8 What's so funny about anarchism?

The task of the anarchist philosopher is not to prove the imminence of a Golden Age, but to justify the value of believing in its possibility.

(Read 1974: 14)

The social-anarchist perspective on education, as I have argued, is underpinned by a specific, substantive vision of the good. While the anarchist belief in the possibility of society without the state implies a radical challenge to the dominant liberal view, the vision of what this society may look like is based on values that, as discussed in the earlier chapters, are not at odds with liberal values. In fact, one could argue, as Noam Chomsky has done, that the social-anarchist tradition is the 'true inheritor of the classic liberal tradition of the Enlightenment' (in Guerin 1970: xii). Furthermore, this tradition perhaps rearticulates the utopian element of classical liberal thought.

Zygmunt Bauman, for example, describes the liberal project as 'one of the most potent modern utopias' in its promotion of a model of the good society, and argues that, at the time of its inception, it may have signified a 'great leap forward' (Bauman 1999: 4).

The aforementioned remarks notwithstanding, there does nevertheless seem to be a tension between the agenda of anarchist education, as reflected in the programmes and curricula developed by educators working within the anarchist tradition (see Chapter 6) and that of what is generally referred to as liberal education. Specifically, and peculiarly, anarchism as an educational stance seems almost both too normative and too open-ended to be palatable to the liberal educator. The explicitly anti-statist, anti-capitalist and egalitarian views espoused by anarchist educators, and built into their curricula (see Chapter 6), smack too much of dogma, perhaps, to those with liberal sensibilities. Yet at the same time, the insistence on the indeterminacy of the future society, the demand for constant, free experimentation and the faith in the power of communities to establish their own educational practices are risky ideas to many liberals who, like Eamonn Callan (1997) and Meira Levinson (1999), see a formal state education system not just as an important social good but also as an essential guarantor of liberal freedoms, social justice and political stability.

Yet, as the preceding discussion shows, the underlying values of the anarchist position are not at odds with those of the liberal one. Although they may assign them different normative and methodological status, few liberals would be inclined to reject such values as freedom, equality, fraternity or solidarity.

Liberal neutrality, education and the liberal state

Why, then, does the notion of 'anarchist education' seem, at best, laughable and, at worst, threatening, from a liberal point of view? I would argue that the reason this is so is because 'liberal education' has, in recent years, become synonymous with education in a liberal state. Many writers conflate the two unthinkingly, and the question of the relationship between them is rarely itself the focus of debate. Thus, for example, Eamonn Callan, Meira Levinson and Alan Ryan have recently written important works on education and liberalism in which, while ostensibly discussing the implications of liberal theory for educational ideas, they are actually concerned to outline the role of education in the liberal state. Alan Ryan, for example, in *Liberal Anxieties and Liberal Education* refers, at the beginning of his discussion, to liberal education as 'the kind of education that sustains a liberal society' (Ryan 1998: 27). However, in the course of the book, he slips into a discussion of 'educating citizens' (ibid.: 123), clearly assuming the framework of the liberal state. A similar process occurs in the writings of several other theorists.

The relationship between liberalism as a system of values and the liberal state as a system of political organization is one which is rarely, if ever, scrutinized, whether by philosophers of education or by liberal theorists in general.

Most theorists, indeed, seem to assume, along with Patricia White, not only that the liberal state is, to all intents and purposes, the only practical framework available, but that theoretically, it has been pretty much established, primarily by Nozick's influential argument (see Nozick 1974) that the state is a necessary evil, and that if it didn't exist, 'we would have to invent [it] – or back into [it] by degrees at least' (White 1983: 8).

'Most political philosophers in the past few generations', Miltrany comments (in Sylvan 1993: 215) 'have what the psychoanalysts might call a "state fixation" '. This is no less true of philosophers of education. But the theoretical implications of conflating 'liberalism' with 'the liberal state' are particularly far-reaching in the case of education, and they hinge above all on the notion of neutrality.

As developed most famously and influentially by Rawls, the liberal notion of neutrality dictates that the state must be neutral regarding conceptions of the good. However, it is important to understand that liberalism, as an ideological position, is not in itself 'neutral' – as indeed it would be logically impossible for any such position to be neutral. So there is nothing neutral about the liberal stance itself. But once 'liberalism' is taken to mean 'the liberal state', the demand for neutrality is logically translated into a demand

that individuals and communities be free to pursue their own conceptions of the good within a political framework and institutions which allow them to flourish and interact as fairly and equitably as possible, refraining from any discrimination on the basis of possibly competing conceptions of the good. This, in essence, is the basis of Rawls' defence of 'political liberalism' (see Rawls 1996). If education is then assumed to be one of the central institutions of the liberal state, this position is translated into the demand that education in the liberal state should be, at most, a facilitator for the pursuit of individual autonomy and the development of civic virtues; these are regarded as, ideally, happily coexisting with various different – even conflicting – comprehensive visions of the good.

Of course, the neutrality thesis has been importantly criticized by liberal theorists, and notably by educational philosophers, in recent years. Thus both Eamonn Callan and Meira Levinson argue for a far more substantive vision of the role of education in the liberal state than that traditionally derived from Rawls' political liberalism. Similarly, Robert Reich points out, in his critique of the idea of liberal neutrality, that the very establishment of a state-funded school system is not neutral:

> In the modern age, there exists no social institution, save perhaps taxation, that intervenes more directly and deeply into the lives of citizens than schools... it is a fantasy that twelve years of education of any sort could possibly leave, as Rawls suggests, all reasonable comprehensive doctrines 'untouched'.
>
> (Reich 2002: 40)

Reich in fact argues that neutrality is theoretically and practically impossible, and that the demands of liberal theory for civic education – primarily as regards fostering autonomy – lead inevitably to the demand for a non-neutral process of education, which in turn has effects on diversity and other aspects of society. Reich makes the point that 'these effects are not unfortunate consequences but the purposeful aim of the liberal state' (ibid.: 42). Yet this argument merely reinforces my earlier claim about the conflation between liberalism and the state: in Reich's analysis, similar to those of Callan and others, it is the state as such that has 'aims' – not liberalism, or even 'liberals' – a point which seems to support the anarchist argument that once a state is established it takes on a life – and aims – of its own, which may, so the argument goes, have little to do with the true needs and aspirations of people and communities.

Reich and other theorists in the liberal tradition seem little aware of the conflation they make between liberalism and the liberal state; one minute they are talking of the demands of liberal theory, and in the next they slip into a discussion of the demands of the state – which, when one pauses to think about it is quite a different thing. There is, as stated, nothing inherently neutral about liberalism; but this issue is often glossed over. Perhaps

inevitably, having become the dominant political doctrine in the modern industrialized world, and one which in fact reflects actual social and political organization in much of this world, liberalism seems to have lost its motivating force. Its normative elements more often than not take the form of guidelines for improving or restricting current regulations or practices, or for making choices within the existing framework, not for building radically new practices. Given this dominance of liberalism as a theory and a system, the main narrative associated with this tradition has, as Bauman (1999) notes, become one of 'no alternative'. The idea that the liberal state is, if not the best of all imaginary worlds, at least in effect the best one realistically available, and one which is here to stay, encourages, as Bauman points out, a degree of political apathy.

Richard Flathman has suggested a further reason for the conflation of liberal education with education in the (neutral) liberal state, arguing that the conception of liberal education as non-specific in the sense of being not vocational, not professional or pre-professional – is 'reminiscent of those versions of political and moral liberalism that promote its neutrality toward or among alternative conceptions of the good' (Flathman 1998: 139). Thus, analogously to the liberal state which is agnostic regarding particular conceptions of the good life, the liberal educational curriculum 'seeks to nurture abilities and understandings regarded as valuable to a generous –albeit, again not limitless – array of careers or callings' (ibid.).

But what happens if one pulls apart this conflation? What happens, that is, if, while holding on to what can be broadly described as liberal values, one removes the state from the equation altogether?

Several writers in recent years have theoretically experimented with the idea of removing education from state control. Indeed, we do not need anarchism to prod us into pondering what education would look like without the state. Theorists working broadly within the liberal tradition have questioned the role of the state in controlling and determining educational ends, policies and processes. And, characteristically, those people who, in such debates, come down squarely on the side of state control of schooling, do so out of a carefully argued conviction that social ills such as socio-economic inequality and deprivation can better be minimized by a centrally controlled system than by leaving things to chance or to local initiative, and not out of any political enthusiasm for powerful central government. Thus Patricia White, for example, in *Beyond Domination* (White 1983: 82), claims, on the basis of such convictions, that against the arguments for total devolution of educational control 'there are no moral arguments, but there are practical and political ones'.

The minimal state and social values

Conversely, but starting from the same questioning attitude, James Tooley, in *Reclaiming Education* (Tooley 2000), presents a thought experiment which

supposedly leads to the conclusion that educational objectives could be better achieved by private enterprise without the control of the state. The point here is that resolving the question of whether or not state controlled education systems can best achieve what could be construed as liberal goals, including the goal of social equality, is largely an empirical question. Although Tooley argues, rather convincingly, that the state has not so far done a great job in eliminating socio-economic inequalities by means of the education system, it remains to be established (and on the face of it seems quite doubtful) whether a free-market system of education such as that which he advocates could do the job any better. Although Tooley does document evidence suggesting that in areas where private corporations have taken over educational functions, such corporations '*can* deliver equity or equality of opportunity' (ibid.: 64, my emphasis), he offers no argument to convince the reader that the private alternative *will* further socio-economic equality in the absence of state control. Indeed, Tooley's own discussion of the way in which there are often happy coincidences between the profit motives of private educational providers and the improvement of opportunities for disadvantaged members of society (see Tooley 2000: 109–110) simply reinforces the impression that in a free-market system, any such improvements would be largely a matter of chance – a situation unlikely to satisfy anyone genuinely committed to socio-economic equality.

Crucially, in the context of anarchist ideas, even in the work of advocates of removing state control from education, notably that of Tooley, the state is still assumed to be somewhere in the background, albeit in a role perhaps approaching Nozick's notion of the minimal state (see Nozick 1974).

Yet the Nozickian notion of the state that is assumed by so many neo-liberal writers is in itself far closer to the individualist, libertarian picture of individuals in society than to the picture which underlies both the social-anarchist and indeed the egalitarian liberal position. For Nozick, it is important to note, formulates his arguments in the context of the anti-statist critiques not of the social anarchists, but of contemporary libertarians such as Murray Rothbard and Ayn Rand – keen supporters of free-market economy and critics of the collectivist ethos.

The argument of minarchists such as Nozick against such libertarians and individualist anarchists assumes the same picture of human nature which forms the background for the individualist, libertarian position. It is the supposedly inevitable selfish aspects of this human nature which, it is argued, will lead to conflict, thus necessitating some kind of minimal state to prevent disorder and maintain harmony.

The normative value of the social virtues, along with the contextualist view of human nature so central to social-anarchist thought, are entirely absent from both the libertarian and the neo-liberal positions, and thus fail to play a role in Tooley's analysis, which draws heavily on the work of neo-liberal theorists.

Similarly, the view of education which Tooley draws from this perspective, namely that those services usually performed by the state could be supplied

far more efficiently and far more morally by private and cooperative enterprise, ignores the charge, shared by social anarchists and Marxists alike, of a systematic bias, in terms of unequal concentration of wealth, inherent in the structure of market relations. The social anarchists, in contrast, viewed market activity as a social relation and thus subject to control by moral obligations.

However radical Tooley's position may seem to be, then, the question he poses is not that of: what kind of society do we want? but the rather less radical one of: given the kind of society we have, what kind of education should we have? The assumption behind such intellectual exercises seems to be very much the basic liberal assumption which constitutes the conclusion of Rawls' work: the ideal of the liberal state as a generally fair framework for negotiating between conflicting conceptions of the good life, managing public affairs with minimum coercion and maximizing individual liberty. As mentioned earlier, the social virtues so central to anarchist – and to much of liberal – thought are not assigned any normative role in Tooley's conceptualization of the education process. The fact that Tooley conflates the term 'education' with that of 'learning' throughout his discussion in *Reclaiming Education*[1] is indicative of his unwillingness to engage with the inherently normative aspects of education, as is the fact that the term 'moral' or 'moral education' does not appear even once in his discussion. If Tooley wants to imply that one can remain 'neutral' regarding the moral and ideological underpinnings of the market-driven society he envisages, this project is arguably undermined both by the point that, as Ruth Jonathan has argued, the 'free markets in education' idea is far from neutral, and indeed 'education is the one social practice where the blind forces of the market are not the expression of liberal freedom, but its nemesis' (Jonathan 1997: 8–9) – as well as by Tooley's self-confessed enthusiasm for Conservative and New-Right political agendas.

In short, although Tooley and similar critics of state control of education may on the face of it seem to be stating a position akin to that of the social anarchists, this is far from the truth. They may indeed be undermining the institutional power of the state, yet they are not doing so out of a commitment to a positive vision of an alternative social arrangement based on justice, equality and mutual aid, but rather out of the rather vague – and potentially dangerous – notion that people should be allowed to run their own affairs as far as possible.

This criticism of Tooley's work touches on a more general problem that I raised in the Introduction, regarding philosophical work on educational issues, namely, that of disassociating discussion of educational concepts and issues from their political and social context. Tooley acknowledges, in his *Disestablishing the School*, that his arguments are largely aimed at 'those who would like to do something to ameliorate educational disadvantage and injustice' (Tooley 1995: 149). Yet while Tooley's arguments suggest that voluntary activity *can* address such disadvantages, this is a very different thing, as mentioned earlier, from trying to design an educational and political programme

that *will* address them. However, I would make the further point – and indeed this is one of the central insights of the anarchist perspective on education – that there is no such thing as 'educational disadvantages' *per se*; one cannot address issues of disadvantage, social justice and distribution without considering the broader political context in which they occur.

Of course, the confusion surrounding the possibly anarchist-sounding tone of proposals such as Tooley's also indicates a need for more careful articulation of the positive core of social anarchism – a project to which, I hope, this work has contributed. For in historical periods and places where the state represented a monolithic, oppressive entity, associated with the repression of liberal freedoms – such as, for example, Spain at the beginning of the last century, when Francisco Ferrer set up the Escuela Moderna – social-anarchist aspirations and visions of alternative models were reflected in the very opposition to the state. In many ways, the act of removing social processes, such as education, from the control of the state, seemed in itself to be a radical statement of belief in an alternative. However, when the state in question is a liberal state, the mere act of removing spheres of action from state control is, in itself, not enough to pose an alternative set of values; contemporary social anarchists have, perhaps, to be far more careful and far more explicit than their nineteenth century counterparts in stating what exactly it is that they object to in current political arrangements, and how their model of the good society and their means for achieving it are different from and superior to those of the dominant (liberal) discourse. Thus, for example, many contemporary anarchist activists take it for granted, due to the traditional anarchist opposition to state monopolies, that community-based or independently run educational initiatives should be supported. However, as the discussion of Summerhill in Chapter 6 suggests, the values and aims implicit in such initiatives may not always be in keeping with those of the social anarchist project.

To use Rawlsian terminology, then, one could say that on the anarchist view, a comprehensive conception of the good is not a given aspect of individual flourishing, different versions of which are to be negotiated amongst by a neutral political system, but rather something constantly being pursued and created, and the quest for which, crucially, is a collective and an open-ended project. Of course, as Will Kymlicka has argued (Kymlicka 1989), a liberal society should be one in which people are not only given the freedom and the capabilities to pursue existing conceptions of the good but also one in which people are free to constantly form and revise such conceptions. In social anarchism, perhaps, the difference is that the conception of the good is, in an important sense, although perhaps not exclusively, one which is arrived at through a communal process of experimentation.

The anarchist educator cannot argue that the school must provide merely basic skills or act to facilitate children's autonomy and abstain from inculcating substantive conceptions of the good. For, on the anarchist view, the school is a part of the very community that is engaged in the radical and

ongoing project of social transformation, by means of an active, creative pursuit of the good. This process, which can only be conducted through an experimental and communal engagement, in dialogue and out of a commitment to social values, is at one and the same time a way of establishing the moral basis for a self-governing, decentralized society, and an experiment in creating such a society. From this social-anarchist perspective, there is no 'elsewhere' where children will get whatever substantive values they need in order to flourish. If the values they get from home conflict with those of the school, then this is a part of the process of social creation, not a problem to be negotiated by coming up with a formal, theoretical framework invoking notions such as liberal neutrality. Thus, while Flathman, Callan, Levinson and others are concerned to address the question of whether 'civic, democratic, and other specifically political conceptions of education are vocational rather than liberal and whether such conceptions are appropriate to a liberal regime' (Flathman 1998: 146), they assume that we know and accept just what a liberal regime consists of. From an anarchist perspective, however, it is precisely this 'regime' that we are in the process of exploring, creating and re-creating.

So if one removes the assumption of the framework of the liberal state from the equation entirely, the question 'how should we educate?' is stripped of its demand for neutrality. In other words, one has to first ask who it is who is doing the educating, rather than assuming that it will be the (liberal) state, before one can go on to ask which values will inform the educational process. This accounts for the normative aspect of anarchist educational ideas – an aspect which, as argued, seems to be at odds with the liberal project, but is only so if one accepts the conflation between liberalism and the liberal state.

Of course, a possible objection to this argument would be that anarchists, in effect, simply replace the notion of the state with that of society so that the problems, for the liberal, remain the same. The social anarchists, however, would respond to this criticism with a defence of the qualitative distinction between the state and society. This distinction is perhaps best articulated by Martin Buber, who had considerable sympathy for the anarchist view that 'social transformation begins with the community and is therefore primarily a social rather than a political objective' (Buber, in Murphy 1988: 180). For the anarchists, social relations governed by the state (including a communist state) are essentially different from those constituted by spontaneous forms of social cooperation, and this is so largely due to their hierarchical nature. Thus although most liberals do not hold any essentialist definition of the state, and could perhaps argue that a federated anarchist commune shares the same functions as the liberal state and is therefore subject to the same theoretical considerations, anarchists would disagree. The anarchist position is that hierarchical, centralized functions are inherent features of the modern capitalist state which, once replaced with an organically established, self governing, decentralized system of communities, would lead to qualitatively different types of social relationships, permeating all levels of social interaction.

This is the idea behind Gustav Landauer's famous remark that

> The state is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently.
>
> (quoted in Ward 1991: 85)

Revolutionary tactics: social anarchism and Marxism

The anarchist anti-hierarchical stance also indicates an important difference between the social-anarchist perspective and that of Marxism, with obvious implications for educational theory and practice. As mentioned earlier, anarchists do not regard the revolutionary struggle to change society as a linear progression, in which there is a single point of reference – the means of production – and a single struggle. As Todd May puts it, in Marxism there is 'a single enemy: capitalism' (May 1994: 26), the focus of Marxist revolutionary thought thus being on class as the chief unit of social struggle. Anarchist thinking, in contrast, involves a far more tactical, multi-dimensional understanding of what the social revolution consists in. Connectedly, an anarchist thinker, unlike a traditional Marxist, cannot offer abstract, general answers to political questions outside the reality of social experience and experimentation. In anarchism then, as Colin Ward says, 'there is no final struggle, only a series of partisan struggles on a variety of fronts' (Ward 1996: 26).

The implications of this contrast for education are significant, and are connected to Marx's disparaging view of the anarchists and other 'utopian' socialists. For in the very idea that there may be something constructive and valuable in positing an ideal of a different society whose final form is determined not by predictable historical progress, but by human experimentation, constantly open to revision, the anarchists reject the basic Marxist materialist assumption that consciousness is determined by the material conditions of life – specifically, by the relations of production. The anarchist position implies that, at least to some degree, life may be determined by consciousness – a position which also explains the optimism inherent in the anarchist enthusiasm for education as a crucial aspect of the revolutionary programme.

On the Marxist view, until the relations of production themselves are radically changed, 'the possibility of an alternative reality is not only impossible, but literally unthinkable' (Block 1994: 65), for our thought structures are determined by the reality of the base/superstructure relationship. However, in anarchism, an alternative reality is 'thinkable'; indeed, it is in some sense already here. As the discussion of the anarchist position on human nature makes clear, the human capacity for mutual aid, benevolence and solidarity is reflected in forms of social relations which exist even within the capitalist state, and whose potential for social change is not rendered unfeasible by the

capitalist relations of production. It is these capacities which, on the anarchist view, need to be strengthened and built on, a project which can be embarked upon without a systematic programme for revolutionary change or a blueprint for the future, but by forging alternative modes of social organization in arenas such as the school and the work-place.

Much work in radical educational theory in recent years is based on some variant of Marxist reproduction theory, according to which 'all practices in the superstructure may be viewed as products of a determining base, and we have only to examine the products for their component parts, which ought to be easily discerned from the economic base' (Block 1994: 65). Reproduction theorists thus regard schools and education as basically derived from the economic base, which they inevitably reproduce. As Block notes, this idea leads to the generally pessimistic Marxist view of education, according to which even alternative schools are allowed to exist by the system itself, which marginalizes them and thus continues to reproduce the dominant social norms and economic structures.

The anarchist perspective, as mentioned, involves not merely subverting the economic relations of the base, but conceptualizing a social-economic framework that is not structured in a hierarchical way. The pyramid of the Marxist analysis of capitalism is not simply inverted, but abolished. Thus for example, in Marxism, the status of the dominant definitions of knowledge – as reflected, for example, in the school curriculum – is questionable because it is determined by the unjust class system, reflecting the material power of the ruling class. However, in anarchist theory, what renders a national curriculum or a body of knowledge objectionable is the simple fact that it is determined by any central, hierarchical top-down organization. For the anarchist, incorporating 'working-class knowledge' or that of excluded cultural or social groups into the school curriculum of a state education system would be equally suspect – the problem is that there is a curriculum and a national school system at all.

So although anarchists share the Marxist insistence that the structural inequalities of society have to be abolished, they believe that this project can be embarked upon on a micro level; in this they share, perhaps, the faith in the emancipatory power of education common to many liberal theorists.

Goals and visions

These remarks may lead one to believe that the anarchist approach to social change is more of a piecemeal, tactical one, than a strategic one. Todd May in fact argues that the opposite is the case, claiming that the anarchists, faced with the need to adopt either a strategic or a tactical position, have to opt for the former due to their reductionist view of power and their humanist ethics (May 1994: 63–66). Yet I believe that both these readings are too narrow. What the anarchist perspective in fact suggests is that one can be, and in fact has to be, both tactical and strategic; what May refers to as the anarchists'

'ambivalence' between a purely strategic and a purely tactical stance is in fact a kind of pragmatic realism, summed up by Chomsky in his argument that:

> In today's world, I think, the goals of a committed anarchist should be to defend some state institutions from the attack against them, while trying at the same time to pry them open to more meaningful public participation – and ultimately, to dismantle them in a much more free society, if the appropriate circumstances can be achieved. Right or wrong – and that's a matter of uncertain judgement – this stand is not undermined by the apparent conflict between goals and visions. Such conflict is a normal feature of everyday life, which we somehow try to live with but cannot escape.
>
> (Chomsky 1996: 75)

So while certain elements of anarchism – notably its insistence on social improvements 'here and now' – may be reminiscent of Popper's characterization of 'piecemeal social engineering' (Popper 1945: 157–163), the social-anarchist perspective in fact straddles Popper's contrast between utopian social engineering and piecemeal social engineering. It is, as I hope to have shown, utopian in that it holds on to a radical vision of society; however it is not narrowly utopian in Popper's sense as it has no fixed blueprint, and the commitment to constant experimentation is built into its vision of the ideal society. It is 'piecemeal' in the sense that it advocates a form of gradual restructuring, as in the comment by Paul Goodman, quoted in Chapter 4: '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' (in Ward 1996: 18). And, as I think the projects of anarchist educators and the anarchist criticism of Marxist revolutionary theory make clear, it is also piecemeal in Popper's sense that it is concerned with 'searching for, and fighting against, the greatest and most urgent evils of society, rather than searching for, and fighting for, its greatest ultimate good' (Popper 1945: 158).

Chomsky indeed expresses something like this idea in summing up the anarchist stance as follows:

> At every stage of history our concern must be to dismantle those forms of authority and oppression that survive from an era when they might have been justified in terms of the need for security or survival or economic development, but that now contribute to – rather than alleviate – material and cultural deficit. If so, there will be no doctrine of social change fixed for the present and future, nor even, necessarily, a specific and unchanging concept of the goals towards which social change should tend.
>
> (Chomsky, in Guerin 1970: viii)

This perspective, like Popper's piecemeal approach, 'permits repeated experiments and continuous readjustments' (Popper 1945: 163).

Yet at the same time, the anarchist approach is distinct from what Popper characterizes as piecemeal social engineering in that it does not simply concern 'blueprints for single institutions', but sees in the very act of restructuring human relationships within such institutions (the school, the work-place), a creative act of engaging with the restructuring of society as a whole.

The anarchist utopia, then, although it does envisage 'the reconstruction of society as a whole' (Popper 1945: 161), is not utopian in Popper's sense as it is not an 'attempt to realize an ideal state, using a blueprint of society as whole, [...] which demands a strong centralized rule of a few' (ibid.: 159). And while the kind of social restructuring envisaged by the social anarchists is not simply, as Popper characterizes utopian engineering, 'one step towards a distant ideal', (see the discussion on means and ends in Chapter 6), neither is it 'a realization of a piecemeal compromise'. Creating, for example, a school community run on social-anarchist principles is both a step towards the ideal and an embodiment of the ideal itself.

Anarchism, to continue this line of thought, is perhaps best conceived not so much as a theory – in Popper's rationalistic sense – about how society can be organized without a state, but as an aspiration to create such a society and, crucially, a belief that such a society can in fact come about, not through violent revolution or drastic modification of human nature, but as an organic, spontaneous process – the seeds of which are already present in human propensities.

Given these points, one may argue that anarchism, in a sense, needs the theoretical components of liberalism to carry it beyond the stage of aspiration to that of political possiblity. For example, the analytical work carried out within the liberal tradition on such key notions as autonomy, individual rights, consent and justice, provides valuable theoretical tools for working out the details of the anarchist project. However, it is not this theorizing which constitutes the core of anarchism but the aspiration itself. In education, this is crucially important. While anarchism perhaps makes little sense without the theoretical framework of the liberal tradition (a tradition which, following Chomsky, it may be a continuation of), it could also be argued that liberalism needs anarchism, or something like the social-anarchist vision, to remind itself of the aspirations behind the theory. Built into these aspirations is, crucially, the belief that things could be different, and radically so, if only we allow ourselves to have faith in people's ability to recreate social relationships and institutions; a sort of perfectibility which, while cherishing traditional liberal values, pushes us beyond the bounds of normal liberal theory. In this context, MacIntyre's comments (MacIntyre 1971) that liberalism is essentially 'negative and incomplete', being a doctrine 'about what cannot be justified and what ought not to be permitted', and that hence 'no institution, no social practice, can be inspired solely or even mainly by liberalism' – seem to make sense.

Utopianism and philosophy of education

I have argued that part of the reason why anarchist education is, on the face of it, objectionable to philosophers within the liberal tradition, is because of

the common conflation between liberalism as a body of values, and the liberal state as a framework within which to pursue these values. This conflation, I have argued, could explain why the normative, substantive aspects of anarchist education seem problematic for those wishing to preserve some form of political liberalism. However, there are also those who object to anarchism's political ideal – that of the stateless society – simply on the grounds of its being hopelessly utopian and who would thus argue that it is pointless to try to construct a philosophy of education around this ideal. As mentioned in the Introduction, the charge of utopianism is one of the commonest criticisms of anarchism, and, in my view, raises several interesting philosophical questions. In what follows, I shall attempt to address this charge and to grapple with some of these questions.

Martin Buber was one of the first to note how the concept *utopia* had been

> victimized in the course of the political struggle of Marxism against other forms of socialism and movements of social reform. In his struggle to achieve dominance for his idiosyncratic system of socialism, Marx employed 'utopia' as the ultimate term of perjoration to damn all 'prehistoric' (i.e. pre-Marxian) social systems as unscientific and utilitarian in contrast to the allegedly scientific and inevitable character of his system of historical materialism.
>
> (Fischoff, in Buber 1958: xiii)

In the mid-nineteenth century, indeed, the social-anarchist position could be perceived as an argument over the contested intellectual ground of the developing nation state; its utopianism, for Marx, lay in its rejection of the materialist position. Yet now that the nation state is such an established fact of our political life, and theoretical arguments justifying its existence are so taken for granted that they are rarely even articulated, it is the very distance between the anarchist vision and that of the dominant liberal state tradition that strikes some as utopian. As discussed above, although philosophers of education devote a great deal of energy to the articulation, analysis and critique of liberal values and their educational implications, the framework within which these values are assumed to operate is rarely the subject of debate. It is the anarchist questioning of this framework, then, which constitutes its radical challenge.

Of course, the charge that anarchism is utopian has some truth if one accepts Mannheim's classic account, according to which 'utopian' describes: 'all situationally transcendent ideas which in any way have a transforming effect on the existing historical, social order' (Mannheim 1991: 173).

But there is an important sense in which anarchism is definitely not utopian or, at least, is utopian in a positive, rather than a pejorative, sense. Isaiah Berlin has characterized utopias in a way which, as David Halpin (Halpin 2003) points out, is highly restrictive and problematic and fails to capture the constructive role of utopias as 'facilitating fresh thinking for the future' (ibid.) which Halpin and other theorists are keen to preserve. Nevertheless, Berlin's characterization is useful here as it is indicative of a typical critical perspective on utopian thought and thus serves to highlight the contrast with anarchism. Berlin states:

> The main characteristic of most (perhaps all) utopias is that they are static. Nothing in them alters, for they have reached perfection: there is no need for novelty or change; no one can wish to alter a condition in which all natural human wishes are fulfilled.
>
> (Berlin 1991: 20)

This is clearly in contrast to the anarchist vision of the future society, on two counts. First, due to the anarchist conception of human nature, most anarchist theorists are under no illusion about the possibility of a society without conflict; a society which, as in Berlin's description of utopia, 'lives in a state of pure harmony' (ibid.). Rather, they envisage a particular way of solving conflict. As William Reichert states,

> Anarchists do not suppose for a minute that men would ever live in harmony [...]. They do maintain, however, that the settlement of conflict must arise spontaneously from the individuals involved themselves and not be imposed upon them by an external force such as government.
>
> (Reichert 1969: 143)

Second, it is intrinsic to the anarchist position that human society is constantly in flux; there is no such thing as the one finite, fixed form of social organization; the principle at the heart of anarchist thought is that of constant striving, improvement and experimentation.

In an educational context, this contrast is echoed in Dewey's critique of Plato's *Republic*. As Dewey notes, Plato's utopia serves as a final answer to all questions about the good life, and the state and education are constructed so as to translate it immediately into reality. Although Plato, says Dewey,

> would radically change the existing state of society, his aim was to construct a state in which change would subsequently have no place. The final end of life is fixed; given a state framed with this end in view, not even minor details are to be altered. [...] Correct education could not come into existence until an ideal state existed, and after that education would be devoted simply to its conservation.
>
> (Dewey 1939: 105–106)

This, again, is in clear contrast to the anarchist vision.

Of course, the utopian nature of Plato's account does not detract from its philosophical value. All this suggests that the 'feasibility' of any political vision should not, on its own, constitute a reason for disregarding it as a basis

for serious philosophical debate. Many writers on utopias, indeed, have stressed the transformative element of utopian thinking, arguing that the study of utopias can be valuable as it releases creative thought, prodding us to examine our preconceptions and encouraging speculation on alternative ways of conceptualizing and doing things which we often take for granted. Politically speaking, it has been argued that 'utopianism thus offers a specific programme and immediate hope for improvement and thereby discourages quiescence or fatalism' (Goodwin and Taylor 1982: 26).

Thus, as David Halpin says in his discussion of Fourrier's nineteenth century depiction of the Utopian Land of Plenty, where whole roast chickens descended from the sky,

> Fourier was not envisaging concretely a society whose members would be fed magically. Rather, through the use of graphic imagery, he was seeking to mobilize among his readers a commitment to a conception of social life in which being properly fed was regarded as a basic human right.
>
> (Halpin 2001: 302)

There are further aspects of utopianism, specifically in the anarchist context, which are associated with the suspicion or derision of anarchist positions by liberal theorists. For while many liberal and neo-liberal theorists seem amenable to the idea of utopia as an individual project, the social anarchists' faith in the social virtues, and their vision of a society underpinned by these virtues, imply a utopia which is necessarily collective. Nozick's vision of the minimalist state, for example, is clearly utopian in the general sense described earlier. Yet, as Barbara Goodwin points out, the utopian nature of Nozick's minimal state lies

> not in the quality of the individual communities (all of which appeal to some people and not to others) but in each individual having the power to choose and to experiment with the Good Life. Utopia is having a choice between Utopias.
>
> (Goodwin and Taylor 1982: 82)

The anarchist vision, both in its insistence on the centrality of the social virtues, and in its normative commitment to these virtues, seems to be demanding that we extend Nozick's 'utopia of Utopias' to something far more substantive. Indeed, many liberals would agree that it is the lack of just such a substantive vision which is partly to blame for the individualist and often alienating aspects of modern capitalist society. Thus, for example, Zygmunt Bauman has spoken of our era as one characterized by 'the privatization of utopias' (Bauman 1999: 7), in which models of 'the good life' are increasingly cut off from models of the good society. Perhaps the kind of utopianism inherent in social-anarchist thinking can help us to amend this situation.

The anarchist utopian stance, at the same time, arguably avoids the charges of totalitarianism which so worried Popper and Berlin due to two important points: first, the fact that, built into its utopian vision, is the demand for constant experimentation, and the insistence that the final form of human society cannot be determined in advance. Second, the insistence, based on the anarchist view of human nature and the associated conceptualization of social change, that the future society is to be constructed not by radically transforming human relations and attitudes, but from the seeds of existing social tendencies. This is, indeed, in contrast to the Marxist vision, where, as Bauman points out, 'the attempt to build a socialist society is an effort to emancipate human nature, mutilated and humiliated by class society'.

The anarchist rejection of blueprints, while arguably rescuing anarchists from charges of totalitarianism, can at the same time be perceived as philosophically, and perhaps psychologically, somewhat threatening, as Herbert Read points out. The idea that, as Read puts it (Read 1974: 148), 'the future will make its own prints, and they won't necessarily be blue', can give rise to a sense of insecurity. Yet such insecurity, perhaps, is a necessary price to pay if one wants to embark on the genuinely creative and challenging project of reconstructing society, or even reconstructing political and social philosophy.

It has in fact been argued that much mainstream work in political theory, notably in the liberal tradition, is conducted in the shadow of what could be seen as another aspect of the 'sense of insecurity' provoked by the open-endedness of such utopian projects as social anarchism. This view is eloquently argued by Bonnie Honig, in her *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics:*

> Most political theorists are hostile to the disruptions of politics. Those writing from diverse positions – republican, federal and communitarian – converge in their assumption that success lies in the elimination from a regime of dissonance, resistance, conflict, or struggle. They confine politics (conceptually and territorially) to the juridical, administrative, or regulative tasks of stabilizing moral and political subjects, building consensus, maintaining agreement, or consolidating communities and identities. They assume that the task of political theory is to resolve institutional questions, to get politics right, over and done with, to free modern subjects and their sets of arrangements of political conflict and instability.
>
> (Honig 1993: 2)

In an academic culture dominated by this perspective, it is hardly surprising that a position such as social anarchism, which both challenges the dominant political system with a radically different vision, and holds that this vision, while accessible, cannot be fully instantiated either in theory or by

revolutionary programmes, but must be the result of spontaneous, free experimentation is rarely taken seriously. Yet as both Noam Chomsky and Paul Goodman have commented, this type of utopianism is not so far removed from the liberal tradition. Paul Goodman (Goodman 1952: 18–19) argues that American culture has lost the spirit of pragmatism embodied in the thought of James and Dewey. In a climate where, he says, 'experts plan in terms of an unchangeable structure, a pragmatic expediency that still wants to take the social structure as plastic and changeable comes to be thought of as "utopian"'.

Richard Rorty, too, has noted the connections between the type of utopianism embodied in the social anarchist view and the Pragmatism of Dewey and other thinkers. His discussion of this idea captures, for me, the value of this perspective for our educational thought. Rorty argues that what is distinctive about Pragmatism is that it 'substitutes the notion of a better human future for the notions of "reality," "reason" and "nature"' (Rorty 1999: 27). While nineteenth century social anarchism, as an Enlightenment tradition, cannot be said by any means to have rejected the notions of reason, reality and nature, I think there is nevertheless an important insight here in terms of the role of utopian hope in social anarchist thought.

The anarchist view that what Fidler refers to as 'awakening the social instinct' is the key role for education, and Kropotkin's insistence that the 'fundamental principle of anarchism' (in Fidler 1989: 37) consists in 'treating others as one wishes to be treated oneself', seems to me in keeping with Rorty's argument that moral progress, for the Pragmatists, 'is a matter of increasing sensitivity' (Rorty 1999: 81). Such sensitivity, Rorty explains, means 'being able to respond to the needs of ever more inclusive groups of people', and thus involves not 'rising above the sentimental to the rational' but rather expanding outwards in 'wider and wider sympathy' (ibid.). This image, which Rorty describes as a 'switch from metaphors of vertical distance to metaphors of horizontal extent' (Rorty 1999: 83) also seems to me in tune with the anarchists' rejection of hierarchical structures, and the image of the ideal anarchist society as one of interconnected networks rather than pyramidal structures. Furthermore, Rorty argues, this element of utopian hope and 'willingness to substitute imagination for certainty' (ibid.: 88) emphasizes the need for active engagement on the part of social agents, articulating a desire and a need 'to create new ways of being human, and a new heaven on earth for these new humans to inhabit, over the desire for stability, security and order' (ibid.).

Rorty's notion of 'replacing certainty with hope' seems to me highly pertinent to the aforementioned discussion of social anarchism and, especially, to the implications of a consideration of the utopian aspects of the social anarchist position for the way we think about education. One aspect of this point is that the utopian – in the sense of radically removed from reality as we know it – aspect of a theory should not in itself be a reason to reject it. Even the evident failure of those utopian projects which have been disasterously

attempted should not lead us to reject the utopian hopes which underlie them. As Rorty says,

> The inspirational value of the New Testament and the Communist Manifesto is not diminished by the fact that many millions of people were enslaved, tortured or starved to death by sincere, morally earnest people who recited passages from one or the other text to justify their deeds.
>
> (Rorty 1999: 204)

The anarchist project, arguably, is less liable to such dismal failure for first, if one accepts its account of human nature, this account suggests that the type of society which the social anarchists seek to establish does not go completely against the grain of existing human propensities. Furthermore, as discussed here, the idea of trying to implement this project on a grand scale, by violent means if necessary, is completely incompatible with anarchist principles. For the flip-side of what Ritter refers to as the anarchists' 'daring leap' is the point that, as noted by Buber, the social anarchist

> desires a means commensurate with his ends; he refuses to believe that in our reliance on the future 'leap' we have to do now the direct opposite of what we are striving for; he believes rather that we must create here and now the space *now* possible for the thing for which we are striving, so that it may come to fulfilment then; he does not believe in the post-revolutionary leap, but he does believe in revolutionary continuity.
>
> (Buber 1958: 13)

Whether or not one is convinced by these social anarchist arguments, it seems to me that Rorty's point that such hopes and aspirations as are embodied in this position may constitute 'the only basis for a worthwhile life' (Rorty 1999: 204) is a compelling one. As far as philosophy of education is concerned, it may be true that attempting to construct a position on the role and nature of education around the notion of hope could lead to neglect of the need to work out clear principles of procedure and conceptual distinctions. However, this notion may perhaps insert a more optimistic and motivating element into educational projects characterized by an often overriding concern to formulate procedural principles.

Furthermore, the perspective of starting debates into educationally relevant issues, like the social anarchists, from a position of hope – in other words, taking the utopian position that a radically different society is both desirable and attainable – can have clear policy implications. For example, arguments for equality of opportunity in (state) education, as put forward by liberal theorists, often involve a veiled assumption that socio-economic inequality is an inevitable feature of our life. Thus Harry Brighouse argues (1998) that educational opportunities should be unaffected by matters of

socio-economic status or family background. In so doing, he assumes, as he himself readily admits, 'that material rewards in the labour markets will be significantly unequal' (Brighouse 1998: 8). Yet were he to take seriously the aspiration of creating a society in which there were no longer any class or socio-economic divisions, he may be led to placing a very different emphasis on the kind of education we should be providing (e.g. one which emphasized a critical attitude towards the political status quo, and the promotion of certain moral values deemed crucial for sustaining an egalitarian, cooperative society).

Patricia White has discussed the notion of social hope in her 1991 paper, 'Hope, Confidence and Democracy' (White 1991), where she notes the powerful motivational role played by shared hopes 'relating to the future of communities'. Yet while acknowledging a need for such social hope in our own democratic society, White admits that 'liberal democracy is not in the business of offering visions of a future to which all citizens are marching if only they can keep their faith in it' (White 1991: 205). Such a view would, obviously, undermine the liberal commitment to an open future and to value pluralism. However it seems, on the basis of the aforementioned analysis, that the type of utopian hope associated with anarchism may fit White's description of a possible way out of this liberal problem, namely,

> that it is possible to drop the idea that the object of hope must be unitary and inevitable and to defend a notion of hope where, roughly speaking, to hope is strongly to desire that some desirable state of affairs, which need not be inevitable and is not impossible, but in the path of which there are obstacles, will come to pass.
>
> (Ibid.)

In terms of how we conceptualize education, what the earlier discussion suggests is that the interplay between our hopes – or our strategic goals – and our tactical objectives is not a conflict to be decided in advance, but an interesting tension that should itself be made part of educational practice. In certain contexts, tactical decisions may make sense, and thus the type of educational change and action promoted may not appear very radical, but the hope, as a long-term goal, is always there, and even if it is only, as Chomsky states, a 'vision' this vision has tremendous motivating force for those involved in education.

Taking the social-anarchist perspective seriously, then, can help us to think differently about the role of visions, dreams, goals and ideals in educational thought. It suggests that perhaps we should think of education not as a means to an end, nor as an end in itself, but as one of many arenas of human relationships, in which the relation between the vision and the ways it is translated into reality is constantly experimented with. Philosophy of education, perhaps, could be seen as part of this process.

Conclusion

> *Faith in the power of intelligence to imagine a future which is the projection of the desirable in the present, and to invent the instrumentalities of its realization, is our salvation. And it is a faith which must be nurtured and made articulate: surely a sufficiently large task for our philosophy.*
>
> (Dewey 1917: 48)

I hope, in the preceding discussion, to have gone some way towards constructing what an anarchist philosophy of education would look like. There are certain important insights to be drawn from my analysis, both regarding anarchism's significance as a political ideology and regarding educational philosophy and practice.

Situating anarchism: a reevaluation

First, in the course of the preceding chapters, I hope to have dispelled some common misconceptions about anarchism as a political theory, especially with regard to its position on the need for social order and authority and its conception of human nature. Above all, I have argued that the anarchist view of human nature is not naively optimistic but rather embraces a realistic, contextual approach to human virtues and capabilities. The implications of this idea form the core aspects of the anarchist position on education; namely, that systematic educational intervention in children's lives, on the part of social institutions, is necessary in order to sustain the moral fabric of society, and that this education must be, first and foremost, a moral enterprise.

Second, I believe it is clear from my analysis that the values and aspirations underpinning social-anarchist thought are – perhaps surprisingly – fairly close to those which inform the liberal tradition. Anarchism's affinity with liberalism, as well as with certain strands of socialism, suggests that we should perhaps extend our understanding of liberalism beyond the constraints of the liberal state. One does not have to reject liberal values in order to challenge dominant aspects of the political framework which we so often take for granted. The question of what remains of liberalism if one removes

the state from the equation is a philosophically puzzling one, but, I suggest, the challenge of trying to answer it may itself be a valuable exercise in re-examining and re-articulating our (liberal) values and prompting us to think through the political implications and scope of these values.

Specifically, examining the implications of the underlying values of social anarchism, in the comparative context of liberal values, may lead us to re-articulate the utopian aspect of the liberal tradition. More broadly speaking, I believe that philosophers, and especially philosophers of education, need to constantly examine and articulate the normative assumptions behind their educational ideas. If, like many liberal theorists, we consciously make compromises in our philosophical treatment of educational notions such as 'equality' – compromises which imply an aquiescence with existing political structures – we should at least articulate our reasons for such compromises, and the way they reflect our substantive ideals. Challenging the political framework within which we commonly formulate such ideas may be one way of prodding us to engage in such a process of articulation.

Anarchism remains a confusing and often frustrating body of ideas, and I do not purport to have resolved the theoretical and practical tensions it involves. Specifically, the charge that social censure will undermine individual freedom in an anarchist society remains a troubling one (eloquently depicted in Ursula Le Guin's science-fictional account of an anarchist colony, *The Dispossessed* (1974)). Similarly, one has to ask oneself whether anarchism, with its Enlightenment understanding of progress and the inevitable triumph of secular, socialist values, is theoretically equipped to deal with the contemporary issues of life in pluralist societies – especially with the question of value pluralism. I have to admit that I find the arguments by Noam Chomsky and others that one cannot resolve such theoretical tensions in advance, but that they have to be worked out through experimentation – an unsatisfactory response to this problem.

These theoretical tensions notwithstanding, I have suggested that both educational practice and philosophy of education may be more challenging and motivating activities if they are guided by a utopian hope; a normative vision, not just of the good life (a phrase commonly employed by philosophers of education), but of the good society – however far removed this may seem from where we are now.

Of course, there is nothing unique to anarchism about the idea of an ideal society. Indeed political liberalism, as formulated by Rawls, is in many ways an ideal theory and a model for the ideal society. It leads to conclusions about the kinds of institutional practices and processes which will enable individuals to live together in what is conceived as the optimal political model, namely, the liberal state. Anarchism's model is similarly ideal but does away with the state. It, like liberalism, begins from intuitions about the moral worth of certain human attributes and values, but its model is strikingly different from that which we have today. Many modern democracies, one could argue, approach something like the Rawlsian model, but need the theoretical framework and arguments of liberal theory to strengthen and underpin their institutions and practices. For anarchism, however, the ideal society is something that has to be created. And education is primarily a part of this creation; it involves a radical challenge to current practices and institutions, yet at the same time a faith in the idea that human beings already possess most of the attributes and virtues necessary to create and sustain such a different society, so do not need to either undergo any radical transformation or to do away with an 'inauthentic' consciousness.

An anarchist philosophy of education?

In my Introduction, I posed the question of whether or not an examination of anarchist ideas could yield a comprehensive, coherent and unique philosophy of education. As indicated by the aforementioned remarks, I believe that while my analysis suggests that anarchism does not perhaps offer a systematic theory of education, it does have significant implications for how we conceptualize education and educational aims, for how we address educational questions in policy and practice, and for how we do philosophy of education.

As far as educational practice is concerned, there are several weaknesses in the anarchist account. Primarily, the sparse attention paid by anarchist writers on education to the issue of pedagogy both exposes this account to theoretical questions about the most appropriate pedagogical approach, and opens the door to questionable pedagogical practices, as witnessed by some graduates of the Stelton school, who suggest (see Avrich 1980) that the actual teaching practices of certain teachers at the anarchist schools were far from anti-coercive. Indeed, the very status of the connection between anarchist ideology and non-coercive pedagogy is one which still demands careful theoretical treatment. Furthermore, the whole question of the teacher–pupil relationship in both its psychological and political dimensions is undertheorized in the literature on anarchist and libertarian education. Although the anarchist account of authority goes some way towards situating and justifying this relationship theoretically, there is clearly a great deal more that could be said on the subject. Similarly, and perhaps most importantly given its central role in creating and sustaining the ideal society, the development of specific approaches to and methods of moral education is sorely lacking from anarchist work on education. Although I have hinted at the form such a programme of moral education may take, and have emphasized its crucial role, I cannot undertake the project of constructing it here.

In spite of these weaknesses in the theoretical framework of anarchist educational practice, I think my analysis establishes that anarchist education is a distinct tradition in the world of what is often loosely referred to as 'radical education'. As such, it differs in important respects from both extreme libertarian positions and various aspects of the free school movement, both in its content and in the conceptualization of education which it embodies.

Above all, an anarchist perspective, I have argued, can help us see questions about the relationship between education and social change in a new light.

Although the anarchist failure to distinguish in any systematic way between social life within as opposed to beyond the state is the cause of much confusion regarding the role of education in promoting and sustaining social transformation, I hope I have gone some way towards drawing this distinction, and clarifying its philosophical significance.

At the same time, I believe that part of anarchism's appeal, and indeed its uniqueness as a perspective on education, lies in its ability to transcend the means/ends model and to perceive every educational encounter as both a moment of striving, through creative experimenting, to create something better, and of celebrating and reinforcing what is valuable in such an encounter.

I can find no better way of illustrating this idea than through an analogy with a very particular instance of education, namely the parent–child relationship. As parents, we are constantly aware of the future-oriented aspect of our relationship with our children. The question of who they will be and how they will turn out is a constant factor in our interaction with them, our concerns, and our motivations and goals for the decisions we make regarding them. Yet to construe this relationship as reducible entirely to this intentional educational aspect would be, surely, to miss the point. For our interaction with our children is also a mutually challenging and stimulating relationship in terms of who they – and we – are now. What makes this relationship so complex is the fact that it involves constant interplay and tensions between the present and the future; between our desires and hopes for our children, our vision of an ideal future in which they will play a part, and our attempt to understand who they are; between our efforts to respect their desires and our inescapable wish to mould these desires; between our own ideals for the future, and the challenges posed for them by the complexities of the present. While the way in which we raise our children is often informed by our commitments, values and aspirations, it is equally true to say that these values and commitments are constantly challenged and questioned by the experience of raising children. In a sense, this inherently confusing, challenging and creative mode of interaction sums up the essence of the anarchist perspective on education. In thus rejecting simplistic distinctions between ends and means, goals and visions, it suggests a certain anti-hierarchical stance not only in its model for the ideal society but also in our very patterns of thinking.

Furthermore, the anarchist stance on the relationship between education and social change has important practical implications. For the anarchist, utopia, as discussed, is not a blueprint for the future society. Therefore the focus of education is not on implementing aspects of this utopia, but on fostering the attitudes and virtues needed to sustain it, alongside a critical attitude to current social principles and practices, out of which the utopian vision grows and which, in turn, are informed by this vision. Education is thus not seen as a means to creating a different political order, but as a space – and perhaps, following Buber, a relationship – in which we experiment with visions of a new political order – a process which itself constitutes an educative and motivating experience both for educators and pupils. I have suggested that this perspective constitutes an alternative to certain dominant views, according to which we tend to regard education as either an end in itself or a means to an end.

Thus even if one remains sceptical as to the feasibility of the social-anarchist model of social organization, the flexibility regarding the exact form and process of this model is the essence of the anarchist position, and it is this, I argue, together with the aspirations and values behind the proposed model, which give meaning to the educational experience.

Critiques of anarchism revisited

Interestingly, one conclusion suggested by my analysis is that the very failure by many commentators to pay adequate attention to the central role of education in anarchist thought has itself contributed to much of the conceptual confusion and apparent tensions surrounding anarchist theory. For the commonly made claim, to the effect that anarchists hold a naïve and optimistic view about the possibility of maintaining a benevolent, decentralized society without institututional control, does not take into account the central and ongoing role of education in promoting, fostering and maintaining the moral foundations deemed necessary to support such a society. In many standard works on anarchism, notably the studies by Miller, Morland and Ritter, education gets barely a passing mention. This is especially striking in Morland's work, which is a detailed study of human nature in social anarchism (Morland 1997). In the light of the complete absence of any discussion of anarchist education in Morland's book, his concluding remark that 'something above and beyond a conception of human nature is required to explain the optimism of the anarchists' (Morland 1997: 198) is quite astonishing. As the present work has suggested, the anarchists' acknowledgement of the need for a substantive educational process, designed along clear moral principles, goes hand-in-hand with their contextualist account of human nature, thus turning what might otherwise be regarded as a sort of naïve optimism, into a complex and inspiring social hope.

A notable exception to this tendency to overlook the centrality of education to the anarchist account is the work of Barbara Goodwin. In her discussion of anarchism in *Using Political Ideas* (Goodwin and Taylor 1982), Goodwin refers to 'the moral basis of anarchist society', arguing that 'the real interest of anarchism lies not in the precise details of communal organization, but in the universal principles on which such communities would be based' (ibid.: 118). In discussing anarchist education in this context, Goodwin acknowledges its important function in promoting and nurturing 'the moral principles which formed the basis of the anarchist order' (ibid.: 128). The present book, I hope, goes some way towards justifying this acknowledgement and exploring just what it consists in. As such, it also shows that articulating the anarchist view

on education is an important contribution to the ongoing debate on the viability of anarchism as a political ideology.

In conclusion, I suggest that even if one is ultimately sceptical about the immediate feasibility of an anarchist society, the suggestion that it is theoretically possible, together with the belief that it reflects the true embodiment of some of our most cherished human values, make exploring it an educationally valuable and constructive project.

Notes

2 Anarchism and human nature

1 In an interesting article based on work by Daniel P. Todes, Stephen Jay Gould points out that Kropotkin was not, as is often assumed, an idiosyncratic thinker, but was part of a well-developed Russian critique of Darwin and contemporary interpreters of evolutionary theory. This tradition of critique rejected the Malthusian claim that competition 'must dominate in an ever more crowded world, where population, growing geometrically, inevitably outstrips a food supply that can only increase arithmetically' (Gould 1988: 3). 'Russia', Gould points out,

> is an immense country, under-populated by any nineteenth-century measure of its agricultural potential. Russia is also, over most of its area, a harsh land, where competition is more likely to pit organism against environment (as in Darwin's metaphorical struggle of a plant at the desert's edge) than organism against organism in direct and bloody battle. How could any Russian, with a strong feel for his own countryside, see Malthus's principle of overpopulation as a foundation for evolutionary theory? Todes writes: 'It was foreign to their experience because, quite simply, Russia's huge land mass dwarfed its sparse population. For a Russian to see an inexorably increasing population inevitably straining potential supplies of food and space required quite a leap of imagination'.
>
> (Ibid.)

3 Anarchist values?

1 Illich, given his concern with poverty and social justice and his arguments for the need to decrease the dependency of individuals on corporate and state institutions, is in many ways a part of the anarchist tradition. However, his focus, in addressing chiefly the institutional effects of the modern state, is somewhat narrow and leads to an emphasis on individual autonomy rather than on ideal of forms of communality, suggesting possible theoretical tensions with the social-anarchist position. Illich's critique of schooling focuses on the structure of the modern school and its relationship to control and authority. He has specifically argued that schooling in modern industrial states is geared primarily to the shaping of a type of character which can be manipulated by consumer society and its institutions of authority (see Spring 1975: 26). Schools, thus conceived, encourage dependeny which 'creates a form of alienation which destroys people's ability to act' (ibid.). Thus while Illich, with his radical social critique, belongs to the same broad dissenting tradition as many anarchist thinkers, his emphasis on the effects of schooling on the

individual arguably places him somewhat closer to the libertarian tradition than to the tradition of (social) anarchist education discussed here (see Chapter 6).

2 Bakunin's use of the term 'right' here is particularly interesting given current debates into the distinction between 'rights' and 'needs', and the general consensus as to the relative novelty of talk of children's rights.

5 The positive core of anarchism

1 In this thought experiment, designed to illustrate Nozick's central argument that maintaining a pattern of distributive justice would entail unacceptable restrictions on people's liberty to do as they wish with their own resources, members of an imaginary society pay a lot of money to watch a highly talented basketball player play, resulting in his accumulating a great deal of wealth. On Nozick's account, although the resulting distribution of resources is unequal, it cannot be regarded as 'unjust' as it emerged from a series of voluntary exchanges, from an initially just situation.

7 Education for an anarchist society: vocational training and political visions

1 Although other contemporary philosophers of education have addressed these issues (e.g. Williams 1994 and White 1997), these two works by Pring and Winch represent the most substantial philosophical treatment of the field of vocational education in recent years.

2 A great deal of the literature on the issue of globalization in educational contexts makes similar assumptions: the economy, we are told, is moving in certain directions, creating certain changes in the labour market, and education must follow suit by preparing children for 'an uncertain future', 'flexible job-skills', or 'insecure employment' (see for example Burbules and Torres 2000: 28).

3 Interestingly, Bakunin seems to have made no acknowledgement of the existence of any kind of educational process before the age of 5.

8 What's so funny about anarchism?

1 Although the book is ostensibly about education, the private initiatives which Tooley describes so enthusiastically in fact seem to be more concerned with the acquisition of skills and training (see Tooley 2000: 102–112) than about education in a broader sense.

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