

Introduction

A Philosophical Approach to Anarchism

This book aims to define – or to *re-define* – anarchism in relation to the fundamental ethico-political problem of authority. Authority is defined in terms of the right to exercise social control (as explored in the ‘sociology of power’) and the correlative duty to obey (as explored in the ‘philosophy of practical reason’). Anarchism is distinguished, philosophically, by its scepticism towards such moral relations – by its questioning of the claims made for such normative power – and, practically, by its challenge to those ‘authoritative’ powers which cannot justify their claims and which are therefore deemed illegitimate or without moral foundation.

Part 1 of the book analyzes both the nature of anarchist scepticism (Chapter 1) and the nature of authority itself (Chapter 2). It pays particular attention to the authority of the state and the anarchist rejection of *all* traditional claims made for the legitimacy of state authority (Chapter 4). However, it also seeks to establish that anarchism cannot be defined simply in terms of its rejection of the state, still less in terms of its supposed rejection of authority as such. The anarchist sceptic must, in principle, be open to the possibility that authority of every kind can be justified. Indeed, a comprehensive treatment of authority (moral, theoretical, and practical) demonstrates that there *are* forms of authority that all but the most absolutist or abstract of anarchists (so-called ‘philosophical anarchists’) believe to be legitimate (Chapter 3).

Part 2 places anarchism in historical context, attempting to locate the origins of the political philosophy outlined in Part 1. It is argued that the three most important influences on the development of anarchism were the eighteenth century Enlightenment, the French Revolution of 1789–1793, and the radical enlightenment philosophy of Left Hegelianism that flourished in the 1830s and 1840s (Chapter 5). The three foundational texts of anarchism – William Godwin’s *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (1793), Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s *What is Property?* (1840), and Max Stirner’s *The Ego and Its Own* (1844) – are studied in some detail (Chapter 6). Finally, the major theoretical developments of anarchism from the late-nineteenth century to the present are summarized (Chapter 7).

This book is, therefore, largely a work of conceptual analysis. However, it is premised on the understanding that political ideas are products of history. The intellectual aspect of this history is central to the study. We will attempt to frame our analysis of the problem of authority within this intellectual history, thus blending conceptual analysis (in Part 1) with the history of ideas (in Part 2).

In Part 1, we will analyze anarchism as a *critical social philosophy* and investigate its *philosophy of authority*: its conceptualization of authority, its scepticism towards the notion of its legitimacy, and its critique of claims made for the legitimacy of

various forms of authority. Particular attention will be paid to the issue of political authority and the anarchist critique of the claims made for the legitimacy of the state. Of course, anarchism *as an ideology* involves a good deal more than this, including diverse visions of ‘anarchy’ and interpretations of the means required to realize it. It is these aspects of the ideology that divide the tradition along individualist and socialist, gradualist and revolutionary, pacifist and terrorist, and other such lines.¹ But even taking into account these ideological elements, one is still left wondering about precisely what it is that unites anarchists, about what exactly the ‘anarchist idea’ is.² This can only be determined at a fundamental philosophical level. Indeed, when confined to this level of abstraction, and divorced from other ideological elements, the anarchist idea is affirmed (often in absolutist terms) by the so-called ‘philosophical anarchist’ – in David Miller’s words, ‘a rather bloodless member of the [anarchist] species’.³ The account of anarchism presented here may appear to characterize the present author in this light, though, for what it’s worth, I would be extremely uncomfortable with such a characterization, and will attempt, especially in the Conclusion, to draw anarchism back from the realm of abstractions into the realm of concrete problems and radical solutions. The Conclusion, then, will contain a number of remarks on the social relevance of anarchism, as defined here. These remarks are intended to counter the widespread belief that a philosophical or ‘sophisticated’ expression of anarchism necessarily points to an abstract anarchism – an anarchism without revolutionary designs or potential. Our claim, on the contrary, is that a coherent philosophical articulation of the anarchist position is necessary (though obviously not sufficient) to make it practically forceful. Fundamental social change is, we contend, not only desirable but imperative. And anarchist alternatives, *properly understood and communicated*, may provide the best road ahead.

1 As George Woodcock puts it: ‘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’ [*Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth, 1975), p. 19].

2 It should be stated at the outset that the fundamental ‘anarchist idea’ does not necessarily give rise to what might be termed *anarchist fundamentalism*, an ideological deformation that asserts a simplistic and one-sided version of anarchism and, moreover, asserts it as definitive and absolute. This fundamentalist deformation is *anti-authoritarianism*, as discussed below. Incidentally, fundamentalist ideological deformation is not peculiar to anarchism. Thus liberalism, the *political philosophy of individual liberty*, has given rise to *neo-liberalism*, an ultra-dogmatic economistic simplification of the tradition. Neo-liberalism, in abstracting a proprietary-economistic aspect of ‘classical liberalism’ (as articulated by John Locke and Adam Smith, partially represented perhaps), has effectively perverted an ideology that was once rich in ethical content (as the writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt, John Stuart Mill, and others testify). The economistic nature of this deformation is unsurprising since the leading theorists of neo-liberalism – notably Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, and Milton Friedman – have been economists rather than political or moral philosophers. The feeble ethico-philosophical efforts of these theorists (or at least Mises and Friedman) deserve rigorous critique that is, alas, beyond the parameters of this book.

3 *Anarchism* (London, 1984), p. 15.

While it is the critical philosophy of anarchism that *may* distinguish it most clearly, a full and adequate philosophical analysis ought to give consideration to it also as a *constructive moral philosophy*. However, this is beyond our scope (and, in any case, largely unnecessary) in the context of a study focused on the problem of authority. Others have adopted a different approach to the philosophy of anarchism, and would probably question ours. Alan Ritter, for example, examines the moral philosophy of anarchism *before* evaluating its critical philosophy; that is, he traces ‘the anarchists’ social criticism to its source in their [ethical] commitment to communal individuality’ as the primary good. This strategy allows him, he claims, to bring out anarchism’s ‘coherence not only as a plan for social reconstruction, but also as a work of criticism’.⁴ On the face of it, this seems like a rather sensible approach – starting with the ethical principle that underpins anarchist criticism in order to assess the coherence of that criticism. Indeed, Ritter’s conception of ‘communal individuality’ *seems* to be a good *approximation* to the anarchist ethic, a conception that brings out some of its complexity. At any rate, it certainly seems better than, say, George Crowder’s conception of ‘freedom’ – freedom as ‘moral self-direction: self-direction in accordance with the will of the true or perfected self, which is the rational and right-willing part of the personality’ – a conception that falls too conveniently within the terms of Berlinian analysis to be convincing.⁵ Nevertheless, the actual ethic of anarchism is a great deal less apparent than the critical dimension (as the ongoing debate about what it is demonstrates), and it only comes into view when we inspect

4 *Anarchism: A Theoretical Analysis* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 87, 61.

5 *Classical Anarchism: The Political Thought of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin* (Oxford, 1991), p. 170. Anarchists, on Crowder’s account, happen to be conveniently categorizable as proponents of one of Isaiah Berlin’s ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’. This is further evidence of the excessive influence of Berlin’s (admittedly interesting) essay, the major chapter from his *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford, 1969). One gets the impression from scholars like Crowder that Berlin wrote the very history of ideas. That said, Crowder thinks of himself as non-Berlinian for two reasons: first, he associates anarchism with the tradition of positive liberty, whereas Berlin associates it with negative liberty; and, secondly, he believes that ‘the positive idea is by no means logically or naturally authoritarian’, as Berlin held – indeed, anarchists have shown that it can secure ‘the basis for a theory that is ... thoroughly libertarian’. Crowder thus writes of ‘the need to revise Berlin’s thesis’. Hence, the non-Berlinian still feels the need to think in Berlinian terms – and this despite the fact that these terms are in many ways quite alien to anarchists. No anarchist theorist that I am aware of maintains so simplistically that positive freedom or ‘moral self-direction’, as defined in the passage quoted in the text, is ‘the highest value of all’ [Crowder, pp. 12, 15–16]. The complexities of the anarchist ethic do not lend it to interpretation within the restrictive Berlinian framework. Indeed, anarchists argue that a Berlinian conception of freedom *qua* freedom (even positive freedom) provides for an inadequate ethical principle. The complexity of the anarchist ethic has at least been acknowledged by some. K. Steven Vincent indicates it in Proudhon’s case: ‘Just as crucial as equality [to Proudhon] was liberty. Equality, in fact, was viewed as the condition of liberty, but only the union of the two formed justice’ [*Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism* (Oxford, 1984), p. 60]. Thus, as I hope to demonstrate in a future work, the primary good for Proudhon and other major anarchists is *justice* – a complex good that must be conceived of integrally.

the critical philosophy of anarchism carefully. Accordingly, we undertake the latter in the present work, and hope to return to the former in a future study.

In Part 2, from the point of view of the history of ideas, it will be argued that anarchism is a child of the Enlightenment, that it received practical impetus as well as a crucial cautionary lesson from the French Revolution, and that it was influenced to a greatly underrated extent by the radical enlightenment philosophy of Left Hegelianism. Next, it will be argued that anarchism's intellectual foundations lie in three major philosophical works: Godwin's *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Proudhon's *What is Property?*, and Stirner's *The Ego and Its Own*. Having examined these foundations in some detail, a number of the more important theoretical developments of anarchism, from Bakunin to Bookchin and beyond, will be summarized.

The purpose of Part 2 is to place anarchism – and ‘the anarchist idea’ explored in Part 1 – in its intellectual context. This idea did not come from nowhere: it arose in a particular intellectual and social climate that gave it special resonance. This was a climate of crisis that called for revolutionary transformation; transformation that has, from the anarchist perspective, yet to take place in full. That is to say, the crisis persists in our society and has intensified to such an extent that we are now faced with an ecological crisis that threatens not only our social well-being, but our very survival. This is the contemporary context in which the anarchist idea continues to resonate.

Our historical examination of the anarchist idea – regardless of any attempt to ‘contextualize’ it *intellectually* – will doubtless be found wanting by social historians and others, who might argue, correctly, that history is more than an intellectual process. Social, economic, and political factors are obviously quite fundamental to historical development, and ideas cannot be fully comprehended in isolation from these factors. However, what concerns us here, in this philosophical study of anarchism, is the anarchist *idea*. No attempt is made to explain this idea in what might be considered ‘fundamental’ terms (in accordance with, say, the ‘materialist conception of history’). The goal is simply to articulate the idea and to present anarchism as a critical philosophy that has developed more or less coherently over the previous couple of centuries. In itself, this may be too abstract. However, this work is not conceived of as a *comprehensive* study of the anarchist ideology, but as an attempt to improve our philosophical understanding of it. It is merely a contribution – and, in my view, a long overdue contribution – to anarchist scholarship from the philosophical standpoint.

As a preliminary to the conceptual and historical work outlined above, we must clear away some prevalent popular and academic misconceptions of anarchism. Therefore, a number of popular stereotypes of and dubious scholarly approaches to anarchism will be confronted in this Introduction.

Stereotypes of Anarchism

More than any other ideology, anarchism is subject to both public and academic misinterpretation, misrepresentation, and even falsification. Thus, every remotely

conscientious scholar of anarchism is obliged to begin by considering prevailing prejudices and stereotypes. In other words, before attempting to explain exactly what anarchism is, scholars are compelled to explain what it is *not*. This can be a difficult and frustrating task, given the popularity, longevity, and power of these prejudices and stereotypes. However, the task is unavoidable and we will begin in this first section by attending to it. Four stereotypes will be considered: the classical, the contemporary, the Marxist, and the academic.

The Classical Stereotype

The classical stereotype of anarchism (by now rather antiquated, as we will argue) is of its close, if not intrinsic, association with terror and violence generally. A significant literary expression of this stereotype is Joseph Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent* (1907), a fantastic story inspired by an attempted bombing of the Greenwich Observatory in 1894. The significance of this novel – by no means a great work – lies perhaps in its contribution to the violent image of anarchism. Conrad populates it with a group of revolutionary anarchists and a nihilistic colleague (whom he describes as 'the perfect anarchist'). The former are characterized as lazy, impotent, unethical propagandists; the latter ('a moral agent of destruction' known as 'The Professor') as an explosive-wearing 'lunatic' motivated by 'vengeful bitterness'. But the violent conviction that unites them at the extreme (the decrepit Karl Yundt as well as the genuinely threatening Professor) is much the same:

'I have always dreamed', [Yundt] mouthed, fiercely, 'of a band of men absolute in their resolve to discard all scruples in the choice of means, strong enough to give themselves frankly the name of destroyers, and free from the taint of that resigned pessimism which rots the world. No pity for anything on earth, including themselves, and death enlisted for good and all in the service of humanity – that's what I would have liked to see'.⁶

Another literary work from the same period that is often thought to be in the same vein is G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908).⁷ However, Chesterton's work is not a political work of the dystopian imagination, like Conrad's, but a philosophical or religious work of a believer in divine order. His target is not political anarchism – the quasi-popular anarchism of 'oppressed, if mistaken, men' in places like Russia and (oddly enough) Ireland – but 'intellectual' anarchism – the metaphysical anarchism (indeed, *nihilism*) of aristocrats and poets, who revolt not against oppression (which they have never experienced) but against order in the universe, *against existence*. (Chesterton elaborates his point about such existential

6 *The Secret Agent*, ed. Roger Tennant (Oxford, 1998), pp. 42, 81, 83, 95, 97. On *The Secret Agent* and anarchism, see the following: Donald Roomm, 'Fictitious Anarchists in *The Secret Agent*', and Paul Avrich, 'Conrad's Anarchist Professor: An Undiscovered Source', *The Raven*, 9 (1996): 76–79, 80–84.

7 In *The Essential G.K. Chesterton*, ed. P.J. Kavanagh (Oxford, 1987). For example, Peter Marshall claims that there is a 'sinister depiction of the anarchist terrorist' in both novels [*Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*, revised edn (London, 1993), p. 490].

‘anarchism’ in a journalistic piece on Shelley written in the same year.⁸) The chief metaphysicians of anarchism, its ‘priesthood’, are animated by what Chesterton characterizes as the Satanic spirit of destruction: the destruction of any principle of order, of all morality, of life itself. As ‘the real anarchist’ and ‘destroyer’, Lucian Gregory (Satan himself), explains:

We do not only want to upset a few despotisms and police regulations; that sort of [political] anarchism does exist, but it is a mere branch of the Nonconformists. We dig deeper and we blow you higher. We wish to deny all those arbitrary distinctions of vice and virtue, honour and treachery, upon which mere rebels base themselves. The silly sentimentalists of the French Revolution talked of the Rights of Man! We hate Rights as we hate Wrongs. We have abolished Right and Wrong.⁹

Anarchists have long been aware of the Conradian stereotype. Alexander Berkman wrote in 1929, ‘You have heard that anarchists throw bombs, that they believe in violence, and that anarchy means disorder and chaos’.¹⁰ Certainly, many at that time (familiar with Conrad’s work or not) had heard this, when Berkman’s American readership would have recalled, in particular, the killing of eight policemen near Haymarket Square, Chicago (allegedly) by an anarchist bomber in 1886, the assassination of President William McKinley by the Polish anarchist Leon Czolgosz in 1901, and the notorious (and spurious) murders by Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in 1920. Indeed, Berkman himself (with the assistance of Emma Goldman) had famously and unsuccessfully tried to assassinate the industrialist Henry Clay Frick in 1892. Berkman’s European readers could point to more local events. These included the Paris bombings by Emile Henry and others in the early 1890s, as well as a number of political assassinations (such as those of French President Sadi Carnot in 1894, Spanish Prime Minister Antonio Canovas in 1897, Austrian Empress Elisabeth in 1898, and Italian King Umberto in 1900).

8 See ‘The Voice of Shelley’, in *The Essential G.K. Chesterton*, pp. 244–45: ‘One wholly non-popular element in [Shelley] was his anarchism. The poor are not anarchists, and never can be anarchists. They live too close to life for such artistic trifling. *When I speak of anarchism, of course I do not use the term in the exact sense which indicates a political programme.* I do not mean that Shelley disapproved of all government though he sometimes used phrases which might be taken in this sense. But his trend and tone was to offer liberty and *an escape from rule* as a panacea for the misfortunes of the people; and this is not a genuine popular trend or tone. The people know that life cannot be conducted without rules. The people is the maker and keeper of all custom, tradition, and convention ...’ [emphasis added]. It seems that the kind of existential anarchism Chesterton has in mind can be defined etymologically (in terms of the rejection of ‘rule’ and *order*), but, as we will see in Part 1, traditional or political anarchism (which is concerned with domination and authority) cannot be defined in this way. That is not to say that Chesterton is sympathetic to the latter, but that what he instinctively opposes is not so much anarchism (or socialism) as that brand of would-be anarchism (or socialism) that is wholly divorced from popular sentiment.

9 *The Man Who Was Thursday*, in *The Essential G.K. Chesterton*, pp. 136, 151, 205, 240–41.

10 *ABC of Anarchism* (London, 1964), p. 3.

Clearly, then, anarchist acts of violence peaked around the turn of the twentieth century.¹¹ These acts were often justified as instances of ‘propaganda by the deed’, a then widespread notion according to which, in the absence of a mass anarchist movement, sporadic acts of individual violence could succeed in awakening revolutionary consciousness.¹² Alternatively, such acts were simply intended to terrorize the ‘enemies of anarchy’. Thus, Emile Henry contributed significantly to the identification of anarchism with violence in his statement to the jury of his trial:

In the merciless war that we have declared on the bourgeoisie, we ask no mercy. We mete out death and we must face it... [You] have not been able to destroy anarchy. Its roots go deep: it sprouts from the bosom of a rotten society that is falling apart; it is a violent backlash against the established order; it stands for the aspirations to equality and liberty which have entered the lists against the current authoritarianism. It is everywhere. That is what makes it indomitable, and it will end by defeating you and killing you.¹³

In addition to the above inventory of anarchist violence, critics have pointed to the most notorious document in what they take to be the anarchist tradition, the *Catechism of a Revolutionary* (1869), to prove not just its violent inclination but its intrinsic nihilism. Take the following passage, which expresses the revolutionary fanaticism and amorality that have come to be associated with anarchism:

All tender, softening sentiments of kinship, friendship, love, gratitude, and even honour itself must be snuffed out in [the revolutionary] by the one cold passion of the revolutionary cause. For him there is only one satisfaction, consolation, and delight – the success of the revolution. Day and night he must have one thought, one aim – inexorable destruction. Striving coldly and unfalteringly towards this aim, he must be ready to perish himself and to destroy with his own hands everything that hinders revolution.

‘Everything’ and everybody, for ‘those men must be destroyed who are particularly harmful to the revolutionary organization’.¹⁴ But this text is a work of nihilism

11 Miller, p. 113, points to a ‘second phase of terror [that] grew out of the New Left movement of the 1960s’ (carried out by the Baader-Meinhof group in Germany, the Brigade Rosse in Italy, the Angry Brigade in Britain, etc.). He admits that it is questionable whether this ‘can be properly described as anarchist’, but argues, unconvincingly I think, that, in part, it can. I do not discuss it here because I believe that its connection to the anarchist ideology is so tenuous that it would be unfair to re-associate anarchism with violence on the basis of it. (As Marshall observes of the groups in question, their ‘libertarian credentials were doubtful to say the least’ [Marshall, p. 558].) In any event, I am not sure that there was such a re-association in the popular mind – and certainly nothing to compare with the popular association at the turn of the twentieth century. That is to say, these groups were generally perceived as revolutionary terrorists, period, rather than as anarchists who resorted to terrorist means.

12 See Marie Fleming, ‘Propaganda by the Deed: Terrorism and Anarchist Theory in Late Nineteenth-Century Europe’, *Terrorism*, 4 (1980): 1–4, and James Joll, *The Anarchists*, 2nd edn (London, 1979), pp. 117–48.

13 *No Gods, No Masters*, ed. Daniel Guérin (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1998), vol. 1, p. 42.

14 See ‘Catechism of a Revolutionary’, in *Daughter of a Revolutionary: Natalie Herzen and the Bakunin-Nechayev Circle*, ed. Michael Confino (LaSalle, 1973), pp. 221–30 (the quoted passages are from Part Two, §§6, 16).

‘pushed to the farthest coherent point’¹⁵ – not a work of anarchism in any meaningful sense; and, indeed, it was predominantly if not exclusively a work produced by the maniacal Russian nihilist (and, true to his word, murderer) Sergei Nechaev rather than the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, as was maintained for so long.¹⁶

Bakunin tended toward nihilism in moments of revolutionary fervour, and this may explain his initial naïve admiration for the energetic and courageous Nechaev. Logically, indeed, he prioritizes the destructive element, or negation. However, for Bakunin, negation is not an end in itself. Destructive elements are justified only insofar as they overcome their ‘merely negative’ revolutionary form and disclose *their implicit ethico-historical content*, even provisionally in revolutionary practice.¹⁷ Nechaev, by contrast, advocates negation for negation’s sake, and by any means; there is no ‘ethical’ end beyond negation; negation is an end in itself. Thus, ‘[we] recognize no other activity but the work of extermination, but we admit that the forms which this activity will take will be extremely varied – poison, the knife, the rope, etc. In this struggle the revolution sanctifies everything alike’.¹⁸ While nihilism offers nothing but a crude ‘*ethic of negation*’, therefore, anarchism is a substantive ethico-political outlook that is grounded on a certain *logic of negation*. This is reflected in Proudhon’s motto, ‘*Destruam et Aedificabo*’, ‘I destroy and I build up’.¹⁹

It has to be said that the classical stereotype of anarchism, notwithstanding its having at least some historical basis in fact, is extremely partial. There were always anarchists – arguably the majority – who rejected most violence as ineffectual and counter-productive, and indiscriminate violence as unethical.²⁰ We should bear in mind, also, that the anarchist tradition at its other extreme includes radical pacifists. Leo Tolstoy maintained that two core principles of his unorthodox Christian ‘anarchism’ are to ‘live at peace with *all* men’ and ‘not [to] resist evil’.²¹ Herbert Read was less radical, or less consistent, than Tolstoy, but believed that central to

15 Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. Anthony Bower (Harmondsworth, 1971), pp. 128–29.

16 Extensive scholarship has been devoted to this controversy, but the key document is perhaps Bakunin’s letter to Nechaev of June 2, 1870, translated by Lydia Bott in *Encounter*, 39 (1972): 81–93. For a detailed study of Nechaev, see Philip Pomper, *Sergei Nechaev* (New Brunswick, 1979).

17 See Bakunin’s ‘Reaction in Germany’ (1842), trans. Mary-Barbara Zeldin, *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings*, ed. Arthur Lehning (London, 1973), pp. 37–58. I discuss this article and Bakunin’s revolutionary logic in Part One of *Mikhail Bakunin: The Philosophical Basis of His Anarchism* (New York, 2002).

18 Nechaev quoted by Paul Avrich in ‘Bakunin and Nechaev’, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton, 1988), p. 37. This chapter provides a good overview of their relationship.

19 Quoted by Woodcock, p. 11. Woodcock notes here that ‘in the mind of no anarchist thinker has the idea of destruction ever stood alone’.

20 See *ibid.*, pp. 12–14: ‘The association of anarchism with political terrorism ... is not a necessary association, nor can it be historically justified except in a limited degree ... at no time was a policy of terrorism adopted by anarchists in general.’

21 *A Confession, The Gospel in Brief, and What I Believe*, trans. Aylmer Maude (Oxford, 1974), p. 167. Emphasis added.

anarchism ‘is the belief in *non-violence* – in non-violent resistance to oppression, and in non-violent methods of attaining our ends’.²²

It is certain, in any event, that anarchist terrorism has been effectively superseded and that no contemporary anarchist of note would recommend ‘propaganda by the deed’. Anarchists also like to point out that the anarchist tradition, though not entirely innocent, has far less blood on its hands than any other ideological tradition. Miller writes: ‘acts of terror have been performed by republicans, by nationalists, by revolutionary socialists, and by fascists, and if one tried to quantify the anarchist contribution to this catalogue of horror, it would turn out to be relatively small’.²³ Furthermore, if one tried to quantify anarchist violence relative to state violence, it would barely register. Perhaps this is due to the insignificance of anarchism and its lack of opportunity to date – or perhaps, as the anarchist would hold, it is precisely because anarchism is opposed to the state as an inherently violent institution, as ‘an organization for the commission of violence and for its justification’.²⁴

There is some doubt as to whether the classical stereotype still prevails. Paul Avrich, a leading scholar of anarchism, wrote in 1978:

By the time of the First World War ... anarchism had acquired a reputation of violence for its own sake that the passage of six decades has failed to alter. The stereotype, once created, has been endlessly recopied, so that to this day the association of anarchism with terrorism, with bombs, dynamite, and chaos, remains deeply embedded in the popular imagination.²⁵

The more recent publication of William Powell’s successful (if seemingly unreliable) manual of DIY weaponry, *The Anarchist Cookbook*, suggests that this stereotype persists.²⁶ However, a major transformation was underway as Avrich wrote, and the title of Powell’s work now seems somewhat archaic. That is not to say that the classical stereotype has been forgotten (indeed, images of ‘anti-globalization’ protesters carrying black flags and attacking McDonald’s have done something to preserve the memory), but it is no longer prevalent and it endures, for the most part, as a dated comic book caricature rather than a firm political prejudice.

The Contemporary Stereotype

The contemporary stereotype of anarchism, which prevails among younger generations, reflects a dramatic change in its perception. Anarchism is no longer

22 *A One-Man Manifesto and Other Writings* (London, 1994), p. 118. Emphasis in original.

23 Miller, p. 109.

24 Leo Tolstoy, *Essays and Letters*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London, 1903), p. 258.

25 Paul Avrich, *An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine de Cleyre* (Princeton, 1978), pp. xiii–xiv.

26 *The Anarchist Cookbook* (Fort Lee, 1989). According to the publisher, more than 2 million copies of this book have been sold. A more recent and similarly titled work has apparently superseded *The Anarchist Cookbook*: David Harber, *The Advanced Anarchist Arsenal: Recipes for Improvised Incendiaries and Explosives* (Boulder, 1991).

considered so much a feature on the political landscape (albeit an anomalous or freakish feature supposedly devoted to the violent destruction of that very landscape) as a feature of popular culture.²⁷ Its political significance is now a matter of mere historical interest – treated, at that, only as something of a curiosity (begrudgingly afforded a chapter in textbooks on political ideologies), or as a footnote to the development of Marxism, communism, syndicalism, federalism, libertarianism, and – of course – terrorism. Accordingly, the majority of the few contemporary scholars who bother with anarchism at all are historians and political scientists, as opposed to, say, political philosophers.

Pop anarchism, to coin a phrase, emerged in the mid- to late-1970s with British punk (and took dogmatic, though scarcely more intelligent, form in the ‘anarcho-punk’ movement that followed). In fact, pop anarchism owed something to situationism, a modish French philosophy of the 1960s. The aesthetic of situationism, divested of much of its actual quasi-anarchist political content (as articulated most notably by Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* and Raoul Vaneigem in *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (both 1967)), made some impact on British punk, or was exploited by those who sought to market it – chiefly Malcolm McLaren, the manager of the Sex Pistols, together with Jamie Reid, whose situationist artwork will be forever associated with punk.

Numerous lyrical and graphic allusions to anarchism were made by bands and fans of the British punk period, but the obvious reference point is the Sex Pistols’ anthem, ‘Anarchy in the UK’ – the title of which, together with their taste for Union Jack design, indicates ignorance of the anarchist tradition’s internationalism if nothing else. Anarchism has subsequently been closely associated with the trappings of punk fashion: dyed spiky hair, body piercing, leather jackets, and so on. Other trappings of the punk lifestyle complete the contemporary caricature: consumption of cheap alcohol, glue sniffing, street-corner aggression, spray-painted graffiti, slogan screaming (‘Smash the System’, ‘Fuck the Police’, etc.), vandalism, simple-minded and riotous protest, etc. Because of its association with punk, still a marketable enough (and cyclically fashionable) brand of youthful rebellion, anarchism even makes it into the society, fashion, and arts pages of mainstream publications, where one might read of Vivienne Westwood’s latest collection or the exhibitions of any number of worthless ‘experimental’ artists. The very symbol of anarchism – the circled A – is featured everywhere from the schoolyard to the catwalk, apparently representing anarchy in the sense of social disorder and youthful rebellion. The marketers of pop anarchism are hardly likely to remind us – even if they knew it – that the circle around the A is actually a letter O, standing for order, and that the symbol as a whole represents Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s famous conviction that

27 For what such anecdotal evidence is worth, everyone I have asked about their associations with anarchism (who is under, say, forty years of age and remotely conscious of popular culture) responds that it is the drunk and aggressive punk, or perhaps the rioting version thereof.

‘Anarchy is Order’; that for genuine anarchists, anarchism is not a decadent lifestyle for malcontents or an anti-social creed, but a sincere social philosophy.²⁸

In any case, anarchism has retained its popular association with punk. This association is resented by some anarchists, who would rather be considered political radicals or outsiders, as of old, than devotees to something like a teen counter-culture or a fashionable (in the sense that the conspicuously unfashionable has become fashionable) ‘lifestyle’.

The Marxist Stereotype

Aside from the classical and contemporary stereotypes, there is also a traditional Marxist stereotype of anarchism. According to this stereotype, anarchism is equivalent to strict ‘anti-authoritarianism’; it consists in the rejection – *a priori* rejection – of *all* authority (since authority is, in Engels’s words, ‘absolutely evil’), or in the quest for ‘the abolition of authority’ (Engels again), a position that is claimed to be *self-evidently* unsustainable, indeed, naïve, infantile, or utopian. Of course, liberals too accuse anarchists of utopianism in their rejection of the ‘necessary evil’ that is the state. (James Buchanan, for example, writes: ‘In a generalized social setting ... and one that man can recognize as being within the realm of plausibility, the anarchistic regime of free men ... becomes the utopian dream’.²⁹) But, leaving aside the general discussion of utopianism for the moment, the classical source of the ‘anti-authoritarian’ stereotype is Friedrich Engels’s short essay, *On Authority* (1872) – an essay in which, it should be observed, Engels not only criticizes anarchism for its anti-authoritarianism but also presents the economic or technocratic rationale for ‘imperious’ authority.³⁰

28 It may be noted that a more sophisticated counterpart to the British anarcho-punk emerged in the United States from the ‘hardcore’ counter-culture, which flourished between the late-1970s and the mid-1980s. Hardcore was essentially a non-commercial – even anti-commercial – cousin of British punk (itself the cynical commercial progeny of New York City punk). In the shape of bands like Bad Brains, Black Flag, and the Minutemen, hardcore exhibited a degree of political consciousness and musical sophistication that put most of the legendary British acts (The Clash excepted) to shame. Every aspect of the hardcore ‘scene’ – lyrical content, musical distribution, show promotion, venue admittance and crowd control policies, together with the mass of self-published musical and political literature and the social activism that were inspired by the music itself and very much part of the scene; this vast manifestation of a cooperative, non-profit, and non-authoritarian ethic, can be termed anarchist in a very real and profound sense. It is perhaps regrettable, however, that so much of what was valuable and instructive in this scene should have been perverted by puritanical elements (the ‘straightedge’ sub-scene, a mildly ascetic offshoot which, in tone, verged on the fascistic and ultimately served as a recruiting-ground for religions such as ‘Mormonism’ and Hare Krishna). It is also a shame that hardcore should be marketed retrospectively by the music industry as forerunner to so-called ‘alternative rock’ – a commercial musical genre that is about as socio-politically relevant and insightful as heavy metal.

29 *The Limits of Liberty: Between Anarchy and Leviathan* (Chicago, 1975), p. 92.

30 See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York, 1978), pp. 730–33.

One of the more recent expressions of the Marxist stereotype from the field of so-called ‘marxiology’ is by Hal Draper in the fourth volume of his massive (and unfinished) *Karl Marx’s Theory of Revolution*. Draper is, as we will see in Part 1, correct in asserting that: ‘The mere “abolition of the state” [is] not enough to define anarchism.’ However, what defines anarchism is, he says, ‘a thesis about “authority”’ involving ‘the absolute sovereignty of the individual Ego as against the imposition of *any* “authority” over it’. In programmatic terms, therefore, anarchism proposes ‘that the *first* word of the revolution [has] to be the abolition of all *authority over the sovereign individual* by any power of any sort outside the individual ego’. Ultimately, such anti-authoritarianism is founded on a particular conception of freedom. Draper writes:

The anarchist view of ‘freedom’ is basically *individual-solipsistic*: it depends on the absolute inviolability of the sovereign Ego in relation to the outside world – the total impermissibility of any imposition of any authority, authority of any kind or source, upon the unconditional autonomy of the sovereign Ego. Anarchism is basically a solipsism, whether or not anarchists recognize this consciously in their philosophical outlook. It does not mean freedom *through* democracy, or freedom *in* society, but, rather, freedom *from* any democratic authority whatsoever or any social constraint: in short, not a free society but freedom from society.³¹

Not surprisingly, Draper is unable to cite any documentary support for this interpretation of anarchism – and it should be emphasized that he has in mind not Stirnerian anarchism, but the developed ideology of anarchism or anarchism on the ‘Bakunin model’. Frankly, Draper’s analysis of anarchism is philosophically inadequate.

As will be argued below, the Marxist stereotype of anarchism is simplistic and inaccurate. That is not to deny that statements such as ‘Anarchy is *society organized without authority*’,³² while heavily qualified, appear to confirm the stereotype. However, the essence of the anarchist position is, I believe, captured by Bakunin when he asks: ‘Does it follow [from the critique and rejection of specific forms of authority] that I reject *all* authority? Far from me such a thought.’³³ We will see which forms of authority anarchists reject and why, as well as which forms they might be willing to countenance shortly.

A patently absurd extension of the Marxist stereotype has it that anarchism consists not merely in the rejection of all authority, but in *the rejection of all power*. This notion has been espoused recently by Saul Newman (a self-confessed fan of ‘post-Marxism’ among other trendy ‘posts’). Newman claims that anarchists (as

31 *Karl Marx’s Theory of Revolution*, IV, *Critique of Other Socialisms* (New York, 1990), pp. 126, 131, 174–75. For a summary of Marx’s and Engel’s economic views on authority, and their critique of the ‘anti-authoritarianism’ of the anarchist ‘autonomists’, see *ibid.*, pp. 134–40. Incidentally, Draper calls Engels’s aforementioned essay *On Authority* ‘a small masterpiece of educational elucidation’ [*ibid.*, p. 138], a comment that captures the tone of his work.

32 Errico Malatesta, *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*, ed. Vernon Richards (London, 1965), p. 20.

33 *God and the State*, ed. Paul Avrich (New York, 1970), p. 32. Emphasis added.

opposed to ‘post-anarchists’ like himself) advocate ‘a grand dialectical overcoming of power’, that they ‘try to construct ... a world outside power’. But, he continues, Michel Foucault shows us that ‘Power is everywhere’ and that ‘We will never be entirely free from relations of power’. Indeed, Foucault shows us that it is not power – which can be ‘productive’ as well as ‘repressive’ – but *domination* that is the problem. Relations of domination emerge ‘when the free and unstable flow of power relations becomes blocked and congealed – when it forms unequal hierarchies and no longer allows reciprocal relationships’. It is these congealed relations of domination that anarchists should challenge, not power as such. In any case, the way to ‘counter political domination’ is ‘by engaging with, rather than denying, power’. Thus, Newman urges anarchists ‘to “say yes” to power, as Nietzsche would put it’.³⁴

Newman’s paper is, however, self-contradictory. For, while he claims that anarchists reject all power, curiously he recognizes that: ‘Anarchists do not reject all forms of authority, as the old cliché would have it.’³⁵ While it may be possible to argue that authority is not a form of power, it certainly isn’t possible to do so once one accepts something like Foucault’s framework. In any case, anarchists certainly do not need Foucault to tell them that there is a distinction between power and domination, and that not all power is ‘repressive’. Would any revolutionary anarchist deny, for instance, that revolution is a (valid) manifestation of power? Newman seemingly attributes a remarkable degree of ignorance to anarchists, which is presumably why he imagines that they need the intellectual assistance not only of Foucault, but, worse again, of scholastic philosophers like Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan too. We will question the alleged theoretical deficiency of anarchism below.

The Academic Stereotype

There is, finally, an academic stereotype of anarchism, which often goes hand-in-hand with the ‘anti-authoritarian’ stereotype. In fact, this may have been partly inspired by the intellectual contempt of Marx for the ‘unscientific’ notions of anarchists like Proudhon and Bakunin (bearing in mind that ‘unscientific’ means disagreeable, or sceptical toward economic monocausality, in Marxist terminology). It is hardly surprising, then, that leading Marxist scholars like Eric Hobsbawm have promulgated this stereotype.³⁶ According to the academic stereotype, anarchism is theoretically nugatory. Anarchists, it appears, reject theoretical enterprise as a whole, considering all intellectual activity distracting or even reactionary. Hence there is a lack of anything like an adequate theoretical formulation of the anarchist case (if one were even conceivable). Anarchism is, then, all about instinctive rebellion – understandable and occasionally justified and illuminating, perhaps, but ultimately

34 ‘Anarchism and the Politics of Ressentiment’, *Theory & Event*, 4:3 (2000): §§30, 31–32, 34. We will return to the topic of Newman’s ‘post-anarchism’, as well as Todd May’s ‘poststructuralist anarchism’, in Chapter 7.

35 Ibid., §15.

36 See his *Revolutionaries: Contemporary Essays* (London, 1973).

irresponsible, immature, and unrealistic – and therefore better suited to popular youth culture than refined academic circles.

This stereotype is the one for which anarchists themselves are most responsible and which they have done little to overcome. An absurd theory-praxis dualism persists within anarchism. Justice is not something to be thought about, but something to be realized. Theory – bad; activism – good. Thus, philosophical reflection can produce only abstraction and practical impotence; philosophical reflection on justice produces Rawls. This kind of anarchist argument is surely inadmissible. Anarchists may be justifiably suspicious about the abstraction of academic culture and even the cowardice of academics and their willingness to serve the status quo. But, ethically, it seems unacceptable to advocate fundamental social transformation that affects all – that is, social revolution – without a coherent justification (which does not automatically amount to scholastic inertia). The alternative is the vanguardism that has typified the Marxist tradition: those with privileged access to the divine truth (of ‘scientific socialism’) should lead the revolution, explaining it (or ‘rationalizing’ it), if they care to at all, only after the event. In any case, it might be that an intelligent articulation of anarchism (which otherwise lacks the power of conviction) might be its best means of propagation. Thus, there is a strong case, both ethical and ‘pragmatic’, for some degree of concentrated intellectual effort on the part of anarchists. (Incidentally, Paulo Freire, for one, acknowledges essentially the same distinction between the kind of ‘authentic praxis’ inspired by ‘critical reflection’ that we have in mind here, and ‘pure activism’, such as that of those anarchists who typically regard themselves as custodians of the tradition.³⁷)

Notwithstanding this objection to activist purism within anarchism, one might still wonder why academics, and philosophers in particular, have continued to dismiss or simply ignore anarchist theory. As any scholar of anarchism (other than the most hostile) can testify, inquiry into the subject is greeted by colleagues, more often than not, with prejudicial incredulity, condescension, and even hostility – beyond the normal ignorance of the over-specialized. Intellectual curiosity and rigour, the principle of charity, and all manner of noble academic characteristics – aside from basic human respect – go out the window and sheer intolerance and not a little stupidity become standard. Be that as it may, the riches of anarchist thought – from William Godwin to Murray Bookchin – remain to be explored by those of an open mind. In any event, a tradition that has been seriously entertained by some of the brightest minds of the twentieth century – from Bertrand Russell and George Orwell to Jean-Paul Sartre and Noam Chomsky – would certainly appear to deserve more respect than is usually accorded to it by academics.³⁸

37 *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (Harmondsworth, 1996), p. 48.

38 As Peter Marshall writes, if the accusation that ‘anarchism lacks philosophical rigour and that its appeal is fundamentally emotional’ were true, ‘it would be difficult to explain why some of the best minds of this century, such as Bertrand Russell and Noam Chomsky, have taken anarchist philosophy so seriously, even if they have not unreservedly endorsed its conclusions’ [Marshall, pp. xiv–xv]. I should clarify what I am saying here (with a few banalities) to see off a possible objection. Implicit here, it might be argued, is some kind of very unanarchist argument from authority: since such-and-such an intellectual

Scholarly Approaches to Anarchism

Despite the general contempt for anarchism within the academic community, scholarly work on it in the English language has accumulated over the years.³⁹ There are exceptions, but many of these studies suffer from a major weakness. That is, they place undue emphasis on the individual and on their entire body of work (often together with gratuitous attention to biographical detail).⁴⁰ Of course, bio-historical overviews are not illegitimate in themselves, but they are rarely philosophically or ideologically insightful. An ideology is not a collection of individuals, embracing everything they ever said, wrote, or did (or are speculated to have said, written, or done). Approaching anarchism as if it were such a collection, it is not in the least surprising that scholars conclude that it is an inconsistent, contradictory, or incoherent ideology. Individuals themselves change and also change their minds. We can hardly expect them to be consistent – say ‘consistently anarchist’ – throughout a lifetime and a body of work. The same applies to representatives of other ideologies without this diminishing the ideology with which they are associated.

authority finds anarchism significant and interesting, we, their intellectual subjects, should think likewise. But I am not making such a claim, and neither, I assume, is Marshall. The fact that the figures in question have a particular attitude to anarchism will probably be of interest to philosophers, that is, to those in the field in which they are widely respected, but it is not a sufficient reason for anyone to adopt the same philosophical attitude. It may encourage some to consider (and, in this sense, to accord respect to) the subject itself, that is, anarchism, but it entails no obligations of any kind. Similarly, if I were to tell the fan of Graham Greene that Greene was well disposed toward Ford Madox Ford, it might encourage that fan to read the latter, but it certainly doesn’t oblige the fan to share this attitude. That is to say, I would not be making an argument from authority in this instance either.

39 The full-length studies of anarchism I have principally in mind are those previously referred to by George Woodcock, James Joll, Alan Ritter, David Miller, George Crowder, and Peter Marshall, as well as the following: Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*, trans. Mary Klopper (New York, 1970); April Carter, *The Political Theory of Anarchism* (London, 1971); David Morland, *Demanding the Impossible? Human Nature and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Social Anarchism* (London, 1997). But this list doesn’t include a mass of biographical work, for example. It seems the anarchist tradition is particularly attractive to biographers. George Woodcock alone has written more than half a dozen biographies of anarchists and libertarians (Godwin, Wilde, Kropotkin, Proudhon, Orwell, Aldous Huxley, Read, and Gandhi), while historians from Max Nettlau to Paul Avrich have contributed masses of bio-historical material on the tradition. See the notes to Chapter 7 for a guide to this area of scholarship.

40 In Daniel Guérin’s words [Guérin, pp. 5–6], they present ‘an excess of biographical details rather than making a profound study of ideas’. (Biography, he adds, is ‘often much less illuminating ... than some writers imagine. Many of [the major anarchists] were not anarchists throughout their lives and their complete works include passages that have nothing to do with anarchism’.) Consequently, the reader is left ‘with a feeling of diffusion, almost incoherence, still asking himself what anarchism really is’. I agree wholeheartedly with Guérin’s sentiments but find his own presentation of ‘the main constructive themes of anarchism’ deeply flawed. Some of his characterizations of anarchism – as a ‘rejection of authority’ or even ‘society as a whole’ [ibid., pp. 3, 13] – certainly don’t stand up to philosophical analysis. That said, Guérin is very strong on the practical history of anarchism.

Ideologies are collections of particular beliefs articulated in particular texts and expressed in particular activities. To understand and evaluate an ideology, one must assess these beliefs. Certainly, locating or specifying the beliefs that characterize a position is a challenge. However, evading this basic challenge of ideological inquiry by simply identifying an ideology with a collection of individuals – and, once again, every aspect of their lives and thought – is indolent and uninformative. Hence it is that scholars of anarchism continue to wonder if anarchism is opposed to the state at all when Proudhon wrote *The Principle of Federation* (1863); if perhaps anarchism isn't nihilistic because of Bakunin's alleged authorship of the *Catechism of a Revolutionary*; and so on. Perhaps these aren't anarchist works, even if we think rather categorically and conveniently of their authors as being anarchists. In any case, that they *may* reflect poorly on some individual or other doesn't have any necessary bearing on anarchism as such.

Why do scholars of anarchism favour the *individualistic approach*? It could of course serve the simple malevolent purpose of discrediting anarchism by highlighting the more eccentric aspects of those associated with it and the more erratic aspects of their thought; but, to be fair, this cannot be claimed of most of the studies in question. We can only suggest one *speculative* answer for consideration. Academic work on anarchism has been conducted primarily within two disciplines: history and political science. Both disciplines clearly have their merits, and historical and political studies of anarchism have been instructive in various (in our view, non-fundamental and sometimes inconsequential) ways. However, in terms of basic philosophical analysis, of conceptual clarification, the modes of thought that characterize these disciplines are arguably inadequate. That isn't to say that professional historians or political scientists are inherently incapable of philosophical thought – any more than professional philosophers are inherently incapable of historical research or political 'science'. Neither is to say that non-academics are incapable in any of these respects. Many leading anarchist theorists, from Proudhon to Bookchin, have been self-taught, while others like Bakunin and Stirner have been academic outcasts. Indeed, this accounts in large part for the originality of anarchist thought, both in form and content, even if it has encouraged academics to adopt a condescending attitude toward it. (Conversely, the most scholastic form of anarchism – the postmodern form that will be described below – would appear to be the least original and the least penetrating.)

Whatever its shortcomings and its overall partiality, the approach fostered by a philosophical training has something to be said for it. In the case of anarchist scholarship, it can at least fill a gap that remains in the work of historians and political scientists: it can disclose the conceptual core of the position. The existing scholarship has largely served to identify anarchism with a group of individuals, or a loosely defined 'movement', rather than a more or less coherent intellectual position (with diverse practical applications). What these individuals did at random points of their lives is held to have some bearing on anarchism, whether or not they were actually advocating a specific position that might be classified as anarchist at those points in time. Likewise, what they wrote in some off-the-cuff pamphlet or letter, whenever and in whatever circumstances, is evaluated on equal terms with their major, recognizably anarchist theoretical work. For the historian, this obsession with

detail and consequent loss of theoretical perspective may be an occupational hazard. For the political scientist, it is rather more difficult to account for. The evidence suggests something rather basic and widespread within the discipline: theoretical incompetence.⁴¹ I will now examine the work of David Morland, which is arguably a recent case in point.

David Morland's *Demanding the Impossible?* is an evaluation of the classical social anarchism of Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin (as opposed to individualistic or 'philosophical' anarchism). However, it is typical of much of anarchist scholarship in its adoption of the individualistic approach. Morland argues that social anarchism is internally incoherent because its 'realistic' conception of human nature is at odds with its 'optimistic' vision of a future anarchist society. Thus, he rejects the common assessment that anarchism is (perhaps internally coherent but) premised on an 'optimistic' conception of human nature which renders it romantic or utopian. According to Morland, the anarchist conception of human nature is realistic in so far as it is 'double-barrelled', that is, 'composed of both sociability and egoism'.⁴² Thus, anarchists are not unduly optimistic or pessimistic about our nature; we are neither intrinsically Good nor intrinsically Bad, but apparently predisposed toward the latter, toward egoism; therefore, we are ill-suited to a society of predominant sociability, as envisioned by social anarchists. Such is the contradictory nature of social anarchist thought, or so Morland would have us believe.

There are a number of problems with this argument, even supposing for a moment that Morland represents social anarchism accurately and fairly (which we will dispute below). For instance, we might ask what grounds there are for assuming that the 'double-barrelled' conception – especially when it is 'fuelled by what is, at times, a particularly honest, if not brutally pessimistic, account of the darker side of human nature' – is 'realistic'. What Morland takes to be 'realistic' in social anarchist thought is (as he represents it) the preponderant (though not exclusive) pessimism of its interpretation of human nature. This moderately 'dystopian' assumption requires justification, just as any 'utopian' assumption would. Furthermore, it appears that Morland simply equates egoism with 'badness' and sociability with 'goodness' (though he seems to be partially aware that this is problematic). We might also question the egoism-sociability dualism, by asking if it is philosophically meaningful (a question to which we will return below), and (if so) if the two components are truly contradictory and irreconcilable. Perhaps Morland would respond that these problems are not his but problems within the social anarchist ideology itself. After all, he is engaging in internal critique and not making any 'attempt to elaborate a definition of human nature'. (He adds, in the questionable terms of a fashionable

41 This may sound like a rather harsh and extreme judgement. I don't intend to justify it in this context, where it was introduced as speculation anyway. Suffice it to say that it is a judgement I have made on the basis of my reasonably extensive reading of anarchist scholarship and, more importantly, my experience of political science both as a student and a teacher. Having had comparative experience in philosophy, I have no doubt where the weakness of political science lies (but, incidentally, neither do I deny its strengths relative to philosophy).

42 Morland, pp. 5–6.

philosophy: ‘Given the essential contestability of the concept of human nature, such an exercise is probably futile.’) That as it may be, he is evidently happy to make a major assumption about the realism of a given conception, a conception which, as he acknowledges at one point, ‘abounds amidst the popular imagination’ – and probably has little other foundation.⁴³

Morland’s account is remarkably clichéd. For example, of anarchism in general, he makes the following claim: ‘Anarchist ideology has no *magnum opus* to afford easy access to the uninitiated. Consequently, its theoretical writings are often inconsistent and sometimes less than remarkable. Much of this is due to the very nature of anarchism. As an ideology it is an active creed’.⁴⁴ This statement contains two stereotypical ingredients that we have alluded to already. The first is that anarchism has little (if anything) of *real* theoretical value to offer. The second, offered in part-explanation of the first, is that anarchism prioritizes praxis (or ‘activism’) to such an extent that it basically rejects theory (or ‘intellectualism’). Many anarchists, with something of an intellectual inferiority complex, accept these stereotypical views.

Morland’s individual treatments of Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin are also riddled with clichés. The principal one is that Proudhon’s thought is ‘paradoxical’, while Bakunin’s is ‘replete with contradictions and anomalies’. (Indeed, Morland comes up with his own paradoxical conclusion that Bakunin is both incoherent and profound: ‘His work seldom amounts to a coherent theory’ but ‘he is undeniably a profound and original thinker’.) Kropotkin, by clichéd comparison, ‘stands proud as a paragon of clarity and coherence’ – relative, that is, to Proudhon and Bakunin. But Morland adds that it would be ‘rather charitable’ to say that he is ‘systematic and clear’ – by a higher intellectual standard, one imagines.⁴⁵

How does Morland go about demonstrating the contradictions and incoherence within the thought of the three social anarchists? Quite simply, by adopting the individualistic approach. Thus, he quotes fairly randomly from texts written decades apart, in completely different circumstances, and for different purposes and audiences (often as translated, it might be noted, in anthologies and biographies of varying quality). What is more, some of the texts he refers to – in the case of the pre-anarchist Bakunin and especially the wavering Proudhon – aren’t anarchist works at all. In any event, Morland quotes from Proudhon, with very little sense of chronology or context, from the 1830s to the 1860s; likewise, with Bakunin, from the 1840s to the 1870s; and, with Kropotkin, from the 1880s to the 1920s. The assumption appears to be that classical social anarchism equals Proudhon plus Bakunin plus Kropotkin. Therefore, anything they said at any time that contradicts or doesn’t cohere with anything else they said at any other time is evidence of anarchism’s contradictory or incoherent nature. Furthermore, since everything they say is part of the social anarchist ideology, when what they say doesn’t seem very anarchistic, one begins

43 Ibid., pp. 4, 6, 22.

44 Ibid., p. 19.

45 Ibid., pp. 33, 77, 166.

to wonder if social ‘anarchism’ is anarchist in the first place – to wonder about ‘the validity of the label of anarchism if not the status of the ideology itself’.⁴⁶

This objection to Morland’s study – to his individualistic approach – may seem rather formal. Perhaps so, though we have suggested that it may indicate theoretical incompetence, an inability to grapple with the core conceptual issues of the anarchist position. In fact, when we look at the substance of Morland’s argument, the suspicion seems to be confirmed. Take his treatment of Bakunin. Bakunin, according to Morland, believes that there are ‘two innate capacities that are distinctive of mankind: a potential to be egoistic and the facility for sociability’. He is therefore faced with what Morland sees as an intractable problem if he is to realize ‘a fully-fledged anarchy’: how ‘to negate or restrict the egoistic side of human nature’ that seems to rule out a viable social anarchist alternative. Morland concludes that Bakunin ultimately abandoned his anarchist principles and opted for ‘an increasingly authoritarian brand of politics’.⁴⁷ Thus, Bakunin is a closet authoritarian, leading those who favour the individualistic approach to ask if, somehow beneath it all, there is an authoritarian undertone to anarchism, a deep internal contradiction within the ideology that is ostensibly set against authority.

This seems like a powerful case against Bakunin – except for one small problem: Bakunin *doesn’t* believe that egoism in any sense of ‘badness’ or immorality is an innate feature, and Morland can’t offer a single piece of evidence to the contrary. The only quotation he offers in support of his argument is the following: ‘Man is not only the most individual being on earth – he is also the most social being’.⁴⁸ Bakunin may be an individualist (of an unusual kind, without doubt), but individualism is not synonymous with egoism (again, in this vague sense of ‘badness’). Nor does Bakunin have any desire to ‘negate or restrict’ individuality in a future anarchist society. He firmly believes that only the socialized conditions secured by ‘anarchy’ enable a full development of individuality (and, by extension or otherwise, moral behaviour). As for egoism in a pejorative sense, he believes that – far from being an innate feature of human nature – it is merely a feature of bourgeois culture.

All of this points to a fundamental misunderstanding on Morland’s part. Egoism is (in the terms of Morland’s discussion) an ethical principle. (Stirner denies this; but his position is deeply problematic, as will become apparent.) Individualism, on the other hand, is a metaphysical principle.⁴⁹ The ethical counterpart of egoism is altruism, not sociability (which is the metaphysical counterpart of individualism). Therefore, the egoism-sociability dualism that Morland occupies himself with rests on philosophical confusion – albeit a confusion encouraged by many anarchists. Bakunin’s claim that man is ‘by nature’ both ‘individual’ and ‘social’ is a metaphysical claim, not an

46 Ibid., p. 7.

47 Ibid., pp. 78, 114, 117.

48 Ibid., p. 78. Quoted from G.P. Maximoff’s notoriously mistitled collection *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism* (Glencoe, 1953), p. 136.

49 In this context, the proposition ‘Man is an individual creature’ is of a metaphysical nature, while ‘Man is egoistic’ is of an ethical nature. Of course, ‘ethical individualism’ is conceivable, but it is an ethical position (of liberalism) that is based on a fundamental metaphysical belief (about the discreteness of individuals and the consequent disparity of their interests). Social anarchists do not share this metaphysical belief.

ethical claim. Ethically, Bakunin is a social determinist: man is, naturally, morally neutral and tends toward ‘good’ and ‘evil’ under given social conditions. (Morland *almost* grasps this without, it appears, grasping its full significance: ‘In effect [human nature] is seen [by Bakunin] as a malleable concept capable of both good and evil, the predominance of which is largely due to environmental circumstances.’⁵⁰ That human nature is capable of good and evil does not mean that it is malleable (or that Bakunin operates with what Morland calls a ‘contextualist’ conception of human nature). For Bakunin, human nature is fixed by definition, biological developments notwithstanding.) The social conditions Bakunin thinks most conducive to moral behaviour are anarchic – conditions without corrupting elements of ‘political power’ and so on.

Frankly, Morland’s critique of Bakunin appears to founder on philosophical confusion. Therefore, even if his case against both Proudhon and Kropotkin held up (in fact, it does to some extent in Proudhon’s case, but scarcely does in Kropotkin’s), his overall argument is disproven. Why? Because he claims to be exposing a ‘fundamental inconsistency in anarchist ideology’ as such – that is, an ‘inconsistency’ shared by Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin, a point of ideological commonality that in fact characterizes their ideology and fatally undermines it. (Morland asserts that there is ‘some definitive agreement or consensus on the concept of human nature upon which anarchist ideology is built’.)⁵¹ If it is not a point of commonality – in other words, if these three theorists do not share the particular conception of human nature that Morland outlines – then Morland has failed to get to grips with anarchism, to recognize what it is that makes anarchism (over and above even social anarchism) anarchism. And, as we will argue, it is not a common conception of human nature that unites anarchists (or even the three Morland examines), but some other philosophical factor. Morland might at least have noted basic differences between Proudhon’s psychocentric conception of human nature, Bakunin’s naturalistic conception, and Kropotkin’s evolutionary conception. All three conceptions are open to criticism – Proudhon’s, which Morland comes closest to appreciating, most of all – but they are quite distinct.⁵²

As noted above, there are important studies that avoid the individualistic approach. David Miller’s *Anarchism* is an outstanding analysis of the ‘anarchist ideology’ that eschews that approach throughout. For Miller, anarchism is not a collection of individuals; it is a collection of beliefs (which he analyses in the first part of his book, ‘Varieties of Anarchism’) that have gained expression in various activities over

50 Morland, p. 122 (note 104).

51 Ibid., pp. 1, 23.

52 Significant though the differences may be, it is true to say that anarchists – with the exception of Stirner and the postmoderns (to whom we shall return in Part 2) – assert the meaningfulness of human nature as such, however it is to be described. Thus, William Godwin writes that ‘We are partakers of a common nature’ [*An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (2 vols, London, 1793), vol. 1, p. 106], Noam Chomsky writes that ‘Human nature exists, immutable except for biological changes in the species’ [*Language and Responsibility: Based on Conversations with Mitsou Ronat*, trans. John Viertel (New York, 1979), p. 91], etc. Anarchists argue that this claim can be upheld on scientific grounds – on the basis of developments in genetic science, for example.

more than a century (as he describes in the second part of his book, ‘Anarchism as a Revolutionary Ideology’). Miller, though largely critical of anarchism, is relatively fair in his evaluation (summarized in the third and final part of his book, ‘Assessing Anarchism’). He concludes that while anarchism, with its ‘idea of abolishing the state entirely’, is ultimately unworkable, it offers much as ‘an important corrective’ to our dependency on ‘relations of power’ (‘relations of domination’ would, as we have seen already, make more sense here) and to encourage ‘the ideal of free, uncoercive social relationships’.⁵³ However, Miller’s work represents another approach to anarchist scholarship – the *ideological approach* – that, while valid and more worthwhile than the individualistic approach, isn’t the approach adopted in this book.

Miller’s aim is to assess anarchism as an ideology, ‘as a set of beliefs about human nature, society, and the state that attempts both to explain the world and to help change it’. Hence, he attempts to summarize anarchism in all its ideological aspects before evaluating it on theoretical and practical grounds. This is a substantial task, and Miller copes with it admirably. Nevertheless, such an extensive treatment of anarchism leaves the reader in some doubt about the nature of its foundations. Indeed, having engaged with varying interpretations of practical ends and revolutionary means, Miller himself questions whether any single ideology could account for such diversity. ‘We must face the possibility’, he announces, ‘that anarchism is not really *an* ideology, but rather the point of intersection of several ideologies’.⁵⁴ This judgement is understandable in the context of Miller’s study, but whether it is ultimately satisfactory remains to be seen. Before making any hard and fast distinction between ‘individualist anarchism’ and ‘communist anarchism’, as Miller does, it might be worth returning to the foundations. We might be able, by concentrating our efforts at this level, to ascertain whether there is a common idea that has somehow inspired the many and varied theoretical and practical beliefs that together constitute what we, wisely or unwisely, call the anarchist ideology.

The approach adopted in this book, then, is neither individualistic nor ideological. It is, rather, a *philosophical approach*: an attempt to reveal the ‘anarchist idea’, an idea that can only be grasped by looking closely at the problem of authority. It is this that we turn to now, before examining the historical origins of anarchism, both in general terms – in terms of the climate that gave rise to it – and in textual terms – in terms of the seminal writings in which it gained original expression. This textual dimension of our philosophical study is significant, for anarchism is not a mere temperament associated with a number of more or less peculiar individuals, but a position articulated with some sophistication by a number of significant philosophers in some outstanding theoretical works.

53 David Miller, p. 182. For a critical review of Miller’s book by an anarchist, see John P. Clark’s review in *Social Anarchism*, 6 (1986–87): 51–53.

54 Miller, ‘Preface’ (unnumbered page) and p. 3.