describes as a 'symbiotic relationship' between historical progress and human nature. Yet although, as mentioned, the position of Bakunin and Kropotkin on this issue is a contextualist one, this does not mean to say that such theorists took a neutral stance towards the two opposed aspects of human nature and the way in which they are manifested in a social context. As an examination of his arguments shows, Kropotkin assigned normative status to the altruistic strand of human nature, and seemed to regard it as in some sense dominant. In a particularly powerful piece written for *Freedom* in 1888, entitled 'Are We Good Enough?' Kropotkin sets out to counter the argument often made that 'men are not good enough to live under a communist state of things' or, rather, 'they would submit to a compulsory Communism, but they are not yet ripe for free, Anarchistic Communism' (Kropotkin, in Becker and Walter 1988). To this he answers with the question 'but are they good enough for Capitalism?'. His argument is that if people were naturally and predominantly kind, altruistic and just, there would be no danger of exploitation and oppression. It is precisely because we are not so compassionate, just and provident that the present system is intolerable and must be changed, for

the present institutions allow 'slavishness' and oppression to flourish. Obviously, the point is not that people do not have a natural, instinctive propensity for justice, altruism and social cooperation but rather that they do not have *only* such propensities. If not for the opposing, egotistical streak of human nature,

> the private ownership of capital would be no danger. The capitalist would hasten to share his profits with the workers, and the best-remunerated workers with those suffering from occasional causes. If men were provident they would not produce velvet and articles of luxury while food is wanted in cottages; they would not build palaces as long as there are slums [...]
>
> (Ibid.)

The only way to suppress, or at least diminish, the 'slavish' and competitive instincts we are unfortunately endowed with is to change society by means of what Kropotkin refers to as 'higher instruction and equality of conditions', thereby eliminating those conditions which 'favour the growth of egotism and rapacity, of slavishness and ambition' (a state of affairs which, Kropotkin emphasizes, is damaging both to the rulers and the ruled). The principal difference, Kropotkin argues in this text, between the anarchists and those who dismiss them as unpractical, utopian dreamers, is that 'we admit the imperfections of human nature, but we make no exception for the rulers. They make it, although sometimes unconsciously...' (ibid.). It is this view, according to Kropotkin, which is behind the paternalistic justification of the inbuilt inequalities of the capitalist state system – that is, that, if not for a few wise rulers keeping them in check, the masses would allow their base, egotistical instincts to get out of control, leading to social and moral depravity. It is in this context that one can begin to understand the crucial and complex role of education in Kropotkin's thought.

Nurturing the propensity for mutual aid

So we see that Kropotkin believes ultimately in the power of the altruistic aspects of human nature to prevail. He contends, unlike Rousseau, that even a corrupt society cannot crush individual human goodness – that is, even the capitalist state cannot 'weed out the feeling of human solidarity, deeply lodged in men's understanding and heart' (Becker and Walter 1988: 38). Nevertheless, he acknowledges that people 'will not turn into anarchists by sudden transformation'. Thus the contextualist account of human nature can go a long way towards answering the question of why education, and schools, are necessary both to help bring about and to sustain an anarchist society.

An analysis of Bakunin's work on the subject supports this view, for Bakunin too subscribed to a contextualist view of human nature, claiming that morality derived from society – and specifically, from education. 'Every

child, youth, adult, and even the most mature man', argued Bakunin, 'is wholly the product of the environment that nourished and raised him' (Maximoff 1953: 153). Thus, although there are two innate sides to human nature, the way in which different propensities develop is a function of environmental conditions. This is a key point in grasping the role assigned to education by the social anarchists, in both bringing about and sustaining a just society organized on anarchist principles. For even if the social revolution is successful, given the contextualist notion of human nature and the acknowledgement of its inherent duality, presumably an ongoing process of moral education will be necessary in order to preserve the values on which the anarchist society is constituted.

This point, albeit alongside an undeniable optimism with respect to the educative power of the revolutionary society itself in terms of suppressing the selfish aspects of human nature, is evident in the following passage from Bakunin:

> There will probably be very little brigandage and robbery in a society where each lives in full freedom to enjoy the fruits of his labour and where almost all his needs will be abundantly fulfilled. Material well-being, as well as the intellectual and moral progress which are the products of a truly humane education, available to all, will almost eliminate crimes due to perversion, brutality, and other infirmities.
>
> (Bakunin, in Dolgoff 1973: 371)

The phrase 'humane education' presumably refers both to procedural aspects of education, such as school climate and teacher–student relationships, which anarchists insisted should be non-authoritarian and based on mutual respect, as well as to the content of education, specifically its moral basis. Both of these aspects will be taken up in later chapters. It is interesting, too, to note Bakunin's demand for equal, universal educational access – a demand which must have sounded far more radical in the nineteenth-century context in which these words were written than it does to contemporary liberal theorists.

The social anarchists, then, clearly believed that an education which systematically promoted and emphasized cooperation, solidarity and mutual aid, thus undermining the values underlying the capitalist state, would both encourage the flourishing of these innate human propensities and inspire people to form social alliances and movements aimed at furthering the social revolution. Indeed, Kropotkin often anticipates the ideas expressed by Berkman and other twentieth-century anarchists concerning the 'here and now' aspect of anarchist philosophy; in other words, that it is by establishing new human values and social relationships (such as educational relationships) that the true social revolution can be achieved. At the same time, Kropotkin's underlying view of human nature also helps to emphasize the essentially educative function of the anarchist society, even once the state has been dismantled. For given the inevitable presence of slavish and selfish instincts, the opposing

instincts need constant reinforcement. Kroptkin sometimes seems to suggest that it is social institutions themselves which will do this job – creating conditions of social equality and justice under which mutual aid would flourish. But, as Morland notes, he did acknowledge that 'egoism and self-assertion survive in anarchy as sociability and mutual aid endures in capitalism' (Morland 1997: 170).

Morland and other critics seem ultimately to regard this point as the downfall of Kropotkin's whole philosophical system, arguing that it leads to the inevitable use of coercion to maintain the future anarcho-communist society. However, I believe that the fact that this question arises, and the disagreements concerning it, do not detract from the force of the basic anarchist argument. I shall discuss later the ways in which various anarchist thinkers have attempted to come to terms with the problem of the inevitable presence of competition, dominance, struggles for power and conflicts of interest in the future anarchist society. In this context, meanwhile, there seems to be a fairly good case for arguing, on the basis of Kropotkin's work, that it is education, and not social and moral sanctions and rules as such, which would 'provide the glue' to hold the future anarchist society together – reinforcing the moral arguments for anarchism, and simultaneously nurturing altruistic and cooperative qualities amongst individuals. Of course one could counter to this that education, conceived in this way, is merely another form of coercion, and that we are left with something very similar to the classic view of education as cultural transmission. I will deal with this point later, in the context of the discussion of education as a means to social change.

In the light of the earlier discussion, it is important not to attach too much importance to the validity of the evolutionary aspects of the anarchist account of human nature. What is relevant, in the present context, is the methodological role which this account plays in emphasizing certain human traits deemed desirable and feasible for the transition to and maintenance of a non-hierarchical, decentralized form of social organization. In fact, many anarchist theorists, writing from an anthropological perspective have tried to defend the feasibility of such a society without recourse to a specific view of human nature. Harold Barclay, for example, in *People Without Government*, discusses a wealth of historical anthropological and ethnographic data, which, he argues, demonstrates that anarchies – defined as governmentless, stateless societies – are possible, albeit on a small scale, and, indeed, that from a historical point of view,

> anarchy is by no means unusual [...] it is a perfectly common form of polity or political organization. Not only is it common, but it is probably the oldest type of polity and one which has characterized most of human history.
>
> (Barclay 1990: 12)

Colin Ward, the contemporary British anarchist, draws similar conclusions from his analysis of contemporary experiments in non-hierarchical social

organizations. The most famous example of such anarchist practice in action is that of the Paris Commune of 1871. But Ward also discusses small-scale social experiments – notably in the areas of education and health care – which support the idea of spontaneous organization based on voluntary cooperation. He quotes John Comerford, one of the initiators of the Pioneer Health Centre project in Peckam, South London, in the 1940s, as concluding that: 'A society, therefore, if left to itself in suitable circumstances to express itself, spontaneously works out its own salvation and achieves a harmony of actions which superimposed leadership cannot emulate' (Ward 1996: 33).

Thus the emphasis on the benevolent potential of human nature goes hand-in-hand with a faith in what Kropotkin called the theory of 'spontaneous order' – which holds that

> Given a common need, a collection of people will, by trial and error, by improvisation and experiment, evolve order out of the situation – this order being more durable and more closely related to their needs than any kind of externally imposed authority could provide.
>
> (Ward 1996: 32)

The ideal of rationality

Of course, such theoretical positions and principles have to be understood against the historical background of the time in which the social anarchists were developing their ideas. As is apparent from this overview, this era was, as noted by DeHaan, 'one of boundless optimism, the exaltation of science, atheism and rationalism' (DeHaan 1965: 272).

Accordingly, the anarchist view of human nature, alongside its emphasis on the human capacity for benevolence, cooperation and mutual aid, places great weight on the idea of rationality. Indeed this idea is one of the central features of the work of William Godwin, commonly regarded as the first anarchist theorist. Godwin, perhaps more than any other anarchist thinker, seems to have placed great faith in the human potential for rational thinking, believing that it was due to this potential that humans could be convinced, by means of rational argument alone, of the ultimate worth of anarchism as a superior form of social organization. Ritter has criticized Godwin's position as an extreme version of cognitivism (Ritter 1980: 92) and in fact later anarchists, especially of the socialist school, who were not, like Godwin, utilitarian thinkers, were far less dogmatic in their position on human reason, often acknowledging the role of emotion in human choice and action. Bakunin, for example, would probably have questioned Godwin's argument that 'the mind of men cannot choose falsehood and reject the truth when evidence is fairly presented' (in Ritter 1980: 95). Nevertheless, as a nineteenth-century movement, social-anarchist thought shared the Enlightenment enthusiasm for scientific method and the belief in 'the possibilities for moral and political progress through the growth of knowledge'

(Crowder 1991: 29). Thus Bakunin, like most anarchists, whether of the individualist or communist school, believed that it was through the powers of reason that humans could advance to higher, more advanced states of morality and social organization.

Although Morland argues that Bakunin ultimately rejected philosophical idealism in favour of a materialist position, other scholars question this view. Miller, for example, argues on the basis of Bakunin's writings that, in the final reckoning, he remained a Hegelian idealist in the sense that his view of historical progress involved a notion of human consciousness progressing through successive stages, each resolving the tensions and contradictions of the previous stages. Human history, on this view, is seen as a process of gradual humanization, 'whereby men emerge from their brutish condition and become, through the influence of social relations, moral beings' (Miller 1984: 71). Freedom, according to this conception, is a positive concept, involving acting in accordance with laws which one has internalized by means of the power of reason.

Accordingly, many early anarchist experiments in education assigned the concept of reason or rationality a central place in their programmes and curricula, and the international organization set up by Francisco Ferrer, an early twentieth-century anarchist educator (see Chapter 6) to coordinate such projects was called 'The Society for Rational Education'.

In their use of the term 'rational', early anarchist thinkers clearly had in mind something akin to 'scientific', in the sense of accordance with the laws of logic, empirical observation and deduction.

It is important to note that Bakunin, with his emphasis on human reason and rationality as central to moral progress, makes frequent mention of the 'ignorance of the masses'. Yet, as Ritter points out, the anarchist view is nevertheless not an elitist one. Anarchists, wary of any political programme which attempted to manipulate the masses so as to achieve social change, stressed the essential aspect of spontaneous free choice and experimentation in achieving social progress. Like Godwin, later anarchists saw this process of rational education as one 'through which rational individuals choose anarchism as the regime they create' (Godwin, quoted in Ritter 1980: 96).

From an educational point of view, this position has obvious associations with the humanistic, liberal concept of education, according to which the key to a freer society is an overall increase in education based on the principles of reason and rationality. This, perhaps, reflects a connection between the educational perspective of anarchism as a political ideology, and the liberal, Enlightenment tradition which underpins the idea of liberal education.

As mentioned earlier, most philosophers writing within the liberal education tradition place great emphasis on rationality and on the development of the mind as an essential component of the good life (see Hirst 1972). Likewise, most theorists of liberal education assume a form of epistemological realism – a view that, as Hirst puts it, 'education is based on what is true'. These points have obvious connections with the Enlightenment belief in progress and

human betterment through expanding knowledge and rationality – a belief which, as we have just seen, was shared by nineteenth-century anarchist thinkers.

Human nature in liberalism

To what extent can the anarchist view of human nature be seen as overlapping with the liberal position? Although few contemporary theorists employ the term 'human nature', it is nevertheless obvious that liberal theory, and particularly liberal educational theory, makes certain assumptions about human capabilities or propensities. The question 'what characteristics of the individual does the liberal state see as important and worthy of encouragement?' (Levinson 1999: 9) is, in an important sense, a question about human nature. Anarchist theorists, as discussed earlier, choose to emphasize the human potential for benevolence, sociability and voluntary cooperation, arguing that these virtues are important and worthy of encouragement and that they are most appropriately fostered in a stateless, non-hierarchical society. Can liberalism be seen to rely on a similar methodological emphasis of particular human traits?

It is certainly true that in assigning a central position to autonomy, liberals must be assuming at the very least a human potential for benevolence, for if such a potential did not exist at all, institutions far more coercive than those of the liberal state would be needed to guarantee individual freedoms. Although it is difficult to find any systematic treatment of this idea, it seems to be supported by the literature. Leroy S. Rouner, for example, in his book on human nature, has noted that the 'positive view of human nature' – that is, the idea that humans have an inherent capacity for goodness – 'is deep-seated within the liberal tradition with which most of us identify ourselves' (Rouner 1997). Ritter, too, has noted this convergence between the liberal and the anarchist view, but he goes further, claiming that the liberal outlook is, like that of the anarchists, essentially dualistic, involving a rejection of the idea that 'malevolence is always dominant everywhere' and at the same time denying that benevolence is the universally dominant motive (Ritter 1980: 118). The contextualist view of human nature to which Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin subscribed is, as Ritter puts it, 'clearly within the boundaries of liberal psychology' (ibid.).

This discussion of human nature addresses one of the main objections to anarchism which I raised in Chapter 1. It thus establishes that to characterize the anarchist view on human nature as holding simply that 'people are benign by nature and corrupted by government' (Scruton 1982: 16) is misleadingly simplistic. Accordingly, it shows that while many liberals may be sceptical about anarchism's viability, this scepticism cannot be justified on the basis of the claim that the anarchist view of human nature is 'utopian' or 'naïve'.

Nevertheless, one may still feel some cause for scepticism with regard to anarchism's feasibility. For, it could be argued, while life without the state

may be theoretically possible, if we accept something like the aforementioned account of human nature, it is still dubious whether we could actually achieve and sustain it. What, in short, is to replace the state, and what, in the absence of state institutions, is to provide the 'glue' to hold such a society together? Addressing these questions means unpacking the anarchist objection to the state to see just what it consists in, and trying to ascertain what substantive values lie at the heart of anarchist theory, and what role they play in the anarchist position on social change and organization. In the course of this discussion we will also be able to develop a further understanding of the relationship between anarchism and liberalism, and of the nature and role of education in anarchist thought.

3 Anarchist values?

The preceding analysis of the anarchist view of human nature has established that the anarchist understanding of human nature is not, as often perceived, one-dimensional or naïve, an impression responsible for much liberal scepticism regarding anarchism's viability.

The fact that the anarchist account of human nature is actually a complex, anti-essentialist one, rescues anarchism, in my view, from charges of utopianism, at least as far as this point is concerned. It also goes some way towards an understanding of the role assigned to education in anarchist thought. For the fact that anarchists acknowledged human nature to be essentially twofold and subject to contextual influence, explains why they saw a crucial role for education – and specifically moral education – to foster the benevolent aspects of human nature and so create and sustain stateless societies.

Anarchists, then, are under no illusions about the continual, potentially harmful, presence of selfish and competitive aspects of human behaviour and attitudes. This both explains the need for an ongoing educational process of some kind, and indicates that simply doing away with the state will not suffice to create a new social order. Indeed, as Ritter notes,

> Anarchists show an appreciation, with which they are too seldom credited, for the insufficiency of statelessness as a setting for their system. Statelessness must in their view, be preceded and accompanied by conditions which combat the numerous causes of anarchy's internal friction that statelessness cannot defeat alone.
>
> (Ritter 1980: 138)

Education, it seems, is acknowledged by most of the social anarchists to be at least one of the major facilitators of such 'conditions'.

Yet discussion of these issues also leads to more general conclusions regarding education. In general, the anarchist view can be seen to be in contrast with the Marxist view, according to which humans attain their true essence in the post-revolutionary stage. For if one combines the above insights of anarchism regarding human nature with the anarchist insistence, discussed in Chapter 1, that the final form of human society cannot be determined in

advance, it seems as if this very perspective yields a far more open-ended, creative image of education and its role in social change. On the Marxist view, education is seen as primarily the means by which the proletarian vanguard is to be educated to true (class) consciousness. Once the revolution is over, it seems, there will be no role for education, for as Lukacs writes, scientific socialism will then be established 'in a complete and definite form, then we shall see a fundamental transformation of the nature of man' (in Read 1974: 150). Anarchism, as discussed, differs from this view in maintaining, first, that the seeds of the stateless society are already present in human action, made possible by existing human moral qualities; and, second, that due to the contextualist view of human nature and the insistence that there is no one scientifically correct form of social organization, education is, and must be, constantly ongoing. Education, on this understanding, is aimed not at bringing about a fixed end-point, but at maintaining an ongoing process of creative experimentation, in keeping with moral values and principles, and in which, as Read says, 'the onus is on man to create the conditions of freedom' (ibid.: 146). This point will be taken up again in later chapters.

These points, in turn, lead one to question the exact nature of the anarchists' objection to the state. As discussed earlier, anarchism cannot be reduced to a simple rejection of the state. Furthermore, if, as this discussion suggests, the anarchist objection to the state is an instrumental one, which cannot be understood without reference to a set of substantive values, the question must then be asked: what exactly are these values and to what extent are they conceived differently from, for example, those of the liberal tradition?

As the preceding chapter suggests, the anarchist position on human nature, both in its emphasis on human rationality and in its contextualist perspective, is remarkably close to the underlying assumptions of liberalism, reflecting the common Enlightenment spirit of both these ideological movements. This sheds an interesting light on the apparent disparity between anarchists and liberals as to the ideal mode of social organization and prompts the question as to what, then, accounts for this disparity, if their assumptions about human potential are so similar. Alan Ritter brings out these political distinctions very well:

> The agreement between anarchists and liberals in psychology makes the main problem of their politics the same. By denying that malevolence is ineradicable, both rule out autocracy as a mode of organization. For only if viciousness must be widespread and rampant is autocracy needed to safeguard peace. By denying the possibility of universal benevolence, they also rule out as unworkable modes of organization which exert no cohesive force. For only if kindness is the overriding motive, can an utterly spontaneous society exist. Thus the problem of politics, for anarchists and liberals alike, is to describe a pattern of social relations that, without being autocratic, provides the required cohesive force.
>
> (Ritter 1980: 120)

The liberal solution to this problem is, of course, to accept the framework of the coercive state but to limit its power so as to guarantee maximum protection of individual liberty. The anarchists reject the state outright as a framework inconsistent with their conception of human flourishing, part of which involves a notion of individual freedom; nevertheless, they have to rely on a certain amount of public censure to ensure the cohesive force and survival of society. As Ritter points out (ibid.), it is because anarchists 'affirm the worth of communal understanding' that they can, unlike liberals, regard such censure as having a relatively benign effect on individuality.

However, this point is not as simple as Ritter suggests. For it is true that for a person engaged in the communal project of building a social-anarchist society, out of a commitment to the values of equality, solidarity and freedom from state control of social institutions, accepting a certain degree of restriction on individual freedom – for example, a demand to share one's income with the community or to take on responsibilities connected with public services such as rubbish-collecting or child-minding – may not be perceived as a great sacrifice. But if life in anarchist communities without the state becomes a reality, it is quite possible that individuals born into such communities may come to perceive such apparent external restraints, which they have not in any way chosen or instituted themselves, as an unacceptable imposition.

This problem, it seems, is at the crux of the mainstream liberal scepticism regarding the feasibility of maintaining an anarchist society. One response to it, of course, is to argue that it is precisely because of their awareness of this tension that anarchists assigned such a central place to education. In order for a social-anarchist society to work, in other words, education – both formal and informal – would have to continue to promote and support the values on which the society was founded. Furthermore, because of the anarchist view of human nature, according to which stateless, social anarchist communities would not need to change human nature but merely to draw out moral qualities and tendencies already present, this view escapes charges of 'character moulding' or coercion by means of education – processes which are inimical to the anarchist position.

Another response, however, is to argue that once stateless, decentralized anarchist communities have been established on a federalized basis and social practices and institutions have been set up to meet the needs of such communities, such institutions, and the communities themselves, being qualitatively different from those of the state, will have an important educative function. Some contemporary anarchists, such as Illich,[1] have indeed taken this position, yet most of the early social anarchists, as discussed earlier, and as will be explored in the following chapters, explicitly acknowledged the need for a formal education system of some kind after the revolutionary period.

There is considerable confusion in the anarchist literature surrounding this point – confusion which I believe is largely a result of the failure of anarchist

theorists to distinguish between life within the state and life beyond the state. This issue is explored further in the course of the following discussion.

Autonomy in anarchism and liberalism

A great deal of criticism of the anarchist position hinges on the claim that there is an internal inconsistency in the belief that one can sustain a stateless society characterized by solidarity, social equality and mutual aid and at the same time preserve individual autonomy. In order to understand more fully the anarchist response to this criticism, it is important to examine the role assigned to autonomy and individual freedom within anarchist thought. Furthermore, a discussion of these notions is an essential aspect of the analysis of the anarchist position on education, particularly in the context of liberal education, where autonomy plays a central role.

As mentioned earlier, most liberal theorists on education cite autonomy as a, if not the, central value in education. Indeed, as Carr and Hartnett put it (1996: 47), 'in many ways, the mobilizing principle behind most theoretical justifications for liberal education has been a commitment to the aims and values of "rational autonomy" '. Some writers in this tradition, like Meira Levinson, specifically link the value of autonomy to the goal of sustaining the liberal state. Patricia White, while not specifically focusing on the educational implications of liberalism as a political doctrine, makes a similar point when she argues that the rationale for our current political arrangements (i.e. those of the democratic, liberal state) is 'to provide a context in which morally autonomous people can live' (White 1983: 140) and that therefore 'educational arrangements must provide the conditions for the development and flourishing of autonomous persons' (ibid.). Other theorists – most notably R.S. Peters and Paul Hirst – refer to a supposedly neutral, analytical account of education defined as initiation into worthwhile activities, or development of the mind. Yet even in this second case, it is liberal values which underlie the account. Furthermore, in both cases, these theorists usually assume something like a Kantian account of autonomy.

R.S. Peters, in summing up the notion of autonomy in the context of his discussion on education, notes two main factors as central to the Kantian conception of autonomy:

1 The idea of adopting a 'code or way of life that is one's own as distinct from one dictated by others' – this can be understood as the condition of authenticity;
2 Rational reflection on rules in light of universal principles.

(Peters 1998: 16)

Another way of grasping this view of autonomy is by means of the idea of the self-legislating person. This notion, which is central to the Kantian view, is, likewise, connected to the idea of the human capacity for reason.

Wolff (1998) links this account with the similarly Kantian idea of moral responsibility, arguing that 'every man who possesses free will and reason has an obligation to take responsibility for his actions' (Wolff 1998: 13) and that it is only the person acting in this way who can be described as an autonomous person (ibid.).

Peters comments that the idea of autonomy as involving acting in accordance with a code which one has adopted as a result of rational reflection on intrinsic considerations (as opposed to rewards, punishments, etc.) implies that the individual be 'sensitive to considerations which are to act as principles to back rules' (Peters 1998: 23) and to regard these considerations as reasons for doing things. Peters leaves the question as to how children acquire such sensitivity open, but it is worth noting that the original Kantian formulation is even stronger in its emphasis on this idea, insisting that for an action to be fully autonomous it must be done for duty's sake and not from inclination or from any empirical motive such as fear (see Ritter 1980: 114).

Yet even if one accepts the arguments of Levinson and others who identify autonomy as a necessary condition for maintaining the liberal state and, therefore, the development of autonomy as a central component of liberal education, it does not of course follow that the liberal state is the only, or even the best, framework in which to realize and promote the value of personal autonomy.

As suggested here, autonomy can be defended as a value in and of itself, for example within a Kantian framework of morality. From an educational perspective, then, the question becomes whether, given the value of autonomy (along with other liberal ideas), one can in fact support a radically different idea of education and schooling – one more compatible, for example, with the anarchist idea. From a political point of view, the anarchist commentator Paul Wolff has argued that, if one takes the value of autonomy seriously, 'there can be no resolution of the conflict between the autonomy of the individual and the putative authority of the state' and that therefore 'anarchism is the only political doctrine consistent with the virtue of autonomy' (Wolff 1998: 12–13). I shall look at Wolff's argument in greater detail later, but in the present context, it is worth noting that if one accepts it, one can then go on to challenge the analogous assumption that liberal education, conceived as universal, compulsory education by and in a liberal state, is the best educational framework in which to pursue and promote the central liberal value of autonomy.

The question that concerns us in this context is whether the understanding of autonomy, and the role assigned to it, within anarchist thought, is similar to that within the liberal tradition and what bearing this has on the anarchist position on education.

There is no doubt that anarchist theorists in the tradition which we have been considering here, while not perhaps providing a systematic account of the notion of autonomy, nevertheless subscribed to something very like the notion described earlier. Indeed, one commentator has argued that for many anarchists, freedom is conceived of as moral autonomy (De George 1978: 92).

Of all the anarchist theorists to write on the subject, it is Godwin whose account of freedom and autonomy most obviously resembles the liberal, Kantian account outlined earlier. For Godwin, the free person is not simply one whose actions are not constrained by external forces, but one who, prior to acting, 'consults his own reason, draws his own conclusions and exercises the powers of his understanding' (Godwin, in Ritter 1980: 11). Furthermore, this formulation presupposes a faith in the human capacity for rationality, which was basic to Godwin's position. As Ritter points out, it follows, from this and similar accounts by other anarchist thinkers, that the only acceptable restraints on individual liberty are those which are the result of rational deliberation.

Other, later anarchist thinkers also seem often to be subscribing to something like the liberal notion of autonomy in their discussions of freedom. Stanley Benn's account of the autonomous person as someone who does not simply accept 'the roles society thrusts on him, uncritically internalizing the received mores, but is committed to a critical and creative search for coherence' (Benn 1975: 109) seems to be in keeping with views expressed by anarchist thinkers such as Bakunin, who states:

> Freedom is the absolute right of every human being to seek no other sanction for his actions but his own conscience, to determine these actions solely by his own will, and consequently to owe his first responsibility to himself alone.
>
> (Guerin 1970: 31)

Yet, as Guerin notes, Bakunin held that this individual freedom could be fully realized 'only by complementing it through all the individuals around him, and only through work and the collective force of society' (ibid.). Although insisting that membership in society or any of its associations is voluntary, Bakunin was convinced that people would choose freely to belong to a society that was organized on the basis of equality and social justice.

So although autonomy is clearly a value within anarchist thought, it would be misleading to imply, as De George does (De George 1978) that the anarchist understanding of freedom – especially for the social anarchists – can be reduced to something like the liberal notion of individual autonomy. Crucially, most of these thinkers tried to develop an account of freedom as bound with a notion of social justice, in the sense that the notion of individual freedom which they defended only made sense in the context of an account of political and social freedom. This position is particularly evident in the work of Bakunin, who argued:

> I can feel free only in the presence of and in relationship with other men. In the presence of an inferior species of animal I am neither free nor a man, because this animal is incapable of conceiving and consequently of

> recognizing my humanity. I am not myself free or human until or unless I recognize the freedom and humanity of all my fellow men.
>
> (Bakunin, in Dolgoff 1973: 76)

As suggested in the earlier discussion on human nature, Bakunin is making an anti-metaphysical point about freedom, focusing on the subjective experience of individual freedom rather than suggesting any essentialist notion. Thus, in a passage clearly intended to contrast with Rousseau's famous statement that 'man is born free...', he writes:

> The primitive, natural man becomes a free man, becomes humanized, and rises to the status of a moral being [...] only to the degree that he becomes aware of this form and these rights in all his fellow-beings.
>
> (Bakunin, in Dolgoff 1973: 156)

For most anarchists, then, autonomy, although an important value within their ideology, did not enjoy any privileged status. Furthermore, this notion is, as shall be discussed later (see Chapter 4), conceptually linked with the equally important social values of solidarity and fraternity. This conceptual connection allows anarchist theorists to go on to draw further, important connections between freedom and equality.

Reciprocal awareness

Some theorists in fact, amongst them Walter and Ritter, have argued that individual freedom, or autonomy, is of instrumental value in anarchist theory, the chief goal of which is what Ritter (1980) calls 'communal individuality'. Ritter bases his account of this notion primarily on Godwin's idea of 'reciprocal awareness', which, it is argued, provides the moral underpinnings of the social-anarchist society. The idea of 'reciprocal awareness' implies a normative view of social relationships based on cooperation and trust, in which each individual perceives her freedom as necessarily bound up with the good of the community. Such an awareness, which seems to be referring primarily to psychological and emotional processes, is obviously one of the qualities to be fostered and encouraged by means of education. This psychological, or emotional attitude, in turn, forms the basis for the moral ideal which Ritter refers to as 'communal individuality'.

This view that it is community, or what Ritter calls 'communal individuality', and not freedom, which is the main goal of social anarchism, finds further support in Bakunin's writings. Bakunin, like other social anarchists, was keen to refute what he regarded as the guiding premise of Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau; namely that individuality and the common good represent opposing interests. Bakunin writes, 'freedom is not the negation of solidarity. Social solidarity is the first human law; freedom is the second law. Both laws interpenetrate each other, and, being inseparable, constitute the essence of humanity' (Bakunin, in Maximoff 1953: 156).

This passage is a typically confusing piece of writing on Bakunin's part, and he seems to offer no explanation as to what he means by 'the first human law'. However, it does seem to be clear that Bakunin, like most social-anarchist thinkers, regards individual freedom as constituted by and in social interaction. Bakunin insisted that it is society which creates individual freedom: 'Society is the root, the tree of freedom, and liberty is its fruit.' (Maximoff 1953: 165).

Significantly, it is this position which enables thinkers like Bakunin to go on to draw conceptual connections between freedom, solidarity – or what Ritter calls 'communal individuality' – and equality, as follows: 'Since freedom is the result and the clearest expression of solidarity, that is of mutuality of interests, it can be realized only under conditions of equality [by which Bakunin means, as discussed later, economic and social equality]' (ibid.).

Yet it is still not entirely clear what status Bakunin is assigning to the connections between freedom and equality. Morland suggests that Bakunin was in fact a Hegelian in this respect, and that his argument that the individual is only truly free when all around him are free implies a notion of liberty as omnipresent in a Hegelian sense, in which 'all duality between the individual and society, between society and nature, is dialectically overcome' (Marshall, quoted in Morland 1997: 81).

Yet I am inclined to think that the justification for Bakunin's arguments for the important connections between social equality and liberty stems more from a psychological account than from a Hegelian dialectic. This seems apparent in the aforementioned passage from Bakunin, in which he argues that

> The liberty of every human individual is only the reflection of his own humanity, or his human right through the conscience of all free men, his brothers and his equals. I can feel free only in the presence of and in relationship with other men.
>
> (Bakunin, in Dolgoff 1973: 237)

Godwin, too, seems to be making a psychological observation in describing individual autonomy as a form of mental and moral independence and noting that this kind of freedom 'supports community by drawing people toward each other leading to a kind of reciprocal awareness which promotes mutual trust, solidarity, and emotional and intellectual growth' (Ritter 1980: 29).

It sounds as if what Godwin has in mind here is something like the point commonly made by individualist anarchists, that 'only he who is strong enough to stand alone is capable of forming a genuinely free association with others' (Parker 1965: 3).

The social anarchists, although explicitly anti-individualistic in their views, seemed to subscribe to a similar psychological view of the connections between individual freedom and the kinds of social values necessary to ensure

life in communities. Alongside this position, they invariably tied their discussion of freedom into their insistence on the immediate improvement of the material conditions of society. As Goodwin and Taylor put it: 'While liberals traditionally see the progress towards greater freedom and rationality in terms of "the progress of the human mind", the early socialists conceived of progress as situated in the context of real material circumstances' (Goodwin and Taylor 1982: 147). Of course, in the same way as autonomy is clearly not conceptually prior to other values within anarchist thought, it is important here to note that neither are all liberals committed to assigning autonomy a position of primary importance. Hocking, for example (1926), has argued that anarchist and liberal aims overlap because both regard liberty (understood as the absence of coercion by the state) as the chief political good. Yet as Ritter (1980) points out, this position is misleading not only because it ignores the view that, for many anarchists, individual freedom in this sense is actually only a means to the conceptually prior value of communal individuality, but because it overlooks strands of liberal thought in which freedom is instrumental (e.g. utilitarian liberalism).

Liberal paternalism and libertarianism

The social anarchists' rejection of the abstract, Rousseauian idea of pre-social freedom, and their insistence that autonomy is not a natural, essential aspect of human nature, but something to be developed and nurtured within the context of social relationships, not only distinguishes them from early Enlightenment liberal thinkers, but also partly explains why, from an educational perspective, they do not adopt an extreme libertarian position – that is, a philosophical objection to all educational intervention in children's lives. Acknowledging, along with later liberal thinkers such as J.S. Mill, that individual freedom is restrained by deliberative rationality, and ever-conscious of the social context of developing human freedom, most anarchist thinkers have no problem in endorsing rational restraints on individual freedom even in the context of a post-state, anarchist society. From an educational point of view, the implication of this position is that anarchists agree with liberals in accepting something like the paternalistic exception to Mill's harm principle in the case of children. In other words, they do not take the extreme libertarian position that educational intervention constitutes a violation of children's autonomy.

This position can be seen most clearly in the work of Bakunin who, dealing with the question of children's rights and the provision of education, expresses views that are strikingly similar to the liberal, humanist tradition. The following passage in particular reflects the development of Bakunin's thought from the Enlightenment tradition:

> It is the right of every man and woman, from birth to childhood, to complete upkeep, clothes, food, shelter, care, guidance, education (public schools, primary, secondary, higher education, artistic, industrial, and scientific), all at the expense of society [....] Parents shall have the right to care for and guide the education of their children, under the ultimate control of the commune which retains the right and the obligation to take children away from parents who, by example or by cruel and inhuman treatment, demoralize or otherwise hinder the physical and mental development of their children.[2]
>
> (Bakunin, in Dolgoff 1973: 112)

Even when he acknowledges that children themselves have rights and can in some sense be regarded as moral agents, it is nevertheless quite clear from these writings that Bakunin is far from adopting an extreme libertarian view of children as autonomous beings responsible for determining their own educational aims and processes:

> We do not claim that the child should be treated as an adult, that all his caprices should be respected, that when his childish will stubbornly flouts the elementary rules of science and common sense we should avoid making him feel that he is wrong. We say, on the contrary, that the child must be trained and guided, but that the direction of his first years must not be exclusively exercised by his parents, who are all too often incompetent and who generally abuse their authority. The aim of education is to develop the latent capacities of the child to the fullest possible extent and enable him to take care of himself as quickly as possible.[...]
>
> Today, parents not only support their children [i.e. providing food, clothes, etc.] but also supervise their education. This is a custom based on a false principle, a principle that regards the child as the personal property of the parents. The child belongs to no one, he belongs only to himself; and during the period when he is unable to protect himself and is thereby exposed to exploitation, it is society that must protect him and guarantee his free development. It is society that must support him and supervise his education. In supporting him and paying for his education society is only making an advance 'loan' which the child will repay when he becomes an adult proper.
>
> (Ibid.)

So although one can find some echoes of the liberal ideal of autonomy within the anarchist tradition, this notion does not play such a central role within social-anarchist thought as it does within liberal theory and, connectedly, liberal ideas on education.

Autonomy and community – tensions and questions

Nevertheless, even if autonomy is only one of several connected goals within anarchist thought, it is still important to try and answer the question of its

role within the anarchist position on education. Specifically, if education for personal autonomy is a common educational goal for both liberal and anarchist theorists, would the same liberal restrictions and principles that apply to the state as an educating body apply to the community within the framework of a stateless, anarchist society? For although anarchists reject the state and the associated centralist control of social institutions, they do nevertheless acknowledge, as we have seen, the need for some kind of educational process which, in the absence of a centralist state, would presumably be run on a community level. Thus, given the anarchist acceptance of the value of individual autonomy, understood as the ability to make and implement choices on the basis of rational deliberation, without external constraints, one could still argue, based on the classic liberal argument for neutrality (see Dworkin 1978), that the community has no right to impose particular versions of the good life on any of its members.

For the social anarchists, the basic unit of social organization is the commune, association within and amongst communes being conducted on an essentially federalist basis. One important element of this federalism is the right to secession – a point which Bakunin made on several occasions:

> Every individual, every association, every commune, every region, every nation has the absolute right to self-determination, to associate or not to associate, to ally themselves with whomever they wish and repudiate their alliances without regard to so-called historic rights... The right of free reunion, as well as the right of secession, is the first and most important of all political rights.
>
> (in Morland 1997: 102)

However, even if secession is a real option, it is quite conceivable that various communities would be organized around particular ideologies and would therefore choose to educate their members according to a substantive vision of the good life as reflected in the organization and ethos of that community. In the absence of any other restriction, it is quite possible that certain such communities would undermine the value of autonomy.

Michael Taylor, in his book *Anarchy, Liberty and Community* (Taylor 1982), has examined this potential tension within anarchist theory in considerable detail. Taylor restates the classic liberal argument that in order for an individual to be autonomous, she must be able to critically choose from amongst genuinely available values, norms and ways of life, and that such possibility for choice only exists within a pluralistic society. Thus, in 'primitive and peasant communities', with strong traditions and considerable homogeneity in terms of lifestyles and values, individual autonomy cannot be said to exist. But Taylor goes on to make the point that, in fact, for members of such communities, autonomy is simply not an issue (and, indeed, not the problem it often becomes in pluralistic societies) for such people 'feel at home in a coherent world' (Taylor 1982: 161). This view seems to support Joseph Raz's argument

(Raz 1986) that individual well-being does not depend on the presence of autonomy. Nevertheless, given that for anarchist theorists, autonomy, in the sense of individual freedom of choice, does seem to have been a central value, one must ask whether the types of communities they sought to create were supportive of this value.

Taylor argues that as utopian communities are always islands within the greater society, and as their members are recruited from that society, the values of the 'outside' world will always, in a sense, be present as real options, as will the possibility of leaving the community – thus ensuring the autonomy of the individuals within it. But if the anarchist–socialist revolution is successful and the state is completely dismantled, the picture one gets is of a future society composed of several federated communities which will not be radically different in terms of their values. The particular social practices and lifestyles may differ from commune to commune, but as all practices are expected to conform to principles of equality and justice, as conceived by theorists such as Bakunin, it is hard to see how any commune could present a radically challenging alternative to an individual in another commune. As an example, one may cite the *kibbutzim* in Israel which, although superficially different from one another (e.g. in terms of the cultural origins and customs of their members, their physical characteristics, their main source of livelihood, etc.), are nevertheless all instantly recognizable as *kibbutzim* in that they clearly exhibit common basic features of social organization and underlying values which distinguish them from the surrounding society.

Can one, then, argue that a child growing up in an anarchist commune after the demise of the nation state, would be less autonomous than a child growing up in a liberal-democratic state? I think there are two possible responses to this. One is to take the line that children growing up in a pluralistic, democratic society are not genuinely autonomous as their choices are restricted by their environment and upbringing. Thus, for example, a child growing up in a thoroughly secular environment could never really have the option of autonomously choosing a religious way of life. Yet this argument does not seem very serious to me. The fact is, it does sometimes happen that such children break away from their backgrounds and choose radically different lifestyles, adopting values which are completely at odds with those of their upbringing. And there seems to be some grounds for the claim that it is the very presence of the alternative, 'somewhere out there' that creates this possibility of choice.

A more promising line of argument is that which connects the discussion to the idea of the conditions of freedom. It makes no sense to talk of someone being able to exercise freedom, either in the sense of negative liberty, or in the sense of autonomy, without the satisfaction of basic material conditions. It seems to me that this is the key to understanding the apparent problem of autonomy within anarchist communes. For, as argued earlier, the autonomy of individual members of a commune may seem to be severely restricted by the absence of genuine alternative versions of the good life from which to

choose, either within the commune or amongst other communes. Yet the very values which create a high degree of similarity between communes and amongst members of the same commune – that is, values of economic and social equality – are those values that constitute prerequisites for the exercise of any form of freedom. Thus although one could argue that the autonomy of a particular individual may be limited in a commune, as opposed to a pluralist, democratic state, there would be fewer members of society lacking in effective freedom than there would, in this view, in less equitable societies. This seems to support the essentially anti-individualistic tendencies of the social anarchists, as well as their insistence on immediate improvement of the material conditions of society. As Goodwin and Taylor emphasize, for the anarchists,

> [...] the values of harmony, association, community, and co-operation were not vague ethical ideals to be realized at some indeterminate point in the future through the loosening of legal restraints, the establishing of declarations of the rights of man, and the winning of constitutional-institutional reforms. Rather the future utopia required quite specific – objective rather than subjective – changes in the material basis of society, changes which could only be brought about through the implementation of an overall, collective plan – a fairly detailed blueprint – of some description. It was in this respect that the very term 'socialism' emerged in the 1830's as the antithesis of liberal 'individualism'.
>
> (Goodwin and Taylor 1982: 147)

All the same, I am inclined to agree with those critics of anarchism who argue that this tension between personal autonomy and the possible coercive effects of public censure is the most worrying aspect of anarchist ideology, and one to which most anarchists have not provided a very satisfactory answer, other than the faith that such conflicts can and simply will be resolved justly in the moral climate and free experimentation that will prevail in the stateless society.

Robert Wolff and the argument from autonomy

It is important to understand that, in advocating autonomy as a central value – albeit with different emphases than those of the liberal tradition – anarchists are not simply going one step further than liberals in objecting to all forms of coercion. It is not a variant of this position which constitutes the philosophical explanation for their principled objection to the state. It is, in fact, this mistaken interpretation of anarchism that, I would argue, lies behind Robert Wolff's attempt to offer a philosophical defence of the anarchist position (Wolff 1998).

It is worth looking into Wolff's argument here, for I believe its very construction helps to highlight some of the points I want to make in this discussion about the difference in perspective between anarchism and liberalism.

Wolff sets out to establish that there is a philosophical contradiction between individual autonomy and the *de jure* state – defined as an entity instantiating *de jure* authority – and that anarchism is thus the only political position compatible with the value of personal autonomy. The anarchist understanding of authority also has bearings on Wolff's argument, as will be discussed later. But the essential point here is that, as Miller notes, Wolff's argument rests on the premise that 'autonomy is the primary moral desideratum' (Miller 1984: 27). Yet, as the foregoing discussion suggests, this premise is questionable, not only within liberalism, but also within anarchist theory itself. However, most commentators on Wolff have not questioned this premise, but have tried, instead, to find fault in his argument (see, for example, the discussions in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, IX, (4), 1972). Without going into the philosophical details of Wolff's argument, the point I wish to make here is that whether or not it is valid, it suggests a misleading interpretation of anarchism and, in fact, obscures the difference of perspective which distinguishes anarchists from liberals.

In a sense, Wolff's argument, if valid, proves too much. Anarchists are not concerned with refuting the validity of the *de jure* state from a philosophical point of view; their objection to the state, as will be discussed below, is based on a more complex and concrete analysis than the conceptual argument that it conflicts with individual autonomy. Similarly, many anarchists – particularly the social anarchists – would not agree with Wolff that 'the defining mark of the state is authority, the right to rule' (Wolff 1998: 18). I shall discuss the anarchist objection to the state in greater detail later. However, at this point, it is important to understand how Wolff's apparent attempt to reduce anarchism to a defensible philosophical argument is connected to the above discussion of the multiplicity of values within anarchist thought.

While attempting to reduce any ideology to a single, logically prior value is, of course, problematic, in the case of anarchism this would seem especially so, for anarchism is in principle opposed to hierarchical thinking. As Todd May points out, anarchist thought involves a 'rejection of strategic political philosophy', and the social-anarchist struggle is conceived 'in terms of getting rid of hierarchic thinking and action altogether' (May 1994: 51). Thus, the anarchist vision of the future ideal society as a decentralized network, in which 'certain points and certain lines may be bolder than others, but none of them functions as a centre from which the others emerge or to which they return' (ibid.: 53) is, I would suggest, reflected in the philosophical position that no one value or goal can be regarded as logically prior or ultimate. This is not to claim that there is no conflict between values within anarchist thought; indeed, as we have seen earlier, the two interrelated anarchist goals of individual freedom and communality may well be in tension under certain circumstances. These conflicts are not conceptual dilemmas to be resolved by philosophical arguments but concrete social problems to be creatively solved as the situation demands. It seems to me that Bakunin's attempts to paint a

picture of such a network of interconnected values as one coherent whole could be read not just as a philosophically confused argument but as a reflection of this anti-hierarchical stance.

Interestingly, after claiming that personal autonomy is logically incompatible with the *de jure* state, Wolff then goes on to suggest that unanimous direct democracy 'is a genuine solution to the problem of autonomy and authority' (Wolff 1998: 27). As Grenville Wall points out (Wall 1978: 276); this move in itself is puzzling as it seems to contradict the premise that this conflict is *logically* irreconcilable. Yet, aside from this methodological problem, this aspect of Wolff's argument also reveals a similar misconception of anarchism. Wolff describes the ideal of unanimous direct democracy as one in which 'every member of the society wills freely every law which is actually passed' (Wolff 1998: 23). As the autonomous person, on both the liberal and the anarchist account, is one whose actions are restrained only by the dictates of his own will and reason, it follows that in a direct democracy, there need be no conflict between 'the duty of autonomy' and the 'commands of authority' (ibid.). Wolff's use of the phrase 'the duty of autonomy' reveals his strong Kantian orientation and, again, is an inaccurate representation of the anarchist view, according to which autonomy is less a 'duty' than a quality of life to be created, aspired to and dynamically forged in a social context along with other social values.

Wolff's picture of a unanimous direct democracy, although described in purely procedural terms, may be quite in keeping with the social-anarchist ideal. Yet interestingly, when discussing the possibility of this theoretical solution to his proposed dilemma (a solution which, as Wall remarks, Wolff seems to regard as unworkable for empirical, rather than philosophical reasons), the basic unit under consideration, for Wolff, is still that of the state. He acknowledges, apparently, the assumption that unanimous democracy 'creates a *de jure* state'. But the point is that anarchists object to the state for other reasons than that it embodies *de jure* authority, so even a state founded on unanimous direct democracy, in which personal autonomy, if we accept Wolff's argument, could flourish, would still be a *state* and would be objectionable for other important reasons. In addition to their positive commitment to specific values, to be discussed later, crucially, the anarchists' objection to the state stems, in large part, from their anti-hierarchical stance. Basic to this stance is the view that, as Woodcock puts it,

> What characterizes the State, apart from its foundation on authority and coercion, is the way in which it cumulatively centralizes all social and political functions, and in doing so puts them out of the reach of the citizens whose lives they shape.
>
> (Woodcock 1977: 21)

Accordingly, all anarchists refer in their discussion of social organization to a basic unit of direct cooperation. This unit, whether a commune, a workshop

or a school, is, crucially, something qualitatively distinct from, and inevitably far smaller than, the state.

It is for this same reason that Wolff's creative suggestions towards overcoming the practical obstacles in the way of direct democracy in contemporary societies undermine the very anarchist idea that his argument is ostensibly intended to support. Wolff's picture of a society, the size of the United States equipped with 'in-the-home voting machines' transmitting 'to a computer in Washington', 'committees of experts' gathering data, and the establishment of a position of 'Public Dissenter in order to guarantee that dissident and unusual points of view were heard' (Wolff 1998: 34–35) could not be further removed from the social-anarchist ideal in which social functions are organized from the bottom-up, in cooperative networks based at the level of the smallest possible scale, and where 'face-to-face contacts can take the place of remote commands' (Woodcock 1977: 21).

To sum up the discussion so far, it seems that anarchism overlaps liberalism in its emphasis on personal autonomy – although it does not assign the value of personal autonomy any priority – and in its acknowledgement of the benevolent potential of human beings; furthermore, it shares the essentially rationalistic stance of liberal education and the faith in human reason as the key to progress. Although several commentators (e.g., Bellamy, Ritter and Walter) have argued that anarchism cannot be regarded as an extension of liberalism due to its emphasis on community, this point could be countered with the argument that an emphasis on the value of community is perfectly consistent with the brand of liberalism defended by theorists such as Kymlicka and Raz.

The essential points on which anarchist and liberal aims diverge seem to be firstly in anarchism's rejection of the framework of the state and, connectedly, in its perspective on the possibility of achieving the desired social change. The essence of this distinct perspective is, it seems to me, captured in Ritter's remark that: 'To redeem society on the strength of rational, spontaneous relations, while slaying the leviathan who offers minimal protection – this is the anarchists' daring choice' (Ritter 1980: 133).