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ANARCHISM

A HISTORY OF LIBERTARIAN IDEAS
AND MOVEMENTS



PENGUIN BOOKS

CONTENTS

| | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 14 | VARIOUS TRADITIONS: ANARCHISM IN LATIN AMERICA, NORTHERN EUROPE, BRITAIN, AND THE UNITED STATES | 401 |
| 15 | EPILOGUE | 443 |
| | SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY | 455 |
| | INDEX | 465 |

1 • Prologue

'WHOEVER denies authority and fights against it is an anarchist,' said Sébastien Faure. The definition is tempting in its simplicity, but simplicity is the first thing to guard against in writing a history of anarchism. Few doctrines or movements have been so confusedly understood in the public mind, and few have presented in their own variety of approach and action so much excuse for confusion. That is why, before beginning to trace the actual historical course of anarchism, as a theory and a movement, I start with a chapter of definition. What is anarchism? And what is it not? These are the questions we must first consider.

Faure's statement at least marks out the area in which anarchism exists. All anarchists deny authority; many of them fight against it. But by no means all who deny authority and fight against it can reasonably be called anarchists. Historically, anarchism is a doctrine which poses a criticism of existing society; a view of a desirable future society; and a means of passing from one to the other. Mere unthinking revolt does not make an anarchist, nor does a philosophical or religious rejection of earthly power. Mystics and stoics seek not anarchy, but another kingdom. Anarchism, historically speaking, is concerned mainly with man in his relation to society. Its ultimate aim is always social change; its present attitude is always one of social condemnation, even though it may proceed from an individualist view of man's nature; its method is always that of social rebellion, violent or otherwise.

But even among those who recognize anarchism as a social-political doctrine, confusion still exists. Anarchism, nihilism, and terrorism are often mistakenly equated, and in most dictionaries will be found at least two definitions of the anarchist. One presents him as a man who believes that government must die before freedom can live. The other dismisses him as a mere promoter of disorder who offers nothing in place of the order he destroys. In popular thought the latter conception is far

more widely spread. The stereotype of the anarchist is that of the cold-blooded assassin who attacks with dagger or bomb the symbolic pillars of established society. Anarchy, in popular parlance, is malign chaos.

Yet malign chaos is clearly very far from the intent of men like Tolstoy and Godwin, Thoreau and Kropotkin, whose social theories have all been described as anarchist. There is an obvious discrepancy between the stereotype anarchist and the anarchist as we most often see him in reality; that division is due partly to semantic confusions and partly to historical misunderstandings.

In the derivation of the words 'anarchy', 'anarchism', and 'anarchist', as well as in the history of their use, we find justifications for both the conflicting sets of meanings given to them. *Anarchos*, the original Greek word, means merely 'without a ruler', and thus anarchy itself can clearly be used in a general context to mean either the negative condition of unruliness or the positive condition of being unruled because rule is unnecessary for the preservation of order.

It is when we come to the use of the three words in a social-political context that we encounter important shifts of meaning. 'Anarchy' and 'anarchist' were first used freely in the political sense during the French Revolution. Then they were terms of negative criticism, and sometimes of abuse, employed by various parties to damn their opponents, and usually those to the Left. The Girondin Brissot, for example, demanding the suppression of the Enragés, whom he called anarchists, declared in 1793, 'it is necessary to define this anarchy'. He went on to do so:

Laws that are not carried into effect, authorities without force and despised, crime unpunished, property attacked, the safety of the individual violated, the morality of the people corrupted, no constitution, no government, no justice, these are the features of anarchy.

Brissot at least attempted a definition. A few years later, turning upon the Jacobins it had destroyed, the Directory descended to partisan abuse, declaring:

By 'anarchists' the Directory means these men covered with crimes, stained with blood, and fattened by rapine, enemies of laws they

do not make and of all governments in which they do not govern, who preach liberty and practise despotism, speak of fraternity and slaughter their brothers . . . ; tyrants, slaves, servile adulators of the clever dominator who can subjugate them, capable in a word of all excesses, all basenesses, and all crimes.

Used moderately by Brissot or violently by the Directory, 'anarchism' was clearly a word of condemnation both during and after the French Revolution; at best it described those whose policies one considered destructive and disastrous, at worst it was a term to be used indiscriminately for the smearing of one's rivals. And so the Enragés, who distrusted excessive power, and Robespierre, who loved it, were tarred by the same invidious brush.

But, like such titles as Christian and Quaker, 'anarchist' was in the end proudly adopted by one of those against whom it had been used in condemnation. In 1840, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, that stormy, argumentative individualist who prided himself on being a man of paradox and a provoker of contradiction, published the work that established him as a pioneer libertarian thinker. It was *What Is Property?*, in which he gave his own question the celebrated answer: 'Property is theft.' In the same book he became the first man willingly to claim the title of anarchist.

Undoubtedly Proudhon did this partly in defiance, and partly in order to exploit the word's paradoxical qualities. He had recognized the ambiguity of the Greek *anarchos*, and had gone back to it for that very reason – to emphasize that the criticism of authority on which he was about to embark need not necessarily imply an advocacy of disorder. The passages in which he introduces 'anarchist' and 'anarchy' are historically important enough to merit quotation, since they not merely show these words being used for the first time in a socially positive sense, but also contain in germ the justification by natural law which anarchists have in general applied to their arguments for a non-authoritarian society.

What is to be the form of government in the future? [he asks]. I hear some of my readers reply: 'Why, how can you ask such a question? You are a republican.' A republican! Yes, but that word specifies nothing. *Res publica*; that is, the public thing. Now, who-

ever is interested in public affairs – no matter under what form of government, may call himself a republican. Even kings are republicans. 'Well, you are a democrat.' No . . . 'Then what are you?' I am an anarchist!

Proudhon goes on to suggest that the real laws by which society functions have nothing to do with authority; they are not imposed from above, but stem from the nature of society itself. He sees the free emergence of such laws as the goal of social endeavour.

Just as the right of force and the right of artifice retreat before the steady advance of justice, and must finally be extinguished in equality, so the sovereignty of the will yields to the sovereignty of reason and must at last be lost in scientific socialism. . . . As man seeks justice in equality, so society seeks order in anarchy. Anarchy – the absence of a master, of a sovereign – such is the form of government to which we are every day approximating.

The seeming paradox of order in anarchy – here indeed we have the key to the change in connotation of this whole group of words. Proudhon, conceiving a natural law of balance operating within society, rejects authority as an enemy and not a friend of order, and so throws back at the authoritarians the accusations levelled at the anarchists; in the process he adopts the title he hopes to have cleared of obloquy.

As we shall later see, Proudhon was a voluntary hermit in the political world of the nineteenth century. He sought no followers, indignantly rebuffed the suggestion that he had created a system of any kind, and almost certainly rejoiced in the fact that for most of his life he accepted the title of anarchist in virtual isolation. Even his immediate followers preferred to call themselves mutualists, and it was not until the later 1870s, after the split in the First International between the followers of Marx and those of Bakunin, that the latter – who were also the indirect followers of Proudhon – began, at first rather hesitantly, to call themselves anarchists.

It is the general idea put forward by Proudhon in 1840 that unites him with the later anarchists, with Bakunin and Kropotkin, and also with certain earlier and later thinkers, such as Godwin, Stirner, and Tolstoy, who evolved anti-governmental

systems without accepting the name of anarchy; and it is in this sense that I shall treat anarchism, despite its many variations: as a system of social thought, aiming at fundamental changes in the structure of society and particularly – for this is the common element uniting all its forms – at the replacement of the authoritarian state by some form of non-governmental cooperation between free individuals.

But even when one has established the view of anarchism as a definite current of social philosophy, crystallizing at certain times into action, there remain misunderstandings which arise from historical rather than semantic confusion. First, there is the tendency to identify anarchism with nihilism, and to regard it as a negative philosophy, a philosophy of destruction simply. The anarchists themselves are partly responsible for the misunderstanding, since many of them have tended to stress the destructive aspects of their doctrine. The very idea of abolishing authority implies a clean sweep of most of the prominent institutions of a typical modern society, and the strong point in anarchist writings has always been their incisive criticism of such institutions; in comparison their plans of reconstruction have been oversimplified and unconvincing.

Yet in the mind of no anarchist thinker has the idea of destruction ever stood alone. Proudhon used the phrase *Destruam et Aedificabo* as the motto for the attack on industrial Caesarism embodied in his *Economic Contradictions* (1846): 'I destroy and I build up.' And Michael Bakunin ended his essay on *Reaction in Germany* with a celebrated invocation: 'Let us put our trust in the eternal spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is the unsearchable and eternally creative source of all life. The passion for destruction is also a creative passion!'

The tradition has continued into our own generation. In 1936, almost a hundred years after Bakunin published *Reaction in Germany*, the Spanish anarchist leader Buenaventura Durutti, standing among the destruction caused by the Civil War, boasted to Pierre van Paassen:

We are not in the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit the earth. There is not the slightest doubt about that. The bourgeoisie may blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of his-

tory. We carry a new world, here in our hearts. That world is growing this minute.

The anarchist, then, may accept destruction, but only as part of the same eternal process that brings death and renewed life to the world of nature, and only because he has faith in the power of free men to build again and build better in the rubble of the destroyed past. It was Shelley, the greatest disciple of Godwin, who gave eloquent expression to this recurrent anarchist dream of renewal:

The earth's great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew
Her winter weeds outworn;
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam
Like wrecks in a dissolving dream.

It is through the wrecks of empires and faiths that the anarchists have always seen the glittering towers of their free world arising. That vision may be naïve – we have not yet come to the point of judging it in such terms – but it is clearly not a vision of destruction unmitigated.

Certainly no man capable of such a vision can be dismissed as a nihilist. The nihilist, using the term in a general sense, believes in no moral principle and no natural law; the anarchist believes in a moral urge powerful enough to survive the destruction of authority and still to hold society together in the free and natural bonds of fraternity. Nor is the anarchist a nihilist in the narrow historical sense, since the particular group somewhat inaccurately called nihilists in Russian history were terrorists who belonged to *The People's Will*, an organized conspiratorial movement which sought during the later nineteenth century to achieve constitutional government – an unanarchistic aim – by a programme of organized assassination directed against the autocratic rulers of Tsarist Russia.

This last statement begs a familiar question. If anarchists are not nihilists, are they not terrorists in any case? The association of anarchism with political terrorism is still well established in the popular mind, but it is not a necessary association, nor can it be historically justified except in a limited degree.

Anarchists may be substantially agreed on their ultimate general aims; on the tactics needed to reach that aim they have shown singular disagreement, and this is particularly the case with regard to violence. The Tolstoyans admitted violence under no circumstances; Godwin sought to bring change through discussion and Proudhon and his followers through the peaceful proliferation of cooperative organizations; Kropotkin accepted violence, but only reluctantly and because he felt it occurred inevitably during revolutions and that revolutions were unavoidable stages in human progress; even Bakunin, though he fought on many barricades and extolled the bloodthirstiness of peasant risings, had also times of doubt, when he would remark, in the tones of saddened idealism:

Bloody revolutions are often necessary, thanks to human stupidity; yet they are always an evil, a monstrous evil and a great disaster, not only with regard to the victims, but also for the sake of purity and the perfection of the purpose in whose name they take place.

In fact, where anarchists did accept violence it was largely because of their adherence to traditions that stem from the French, American, and ultimately the English revolutions – traditions of violent popular action in the name of liberty which they shared with other movements of their time such as the Jacobins, the Marxists, the Blanquists, and the followers of Mazzini and Garibaldi. With time – and particularly as the memory of the Commune of 1871 began to fade – the tradition acquired a romantic aura; it became part of a revolutionary myth and in many countries had little relation to actual practice. There were, indeed, special situations, particularly in Spain, Italy, and Russia, where violence had long been endemic in political life, and here the anarchists, like other parties, accepted insurrectionism almost as a routine; but among the celebrities of anarchist history the heroes of violent action have been far outnumbered by the paladins of the word.

Nevertheless, through the shadowy confusion of attitudes regarding violence and non-violence there move unmistakably those dark angels of anarchism, the terrorist assassins. Outside the special conditions of Spain and Russia, they were few in number and they operated mostly during the 1890s. The

distinction of their victims – for several royal personages as well as Presidents of France and the United States were among those executed by these self-appointed judges of the crimes of authority – gave their acts a notoriety out of all proportion to their numbers. But at no time was a policy of terrorism adopted by anarchists in general. The terrorists, as we shall see, were mostly lonely men driven by a curious blend of austere idealism and apocalyptic passion, the black aspect of the same passion that turned other anarchists, like Peter Kropotkin and Louise Michel, into secular saints.

Yet there is no doubt that the assassinations carried out by men like Ravachol and Émile Henry and Leon Czolgosz, to name only three of the most notorious, did enormous harm to the anarchist cause by implanting in the popular mind an identification which lingers long after its justification has vanished. What seems curious is that other assassinations of the same period should have been so much more easily forgotten than those of the anarchists. The name of the Russian Social Revolutionaries, whose victims were far more numerous, arouses no reminiscent shudder, and few people who associate anarchists with daggers and infernal machines pause to remember that only one of the three assassins of American Presidents claimed to be an anarchist; of the others one was a Confederate and the third a disappointed Republican.

The lingering prejudice can possibly be explained by the disturbance that is created in the minds of the insecure by any doctrine of logical extremity. The anarchists attack the principle of authority which is central to contemporary social forms, and in doing so they arouse a guilty kind of repugnance in ordinary people; they are rather like Ivan Karamazov crying out in the court-room, 'Who does not desire his father's death?' The very ambivalence of the average man's attitude to authority makes him distrust those who speak openly the resentments he feels in secret, and thus it is in the psychological condition which Erich Fromm has named 'the fear of freedom' that we may find the reason why – against the evidence of history – so many people still identify anarchism with unmitigated destruction and nihilism and political terror. What anarchism really is we shall now begin to consider.

To describe the essential theory of anarchism is rather like trying to grapple with Proteus, for the very nature of the libertarian attitude – its rejection of dogma, its deliberate avoidance of rigidly systematic theory, and, above all, its stress on extreme freedom of choice and on the primacy of the individual judgement – creates immediately the possibility of a variety of viewpoints inconceivable in a closely dogmatic system. Anarchism, indeed, is both various and mutable, and in the historical perspective it presents the appearance, not of a swelling stream flowing on to its sea of destiny (an image that might well be appropriate to Marxism), but rather of water percolating through porous ground – here forming for a time a strong underground current, there gathering into a swirling pool, trickling through crevices, disappearing from sight, and then re-emerging where the cracks in the social structure may offer it a course to run. As a doctrine it changes constantly; as a movement it grows and disintegrates, in constant fluctuation, but it never vanishes. It has existed continuously in Europe since the 1840s, and its very Protean quality has allowed it to survive where many more powerful but less adaptable movements of the intervening century have disappeared completely.

The peculiar fluidity of anarchism is reflected in its attitude toward organization. By no means all anarchists reject organization, but none seeks to give it an artificial continuity; the fluid survival of the libertarian attitude itself is what is important. In fact, the basic ideas of anarchism, with their stress on freedom and spontaneity, preclude the possibility of rigid organization, and particularly of anything in the nature of a party constructed for the purpose of seizing and holding power. 'All parties without exception, in so far as they seek for power, are varieties of absolutism,' said Proudhon, and none of his descendants has thought otherwise. For the idea of partisan organization the anarchists substitute their mystique of individual and popular impulse, which in practice has found its expression in a succession of loose and impermanent groups and confederations of propagandists who see their duty not to lead the people so much as to enlighten and give example to them. Even the anarchist insurrectionaries in Italy and Spain carried out their small uprisings not because they thought revo-

lutions under their control would ensue, but because they considered such acts to be 'propaganda by deed', aimed at showing the people a course of action that might lead to their liberation. In practice, of course, anarchist militants have often come dangerously near to the authoritarian stance of the revolutionary leader, but their basic theory has always rejected any such position, and has sought to eliminate its necessity by posing the idea of the spontaneous origin of revolutions.

Revolutions [said Bakunin] are not made, either by individuals or by secret societies. They come automatically, in a measure; the power of things, the current of events and facts, produces them. They are long preparing in the depth of the obscure consciousness of the masses - then they break out suddenly, not seldom on apparently slight occasion.

Kropotkin gave the same thought a scientific twist in accordance with the mode of the later nineteenth century:

Evolution never advances so slowly and evenly as has been asserted. Evolution and revolution alternate, and the revolutions - that is, the times of accelerated evolution - belong to the unity of nature as much as do the times when evolution takes place more slowly.

Both Bakunin's mystical faith in unreasoning mass impulse and Kropotkin's adapted social Darwinism imply that rigid organization and rigid theoretical systems are drags on progress - whether revolutionary or evolutionary; at the same time they encourage the flexibility of approach that makes men sensitive to currents of discontent and aspiration.

Hence freedom of interpretation and variety of approach are elements one would naturally expect to find in the world of the anarchist. The congealing elements of dogmatism and orthodoxy have not been absent even in that world - for these are matters of personality as much as of theory - but in the relatively short run they have always dissolved in the renewed urge toward change, an urge unhindered by the power of personal leaders or sacred texts. Respected as individuals like Kropotkin and Malatesta and Louise Michel may have been in their time, none of them wielded or attempted to wield the same hypnotic influence over a whole movement as either

Blanqui or Marx; and, though anarchism has produced its quota of notable books - Godwin's *Political Justice*, Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, Proudhon's *General Idea of the Revolution* - none of these has been accorded or has seemed to demand a niche in the tabernacle such as the faithful keep for the canonical texts of Marxism.

Yet, despite the recurrent impulse toward individualism of approach and interpretation, common circumstances and personal affinities have induced even among anarchists a modified tendency to group thinking, and so it is possible to identify a number of fairly well-defined 'schools' of anarchist thought.

At one end of the series - Left or Right according to one's predilections - stands individualist anarchism. Max Stirner, preaching insurgent self-assertion and foreseeing a Union of Egoists drawn together by respect for each other's ruthlessness, carries this trend as far as logical fanaticism will go; William Godwin, in his vision of a Thebaid of free men sharing their means according to the dictates of abstract justice, offers a rather coldly benevolent variation of the same vision.

The next point along the spectrum of anarchist attitudes is Proudhon's mutualism. Proudhon differs from the true individualist anarchists because he sees history in social form and, despite his fierce defence of individual freedom, thinks in terms of association. 'That I may remain free, that I may be subject to no law but my own, and that I may govern myself,' he says, 'the edifice of society must be rebuilt on the idea of Contract.' He seeks to *rebuild* society, not to abolish it, and he envisages the world of the future as a great federation of communes and workers' cooperatives, based economically on a pattern of individuals and small groups possessing (not owning) their means of production, and bound by contracts of exchange and mutual credit which will assure to each individual the product of his own labour.

Beyond mutualism we reach the three more familiar varieties of anarchist thought - collectivism, anarchist communism, and anarcho-syndicalism. These all retain some of the elements of Proudhon's theory - particularly his federalism and the emphasis on workers' associations which led his mutualist followers to establish the first French sections of the International

in 1865. But Bakunin and the collectivists of the later 1860s, seeking to adapt anarchist attitudes to a society of growing industry, replaced Proudhon's insistence on individual possession by the idea of possession by voluntary institutions, with the right to the enjoyment of his individual product or its equivalent still assured to the individual worker. During the later 1870s, Kropotkin and his fellow anarchist communists took the development a logical stage further. They not only envisaged the local commune and similar associations as the proper guardians of the means of production; they also attacked the wage system in all its forms, and revived the idea – already put forward by Sir Thomas More – of a literal communism that would allow everyone to take, according to his wishes, from the common store-houses, on the basis of the slogan: 'From each according to his means, to each according to his needs.' The main difference between the anarchist communists and the anarcho-syndicalists, who appeared a decade later in the French trade unions, was that the latter emphasized the revolutionary trade union both as an organ of struggle (the general strike its most potent tactic) and also as a foundation on which the future free society might be constructed.

Finally, somewhat aside from the curve that runs from anarchist individualism to anarcho-syndicalism, we come to Tolstoyanism and to the pacifist anarchism that appeared, mostly in Holland, Britain, and the United States, before and during the Second World War. Tolstoy, who associated anarchism with violence, rejected the name, but his complete opposition to the state and other authoritarian forms brings his ideas clearly within the orbit of anarchistic thought. His followers and the modern pacifist anarchists, who accept the label he rejected, have tended to concentrate their attention largely on the creation of libertarian communities – particularly farming communities – within present society, as a kind of peaceful version of the propaganda by deed. They divide, however, over the question of action. Tolstoy preached non-resistance and his greatest disciple, Gandhi, attempted to give practical expression to this doctrine. The pacifist anarchists have accepted the principle of resistance and even revolutionary action, provided it does not incur violence, which they see as a form of power

and therefore non-anarchist in nature. This change in attitude has led the pacifist anarchists to veer toward the anarcho-syndicalists, since the latter's concept of the general strike as the great revolutionary weapon made an appeal to those pacifists who accepted the need for fundamental social change but did not wish to compromise their ideal by the use of negative (i.e. violent) means.

The differences between the various anarchist schools, though at first sight they appear considerable, actually lie in two fairly limited regions: revolutionary methods (especially the use of violence) and economic organization. All recognize that if anarchist hopes are fulfilled and political domination is brought to an end, economic relations will become the main field in which organization is necessary; the differences we have encountered between the various schools of thought reflect differing views of how far cooperative 'administration of things' (to use a Saint-Simonian phrase which anarchist writers have borrowed extensively) can then be applied without danger to individual independence. At one extreme, the individualists distrust all cooperation beyond the barest minimum for an ascetic life; at the other, the anarchist communists envisage an extensive network of interconnecting mutual-aid institutions as a necessary safeguard for individual interests.

Despite these differences, the various anarchist schools are united by a group of common assumptions which form the kernel of their philosophy. These begin with a naturalistic view of society.

All anarchists, I think, would accept the proposition that man naturally contains within him all the attributes which make him capable of living in freedom and social concord. They may not believe that man is naturally good, but they believe very fervently that man is naturally social. His sociality is expressed, according to Proudhon, in an immanent sense of justice, which is wholly human and natural to him:

An integral part of a collective existence, man feels his dignity at the same time in himself and in others, and thus carries in his heart the principle of a morality superior to himself. This principle does not come to him from outside; it is secreted within him, it is immanent. It constitutes his essence, the essence of society itself.

It is the true form of the human spirit, a form which takes shape and grows toward perfection only by the relationship that every day gives birth to social life. Justice, in other words, exists in us like love, like notions of beauty, of utility, of truth, like all our powers and faculties.

Not merely is man naturally social, the anarchists contend, but the tendency to live in society emerged with him as he evolved out of the animal world. Society existed before man, and a society living and growing freely would in fact be a natural society, as Kropotkin emphasizes in *Modern Science and Anarchism*:

The anarchists conceive a society in which all the mutual relations of its members are regulated, not by laws, not by authorities, whether self-imposed or elected, but by mutual agreements between the members of that society, and by a sum of social customs and habits – not petrified by law, routine, or superstition, but continually developing and continually readjusted, in accordance with the ever-growing requirements of a free life, stimulated by the progress of science, invention, and the steady growth of higher ideals. No ruling authorities, then. No government of man by man; no crystallization and immobility, but a continual evolution – such as we see in Nature.

If man is naturally capable of living in such a free society, if society is in fact a natural growth, then clearly those who attempt to impose man-made laws, or to create what Godwin called 'positive institutions' are the real enemies of society, and the anarchist who rebels against them, even to the extent of violence and destruction, is not antisocial after all; according to anarchist reasoning he is the regenerator, a responsible individual striving to adjust the social balance in its natural direction.

The emphasis on the natural and prehuman origin of societies has made almost every anarchist theoretician, from Godwin to the present, reject Rousseau's idea of a Social Contract. It also makes them reject not merely the authoritarian communism of Marx, with its emphasis on a dictatorship of the proletariat to impose equality by external force, but also the various pre-Marxist Utopian socialisms. In fact the very idea of Utopia repels most anarchists, because it is a rigid mental construction

which, successfully imposed, would prove as stultifying as any existing state to the free development of those subjected to it. Moreover, Utopia is conceived as a perfect society, and anything perfect has automatically ceased growing; even Godwin qualified his rash claims for the perfectibility of man by protesting that he did not mean men could be made perfect, but that they were capable of indefinite improvement, an idea which, he remarked, 'not only does not imply the capacity for being brought to perfection, but stands in express opposition to it'.

The general distaste for the rigidity of Utopian thinking has not prevented the anarchists from adopting some ideas contained within Utopias. We have already seen that the anarchist communists echoed the suggestions on communistic distribution put forward by More in the original *Utopia*, while certain of Fourier's ideas on how to induce men to work for passion rather than profit have entered deeply into anarchist discussions on such questions as 'What to do with the lazy man?' and 'Who will do the dirty work?' But the only complete Utopian vision that has ever appealed generally to anarchists is *News from Nowhere*, in which William Morris, who came remarkably near to Kropotkin in his ideas, presented a vision – charmingly devoid of any suspicion of compulsion – of the kind of world that might appear if all the anarchist dreams of building harmony on the ruins of authority had the chance to come true.

One of the most interesting features of Morris's vision in *News from Nowhere* is the curious feeling it induces in the reader of having passed into a continuum where ordinary time relationships have ceased; the Middle Ages are in fact more real to the inhabitants of Nowhere than the chronologically much nearer nineteenth century. The idea of progress as a necessary good has vanished, and all happens, not in the harsh white light of perfection, which Morris denies, but in the mellow stillness of a long summer afternoon which ends only for the unfortunate visitor to the future who has to return to Victorian life and London and the acrimonious debates that were wrecking the Socialist League.

The golden sunlight of that long summer afternoon when time paused on the edge of eternity haunted the anarchists too.

Admittedly, like most nineteenth-century men of the Left, they talked often of Progress. Godwin dreamed of men improving indefinitely, Kropotkin sedulously linked anarchism with evolution, and Proudhon actually wrote a *Philosophie du progrès*. Yet it is only with qualifications that anarchism can be regarded either as progressive in the ordinary Victorian sense, or as evolutionary in the commonly understood sense of desiring development toward more complex forms – in this case social forms.

The Marxists, indeed, have always denied the existence of a progressive element in anarchism, and have even accused anarchists of reactionary tendencies. From their own standpoint they are not entirely wrong, for in its attitude toward social development anarchism often seems to float like Mohammed's coffin, suspended between the lodestones of an idealized future and an idealized past. The past the anarchist sees may not be the golden age of Hesiod and Plato, but it resembles that antique vision; it is a kind of amalgam of all those societies which have lived – or are supposed to have lived – by cooperation rather than by organized government. Its components come from all the world and from all history. The peasant communism of the Russian *mir*, the village organization of the Kabyles in the Atlas Mountains, the free cities of the European Middle Ages, the communities of the Essenes and the early Christians and the Doukhobors, the sharing of goods implied in the customs of certain primitive tribes: all these attract the anarchist theoretician as examples of what can be done without the apparatus of the state, and they draw him nostalgically to a contemplation of man as he may have been in these fragments of a libertarian past. The accuracy of the interpretations which Kropotkin in particular made of these early societies may well be questioned on the grounds that insufficient account was taken of the extent to which a tyranny of custom becomes a substitute for overt authority. But here we are less concerned with the flaws in this view of the past than with the attitude it represents, an attitude which not only seeks to establish a continuity – almost a tradition – uniting all non-authoritarian societies, but also regards simplicity of life and nearness to nature as positive virtues.

Here we reach another important difference between anarchists and Marxists. The Marxist rejects the primitive as representing a stage in social evolution already past; for him, tribesmen, peasants, small craftsmen, all belong with the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy on the scrap heap of history. Communist *Realpolitik* may at times demand a *rapprochement* with the peasants, as now in the Far East, but the end of such a policy is always to turn the peasants into proletarians of the land. The anarchists, on the other hand, have placed great hopes in the peasant. He is near to the earth, near to nature, and therefore more 'anarchic' in his reactions; Bakunin regarded the Jacqueries as rough models for the spontaneous popular uprising which was his ideal for the revolution. The peasant, moreover, is the heir to a long tradition of cooperation forced upon him by historical circumstances; in approving this tendency in peasant societies the anarchist theoreticians tend to forget that, as they become more prosperous, peasant societies begin to show – like any other developing society so far known in history – differences in wealth and status that end in the establishment of a class hierarchy of rich peasants, poor peasants, and labourers. It is significant that anarchism became a powerful mass movement among the poor peasants of Andalusia and the Ukraine, but failed to gain any appreciable success among more prosperous peasants; it was only fear of Durutti and his militia columns that forced the vine-growers of Aragón to adopt the collectivist organization favoured by the Spanish anarchists in the early years of the Civil War.

The anarchist's cult of the natural, the spontaneous, the individual, sets him against the whole highly organized structure of modern industrial and statist society, which the Marxist sees as the prelude to his own Utopia. Even efforts to encompass the industrial world by such doctrines as anarcho-syndicalism have been mingled with a revulsion against that world, leading to a mystic vision of the workers as moral regenerators; even the syndicalists could not foresee with equanimity the perpetuation of anything resembling industrial society as it exists at present.

Indeed, except for pockets of industrial workers in Paris, the Lyons region, Marseilles, Barcelona, and Milan, the appeal

of anarchism has always been strongest among the very classes that remain outside the general trend toward mechanism and conformity in the industrial world. A high proportion of celebrated anarchists came from the aristocracy or the country gentry; Bakunin, Kropotkin, Cherkesov, and Tolstoy in Russia, Malatesta and Cafiero in Italy, are typical examples. Others, like Godwin, Domela Nieuwenhuis, and Sébastien Faure, were former clergymen or seminarists. Among the rest, members of the artisan class – the traditional handcraftsmen – have been perhaps the most important; anarchist militants include an astonishing proportion of shoemakers and printers. At certain times – the 1890s in France and the 1940s in Britain and the United States – intellectuals and artists in rebellion against mass values have been attracted in considerable numbers. Finally, anarchists have tended to welcome as natural rebels the *déclassé* elements whom Marx despised most of all because they fitted nowhere into his neat pattern of social stratification; as a result the anarchist movement has always had its links with that shadowy world where rebellion merges into criminality, the world of Balzac's Vautrin and his originals in real life.

These elements unite mainly in their opposition to the modern state and the modern capitalist or communist economy. They represent a rebellion, not necessarily in favour of the past, but certainly in favour of an ideal of individual freedom which belongs outside the present in which they find themselves. This fact alone should make us look cautiously at anarchist progressivism. What it implies is certainly not progress in terms of society as it now exists. On the contrary, the anarchist contemplates what in some ways is a retreat – a retreat along the lines of simplification.

This appears, of course, in his proposals for social reconstruction. He seeks to break down, to get back to the roots, and to base any organization that may be necessary on – to use a favourite anarchist phrase – 'the point of production'. This dissolution of authority and government, the decentralization of responsibility, the replacement of states and similar monolithic organizations by a federalism which will allow sovereignty to return to the intimate primal units of society – this is

what in their various ways the anarchists have all desired, and such a desire necessarily implies a policy of simplification. But we should miss the essence of the anarchist attitude if we ignored the fact that the urge toward social simplification arises not from any desire for the more efficient working of society, nor even entirely from a wish to eliminate the organs of authority that destroy individual freedom, but largely from a moral conviction of the virtues of a simpler life.

The deeply moralistic element in anarchism, which makes it much more than a mere political doctrine, has never been explored adequately, and this is due partly to the reluctance of the anarchists themselves, who have rejected conventional moralities, to stress this aspect of their own philosophy. Nevertheless, the urge to simplicity is part of an ascetic attitude which permeates anarchist thought. The anarchist does not merely feel anger against the wealthy; he feels anger against wealth itself, and in his eyes the rich man is as much a victim of his luxury as the poor man of his destitution. To enable all men to live in luxury, that vision which bedevils North American democracy, has never appealed to the anarchists. Their attitude was expressed by Proudhon when, in *La Guerre et la paix*, he pointed out the distinction between pauperism and poverty. Pauperism is destitution; poverty is the state in which a man gains by his work enough for his needs, and this condition Proudhon praises in lyrical terms as the ideal human state, in which we are most free, in which, being masters of our senses and our appetites, we are best able to spiritualize our lives.

The sufficiency that will allow men to be free – that is the limit of the anarchist demand on the material world. That it has not been a merely theoretical limit is emphasized by the extraordinary accounts Franz Borckenau has given of those Andalusian villages which, having chased out authority in the early days of the Spanish Civil War, set out to create the anarchist Eden. Quite deliberately, they aimed at the simplification even of the poor life that had been theirs in the unregenerate past, closing the *cantinas*, and, in their plans for exchange with neighbouring communes, deciding that they had no further need even for such innocent luxuries as coffee. These men were not all fanatical apostles of anarchism; most of

them were ordinary villagers inspired at a historic moment by the moral dimensions of a faith that had long given them hope.

Proudhon and the village ascetics of Andalusia have not been isolated in the movement to which they both belong. Throughout anarchist literature one finds echoes of their conception of a society where, once simple needs have been satisfied, men will have the leisure to cultivate their minds and their sensibilities. Kropotkin includes in *The Conquest of Bread* a chapter on 'The Need for Luxury' which might seem to negate this contention, but when we examine it we find that he sees luxury, not as material enjoyment, but as 'the higher delights, the highest within man's reach, of science, and especially of scientific discovery; of art, and especially of artistic creation'. By simplifying existence so that toil is reduced, the anarchist believes that man can turn his attention to such noble activities and achieve the philosophic equilibrium in which death will cease to have terror. Again, it is Proudhon who presents the vision most concisely when, in *De la justice*, he remarks that human life enters its fullness when it contains love, work, and 'social communion or Justice'. 'If these conditions are fulfilled,' he declares, 'existence is full; it is a feast, a song of love, a perpetual enthusiasm, an endless hymn to happiness. At whatever hour the signal may be given, man is ready; for he is always in death, which means that he is in life and in love.'

This digression into the vision of the simplified life will have made it evident that the anarchist sees progress not in terms of a steady increase in material wealth and complexity of living, but rather in terms of the moralizing of society by the abolition of authority, inequality, and economic exploitation. Once this has been achieved, we may return to a condition in which natural processes resume their influence over the lives of societies and individuals, and then man can develop inwardly in accordance with the spirit that raises him above the beasts. And thus we see Proudhon, in the *Philosophie du progrès*, insisting that the presence of equilibrium is the inevitable complement to the unending movement in the universe. Progress is indefinite, but it has no end, nor, in the ordinary sense, does it appear to have a goal; it is 'an incessant metamorphosis', a

negation of the Absolute, 'the affirmation of universal movement and in consequence the negation of immutable forms and formulae, of all doctrines of eternity, permanence, or impeccability, of all permanent order, not excepting that of the universe, and of every subject or object, spiritual or transcendental, that does not change'. The formula is almost Heraclitean; it suggests the flux of never-ending change rather than the dialectical forward movement of the Hegelians and the Marxists; it suggests a world in which history loses all its rigidity in the interflow of balancing forces; it suggests contradiction as a positive and productive element, and equilibrium as a dynamic condition in a world that changes constantly and never reaches the stillness of perfection because imperfection is a cause and a consequence of its everlasting movement.

But I would misrepresent anarchism as it has appeared in history if I ended this introductory chapter by leaving the impression that there is anything in the theory which suggests a passive acceptance of inevitable process. To the anarchist, despite the scientific determinism that at times has inconsistently found its way into his teachings, no specific event is inevitable, and certainly no specific event in human society. For him history does not move, as it does for the Marxist, along the steel lines of dialectical necessity. It emerges out of struggle, and human struggle is a product of the exercise of man's will, based on the spark of free consciousness within him, responding to whatever impulse - in reason or in nature - provokes the perennial urge to freedom.

It is the consciousness of the need for struggle, of the need to take practical steps to achieve the liberation of society, that takes anarchism into the world of politics. Here I raise a controversial question, since, although anarchists differ in their ideas of the tactics to be used in achieving social change, they are united in regarding themselves as apolitical or even anti-political. The bitterest battles between anarchists and Marxists were fought over the question of whether an egalitarian society could be created by workers' political parties aiming at seizure of the state machine. The anarchists have all denied political action, and have declared that the state must not be taken over, but abolished; that the social revolution must lead, not to the

dictatorship of any class, even the proletariat, but to the abolition of all classes.

Such an attitude can indeed be described as antipolitical, but, just as anti-Utopias like *Brave New World* and *1984* are part of Utopian literature, so the antipolitics of the anarchist is part of political history, conditioned by the very governmental institutions against which it fights. The development of anarchism ran parallel to the development of the centralized state and for many years, until its disappearance as a numerically significant movement with the fall of the Spanish Republic, anarchism was an integral part of the political pattern of Europe and the Americas.

The sharp difference between the anarchist conception of strategy in a politically dominated world and that of the movements with which it has competed arises partly from libertarian individualism and partly from the conviction we have already observed, that, in the larger sense at least, means profoundly affect ends. Sharing metaphorically Christ's contention that one cannot cast out devils by Beelzebub, the anarchists regard all institutions and parties based on the idea of regulating social change by governmental action and man-made laws as counter-revolutionary. In proof of this argument, they point to the fact that all revolutions carried out by political means have ended in dictatorships; the resort to coercion has transformed them and betrayed the revolutionary ideal. It is for this reason that the anarchists not only reject political action as such, but also attack reformism – the idea that society can be changed by piecemeal measures – and deny the theory of a transitional period between the capitalist state and the anarchic society. It may indeed be impossible for society to move in one step to complete freedom, but the anarchist believes that he should accept no less as his aim, and should continue to struggle and use every weakness of the unfree society to reach his ultimate goal.

The anarchists therefore base their tactics on the theory of 'direct action', and claim that their means are essentially social and economic. Such means embrace a whole varied range of tactics – from the general strike and resistance to military service to the formation of cooperative communities and credit

unions – which aim to dissolve the existing order and either prepare for the social revolution or make sure that once it has begun it may not proceed in an authoritarian course. But the distinction between social-economic and political means is in fact less clearly defined than the anarchists usually maintain, since a general strike aimed at a change in the political structure of society – or a dissolution of that structure – is really, as Clausewitz said of war, politics carried on by other means, and the same applies to the insurrectionism advocated at various periods by the violent anarchists and the assassinations practised by the terrorist minority of the 1880s and the 1890s.

But this question of definition should not be allowed to obscure the fact that a real difference does exist between anarchist direct-actionism and the methods of other left-wing movements. For what unites and characterizes all the various tactics advocated by the anarchists, however they may differ on points of violence and non-violence, mass action and individual action, is the fact that they are based on direct individual decisions. The individual takes part voluntarily in a general strike; of his own free will he becomes a member of a community, or refuses military service, or takes part in an insurrection. No coercion or delegation of responsibility occurs; the individual comes or goes, acts or declines to act, as he sees fit. It is true that the anarchist image of the revolution does indeed take most frequently the form of a spontaneous rising of the people; but the people are not seen as a mass in the Marxist sense – they are seen as a collection of sovereign individuals, each of whom must make his own decision to act.

The means of revolutionary action, based on the spontaneous will of the individual, is of course paralleled by the end of the free society, in which the administration of social and economic affairs will be carried out by small local and functional groups demanding of the individual the minimum sacrifice of sovereignty necessary for a life that has been decentralized, debureaucratized, and highly simplified. Individuals, in fact, will federate themselves into communes and working associations, just as these will be federated into regional units, and overriding authorities will be replaced by coordinating secretariats. In this organic network of balancing interests, based on the