# 4 Authority, the state and education

Anarchism and liberalism, as we have seen, share certain important underlying values. We now have to ask whether this means that the philosophical and moral underpinnings of the anarchist conception of education are not essentially different from those that form the basis of the idea of liberal education.

Once again, the difference would seem to turn not on the question of the adherence to certain values and virtues, such as autonomy, rationality or equality, but on the different scope and perspective on social change within which such values are understood, and the role of education in achieving this change.

Crucially, in spite of their emphasis on the inherent human propensity for benevolence and voluntary cooperation, and in spite of their rationalist convictions, it would appear that the social anarchists, with their critical analysis of capitalist society and its social institutions, alongside their pragmatic view of the innate lust for power potentially present in everyone, could not, like Mill, or indeed Godwin, put all their faith in the Enlightenment ideal of the ultimate triumph of human reason over oppressive forms of social organization.

Thus Bakunin, a thinker typical of this tradition, did not stop at the liberal idea of achieving social change – or even the overthrow of oppressive regimes – by means of rational education. As a revolutionary thinker, he insisted on the ultimate abolishment of all structural forms of authority which he saw as hostile to individual freedom. 'The revolution, instead of modifying institutions, will do away with them altogether. Therefore, the government will be uprooted, along with the church, the army, the courts, the schools, the banks and all their subservient institutions' (Bakunin, in Dolgoff 1973: 358).

Yet as we shall see, experiments in implementing social-anarchist principles on a community level did not involve abolishing schools altogether, but, on the contrary, often centred around the establishment of schools – albeit schools that were radically different from the typical public schools of the time. Crucially, these schools were seen not just as a means for promoting rational education and thus encouraging children to develop a critical attitude to the capitalist state, and, hopefully, to eventually undermine it; rather, the schools themselves were regarded as experimental instances of the



social-anarchist society in action. They were, then, not merely a means to social revolution but a crucial part of the revolutionary process itself.

So Bakunin and other nineteenth century social-anarchist thinkers shared certain liberal assumptions about human nature and a liberal faith in the educative power of social institutions, as reflected in Bakunin's claim that: 'it is certain that in a society based on reason, justice, and freedom, on respect for humanity and on complete equality, the good will prevail and the evil will be a morbid exception' (Bakunin, in Dolgoff 1973: 95).

Yet such thinkers did not believe that such a society was possible within the framework of the state – however liberal. The focus of their educational thought and experimentation, therefore, was on developing active forms of social interaction which would constitute an alternative to the state. In so doing, however, the conceptualization of education which informed their views, as I shall argue further later, was not one of education as a means to an end but a more complex one of education as one of the many aspects of social interaction which, if engaged in in a certain spirit, could itself be part of the revolutionary process of undermining the state and reforming society on a communal basis.

This reflects the crucial aspect of social anarchism expressed by Paul Goodman as follows: 'A free society cannot be the substitution of a 'new order' for the old order; it is the extension of spheres of free action until they make up most of social life (quoted in Ward 1996: 18).

## The anarchist objection to the state

The earlier discussion notwithstanding, the anarchists' rejection of the state as a mode of social organization which they regarded as inimical to human freedom and flourishing raises two important questions: first, is the anarchist rejection of the state a principled rejection of states *qua* states or is it a contingent rejection, based on the fact that the modern nation state typically has properties which the anarchists regard as objectionable? Second, even if Wolff and other commentators are mistaken in implying that it is the notion of authority which constitutes the core of the anarchist objection to the state as a form of social organization, suspicion of authority is nevertheless a central aspect of all anarchist thought. It is important, then, particularly in the context of education, to ascertain what anarchists understand by the notion of authority and connected notions, and whether their objection to it is philosophically coherent and defensible.

Although certain commentators, such as Miller and Reichert, talk of anarchism's 'hostility to the state' (Miller 1984: 5) as its defining characteristic, often implying that this hostility is a principled one towards the state as such, many theorists have acknowledged the nuances involved in this hostility. Thus, Richard Sylvan notes (Sylvan 1993: 216) that, although it may be true that anarchists oppose all existing systems of government, this is 'crucially contingent upon the character of prevailing state systems.' One can in fact

find support for this interpretation in the writings of the social anarchists themselves. Kropotkin, for example, made the claim, late in his life (quoted in Buber 1958), that what the anarchists were calling for was 'less representation and more self-government' – suggesting a willingness to compromise with certain elements of the democratic state.

Bakunin, too, devoted much of his writings against the state to a detailed account of what he regarded as the characteristics of the modern state. In 'The Modern State Surveyed' (Dolgoff 1973: 210–217), which very title lends itself to the interpretation suggested by Sylvan, Bakunin outlines a list of what he regards as the principal faults of the state. Chief amongst these are capitalism, militarism and bureaucratic centralization. This analysis, along with the considerable space Bakunin and other nineteenth century anarchists devoted to attacking the association between the state and the Church, suggests that their objection to the state was, indeed, an objection to particular features which they regarded as inherent properties of the state. Yet most of these features are, arguably, contingent on particular historical forms of the state – and were particularly salient in the evolving nineteenth century model of the powerful nation state in the context of which the social anarchists were developing their position.

It is therefore apparently not logically inconceivable that a political system calling itself a state could be compatible with anarchist principles. Some contemporary anarchists, in fact, have suggested that the Swiss cantons are a close approximation of anarchist political principles, although the social anarchists would probably have criticized them for their inequitable economic policies. The point that Sylvan is making is that the modern state *as we know it* has come to constitute 'the paradigmatic archist form' (Sylvan 1993: 217) and as such, it is incompatible with anarchist principles.

I would therefore disagree with the argument made by Miller and others that perhaps the central defining feature of anarchism is its 'hostility to the state'. This hostility, in fact, as discussed earlier, and as I shall argue further in what follows, is an instrumental one; the crucial core of anarchism is, rather, the positive values which it espouses, and it is the state as inimical to these values, not the state as such, to which anarchists object. Miller argues that anarchists 'make two charges against the state – they claim that it has no right to exist, and they also claim that it brings a whole series of social evils in its train' (Miller 1984: 5). But I would argue that this formulation is misleading: the claim that the state has no right to exist is not an independent, *a priori* claim. It is because of its 'social evils' that the state, under a particular definition, has no right to exist. These are, then, not two charges, but one and the same charge.

Nevertheless, even if anarchism's hostility to the state is 'contingent and consequential [...], derived from the conjunction of anarchism's defining features together with a particular standard theoretical characterization of "the state" ' (Sylvan 1993: 218), one must ask what exactly this characterization consists of.



Most political theorists writing on this topic accept something like Weber's classic definition of the state as an association that 'successfully claims the monopoly of legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (see Taylor 1982: 4–5).

Many social anarchists seem to have had something like this notion in mind in formulating their rejection of the state. However, as suggested here, this rejection derived more from what Sylvan refers to as 'anarchism's defining features' than from any coherent theoretical characterization. This point is perhaps most apparent in the writings of Bakunin, who devoted considerable space (see Dolgoff 1973: 206–208) to a rejection of what he calls the 'theology of the state' – namely, the defence of the idea of the state by social contract theorists such as Rousseau. Yet in fact, most of Bakunin's objection centres on specific features which he claims to be logically associated with the state. First, he argues, the state 'could not exist without a privileged body' (ibid.). Here, Bakunin's objection stems from his socialist-egalitarian commitments, his conviction being that the state 'has always been the patrimony of some privileged class' (ibid.). Yet this, of course, is an empirical point. Furthermore, he argues, the modern state is 'necessarily a military state', and thus 'if it does not conquer it will be conquered by others' (ibid.). Yet this, again, seems to be an empirical point and, as cases like Switzerland suggest, it is highly contentious.

In short, it seems to be modern capitalism and its resulting inequalities which constitute the basis for Bakunin's objection to the state. Although there are obvious connections between capitalist production and the structure of the nation state, it is arguable whether the former is a necessary feature of the latter. Thus, once again, it would seem that the anarchist objection to the state, on this point, is an instrumental one.

## Authority

Of course, as Taylor (1982) notes, even if anarchists implicitly accepted something like Weber's (albeit problematic) definition of the state, there is no logical reason why rejecting the state should entail a complete rejection of authority or censure. Yet the idea of authority is clearly conceptually linked to this idea of the state. Wolff, for example, suggests a revision of Weber's definition as follows: 'The state is a group of persons who have and exercise supreme authority within a given territory or over a certain population', arguing that 'the defining mark of the state is authority, the right to rule' (Wolff 1998: 18).

Indeed, the impression that what the anarchists object to in the state is the idea of authority itself is reinforced by some early anarchist writers. Sebastien Faure, for example, writing in the nineteenth century *Encyclopedie Anarchist* (quoted in Woodcock 1977: 62) claimed that what unites anarchists of all varieties is 'the negation of the principle of authority in social organizations and the hatred of all constraints that originate in institutions founded on this principle'.

Yet although individualist anarchists such as Stirner do at times seem to be defending a philosophical objection to authority *per se*, a reading of the social anarchists, along with other anarchist theorists who developed a more careful account of authority, suggests that it is not authority *per se* but certain kinds of authority to which the anarchists object, and which they regard as instantiated in the modern state and its institutions.

One of the most comprehensive philosophical accounts of the anarchist position on authority is that provided by De George (1978), who argues that most anarchist theorists were well aware of the fact that some kind of authority is necessary for social organization to function. But in rejecting the type of authority characteristic of the state and its institutions, what the anarchists were asserting, according to De George, was that

> The only justifiable form of authority comes ultimately from below, not from above. The autonomy of each individual and lower group should be respected by each higher group. The higher groups are formed to achieve the will of the lower groups and remain responsible to them and responsive to their will.
>
> (De George 1978: 97)

De George's choice of imagery here may look odd in the light of the anarchist opposition to hierarchies. But I think that the use of the terms 'higher' and 'lower' in the aforementioned passage serves to illustrate the purely functional nature of authority in a social-anarchist society. A more appropriate image, in fact, may be that of concentric circles; the 'lower' group, in other words, would be the most basic, inner circle – that of the self-governing, face-to-face community, where social arrangements would be established to meet the needs of this community. In the event of needs arising which could not be met by the community itself, an outer circle would come into being, representing the federated coordination with another community – for purposes of trade, for example, or common interests such as transport. This outer circle would then have functional authority, purely for the purposes of the function it was set up to fulfil, towards those in the inner circle. There could, in theory, be an infinite, elaborate network of such circles, the crucial point being that none of them would have absolute authority; all could be dismantled or rearranged if they failed to perform their functions, and all would be ultimately justifiable in terms of the needs of the basic unit of community.

The point De George is leading up to in his analysis is that, in fact, what the anarchists were rejecting was not authority but authoritarianism which, as De George points out, 'starts at the top and directs those below for the benefit of those above' (De George 1978: 98).

In short, the anarchist, De George argues, 'is a sceptic in the political arena. He insists on the complete justification for any political or legal system prior to accepting it' (ibid.: 91). This demand for 'justification' is in fact a demand for accountability to the smallest possible unit of social organization, to whom any such system of moral or legal rules must be responsive.



This analysis is supported by Richard Sennet's discussion of nineteenth century anarchist thinkers who, he says, 'recognized the positive value of authority' (Sennet 1980: 187). In fact, Sennet argues, what thinkers like Kropotkin and Bakunin were aiming at was to create 'the conditions of power in which it was possible for a person in authority to be made fallible' (Sennet 1980: 188).

The above points also illustrate how the anarchist understanding of what constitutes legitimate authority is linked to the anarchist faith in human rationality – a faith which, in turn, is reflected in the call for 'rational education'; in other words, an education which was not only anti-authoritarian, but which encouraged children to accept the kind of authority which was rational in nature (see Chapter 6). Perhaps the philosophical account of authority which comes closest to what the social anarchists had in mind in this context is that suggested by Gerald Dworkin in his notion of 'epistemological authority' (Dworkin 1988: 45), namely, the practice of accepting or consulting the authority of others in non-moral matters. This practice, Dworkin explains, is essentially rational, for a variety of practical and social reasons.

In the light of the earlier discussion, one can begin to understand the role of authority within anarchist thought, and to appreciate the claim that anarchists are not, in fact, opposed to authority *per se*, but to 'any exercise of authority which carries with it the right to require individuals to do what they do not choose to do' (Wasserstrom 1978: 113). In fact, even this formulation is unnecessarily strong. As we have seen, what the anarchists objected to was the idea of an *absolute right* to command authority. They have no problem in acknowledging that individuals or organizations may have a right to command others, but such a right must always be temporary, and always justifiable in terms of the needs of the community in question.

So as anarchists recognize that some form of social organization will always be necessary, they also recognize that some form of authority must be accepted in order for social arrangements to function. The types of authority which would be acceptable – and perhaps necessary – in an anarchist society are what De George calls 'the authority of competence', 'epistemic authority', or 'operative authority'. Miller (1984) makes a similar distinction in discussing the anarchist acknowledgement of what he calls 'authority in matters of belief' , and indeed this point is reflected in the analytic literature on the subject, namely in the distinction, noted by Richard Peters, between authority *de jure* and authority *de facto* (Peters 1967: 84–85). The point of this distinction is that a person can possess authority by virtue of 'personal history, personal credentials and personal achievements', including, in certain cases, the kind of charisma associated with authoritative figures. However this is different from having or claiming authority by virtue of one's position within a recognized normative structure. The anarchists, of course, reject the kind of authority that is derived solely from one's position in a preordained social system – this is the kind of authority which they refer to as 'irrational'. However, if De George is right in emphasizing that the anarchists' chief objection was to authority imposed from above, presumably anarchists would have to acknowledge that certain forms of authority which are determined by

defined roles within social or political systems would be legitimate, provided the system in question was one which had developed organically, in other words, from below, in response to and in accordance with the needs of people and communities. Indeed, most anarchists recognize that there can be people who are *authorities* in various realms and are accepted as such. To connect this point back to the previous discussion of rationality as a key aspect of moral autonomy, it seems that rationality is the overriding criterion for the anarchists in judging which types and instances of authority are legitimate. Bakunin expressed this idea when he stated: 'We recognize, then, the absolute authority of science. Outside of this only legitimate authority, legitimate because it is rational and is in harmony with human liberty, we declare all other authorities false, arbitrary and fatal' (in Maximoff 1953: 254).

One might well question this idea, however, as it is all too obvious that it could lead one to the dangerous position of blindly revering everything 'scientific', thereby elevating science, *qua* science, to the position of an unquestionable authority. However Bakunin himself seems to have been well aware of this danger, and explicitly warned against the idea of what he referred to as 'dictatorship by scientists' (Bakunin, in Maximoff 1953: 250), in which all legislation would be entrusted to a learned academy of scientists. Such systems would, Bakunin argues, be 'monstrosities' (ibid.), first due to the fact that 'human science is always and necessarily imperfect', and second because

> a society obeying legislation emanating from a scientific academy, not because it understood the reasonableness of this legislation (in which case the existence of that academy would become useless) but because the legislation emanated from the academy and was imposed in the name of science, which was venerated without being understood – that society would be a society of brutes and not of men.
>
> (Ibid.)

Furthermore, a scientific academy, like any similar body invested with 'absolute, sovereign power', would inevitably become 'morally and intellectually corrupted' (ibid.).

These remarks of Bakunin's are indicative of the essence of the anarchist objection to certain kinds of authority, which has echoes in Erich Fromm's distinction between 'rational' and 'irrational' authority. The key feature of rational authority is that, while it is based on competence, it must be subjected to constant scrutiny and criticism and, above all, is always temporary.

This notion is particularly salient in Bakunin's critique of Marx, and has important connections with the anarchist insistence on the commensurability of the means and the ends of the revolution. For if the ultimate objective is a society free from authoritarian, hierarchical structures, then, as Bakunin argued, the revolutionary movement itself has to avoid such structures and processes. Indeed, it was this point that led to the bitter dispute between the



anarchists and the Marxists after the First International. Bakunin argued, with depressing accuracy, that the Marxist idea of the working class seizing political power would lead to a dictatorship of the proletariat which would be only superficially different from that of the state, and was sceptical regarding the Marxist claim that such an arrangement would be only transitional. In Bakunin's view, the International as an 'embryo of future society' must, according to the anarchist position, reject all principles associated with authoritarianism and dictatorship. Bakunin, as Morland notes, was not so naive as to overlook the natural tendency of people in revolutionary movements to take on different roles according to different propensities and talents, some inevitably commanding, initiating and leading, while others follow. But the crucial point in anarchist thought is that

> no function must be allowed to petrify and become fixed, and it will not remain irrevocably attached to any one person. Hierarchical order and promotion do not exist, so that the commander of yesterday can become a subordinate tomorrow. No-one rises above the others, or if he does rise, it is only to fall back a moment later, like the waves of the sea forever returning to the salutary level of equality.
>
> (Bakunin, in Joll 1979: 91–92)

It is, then, this notion of what Miller refers to as 'functionally specific authority' (Miller 1984: 57), that underlies most anarchist thinking on social structures.

This acceptance, by anarchist thinkers, of certain kinds of rational authority explains how they can, while rejecting the state, nevertheless coherently acknowledge the legitimacy of certain rules of social organization. The members of an anarchist community may well, in this view, come to accept the need for social rules of some kind, but such rules or sanctions would not constitute an infringement of one's personal freedom, for this freedom, as Bakunin puts it, 'consists precisely in this: he does what is good not because he is commanded to, but because he understands it, wants it and loves it' (Ritter 1980: 23). The distinction which Bakunin makes between social sanctions – which may have a legitimate role in the stateless society – and government, which 'coerces its subjects with commands instead of persuading them with reasons' (ibid.) is arguably, as Ritter suggests, the only plausible defence of the reconciliation between freedom and censure.

There are obviously several ways in which the anarchist position on authority, and the connected ideas discussed here, can have bearings on educational issues. In the present context, the important point to note is that the anarchist acceptance of certain kinds of authority as legitimate is sufficient to reject the extreme libertarian claim that education *per se*, as conceived as a form of human interaction necessarily involving some kind of authority, is morally illegitimate.

# 5 The positive core of anarchism

The preceding discussion suggests the following conclusions:

First, what the social anarchists object to is not the state as such but the state as instantiating a number of features which they regard as objectionable because of their infringement on human development and flourishing, understood as involving freedom, solidarity and reciprocal awareness – values that are inherently interconnected and interdependent.

Second, and connectedly, the anarchist stance is, above all, not anti-state or anti-authority, but anti-hierarchy, in the sense that all centralized, top-down structures are to be regarded with suspicion, and small communities favoured as basic units of social organization. As Woodcock remarks:

> Instead of attempting to concentrate social functions on the largest possible scale, which progressively increases the distance between the individual and the source of responsiblity even in modern democracies, we should begin again from the smallest possible unit of organization, so that face-to-face contacts can take the place of remote commands, and everyone involved in an operation can not only know how and why it is going on, but can also share directly in decisions regarding anything that affects him directly, either as a worker or as a citizen.
>
> (Woodcock 1977: 21)

This perspective is supported by J.P. Clark who, in his analysis (Clark 1978: 6) argues that 'anarchism might also be defined as a theory of decentralization'. One of the implications of these points is that the normative core of anarchism is not a negative one but a positive one. I have already discussed the anarchist conception of mutual aid, which is essential for the flourishing of the kind of communities envisaged by social anarchists. This notion is, perhaps, the most important element of this positive core. As Ritter points out, for the social anarchists, notably Kropotkin, who developed the theory of mutual aid from a historical and anthropological perspective, benevolence, understood as 'a generous reciprocity that makes us one with each other, sharing and equal' (Ritter 1980: 57) is the 'mediating attitude of anarchy' (ibid.).



Ritter notes that the notion of mutual aid – a notion to some extent anticipated by Godwin's ideal of 'reciprocal awareness', discussed earlier – supports not only the ideal of the equitable, cooperative society so central to the social anarchists but also the notion of creative individualism which is a common theme in anarchist literature, most notably – although not exclusively – amongst the more individualist anarchist thinkers. The attempt to combine, in an educational setting, attitudes of mutual respect and cooperation, with the pursuit of individual creativity and freedom of expression, is apparent in the American anarchist educational experiments discussed in Chapter 6. The theoretical basis for this connection between the notion of mutual aid and that of creative individualism is summed up by Ritter in his argument that 'the knowledge that one can rely on this reciprocal support from others gives one courage to pursue unique and creative paths in self-becoming' (Ritter, ibid.) – suggesting a primarily psychological basis for this connection.

But, as Bakunin's instrumental rejection of the state suggests, there are other connected, substantive values which form the positive core of the anarchist position, and which have not been discussed in detail in the preceding analysis. The central such values are: equality and fraternity.

## Equality

In general, most anarchist thinkers seem to have understood the notion of equality in terms of distributive social justice, emphasizing the social and economic implications of this notion, rather than the legalistic aspects. Indeed, the nineteenth century social anarchists – like all early socialists – were highly critical of the theorists of the French Revolution who, they argued, promised equal rights in terms of equality before the law but neglected to deal with the material aspects of social inequality.

Even Godwin, who, as discussed earlier, was an anarchist thinker closer to the individualist than the socialist end of the spectrum, was adamant on the evils of social and economic inequality. As Ritter explains, Godwin saw unequal distribution of wealth, and its negative effects on human character and communal relations, as the principal reason for the imposition of legal government and the establishment of the state (Ritter 1980: 76). Alongside the fundamental argument that economic inequality is unjust because it denies some people the means of a happy and respectable life (ibid.: 77) and gives the advantaged 'a hundred times more food than you can eat and a hundred times more clothes than you can wear' (ibid.), Godwin also argues that inequality damages human character, particularly from the point of view of the rational independence which he regarded as a supreme value. Both the poor and the rich, in a stratified society, have their rational capacities sapped by servility on the one hand and arrogance on the other (ibid.).

Godwin talks in terms of a floor of basic goods to which all members of society are entitled on the basis of a conception of the basic needs of individuals.

Beyond this, he is prepared to accept a certain amount of inequality, based on merit. 'The thing really to be desired is the removing as much as possible of arbitrary distinctions, and leaving to talents and virtue the field of exertion unimpaired' (Ritter 1980: 78).

Thus Godwin, while aware of the damaging effects of inequality for the ideal of communal individuality, was far from endorsing the social anarchists' ideal of 'to each according to his need' – which, according to Guerin (Guerin 1970: 50) 'should be the motto of libertarian communism'.

As Ritter notes, the social anarchists who succeeded Godwin gradually tried to rid anarchism of its 'anti-egalitarian, meritocratic elements' (Ritter 1980: 79). Kropotkin went furthest in this respect, advocating a redistribution of wealth based entirely on the conception of needs and not contribution or merit. Indeed, in arguing for a floor of basic needs as the basis for social-economic policy, the social anarchists were clearly closer to Marxism than to classical liberalism. Kropotkin's form of communal anarchism demanded 'the right of all to wealth – whatever share they may have taken in producing it' (Ritter 1980: 81). Similarly, twentieth century social anarchists were highly critical of the Bolshevik revolution precisely concerning this issue. One of the greatest mistakes of the Bolsheviks, argued Alexander Berkman in *An ABC of Anarchism* in 1929, was to introduce a differential scale of rationing in the immediate post-revolutionary period. 'At one time', Berkman claims, 'They had as many as fourteen different food rations' (Berkman 1995: 89), the best rations being for Party members and officials. The inevitable material inequality and political tensions that this situation created were, according to anarchist critics, just one symptom of the Bolshevik failure to base their political programme on an understanding of 'the needs of the situation' (ibid.). Berkman, like Guerin, argues that the principle of 'to each according to his needs' must be the guiding principle behind socio-economic organization in the anarchist society.

In this context, it is important to keep in mind, as Ritter points out, that none of the anarchists can be seen to hold the radical egalitarian thesis – that is, the thesis that everybody should be treated alike. Ritter cites Kropotkin's commitment to need as the criterion of distribution as an example of this: 'needs', the argument goes, 'cannot be satisfied without treating people differently' (Ritter 1980: 82). Thus, as Ritter argues, while the social anarchists seek to eliminate inequalities of rank and hierarchy, they seek to increase those of kind, which support the kind of social diversity which they regard as highly valuable and desirable.

It seems, then, that the anarchist understanding of equality is fairly close to that developed within egalitarian liberalism. Specifically, Bakunin and other social anarchists seem to have adopted a view akin to Rawls' notion of 'primary social goods'. Bakunin talks of the need 'to organize society in such a manner that every individual, man or woman, should, at birth, find almost equal means for the development of his or her various faculties and the full utilization of his or her work' (Bakunin, in Maximoff 1953: 156). Although



the emphasis in this conception may be different from that of Rawls, the basic perspective on social justice makes the anarchists far closer, here, to egalitarian liberals than, say, to utilitarians – given, of course, that the social anarchists may interpret Rawls' notion of 'primary social goods' somewhat differently.

Some theorists have criticized Rawlsian liberalism for failing to offer guidelines for moral and just action on an interpersonal level. Thus G.A. Cohen, for example, argues that Rawls' contention that he has provided, in *A Theory of Justice*, a comprehensive conception of justice, is questionable, for 'a society that is just within the terms of the difference principle [...] requires not simply just coercive *rules*, but also an ethos of justice that informs individual choices' (Cohen 2001: 128). It is thus questionable, Cohen argues, whether 'the ideals of dignity, fraternity, and full realization of people's moral natures' are actually delivered by the Rawlsian account of justice (ibid.: 136). This point has important connections with the anarchist perspective, as will be discussed later. However, it seems an unfair criticism of Rawls who, in *Justice as Fairness, a Restatement*, clearly states that his theory of justice is intended 'not as a comprehensive moral doctrine but as a political conception to apply to that structure of political and social institutions' (Rawls 2001: 12). Crucial, indeed, to Rawls' argument, is the distinction between the political and the moral. He insists on preserving the narrow focus of his conception of justice which, although it will hopefully gain the support of a broad overlapping consensus, cannot, on this understanding, have anything to say about the 'transcendent values – religious, philosophical or moral' with which it may conflict. It cannot, in other words, 'go beyond the political' (ibid.: 37).

The anarchists, however, would, I believe, reject this distinction between the political and the moral, partly because they do not start from an acceptance of an institutional framework – that of constitutional democracy – as Rawls and many other liberal theorists do. Furthermore, most anarchists, as May notes (May 1994: 85), 'regard the political as investing the entire field of social relationships' – in other words, they would not accept Rawls' focus on the 'basic structure' of society as the sole subject for political deliberation.

The anarchist account, which can by no means be regarded as a comprehensive account of distributive justice, does seem to place less emphasis on procedural rules and principles for the just management of social affairs and more on the moral qualities needed, as Cohen suggests, to sustain human relationships conducive to social justice. It is indeed partly for this reason that education plays such an important role in anarchist thought.

The anarchist conception of the value of equality has obvious conceptual connections both with the idea of community and with the view of human nature. Michael Taylor (Taylor 1982) argues that equality is perceived as an important value for the anarchists but is secondary to the basic good of community. Following on from his central argument that it is only in community that social order without the state can be maintained, Taylor points out that

community requires a considerable degree of basic material equality in order to flourish. For 'as the gap increases between rich and poor, so their values diverge, relations between them are likely to become less direct and many-sided, and the sense of interdependence which supports a system of reciprocity is weakened' (ibid.: 95). Yet, as he points out – and this seems to be supported by the writings of the social anarchists – it is only gross inequality which undermines community.

As Taylor notes, this argument runs counter to the prevailing liberal argument that the state is necessary to ensure even approximate equality – specifically, that as 'the voluntary actions of individuals' inevitably disrupt material equality, even approximate equality can only be maintained by 'continuous interference by the state in people's lives' (ibid.: 96). The neo-liberal development of this argument is the claim that, as such interference is clearly in violation of individual rights (primarily property rights), then any pursuit of economic equality must be secondary to the defence of the basic value of individual liberty. But as Taylor argues, this argument rests on certain assumptions about human nature, or at the very least, about what people will voluntarily do in a given kind of society. The anarchist position on human nature, combined with their faith in the potential of rational education in a climate of solidarity and mutual aid, leads to far less pessimistic conclusions regarding the possibility of maintaining relatively equitable socio-economic arrangements in a stateless, self-governing community, than those, for example, of Nozick, in his famous 'Wilt Chamberlain' thought experiment[1] (Nozick 1974: 161–164). Furthermore, as Taylor points out, in a society unlike the modern, industrialized one which Nozick assumes, 'where wealth and power are already unevenly distributed', people may voluntarily choose to act in ways which maintain equal distribution of wealth (ibid.: 100). Taylor acknowledges that even in equality-valuing communities, no actions undertaken to maintain equality can be described as absolutely 'voluntary', for, in the absence of interference by the state, there are always some kind of sanctions in place to ensure the survival of relative equality and, therefore, of the community. In short, although Taylor concedes that approximate economic equality is unlikely to last without some form of counteractive influence, that does not necessarily have to be provided by the state.

The social anarchists, in conclusion, seem to have genuinely believed that the natural human propensity for mutual aid and benevolence, if encouraged and promoted by social relationships and institutions, would go a long way towards ensuring the survival of a relative degree of material equality. Both this argument and Taylor's moderate version of it reveal, once again, the important role of education in anarchist society. For education must systematically promote the values which support the flourishing of community, and, as Taylor argues, community both needs equality and provides the conditions for it to survive.

It is important to keep in mind here the point which I made earlier in discussing the multiplicity of values within anarchist thought. It is in keeping



with anarchism's anti-hierarchical stance that no single value can be regarded as conceptually prior within this system of thought – in spite of attempts by theorists, both within and outside the anarchist radition, to defend such accounts. Thus while equality plays an important role in the social critique of the social anarchists, its full significance cannot be grasped without an understanding of its conceptual links with other, equally important values, notably that of fraternity. Thus while many social anarchists talk of needs as a basis for distributive justice, it would be misleading to conclude that their conception of the just society or human flourishing is basically a needs-based one. In this, perhaps, they would have agreed with Michael Ignatieff's comment that:

> To define what it means to be human in terms of needs is to begin, neither with the best, nor with the worst, but only with the body and what it lacks. It is to define what we have in common, not by what we have, but by what we are missing. A language of human needs understands human beings as being naturally insufficient, incomplete, at the mercy of nature and of each other. It is an account that begins with what is absent.
>
> (Ignatieff 1994: 57)

Far from assuming that something was absent, the social anarchists, as is apparent from the earlier discussion of human nature, worked on the assumption that human beings have a great capacity for fraternal, benevolent sensibilities and action, and that the just society must be – and can be – underpinned by such values.

## Fraternity

The relatively under-theorized concept of fraternity – a concept which Adam Swift describes as 'quaint and politically incorrect' (Swift 2001: 133) has, of course, conceptual links with that of equality. In fact Swift himself acknowledges that 'economic inequality may be inimical to fraternal relations in a society' due to the fragmentation and stratification associated with high levels of socio-economic inequality (ibid.: 113–114). As Patricia White defines it in *Beyond Domination*, fraternity consists in 'feeling a bond between oneself and others as equals, as moral beings with the same basic needs and an interest in leading a life of one's own' (White 1983: 72). White argues that this attitude is necessary amongst citizens of a participatory democracy (contrasted with servility and patronage), but she also goes further than this and makes the educationally important point that the attitude of fraternity can be a motivating force.

If one adopts the view that fraternity is an 'attitude', then presumably, like other moral dispositions such as gratitude, it is something which can be learned. White indeed seems to take this view. In other words, people develop

fraternal feelings by coming to hold certain beliefs and attitudes about others. Developing such beliefs and attitudes, then, is clearly a task for education. Furthermore, as White notes,

> in a fully-fledged participatory democracy, fraternal attitudes will both underpin the institutions of the society and also be themselves undergirded by the social structure which does not permit gross discrepancies in the share of primary goods between citizens.
>
> (Ibid.)

This suggests that the conceptual connection between fraternity and equality can work both ways: not only does a relatively high degree of socio-economic equality foster and support fraternal attitudes, but the institutional maintenance of such equality may depend on a degree of fraternal feeling. Some social-anarchist theorists may well have endorsed this view, although they would obviously understand the notion of 'participatory democracy' in a narrower sense than that in which White seems to be using it. For the anarchists, any form of participatory democracy which was institutionally dependent on a centralized, hierarchical state, was to be viewed with suspicion. A 'fully fledged' participatory democracy could only, so the social-anarchist view seems to imply, exist at the level of the workshop, the community, or the school. It is at these levels, in fact, as the foregoing discussion suggests, that we should focus our analysis of desirable educational qualities. And indeed, the anarchist insistence that the schools they founded be run as communities (see Chapter 6), in which solidarity and mutual respect prevailed, supports the view that fraternal attitudes were both 'taught', in such educational settings, by means of the prevailing climate, and helped to sustain and foster the kinds of experimental communities that were being created as an alternative to the state.

But White's comments also draw attention to another important aspect of fraternity in an educational context. Part of the anarchist objection to the state is precisely that, as Kropotkin argues in his discussion of mutual aid (see Chapter 2), the capitalist state system undermines precisely those fraternal attitudes which should ideally underpin social institutions. Thus, in disagreeing with White that the state itself could underpin the kinds of fraternal attitudes essential to a genuine democracy, the anarchists are tacitly admitting that social processes at the community level – primarily education – must take on even more of a responsibility for promoting these attitudes.

White also notes, in reply to critiques from the individualistic liberal tradition, that this notion of fraternity is in no way a threat to individuality and freedom, as it goes hand-in-hand with a tolerance for diversity (something much championed by anarchists), and 'carries no demands that people should engage in communal projects or should enjoy spending the major part of their time in the company of their fellows' (White 1983: 74).



Another interesting theoretical perspective on the notion of fraternity comes from the work of Eric Hobsbawm. In his article 'Fraternity' (Hobsbawm 1975), Hobsbawm argues that the reason fraternity has been the most neglected by theorists of the revolutionary triad is largely due to the fact that 'While parts of what may be defined as liberty [...] and parts of equality may be achieved by means of laws or other specific measures of political reform, fraternity cannot be so conveniently translated into even partial practice' (ibid.: 471), being rather 'a function of certain types of society or movement' (ibid.).

Hobsbawm argues that the notion of fraternity implies both 'an ideal of society as a whole, and an ideal relationship between people for particular purposes: a programme and a technique' (ibid.: 472). Yet this distinction between the 'programme' and the 'technique' reflects precisely the kind of crude distinction between 'means' and 'ends' which the anarchists were so opposed to, as is evident in their critique of Marxism (see Chapter 4). For the social anarchists, in conceptualizing revolutionary social change, the 'programme' and the 'technique' were one and the same thing. The social-anarchist vision of the good society is, then, arguably precisely the conjunction of both aspects of fraternity which Hobsbawm mentions – the social ideal and the ideal form of relationships – and, perhaps, the insistence that they are one and the same; the fraternal relationships which are so essential to building functional communities for a common purpose, are exactly those which should underpin the ideal of the good society, on the social-anarchist view. It is in this respect, indeed, that fraternity can be regarded as a core educational value – implying both the ideal and the practice necessary to promote and underpin it.

Hobsbawm offers a historical account of the development of the notion of fraternity, suggesting that 'middle–class liberal political thought has always been essentially individualist' (ibid.), regarding fraternity therefore as only 'a by-product of individual impulses' or the result of functionalist systems.

Furthermore, he argues, 'The people who have used and needed fraternity most in modern societies, are least likely to write books about it; or if they do, they tend to be esoteric, like most Masonic literature' (ibid.). Illustrative of this point is the fact that fraternity has always been regarded as a basic value of the labour movement, but is not, as such, an articulated aspect of political theory.

Hobsbawm in fact makes the claim that the revolutionary triad – 'Equality, Liberty, Fraternity' – was almost certainly historically derived from the Freemasons. The Masonic notion of fraternity embodied, according to Hobsbawm, the idea of 'a relation of voluntary mutual aid and dependence, which implies that each member can expect the unlimited help of every other when in need' (Hobsbawm 1975: 472), and thus implied a 'certain type of social cooperation' (ibid.). This notion is remarkably close to Kropotkin's notion of mutual aid, although without Kropotkin's historical and evolutionary perspective on its political manifestations and its conceptual connections

to different types of social organization. As Hobsbawm points out, it is essential to this idea of mutual help that it is 'not measured in terms of money or mechanical equality or reciprocal exchange' (ibid.) and thus has the notion of kinship built into it. More pertinently, he argues that this notion invariably has 'overtones of communism', as 'the obligations of artificial brotherhood frequently implied the sharing, or at least the free use, of all property between "brothers" ' (ibid.).

Both White's and Hobsbawm's analyses draw attention to the strong ethical aspect of fraternity, and also to its emotional aspect – an aspect which seems somewhat neglected in the anarchist treatment of the notion.

Hobsbawm notes that, although theoretically neglected, the fraternal code has survived to some extent in revolutionary organizations, unions, and some political parties, where it has an essential function. As part of a political programme, however, it is, as he remarks, 'less clear and codified', and has played a generally minor role in political programmes, where it is most often used to propogate the idea of the 'brotherhood of man' as opposed to the narrower bonds of nationalism and patriotism. Interestingly, Hobsbawm barely mentions social-anarchist progammes in his historical account. This omission is particularly surprising given Hobsbawm's general remarks on the role played by the notion of fraternity after the French Revolution, when it expressed, as he puts it, 'part of what men expected to find in a new society' (Hobsbawm 1975: 472). A fraternal society, Hobsbawm writes, in a description which sounds like a paraphrase of Kropotkin,

> was not merely one in which men treated each other as friends, but one which excluded exploitation and rivalry; which did not organize human relations through the mechanism of a market – or perhaps of superior authorities. Just as slavery is the opposite of liberty, and inequality of equality, so the competitive system of capitalism was the opposite of fraternity.
>
> (Ibid.)

So for the social anarchists, fraternity and the connected notions of mutual aid, benevolence and solidarity were not only argued to be real and salient features of human life in society but were assigned normative status as the basis for the ideal, stateless society. In this context one can also see the further significance of the anarchist insistence on small, face-to-face communities as the basic units of social organization. Keeping social units and institutions as small as possible not only has the function of facilitating non-hierarchical, decentralized forms of social organization and avoiding oppressive bureaucratic structures but is also clearly essential to ensure the flourishing of fraternity. For only in small communities can the basic sense of solidarity with and fraternity towards others be maintained. It is anonymity and lack of interpersonal understanding which not only exacerbates socio-economic injustice but also facilitates the phenomenon of free-riders which many theorists cite as an inevitable problem of stateless societies.



Interestingly, in this connection, many liberal theorists – most notably Rawls – seem to start from the assumption of a community of rational individuals not characterized by fraternal feelings. Rawls' 'circumstances of justice', in fact, are necessarily defined in this way, leading some critics of Rawlsian liberalism, like Michael Sandel (1982), to point out that justice only becomes relevant in the absence of feelings such as fraternity and benevolence. Sandel quotes Hume, who remarked: 'Increase to a sufficient degree the benevolence of men, or the bounty of nature, and you render justice useless, by supplying in its place much nobler virtues, and more favourable blessings' (ibid.: 32). Perhaps the most outspoken exponent of the view that such 'nobler virtues' have a basis in human nature, and accordingly can underpin a well-functioning, equitable stateless society, was Joseph Proudhon, who anticipated Kropotkin in arguing for a 'social instinct' which is prior to any formal account of social justice:

> To practice justice is to obey the social instinct; to do an act of justice is to do a social act... man is moved by an internal attraction towards his fellow, by a secret sympathy which causes him to love, congratulate, condole; so that, to resist this attraction, his will must struggle against his nature.
>
> (Proudhon, in Edwards 1969: 226–227)

This sense of the social virtues as constituting the foundation for social organization and, if not undermining the priority of justice altogether, at least giving rise to a different understanding of what justice may mean, is captured by Kropotkin in the following passage:

> It is not love and not even sympathy upon which society is based in mankind; it is the conscience – be it only at the stage of an instinct of human solidarity. It is the unconscious recognition of the force that is borrowed by each man from the practice of mutual aid; of the close dependency of everyone's happiness upon the happiness of all; and of the sense of justice, or equity, which brings the individual to consider the rights of every other individual as equal to his own. Upon this broad and necessary foundation the still higher moral feelings are developed.
>
> (Kropotkin 1972: 22)

This passage also reflects the anarchist view that life in cooperative communities is not only underpinned by the social virtues, but itself constitutes an important educative force in fostering and maintaining these virtues.

Sandel, in his critique of Rawls, provides further support for the argument that the anarchist insistence on small communties implies normative moral, as well as functional considerations pertaining to the priority of social values. As he notes, we can easily imagine large-scale organizations like the modern state meeting the requirements of the circumstances of justice, but 'we can

readily imagine a range of more intimate or solidaristic associations in which the values and aims of the participants coincide closely enough that the circumstances of justice prevail to a relatively small degree' (Sandel 1982: 30–31).

Although Rawls, of course, acknowledges the social significance of interpersonal ties and sentiments of affection, solidarity and so on, he does not include such sentiments as part of the motivations of the people in the original position, who are, as Sandel remarks, 'theoretically defined individuals' (Sandel 1982: 147). One would expect to find people with a sense of justice acting in accordance with such sentiments 'once the veil of ignorance is lifted', as Sandel comments, but they cannot form part of the theoretical foundations on which the just society is constructed. Yet as Hume pointed out, the 'nobler virtues' of benevolence and fraternity, if increased, would render justice, if not totally irrelevant, at least theoretically less central.

On the anarchist view, fraternity and the connected social virtues are not just fostered by life in small, face-to-face communities, but are at the same time necessary for the stability of such communities, as Michael Taylor has discussed. Obviously, as McKenna points out, 'one is less likely to fight within a community, or to wage war with another community, if they view people of that community as connected to themselves' (McKenna 2001: 61). Similarly, it makes no sense, as the member of such a community, to undermine other people's projects, or to produce something of inferior quality, because 'at some point the inferior product will come back to you' (ibid.).

## Liberal values? Anarchist values?

Both the discussion of human nature and the earlier discussion of the core values of social anarchism seem to suggest that anarchism, as an ideology, is not as far removed from liberalism as may have first appeared, and in fact overlaps with liberal values in important respects. The difference seems to lie primarily in what Ritter refers to as the anarchists' 'daring leap' of supposing that a society which embodies, as fully as possible, the virtues of individual autonomy, social equality and mutual aid, can be sustained without the institutional mediation of the state.

Yet another, important, conclusion is also emerging from this discussion, namely, if the stability of a social-anarchist society rests so clearly on the presence of these social virtues, and if there is to be no state structure to maintain it, it seems as if education, and particularly moral education, has an important role to play. What form, then, is such an education to take in an anarchist society? There are two ways of approaching this question. One is to construct, on the basis of anarchist theory, a philosophical argument for an educational process designed to foster and maintain the types of ideal communities envisaged by the social anarchists. Another approach is to look at actual accounts of educational experiments conducted by anarchists over the years and to ascertain whether such practice is consistent with anarchist principles and in



what way – if at all – it was conceived as playing a role in achieving the desired social change. In the following chapters, I shall employ both these approaches in an attempt both to illustrate instances of educational practice by anarchists and to discuss the philosophical perspective on education behind such practice.

## Education for the social virtues

Given the central importance assigned to the social virtues in sustaining an anarchist society, it follows that a moral education which fosters this attitude must surely form the basis of all anarchist education. I suspect, too, that most anarchist thinkers were aware of the fact, mentioned in the preceding chapter, that the problem of how to maintain a stateless, decentralized community without resorting to a certain degree of public censure, remains one of anarchism's chief theoretical stumbling blocks. The central role played by educational programmes in so much of the anarchist literature seems to be, amongst other things, an implicit acknowledgement of the need to surmount this problem, although it also, of course, results from the anarchists' contextualist perspective on human nature, as discussed in Chapter 2. And of course, as Goodwin and Taylor note, ideals such as the social anarchists' ideal of a society based on the principles of self-government and participatory democracy, in which there were very few rules for adults, often rested on the assumption of there being 'massive moral education of children' (Goodwin and Taylor 1982: 45).

The clearest expression of this idea in the anarchist literature is in Kropotkin's essay, 'Anarchism; Its Philosophy and Ideal' (Kropotkin 1897), in which he states: 'When we ask ourselves by what means a certain moral level can be maintained in a human or animal society, we find only such means: the repression of anti-social acts; moral teaching, and the practice of mutual help itself' (ibid.: 23).

Following a similar line of thought, Kropotkin goes on to write of the importance of 'moral teaching':

> especially that which is unconsciously transmitted in society and results from the whole of the ideas and comments emitted by each of us on facts and events of everyday life. But this force can only act on society under one condition: that of not being crossed by a mass of contradictory immoral teachings resulting from the practice of institutions.
>
> (Ibid.)

These passsages reveal both the central role assigned to moral education in anarchist thought and the anarchist view that if social institutions are to fulfil their educational role both before and after the dismantling of the state, they must themselves embody anarchist principles. On a more sinister note, the aforementioned passage also hints, in its reference to 'the repression of

anti-social acts' at an acknowledgement of the need for some form of what Ritter refers to as 'public censure'. Of course, one can imagine certain relatively benign versions of 'public censure', such as the practice of 'shaming' – which has recently aroused renewed theoretical interest through the development of theories of reintegrative justice. Nevertheless, one cannot help feeling that, given this choice of phrase, Ritter and others may be justified in fearing that the value of individual autonomy may be under serious threat in a social-anarchist community.

I have argued here that not only does an attempt to take the anarchist perspective on social change seriously prod us to think about education in a different way, but also that there is a substantive, primarily moral core to educational programmes conceived from a specifically anarchist position. Of course, education is only one of the channels through which anarchists sought to create an alternative social reality to that which, they believed, was characteristic of social relations constituted by the state. As Bookchin notes:

> Sensibility, ethics, ways of building reality, and selfhood have to be changed by educational means, by a politics of reasoned discourse, experimentation and the expectation of repeated failures from which we have to learn, if humanity is to achieve the self-consciousness it needs to finally engage in self-management.
>
> (Bookchin 1990: 189)

The questions to be addressed now are how this perspective might be translated into educational policy and practice, and how might the normative core of anarchist values discussed here be reflected in the content of specific educational programmes. This is the task of the next two chapters.

# 6 Anarchism goes to school

In the light of the outline of anarchism discussed, the role of education in anarchist thought may seem more confusing than ever. On the one hand, given the anarchist aversion to blueprints and the demand for constant experimentation in the endeavour to improve society, it may seem quite reasonable to argue that doing away with schools and formal education altogether would be a crucial step towards the creation of an anarchist society. Indeed, the anarchists' insistence that individuals be 'active agents creating the possibilities of their own future' (McKenna 2001: 52) seems to demand that any education be broadly libertarian – allowing, as far as possible, freedom for creative experimentation, critical thought and active problem-solving. This view is also, of course, a consequence of the anarchist insistence that the means for achieving social revolution be consistent with its ends.

Yet on the other hand, the earlier discussion of the substantive core of anarchism suggests that any educational practice consistent with these values cannot coherently adopt a libertarian position, in the sense of a *laissez-faire* attitude to children's upbringing. Although the terms 'anarchist education' and 'libertarian education' are often conflated (not least by writers themselves sympathetic to the anarchist tradition, such as John Shotton, or Michael Smith, whose book on the subject is titled *The Libertarians and Education*), it is important to distinguish between the libertarian position and the anarchist position. One of the points I wish to argue in favour of here is that although many anarchists can be described as libertarian, the anarchist educational tradition is distinct from the tradition commonly described as 'libertarian education'.

The term 'libertarian' is used to refer, broadly, to all educational approaches which reject traditional models of teacher authority and hierarchical school structure, and which advocate maximum freedom for the individual child within the educational process – including, in its extreme version, the option to opt out of this process altogether. In the following discussion, I shall use the term 'anarchist education' to refer specifically to a tradition of educational practice and theory which, I shall argue, although it appears to overlap with libertarian ideas in certain respects, is significantly different from the mainstream libertarian tradition. Accordingly, I shall focus on descriptions of schools which were established and run out of an explicitly anarchist

commitment, mentioning non-anarchist libertarian educational approaches merely in order to bring out the contrast which I want to make between these two terms.

For example, many accounts of libertarian education, which, as mentioned, include both anarchist and non-anarchist educators in their descriptions, cite Tolstoy's educational experiments in the 1870s as one of the first attempts at libertarian education. Tolstoy is often described as an anarcho-pacifist, or a Christian anarchist, and although his emphasis on individual responsibility and freedom places him at some distance from the social anarchists, he shared their objections to the state, the church, and the institution of private property. However, he was not part of the anarchist movement and, as Michael Smith points out (Smith 1983: 64) his commitment to non-coercive pedagogy stemmed from an educational and moral principle rather than a political one. Tolstoy's chief argument – expressed eloquently in his essay 'Education and Culture' (in Weiner 1967) – was that 'for education to be effective it had to be free' (Smith 1983: 64). In formulating his educational ideas, Tolstoy seemed to be driven more by moral concerns about interference in children's development than by a vision of the kind of society he would like to help create.

It has of course been argued by certain theorists within the libertarian tradition, for example, Stephen Cullen (Cullen 1991), and to a certain extent A.S. Neill (see below) – certainly with regard to moral education – that any form of education is a kind of coercion and as such has no place in a truly free society. The alternative could be something like Ivan Illich's 'learning webs' (see Illich 1971), educational relationships entered into on a contractual basis, or a reconception along the lines suggested by Carl Bereiter's vision, where, although society may not undergo any radical structural changes, all pretence at 'educating' people has been abandoned as morally unacceptable (Bereiter 1974). In such cases, what effectively happens is that society itself becomes the educating force. In Bereiter's case, it is not clear how this is going to happen, as he makes no explicit commitment to particular political principles, whereas in Illich's case, there is more of a clue as to the kind of society he would like to see – one in which 'convivial' institutions replace the coercive institutions of the state – a vision similar to the original social anarchist one but without the egalitarian commitment or the working out of economic principles.

However, as evidenced by the sheer volume of anarchist literature devoted to educational issues, and the efforts invested by anarchist activists in educational projects, the social anarchists, unlike the earlier theorists, seemed to agree that schools, and education in general, are a valuable aspect of the project for social change, rather than proposing to do away with them altogether along with the other machinery of state bureaucracy.

Of course, to a certain extent, this point is a logical conclusion from the anarchist conception of human nature. If, as has been often contended, the anarchists believed that human nature is naturally benevolent, that children



have in some sense an innate capacity for altruism and mutual aid – the virtues deemed necessary to sustain a social anarchist society – then, one could argue, it would be enough to do away with the repressive institutions of the state; in the absence of such coercive and hierarchical structures, these positive human qualities would flourish, without any need for further intervention. Any learning necessary for practical purposes could be accomplished by some sort of informal network like that proposed by Illich. Yet given the anarchist belief, discussed in Chapter 2, that human nature involves both an altruistic and a selfish aspect, and that it is environmental factors that determine which of these aspects will dominate at any given time, anarchists could clearly not leave processes of education and socialization to pure chance.

This is not to say that a libertarian approach to education is not often suggested by certain anarchist writers – for example, Emma Goldman who, upon visiting Sebastian Faure's libertarian anarchist school in France at the beginning of the last century, commented,

> If education should really mean anything at all, it must insist upon the free growth and development of the innate forces and tendencies of the child. In this way alone can we hope for the free individual and eventually also for a free community which shall make interference and coercion of human growth impossible.
>
> (Goldman 1906)

Without an understanding of the ideological context of anarchism, and particularly the contextualist anarchist view of human nature, these remarks by Emma Goldman could be construed as calling for a reconceptualization of education; a perspective which would replace the narrow understanding of education as a formal system that goes on in institutions, with a broader view of how society should educate its members. Yet, as discussed earlier, the contextualist view of human nature goes a long way towards explaining the need for a substantive programme of education. And indeed, what Goldman and the many other anarchists involved with educational theories and experiments over the years had in mind was a consciously planned process of education which was to occur in places which, although perhaps very different from the traditional schools of the time, were nevertheless undoubtedly kinds of schools.

Just what, though, did such schools look like? What, in other words, is 'anarchist education', in its practical manifestation? In posing this question, I cannot help recalling a conversation I had some time ago with Colin Ward, the contemporary British anarchist, who commented, perhaps with a touch of irony, 'There is no such thing as "anarchist education." There are just different kinds of educational experiments which anarchists have supported and been involved in'. This comment is important in that it reminds us of one of the essential principles of anarchism, namely, that there is no single theory or doctrine as to the correct form of social organization, including education.

It also indicates the need to answer the question of why it is that anarchists have always been sympathetic to particular kinds of educational practice.

Nevertheless, there is, I believe, a particular anarchist perspective on education and the educational experiments which have been conducted over the years by people aligning themselves with this perspective share, in spite of their differences, important and fundamental features. These features, in turn, need to be understood in the context of anarchism as a political ideology. Thus to answer the question 'what is anarchist education?', while keeping in mind the aforementioned reservation, it is necessary to examine both the educational experiments undertaken over the years by individuals committed to anarchist principles, and the theoretical ideas behind these experiments. The aim of this chapter is to describe some typical educational projects, initiated in various different historical, cultural and political contexts, and with varying degrees of success, which share key features that, as I shall argue later, are unique in the sense that they are logically connected to a set of specifically anarchist beliefs. The question of the logic of this connection, and the possible tensions between the theory and the practice, will be discussed later on.

This chapter is not intended to provide a comprehensive historical account of the development of the movement for anarchist education. This has already been done, in admirable detail, by Paul Avrich in his fascinating study of the Modern School Movement in the United States (Avrich 1980), and by Michael Smith in his study of libertarian educational ideas (Smith 1983), to name two central works in the field. I rely heavily on these works in what follows, with the aim of painting a picture of what a typical anarchist school would look like, as a basis for the ensuing philosophical discussion. In addition, I draw on first-hand accounts by pupils and teachers of life in anarchist schools and communities. As, apart from the aforementioned books, the available documentation on such projects is often sketchy, the educational experiments described here have been selected largely on the basis of the wealth and quality of such first- and second-hand accounts that are readily available to the English reader.

## The Escuela Moderna, Barcelona, 1904–1907

One of the first systematic attempts to translate anarchist ideas into educational practice took place in Spain at the beginning of the twentieth century, amidst a climate of severe social unrest, high illiteracy levels, and a public school system completely in the grip of the Catholic Church. The anarchist movement was relatively strong in Spain at the time, and Francisco Ferrer, a long-time political radical, was active in anarchist circles both in France, where he lived in exile for several years, and on his return, in his native Barcelona. While in France, Ferrer had become interested in experiments in libertarian education, particularly those of Paul Robin and Jean Grave, both influential theorists of libertarian education and was familiar with the educational ideas of the utopian socialist Fourier. He became convinced that 'a new society can be the product only of men and women whose whole mental and social training has



made them embodiments of new social ideals and conceptions' (Kelly 1916). On 8 September 1901, Ferrer, with the generous financial support of a sympathetic patron, opened The Escuela Moderna in Barcelona. By the end of the first year, the number of pupils had grown from 30 to 70, and by 1905, 126 pupils were enrolled.

In his prospectus, Ferrer declared: 'I will teach them only the simple truth. I will not ram a dogma into their heads. I will not conceal from them one iota of fact. I will teach them not what to think but how to think.' (Avrich 1980: 20).

This attitude was typical of early anarchist educators, who emphasized the 'rational' nature of the education they were proposing – which they contrasted to the dogmatic teaching of the Church, on the one hand, and the nationalistic 'political' education of the capitalist state, on the other. Indeed, Ferrer later established the League for the Rational Education of Children, which became an important forum for the exchange of anarchist and libertarian ideas on education.

The Escuela Moderna was co-educational – a fact which seems to have been perceived by the authorities as more of a threat than any of its other features – and was also quite heterogeneous in terms of the socio-economic backgrounds of its pupils.

Another important aspect of the school was the absence of grades, prizes and punishments. 'Having admitted and practiced', wrote Ferrer,

> the coeducation of boys and girls, of rich and poor – having, that is to say, started from the principle of solidarity and equality – we are not prepared to create a new inequality. Hence in the Modern School there will be no rewards and no punishments; there will be no examinations to puff up some children with the flattering title of 'excellent', to give others the vulgar title of 'good', and make others unhappy with a consciousness of incapacity and failure.
>
> (Ferrer 1913: 55)

Although Ferrer acknowledged that in the case of teaching a trade or specific skills requiring special conditions it may be useful to the teacher to employ tests or exams in order to monitor a pupil's progress, he made it clear that, if not conducive to the pupils' personal development, such devices had no part to play in the kind of education he was advocating. In one of the first bulletins issued by the school, Ferrer noted that, in spite of some initial hesitation, the parents of children at the school gradually came to accept and value this approach, and he went on to point out that 'the rituals and accompanying solemnities of conventional examinations in schools' seemed indeed to serve the sole purpose 'of satisfying the vanity of parents and the selfish interests of many teachers, and in order to put the children to torture before the exam and make them ill afterwards' (ibid.).

There was no rigid timetable at the school, and pupils were allowed to come and go as they wished and to organize their own work schedules.

Although sympathetic to the anti-intellectualism of Rousseau, Ferrer did not scorn 'book-learning' altogether, but a great emphasis was placed on 'learning by doing', and accordingly, much of the curriculum of the school consisted in practical training, visits to museums, factories and laboratories, or field-trips to study physical geography, geology and botanics.

'Let us suppose ourselves', Ferrer writes,

> in a village. A few yards from the threshold of the school, the grass is springing, the flowers are blooming; insects hum against the classroom window-panes; but the pupils are studying natural history out of books!
> (Ferrer 1909: 2)

This insistence on the role of practical training and experience in the curriculum also reflected a central anarchist educational idea which Ferrer was keen to put into practice, namely the idea of 'integral education'. This concept essentially involved an understanding of the class structure of capitalist society as being reflected in the distinction between manual labour and intellectual work. It received considerable theoretical treatment at the hands of several social-anarchist theorists, notably Kropotkin and was a crucial element of the anarchist perspective on education. I shall offer a more detailed discussion of this notion and its theoretical underpinnings in Chapter 7.

Ferrer was also adamant about the need for teachers to have complete 'professional independence'. Criticizing the system by which the educator is regarded as a public official, an 'official servant, narrowly enslaved to minute regulations, inexorable programmes' (ibid.) he proclaimed that the principle of free, spontaneous learning should apply not only to the pupil, but to the teacher. 'He who has charge of a group of children, and is responsible for them, should alone be qualified to decide what to do and what not to do' (ibid.).

The avowedly anti-dogmatic principles behind Ferrer's curriculum, and his apparent faith in his ability to create a curriculum which reflected nothing but rational, scientific truth, is revealed in the story of the school library. On the eve of the school's opening, Ferrer scoured the libraries of France and Spain in search of suitable textbooks for his school. To his horror, he reports, he found not a single one. The religious dogma of the Church on the one hand was matched by the 'political' (i.e. patriotic) dogma of the state on the other. He thus opened the school without a single book in the library and sent out a call to leading intellectuals across Europe, commissioning textbooks which would reflect the latest scientific discoveries. To this end, he installed a printing press on the school premises and enlisted a team of translators. The works eventually approved for inclusion in the school library included, to quote Avrich, texts on 'the injustices connected with patriotism, the horrors of war, and the iniquity of conquest' (Avrich 1980: 23). Alongside titles such as *The Compendium of Universal History, The Origins of Christianity* and *Poverty; Its Cause and Cure*, the children regularly read a utopian fairy tale by Jean Grave, *The Adventures of Nono* in which, as Ferrer puts it, 'the happier future is ingeniously and dramatically contrasted with the sordid realities of the present order' (ibid.).



Thus, it would be wrong to assume that Ferrer naively believed that he could provide an education which, as opposed to that of the Church and the state, was politically neutral. As he said in his prospectus, 'It must be the aim of the rationalist school to show the children that there will be tyranny and slavery as long as one man depends on another' (Avrich 1980: 24). Accordingly, the children were encouraged to value brotherhood and cooperation, and to develop a keen sense of social justice, and the curriculum carried a clear anti-capitalist, anti-statist and anti-militarist message. Another example of this commitment is the teaching of Esperanto, which was seen as a way to promote international solidarity.

In short, Ferrer saw his school as an embryo of the future, anarchist society; as proof that, even within the authoritarian society surrounding it, an alternative was possible. He hoped that the school would be nothing less than the vanguard of the social-anarchist revolution. His emphasis on 'rational' and 'scientific' education reflected the Enlightenment ideal of progress which, as discussed earlier, underpinned much of anarchist thought. Yet at the same time, his insistence that the school itself be a microcosm of anarchist society, in the sense of constituting a community based on solidarity and equality, seems to go one step further than the liberal humanist ideal that the way to moral progress lies in gradual intellectual enlightenment. While obviously allowing both children and teachers a great deal more freedom than was common in schools at the time, Ferrer was clearly no libertarian – as the substantive agenda of the school illustrates. This reflects the theoretical point made earlier that the anarchist stance involves more than just doing away with the state by establishing alternative means of social organization; it involves a normative, substantive and ongoing commitment to a set of values and principles. One educational implication of this point is that an implicit or explicit form of moral education underpins all aspects of the anarchist educational process and curriculum.

Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that the Spanish authorities saw the Escuela Moderna, and Ferrer himself, as a threat. Although Ferrer was not directly involved in anarchist activity during the years of the school, and indeed saw himself first and foremost as an educator, his anarchist sympathies were obvious, and the school was constantly under surveillance and was frequently denounced by the clerical authorities as a nest of subversion. In 1906, after years of official harassment, it was closed down. Ferrer himself was arrested in August 1909 on false charges of instigating the mass uprising, anti-war riots and general strike which had plunged Barcelona into violence following Spain's colonial war in Morocco. In spite of attempts by the international liberal community to intervene, Ferrer was found guilty at a mock trial, and condemned to death by firing squad.

Ferrer's death, on 13 October 1909, predictably sparked off a wave of international protest, and is probably, as Avrich notes, the reason why he rather than anyone else became the most famous representative of anarchist

education. In the wake of his execution, anarchist activists and enthusiasts for libertarian education around the world were moved to establish educational projects designed to continue and promote Ferrer's ideas. The most extensive and long-lived Ferrer movement arose in the United States, and it is to a study of a typical school of this movement that I now turn.

## The Ferrer School, New York and Stelton, 1911–1953

The Ferrer School in New York (or, as it later came to be known, the Modern School) obviously took Ferrer's educational creed as its inspiration, its founding members being convinced that rational, libertarian educational practice was the most likely to advance anarchist ideas. Thus the 1914–1915 prospectus for the school states:

> The Modern School has been established by men and women who believe that a child educated in a natural way, unspoiled by the dogmas and conventionalities of the adult, may be trusted in later life to set his face against injustice and oppression.
>
> (Kelly 1916)

Accordingly, the basic organizational principles of the school were very similar to those of the Barcelona school, namely, coeducation, an emphasis on 'learning by doing', an anti-authoritarian pedagogy, and a heavily anti-capitalistic, anti-statist and anti-religious tone throughout the curriculum. However, the New York group seems to have taken the idea of the school as a vanguard of the socialist–anarchist revolution, and as a microcosm of an alternative society organized on non-hierarchical, cooperative grounds, further than Ferrer did. They believed that in order for the children to develop an adequate understanding of ideas such as justice, equality and cooperation, they must experience them first-hand in the fullest possible way. Thus:

> We hold that children do not and cannot learn the meaning of duties or rights in an economic system composed of masters and slaves. That is why the children of the public schools and the vast majority of children who are pampered and petted by their ignorant or blinded parents know nothing clearly of either rights or duties. Where alone can children, or any others, learn the meaning of rights and duties? In a mode of life which is genuinely cooperative. A life whose products all justly share and whose labour all justly share. This points inevitably to a school which is based upon complete and inclusive cooperation.
>
> (Kelly 1916: 4–5)

Accordingly, a key feature of the New York school was the communal garden, where children learned to plan, plant, care for and gather plants communally.



In addition, all maintenance and domestic work on the school premises was shared cooperatively by the children and staff. In fact, the New York school also served as a kind of community centre, offering a wide range of adult education courses, public lectures and social gatherings, and as a centre for political activity. In 1915, pursuing their ideal of communal life even further, the New York anarchist group purchased a tract of farming land at Stelton, New Jersey, where they set about founding an anarchist colony. The school, which moved there, became a focal point of the colony. Here the community attempted to put their social anarchist ideals into practice, working the land and sharing administration of community matters. A key element of their ideology, which was reflected in the school, was the idea of breaking down the distinction between 'brain work' and 'manual work' – a theme which, as mentioned earlier, was repeatedly taken up by anarchist theorists (see Chapter 7) and which can be seen in Ferrer's insistence on integral education. The justification for this approach was, first and foremost, a political one: as Harry Kelly writes

> The curse of existing capitalist society is its parasitism. It permits idle and useless people to live on the products of its useful members. No society is tolerable in which all are not workers. In the Modern School, all are workers.
>
> (Kelly 1916: 5)

The anarchist ideal of a socialist, communal society also stressed the need for a natural continuity between the world of the school and that of the community. This ideal was more practically feasible once the school moved to Stelton, where many of the teachers and parents involved in the school were also active members of the colony, and the children naturally combined schoolwork with work in the community.

The educators involved in the experiment saw their creation of the community around the school as naturally connected to the libertarian call for a more spontaneous, child-centred pedagogy. Thus, in an argument which anticipates the critique of the institutionalization of education by the capitalist state voiced by the de-schoolers some 50 years on, Elizabeth Ferm, an influential teacher at Stelton, states:

> Herding children in child centers has made it necessary to control and regulate their activities. As the child does not understand the reason for his being gathered in with so many strange children and strange adults, one of the first problems of the teacher is how to adjust him as quickly and as pleasantly as possible into a grade or group where he seems to fit. There is no time to let the child adjust himself slowly and to find his own place.
>
> (Ferm 1949: 11)

However, it would appear that the enthusiasm of anarchist educators like Ferm for child-centred pedagogy stemmed more out of a general sympathy

for any calls for radically challenging mainstream educational practice and therefore constituting an alternative to state-controlled schools than out of any carefully worked-out theoretical arguments. Furthermore, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the child-centred, or progressive education movement was heralded as the most 'scientific' approach to education, which partly explains its appeal for anarchist educators. Like the European anarchists, the American anarchists associated with the founding of the Ferrer school (amongst them leading activists such as Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman and Harry Kelly) saw themselves and the education they were promoting as essentially 'rational' and 'scientific' – in contrast with what they saw as the dogmatic, superstitious beliefs which prevailed in the state system. Thus Kelly stated, in an editorial entitled 'The Meaning of Libertarian Education',

> Our aim in the Ferrer School is to free both the child and the adult from the false conventionalities and superstitions which now hinder the progress of the race. We believe that these superstitions operate chiefly in the fields of industry, religion and sex, so that we especially direct attention to those three subjects. [...] We are not dogmatics in the sense that we teach any one ism or point of view to the exclusion of others. We believe that every human being has the right to make his or her choice of life philosophy.
>
> (Kelly 1913)

Indeed, the anarchists' suspicion of anything clearly systemized and prescriptive, along with their revolutionary social outlook, led the New York group to be highly critical even of some progressive educational theorists, such as Montessori and Pestalozzi. Emphasizing the difference between the anarchist–libertarian approach and that of the Montessori system, a further editorial in the *Modern School* journal states:

> Ferrer, a freethinker and social revolutionist, treats of the school as an essential factor in the struggle for a new society; Montessori, a Roman Catholic and social reformer, regards the school as a means to prepare the child for the present society – admittedly an imperfect society, but one gradually improving [...] Montessori's work indicates that she desires not much more for society than remedial measures for its ills. Several times in her book she writes of the yoke of slavery growing easier from century to century. It is the voice of the conservative shrinking at the thought of the larger scheme, and regarding the prolonged existence of things as they are with complete equanimity. Not so Ferrer. It is not enough for him to lighten the yoke from century to century. He demands its utter removal.
>
> (Kerr 1913)

The author goes on to conclude that in order to develop in children such an objective, enlightened view of society and a commitment to the desired social change, it is essential to remove all 'political' (a term seen as equivalent to



'patriotic') or religious education from the curriculum. The ideal was that 'every pupil shall go forth from it into social life with the ability to be his own master, and guide his life in all things' (Avrich 1980: 75). In theory, then, the curriculum of the Modern School in New York and Stelton was to be less prescriptive than that offered by Ferrer, which, as discussed, contained explicitly anti-statist and anti-capitalist messages. In practice, however, the American Modern School was far from apolitical, both in terms of the formal study programme and in terms of the inter-connectedness between the school and the community, which led to participation by pupils and teachers in workers' rallies, political meetings and so on.

In short, there seems to have been some confusion amongst anarchist educators as to the extent to which a libertarian pedagogy could be combined with a substantive curriculum and school ethos. In spite of their general sympathy for the idea of child-centred education, their reservations about this approach clearly reflect their belief in the necessity of radical social change, and their conviction that such change could only be achieved by people 'whose education has trained them [...] to cherish and practice the ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity' (Kelly 1916: 51). It is a serious failing of the work of anarchist educators that they made little systematic attempt to provide a theoretical account of the relationship between child-centred pedagogical practice and their own anarchist goals and values. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the emphasis, in their writing and practice, on expressions of the basic idea formulated in the aforementioned quote, reinforces the impression that what gave these projects their distinct identity was not their espousal of particular educational practices but their underlying moral and political vision.

So although the educational philosophy of the Ferrer schools in New York and Stelton was, in some sense, child-centred, this was understood in a far looser sense than that developed in the work of Dewey and Montessori. Indeed, the founders of the school claimed (Kelly 1914) that the idea of highly trained teachers implementing the Montessori method with the appropriate apparatus was nothing less than 'a contradiction of the rational idea of education', which they saw as essentially concerned with the spontaneous development of the child:

> A normal child is capricious, whimsical and spasmodic in activity. Unless he is under control he will not persist in the use of didactic toys or any set apparatus for play [...] The Montessori method presupposes that children are interested in building correct staircases, in discriminating among shades of a colour. It takes for granted that little folks should learn to be economical in movements; that they should be quiet and orderly; that they should persist, that they should learn to endure.
>
> (Kelly 1914)

Although acknowledging that this inhibition of the child's instincts may often not be conscious on the part of Montessori educators, the author cites

the physical and psychological dangers of such practice – which, he argues, hinder emotional growth and independent thought.

In comparison, the Modern School had no rigid structure, curriculum or schedules, but maintained 'what order we feel necessary' (ibid.), relying on the anarchist principle of natural order – that is, an order evolved from below, as opposed to imposed from above. In this, anarchist educators were taking a stand against what they regarded as the essentially authoritarian order of the conventional school – an authoritarianism which is reflected and reinforced throughout the social practices of the capitalist state. This stance also reflects the basic anarchist insight that the ideal mode of social organization is a non-hierachical, decentralized one, in which any system of authority and rules is functional and temporary.

It is worth noting that other anarchist schools established following the execution of Ferrer took a somewhat more systematic approach to issues of pedagogy. Thus Mathew Thomas has shown, in his historical study of anarchist schools in Britain in 1890–1916 (Thomas 2004), that the organizers of the International Modern School established in London in 1906, adopted a Froebelian method of teaching. Believing that Froebel's developmental theory was in keeping with the anarchist view of the spontaneous development of the child, the educators involved in this project thus had no problem in 'teaching according to age and stage', as suggested by Froebel.

The conviction of the educators involved in the Ferrer School, and later at Stelton, that what they were doing was providing an education that was above all rational and scientific, is witnessed by several amusing anecdotes about interaction with the children. On one occasion, for example (described in Ferm 1949), a teacher reports a small child running up to her from the kitchen to say that 'The potatoes are ready!' At which, the child is confronted with a series of interrogations – 'How do you know?', 'Did you test them?', 'What makes you think so?' – all designed to encourage children to appreciate the difference between facts and judgements, to develop their abilities to think in a rational fashion, to rely on observation and empirical verification – in short, to make them 'scientific'.

Although there was no formal timetable at the Modern School, lessons were offered along the lines of fairly traditional academic subjects, and children were free to attend them if and when they wished. The classes on offer are listed in the prospectus as follows:

> English, History, Geography, Physiology, Biology, Astronomy.... Big words, these, but we have no others to use and to employ them here means that normal young people want to know what the stars are, how the earth and the soil and the sea and themselves were made.
>
> (Kelly 1916)

For most of these classes, the children did group work, with very little frontal teaching by the teacher. Yet one teacher described how, in the case of



arithmetic, 'the individual system of research' seemed to prevail, as opposed to the other classes, where group work was the norm. Apparently, the pupils, by mutual consent, had hit on an arrangement whereby they began 'doing sums' individually on coming into class in the mornings. 'In an extreme emergency', writes the author,

> or if his faculty of perseverance is not working as well as usual, one calls on the teacher or some other pupil to help him out of a tight place. But the general feeling is that it is much better to 'get stuck', to turn back and see where the difficulty is. Whatever may be said against this lonely struggle in the arithmetic field, it certainly develops powers of initiative and perseverance.
>
> (Ibid.)

In short, the founders and, to a large extent the teachers, of the Ferrer School in New York and later at Stelton, like Ferrer himself, made no pretense at political neutrality in education. They saw what they were doing as an important attempt to challenge what they regarded as the conservative forces at work in all aspects of the state system, and to further the development of a radically different kind of society. Like the Escuela Moderna in Barcelona, the New York school appealed primarily to working-class parents, many of whom were already involved in radical social movements, and who objected to the values being promoted in the public schools. Defending the need for the Modern School in a country like the United States, where there is free public schooling, Stewart Kerr (1913) puts forth the classic anarchist argument against state schooling: 'The ruling classes everywhere [...] use the school, often unconsciously, as a means to keep themselves in power, to maintain things as they are'. The Modern School, in contrast,

> is consciously dynamic, aims to cultivate the critical attitude of mind, the indispensable factor in every step forward the world has ever made [...]. The avowed purpose of the public school is to equip the child for his environment. The order of the environment is not questioned [...]. It is the function of the Modern School to strip the social system of its economic fallacies and expose its sordid selfishness.
>
> (Ibid.)

Thomas's study suggests that anarchist educators elsewhere may have been somewhat more uncomfortable than Kelly and his American colleagues with the idea that the education promoted in their schools could be construed as another form of indoctrination. Thomas suggests that there was some controversy, in the British schools, 'about the politicized nature of the subject matter' (Thomas 2004: 428). Yet Thomas's account merely serves to underline the important differences between the social anarchists, who formed the bulk of those involved in the schools discussed here, and individualist

anarchists who, following Stirner, 'rejected the entire concept of the school as an affront to the child's autonomy' (ibid.). What characterized those involved in the anarchist school movement was their 'belief in the transformative potential of alternative schools' (ibid.).

Although longer lived than most experiments in communal living, the Stelton colony, and with it the school, was in decline from the late 1920s onwards and finally disintegrated in 1953. Avrich cites both the impact of the Depression and the rift created in the community between the anarchists and communists during the First World War as the main reasons for its demise.

> Before the war, radicals of different stripes could still argue about their differences, could still have their different groups and theories and yet agree about a common enemy, capitalism, and be friends – could even start colonies together. But after the war and the Russian Revolution, this became more and more difficult.
>
> (Ben Liberman, in Avrich 1980: 327)

Ben Lieberman, a former colonist, pinpoints the final rift at a somewhat later date, citing Stalinism as the decisive reason for the break-up of the community (see Avrich, ibid.).

## The Walden Center and School, Berkeley, 1956–

Although the Walden Center and School is still in existence, it does not appear to be explicitly associated with the anarchist movement, and indeed makes no reference to anarchism (or indeed libertarian education) in its prospectus or mission statement. The school's website (http://www.walden-school.net) describes it as 'an arts-based progressive, teacher-run elementary school'. The term 'progressive' here is understood as referring to the fact that classes are mixed-age, there are no grades or standardized testing, and there is an emphasis on the arts and on experiential learning. However, I am including this school in the present discussion as its original founding group all shared anarchist views (see Walden Foundation 1996: 21), and the documentation describing the early years of the school provides a valuable example of an attempt to translate anarchist ideas into educational practice.

The idea of setting up the Walden Center and School grew out of the long association and friendship of a group of committed anarchists, communists and pacifists, most of whom had been active in anti-conscription movements, workers' union struggles and various other social causes. On becoming parents, several of the group, unwilling to send their children to the available state schools, which they regarded as reflecting a cultural conflict 'between human needs and social structures', and attracted by the idea of community life (many of them had already been part of experiments in communal living)



developed the idea of founding and running their own school, which was to be not only 'a means of educating children in a freer environment, but also a centre for education and action in the adult community we were a part of' (ibid.: 25). Although not all founding members belonged to the anarchist movement, they all, according to the testimony of several members of the group, 'shared the anarchist–pacifist philosophy that shaped the school' (ibid.: 65).

As political activists throughout the 1940s and 1950s many of the founding group had experienced marked changes in their political thinking, which evolved, according to one testimony, 'from the nineteenth century belief that revolutionary change was possible in our lifetime, to our taking a long view of the role of anarchism in society' (ibid.: 21). Thus their agenda, and their political activities, were somewhat less revolutionary than those of the anarchists involved in the Modern School at the beginning of the twentieth century. Of course, this had to do largely with the changed political context within which they were operating – both at the macro level, and at the level of what was actually going on in state schools at the time. Nevertheless, most of the group still regarded themselves as continuing a line of anarchist thought, and felt, in keeping with this tradition, that 'if revolutionary change wasn't imminent, there must be action we could take that would point to the possibilities inherent in anarchistic relationships' (ibid.). Some of the founding members had in fact, before moving to California, had some contact with teachers and colonists at Stelton.

The process of agreeing, jointly, on the school's programme and structure, was regarded as an experimental, philosophical exercise through which the group tested their educational ideas in the light of their philosophy, and 'strove to build a form, both functional and educational, that most reflected our anarchist/pacifist views' (ibid.: 24).

The form which this initial process took is in itself an example of anarchist principles put into practice: wary of the tendency of ideas to turn into ideology, principles into dogma, and 'carefully wrought attitudes' into slogans, the founders were reluctant to document the countless discussions and debates which preceded and accompanied the initial years of the school, and avoided creating a written programme or prospectus. This suspicion of constitutions, dogmas and blueprints for institutions and practices is, of course, a basic thread common to all anarchists, who believe that to lay down such blueprints would undermine the commitment to human freedom, progress and perfectibility.

Another political principle of anarchism put into practice in these founding sessions, as well as in regular parent–teacher meetings throughout the years, was the rejection of the democratic belief in majority rule – the adherence to which had, according to David Koven, one of the school's founders, destroyed parent–teacher coalitions in other independent schools where the founders of the cooperatives had used it to 'push their Marxist bias' (Walden Foundation 1996: 28). What Koven and his colleagues sought, in contrast, was a form of

day-to-day management practice that would 'prevent the creation of a bureaucracy that could dictate life at the school' (Walden Foundation 1996: 27). All decision-making, therefore, took place only after the group had reached consensus. Furthermore, in order to prevent the founding group from becoming 'stodgy and self-satisfied', it was agreed that every new teacher or family was entitled to join in the decision-making process after having been at the school for an initial period of 1 to 2 years. The commitment to consensus meant that no proposed new action or policy to which any member of the school community objected could be carried out until the principled objection had been heard and discussed and a workable compromise had been reached. Of course, the insistence on consensus by no means rules out the possibility of power-struggles and, furthermore, as testified by the founders, running the school this way meant that the process of decision-making was slow and painstaking. However, they felt it was an essential element of their anarchist commitments and seemed convinced that it insured the community, to a considerable degree, against power-struggles over the control of the school and the development of an ambitious, power-seeking minority.

What is of particular interest in this context is that all the founders were adamant that the school was not to be a 'parent–teacher cooperative'. Although the founding parents outlined the basic philosophy of the school, they felt very strongly that on a day-to-day basis, the teachers needed to be in charge, as the ongoing continuity essential to good education could not occur if the teachers were constantly functioning at the whim of the parents. Ultimately, the founders believed, education was the concern of teachers and children, and thus, 'parents could raise hell, but in the end, decisions were made at the teacher–child level' (ibid.: 79), with many decisions made by the children themselves.

As the Fourth Draft of the Philosophy Statement (the only surviving document from the early years of the school) states:

'We do not visualize the teacher as a technician, mass-producing according to someone else's plan, but as a sensitive, creative force at innumerable moments in the learning experience' (ibid.: 10).

Another basic anarchist tenet which was translated into educational practice at Walden is the belief in small communities as the optimal units of social organization. This belief is reflected not only in the organization of the community around the school – which relied heavily on personal contacts, mutual support and friendship as a basis for commitment to this and other projects – but in the pedagogical principle that class size should be limited (15 was eventually agreed upon as the maximum number of children per class) in order to promote an ideal learning environment for children – one in which the teacher could be responsive and sensitive to individual needs and could relate to the children on a personal basis.

In keeping with these anarchist principles of social organization, the school in effect had no central authority, and thus each teacher was autonomous and was responsible for determining procedures, developing curricula and planning programmes – aided in this process, of course, by the ongoing discussions with other members of the staff and the board.



What is surprising, however, in the context of this emphasis on freedom, is that, in contrast to many accounts of experiments in anarchist education (notably those discussed earlier), there is very little mention in the accounts of Walden of the notion of the freedom of the individual child. Of course, there is frequent mention of general principles designed to promote the child's freedom – for example, 'We do not believe in simple indoctrination, even for the sake of the good' (ibid.), and of the vision of a school that would help children to 'think independently, would give them all the tools for creative existence, [...] would be secular, would have no heroes, no presidents, no icons' (ibid.: 40). Likewise, several of the founders point to an explicit connection between anarchist principles and pedagogic practice in the notion that 'the needs of children rather than the needs of the state' should be the driving motives behind educational practice. However, there is very little mention of the way these ideas were reflected in the day-to-day life of the school. It is not at all clear, for example, what Walden's position was on the issue of compulsory attendance – abolishment of which is commonly a central principle of anarchist educational initiatives. Denny Wilcher, one of the original founders, testifies that 'no teacher ever forced a child to attend structured classes' (Walden Foundation 1996: 79), but the emphasis in the school's philosophy seems to be more on a commitment to the individual development and emotional and intellectual needs of the child, rather than to the principle of non-coercion *per se*. In fact, the school's apparent reluctance to make non-attendance a central and viable option for children is suggested by the fact that, from the beginning, they attempted to deal with this issue by carving out spaces in the curriculum in which such practice was legitimated. 'On Wednesdays', as Wilcher describes, 'there was no school at all and groups and individuals did whatever interested them' (Walden Foundation 1996: 78), and another founding parent and teacher, Alan MacRae, is credited with having invented 'Hookey Day', held on the first day of Spring, when the entire school, parents included, went to the park and played.

Another point on which Walden seems to differ from the anarchist educational initiatives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is in its emphasis on the arts and creativity in general. In contrast to schools such as the Ferrer School in New York or the Modern School at Stelton, where great emphasis was placed on rationality and 'scientific' approaches, the first few years at Walden were characterized by an emphasis on dance, music and plastic arts, and the high points of the school year were always lavish productions of various musical dramas on which the parents, teachers and children collaborated. This emphasis could have been due in part to the fact that many of the founders were themselves professional dancers, musicians or skilled craftspeople, and brought their skills in these fields to the school when they became involved as teachers. But there does also seem to have been an explicit commitment to the role of artistic creativity in creating the kind

of educational environment and, indeed, the kind of society envisioned by the founders. The classes at the school took the form of a confederation of groups, each new child being admitted not to the school but to a particular group, and each group made a commitment to engage in a significant amount of music, dance and arts and craft, which, according to Wilcher, 'were seen as basics, not luxuries' (Walden Foundation 1996: 79).

Many of the aforementioned features, particularly the emphasis on the arts, have endured over the years and are clearly an essential element of the school's identity. However, several founding members, reflecting, in the mid 1980s, on the development of the school over the years, expressed the view that the political ethos of the school community had changed considerably. The current parent body seemed, in the words of one of the founding members, to be 'more interested in success' and less open to radical ideas on education and society. This sense can be confirmed by a glance at the comments recently posted about the school on the local web-based parents' network, where enthusiastic testimonies about the school's unique environment typically contain comments such as: 'current studies are showing that this type of environment is excellent for developing upper reasoning math skills' [http://parents.berkeley.edu/recommend/schools/walden.html]. A cynical reader may conclude that, while Walden Center and School still clearly and admirably demonstrates an emphasis on creativity, a commitment to collective decision-making, and an atmosphere of mutual respect between teachers and children, the radical dissenting philosophy on which it was founded has all but been replaced by an acquiescence in the mainstream race for academic achievement and accreditation. Nevertheless, Koven concluded, in 1987 (Walden Foundation 1996: 33), 'When I think of Walden functioning for almost thirty years without a director or central authority, I'm filled with both awe and joy. Here is real affirmation of our anarchist insight.'

In short, Walden, in its early days, seems to have differed from earlier anarchist educational experiments primarily in that it saw itself not so much as a vanguard of the anarchist revolution, or a step towards developing the kind of people capable of bringing about and sustaining the free society of the future, but, above all, as an experiment in human living. The underlying idea seems to be a commitment to anarchism as 'a way of life'. As such, the Walden School would seem to be less clearly a reflection of the political ideology of the social anarchists discussed in the preceding chapters, although it echoes many central anarchist ideas. One way of bringing out these differences between Walden and the experiments set up by the nineteenth century and early twentieth century anarchists is in terms of how the school community perceived the relationship between the school and the wider society. In the case of the early social anarchists, it is quite clear that the school was intended to be not only a microcosm of a social alternative to the state but also a vanguard of the social anarchist revolution. The school, in other words, had two revolutionary functions: creating a generation of people capable of laying the basis for the future anarchist society, through a process of moral education



and engagement in critical social and political activism and serving as an example to the surrounding society of how such an alternative future was possible. In the case of Walden, in contrast, one gets the impression that the school founders saw their school less as a revolutionary vanguard, and more simply as a social experiment, serving primarily to remind the outside world that alternatives are possible.

## Other anarchist schools

As documented in several excellent accounts, there have been explicitly anarchist schools in existence since probably the middle of the nineteenth century. Notably, Paul Robin, Sebastien Faure and Madeline Vernet, all of whom founded innovative libertarian schools in France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, were associated, to some extent, with the anarchist movement. (See Shotton 1993 and Smith 1983.) During the same period in Britain, there were several experiments in anarchist education, along more socialist or social-anarchist lines (for an account of these see Shotton 1993 and Thomas 2004). However, anarchist schools are more often than not excluded from historical accounts of radical schooling. In their account of Owenist education, for example, Stewart and McCann make the astonishing claim that the Owenist schools established in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century

> were the only popular educational institutions in the nineteenth century that were specifically designed to produce a change in society by changing the character of the knowledge given to the individuals composing it, and through their influencing the society itself.
>
> (Stewart and McCann 1967: 91)

## Summerhill – a non-anarchist experiment

The aforementioned description may suggest that the famous Summerhill School, the longest-lived libertarian educational project, founded in Leiston, Suffolk in 1921 by the late A.S. Neill, is a natural candidate for inclusion in this account. Indeed, from a structural point of view, there are many similarities between day-to-day practice at Summerhill and that at the anarchist schools described here. Summerhill, like anarchist schools, has no rigid timetable or curriculum, teaching is informal, children are free to come and go as they like (provided they remain within the school grounds – a compromise Neill was forced to make in order to comply with the Compulsory Education Law), and Neill always rejected traditional roles of teacher authority. Similarly, Neill's writings, which continue to inform the school's policies and practice, are full of references to the freedom of the individual child and damning descriptions of authoritarian child-rearing practice.

One of the few differences which are immediately apparent on the structural level has to do with the avowedly democratic principles involved

in the administration of Summerhill. In contrast to the anarchist suspicion of majority rule as a political system (as evidenced earlier by the example of Walden School), Summerhill has always stressed its democratic character, both at the level of policy and day-to-day running of the school. In the context of Summerhill and similar schools (such as the Israeli Democratic School in Hadera, which is modelled on Summerhill), the notion of democracy seems to have been given a very narrow interpretation, emphasizing above all the principle of majority rule. The school meeting, for example, one of the key features of life at Summerhill, is an assembly where every member of the school community – staff and children alike – have equal voice, and where all decisions are reached by democratic voting.

Apart from this obvious example, however, the differences between Summerhill and similar libertarian or 'free' schools, on the one hand, and anarchist schools on the other, may not be immediately apparent. Yet they are, I believe, crucial. In order to understand their significance, one has to examine the philosophical and ideological commitments which informed the educational principles and practice of these two different approaches. A consideration of the philosophical background of anarchist educational ideas, as discussed in the preceding chapters, shows that these two superficially similar types of school in fact reflect very different positions.

First, and perhaps crucially, Neill conceived of freedom in a primarily individual, psychological sense. His chief intellectual influences were those of the psychoanalytical tradition – especially the work of Wilhelm Reich and, later, Homer Lane. Thus, although critical of existing society, he believed that the way forward to a better world lay in gradual reform at the individual level – a sort of mass therapy, in a sense, by which we would gradually achieve a society of self-aware, uninhibited, emotionally stable and happy individuals. In contrast, the notion of freedom behind the anarchist position is, along with other concepts such as those of freedom and cooperation, not, as Smith puts it, 'an abstract, context-free concept', but one which carries 'concrete political connotations' (Smith 1983: 17). The anarchist understanding of freedom in the context of education involves, as discussed in Chapter 4, not only a clear sense of, as Smith notes, 'what pupils are to be freed from' (ibid.: 87), but also a carefully thought-out positive ideal.

In contrast, in *A Dominie Dismissed*, one of Neill's early books, which is a semi-autobiographical story based on his years as a young teacher in rural Scotland, he describes his dissatisfaction with the current state of society: 'Obviously present day civilization is all wrong. "But", a dominie might cry, "can you definitely blame elementary education for that?" I answer "Yes, yes, Yes!" ' (Neill, quoted in Hemmings 1972: 24). Thus Neill, unlike the anarchists, did not seem to believe that broad, structural social change was the main goal of social reform. Rather, he envisaged a process of social transformation whereby educational practice, reformed along the lines he suggested, could remedy the ills of society. Interestingly, Neill echoed many anarchist ideas in his emphasis on the need to remove authority as a basis for relations



in the family, the school and the work-place. He was greatly impressed by the work of Homer Lane at the Little Commonwealth, the experimental self-governing community for young delinquents. Self-government, Neill argued, not only serves to remove the negative effects of authority, but also 'breeds altruism', as witnessed by the experiments of Homer Lane and others (Hemmings 1972: 30).

Yet Neill was adamant on his non-political – one may even argue, value-relative – position as an educator. 'Life is so difficult to understand', he remarked in an interview for the *The New Era* (quoted in Hemmings 1972: 35), 'that I personally cannot claim to settle the relative educational values of anyone.' As Hemmings comments, Neill seemed genuinely to believe that 'children must determine their own values, in culture as in morality' (ibid.). This is a far cry from the committed political stance of anarchist educators who, though they may have believed in the educational value of allowing free, critical dialogue and encouraging creative independent thinking on the part of pupils, had no qualms about stating their own ideological convictions, and indeed designed a curriculum and a school climate which would reflect the values implicit in these convictions. For 'neutrality in the school', the anarchist founders of the Modern School declared, 'can be nothing but hypocrisy', and they went on to state:

> We should not, in the school, hide the fact that we would awaken in the children a desire for a society of men truly free and truly equal [...], a society without violence, without hierarchies, and without privilege of any sort.
>
> (Ferrer 1909: 6)

Neill, although he began his professional life as a teacher, developed a growing fascination with Freudian psychology early on in his career, and in fact described himself on several occasions as a psychologist rather than an educationalist – his preface to *The Problem Child* (Neill 1926) begins with the words: 'Since I left education and took up child psychology...' and, as early as 1922, in *A Dominie Abroad*, he states 'It has come to me as something of a sudden shock that I am no longer interested in teaching. Teaching English bores me stiff. All my interest is in psychology' (Hemmings 1972: 48).

As Hemmings notes, Neill's agreement with Homer Lane's idea of 'original virtue' – reflected in his insistence that all moral instruction perverts the innate goodness of the child – entails certain philosophical difficulties when placed alongside his apparent moral relativism. Neill's position on this issue is also strikingly at odds with the anarchists' rejection of the romantic, Rousseauian view of a pre-social, naturally benign human nature, and with their insistence that human nature is actually twofold and contextualist.

A more explicit statement of Neill's views on society and the individual can be found in his comment, in *The Problem Child*, that 'When the individual and the social interests clash, the individual interests should be allowed

to take precedence' (Neill 1926: 216). This suggests that Neill did not share the anarchist view of humans as essentially social by nature and of the impossibility of talking about individual self-fulfilment in isolation from the social context.

Hemmings goes as far as to suggest, based on Neill's comments about the primacy of individual interests and the need for the child to create his own culture and values, that

> Such insistence on individual freedom led Neill to avoid serious consideration of the social consequences of his education: he was prepared to let these evolve their own way. On the individual level, he was saying that if the emotions were right the intellect would look after itself, and as regards social structure he seemed to be assuming that, given emotionally healthy individuals, their culture could safely be left to develop. (Hemmings 1972: 109)

Smith, too, notes that at Summerhill, there is 'no systematic attempt to introduce the discussion of political values [...] and no real attempt to promote cooperative values' (Smith 1983: 100).

This view is in fact backed up by my own impressions of visits to Summerhill today. One has the impression of a lively group of self-confident, happy children, who may, as one imagines, very well grow up to be happy, but completely self-centred individuals. As witnessed by the account by a new teacher of the opposition he encountered from the school staff to his proposal to develop a P.S.E. project involving children from the local town, there is little attempt to engage with broader social issues or to confront present socio-political reality. Indeed, there is very much a sense (again, this is supported by comments of parents at the school) of the school having created a little island, in which Summerhill, and the superior kind of education which it represents, is regarded as being against the rest of the world, with its misguided ideas. Whereas the anarchists associated with the schools described earlier were always deeply involved in the social and political environment in which they lived, and seemed to feel themselves to be in some sense a part of something greater, in contrast, as Hemmings notes (Hemmings 1972: 174), for the children and teachers at Summerhill, the school itself represents the 'real, present society – the conflicts and demands of the "outside" society being somewhat removed from experience'.

This contrast is reflected, too, in the way in which Summerhill recently conducted its battle against the threat of closure from the current government, following a damning OFSTED inspection. Instead of addressing the broader social implications of the threat by a centralist government to an alternative school and broadening support for their campaign by engaging with other groups (such as struggling comprehensive schools in deprived areas, frustrated teachers and parents) who felt their autonomy and rights to make educational choices similarly threatened – the school community chose



to focus their campaign on the particular validity of Neill's educational philosophy and their right to defend this philosophy against that of the mainstream educational establishment. Anarchist educators, although they did indeed aim to create a community that represented a particular way of social organization and a way of life different from that typical of the surrounding society, nevertheless saw themselves as constantly engaging in the outside world – as, indeed, involved in an ongoing process of interaction with it in their efforts to bring about the social change they saw as so essential. As Hemmings suggests, what Neill was really after was an appreciation of freedom for its own sake (Hemmings 1972: 73) – a far cry from the social anarchists, who viewed freedom, in the sense described here, as an inherent aspect of creating a society based on mutual aid, socio-economic equality and cooperation.

## Anarchist schools versus libertarian education

In short, although many writers, Smith (1983), Shotton (1993) and Spring (1975) among them, include Summerhill and similar schools under the broad heading of 'libertarian education', I believe there is a significant difference between the philosophical and political outlook behind these experiments in alternative education and that of the anarchist schools discussed earlier. It would appear that the anarchist educational experiments are unique in the world of 'progressive', 'libertarian' or 'free' education not in terms of their pedagogical practice but in terms of the substantive ideas and motivations behind them. These ideas can only be grasped in the context of the anarchist commitment to undermining the state by creating alternative forms of social organization and relationships.

As discussed earlier, the anarchist view of human nature as not predominantly or innately 'good' or 'evil', but as determined largely by social context, goes a long way towards explaining the central role that anarchist thinkers over the ages have assigned to educational experiments, and particularly to the moral content and form of these experiments. In contrast, it is in fact the libertarian position associated with educational experiments such as Summerhill which makes the type of optimistic or naïve assumptions about human nature often wrongly attributed to anarchism. John Darling notes this point in his discussion of 'growth theorists' (Darling 1982), where he quotes Neill as assuming that children are 'naturally good' and will turn out to be 'good human beings if [they are] not crippled and thwarted in [their] natural development by interference' (Neill, quoted in Darling 1982: 68).

The picture of typical anarchist schools outlined earlier, then, serves two purposes: first, it makes it abundantly clear that anarchists did not subscribe to the view that one can do away with education, or even with schools, altogether, but seemed to agree that schools, and education in general, are a valuable aspect of the project for social change, rather than simply another objectionable aspect of the machinery of state bureaucracy.

Second, it distinguishes the anarchist view from the pure libertarian view, that there is something morally objectionable in the very attempt by educators to pass on any substantial beliefs or moral principles to children. Although anarchist educators have often been sympathetic to libertarian educational experiments such as Summerhill, this is, I suggest, not because of an underlying commitment to the same set of values and principles, but rather because, as Colin Ward points out,

> The handful of people who have sought to put their ideas of 'free' education into practice have always been so beleagured by the amused hostility of the institutionalised education system on the one hand and by the popular press in the other [...] that they have tended to close ranks and minimise their differences.
>
> (Ward 1990: 15)

Although, as Ehrlich puts it, 'In an anarchist society, the social function of schools and the potential of education would be quite different' (Ehrlich 1996: 15), I think the point made by Morland about Bakunin's thought, namely, that 'some form of schooling will exist after the abolition of state mechanisms' (Morland 1997: 113), generally holds true for the social anarchists.

How such schools would be run, and by whom, is, in keeping with the anarchists' commitment to free experimentation and their aversion to blueprints, to be left to the discretion of individual communes. The following passage from Bakunin provides further illustration of this idea, along with support for the aforementioned point, that the social anarchists, unlike many libertarian educators or individualist anarchists, regarded education as an important social good and were reluctant to leave it in the hands of parents.

> It is society not the parents who will be responsible for the upkeep of the child. This principle once established we believe that we should abstain from specifying the exact manner in which this principle should be applied; to do otherwise would risk trying to achieve a Utopia. Therefore the application must be left to free experimentation and we must await the lessons of practical experience. We say only that *vis à vis* the child, society is represented by the commune, and that each commune will have to determine what would be best for the upbringing of the child; here they would have life in common; there they would leave children in care of the mother, at least up to a certain age, etc.
>
> (Bakunin, in Dolgoff 1973: 372)

However, this passage by Bakunin clearly refers to education in the post-state reality, that is, once the social-anarchist society has been established. Although, as discussed earlier, the anarchist view of human nature explains the need for an ongoing process of moral education alongside the educative function of social institutions run on anarchist principles, many anarchists



were theoretically vague on the question of the role of education in bringing about the transition to the anarchist society.

Most anarchist writers on education in fact completely fail to distinguish between the stage of life within the state and the theoretical stage of life beyond the state. Such a failure is responsible for a great deal of confusion and, indeed, largely explains the enthusiasm of many anarchist sympathizers for educational experiments such as Summerhill which, while arguably in keeping with Bakunin's vague remarks about the forms of education acceptable in the future anarchist society, do not, as discussed, provide the substantive moral core necessary to further and sustain such a society. However, in another sense, this very failure to distinguish between these two theoretical stages in itself reflects an important aspect of the anarchist perspective on education and one in which, I suggest, it differs from the mainstream liberal, as well as the Marxist, view. This point will be taken up again in the following chapters.

## Means and ends in education

The picture of education that emerges from this discussion then is a complex, dialectical one, in which education for social virtues is both necessary to sustain stateless, cooperative communities, and is itself reinforced by the day-to-day experience of life in such communities. Yet how, one may still insist, are we to get from *a* to *b*? Given that we are faced, today, with the all-pervasive and, to all intents and purposes, permanent reality of the liberal state and its institutions, how are educators with anarchist sympathies expected to use education as one amongst the many means to further their goals?

This question has both a theoretical and a practical aspect. On the theoretical level, it has to do with how we conceptualize the relationship between means and ends.

The means–ends distinction has received considerable attention in the tradition of liberal-analytic philosophy of education. Richard Peters famously argued, in 'Must an Educator Have an Aim?' (Peters 1959), that the inherently normative aspect of the concept 'education' should not mislead us into thinking of education in terms of a model 'like building a bridge or going on a journey' (Peters 1959: 123), where all experiences and processes leading up to the stated end are regarded as means to achieving it. So although talk of education inevitably involves judgements of value, the simple means–ends model, according to Peters, can give us 'the wrong picture of the way in which values must enter education' (ibid.).

Yet what Peters is anxious to avoid here is a notion of aims which implies a simple means–ends model and thus an apparent willingness to employ any means necessary in order to achieve the stated end. He gives as an example of what he calls a 'very general aim', the political aim of equality, arguing that the type of people who regard this as an important aim, lured by the picture of a society without inequalities, often advocate all sorts of drastic structural

measures in order to achieve it. The notion of equality, when employed as a 'principle of procedure', on the other hand, would, according to Peters, yield far more moderate, liberal measures – for example, the insistence that 'whatever schemes were put forward must not be introduced in a way which would infringe his procedural principle' (Peters 1959: 127). The second type of reformer would, as Peters notes, not have any 'concrete picture to lure him on his journey' (ibid.).

However, I would criticize Peters on this point, for 'aims' of the kind he has in mind are often important in providing what Noam Chomsky has called an 'animating vision' (Chomsky 1996: 70) for human activity, particularly education. It is the way one thinks of such an aim, and the imaginative use one makes of it, rather than its general nature, that determines whether or not it can become a constructive factor in one's educational endeavours, or a restrictive, potentially dangerous one. Positive, substantive 'pictures' – of a world without poverty, of a society without distinctions of class and wealth – are often valuable in inspiring people to act positively to improve their lives and those of others. The fact that there is always a risk of aims being interpreted rigidly is not an argument against having 'concrete aims' as such but against trying to impose them without any critical evaluation or sensitivity to existing conditions. As John Dewey notes, it is when aims are 'regarded as literally ends to action rather than as directive stimuli to present choice' that they become 'frozen and isolated' (Dewey 1965: 73).

Crucially, for Dewey, the means cannot be determined in advance, and they are in constant interplay with the aim which, far from being a fixed point in the distance, is constantly a part of present activity; not 'an end or terminus of action' but something which directs one's thoughts and deliberations, and stimulates action; 'Ends are foreseen consequences which arise in the course of activity and which are employed to give activity added meaning and to direct its further course.' (Dewey 1964: 72) Furthermore, the original 'aim' is constantly being revised and new aims are 'forever coming into existence as new activities occasion new consequences' (Dewey 1964: 76).

This Deweyan idea goes some way towards capturing what I believe is the anarchist perspective on the relationship between education and social change. Crucial to this perspective is the insight that while aims and goals play an important role in the educational process, they do so not in the sense of ends and means. Thus criticisms such as Erin McKenna's, that 'the anarchist vision lacks a developed method of change' (McKenna 2001: 65) seem to me to fall into the trap of assuming a simplistic ends–means model. This model, whereby educational processes are regarded merely as a means to achieving social or political ends, is an inadequate tool for understanding the anarchist position.

I said, earlier, that the question of how to get from *a* to *b* has both a theoretical and a practical aspect. I hope these remarks on the conceptualization of ends and means go some way towards addressing the theoretical aspect. I shall take up these themes again in the ensuing discussion. As far as the practical aspect goes, it may be helpful to examine this question by looking, in the next chapter, at a specific issue of educational policy. Contrasting the liberal treatment of a particular policy issue with the anarchist treatment of it will, I hope, illustrate these theoretical points about the way in which anarchist goals and visions can be reflected in educational processes and about the general differences in perspective between anarchism and liberalism.