

# **Demanding the Impossible**

**A History of Anarchism**

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# Introduction

ANARCHY IS TERROR, the creed of bomb-throwing desperadoes wishing to pull down civilization. Anarchy is chaos, when law and order collapse and the destructive passions of man run riot. Anarchy is nihilism, the abandonment of all moral values and the twilight of reason. This is the spectre of anarchy that haunts the judge's bench and the government cabinet. In the popular imagination, in our everyday language, anarchy is associated with destruction and disobedience but also with relaxation and freedom. The anarchist finds good company, it seems, with the vandal, iconoclast, savage, brute, ruffian, hornet, viper, ogre, ghoul, wild beast, fiend, harpy and siren.<sup>1</sup> He has been immortalized for posterity in Joseph Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent* (1907) as a fanatic intent on bringing down governments and civilized society.

Not surprisingly, anarchism has had a bad press. It is usual to dismiss its ideal of pure liberty at best as utopian, at worst, as a dangerous chimera. Anarchists are dismissed as subversive madmen, inflexible extremists, dangerous terrorists on the one hand, or as naive dreamers and gentle saints on the other. President Theodore Roosevelt declared at the end of the nineteenth century: 'Anarchism is a crime against the whole human race and all mankind should band against anarchists.'<sup>2</sup>

In fact, only a tiny minority of anarchists have practised terror as a revolutionary strategy, and then chiefly in the 1890s when there was a spate of spectacular bombings and political assassinations during a period of complete despair. Although often associated with violence, historically anarchism has been far less violent than other political creeds, and appears as a feeble youth pushed out of the way by the inarching hordes of fascists and authoritarian communists. It has no monopoly on violence, and compared to nationalists, populists, and monarchists has been comparatively peaceful. Moreover, a tradition which encompasses such thoughtful and peaceable men as Godwin, Proudhon, Kropotkin, and Tolstoy can hardly be dismissed as inherently terroristic and nihilistic. Of the classic anarchist thinkers, only Bakunin celebrated the poetry of destruction in his early work, and that because like many thinkers and artists he felt it was first necessary to destroy the old in order to create the new.

The dominant language and culture in a society tend to reflect the values and ideas of those in power. Anarchists more than most have been victims of the tyranny of fixed meanings, and have been caught up in what Thomas Paine called the 'Bastille of the word'. But it is easy to see why rulers should fear anarchy and wish to label anarchists as destructive fanatics for they question the very foundations of their rule. The word 'anarchy' comes from the ancient Greek *ἀναρχία* meaning the condition of being 'without a leader' but usually translated and interpreted as 'without a ruler'. From the beginning, it made sense for rulers to tell their subjects that without their rule there would be tumult and mayhem; as Yeats wrote: 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.'<sup>3</sup> In the same way, upholders of law argued that a state of 'lawlessness' would mean turmoil, licence and violence. Governments with known laws are therefore necessary to maintain order and calm.

But it became increasingly clear to bold and independent reasoners that while States and governments were theoretically intended to prevent injustice, they had in fact only perpetuated oppression and inequality. The State with its coercive apparatus of law, courts, prisons and army came to be seen not as the remedy for but rather the principal cause of social disorder. Such unorthodox thinkers went still further to make the outlandish suggestion that a society without rulers would not fall into a condition of chaotic unruliness, but might produce the most desirable form of ordered human existence.

The 'state of nature', or society without government, need not after all be Hobbes' nightmare of permanent war of all against all, but rather a condition of peaceful and productive living. Indeed, it would seem closer to Locke's state of nature in which people live together in a state of 'perfect freedom to order their actions', within the bounds of the law of nature, and live 'according to reason, without a common superior on earth, with authority to judge between them'.<sup>4</sup> Anarchists merely reject Locke's suggestion that in such a condition the enjoyment of life and property would be necessarily uncertain or inconvenient. For this reason, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the first self-styled anarchist, writing in the nineteenth century, launched the apparent paradox: 'Anarchy is Order.' Its revolutionary import has echoed ever since, filling rulers with fear, since they might be made obsolete, and inspiring the dispossessed and the thoughtful with hope, since they can imagine a time when they might be free to govern themselves.

The historic anarchist movement reached its highest point to date in two of the major revolutions of the twentieth century – the Russian and the Spanish. In the Russian Revolution, anarchists tried to give real meaning to the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets', and in many parts, particularly in the Ukraine, they established free communes. But as the Bolsheviks concentrated their power, the anarchists began to lose ground. Trotsky, as head of the Red Army, crushed the anarchist movement led by Nestor Makhno in the Ukraine, and then put down the last great libertarian uprising of sailors and workers known as the Kronstadt Mutiny in 1921.

By far the greatest anarchist experiment took place in Spain in the 1930s. At the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, peasants, especially in Andalucía, Aragón and Valencia, set up with fervour a network of collectives in thousands of villages. In Catalunya, the most highly developed industrial part of Spain, anarchists managed the industries through workers' collectives based on the principles of self-management. George Orwell has left a remarkable account of the revolutionary atmosphere in his *Homage to Catalonia* (1938). But the intervention of fascist Italy and Germany on the side of Franco and his rebels, and the policy of the Soviet Union to funnel its limited supply of arms through the Communists, meant that the experiment was doomed. Communists and anarchists fought each other in Barcelona in 1937, and Franco triumphed soon after. Millions of Spanish anarchists went underground or lost their way.

The Second World War which followed shattered the international anarchist movement, and the most dedicated were reduced to running small magazines and recording past glories. Only Gandhi's strategy of civil disobedience used to oust the British from India and his vision of a decentralized society based on autonomous villages seemed to show a libertarian glimmer. When George Woodcock wrote his history of anarchism at the beginning of the 1960s, he sadly concluded that the anarchist movement was a lost cause and that the anarchist ideal could principally help us 'to judge our condition and see our aims'.<sup>5</sup> The historian James Joll also struck an elegiac note soon after and announced the failure of anarchism as 'a serious political and social force', while the sociologist Irving Horowitz argued that it was 'foredoomed to failure'.<sup>6</sup>

Events soon proved them wrong. Anarchism as a volcano of values and ideas was dormant, not extinct. The sixties saw a remarkable revival, although in an unprecedented and more diffuse form. Many of the themes of the New Left — decentralization, workers' control, participatory democracy — were central anarchist concerns. Thoughtful Marxists like E. P. Thompson began to call themselves 'libertarian' socialists in order to distance themselves from the authoritarian tactics of vanguard parties. The growth of the counter-culture, based on individuality, community, and joy, expressed a profound anarchist sensibility, if not a self-conscious knowledge. Once again, it became realistic to demand the impossible.

Tired of the impersonality of monolithic institutions, the hollow trickery of careerist politics, and the grey monotony of work, disaffected middle-class youth raised the black flag of anarchy in London, Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, Chicago, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, and Tokyo. In 1968 the student rebellions were of libertarian inspiration. In Paris street posters declared paradoxically 'Be realistic: Demand the impossible', 'It is forbidden to forbid' and 'Imagination is seizing power'. The Situationists called for a thorough transformation of everyday life. The Provos and the Kabouters in Holland carried on the tradition of creative confrontation. The spontaneous uprisings and confrontations at this time showed how vulnerable modern centralized States could be.

The historians took note. Daniel Guérin's lively *L'Anarchisme: de la doctrine à l'action* (1965) both reflected and helped develop the growing libertarian sensibility of the 1960s: it became a best-seller and was translated into many languages. Guérin concluded that it might well be State communism, and not anarchism, which was out of step with the needs of the contemporary world, and felt his prediction fully vindicated by the events of 1968 in Prague and Paris.<sup>7</sup> Joll was obliged to acknowledge that anarchism was still a living tradition and not merely of psychological or historical interest.<sup>8</sup> Woodcock too confessed that he had been too hasty in pronouncing anarchism to be moribund. Indeed, far from being in its death throes, it had become 'a phoenix in an awakening desert'.<sup>9</sup>

The hoped-for transformation of everyday life did not occur in the seventies, but the anarchist influence continued to reveal itself in the many experiments in communal living in Europe and North America which attempted to create free zones within the Corporate State. The movement for workers' control and self-management echoed the principles of early anarcho-syndicalism. The peace and women's movements have all been impressed by the anarchist critique of domination and hierarchy, and have adopted to different degrees the anarchist emphasis on direct action and participatory democracy. The Green movement is anarchist in its desire to decentralize the economy and to dissolve personal and political power. Anarchists are influential in the fields of education, trade unions, community planning and culture. The recent trend towards more militarized, centralized and secretive governments has created a counter-movement of people who challenge authority and insist on thinking for themselves.

In the remaining authoritarian socialist regimes, there is a widespread demand for more self-determination and fundamental freedoms. In the independent republics of the former Soviet Union, the role of the State is once again back on the agenda, and young radicals are reading Bakunin and Kropotkin for the first time. Before the tanks rolled in, the student-inspired demonstrations in China in May 1989 showed the creative possibilities of non-violent direct action and led to calls for autonomous unions and self-management on anarchist lines.

In the West, many on the Right have also turned to anarchist thinkers for inspiration. A new movement in favour of 'anarcho-capitalism' has emerged which would like to deregulate the

economy and eradicate governmental interference. Although in practice they did the opposite, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in Britain tried ‘to roll back the frontiers of the State’, while in the USA President Ronald Reagan wanted to be remembered principally for getting ‘government off people’s backs’. The Libertarian Party, which pushes these ideas further, became the third largest party in the United States in the 1980s.

It is the express aim of this book to show that there is a profound anarchist tradition which offers many ideas and values that are relevant to contemporary problems and issues. It is not intended, like many studies of anarchism, to be a disguised form of propaganda, attacking Marxist and liberal critics alike, in order simply to establish the historical importance and relevance of anarchism. Nor does it offer, as David Miller’s recent work does, an account of anarchism as an ideology, that is to say, as a comprehensive doctrine expressing the interests of a social group.<sup>10</sup>

*Demanding the Impossible* is primarily a critical history of anarchist ideas and movements, tracing their origins and development from ancient civilizations to the present day. It looks at specific thinkers but it does not consider their works merely as self-contained texts. It tries to place the thinkers and their works in their specific historical and personal context as well as in their broader traditions.

Where one begins and who one includes in such a study is of course debatable. It could be argued that a study of anarchism should begin with Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the first self-styled anarchist, and be confined only to those subsequent thinkers who called themselves anarchists. Such a study would presumably exclude Godwin, who is usually considered the first great anarchist thinker, as well as Tolstoy, who was reluctant to call himself an anarchist because of the word’s violent associations in his day. It would also restrict itself to certain periods of the lives of key individual thinkers: Proudhon, for instance, lapsed from anarchism towards the end of his life, and Bakunin and Kropotkin only took up the anarchist banner in their maturity. In general, I define an anarchist as one who rejects all forms of external government and the State and believes that society and individuals would function well without them. A libertarian on the other hand is one who takes liberty to be a supreme value and would like to limit the powers of government to a minimum compatible with security. The line between anarchist and libertarian is thin, and in the past the terms have often been used interchangeably. But while all anarchists are libertarians, not all libertarians are anarchists. Even so, they are members of the same clan, share the same ancestors and bear resemblances. They also sometimes form creative unions.

I have followed in this study the example of Kropotkin who, in his famous article on anarchism for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1910), traced the anarchist ‘tendency’ as far back as Lao Tzu in the ancient world.<sup>11</sup> I am keen to establish the legitimate claims of an anarchist tradition since anarchism did not suddenly appear in the nineteenth century only when someone decided to call himself an anarchist. I would also like to uncover what Murray Bookchin has called a ‘legacy of freedom’ and to reconstruct a strand of libertarian thinking which has been covered or disguised by the dominant authoritarian culture in the past.<sup>12</sup> I have primarily restricted myself to thinkers; poets like Shelley and novelists like Franz Kafka, B. Traven and Ursula K. LeGuin who express a profound anarchist sensibility have been reluctantly left out; and the rich vein of anarchist art is only touched upon.<sup>13</sup> I have been chiefly motivated in my choice to show the range and depth of anarchist philosophy and to dispel the popular prejudice that the anarchist tradition has not produced any thinkers of the first order.

*Demanding the Impossible* is therefore intended as a history of anarchist thought and action. While it attempts to place thinkers and ideas in their historical and social context, the emphasis

will be on the development of anarchism as a rich, profound and original body of ideas and values. It should therefore be of both historical and philosophical interest. It is not written with any propagandist intentions, but my own sympathies will no doubt shine through.

A study of anarchism will show that the drive for freedom is not only a central part of our collective experience but responds to a deeply felt human need. Freedom is necessary for original thought and creativity. It is also a natural desire for we can see that no animal likes to be caged and all conscious beings enjoy the free satisfaction of their desires. Anarchism further seeks in social life what appears to operate in nature: the call for self-management in society mirrors the self-regulation and self-organization of nature itself.

Anarchism has been dismissed by its opponents as puerile and absurd. Authoritarian Marxists echo Lenin and dismiss it with other forms of 'left-wing' communism as an 'infantile disorder'.<sup>14</sup> In this respect, they find company with orthodox Freudians who believe that civilization can only exist on the basis of severe repression of instinctual drives. Anarchists, it is suggested, project on to the State all the hatred they felt for parental authority. A serious moral and social philosophy is thus reduced to a badly resolved parricide wish or dismissed as a form of therapy for an infantile neurosis. It is further claimed that anarchism lacks philosophical rigour and that its appeal is fundamentally emotional. If these criticisms were accurate, it would be difficult to explain why some of the best minds of the twentieth century, such as Bertrand Russell and Noam Chomsky, have taken anarchist philosophy so seriously, even if they have not unreservedly endorsed its conclusions. It would also prove hard to account for the widespread influence of anarchism as a social movement in the past, especially in Spain, if it did not offer a rational and meaningful response to specific historical conditions. Far from being utopian or atavistic, anarchism grapples directly with the problems faced by individuals and communities in advanced industrial societies as well as in predominantly agricultural ones. The continued appeal of anarchism can probably be attributed to its enduring affinity with both the rational and emotional impulses lying deep within us. It is an attitude, a way of life as well as a social philosophy. It presents a telling analysis of existing institutions and practices, and at the same time offers the prospect of a radically transformed society. Above all, it holds up the bewitching ideal of personal and social freedom, both in the negative sense of being free from all external restraint and imposed authority, and in the positive sense of being free to celebrate the full harmony of being. Whatever its future success as a historical movement, anarchism will remain a fundamental part of human experience, for the drive for freedom is one of our deepest needs and the vision of a free society is one of our oldest dreams. Neither can ever be fully repressed; both will outlive all rulers and their States.

# **PART ONE: Anarchism in Theory**

To be governed is to be watched over, inspected, spied on, directed, legislated, regimented, closed in, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, assessed, evaluated, censored, commanded; all by creatures that have neither the right, nor wisdom, nor virtue ... To be governed means that at every move, operation, or transaction one is noted, registered, entered in a census, taxed, stamped, priced, assessed, patented, licensed, authorized, recommended, admonished, prevented, reformed, set right, corrected. Government means to be subjected to tribute, trained, ransomed, exploited, monopolized, extorted, pressured, mystified, robbed; all in the name of public utility and the general good. Then, at the first sign of resistance or word of complaint, one is repressed, fined, despised, vexed, pursued, hustled, beaten up, garroted, imprisoned, shot, machine-gunned, judged, sentenced, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed, and to cap it all, ridiculed, mocked, outraged, and dishonoured. That is government, that is its justice and its morality!

PIERRE – JOSEPH PROUDHON

Man is truly free only among equally free men.

MICHAEL BAKUNIN

Every State is a despotism, be the despot one or many.

MAX STIRNER

# The River of Anarchy

ANARCHY IS USUALLY DEFINED as a society without government, and anarchism as the social philosophy which aims at its realization. The word 'anarchy' comes from the ancient Greek word in which *an* meant 'without' and *archos* meant first a military 'leader' then 'ruler'. In medieval Latin, the word became *anarchia*. During the early Middle Ages this was used to describe God as being 'without a beginning'; only later did it recapture its earlier Greek political definition. Today it has come to describe the condition of a people living without any constituted authority or government. From the beginning, anarchy has denoted both the negative sense of unruliness which leads to disorder and chaos, and the positive sense of a free society in which rule is no longer necessary.

It would be misleading to offer a neat definition of anarchism, since by its very nature it is anti-dogmatic. It does not offer a fixed body of doctrine based on one particular world-view. It is a complex and subtle philosophy, embracing many different currents of thought and strategy. Indeed, anarchism is like a river with many currents and eddies, constantly changing and being refreshed by new surges but always moving towards the wide ocean of freedom.

While there are many different currents in anarchism, anarchists do share certain basic assumptions and central themes. If you dive into an anarchist philosophy, you generally find a particular view of human nature, a critique of the existing order, a vision of a free society, and a way to achieve it. All anarchists reject the legitimacy of external government and of the State, and condemn imposed political authority, hierarchy and domination. They seek to establish the condition of anarchy, that is to say, a decentralized and self-regulating society consisting of a federation of voluntary associations of free and equal individuals. The ultimate goal of anarchism is to create a free society which allows all human beings to realize their full potential.

Anarchism was born of a moral protest against oppression and injustice. The very first human societies saw a constant struggle between those who wanted to rule and those who refused to be ruled or to rule in turn. The first anarchist was the first person who felt the oppression of another and rebelled against it. He or she not only asserted the right to think independently but challenged authority, whatsoever form it took. As a recognizable trend in human history, the thread of anarchism, in thought and deed, may be traced back several thousands of years. Kropotkin once observed that 'throughout the history of our civilization, two traditions, two opposing tendencies have confronted each other: the Roman and the Popular; the imperial and the federalist; the authoritarian and the libertarian.'<sup>1</sup> Anarchism is part of the latter tradition. It is a tradition opposed to domination, a tradition which sees the self-governing community as the norm and the drive to create authoritarian and hierarchical institutions as an aberration.

Anarchism began to take shape wherever people demanded to govern themselves in the face of power-seeking minorities — whether magicians, priests, conquerors, soldiers, chiefs or rulers. Throughout recorded history, the anarchist spirit can be seen emerging in the clan, tribe, village community, independent city, guild and union.

The anarchist sensibility made its first appearance amongst the Taoists of ancient China, and has been with us ever since. It is clearly present in classical Greek thought. During the Christian era, its message found direct political expression in the great peasants' revolts of the Middle Ages. The factions of the extreme Left which flourished during the English Revolution, especially the Diggers and the Ranters, were deeply imbued with its spirit. Equally, it was to infuse the lively town meetings in the New England of the seventeenth century.

Nevertheless, these manifestations are, strictly speaking, part of the prehistory of anarchism. It required the collapse of feudalism in order for anarchism to develop as a coherent ideology, an ideology which combined the Renaissance's growing sense of individualism with the Enlightenment's belief in social progress. It emerged at the end of the eighteenth century in its modern form as a response partly to the rise of centralized States and nationalism, and partly to industrialization and capitalism. Anarchism thus took up the dual challenge of overthrowing both Capital and the State. But it soon had to struggle on two fronts, against the existing order of State and Church as well as against authoritarian tendencies within the emerging socialist movement.

It was of course the French Revolution which set the parameters for many of the arguments and struggles which preoccupied the Left during the nineteenth century. Anarchist sentiments and organization can be seen in the districts and municipalities during the Revolution. But the term 'anarchist' was still used as a term of abuse by the Jacobins and the Girondins when attacking the extreme sans culottes and the enragés who advocated federalism and the abolition of government. The real father of anarchism is to be found on the other side of the Channel. It was William Godwin who gave the first clear statement of anarchist principles, looking forward eagerly to the dissolution of that 'brute engine' of political government.<sup>2</sup>

The nineteenth century witnessed a great flood of anarchist theory and the development of an anarchist movement. The German philosopher Max Stirner elaborated an uncompromising form of individualism, firmly rejecting both government and the State. The first person deliberately to call himself an anarchist was the Frenchman Pierre-Joseph Proudhon; he insisted that only a society without artificial government could restore natural order: 'Just as man seeks justice in equality, society seeks order in anarchy.'<sup>3</sup> He launched the great slogans 'Anarchy is Order' and 'Property is Theft'.

The Russian revolutionary Michael Bakunin described anarchism as 'Proudhonism broadly developed and pushed to its extreme consequences'.<sup>4</sup> He popularized the term 'anarchy', exploiting the two associations of the word: with the widespread discord of revolutionary upheaval, and with the stable social order of freedom and solidarity which would follow. Providing a charismatic example of anarchy in action, Bakunin also helped forge the identity of the modern anarchist movement.

His aristocratic compatriot Peter Kropotkin tried, in the latter half of the century, to make anarchism more convincing by developing it into a systematic social philosophy based on scientific principles. He further refined Bakunin's collectivism — which had looked to distribute wealth according to work accomplished — by giving it a more communistic gloss. Reacting against Kropotkin's mechanistic approach, the Italian Errico Malatesta brought about a major shift by emphasizing the importance of the will in social struggle. During this period Benjamin R. Tucker in America also took up Proudhon's economic theories but adopted an extreme individualist stance.

Although Tolstoy did not publicly call himself an anarchist because of that tide's associations with violence, he developed an anarchist critique of the State and property based on the teachings

of Christ. As a result, he helped develop an influential pacifist tradition within the anarchist movement.

In the twentieth century, Emma Goldman added an important feminist dimension, while more recently Murray Bookchin has linked anarchism with social ecology in a striking way. More recent anarchist thinkers have, however, been primarily concerned with the application of anarchist ideas and values. The Russian Revolution and the Spanish Republic both proved great testing-grounds for anarchism before the Second World War. After it, the flood of anarchy subsided, but it did not disappear; the demographic complexion of the movement merely became more middle-class, and, since the sixties, the New Left, the counter-culture, the peace, feminist and Green movements have all taken up many central anarchist themes.

But while anarchism is a broad river, it is possible to discern a number of distinctive currents. What principally divides the family of anarchists is their different views of human nature, strategy and future organization. The mainstream is occupied by the social anarchists, but the individualists form an important part of the flow. Amongst the social anarchists, there are mutualists, collectivists, communists, and syndicalists who differ mainly on the issue of economic organization. Some may be grouped according to their ideas, like the spiritual and philosophical anarchists; others according to their strategies, like the pacifist anarchists.

The social anarchists and individualists often work together but bear differing emphases. The individualists see the danger of obligatory cooperation and are worried that a collectivist society will lead to the tyranny of the group. On the other hand, the social anarchists are concerned that a society of individualists might become atomistic and that the spirit of competition could destroy mutual aid and general solidarity. Such differences do not prevent both wings coming together in the notion of communal individuality, which attempts to achieve a maximum degree of personal freedom without destroying the community.

The boundaries between the different currents of anarchism are not clear-cut; indeed they often flow into each other. Mutualism, collectivism, communism, and syndicalism might well exist side by side within the same society, as different associations and districts experiment with what best meets their specific wants and demands. No anarchist would be comfortable laying down an incontrovertible blueprint for future generations. Spiritual anarchists see humans as primarily spiritual beings capable of managing themselves without the curb of external government. Most of them reject man-made laws in favour of a prior obligation to natural law or the law of God; some go even further to insist that in a state of grace no law, whether human or divine, is applicable. They generally assume that human impulses are fundamentally good and beneficent. Spiritual anarchism is not linked to any particular creed or sect, but its adherents all reject organized religion and the hierarchical church.

Like Tolstoy and Gandhi, many spiritual anarchists subscribe to pacifist beliefs. Pacifist anarchists refuse to use physical violence even to repel violence. They see the State and government as the ultimate expressions of organized violence, agreeing, with Randolph Bourne, that 'War is the Health of the State'. In their vocabulary, the State stands for legalized aggression, war mass murder, conscription slavery, and the soldier a hired assassin. They argue that it is impossible to bring about a peaceful and free society by the use of violence since means inevitably influence the nature of ends. It therefore follows, as Bart de Ligt argued, 'the greater the violence, the less revolution'.<sup>5</sup> The preferred tactics of the pacifist anarchists are non-violent direct action, passive resistance and civil disobedience; they engage in strikes, boycotts, demonstrations and occupations.

Philosophical anarchism has often been despised by militants, although clearly any action executed without thought is just an arbitrary jerk. All anarchists are philosophical in a general sense, but it is usual to call those thinkers philosophical anarchists who have reached anarchist conclusions in their search for universal principles without engaging in any practical activity. While the philosophical anarchists like Godwin have tended to stay aloof from direct action, the great anarchist thinkers of the nineteenth century — Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin — were actively involved in promoting the application of their distinctive strain of anarchism.

Proudhonism was the first current in anarchism to emerge (in Europe from the 1840s on) as an identifiable social movement, with federalism as the means of organization, mutualism as the economic principle and anarchy as the goal. The indispensable premiss of mutualism was that society should be organized, without the intervention of a State, by individuals who are able to make free contracts with each other. To replace the existing State and Capital, mutualists proposed, and tried to create, a co-operative society, comprising individuals who exchange the necessities of life on the basis of labour value and obtain free credit through a people's bank. Individuals and small groups would still possess their instruments of labour, and receive the produce thereof. Associations based on *mutualité* (reciprocity) would ensure that exchange took place in the proper fashion by employing a system of labour notes valued according to the average working time it took to make a product.

On a larger scale, mutualists suggested that local communities link up in a federalist system. Society would thus become a vast federation of workers' associations and communes co-ordinated by councils at the local, regional, national and international level. Unlike parliaments, the members of the councils would be delegates, not representatives, without any executive authority and subject to instant recall. The councils themselves would have no central authority, and consist of co-ordinating bodies with a minimal secretariat. Mutualism was not only taken up by members of the first International Working Men's Association (IWMA); many revolutionaries in the Paris Commune of 1871 called themselves mutualists. Since it made no direct attack on the class system, mutualism tended to appeal to craftsmen and artisans, shopkeepers and small farmers, who valued their independence rather more than did the industrial working class.

It was not long before delegates within the federalist wing of the IWMA developed Proudhon's mutualist economic doctrine towards collectivism. Bakunin used the term for the first time at the Second Congress of the League of Peace and Liberty at Bern in 1868. Collectivists believed that the State should be dismantled and the economy organized on the basis of common ownership and control by associations of producers. They wished to restrict private property only to the product of individual labour, but argued that there should be common ownership of the land and all other means of production.

Collectivists in general look to a free federation of associations of producers and consumers to organize production and distribution. They uphold the socialist principle: 'From each according to his ability, to each according to work done.' This form of anarchist collectivism appealed to peasants as well as workers in the labour movement who wanted to create a free society without any transitional revolutionary government or dictatorship. For a long time after Bakunin, nearly all the Spanish anarchists were collectivists.

After the demise of the First International in the 1870s the European anarchist movement took a communist direction. At first the distinction between communism and collectivism was not always readily apparent; 'collective socialism' was even used as a synonym for 'non-authoritarian communism'. Nevertheless, anarchist communists came to believe, like Kropotkin, that the prod-

ucts of labour as well as the instruments of production should be held in common. Since the work of each is entwined with the work of all, it is virtually impossible to calculate the exact value of any person's labour. Anarchist communists therefore conclude that the whole society should manage the economy while the price and wage system should be done away with.

Where collectivists see the workers' collective as the basic unit of society, communists look to the commune composed of the whole population — consumers as well as producers — as the fundamental association. They adopt as their definition of economic justice the principle: 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their need.' In a free communist society, they are confident that drudgery could be transformed into meaningful work and that there could be relative abundance for all. Economic relations would at last express the natural human sympathies of solidarity and mutual aid and release spontaneous altruism. Anarchist communists hold a different view of human nature from the individualists, stressing that man is a social being who can only realize his full potential in society. Where the individualists talk about the sovereignty of the individual and personal autonomy, the communists stress the need for solidarity and co-operation. The proper relationship between people, they argue, is not one of self-interest, however enlightened, but of sympathy.

Anarcho-syndicalism shares their concern with mutual aid. Its roots may be traced to the First International which insisted that the emancipation of the workers must be the task of the workers themselves. But it developed, as a recognizable trend, out of the revolutionary trade union movement at the end of the last century, especially in France, where workers reacted against the methods of authoritarian socialism and adopted the anarchist rejection of parliamentary politics and the State. Syndicalism in general redirected the impulses of the advocates of 'propaganda by the deed' and took over many of the most positive ideas of anarchism about a free and equal society without government and the State.

The advocates of anarcho-syndicalism take the view that trade unions or labour syndicates should not only be concerned with improving the conditions and wages of their members, although this is an important part of their activity. They should take on a more positive role and have an educational as well as social function; they should become the 'most fruitful germs of a future society, the elementary school of Socialism in general'.<sup>6</sup> By developing within the shell of the old society, the syndicates should therefore establish institutions of self-management so that when the revolution comes through a general strike the workers will be prepared to undertake the necessary social transformation. The syndicates should in this way be considered the means of revolution as well as a model of the future society.

The most constructive phase of syndicalism was from 1894 to 1914, especially in France and Italy; anarcho-syndicalists also played a significant part in the Russian Revolution. After the First World War, however, anarcho-syndicalism began to lose its way, except in Spain and to a lesser extent in Latin America. It tended to flourish in countries where the labour movement was not well-organized and the class struggle was sharp and bitter. The international movement however regrouped at a Congress in Berlin, Germany, in 1922. It called itself the International Working Men's Association and in its declaration of principles asserted:

Revolutionary Syndicalism is the confirmed enemy of every form of economic and social monopoly, and aims at its abolition by means of economic communes and administrative organs of field and factory workers on the basis of a free system of councils, entirely liberated from subordination to any government or political party.

Against the politics of the State and parties it erects the economic organization of labour; against the government of men, it sets up the management of things. Consequently, it has for its object, not the conquest of political power, but the abolition of every State function in social life.

Its aims were to be put to the test in the last remaining bastion of anarcho-syndicalism in Spain during the Spanish Revolution, when the syndicates took over the industries in Catalunya and demonstrated that they were capable of running them on efficient and productive lines.

Despite its historical importance, many anarchists have argued that anarcho-syndicalism with its emphasis on class struggle has too narrow a vision of a free society. On the one hand, it concentrates on problems of work and can easily become entangled in day-to-day struggles for better wages and conditions like any other union. On the other hand, it places a utopian confidence in the general strike as inaugurating the social revolution. Above all, it is principally concerned with the liberation of producers and not the whole of society.

Individualist anarchism is the most self-regarding form of anarchism. Socially, the individualists conceive society not as an organic whole but as a collection of separate and sovereign individuals. Morally, they celebrate individuality as the supreme value, and are fearful of the individual submerging himself or herself in the community. Economically, they want each person to have the free disposal of the products of his or her labour.

Individualist anarchism comes closest to classical liberalism, sharing its concepts of private property and economic exchange, as well as its definitions of freedom as the absence of restraint, and justice as the reward of merit. Indeed, the individualist develops the liberal concept of the sovereignty of the individual to such an extent that it becomes incompatible with any form of government or State. Each person is considered to have an inviolable sphere which embraces both his body and his property. Any interference with this private sphere is deemed an invasion: the State with its coercive apparatus of taxation, conscription, and law is the supreme invader. Individuals may thus be said to encounter each other as sovereign on their own territory, regulating their affairs through voluntary contracts.

Anarcho-capitalism is a recent current which has developed out of individualist anarchism. It wishes to dismantle government while retaining private property and to allow complete *laissez-faire* in the economy. Its adherents stress the sovereignty of the individual and reject all governmental interference in everyday life. They propose that government services be turned over to private entrepreneurs. Even the symbolic spaces of the public realm like town halls, streets and parks would be made into private property. Radical libertarianism has recently had a considerable vogue in the USA, where the Libertarian Party has taken up many of its ideas, and in Great Britain where the right wing of the Conservative Party talk its language. While all anarchists are individualist to some degree in that they do not want to be ruled by others, collectivists and communists maintain that social problems cannot be solved on an individual basis or by the invisible hand of the market. In order to change existing society and establish an equitable replacement, it is necessary, they argue, to combine with others and work together.

In recent times, the various currents of anarchism have flown closer together. There are genuine differences between those who are strict pacifists and those who would allow a minimal use of violence to achieve their common goal. Militants are often critical of the more philosophically inclined, and communists keep reminding the individualists of the importance of solidarity. But the different currents have not split off into different streams or hardened into sects. The concept

of 'anarchism without adjectives' is being discussed again in the context of creating a broad front to face the challenges of the third millennium.

Except for a few diehard fanatics, most anarchists would see the various currents as expressing a different emphasis rather than an unbridgeable chasm. Indeed, some would find it quite acceptable to call themselves individualists in everyday life, syndicalists in wanting self-management at work, and communists in looking forward to a society in which goods are shared in common. For all the different philosophical assumptions, strategies and social recommendations, anarchists are united in their search for a free society without the State and government. They all flow in the broad river of anarchy towards the great sea of freedom.

# Society and the State

ANARCHISTS MAKE A CLEAR distinction between society and the State. While they value society as a sum of voluntary associations, they reject the State as a particular body intended to maintain a compulsory scheme of legal order.<sup>1</sup> Most anarchists have depicted the State as an extraneous burden placed on society which can be thrown off, although more recently some, like Gustav Landauer, have stressed that the State is a certain relationship between human beings and overlaps society.

## Society

Society for anarchists is, as Thomas Paine wrote, invariably 'a blessing', the repository of all what is good in humanity: co-operation, mutual aid, sympathy, solidarity, initiative, and spontaneity.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore quite misleading, as Daniel Guérin has done, to suggest that the anarchist 'rejects society as a whole'.<sup>3</sup> Only the extreme individualist Stirner attacks society as well as the State, and even he calls for an association or 'union of egoists' so that people can achieve their ends together. Godwin may have considered society only as an 'aggregate of individuals', but he speaks on behalf of most anarchists when he asserts that 'The most desirable condition of the human species, is a state of society.'<sup>4</sup>

Anarchists argue that the State is a recent development in human social and political organization, and that for most of history human beings have organized themselves in society without government and law in a peaceful and productive way. Indeed, in many societies social order exists in inverse proportion to the development of the State.

Pure anarchy in the sense of a society with no concentration of force and no social controls has probably never existed. Stateless societies and peasant societies employ sanctions of approval and disapproval, the offer of reciprocity and the threat of its withdrawal, as instruments of social control. But modern anthropology confirms that in organic or 'primitive' societies there is a limited concentration of force. If authority exists, it is delegated and rarely imposed, and in many societies no relation of command and obedience is in force.

Ever since man emerged as homo sapiens, he has been living in stateless communities which fall roughly into three groups: acephalous societies, in which there is scarcely any political specialization and no formal leadership (though some individuals have prestige); chiefdoms, in which the chief has no control of concentrated force and whose hereditary prestige is largely dependent on generosity; and big-man systems, in which the charismatic big man collects his dues for the benefit of society. Anthropologists have described many different types of indigenous anarchies. They vary from gardeners to pastoralists, small groups like pygmies and Inuits in marginal areas to vast tribes like the Tiv in Nigeria or the Santals in East India.<sup>5</sup> But while human beings have been living in such communities for forty or fifty thousand years, they have nearly all been absorbed or destroyed by states in the last couple of centuries.

Many of these organic societies are quite libertarian but some are characterized by ageism and sexism. They often have strong collective moral and religious systems which make people conform. Powerful moral and social pressures as well as supernatural sanctions are brought to bear on any anti-social behaviour. Yet for all their limitations, they show that the Hobbesian nightmare of universal war in a 'state of nature' is a myth. A society without hierarchy in the form of rulers and leaders is not a utopian dream but an integral part of collective human experience. Anarchists wish to combine the ancient patterns of co-operation and mutual aid of these organic societies with a modern sense of individuality and personal autonomy.

Apart from extreme individualists, anarchists thus see society as the natural condition of human beings which brings out the best in them. They consider society to be a self-regulating order which develops best when least interfered with. When asked what would replace government, numerous anarchists have answered 'What do you replace cancer with?' Proudhon was more specific and replied 'Nothing':

Society is eternal motion; it does not have to be wound up; and it is not necessary to beat time for it. It carries its own pendulum and its ever-wound-up spring within it. An organized society needs laws as little as legislators. Laws are to society what cobwebs are to a beehive; they only serve to catch the bees.<sup>6</sup>

Anarchists thus believe that existing religious and political institutions are for the most part irrational and unnatural and prevent an orderly social life. Left to its own devices, society will find its own beneficial and creative course. Social order can prevail in the fundamental sense of providing security of persons and property.

This fundamental distinction between society and the State is held by liberal as well as anarchist thinkers. Locke depicted men in a state of nature as free and equal and regulated by the law of nature from which natural rights are derived. His notion of natural order existing independently of the State provides the theoretical grounds for the classic liberal defence of laissez-faire. He only differed from the anarchists in thinking that life in a state of nature could be uncertain and inconvenient without known laws and a limited government to protect the natural rights to life, liberty and property. Anarchists agree with Locke that humanity has always lived in society but argue that government simply exasperates potential social conflict rather than offering a cure for it.

Anarchists therefore believe that people can live together in peace and freedom and trust. The social anarchists look towards natural solidarity to encourage voluntary co-operation, while the individualists consider it possible to regulate affairs through voluntary contracts based on rational self-interest. Even those few anarchists like Sébastien Faure who see a struggle for survival in the state of nature believe that without laws, masters and repression, the 'horrible struggle for life' can be replaced by 'fertile agreement'.<sup>7</sup> There is therefore simply no need for the night-watchman State of the liberal, let alone for the roaring Leviathan of authoritarian communists and fascists. Natural order can spontaneously prevail.

## **Natural Order**

A fundamental assumption of anarchism is that nature flourishes best if left to itself. A Taoist allegory goes:

Horses live on dry land, eat grass and drink. When pleased, they rub their necks together. When angry, they turn round and kick up their heels at each other. Thus far only do their natural dispositions carry them. But bridled and bitted, with a plate of metal on their foreheads, they learn to cast vicious looks, to turn the head to bite, to resist, to get the bit out of the mouth, or the bridle into it. And thus their natures become depraved.<sup>8</sup>

The same might be said of human beings. It is interfering, dominating rulers who upset the natural harmony and balance of things. It is only when they try to work against the grain, to block the natural flow of energy, that trouble emerges in society. The anarchist confidence in the advantages of freedom, of letting alone, is thus grounded in a kind of cosmic optimism. Without the interference of human beings, natural laws will ensure that spontaneous order will emerge.

In their concept of nature, anarchists tend to see the natural ground of society not in a historical sense of 'things as they now are or have become', *natura naturata*, but in a philosophical sense of 'things as they may become', *natura naturans*. Like Heraclitus, they do not regard nature as a fixed state but more as a dynamic process: you never put your foot in the same river twice. Where conservative thinkers believe that nature is best expressed in 'things as they are', that is, what history has produced so far, progressive thinkers look to nature to fulfil its potential. Most anarchists believe that the best way to bring about improvement is to let nature pursue its own beneficent course.

This confidence in the beneficence of nature first emerges amongst the Taoists in ancient China. The early Greeks, especially the Stoics, also felt that if human beings lived in conformity with nature, all would be well. By the time of the Middle Ages, nature came to be perceived in terms of a Great Chain of Being, composed of an infinite number of continuous links ranging in hierarchical order from the lowest form of being to the highest form — the Absolute Being or God. Woodcock has suggested that in their view of man's place in the world, anarchists believed in a modified version of the Great Chain of Being.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the conception of the universe as a Chain of Being, and the principles which underline this conception — plenitude, continuity, and gradation — were deeply conservative. Moreover, the hierarchical cosmogony of the Chain of Being, with its gradations from beast to angels with man in the middle, reflected the social hierarchy of the period. In the eighteenth century, it led to the belief that there could be no improvement in the organization of society and to Pope's conclusion that 'whatever is, is right'.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, it was only towards the end of the eighteenth century when the static notion of a Chain of Being was temporalized and replaced by a more evolutionary view of nature that progressive thinkers began to appeal to nature as a touchstone to illustrate the shortcomings of modern civilization. The primitivist Rousseau reacted against the artificiality of European civilization by suggesting that we should develop a more natural way of living. The natural goodness of man had been depraved by government and political institutions; it was therefore necessarily to create them anew in order to let the natural man flourish.

There is undoubtedly a strong strand of primitivism in anarchist thought. It takes both a chronological form, in the belief that the best period of history was before the foundation of the State, and a cultural form, in the idea that the acquisitions of modern civilization are evil. These beliefs can combine in a celebration of the simplicity and gentleness of what is imagined to be the primitive life. Most anarchists however do not look back to some alleged lost golden age, but forward to a new era of self-conscious freedom. They are therefore both primitivist and

progressive, drawing inspiration from a happier way of life in the past and anticipating a new and better one in the future.

This comes clearly through in the work of Godwin, the first to give a clear statement of anarchist principles at the end of the eighteenth century. He saw nature in terms of *natura naturans*, things as they may become. He never lost his confidence in the possibility of moral and social progress. Even when an atheist, he believed that truth is omnipotent and universal. In his old age, he began to talk of some mysterious and beneficent power which sustains and gives harmony to the whole universe. Proudhon also believed in universal natural law and felt that there was an immanent sense of justice deep within man: 'he carries within himself the principles of a moral code that goes beyond the individual ... They constitute his essence and the essence of society itself. They are the characteristic mould of the human soul, daily refined and perfected through social relations.'<sup>11</sup>

Bakunin looked at nature and society in a more dialectical way and saw change occurring through the reconciliation of opposites: 'the harmony of natural forces appears only as the result of a continual struggle, which is the real condition of life and of movement. In nature, as in society as well, order without struggle is death.' Nature itself only acts in an unconscious way according to natural laws. Nevertheless, universal order exists in nature and society. Even man with his powers of reasoning is 'the material product of the union and action of natural forces'.<sup>12</sup>

Kropotkin not only felt, like Proudhon, that the moral sense is innate but that nature evolves principally through mutual aid to higher and more complex forms. Malatesta questioned Kropotkin's excessive optimism and suggested that anarchy is 'the struggle, in human society, against the disharmonies of Nature'. But even though he felt that 'natural man is in a continuous state of conflict with his fellows', he believed social solidarity and harmony were possible.<sup>13</sup> Modern theorists like Murray Bookchin and John Clark follow Kropotkin's lead in trying to link anarchism with ecology, and to show that the ecological principles of unity in diversity and of harmony through complexity apply to a free society.

All anarchists thus believe that without the artificial restrictions of the State and government, without the coercion of imposed authority, a harmony of interests amongst human beings will emerge. Even the most ardent of individualists are confident that if people follow their own interests in a clear-sighted way they would be able to form unions to minimize conflict. Anarchists, whatever their persuasion, believe in spontaneous order. Given common needs, they are confident that human beings can organize themselves and create a social order which will prove far more effective and beneficial than any imposed by authority.<sup>14</sup> Liberty, as Proudhon observed, is the mother, not the daughter of order.

But while all anarchists call for the dissolution of the State and believe that social order will eventually prevail, they base their confidence on different premisses and models.<sup>15</sup> Individualists like Stirner and Tucker developed Adam Smith's economic vision in which a hidden hand will translate private interest into general good and promote a coincidence of interests. Since economic activity involves countless decisions and operations it cannot be successfully regulated or directed by one individual or a group of individuals. It should therefore be left to itself and a system of self-regulating economic harmony would result. In Saint-Simon's celebrated phrase, the 'administration of things' would eventually replace 'the government of men'. Godwin based his model of a harmonious free society on the reign of reason in accordance with universal moral laws. Through education and enlightenment, people would become more rational and recognize universal truth and their common interests and act accordingly. All would listen to the voice

of truth. Proudhon felt that people were necessarily dependent on each other and would gain from co-ordinating voluntarily their economic interests. Bakunin believed that conscience and reason were sufficient to govern humanity, although he was enough of a Hegelian to depict human consciousness and society developing through history in a dialectical way. Only popular spontaneous organizations could meet the growing diversity of needs and interests.

Both Kropotkin and Tolstoy based their vision of social harmony on their observations of tribal organizations and peasant villages. They were impressed by the way in which such communities arranged their lives without law and government according to custom and voluntary agreement. At the same time, Kropotkin tried to ground anarchism in the scientific study of society and natural history and to demonstrate that it was a rational philosophy which sought to live in accordance with natural and social laws. Human beings, he argued, had evolved natural instincts of sympathy and co-operation which were repressed or distorted in authoritarian and capitalist States. In the spontaneous order of a free society, they would re-emerge and be strengthened.

## **State and Government**

The State did not appear until about 5500 years ago in Egypt. While great empires like those of the Chinese and Romans ebbed and flowed, with no clear boundaries on their outer limits, most of the world's population continued to live in clans or tribes. Their conduct was regulated by customs and taboos; they had no laws, political administration, courts, or police to maintain order and cohesion.

The State emerged with economic inequality. It was only when a society was able to produce a surplus which could be appropriated by a few that private property and class relations developed. When the rich called on the support of the shaman and the warrior, the State as an association claiming supreme authority in a given area began to emerge. Laws were made to protect private property and enforced by a special group of armed men. The State was thus founded on social conflict, not, as Locke imagined, by rational men of goodwill who made a social contract in order to set up a government to make life more certain and convenient.

Kropotkin in his study of the origins of the State argues that the Roman Empire was a State, but that the Greek cities and the medieval city republics were not. In European nations, he argues, the State barely dates from the sixteenth century when it took over the free towns and their federations. It resulted from a 'Triple-Alliance' of lords, lawyers and priests who dominated society.<sup>16</sup> They were later joined by the capitalists who continued to strengthen and centralize the State and crush free initiative. The people in the mean time were persuaded to co-operate with the process and grew accustomed to voluntary servitude.

Most anarchists would accept this version of history in general terms. While society is invariably a blessing, they accept that the State is an artificial superstructure separate from society. It is an instrument of oppression, and one of the principal causes of social evil. They therefore reject the idealist view put forward by Rousseau that the State can express the General Will of the people. They will have none of the Hegelian mysticism which tries to see the State as the expression of the spirit of a nation. They do not believe that it forms a moral being or a body politic which is somehow greater than the sum of its parts. They look through its mystifying ceremony and ritual which veil its naked power. They question its appeals to patriotism and democracy to

justify the rule of the ruling minority. They do not even accept the liberal contention that the State can be considered a centre of sympathy and co-operation in certain areas.

On the other hand, anarchists have no trouble in accepting Max Weber's definition of the State as a body which claims the monopoly of legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. It uses its monopoly of force, through the army and police, to defend itself against foreign invasion and internal dissension. As the supreme authority within a given territory, it claims the sole legitimate right to command its citizens and to be obeyed.

Anarchists also agree with socialists that the State is invariably controlled by the rich and powerful and that its legislation is inevitably made in the interests of the dominant elite. Godwin saw, like Marx, that the rich are always 'directly or indirectly the legislators of the state' and that government perpetuated the economic inequality in society. Kropotkin argued that the State has always been both in ancient and modern history 'the instrument for establishing monopolies in favour of ruling minorities'.<sup>17</sup> With the abolition of the State, anarchists assume that greater equality will eventually be achieved but they propose widely different economic systems, ranging from *laissez-faire* based on private property to voluntary communism. There is of course a difference between the State and government. Within a given territory, the State remains while governments come and go. The government is that body within the State which claims legitimate authority to make laws; it also directs and controls the State apparatus. It follows certain procedures for obtaining and using power, based in a constitution or on custom. Tucker defined the State as a 'monopoly of government' in a particular area, and government as an 'invasion of the individual's private sphere'.<sup>18</sup>

Most anarchists however use the terms State and government loosely as if they were synonymous for the repository of political authority in society. While all anarchists are opposed to the State, a few are ready to allow government in an attenuated form in a transitional period. Godwin, at a time when Nation-States in Europe were beginning to take on their modern form, wrote mainly about the evils of government. He argued that men associated at first for the sake of mutual assistance, but the 'errors and the perverseness of the few' led to the need for restraint in the form of government. But while government was intended to suppress injustice, its effect had been to perpetuate it by concentrating the force of the community and aggravating the inequality of property. Once established, governments impede the dynamic creativity and spontaneity of the people:

They 'lay their hand on the spring there is in society, and put a stop to its motion'. Their tendency is to perpetuate abuse. Whatever was once thought right and useful they undertake to entail to the latest posterity. They reverse the general propensities of man, and instead of suffering us to proceed, teach us to look backward for perfection. They prompt us to seek the public welfare, not in alteration and improvement, but in a timid reverence for the decisions of our ancestors, as if it were the nature of the human mind always to degenerate, and never to advance.<sup>19</sup>

The individualist Stirner, on the other hand, focused on the State as the cause of evil. 'Every State is a despotism, be the despot one or many.'<sup>20</sup> Its one purpose is to limit, control and subordinate the individual. Not all anarchists are as consistent as Godwin and Stirner. Proudhon asserted that the government of man by man is servitude, but he paradoxically defined anarchy as the absence of a ruler or a sovereign as a 'form of government'. In a late work on federalism,

he even saw a positive role for the State 'as a prime mover and overall director' in society.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, he acknowledged that 'anarchical government' is a contradiction in terms and left one of the most damning descriptions of government and bureaucracy ever made:

To be governed is to be watched over, inspected, spied on, directed, legislated, regimented, closed in, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, assessed, evaluated, censored, commanded; all by creatures that have neither the right, nor wisdom, nor virtue ... To be governed means that at every move, operation, or transaction one is noted, registered, entered in a census, taxed, stamped, priced, assessed, patented, licensed, authorized, recommended, admonished, prevented, reformed, set right, corrected. Government means to be subjected to tribute, trained, ransomed, exploited, monopolized, extorted, pressured, mystified, robbed; all in the name of public utility and the general good. Then, at the first sign of resistance or word of complaint, one is repressed, fined, despised, vexed, pursued, hustled, beaten up, garroted, imprisoned, shot, machine-gunned, judged, sentenced, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed, and to cap it all, ridiculed, mocked, outraged, and dishonoured. That is government, that is its justice and its morality!<sup>22</sup>

Bakunin reserved some of his finest rhetoric for his condemnation of the State for crushing the spontaneous life of society. But he too was not always consistent. In the First International, Bakunin and his supporters allowed the terms 'regenerate State', 'new and revolutionary State', or even 'socialist State' to stand as synonyms for 'social collective'. But aware of the ambiguity which could be exploited by the authoritarian socialists and Marxists, they went on to propose *fédération* or *solidarisation* of communes as a more accurate description of what they wanted to see to replace the existing State. In his speech at the Basel Congress of 1869, Bakunin thus made clear that he was voting for the collectivization of social wealth by which he meant 'the expropriation of all who are now proprietors, by the abolition of the juridical and political State which is the sanction and sole guarantor of property as it now is'. As to the subsequent form of organization, he favoured the *solidarisation* of communes because such *solidarisation* entails the 'organization of society from the bottom up'.<sup>23</sup>

The practice amongst some anarchists to confuse the government and the State appears most clearly in Malatesta. In his pamphlet *Anarchy* (1891), he defined the State as

the sum total of political, legislative, judiciary, military and financial institutions through which the management of their affairs, the control over their personal behaviour, the responsibility for their personal safety, are taken away from the people and entrusted to others who, by usurpation or delegation, are vested with the powers to make the laws for everything and everybody, and to oblige the people to observe them, if need be, by the use of collective force.

But he added that in this sense the word State means government, or to put it another way, it is 'the impersonal, abstract expression of that state of affairs personified by government'. Since the word State is often used to describe a particular human collectivity gathered in a particular territory, and to mean the supreme administration of a country, he preferred to replace the expression 'abolition of the State' with the 'clearer and more concrete term abolition of government'.<sup>24</sup>

Kropotkin was concerned about abolishing both the government and the State. He defined anarchism as the 'No government system of socialism' and as 'a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government'.<sup>25</sup> In his work on the origins of *The State* (1897), Kropotkin distinguished between the State and government. He does not consider all governments to be equally bad for he praises the medieval cities and their governmental institutions, with their assemblies, elected judges, and military force subordinate to the civil authority. But when the State emerged it not only included the existence of a power situated above society like the government but also a 'territorial concentration and a concentration of many or even all functions of society in the hands of a few'. It implies some new relationships between members of society which did not exist before the formation of the State. It had been the historical mission of the State 'to prevent the direct association among men, to shackle the development of local and individual initiative, to crush existing liberties, to prevent their new blossoming — all this in order to subject the masses to the will of minorities'.<sup>26</sup>

This century the anarchist critique of the State has become more sophisticated. Gustav Landauer has suggested that 'the State is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently'. Only when people make the existing connection between them a bond in an organic community can the legal order of the State be made obsolete.<sup>27</sup> More recently, Murray Bookchin has argued persuasively that the State is not merely a constellation of bureaucratic and coercive institutions but also a state of mind, 'an instilled mentality for ordering reality'. In liberal democracies this century, its capacity for brute force has been limited, but it continues to have a powerful psychological influence by creating a sense of awe and powerlessness in its subjects. Indeed, it has become increasingly difficult to fix its boundaries and the line between the State and society has become so blurred that now 'the State is a hybridization of political with social institutions, of coercive with distributive functions, of highly punitive with regulatory procedures, and finally of class with administrative needs'.<sup>28</sup>

## **Liberal Democracy**

It is on the issue of the State that anarchists part company with their liberal and socialist allies. Liberals maintain that a State as a compulsory legal order is necessary to protect civil liberties and rights, to deal with disputes and conflicts in society with an unfettered economy. As the liberal thinker L. T. Hobhouse wrote:

The function of State coercion is to override individual coercion, and, of course, coercion exercised by any association of individuals within the State. It is by this means that it maintains liberty of expression, security of person and property, genuine freedom of contract, the rights of public meeting and association, and finally its own power to carry out common objects undefeated by the recalcitrance of individual members.<sup>29</sup>

Anarchists argue, on the other hand, that even the most minimal 'nightwatchman' State advocated by modern libertarians would be controlled by the rich and powerful and be used to defend their interests and privileges. However much it claims to protect individual rights, the government will always become 'an instrument in the hands of the ruling classes to maintain power

over the people'.<sup>30</sup> Rather than providing healthy stability, it prevents positive change; instead of imposing order, it creates conflict; where it tries to foster enterprise, it destroys initiative. It claims to bring about security, but it only increases anxiety.

Although anarchists feel that representative democracy is preferable to monarchy, aristocracy or despotism, they still consider it to be essentially oppressive. They rebut the twin pillars of the democratic theory of the State — representation and majority rule. In the first place, no one can truly represent anyone else and it is impossible to delegate one's authority. Secondly, the majority has no more right to dictate to the minority, even a minority of one, than the minority to the majority. To decide upon truth by the casting up of votes, Godwin wrote, is a 'flagrant insult to all reason and justice'.<sup>31</sup> The idea that the government can control the individual and his property simply because it reflects the will of the majority is therefore plainly unjust.

Anarchists also reject the liberal theory of a social contract beloved by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. No government, in their view, can have power over any individual who refuses his consent and it is absurd to expect someone to give his consent individually to all the laws. The American individualist Lysander Spooner exploded the contractual theory of the State by analysing the US Constitution. He could find no evidence of anyone ever making a contract to set up a government, and argued that it was absurd to look to the practice of voting or paying taxes as evidence of tacit consent. 'It is plain', he concluded, 'that on the general principles of law and reason ... the Constitution is no contract; that it binds nobody, and never did anybody; and that all those who pretend to act by its authority ... are mere usurpers, and that every body not only has the right, but is morally bound, to treat them as such.'<sup>32</sup>

Not all anarchists share the same view of contracts amongst individuals. Godwin rejected all forms of contract since they usually result in past folly governing future wisdom. If an action is right, it should be performed; if not, avoided. There is no need for the additional obligation of a contract. On the other hand, both Proudhon and Kropotkin looked to contracts in the form of voluntary agreements to regulate affairs between people in an anarchist society without the State. But since such contracts are not legally enforceable and carry no sanctions, they are more like declarations of intent than binding contracts in the conventional sense. The only reason why people would keep them is the pragmatic one that if an individual habitually broke his contracts, he would soon find few people to enter into agreement with him.

Anarchists have few illusions about the nature of liberal democracy and representative government. When Proudhon entered briefly the National Assembly during the 1848 Revolution, it confirmed what he had long suspected: 'As soon as I set foot in the parliamentary Sinai, I ceased to be in touch with the masses. Fear of the people is the sickness of all those who belong to authority; the people, for those in power, are the enemy.'<sup>33</sup> Henceforth he declared 'Universal Suffrage is the Counter-Revolution' and insisted that the struggle should take place in the economic and not the political arena. Bakunin never entered a parliament as a representative or joined a political party. From the beginning he was well aware that 'Whoever talks of political power, talks of domination' and insisted that 'All political organization is destined to end in the negation of freedom.'<sup>34</sup> Although during the Spanish Civil War anarchists did participate for a short while in the republican government in order to fight Franco's rebels, the historic anarchist movement has consistently preached abstention from conventional politics. Hence the popular slogans: 'Whoever you vote for, the government always gets in', or better still, 'If voting changed anything, they'd make it illegal'.

As a result of the social struggles of the last two centuries, the modern liberal State has of course been obliged to provide welfare and education for its citizens. Some anarchists like Nicolas Walter have suggested that not all State institutions are wholly bad since they can have a useful function when they challenge the use of authority by other institutions and when they promote certain desirable social activities: ‘Thus we have the liberatory state and the welfare state, the state working for freedom and the state working for equality.’<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, the principal role of the State has always been to limit freedom and maintain inequality. Although it may have a benevolent face, the Welfare State can be restrictive by intensifying its grip on the lives of its subjects through registration, regulation and supervision. It creates a surly and overblown bureaucracy. It can, as George Woodcock has argued, become ‘just as ingenious a means of repression and regimentation as any more overtly totalitarian system’.<sup>36</sup> It singularly fails to make people happy, and by offering a spurious security it undermines the practice of mutual aid. It tends to be wasteful by not directing resources to those most in need. Instead of paying taxes to the State which then decides who is in need, anarchists prefer to help directly the disadvantaged by voluntary acts of giving or by participating in community organizations.

The same arguments against the liberal State apply to the socialist State, only more so. Anarchists reject the claim made by democratic socialists that the State is the best means of redistributing wealth and providing welfare. In practice, the socialist State tends to spawn a vast bureaucracy which stifles the life of the community. It creates a new elite of bureaucrats who often administer in their own interest rather than in the interest of those they are meant to serve. It encourages dependency and conformity by threatening to withdraw its aid or by rewarding those its favours. By undermining voluntary associations and the practice of mutual aid, it eventually turns society into a lonely crowd buttressed by the social worker and policeman. Only if social democrats adopt a libertarian and decentralized form of socialism can anarchists join them in their endeavours and encourage them to adopt the principles of voluntary federation and association.

## **The Marxist State**

At first sight, anarchists and Marxists would seem to have much in common. Both criticize existing States as protecting the interests of the privileged and wealthy. Both share a common vision of a free and equal society as the ultimate ideal. But it is with Marxist-Leninists that anarchists have encountered the greatest disagreement over the role of the State in society. The issue led to the great dispute between Marx and Bakunin in the nineteenth century which eventually led to the demise of the First International Working Men’s Association.

In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Engels argued like Kropotkin that the State had emerged recently in human history as an apparatus of rule separate from society: ‘The state, then, has not existed from all eternity. There have been societies that did without it, that had no idea of the state and state power.’ It had developed only with the division of society into classes and became a coercive machine for maintaining the rule of one class over another. The capitalist State provided liberty only for those who owned property and subjection for the rest — workers and peasants. Engels however was confident that his generation was approaching

a stage in the development of production when classes and the State would inevitably fall. When that time comes

Society, which will reorganise production on the basis of a free and equal association of the producers, will put the whole machinery of the state where it will then belong: into the museum of antiquities, by the side of the spinning-wheel and the bronze axe.<sup>37</sup>

Although Marx and Engels felt it was necessary for the proletariat to take over the State to hold down their adversaries and to reorganize production, they both looked forward to a time when the proletariat would abolish its supremacy as a class and society would become ‘an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all’.<sup>38</sup> It was Engels’s contention in his *Anti-Dühring* that the interference of the State becomes superfluous in one sphere after another so that the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things. In the process, ‘The state is not “abolished”, it withers away.’<sup>39</sup>

Engels however still insisted on the need for a State in a transitional period of socialism before communist society could be established. While Bakunin and the anarchists claimed the direct democracy of the Paris Commune provided a model of a free society, Engels argued that

The anarchists put the thing upside down. They declare that the proletarian revolution must begin by doing away with the political organization of the state ... But to destroy it at such a moment would be to destroy the only organism by means of which the victorious proletariat can assert its newly conquered power, hold down its capitalist adversaries, and carry out that economic revolution of society ...<sup>40</sup>

Lenin developed Marx’s and Engels’s view of the State. As a general principle, he declared that ‘we Marxists are opposed to all and every kind of State’.<sup>41</sup> In his pamphlet *The State and Revolution*, written in August 1917 on the eve of the Bolshevik seizure of power, Lenin gave ‘the most idyllic, semi-anarchist account’ of the proletarian revolution, describing how the State could begin to wither away immediately after its victory.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Lenin considered the issue of the State to be of the utmost importance in the coming revolution. In his commentary on Plekhanov’s pamphlet *Anarchism and Socialism* (1894), he criticizes Plekhanov for contriving completely to ignore ‘the most urgent, burning, and politically most essential issue in the struggle against anarchism, viz., the relation of the revolution to the state, and the question of the state in general!’<sup>43</sup> He further differed from Engels who believed that a factory is necessarily authoritarian in its organization, by maintaining that it would be possible under communism to operate modern industrialized society without the need for compulsion or narrow specialization.

But Marxists and anarchists disagree profoundly over the means of realizing this desirable state of affairs. Marx suggested the need for the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ in a transitional socialist period and it has since become a central part of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. Yet the difference between anarchists and Marxists is more than simply a question of tactics. It also involves substantial theoretical differences. Marx’s dispute with Bakunin did have an important historical dimension, but it was fired by theoretical considerations as well. He attacked Stirner in *The German Ideology* and Proudhon in *The Poverty of Philosophy* for their failure to appreciate dialectical materialism. Where Marx tried to reverse Hegel’s position and give primacy to the

capitalist economy over the bourgeois State, many anarchists persisted in seeing the State as a determining influence over the economy. Rather than recognizing the need to wait for economic conditions to develop before abolishing the State, some placed their confidence in the creative power of revolutionary will. Marx also opposed the anarchists' rejection of imposed authority; he was keen to alter the form of authority in a communist society but did not seek to abolish the principle of authority altogether. He thought it was not only necessary to seize State power in order to defend the revolution but also to develop new kinds of social control of the productive forces.

The anarchists failed in Marx's eyes to develop a coherent class analysis, either by taking an individualist position like Stirner, by adopting a 'petty-bourgeois' approach like Proudhon in his defence of the peasantry, or by having an 'opportunist' and 'voluntarist' faith like Bakunin in the creative energies of the undefined 'people' and the 'lumpenproletariat'. There is of course some substance to this criticism. Unlike Marxists, anarchists do not have a specific class base. They recognize the differences in power and wealth between the rich and poor, and align themselves with the 'people', and stress the role of different classes at different times. Proudhon started his career mainly concerned with the peasantry only to finish up considering favourably the political capacity of the working class. Bakunin sometimes used the rhetoric of the 'working class' and the 'proletariat' but when he specified who the revolutionary workers were, they turned out to be the less-educated urban proletarians and the peasants. Although he felt, like Marx, that the proletarians would lead the revolution, he went out of his way to stress the revolutionary potential of the peasantry. In addition, he looked to the dispossessed and disinherited to rise up since they had nothing to lose but their chains.

Above all, Marx criticized the anarchists for struggling on the economic and cultural level only and failing to grasp the need for the working class to conquer political power. Politics even in its parliamentary form could be progressive for Marx; he even entertained the view that it was possible to use political means in order to go beyond conventional politics. In his 'Instructions' to the Geneva Congress of the International, he argued against the Proudhonists that the working class could win reforms through 'general laws, enforced by the power of the state' and 'in enforcing such laws, the working class do not fortify government power. On the contrary, they transform that power, now used against them, into their own agency'.<sup>44</sup> Referring to Bakunin, he declared contemptuously: 'this ass cannot even understand that any class movement, as such, is necessarily and always has been, a political movement'.<sup>45</sup> In particular, he condemned Bakunin for believing that 'The will, and not economic conditions, is the foundation of social revolution.'<sup>46</sup> In his dealings with Stirner, Proudhon and Bakunin, Marx certainly emerges 'at his least appealing and at his most hectoring and heavy-handed'.<sup>47</sup> He not only revealed the authoritarian tendency of his own social and political thought, but also the authoritarian nature of his own personality. Moreover, his anti-anarchist manoeuvres which led to the demise of the First International ensured that future Internationals in the control of Marxists would become rigid and monolithic and that Marxism itself would harden into a dogmatic creed which brooked no dissent.

Lenin more than any one else helped contribute to this process. He took issue with the anarchists primarily on the role of the State in the revolution. He argued that they went wrong not in wanting to abolish the State, but in wanting to abolish it overnight. Lenin felt it was essential to 'smash' the inherited bureaucratic military State machine. But this did not mean doing away with State power altogether since it was necessary for the proletariat to use it during its dictatorship in a transitional period. Like Marx, Lenin believed in 'democratic centralism'; it was

therefore necessary to strengthen and centralize the State power in order to oppose counter-revolutionary forces and ‘to crush the resistance of the bourgeoisie’.<sup>48</sup> Lenin has been accused of hypocrisy in his call for the withering away of the State immediately before his seizure of power in Russia.<sup>49</sup> Certainly after the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917, he proceeded to undermine the power of the Soviets and establish a hierarchical and centralized structure of command by the ‘vanguard’ Communist Party. In his work *‘Left-Wing’ Communism, An Infantile Disorder* (1920), he proceeded to castigate anarchists and socialist revolutionaries for their immature ‘opportunism’ in wanting to abolish the State immediately on the morrow of the revolution. He narrated how Bolshevism became ‘steeled’ in its struggle against ‘petty-bourgeois revolutionism which smacks of, or borrows something from, anarchism’ and which easily goes to revolutionary extremes but is ‘incapable of perseverance, organization, discipline and steadfastness’. Indeed, he declared that anarchism was ‘not infrequently a sort of punishment for the opportunist sins of the working-class movement’. He found to his dismay that certain sections of the Industrial Workers of the World and anarcho-syndicalist trends in Russia continued to uphold the ‘errors of Left-Wing Communism’ for all their admiration of the Soviet system.<sup>50</sup>

Yet despite his centralizing and strengthening of the State and his liquidation of the anarchist opposition, Lenin still firmly believed that the withering away of the State was the final goal of communism. In a lecture on the State, he insisted that while it was necessary to place the machine (or ‘bludgeon’) of the State in the hands of the class that is to overthrow the power of capital, he looked to a time when they ‘shall consign this machine to the scrap heap. Then there will be no state and no exploitation’.<sup>51</sup>

Whatever Lenin’s ultimate ideal, his reliance on a vanguard Communist Party to steer the ‘Dictatorship of the Proletariat’ led eventually not only to the dictatorship of the Party but also to the dictatorship of one man – Stalin – in the Soviet Union. Moreover, in the other major Marxist-Leninist revolutions this century, in China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba, ‘democratic centralism’ has resulted in practice in highly hierarchical and authoritarian States controlled by an elitist party. The dire warnings of Bakunin that a ‘Workers’ State’ would lead to a new ‘red bourgeoisie’ have been tragically confirmed. The Communist States that have emerged this century amply demonstrate the anarchists’ fear that a ‘People’s State’ or ‘Revolutionary Government’ would not only perpetuate but extend tyranny.

## Law

The anarchists like liberals see the State as primarily a legal association and law as its mode of action.<sup>52</sup> It is designed to maintain a compulsory degree of legal order. Its principal bodies – the legislature, judiciary, and executive – are responsible for making, interpreting and enforcing the law. Strictly speaking, a law is a rule of conduct made by government and enforced by the State.

Tolstoy describes laws vividly as ‘rules, made by people who govern by means of organized violence, for non-compliance with which the non-compliant is subjected to blows, to loss of liberty, or even to being murdered’.<sup>53</sup> Laws restrict our liberty by making us act or refrain from acting regardless of our wishes; they stand like high hedges, keeping us on the straight and narrow. The methods used by the State to enforce its laws are those of compulsion: the ultimate power of the law is the coercive power of the State. As Hobbes recognized, the authority of Leviathan is ultimately based on the sword – or its modern equivalent, the policeman’s cosh

or the soldier's gun. Indeed, as Tolstoy observed, the characteristic feature of government is that 'it claims a moral right to inflict physical penalties, and by its decree to make murder a good action'.<sup>54</sup> Since they reject the State, it is therefore inevitable that anarchists reject its most coercive expression in the law; in the words of Jean Grave, 'anarchy demonstrates that there cannot be any good laws, nor good governments, nor faithful applications of the law ... all human law is arbitrary.'<sup>55</sup>

Of all anarchists, Godwin was the earliest and most trenchant critic of law. In the first place, he argued that man-made law is unnecessary since 'immutable reason is the true legislator'. Men can do no more than declare and interpret the rules of universal justice as perceived by reason. Secondly, the principal weakness of law is its status as a general rule. No two actions are the same and yet the law absurdly tries to reduce the myriad of human actions to one common measure, and as such operates like Procrustes' bed in the Greek legend which cuts or stretches whoever lays on it. Thirdly, law is inevitably made in the interest of the lawmakers and as such is a 'venal compact by which superior tyrants have purchased the countenance and alliance of the inferior'.<sup>56</sup> Above all, like government it fixes the human mind in a stagnant condition and prevents that unceasing progress which is its natural tendency.

Godwin was certain that the punishment — the voluntary infliction of evil on a vicious being — threatened or imposed by law is not an appropriate way to reform human conduct. Since men are products of their environment, they cannot strictly speaking be held responsible for what they do: an assassin is no more guilty of the crime he commits than the dagger he holds. Since they are in the grip of circumstances, they do not have free will. There can therefore be no moral justification in punishment, whether it be for retribution, example or reform. All punishment is 'a tacit confession of imbecility'; indeed, it is worse than the original crime since it uses force where rational persuasion is enough. Coercion cannot convince or create respect; it can only sour the mind and alienate the person against whom it is used.

Godwin was convinced that law, like government, is not only harmful but unnecessary. His remedy for anti-social acts was to reduce the occasion for crime by eradicating its causes in government and accumulated property and by encouraging people through education to think in terms of the general good rather than private interest. Since vice is principally error, enlightenment will be enough to make people virtuous. Godwin is realistic enough to recognize that even in a free society it may be necessary to restrain violent people on a temporary basis, but they should always be treated kindly and kept within the community as far as possible. Instead of resorting to courts and professional lawyers, disputes could be solved by popular juries who consider the specific circumstances of each case: 'There is no maxim more clear than this, "Every case is a rule to itself"'.<sup>57</sup> The aim should always be to resolve conflict rather than apportion blame. Eventually, Godwin believed, it would only be necessary to recommend rather than enforce the decisions of juries. In place of law, the power of public opinion would suffice to check anti-social acts. And once the 'rules of justice' were properly understood by the community, then laws would become unnecessary.

After Godwin, Kropotkin offered the most cogent anarchist criticism of the law. All legislation within the State, he asserted, has always been made with regard to the interests of the privileged classes. He traced the origins of law first to primitive superstitions, and then to the decrees of conquerors. Originally human relations were regulated by customs and usages, but the dominant minority used law to make immutable those customs which were to their advantage. Law thus

made its appearance 'under the sanction of the priest, and the warrior's club was placed at its service'.<sup>58</sup>

Kropotkin divided the millions of laws which exist to regulate humanity into three main categories: the protection of property, the protection of governments, the protection of persons. The first is intended to appropriate the product of the worker's labour or to deal with quarrels between monopolists; as such they have no other object than to protect the unjust appropriation of human labour. The second category, constitutional law, is intended to maintain the administrative machine which almost entirely serves to protect the interests of the possessing classes. The third category, the protection of persons, is the most important since such laws are considered indispensable to the maintenance of security in European societies. These laws developed from the nucleus of customs which were useful to human communities, but since they have been adopted by rulers to sanctify their domination they have become as useless and injurious as the other categories of law.

Kropotkin argued that the main supports for crime are idleness, law and authority. But since about two-thirds of existing crimes are crimes against property, 'they will disappear, or be limited to a quite trifling amount, when property which is now the privilege of a few, shall return to its real source — the community'.<sup>59</sup> For those people who will still be anti-social and violent, Kropotkin insists that punishment is not appropriate since the severity of punishment does not diminish the amount of crime. Talking from his own experience of Russian and French prisons, he condemned prisons for killing physical energy, destroying the individual will, and encouraging society to treat the liberated prisoner as 'something plague-stricken'.<sup>60</sup> It is not possible to improve prisons. The more prisons are reformed, the more detestable they become: modern penitentiaries are far worse than the dungeons of the Middle Ages. The best cure for anti-social tendencies is to be found in human sympathy. Kropotkin concludes:

Peoples without political organization, and therefore less depraved than ourselves, have perfectly understood that the man who is called 'criminal' is simply unfortunate; that the remedy is not to flog him, to chain him up, or to kill him on the scaffold or in prison, but to help him by the most brotherly care, by treatment based on equality, but the usages of life amongst honest men.<sup>61</sup>

Anarchists assume that there would be a greater harmony of interests amongst individuals living in a society without government, law and unequal property. But they do not think that everyone would immediately behave in a responsible fashion and there would be no more disputes or conflicts. In place of the force of law, Godwin and Kropotkin recommended the influence of public opinion and mutual censure to reform conduct. There is of course a possibility that the tyranny of public opinion could replace the oppression of law. But while Godwin and Kropotkin allow censure as a form of social control, they insist that people should decide for themselves how they should behave.

Again, in a society where anti-social individuals are considered to be sick and in need of a cure, psychological manipulation can be more coercive and tyrannical than imprisonment. The use of psychiatry to reform dissidents has become notorious in authoritarian societies. Stirner put the problem succinctly: '*Curative means or healing is only the reverse side of punishment, the theory of cure runs parallel to the theory of punishment, if the latter sees in an action a sin against right, the former takes it for a sin of the man against himself, as a decadence from his health.*'<sup>62</sup>

With their concern for personal autonomy and individual freedom, anarchists more than any other socialists are aware of the inhumanity of both physical punishment and manipulative cure for anti-social members of the community. They look to reasoned argument and friendly treatment to deal with criminals and wish to respect their humanity and individuality.

## The Nation-State

The Nation-State has become the norm of modern political organization and the main object of citizens' loyalties. The State is considered the guardian of a nation's identity, and colonized peoples who win their independence invariably strive to set up their own Nation-State. Yet many nations exist without their own States, and many States consist of several different nations. The Nation and the State are not therefore synonymous. Nor are they necessarily desirable. From the beginning, the anarchists have questioned the legitimacy of Nation-States and strongly resisted their formation.<sup>63</sup> They have not however ignored the strong emotional pull of nationalism and patriotism, and some, notably, Proudhon and Bakunin, have succumbed to it.

Like the ancient Stoics, the anarchists have always been cosmopolitan and internationalist in outlook, and considered themselves 'citizens of the world'. In general, they have supported national liberation struggles as part of a wider struggle for freedom, but they have opposed the statist aspirations and exclusive loyalties of the nationalists. They are particularly critical of patriotism which makes the ruled identify with their rulers and become their obedient cannon-fodder. They also recognize that rivalry between Nation-States is one of the principal causes of war.

Godwin was highly critical of Rousseau and others who exhorted people to love their country and to 'sink the personal existence of individuals in the existence of the community' as if it were an abstract being. The love of our country is 'one of those specious illusions which are employed by impostors for the purpose of rendering the multitude the blind instruments of their crooked designs'. It makes us consider whatever is gained for country as so much gained to 'our darling selves'. Patriotism moreover leads to 'a spirit of hatred and all uncharitableness towards the countries around us'. In place of a narrow patriotism, Godwin taught universal benevolence: we should help the most needy and worthy, regardless of our personal connections. We should act as impartial spectators and not be swayed by the ties of family, tribe, country, or race. And since ideas of great empire and of legislative unity are plainly 'the barbarous remains of the days of military heroism', Godwin looked to a decentralized society of federated parishes to replace the Nation-State.<sup>64</sup>

Tolstoy like Godwin also rigorously condemned patriotism. He saw it inextricably linked with government. By supporting government and fostering war, he declared patriotism to be a 'rude, harmful, disgraceful, and bad feeling, and above all, immoral' since it influences man to see himself the 'son of his fatherland and the slave of his Government, and commit actions contrary to his reason and his conscience'.<sup>65</sup> He felt that if people could understand that they are not the sons of some fatherland or other, nor of Governments, but the sons of God, they would be neither slaves nor enemies to each other.

Not all anarchists however have condemned patriotism so roundly as Godwin and Tolstoy. Proudhon was undoubtedly a French nationalist. As he grew older, he not only celebrated the French revolutionary tradition but also the French people and their heritage. He was markedly

anti-Semitic. Nevertheless, he argued that federalism is the only answer to end the rivalry between nations and to dissolve empires. Like Rousseau, he felt that the larger a nation in territory or population, the greater the danger of tyranny. He therefore urged a process of decolonization, as the United States and Canada had from England, and looked to a time when Algeria would constitute itself an 'African France'.<sup>66</sup>

Bakunin was a nationalist before becoming an anarchist. He tended to harbour nationalist prejudices, celebrating the freedom-loving and spontaneous Slavs and condemning the militaristic Germans. He thought Marx was a thorough-going authoritarian partly because he was a German and a Jew. However, Bakunin's early support for Polish nationalism and Panslavism was motivated by a desire to break up the Russian empire and to set its colonized peoples free. He expressed 'strong sympathy for any national uprising against any form of oppression' and declared that every people has 'the right to be itself and no one is entitled to impose its costume, its customs, its language, its opinions, or its laws'.<sup>67</sup>

While Bakunin believed that nationalism was a 'natural fact' and that each nation had an incontestable right to free development, he did not think nationalism acceptable as a legitimate political principle because it has an exclusive tendency and lacks 'the power of universality'.<sup>68</sup> In a subtle analysis of patriotism, he distinguished three types. The first is 'natural', an 'instinctive, mechanical, uncritical attachment to the socially accepted hereditary or traditional pattern of life'. But while it is an expression of social solidarity, it exists in an inverse ratio to the evolution of humanity. The second is 'bourgeois', the object of which is to maintain the power of the Nation-State, that is 'the mainstay of all privileges of the exploiters throughout the nation'. The third is 'proletarian', the only truly acceptable form of patriotism, which ignores national differences and State boundaries and embraces the world.<sup>69</sup>

Bakunin therefore looked to a 'large, fraternal union of mankind' and extended the principle of federalism to the world as a whole. As a transition to a federation of all nations, he called for a United States of Europe as the only way of making a civil war between the different peoples in the 'European family' impossible. The 'United States' he had in mind however would not be a centralized, bureaucratic and military federation, but organized from the bottom up with member nations having the right to secession. True internationalism, he insisted, rests on self-determination: 'each individual, each association, commune, or province, each region and nation, has the absolute right to determine its own fate, to associate with others or not, to ally itself with whomever it will, or break any alliance, without regard to so-called historical claims or the convenience of its neighbour'.<sup>70</sup> Only in this way would nations cease to be the products of conquest and historical and geographical distortion. In the long run, however, Bakunin believed that the national question is secondary to the social revolution and the social revolution should become a world revolution.

Rudolf Rocker has provided the most incisive condemnation of the Nation-State in his vast study *Nationalism and Culture* (1937). For Rocker, the nation is not the origin but the product of the State: '*It is the state which creates the nation, and not the nation the state*'. The nation cannot therefore exist without the State. But he does not deny local feelings of attachment to a culture and land. He distinguishes between a people, which is the 'natural result of social union, a mutual association' brought about by a common language and particular conditions of living, and the nation, which is the 'artificial struggle for political power'.<sup>71</sup> A people always consists of a community with narrow boundaries, while a nation often encapsulates a whole array of different peoples who have by more or less violent means been pressed into the frame of a common state.

He therefore condemned nationalism for trying to create artificial barriers and disturbing the organic unity of the community.

Gustav Landauer, who was strongly influenced by Proudhon, made an interesting attempt to combine nationalism and anarchism. He contrasted like Rocker the 'Community' against the 'State'; the people in a statist society do not find themselves together in the organism of true community. Community however exists alongside and outside the State, but it has not yet been fully realized. A free community is therefore not the founding of something new, but 'the actualization and reconstitution of something that has always been present, which exists alongside the state, albeit buried and laid waste'.<sup>72</sup> It is necessary to develop this community made from the union of persons and families into various communities, and communities into associations.

The 'nationhood' of a people, according to Landauer, remains once 'Statehood' has been superseded. Nationhood consists of the closeness of people together in their way of life, language, tradition, and memories of a common fate and works to create real communal living. It follows that 'nothing but the rebirth of all peoples out of the spirit of regional community can bring salvation'.<sup>73</sup> But while Landauer wanted to revive old communal traditions and dissolve the State, his vision was not parochial. It would seem that the essential features of Rocker's concept of a 'people' are to be found in Landauer's concept of the 'nation'. The nation for Landauer is not an artificial whole but a community of communities. The individual moreover should not identify only with his nation, but see it as one ring in the widening circle of humanity.

The anarchists have thus mounted the most consistent and rigorous critique of the State, whether in its liberal, social democratic, or Marxist form. While the State may have been intended to suppress injustice and oppression, they argue that it has only aggravated them. It fosters war and national rivalries; it crushes creativity and independence. Governments, and the laws through which they impose their will, are equally unnecessary and harmful. At the same time, their confidence in natural order leads anarchists to believe that society will flourish without imposed authority and external coercion. People thrive best when least interfered with; without the State, they will be able to develop initiative, form voluntary agreements and practise mutual aid. They will be able to become fully realized individuals, combining ancient patterns of co-operation with a modern sense of individuality. The anarchist critique of the State not only questions many of the fundamental assumptions of political philosophy but challenges the authoritarian premisses of Western civilization.

# Freedom and Equality

ANARCHISM IS A PHILOSOPHY in its own right. Although as a social movement it has developed a wide variety of strands from extreme individualism to communism, all anarchists share certain common concerns. They offer a critique of the existing order, a vision of a free society, and a way of moving from one to another. Above all, they reject all coercive forms of external authority in order to achieve the greatest degree of freedom and equality. In the process they illuminate many of the fundamental principles of moral and political philosophy. While they may not always be consistent, they cannot be accused of having a naive or simplistic view of the great ideals of liberty and equality launched by the French Revolution.

It is usual to see absolute freedom as the anarchists' supreme ideal and their central commitment. Sébastien Faure wrote in the twenties: 'The anarchist doctrine may be resumed in one word: liberty'.<sup>1</sup> For Herbert Read freedom is 'the value of all values'.<sup>2</sup> Anarchists certainly see freedom as a permanent and necessary factor in the life and progress of humanity, as an intrinsic good without which it is impossible for human beings to reach their full stature. The American individualist Josiah Warren speaks for most anarchists when he writes: 'Man seeks freedom as the magnet seeks the pole or water its level, and society can have no peace until every member is really free.'<sup>3</sup>

As philosophers are only too well aware, the notion of freedom can be a conceptual labyrinth and it is important to consider its different meanings. Anarchists wish to expand human freedom in the negative sense of being free from restraint. Most anarchists also see freedom in the positive sense of being free to do what one likes and to realize one's full potential.<sup>4</sup> But freedom is always a triadic relation and involves not only freedom from something in order to do something, but also the freedom of certain agents.<sup>5</sup> In the anarchists' case, they are not concerned with the freedom of a particular class or elite, but the freedom of all human beings. They recognize that the freedom of all is the necessary condition for the freedom of each; as Bakunin declared, 'Man is truly free only among equally free men.'<sup>6</sup>

Herbert Read distinguishes between 'liberty' as a political ideal, which is expressed in social organization, and 'freedom' in which man achieves spontaneity and creativity.<sup>7</sup> While this verbal distinction is peculiar to English, most anarchists reject the Roman sense of *libertas* as popular government embodied in a republican constitution. Their principal concern is with freedom from external political authority. They do not accept like Locke that the State is necessary to protect individual liberty. They equally reject Rousseau's notion of civil liberty in which one can be legitimately forced to obey the laws one makes for oneself. They have no truck with Hegel's idealist definition of liberty as 'necessity transfigured' so that the individual somehow realizes his 'higher self in obeying the law of the State.'

On the contrary, anarchists believe that genuine freedom can only be achieved in a society without the State. They therefore embrace the traditional socialist freedoms such as freedom from want and insecurity as well as the liberal freedoms of expression, thought, assembly and movement. When they talk about economic freedom, they mean both the liberal sense of free-

dom from the economic controls of the State and the socialist sense of freedom from economic hardship. The alleged 'freedom' of the few on the other hand to exploit and to command is not a desirable form of freedom since it leads to oppression. They are thus the most coherent and consistent advocates of freedom.

Some anarchists have taken up Rabelais' motto 'Do what you will!' Faure insists that 'the man who does not do what he wants, only what pleases him and which suits him, is not free.'<sup>8</sup> But few anarchists believe that one should do what one wants whatever the consequences. Elisée Reclus sees in anarchism the 'right to act according to one's own agreement, to do "what one wants"', but adds immediately 'while associating one's will to those of other men in all collective works'.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Godwin makes a distinction between freedom and licence. He rejects the positive right to do as we please on the grounds that we have a permanent duty to contribute to general happiness. Freedom from constraint (except that of reasons presented to the understanding) is of the utmost importance, but 'moral independence' is always injurious.<sup>10</sup> We should therefore be free from political constraints, not moral constraints. Godwin's position resembles Spinoza's description of a free man as one who lives according to the dictates of reason alone. Bakunin went even further to argue that the idea of absolute independence from natural law is a 'wild absurdity', the brainchild of metaphysicians: 'absolutely self-sufficient freedom is to condemn oneself to nonexistence'.<sup>11</sup> As with Marx and Engels, freedom for Bakunin involves control over ourselves and over external nature which is founded on a knowledge of natural law.

Anarchists are not therefore immoralists asserting absolute freedom for themselves alone. They do not, like Dostoevsky's Underground Man, believe that it is right to assert one's independence whatever it may cost and wherever it may lead, or maintain that the greatest good is 'one's own free and unfettered volition, one's own caprice, however wild, one's own fancy, inflamed sometimes to the point of madness ...'<sup>12</sup> To see freedom entirely in personal terms in this way would seem to justify the kind of self-assertion which leads to the oppression or exploitation of others.

Malatesta argued for instance that the simple desire to be free to do as one pleases is not enough to make an anarchist: 'That aspiration towards unlimited freedom, if not tempered by a love for mankind and by the desire that all should enjoy equal freedom, may well create rebels who, if they are strong enough, soon become exploiters and tyrants, but never anarchists.'<sup>13</sup> Malatesta believed that men are not naturally harmonious, and that living together in society involves a limitation on freedom since we must sacrifice desires which are irreconcilable with those of others. He called for freedom as the power to do as one wishes with the important proviso that it must be 'freedom for everybody and in everything, with the only limit of the equal freedom for others'.<sup>14</sup>

Even the most extreme individualist anarchist Max Stirner does not entirely reject morality and believes voluntary co-operation with other rational egoists desirable. While refusing to accept binding moral rules imposed from without, anarchists look to some form of morality to replace political authority. Kropotkin looked to our innate moral sense as a compass in a free society, and argued that moral principles should replace man-made laws as a guide to human conduct. Even the arch-individualist Benjamin Tucker insisted on a moral code, even if he did reduce the only moral law to 'Mind your own business'.<sup>15</sup>

To adopt moral rules for oneself is not therefore inconsistent with anarchism. Government, with its laws, restricts our freedom by the threat of force, but if a person imposes rules on himself he is not being compelled but acting voluntarily. Freedom in the sense of government by reason

is quite acceptable. As Tucker wrote: 'If the individual has a right to govern himself, all external government is tyranny'.<sup>16</sup> The idea of ruling oneself rather than being ruled by others is implicit in the anarchists' advocacy of self-government and self-management. The whole thrust of the anarchist argument for social freedom is that the absence of laws would not lead to a state of moral chaos or disorder since people are capable of governing themselves. Nevertheless, they do not accept that rational freedom in the sense of governing oneself through constraints imposed from within is enforceable in any way. It is not for the community to compel one to obey the general will; anarchists will have no truck with Rousseau's pernicious paradox that it is possible to 'be forced to be free'.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, they would accept Kant's view of autonomy as self-imposed rules which have been freely chosen for oneself.

The anarchist stress on personal morality does not of course mean a commitment to past values. Kropotkin sees the value of age-old patterns of co-operation and mutual aid, but would like to combine them with a modern sense of individuality. Most anarchists call, like Nietzsche and Emma Goldman, for a transvaluation of values, a going beyond existing definitions of good and evil, to forge a new morality for a free society.<sup>18</sup> While rejecting man-made laws, all the classic anarchist thinkers except Stirner recognize the force of natural law as a way of achieving social cohesion in the absence of government and man-made laws. Godwin believed that the universe was governed by universal laws and believed that truth is always victorious over error. He was convinced that morality is independent of positive institutions; that it is 'immutably true' that whatever tends to procure a balance of happiness and pleasure is to be desired.<sup>19</sup> Proudhon too based his whole case for anarchy on the existence in nature and human nature of immanent justice which was revealed through his moral sense.

Bakunin presented himself as a 'scientific' anarchist and argued that natural law is the foundation of our liberty. He celebrated the liberty which consists in the full development of our potential, 'the liberty which recognizes no other restrictions than those which are traced for us by the laws of our own nature'. But according to Bakunin these are no real restrictions since 'these laws are not imposed on us by some outside legislator, beside us or above us; they are immanent in us, inherent, constituting the very basis of our being, material as well as intellectual and moral; instead, therefore, of finding them a limit, we must consider them as the real conditions and effective reason for our liberty.'<sup>20</sup>

Kropotkin, too, argued that anarchism should be based on the method of modern science. He believed the same laws governed nature and society, especially the law of sociability, which gave rise to a social instinct in animals and humanity and enabled them to survive in the struggle for existence and develop a moral sense. Although Malatesta criticizes the attempt to make anarchism 'scientific', since this would deny free will, he still recognized 'the great law of solidarity, which predominates in society as in nature'.<sup>21</sup> It should now be clear that anarchists do not take absolute freedom as their ideal. Given the physical and social limits we all experience, the very idea of absolute freedom is strictly speaking absurd. Without recognizable limits, a definition of freedom is empty and meaningless. Such 'freedom' if it could exist would be like the senseless and hopeless 'inviolability' which K experiences in Kafka's *The Castle* when people have broken off relationships with him and left him alone.<sup>22</sup>

It has even been questioned whether freedom is the supreme ideal of anarchists. As Malatesta wrote, since living in society necessarily involves curbing some of our desires 'freedom, in its absolute sense, could not solve the question of a happy and voluntary co-existence'.<sup>23</sup> In addition, for those who principally define freedom negatively as freedom from restraint it is difficult to see

how it can be a supreme value. Even as a necessary condition of self-development it is valued as a means, not an end. Godwin, for instance, argued that civil liberty is chiefly desirable as a means to encourage a certain type of personality: 'To be free is a circumstance of little value, if we could suppose men in a state of external freedom, without the magnanimity, energy and firmness that constitute almost all that is valuable in a state of freedom.'<sup>24</sup>

Again, the anarchists' readiness to use public opinion, censure and social pressure to reform conduct in place of law and punishment might suggest that they do not value freedom above everything else. Censure, even in the form of reasoned argument, curtails the freedom of some in an anarchist society to enable the maximum amount of freedom for all. By wishing to combine the greatest individual development with the greatest communal unity, Alan Ritter has argued that their overriding goal is 'communal individuality' and that they therefore cannot strictly speaking be called 'libertarians'; their libertarianism is 'not of direct intention, but of oblique effect'.<sup>25</sup> Freedom is thus valued more as a means than an end.

This view, while pointing to an important element in the anarchist conception of freedom, is not comprehensive enough. Stirner, Tucker and other individualist anarchists, for instance, do not see community as supporting individuality. But it does remind us that anarchists accept that liberty has physical and social limits and recognize that personal freedom is inevitably curtailed in some way by the freedom of others. For the strict individualist other people must inevitably stand as a constant threat to his or her freedom.

Afraid of those who would invade his 'sphere of discretion' and reduce him to clockwork uniformity, Godwin felt compelled to conclude that 'everything that is usually understood by the term co-operation is, in some degree, an evil.'<sup>26</sup> But the more collectivist anarchist thinkers like Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin believed that since we are social beings we can only be free to realize ourselves in the company of others. Individuality, in their case, is based on reciprocal awareness. As Proudhon put it, the individual 'recognizes his own self in that of others'.<sup>27</sup> People need not therefore be a threat but a help. Anarchists experience freedom as potentially joyous. Malatesta became an anarchist precisely because of his aspirations towards a society which reconciles 'the liberty of everyone with co-operation and love among men'. For him freedom is not an abstract right but the possibility of acting. It is the isolated individual who is powerless; it is 'by co-operation with his fellows that man finds a means to express his activity and his power of initiative'.<sup>28</sup>

While celebrating personal and social freedom as a central if not supreme ideal, anarchists are strongly aware that it cannot easily be achieved. They are aware of the strong social, cultural and psychological obstacles which block the way to a free society. Randolph Bourne not only noted that war is the health of the State but that a herd instinct drives the individual into obedience and conformity since 'You feel powerful by conforming, and you feel forlorn and helpless if you are out of the crowd'. The State – 'the organization of the entire herd' – is founded on these impulses and makes careful use of them.<sup>29</sup> Anarchists are also aware, as Erich Fromm pointed out, that many people fear freedom because of the responsibility it entails and in times of economic insecurity and social unrest look to strong leaders to tell them what to think and do. Isolated and rootless individuals in modern society readily resort to devotion and submission to authoritarian organizations or the State. Like Adam after his expulsion from the Garden of Eden for rebelling against the authority of God, newly won freedom can appear to modern man as a curse; 'he is free from the sweet bondage of paradise, but he is not free to govern himself, to realize his individuality'.<sup>30</sup>

Again, anarchists appreciate the insights of Wilhelm Reich who has shown how the subject person only too easily becomes an active participant in his own subjection. The utter powerlessness of the modern citizen can often lead to the primary masochism of internalized submissiveness so that he begins to identify with the agent who has thwarted his vital energy. He becomes, as Etienne de la Boétie pointed out, a voluntary slave. Moreover, modern man's experience of our ancient patriarchal and authoritarian society and culture encourages '*an armouring against nature within himself and against social misery outside himself*' leading to 'helplessness, craving for authority, fear of responsibility, mystical longing, sexual misery'.<sup>31</sup>

Yet for all their appreciation of the psychology of obedience and dependence and the powerful influence of the State and culture in shaping conforming citizens, anarchists still believe that all human beings are ultimately capable of breaking out of the Crystal Palace, of releasing themselves from their physical manacles and mental chains of illusion. They call for freedom for all from all forms of imposed authority as well as the freedom to achieve the active realization of the individual self.

Clearly anarchists do not have a naive or crude view of freedom. Moreover, their aspiration to create a free society need no longer appear a utopian dream as it has done in the past. Malatesta at the turn of the century argued that 'All specifically human life is a struggle against outside nature, and every forward step is adaptation, is the overcoming of a natural law'.<sup>32</sup> In our post-scarcity society of relative abundance, the objective conditions are there (in the West at least) to enable us to pass from the historic realm of economic necessity to the realm of freedom. For the first time in human history, we are now free to choose our needs. Desire no longer may be seen as a form of bondage to be controlled by reason since the free satisfaction of desire is possible to a large degree. Indeed, Bookchin has even argued that human beings while freeing themselves are now in a position to create a '*free nature*' by helping it to realize its evolutionary trend towards consciousness and subjectivity.<sup>33</sup>

Of all political doctrines, anarchism responds most to the deeply felt human need for freedom which is essential for creativity and fulfilment. It holds up the ideal of personal freedom as a form of autonomy which does not restrict the freedom of others. It proposes a free society without government in which people make their own free structures. It looks to a time when human beings are not only free from each other, but are able to help each other and all life-forms to realize their full potential.

## Authority

Another way of saying that anarchism takes freedom as its ultimate goal is to claim that it opposes authority. 'All anarchists', George Woodcock insists, 'deny authority'.<sup>34</sup> Certainly many anarchists have argued this to be the case. Bakunin, who called himself an 'anti-authoritarian', advocated the '*absolute rejection of every authority*' while Kropotkin maintained that anarchism works 'to destroy authority in all its aspects'.<sup>35</sup> Malatesta also defined anarchy as '*society organized without authority*', meaning by authority 'the power to *impose* one's will'.<sup>36</sup> More recently, Colin Ward has called an anarchist society 'a society which organizes itself without authority'.<sup>37</sup>

This definition of anarchism as an opposition to authority comes from the common definition of the State as the supreme authority within a given territory, and since all anarchists are opposed to the State, it is inferred that they are opposed to authority. Authority however is more

fundamental and exists prior to the foundation of the State. In addition, it might be misleading to define anarchy as an absence of authority for strictly speaking it would appear that a society without some form of authority is virtually inconceivable.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, it is true to say that all anarchists are opposed to political authority in the sense that they deny anyone the legitimate right to issue commands and have them obeyed. As Robert Paul Wolff has argued, since 'the state is authority, the right to rule', anarchism which rejects the State is the only political doctrine consistent with autonomy in which the individual alone is the judge of his moral constraints.<sup>39</sup> Anarchists also reject legal authority as defined by Max Weber as 'a belief in the "legality" of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands'.<sup>40</sup> Communist anarchists further reject what they call 'economic authority'; as Faure pointed out, 'Authority dresses itself in two principal forms: the political form, that is the State; and the economic form, that is private property'.<sup>41</sup>

Anarchists however are less clear-cut about traditional authority resting on a belief in ancient traditions and the legitimacy of the holders of the tradition. Kropotkin, for instance, stressed repeatedly that customs precede man-made laws to regulate human affairs, and thought they could replace them again in the future. Proudhon even accepted the need for patriarchal authority within the family while opposing it in wider society. Anarchists are also prone to being influenced by charismatic authority, that is by the exemplary character of an exceptional person. Godwin appeared to Shelley as a wise mentor and did not reject the role. Bakunin undoubtedly possessed enormous charisma and exploited it to influence his comrades. Many were also affected by Kropotkin's saintly aura and were prepared to be his followers. Apart from Bakunin, they all saw the dangers of unthinking obedience to or slavish imitation of a leader.

It has been argued that anarchism does not preclude the legitimacy of every type of authority and that anarchists are really opposed only to 'imposed authority, or authoritarianism'.<sup>42</sup> Again, it has been asserted that libertarians reject 'command-authority' in coercive institutions, but are willing to accept 'belief-authority' in which a person voluntarily legitimizes the influence any other person may have upon them.<sup>43</sup>

There is some evidence to support this view. Some anarchists have accepted certain attenuated forms of authority. Bakunin, while rejecting the government of science, accepts the authority of superior or technical knowledge. However, while recognizing the authority of technical competence, he insists that the advice of an expert should only be accepted on the basis of voluntary consent: if I am to accept the authority of the cobbler in the matter of shoes, my decision to act on his advice is mine and not his. Malatesta also believes that it is inevitable that a person who has greater understanding and ability to carry out a given task will succeed more easily in having his opinion accepted, and that it is all right for him to act as guide in his area of competence for those less able than himself.

It is also the case that many anarchists look to some kind of censure in the shape of public opinion or social pressure as a means of influencing the behaviour of others in the absence of positive laws. Such censure can be extremely authoritarian by making people comply with threats. Indeed, in a society without public authority, Godwin wrote that 'general inspection' could provide a force 'not less irresistible than whips and chains' to reform conduct.<sup>44</sup> Bakunin also argued that the 'only great and all powerful authority ... we can respect is the collective and public spirit'.<sup>45</sup>

More recently, Giovanni Baldelli has followed Bakunin in arguing that the 'rule of authority' is acceptable if it is based on competence as well as consent.<sup>46</sup> David Wieck has gone even further

to defend delegated authority if it does not entail power over persons.<sup>47</sup> Alan Ritter has also tried to elaborate an anarchist justification of authority by claiming that it is legitimate if it is shared by all and if it is 'intimate, particular and internal and cannot issue directives of a legal sort'.<sup>48</sup> And Miller argues that anarcho-communists accept a form of authority, although it is 'non-compulsory, non-coercive, functionally specific, and exercised collectively in a particular locality or shares a particular interest'.<sup>49</sup>

But it would be wrong to infer from this that despite their alleged claims to the contrary, anarchists in fact all accept some form of authority. Bakunin's defence of the authority of superior knowledge, for instance, would be anathema to Godwin as an infringement of the right of private judgement. Any reliance on someone with superior knowledge is for him the most pernicious form of authority since it prevents independent thought and encourages a spirit of dependence. Again, while accepting that the influence of public opinion is preferable to the tyranny of the law, Godwin rightly insists that 'coercion cannot convince, cannot conciliate, but on the contrary alienates the mind of him against whom it is employed'.<sup>50</sup> People may advise and admonish an individual, but he should act by his own deliberation and not theirs.

In general, anarchists reject the use of physical force or even manipulation by unconsciously changing beliefs and actions. They deny anyone the right to issue orders and have them obeyed. They are highly critical of political and bureaucratic authority and do not wish to become dominating leaders, even within small, informal groups. Instead, they prefer to influence others through persuasion, offering rational arguments for their anarchist beliefs and practices. Some may accept a temporary form of leadership based on competence, but most believe in leaderless groups and have no time for bosses or masters. Even if in practice anarchists have voluntarily followed charismatic leaders, they are aware of the dangers of such a form of leadership.

Michael Taylor argues that if we get a person to do something he would not otherwise have done by using convincing reasons, we are still exercising authority.<sup>51</sup> But this would seem to confuse persuasion with authority. What distinguishes authority from persuasion and influence is its claim to legitimacy, a claim which all anarchists deny. Authority is also invariably exercised in a clearly defined hierarchy in which superiors assert the right to issue commands and subordinates are obliged to obey. Of the classic anarchist thinkers, only Bakunin was ready to resort to manipulation through his 'invisible dictatorship' and his secret societies.

If they do not reject all forms of authority outright, all anarchists are suspicious of authority, especially that imposed from above, and seek to minimize its influence in society. They certainly do not want to erect an 'anarchist authority', even if all participate in it.<sup>52</sup> What distinguishes anarchists from other socialists is the precise fact that they are 'anti-authoritarian'. Unlike Engels, they believe it is quite possible to organize production and distribution without authority. For anarchists, organization without compulsion, based on free agreement and voluntary co-operation, is the only cure for authority. To this end, anarchists call for the decentralization of authority and finally for its maximum dissolution.

## **Power**

Authority is clearly a manifestation of power, but they are not identical. Power may best be defined as the ability to impose one's will. Power is different from authority for where the latter asserts the right to command and the right to be obeyed, the former is the ability to compel

compliance, either through the use or threat of force. A society without political authority can still have coercive power relationships.

In general, anarchists believe not only that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, but that power destroys both the executioner and victim of power. Their awareness of the corrupting nature of power is the basis of their criticism of concentrated power and their reluctance to relinquish any power to leaders and rulers. The State consists of nothing more than a small elite who have more power than the rest of society. Anarchists therefore call for the decentralization of political power in the short term and would like to see it dissolved as much as possible in the long term.

But power is not only political. Bertrand Russell defines power as 'the production of intended effects'.<sup>53</sup> Power in this sense in existing society is ubiquitous, diffuse and often concealed. Power over human beings may usefully be classified by the manner of influencing individuals or by the type of organization involved. An individual may be influenced by direct physical power over his body, (army and police); by rewards and punishments which act as inducements (economic organizations); by the sway of opinion or propaganda (schools, churches, political parties). Indeed, the distinctions between the organizations are not always so clear cut as they often use different forms of power at the same time.

Within society, there is also traditional power (an ancient form based on custom); newly acquired power (such as law based on coercive power of the State or 'naked' military power); and revolutionary power (of party or group). Anarchists would condemn all three, though some like Kropotkin would accept the first as the least pernicious, and others like Bakunin would accept the last in the form of a mass uprising. All however would oppose any centralization of power, which, as Alex Comfort has argued, leads to psychopathic leadership: 'The greater the degree of power, and the wider the gap between governors and the governed, the stronger the appeal of office to those who are likely to abuse it, and the less the response which can be expected from the individual'.<sup>54</sup> Even 'anarcho-capitalists' like Murray Rothbard assume individuals would have equal bargaining power in a market-based society.

At the same time, while opposing power over others, anarchists are not necessarily averse to power over oneself in the form of self-discipline, self-management, or self-determination. Given the unequal distribution of power between the rulers and the ruled, Bookchin has borrowed the language of liberation movements and made out a case for 'empowering' the weaker members of society.<sup>55</sup> And they are not merely concerned with political power in the form of the State and government, but with economic power in society and patriarchal power in the family.

Anarchists are opposed to all power which is coercive and non-reciprocal, especially in the sense of domination which involves force and conflict between two parties. But they sometimes wield a form of power in trying to influence others by making things unpleasant. Indeed, in the place of law, Godwin and Kropotkin both look to public censure to reform wrongdoers. Tucker might well reduce ethics to the sole moral law of 'Mind your own business', but he is ready to exert 'the influence of reason; the influence of persuasion; the influence of example; the influence of public opinion; the influence of social ostracism; the influence of unhampered economic forces; the influence of better prospects ...'<sup>56</sup> The two principles would seem to be contradictory, and the latter form of influence undoubtedly involves a form of coercive power. The desire to have power over oneself is quite compatible with the anarchist position. But as Paul Goodman has pointed out, people live quite happily without 'power' that manages or coerces from outside. Most human activities moreover do not need external motivations in the form of reward or punishment.<sup>57</sup>

Anarchists are well aware that an authoritarian upbringing and education produce people who are either submissive or imperious types. As Alfred Adler observed, 'the servile individual lives by the rules of others, and this type seeks out a servile position almost compulsively'.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, they recognize with Hobbes and Adler that the will to power over others is a common tendency amongst human beings. They are aware that, given the opportunity, not only do ex-slaves often try to become masters, but oppressed men try to find weaker beings to lord it over. But anarchists do not see that this tendency is intrinsic in human nature, but rather a product of our authoritarian and hierarchical society. They reject the view that the only possible human relationship is that in which one issues orders and the other obeys, one asserts himself and the other cringes. Such an unequal distribution of power enslaves both the ruler and the ruled. Anarchists look to a time when there will no longer be masters and servants, leaders and followers, rulers and ruled.

Anarchists have therefore principally been concerned with the way in which organizations and individuals have acquired power over people's lives. In the past, anarchists rejected power over each other, but still thought it was necessary to increase power and control over nature. Kropotkin not only entitled one his books *The Conquest of Bread* but argued like Marx that industrial progress required 'conquest over nature'.<sup>59</sup> Despite this, Malatesta still criticized Kropotkin for his view of natural harmony, and insisted that men must combine to harness the 'hostile forces of Nature'. He even went so far as to define anarchy as 'the struggle, in human society, against the disharmonies of Nature'.<sup>60</sup>

More recently however anarchists have been increasingly concerned not only with the unequal distribution of power between human beings, but man's power over nature. Indeed, Murray Bookchin has traced the origin of man's destructive domination of nature to man's domination over man and woman and calls for the dissolution of hierarchy.<sup>61</sup> Breaking with the historical Western anarchist tradition, he has developed an organicist view which see man as an integral part of nature. Working within a similar framework of social ecology, John Clark has also argued that a thoroughgoing anarchist critique is 'a critique of all forms of domination' that block the attainment of the goal of 'universal self-realization'.<sup>62</sup>

Anarchism as a philosophy wishes to dissolve all forms of authority and power, and if possible, seeks their complete abolition. All anarchists reject political authority in the form of the State and government, and most reject the moral authority of exceptional individuals. Where some allow the authority of competence, they stress that it must be based on accountability and consent. The ideal still remains for all people to judge and act for themselves and not to rely on experts.

Given the present unequal distribution of power, they would prefer it to be spread more evenly. They recognize the right of the individual to have power over his or her own person, but ultimately they prefer a situation where no one has the possibility or desire to impose his or her will on others. More recently, anarchists have gone beyond traditional humanism and called for an end to power over nature itself. In a condition of anarchy, there would be no State and thus no concentration of force or political specialization.<sup>63</sup> Human beings would be equal partners in a non-hierarchical world without domination. And while it may be impossible to realize in practice, the ultimate goal would be to achieve the complete absence of imposed authority and coercive power.

## Equality

What distinguishes the democratic ideal from other political ideals is its attempt to combine liberty and equality. Anarchists are democratic in a broad sense. They would agree with Plato that the ends of democracy are liberty, equality and variety, and most would add like the French revolutionaries, fraternity. But it is a commonplace of liberal political theory that liberty and equality are incompatible. Anarchists are as aware as De Tocqueville and J. S. Mill of the potential dangers of the tyranny of the majority and the triumph of mediocrity. They do not want to submerge the individual in the community or level all society to one common standard of grey uniformity. They reject all rulers, whether one man, a few, or the 'people'. Government, even in Abraham Lincoln's definition as 'government of the people by the people for the people', is inadmissible. Nevertheless, unlike socialists and liberals, they seek a genuine resolution of liberty and equality, and believe that everyone has an equal claim to be free.

Anarchists go beyond the liberal concept of equality as equality before the law. Equality before the law, they point out, does not mean the end of injustice, for all people could be treated with equal unfairness under unjust laws. Moreover, if structural inequalities exist in society, the application of the law is likely to be unequal: one law for the rich, and another for the poor. Since they reject man-made law as an interference with personal freedom, clearly any legal concept of equality is inadequate.

As for the doctrine of equal opportunity to develop one's talents, anarchists do not deny that everyone should have an equal claim to self-development. But they recognize that the principle of equal opportunity is fundamentally conservative since existing society with its hierarchy of values only supports the opportunity to develop those talents and abilities which it considers worth developing. The application of the principle will also increase inequalities by creating a society ruled by a meritocracy. Above all, it is founded on an antagonistic, competitive model of society in which there are more losers than winners in the race for goods and status.

In general, then, anarchists go beyond the liberal concept of equality as equality before the law or equality of opportunity. Like the socialists, they have a commitment to economic and social equality. But different anarchist thinkers try to combine equality with liberty in very different ways.

Godwin, for instance, believed that humanity had a common nature and advocated sexual and racial equality, but did not think all people should be treated equally. By defining justice as utility and linking it with the principle of impartiality, he maintained that we should give preferential treatment to those most likely to increase human happiness: in a fire where I could only save one person, I should save a benevolent philosopher who might contribute to the happiness of thousands before his vicious maid, even if she happened to my mother.

Proudhon, on the other hand, accepted that men and women had equal rights and duties, but he believed that 'if one compares sex with sex, women are inferior'.<sup>64</sup> His notion of justice involved the idea of equality of respect, but his insistence on exchange of equal shares based on labour time meant that he tolerated economic inequality. One of his principal criticisms of authoritarian communism is that it would produce an equality of slaves. The individualist Tucker was even more willing to countenance economic inequalities which might result from the superiority of muscle or brain. As for the 'beautiful world' in which absolute equality had been achieved, 'who would live in it?', he asks. 'Certainly no freeman'.<sup>65</sup>

Bakunin had an entirely different approach. He asserted that all humanity was physically and socially equal, and insisted that since man is truly free only among equally free men, the 'freedom of each is therefore realizable only in the equality of all. The realization of freedom through equality, in principle and in fact, is justice.'<sup>66</sup> Yet by retaining a collectivist system of distribution according to work done he endorsed like Proudhon economic inequality.

Kropotkin went one step further than Bakunin. He shared his belief in human equality but adopted a communist definition of justice: from each according to ability, to each according to need. Clearly this is also an unequal principle, since under a system of voluntary communism the distribution of burdens and rewards will depend on different abilities and needs. In practice, the communist idea of just distribution according to need is more concerned with fair shares than equal shares.

Malatesta was a communist like Kropotkin, but he tried to bring equality and freedom together in his definition of social freedom as 'equal freedom for all, an equality of conditions such as to allow everybody to do as they wish, with the only limitation, imposed by inevitable natural necessities and the equal freedom of others'<sup>67</sup> More recently, Bookchin has been inspired by the concept of the 'irreducible minimum' practised by organic societies in which everyone has their basic needs satisfied. He also calls for an 'equality of unequals' which recognizes differences between human beings within an overall framework of social equality and economic communism.

In general, anarchists see no contradiction between freedom and equality, but believe that one reinforces the other. Over the last two centuries, they have extended the principle of equality to embrace all humanity. At the same time, their concern with individuality has prevented them from calling for absolute economic equality. While advocating the impartial consideration of everyone's worth and need, they do not insist on equal treatment and equal shares. They would accept John Rawls' principle in his definition of justice as fairness that each person has 'an equal right to the most extensive liberty compatible with a like liberty for all', although they would add the proviso that any inequalities in a free society would ideally be the result of voluntary agreement.<sup>68</sup> But they go beyond Rawls who believes that citizens of a country do not object to there being different offices of government. Because they adopt a principle of justice that everyone has an equal claim to a maximum of freedom they reject all political authority as an illegitimate interference with freedom. As Tucker put it, they seek the 'greatest amount of liberty compatible with equality of liberty'.<sup>69</sup>

## **PART TWO: Forerunners of Anarchism**

Love, and do what you will. ST AUGUSTINE

All men have stood for freedom ... For freedom is the man that will turn the world upside down. GERHARD WINSTANLEY In vain you tell me that Artificial Government is good, but that I fall out with the Abuse. The Thing! The Thing itself is the Abuse! EDMUND BURKE

Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is patron, the last a punisher. Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil; in its worse state an intolerable one. THOMAS PAINE

# Taoism and Buddhism

## Taoism

ANARCHISM IS USUALLY CONSIDERED a recent, Western phenomenon, but its roots reach deep in the ancient civilizations of the East. The first clear expression of an anarchist sensibility may be traced back to the Taoists in ancient China from about the sixth century BC. Indeed, the principal Taoist work, the *Tao te ching*, may be considered one of the greatest anarchist classics.<sup>1</sup>

The Taoists at the time were living in a feudal society in which law was becoming codified and government increasingly centralized and bureaucratic. Confucius was the chief spokesman of the legalistic school supporting these developments, and called for a social hierarchy in which every citizen knew his place. The Taoists for their part rejected government and believed that all could live in natural and spontaneous harmony. The conflict between those who wish to interfere and those who believe that things flourish best when left alone has continued ever since.

The Taoists and the Confucians were both embedded in ancient Chinese culture. They shared a similar view of nature, but differed strongly in their moral and political views. They both had an attitude of respectful trust to human nature; the Christian notion of original sin is entirely absent from their thought. Both believed that human beings have an innate predisposition to goodness which is revealed in the instinctive reaction of anyone who sees a child falling into a well. Both claimed to defend the Tao or the way of the ancients and sought to establish voluntary order.

But whereas the Taoists were principally interested in nature and identified with it, the Confucians were more worldly-minded and concerned with reforming society. The Confucians celebrated traditionally 'male' virtues like duty, discipline and obedience, while the Taoists promoted the 'female' values of receptivity and passivity.

Although it has helped shape Chinese culture as much as Buddhism and Confucianism, Taoism by its very nature never became an official cult. It has remained a permanent strain in Chinese thought. Its roots lay in the popular culture at the dawn of Chinese civilization but it emerged in the sixth century BC as a remarkable combination of philosophy, religion, proto-science and magic.

The principal exponent of Taoism is taken to be Lao Tzu, meaning 'Old Philosopher'. His year of birth was some time between 600 and 300 BC. He was probably of a noble family in Honan province. He rejected his hereditary position as a noble and became a curator of the royal library at Loh. All his life he followed the path of silence – 'The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao', he taught.<sup>2</sup> According to legend, when he was riding off into the desert to die, he was persuaded by a gatekeeper in northwestern China to write down his teaching for posterity.

It seems likely that the *Tao te ching* (The Way and its Power) which is attributed to Lao Tzu, was written in the third century BC. It has been called by the Chinese scholar Joseph Needham 'without exception the most profound and beautiful work in the Chinese language'.<sup>3</sup> The text consists of eighty-one short chapters in poetic form. Although often very obscure and paradoxical, it offers not only the earliest but also the most eloquent exposition of anarchist principles.

It is impossible to appreciate the ethics and politics of Taoism without an understanding of its philosophy of nature. The *Tao te ching* celebrates the *Tao*, or way, of nature and describes how the wise person should follow it. The Taoist conception of nature is based on the ancient Chinese principles of *yin* and *yang*, two opposite but complementary forces in the cosmos which constitute *ch'i*' (matter-energy) of which all beings and phenomena are formed. *Yin* is the supreme feminine power, characterized by darkness, cold, and receptivity and associated with the moon; *yang* is the masculine counterpart of brightness, warmth, and activity, and is identified with the sun. Both forces are at work within men and women as well as in all things.

The *Tao* itself however cannot be defined; it is nameless and formless. Lao Tzu, trying vainly to describe what is ineffable, likens it to an empty vessel, a river flowing home to the sea, and an uncarved block. The *Tao*, he asserts, follows what is natural. It is the way in which the universe works, the order of nature which gives all things their being and sustains them.

The great Tao flows everywhere, both to the left and the right. The ten thousand things depend on it; it holds nothing back. It fulfils its purpose silently and makes no claim.(34)

Needham describes it not so much as a force, but as a 'kind of natural curvature in time and space'.<sup>4</sup>

Like most later anarchists, the Taoists see the universe as being in a continuous state of flux. Reality is in a state of process; everything changes, nothing is constant. They also have a dialectical concept of change as a dynamic interplay as opposing forces. Energy flows continually between the poles of *yin* and *yang*. At the same time, they stress the unity and harmony of nature. Nature is self-sufficient and uncreated; there is no need to postulate a conscious creator. It is a view which not only recalls that of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus but coincides with the description of the universe presented by modern physics. Modern social ecology, which stresses unity in diversity, organic growth and natural order, further reflects the Taoist world-view.

The approach to nature recommended by Lao Tzu and the Taoists is one of receptivity. Where the Confucian wants to conquer and exploit nature, the Taoist tries to contemplate and understand it. The Taoists' traditionally 'feminine' approach to nature suggests that their way of thinking may well have first evolved in a matriarchal society. While at first sight it might seem a religious attitude, in fact it encouraged a scientific and democratic outlook amongst Taoists. By not imposing their own preconceptions, they were able to observe and understand nature and therefore learn to channel its energy beneficially.

The Taoists were primarily interested in nature but their conception of the universe had important corollaries for society. A definite system of ethics and politics emerges. There are no absolute Taoist values; for good and bad, like *yin* and *yang*, are related. Their interplay is necessary for growth, and in order to achieve something it is often best to start with its opposite. Nevertheless, an ideal of the wise person emerges in Taoist teaching who is unpretentious, sincere, spontaneous, generous and detached. For the Taoists, the art of living is to be found in simplicity, non-assertion and creative play.

Central to Taoist teaching is the concept of *wu-wei*. It is often translated as merely non-action. In fact there are striking philological similarities between 'anarchism' and '*wu-wei*'. Just as *αναρχια* in Greek means absence of a ruler, *wu-wei* means lack of *wei*, where *wei* refers to 'artificial, contrived activity that interferes with natural and spontaneous development'.<sup>5</sup> From a

political point of view, *wei* refers to the imposition of authority. To do something in accordance with *wu-wei* is therefore considered natural; it leads to natural and spontaneous order. It has nothing to do with all forms of imposed authority.

The *Tao te ching* is quite clear about the nature of force. If we use force, whether physical or moral, to improve ourselves or the world, we simply waste energy and weaken ourselves: 'force is followed by loss of strength'(30). It follows that those who wage war will suffer as a result: 'a violent man will die a violent death'(42). By contrast, giving way is often the best way to overcome: 'Under heaven nothing is more soft and yielding than water. Yet for attacking the solid and strong, nothing is better; it has no equal. The weak can overcome the strong; the supple can overcome the stiff.'(78) The gentle peacefulness recommended by the Taoists is not a form of defeatist submission but a call for the creative and effective use of energy.

'Practise non-action. Work without doing'(63), Lao Tzu recommends. In their concept of *wu-wei*, the Taoists are not urging non-action in the sense of inertia, but rather condemning activity contrary to nature. It is not idleness that they praise, but work without effort, anxiety and complication, work which goes with and not against the grain of things. If people practised *wu-wei* in the right spirit, work would lose its coercive aspect. It would be undertaken not for its useful results but for its intrinsic value. Instead of being avoided like the plague, work would be transformed into spontaneous and meaningful play: 'When actions are performed/Without unnecessary speech,/People say, "We did it!" '(17).

If people followed their advice, the Taoists suggest, they would live a long life and achieve physical and mental health. One of their fundamental beliefs was that 'Whatever is contrary to Tao will not last long'(55), while he who is filled with virtue is like a new-born child. In order to prolong their lives the Taoists resorted to yoga-like techniques and even alchemy.

The most important principle at the centre of their teaching however was a belief that 'The world is ruled by letting things take their course. It cannot be ruled by interfering.'(48) The deepest roots of the Taoist view of *wu-wei* probably lies in early matriarchal society in ancient China. The Taoist ideal was a form of agrarian collectivism which sought to recapture the instinctive unity with nature which human beings had lost in developing an artificial and hierarchical culture. Peasants are naturally wise in many ways. By hard experience, they refrain from activity contrary to nature and realize that in order to grow plants they must understand and co-operate with the natural processes. And just as plants grow best when allowed to follow their natures, so human beings thrive when least interfered with.<sup>6</sup> It was this insight which led the Taoists to reject all forms of imposed authority, government and the State. It also made them into precursors of modern anarchism and social ecology.

It has been argued that Taoism does not reject the State as an artificial structure, but rather sees it as a natural institution, analogous perhaps to the family.<sup>7</sup> While the *Tao te ching* undoubtedly rejects authoritarian rule, it does read at times as if it is giving advice to rulers to become better at ruling:

If the sage would guide the people, he must serve with humility. If he would lead them, he must follow behind. In this way when the sage rules, the people will not feel oppressed (66)

Bookchin goes so far as to claim that Taoism was used by an elite to foster passivity amongst the peasantry by denying them choice and hope.<sup>8</sup>

Certainly Lao Tzu addresses the problem of leadership and calls for the true sage to act with the people and not above them. The best ruler leaves his people alone to follow their peaceful and productive activities. He must trust their good faith for 'He who does not trust enough will not be trusted.'(17) If a ruler interferes with his people rather than letting them follow their own devices, then disorder will follow: 'When the country is confused and in chaos, Loyal ministers appear.'(18) In a well-ordered society,

Man follows the earth. Earth follows heaven. Heaven follows the Tao. Tao follows what is natural.(25)

However a closer reading shows that the *Tao te ching* is not concerned with offering Machiavelian advice to rulers or even with the 'art of governing'. The person who genuinely understands the Tao and applies it to government reaches the inevitable conclusion that the best government does not govern at all.<sup>9</sup> Lao Tzu sees nothing but evil coming from government. Indeed, he offers what might be described as the first anarchist manifesto:

The more laws and restrictions there are, The poorer people become. The sharper men's weapons, The more trouble in the land. The more ingenious and clever men are, The more strange things happen. The more rules and regulations, The more thieves and robbers.

Therefore the sage says:

I take no action and people are reformed. I enjoy peace and people become honest. I do nothing and the people become rich. I have no desires and people return to the good and simple life. (57)

Contained within the marvellous poetry of the *Tao te ching*, there is some very real social criticism. It is sharply critical of the bureaucratic, warlike, and commercial nature of the feudal order. Lao Tzu specifically sees property as a form of robbery: 'When the court is arrayed in splendour, The fields are full of weeds, / And the granaries are bare.'(53) He traces the causes of war to unequal distribution: 'Claim wealth and tides, and disaster will follow.'(9) Having attacked feudalism with its classes and private property, he offers the social ideal of a classless society without government and patriarchy in which people live simple and sincere lives in harmony with nature. It would be a decentralized society in which goods are produced and shared in common with the help of appropriate technology. The people would be strong but with no need to show their strength; wise, but with no pretence of learning; productive, but engaged in no unnecessary toil. They would even prefer to reckon by knotting rope rather than by writing ledgers:

A small country has fewer people. Though there are machines that can work ten to a hundred times faster than man, they are not needed. The people take death seriously and do not travel far. Though they have boats and carriages, no one uses them. Though they have armour and weapons, no one displays them. Men return to the knotting of rope in place of writing. Their food is plain and good, their clothes fine but simple, their homes secure; They are happy in their ways. Though they live within sight of their neighbours, And crowing cocks and barking dogs are heard across the way, Yet they leave each other in peace while they grow old and die.(80)

The anarchistic tendency of the Taoists comes through even stronger in the writings of the philosopher Chuang Tzu, who lived about 369–286 BC. His work consists of arguments interspersed with anecdotes and parables which explore the nature of the Tao, the great organic process of which man is a part. It is not addressed to any particular ruler. Like the Tao te ching, it rejects all forms of government and celebrates the free existence of the self-determining individual. The overriding tone of the work is to be found in a little parable about horses:

Horses live on dry land, eat grass and drink water. When pleased, they rub their necks together. When angry, they turn round and kick up their heels at each other. Thus far only do their natural dispositions carry them. But bridled and bitted, with a plate of metal on their foreheads, they learn to cast vicious looks, to turn the head to bite, to resist, to get the bit out of the mouth or the bridle into it. And thus their natures become depraved.<sup>10</sup>

As with horses, so it is with human beings. Left to themselves they live in natural harmony and spontaneous order. But when they are coerced and ruled, their natures become vicious. It follows that princes and rulers should not coerce their people into obeying artificial laws, but should leave them to follow their natural dispositions. To attempt to govern people with man-made laws and regulations is absurd and impossible: 'as well try to wade through the sea, to hew a passage through a river, or make a mosquito fly away with a mountain!'.<sup>11</sup> In reality, the natural conditions of our existence require no artificial aids. People left to themselves will follow peaceful and productive activities and live in harmony with each other and nature.

In an essay 'On Letting Alone', Chuang Tzu asserted three hundred years before Christ the fundamental proposition of anarchist thought which has reverberated through history ever since:

There has been such a thing as letting mankind alone; there has never been such a thing as governing mankind. Letting alone springs from fear lest men's natural dispositions be perverted and their virtue left aside. But if their natural dispositions be not perverted nor their virtue laid aside, what room is there left for government?<sup>12</sup>

which individuals would be left to themselves. But while pursuing their own interests, they would not forget the interests of others. It is not a sullen selfishness which is recommended. The pursuit of personal good involves a concern for the general well-being: the more a person does for others, the more he has; the more he gives to others, the greater his abundance. As the Taoist text Huai Nan Tzu put it, 'Possessing the empire' means 'self-realization. If I realize myself then the empire also realizes me. If the empire and I realize each other, then we will always possess each other.'<sup>13</sup>

Human beings are ultimately individuals but they are also social beings, part of the whole. Anticipating the findings of modern ecology, the Taoists believed that the more individuality and diversity there is, the greater the overall harmony. The spontaneous order of society does not exclude conflict but involves a dynamic interplay of opposite forces. Thus society is described by Chuang Tzu as

an agreement of a certain number of families and individuals to abide by certain customs. Discordant elements unite to form a harmonious whole. Take away this unity and each has a separate individuality ... A mountain is high because of its

individual particles. A river is large because of its individual drops. And he is a just man who regards all parts from the point of view of the whole.<sup>14</sup>

Taoism thus offered the first and one of the most persuasive expressions of anarchist thinking. Its moral and political ideas were firmly grounded in a scientific view of the world. Although Taoist philosophy (*Tao chid*) contains spiritual and mystical elements, the early Taoists' receptive approach to nature encouraged a scientific attitude and democratic feelings. They recognized the unity in the diversity in nature and the universality of transformation. In their ethics, they encouraged spontaneous behaviour and self-development in the larger context of nature: production with possession, action without self-assertion and development without domination. In their politics, they not only urged rulers to leave their subjects alone and opposed the bureaucratic and legalistic teaching of the Confucians, but advocated as an ideal a free and co-operative society without government in harmony with nature.

Taoism was not aimed by an elite at peasants to make them more docile and obedient. The Taoists' social background tended to be from the small middle class, between the feudal lords and the mass of peasant farmers. Nor were they merely offering advice on how to survive in troubled times by yielding to the strong, keeping a low profile, and by minding their own business. On the contrary, Taoism was the philosophy of those who had understood the real nature of temporal power, wealth and status, sufficiently well to find them radically wanting. Far from being a philosophy of failure or quietude, Taoism offers profound and practical wisdom for those who wish to develop the full harmony of their being.

## Buddhism

While the Taoists have long been recognized as forerunners of anarchism, the libertarian tendency within Buddhism is not immediately so obvious. It is difficult to reconcile the teachings of the Buddha, for instance, with the triumphant State in modern Sri Lanka, where Sinhalese nationalism is supported most vehemently by the Buddhist clergy. But as with contemporary Taoism (*Tao chiao*) and organized Christianity, the distortions of institutionalized religion do not invalidate the original message. The poet Gary Snyder has not been the only one to find in 'Buddhist anarchism' a positive force 'with nation-shaking' implications.<sup>15</sup>

Buddhism was originally an Indian religion, founded in the fifth century BC by Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha (the enlightened one). Buddha found the cause of evil in this world to be ignorance which encourages a person to try and satisfy his or her desires. Craving, whether for possessions, wealth, power or status, inevitably brings suffering and pain. But there is a way out. The four 'Noble Truths' which Buddha taught may be summed up as: '(a) the omnipresence of suffering; (b) its cause, wrongly directed desire; (c) its cure, the removal of the cause; and (d) the Noble Eightfold path of self-development which leads to the end of suffering.'<sup>16</sup>

To avoid suffering it is therefore necessary to overcome one's ego and eradicate all desire. To escape the painful cycle of rebirth in this world of illusion or *maya*, the individual must also try and become enlightened and realize that he or she ultimately has no self. Only by recognizing that *sansara*, the wheel of life, is *nirvana*, nothingness, will a person achieve complete liberation.

In the beginning Buddhism was principally restricted to ethics and meditation exercises. It began to spread in India five hundred years prior to Christ and separated from Hinduism by rejecting the scriptures, rituals and social system. It eventually split into two separate branches, one

becoming more rationalistic, formalized and scholastic (Theravada) and the other more mystical (Mahayana). By 1200 Buddhism had practically disappeared in India, but became well established in Sri Lanka, Tibet and Thailand.

While institutional Buddhism has been ready to support inequalities and tyrannies, the disaffiliation, voluntary poverty and traditional harmlessness of practising Buddhists express a strong libertarian sensibility. Snyder has found in the practical systems of meditation developed by Mahayana Buddhism a powerful means of liberating individuals from their 'psychological hang-ups and cultural conditionings'. He also believes that Buddhist Tantrism, or Vajrayana, offers probably the finest and most modern statement of the ancient view that 'man's life and destiny is growth and enlightenment in self-disciplined freedom'.<sup>17</sup> But it was in its Zen form however that Buddhism developed its libertarian potential to the fullest.<sup>18</sup> Zen Buddhism developed in China after it was brought from India in the sixth century. During the following five hundred years, the Chinese called the school Ch'an. It reached Japan in the twelfth century where it came to be known as Zen. Here two main sects developed, the first Rinzai, which carried on the 'sudden' technique of the founder, and the second Soto, the more gentle way.

Zen has rightly been called the 'apotheosis of Buddhism'.<sup>19</sup> It is uniquely iconoclastic, attempting to reach truth and enlightenment by ultimately transcending the use of concepts, scriptures, and ritual. Where Theravada Buddhism became neatly arranged and systematized, with its twelve-fold chain of Causation, Zen adepts see in the Buddha the first rebel: 'The Buddha was not the mere discoverer of the Twelvefold Chain of Causation,' Suzuki informs us, 'he took the chain in his hands and broke it into pieces, so that it would never again bind him to slavery.'<sup>20</sup> The familiar props of religion are thrown away. The four central statements of Zen are:

A special transmission outside the Scriptures; No dependence upon words or letters;  
Direct pointing to the soul of man; Seeing into one's nature and the attainment of  
Buddhahood.<sup>21</sup>

Traditionally Zen aspirants have learned from a teacher. He is usually called master, but more in the sense of schoolmaster than lord. His task is to help them break out of their everyday perceptions and intellectual habits. Buddhist monks are therefore exemplars, not intermediaries between the individual and God like Christian priests. They may carry sticks and not be averse to using them, but the blows are ways of shaking people out of their habitual way of seeing. In the Rinzai school, where the treatment is particularly vigorous, the discipline is used primarily to develop the pupil's character from within and to increase his or her moral strength.

Zen thus offers a fiery baptism. However rough or gentle, it is intended to bring the student back to his original state of freedom which he has lost through ignorance. It is aimed at creating self-disciplined freedom, not dependence on masters. The successful Zen practitioner controls sound, colour and form and lives out the truth as he sees it. He leaves behind the rules of social and monastic life which helped him on his way. Even the robes which the monks wear and the bells which call them to their meditation are ladders to be finally discarded.

While a teacher may point the way, the individual must ultimately make his own choices and walk alone on his journey. Awakening cannot be achieved by another's power. The Buddha said: 'Work out your own salvation with diligence.'<sup>22</sup> Buddhism thus knows no authority for truth save the mindfulness of the individual, and that is authority for himself alone. It is very egalitarian: everyone can become enlightened on their own through learning by direct and immediate

experience. When Daiju visited the teacher Baso in China, and told him he was seeking enlightenment, Baso said: 'You have your own treasure house. Why do you search outside?'<sup>23</sup>

In China, the Ch'an Zen masters did not follow the Buddha but aspired to be his friends and to place themselves in the same responsive relationship with the universe. Zen is an experience and has never become the doctrine of a sect. There are no set rules or regulations; the end at all times dominates the choice of means. As the greatest exponent in China Wei Lang (also known as Hui-neng) declared: 'If I tell you that I have a system of Law to transmit to others I am cheating you. What I do to my disciples is to liberate them from their own bondage with such devices as the case may need.'<sup>24</sup>

The aim is to achieve a state of enlightenment in which one sees directly into one's own nature and realizes that it is not separate from Nature, but part of an organic whole. Opposites are transcended. One feels clear, calm, whole. One becomes uncircumscribed and free. One is beyond conventional definitions of good and evil, moral codes and laws. If you have Zen, you have no fear, doubt or craving. You live a simple life, serene and complete:

Imperturbable and serene the ideal man practises no virtue; Self-possessed and dispassionate he commits no sin; Calm and silent he gives up seeing and hearing; Even and upright his mind abides nowhere.<sup>25</sup>

It is an ideal shared by many anarchists who seek simplicity and peace.

In the natural world, there are no grounds for hierarchy or domination and we are all born free and equal. This equality for Buddhism is both spiritual and social. People are spiritually equal in the sense that all are equally capable of achieving enlightenment. In their social life, Zen monks live and work communally. Even amongst teachers and pupils, there should be equal obligation and equal treatment; as some Zen parables put it, 'no work, no food', and all should share 'sour miso'.<sup>26</sup> In wider society, Buddha rejected the caste system and Zen Buddhism in particular is no respecter of persons. One story has it that the Governor of Kyoto came to visit a Zen master and sent in his visiting card with his title on it. It was returned. Only when he sent it in again with his title crossed out, was he received.<sup>27</sup>

The Zen Buddhist concept of freedom is also spiritual and social. In a spiritual sense, we are born free. Our fetters and manacles are not the true condition of our existence but forged by our ignorance. Such chains of ignorance, wrought by sensuous infatuation and misused reason, cling to us like wet clothes. But it is the aim of the Zen teachers to help us return to our original state of freedom. Zen tries to break the logjam of our mind, and to free us from the finite world of power, wealth and status. But it attempts this in no fixed pattern. According to Ummon, the great Chinese master, 'in Zen there is absolute freedom; sometimes it negates and at other times it affirms; it does either way at pleasure.'<sup>28</sup>

The most anti-authoritarian statement in the Zen tradition is probably I-Hsuan's. Speaking metaphorically, he declared:

Kill anything that you happen on. Kill the Buddha if you happen to meet him. Kill a patriarch or an arhat [saint] if you happen to meet him. Kill your parents or relatives if you happen to meet them. Only then can you be free, not bound by material things, and absolutely free and at ease ...

I-Hsuan added, 'I have no trick to give people. I merely cure disease and set people free ...'<sup>29</sup>

We are also free to seek our own salvation. Zen finds no contradiction between free will and determinism. It accepts that there is universal determinism, and that all effects have causes. A man's character is the sum total of his previous thoughts and acts. Our lives and all existence are ruled by karma, that is to say every action has a reaction. But while the present is determined by the past, the future remains free. Every action we make depends on what we have come to be at the time, but what we are coming to be at any time depends on our will. Every person is thus free within the limitations of his self-created karma. By right thought and action, I can change myself and shape my destiny.

While Buddhism seeks personal enlightenment, it does not turn its back on this world. The seeker in the famous story of the Bull, who eventually tames and releases himself from his worldly self, returns to the marketplace with dusty clothes to find the trees living. Again, while the emphasis in Zen is placed on personal autonomy, others are not neglected. Like the Taoists, the Japanese Zen Master Mumon Ekai commented:

Do not fight with another's bow and arrow. Do not ride another's horse. Do not discuss another's faults. Do not interfere with another's work.<sup>30</sup>

While only the individual can work out his own salvation, he should still think of others. For all its spiritual interests, Zen Buddhism is not an otherworldly mysticism but is concerned with all beings here and now. As the teacher Gasan told his pupils:

Those who speak against killing and who desire to spare the lives of all conscious beings are right. It is good to protect even animals and insects. But what about those persons who kill time, what about those who are destroying wealth, and those who destroy political economy? We should not overlook them.<sup>31</sup>

While Zen goes beyond conventional definitions of good and evil, and has no commandments enforced by threat of punishment, certain moral values do emerge in the koans and stories. Evil itself is not considered part of nature but man-made: 'Nature has no demons; they are human creations.'<sup>32</sup> The fundamental principle which Buddha taught was compassion for all sentient beings. Since life is one and indivisible, whoever breaks the harmony of life will suffer accordingly and delay his or her own development. If I hurt some other being, I therefore hurt myself.

Zen Buddhism also rejects private property and sees the craving for possessions as just another chain preventing spiritual development. In giving and taking, the receiver should not feel gratitude; if anything, the giver, not the receiver, should be thankful for having the opportunity to give. Many Zen Buddhists would like to see an economy based on the gift relationship, not exchange or barter. The most valuable thing however is natural beauty which no one can take or steal.

Buddhism, particularly in its Zen form, thus has, like Taoism, a strong libertarian spirit. Both reject hierarchy and domination. Both seek growth in self-disciplined freedom and assert that all are capable of enlightenment. Both are concerned with personal autonomy and social well-being. They recognize that each person is not only part of society, but of organic nature itself, as many modern anarchists in the West recognize. The voluntary poverty, compassionate harmlessness, and love of life and beauty of the greatest practitioners of Taoism and Buddhism offer a sound moral base for a free society. Above all, the vision of social freedom makes them a major source of the anarchist sensibility, which if properly understood, must pose as a profound threat to any existing State and Church.

# The Greeks

THE WORD ANARCHY NOT only came from the Greeks, but it had from the beginning both a negative and a positive sense of living without rulers, in a condition of spontaneous order or of unruly chaos. The mainstream of Greek political philosophy however was rooted in the idea that the search for justice and the civilized life could only be achieved within the confines of the State. Thus for Plato democracy was a form of unjust government which was always 'anarchical'. His pupil Aristotle referred to those outside the State as 'lawless dangerous beasts' and felt that the fundamental problem of democracy was precisely how to prevent it from slipping into 'anarchy'. But while Plato and Aristotle both felt the need for a hierarchical State with strong laws to maintain social order, not all Greek thinkers were so authoritarian.

Many Greeks drew a distinction between man-made and divine or natural laws. Sophocles depicted the conflict between the two in his great drama of rebellion *Antigone* (c.441 BC). When Creon ascends to the throne of Thebes and forbids the burial of the traitor Polynices, his niece Antigone defies his order and gives her brother a token burial. She appeals above Creon's head to the laws of nature:

For it was not Zeus that had published me that edict; not such are the laws set among men by the Justice who dwells with the gods below; nor deemed I that thy decrees were of such form, that a mortal could override the unwritten and unfailing statutes of heaven. For their life is not of to-day or yesterday, but from all time, and no man knows when they were first put forth.<sup>1</sup>

Heraclitus from Ephesus, who lived around 500 BC expressed views remarkably similar to those of the Taoists in China. Known as the 'riddler' for the mystical obscurity of his thought, he was the most important of the pre-Socratic thinkers. From the fragments of his work *On Nature* which remain, it seems he argued that reason should look beyond common sense and realize that the appearance of stability and permanence presented to our senses is false. All things are in a constant flux, even the 'unchanging' hills. Everything flows. His follower Cratylus popularized his teaching: 'You cannot step twice in the same river.'

Like the Taoists, Heraclitus saw change as a dynamic interplay of opposites: 'cold things warm themselves, warm cools'. He concluded that since all opposites are polar they are united: 'The up and the down is one and the same.'<sup>2</sup> Change takes place dialectically through the dynamic unity of opposites. But while everything changes, there is also a natural order. He pictured the world as 'an everliving fire, kindling in measures and going in measures.'<sup>3</sup> It is the 'reason' or 'destiny' which keeps everything in order and ensures the orderly succession of events. Although Heraclitus had a pessimistic view of the human condition, which earned him the title of 'weeping philosopher', he is the first philosopher in the Western tradition to anticipate the anarchist belief that constant change takes place within a natural order. But he was no democrat and was very scornful of his contemporaries. Only force could make them act for their own good: 'Every beast

is driven to the pasture with blows.' He believed strife is justice, and celebrated war. 'War is the father of all and the king of all; and some he has made gods and some men, some bond and some free.'<sup>4</sup>

The case for Socrates as a libertarian is founded on his insistence that one should question authority and think for oneself. He offers the earliest defence of liberty of thought, insisting on the indefeasible right of conscience of the individual and the social importance of criticism and discussion. Although Socrates was an elitist – he opposed the democracy which triumphed in Athens in 403 BC – he bravely opposed his private judgement against the Athenian State. In 399 BC he was persecuted and put to death for being an atheist and a corrupter of youth. His 'crime' was to have argued that we should approach everything with an open mind and examine popular beliefs in the light of reason, undeterred by the dictates of authority or the opinions of the majority. When Socrates said that it was necessary to live by the law and die by the law, he was not simply asserting the need for law for its own sake. In keeping with his characteristic irony, he wished to clarify the accusation made against him by the Athenian State and to bring out its true nature.

As Plato makes clear in his *Apology*, Socrates insisted on the supremacy of individual conscience so that no one should allow themselves to be compelled by any human authority to do what they think is wrong. He also emphasized the public value of free discussion since truth best emerges through the clash of opposing opinions. Socrates not only chose free discussion as his method of teaching but insisted that 'Daily discussion of the matters about which you hear me conversing is the highest good for man. Life that is not tested by such discussion is not worth living.'<sup>5</sup>

Plato, Socrates' most brilliant pupil, failed to heed his teacher's advice. While the communism of goods and women in *The Republic* inspired some later socialists, Plato's ideal State has a rigid social hierarchy ruled by a small elite of guardians and soldiers. It is moreover a completely totalitarian State with no freedom of thought or action: religion is chosen on utilitarian grounds and must be obeyed on fear of punishment or death. If Socrates appears as one of the great libertarians, Plato stands at the fountainhead of the great authoritarian river which subsequently swamped Western thought.

After the death of Socrates, the comparative freedom of discussion which prevailed enabled many schools of philosophy to flourish. The most significant were the Epicureans, the Cynics and the Stoics who all aimed at securing peace for the individual soul in a period of social turmoil. The Epicureans, Cynics and Stoics were extreme individualists for whom the State counted little; they celebrated the natural authority of the individual over that of the State. They looked to a world of universals in nature beyond civil society. Where the theories of Plato and Aristotle were for the improvement of a few, they extended their teaching to all men and recognized them as brothers.

Aristippus, active in the fourth century (born c.430 BC), was the founder of the Cyrenaic or Epicurean (also known as Hedonistic) school of philosophy which took pleasure to be the highest good. He was the first of Socrates' pupils to take money for his teaching, but told Socrates that he did not wish to belong to either the governing or the governed class. He taught philosophy at Athens and Aegina, and spent much of his life in the court of Dionysus the tyrant in Syracuse, where he earned a reputation as a voluptuary. It was this experience which no doubt led him to teach that the wise should not give up their liberty to the State. His daughter Arete adopted his doctrines and passed them on to her son Aristippus the Younger.

The Cynics of the third century came even closer to anarchism. They did not develop into a school like the Epicureans and the Stoics, but they interpreted the two fundamental Greek concepts of *Physis* and *Nomos* in a radical way. Usually translated as Nature and Custom respectively, *Physis* can refer to the natural form of an object, a person's nature, or the natural order of things; *Nomos* can refer to usage, convention or law. Most Greek thinkers sought to reconcile these two concepts — Aristotle for instance wished to impose law on the natural occurrence of things. The Cynics alone however rejected *Nomos* in favour of *Physis*; they wished to live purely 'according to Nature'. Since the Greek *polis* was based on the rule of custom or convention, by rejecting *Nomos*, the Cynics denied the right of established authority to prescribe the limits of their actions.<sup>6</sup> Since laws are made by men and could have been otherwise, and customs vary from country to country, they held that they had no validity. They denied the competence of courts to judge actions and argued that all social laws, hierarchies and standards are without moral foundation.

The real founder of the Cynics was Antisthenes (c.444–370 BC). He was the son of an Athenian father and Thracian mother. He fought at Tanagra in 426 BC, and died in Athens. A friend of Socrates, he turned his back on his former aristocratic circle in order to pursue simple goodness amongst working people. In his desire to 'return to nature', he preached at open-air meetings that there should be no government, no private property, no marriage and no established religion. He despised the artificial pleasures of the senses, declaring 'I had rather be mad than delighted'.<sup>7</sup>

His pupil Diogenes of Sinope became even more famous for his doctrines and his eccentric way of living. Like the Taoists, Diogenes condemned the artificial encumbrances of civilization. He decided to live like a 'dog', and therefore was called a 'cynic' which means 'canine'. Rejecting all conventions, reducing his needs to a minimum, he is said to have lived in a barrel or 'tub', (probably a large pitcher used for burials). When Alexander the Great visited him and tried to corrupt him by offering anything he wished, he asked him 'only to stand out of my light'. The simple beggar was no respecter of persons. He not only rejected the institution of slavery but declared his brotherhood with all beings, including animals. He considered himself to be a 'citizen of the world'.

Diogenes was not therefore 'cynical' in the modern sense, for he pursued moral freedom in liberation from desire and fear, and was deeply anxious about the nature of virtue. As he saw it, only by being indifferent to fame or fortune can a person become truly free. But his teaching was not only aimed at the individual, requiring him to lead a simple and contented life; it had important social implications. One of his most famous paradoxes was his call to 'deface the currency'. The son of a moneychanger, he wished to transform his father's activity on a universal scale. The Greek for 'currency' was *nomisma*, derived from the word *Nomos* (custom). Since Diogenes felt that the standard of society was wrong, his call to deface the currency represented an attack on all prevailing customs, rules and laws. It was also coupled with a demand for complete freedom of speech and action. In his own life, he rejected the conventions of religion, manners, dress and even food. As a result, he may be considered one of the great forerunners of anarchism.

The Stoics took up the doctrine of the Cynics but they did not reject the benefits of civilization. Socrates had shown that laws may be unjust and public opinion may be wrong, but he offered no alternative guiding principle except that of reason. The Stoics however found in the law of nature a guide which is prior and superior to all human customs and written laws. They looked beyond civil society to the world of universals in nature. In so doing, they reached anarchist conclusions, developing the ideals of individualism, rationalism, equality, internationalism and

cosmopolitanism.<sup>8</sup> Stoicism found adherents in the outlying parts of the Greek world, especially in Asia Minor, where Greeks and Orientals mingled. It made a strong appeal to educated Romans of the second century and influenced Roman jurisprudence, particularly in ideas of universal law and citizenship.

Kropotkin called the founder of Stoicism, Zeno of Citium (336–264 BC), the ‘best exponent of Anarchist philosophy in ancient Greece’.<sup>9</sup> Zeno was a Phoenician born at Citium in Cyprus, and educated in Athens. Attracted to the Cynics, Zeno became principally interested in virtue, and adopted a materialist philosophy of common sense. He went on to proclaim the supremacy of natural law over man-made law. Zeno further opposed Plato’s State communism by offering his own ideal of a free community without government.

The starting-point and end for Zeno is nature. He identifies God with Nature which is the most excellent of all things. Virtue results when the will of the individual is in harmony with nature. The wise person, like the Taoist, sees how things happens and conforms his will accordingly. Zeno recommends a life in agreement with nature, which is also a life according to reason. He taught:

The end may be defined as life in accordance with nature, or, in other words, in accordance with our own human nature as well as that of the universe, a life in which we refrain from every action forbidden by the law common to all things, that is to say, the right reason which pervades all things, and is identical with Zeus, lord and ruler of all that is.<sup>10</sup>

Natural man is an individual and social being. Although the Stoic doctrine tended towards self-sufficiency, they believed that man is ‘naturally made for society and action’.<sup>11</sup> Zeno believed that together with the instinct of self-preservation which leads to egoism, there is also a social instinct which makes us join others and co-operate for the common good. While pleasure or freedom from pain might be an advantage it is not a good, for Zeno asserted the official Stoic doctrine that virtue is the only desirable good.

If human beings followed their natural instincts and were guided by reason, they would be able to live in peace and harmony without the need for coercive institutions. In Zeno’s Republic, according to the fragments preserved for us by Diogenes Laertius, there are no lawcourts, police, armies, temples, schools, money or even marriage. People live as a single ‘herd’ without family and property, with no distinctions of race or rank, and without the need for money or courts of law. Above all, there is no longer any need for compulsion. People fulfil their natures living in a stateless society of complete equality and freedom which spreads across the whole globe.

It is their attitude to the State which was the most original contribution of the Stoics to political philosophy and which marks them out as anarchist forerunners. The wise man, they taught, ‘will take part in politics, if nothing hinders him’.<sup>12</sup> But it is the nature of the State to hinder. A statesman must inevitably either displease the gods or displease the people. All States are therefore equally bad. It follows that since man is endowed with reason and has social instincts, the State in any form is an unnecessary evil. The Stoics extended this reasoning beyond the Greek *polis* with its slaves to embrace not only the ‘barbarians’ but the whole of humanity. Where Plato wanted to exclude the foreigner from his State, the Stoics considered themselves citizens of the world.

It was not only Greek philosophy which inspired later anarchists like Godwin and Kropotkin. Greek society produced one of the most remarkable examples of democracy which the world has

ever known. Prior to the conquests of Philip of Macedon, the Greeks were city dwellers, relating to each other as members of the *polis*. While the *polis* has often been called a 'city-state', it was not a State in the modern sense and may best be described as 'political society'. It formed a social entity, politically autonomous and economically self-sufficient.

In Athens, Greek democracy reached its apogee in the fifth century. Its great lawgiver Solon had claimed that the best-policed city is 'the city where all citizens, whether they have suffered injury or not, equally pursue and punish injustice'. Under the guidance of Pericles, it developed into a remarkable form of direct democracy. At the height of Athens's splendour at the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian War, Pericles declared in his Funeral Oration:

Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law; when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty. And just as our political life is free and open, so is our day-to-day life in relations with each other ... I declare that in my opinion each single one of our citizens, in all the manifold aspects of life, is able to show himself the rightful lord and owner of his own person, and to do this, moreover, with exceptional grace and exceptional vitality.<sup>13</sup>

Thucydides observed that because of his intelligence and integrity, Pericles could respect the liberty of the people and at the same time hold them in check: 'It was he who led them, rather than they who led him.' Nevertheless, he was continuously accountable to the members of the assembly (*ecclesia*) and absolutely dependent on their approval. He had to persuade the people to vote for every measure that he wished to pass. On a good day it has been estimated that in the last quarter of the fifth century six thousand might attend the assembly out of a citizen population of about thirty thousand. Athenian policy was thus determined by mass meetings of the citizenry on the 'advice of anyone who could win the people's ear'.<sup>14</sup> The system, with its regular assemblies, its rotating Council of Five Hundred, and its elected juries, was deliberately organized to prevent the creation of a permanent bureaucracy and to encourage active participation of the citizens. In practice, this process of direct democracy affirmed citizenship as a form of direct action.<sup>15</sup>

Athenian democracy was based on the Greek concept of *autarkia*, of individual self-sufficiency, but it managed to foster a sense of community and civic duty. In his Funeral Oration, Pericles maintained that in the ordinary life of Athenians

far from exercising a jealous surveillance over each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbour for doing what he likes, or even indulge in those injurious looks which cannot fail to be offensive, although they inflict no positive penalty. But all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless as citizens.<sup>16</sup>

There were of course limits to Athenian democracy. It did not embrace women, slaves, and resident aliens who made up the majority of the population. But it is misleading to say that it was 'based' on slavery and therefore somehow invalid. The great majority of citizens earned their

living by working with their hands and only about a third owned slaves.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, even this degree of slavery shows that Athens did not fully understand democracy. Another sign was its readiness to go to war; its imperial ambitions led to the Peloponnesian War which finally brought about its downfall towards the end of the third century.

For all its shortcomings, the libertarian legacy of Greek philosophy and Athenian democracy remains impressive and should not be overshadowed by the dominating presence of Plato and Aristotle. The right to private judgement and the freedom of thought and action were first defended by the Greeks. They not only made the fundamental distinction between nature and convention which runs like a silver thread through all anarchist thinking, but developed a strong sense of the common destiny of all humanity to live a life of virtue. They recognized that justice was a universal principle. They loved laughter and friendship and all that is human. Above all, they saw in education the means to awaken the understanding which alone can bring humanity to personal and social freedom.

# Christianity

AT FIRST SIGHT, IT may seem strange to link Christianity with anarchism. Many of the classic thinkers, imbued with the scientific spirit of the nineteenth century, were atheists or agnostics. Like the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment, they tended to dismiss organized Christianity as part of the superstition and ignorance of the Middle Ages. They saw the Church aligned with the State, and the priest anointing the warrior and the king. For the most part, they thought Christianity taught a slavish morality with its stress on humility, piety, submission. The traditional image of God as an authoritarian father-figure was anathema to them, and they felt no need for a supernatural authority to bolster temporal authority.

There is of course some basis for these views in the theory and practice of Christianity. Genesis asserts that man is created from the dust of the earth and given special authority over the rest of creation: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth ... Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.' (Genesis 1: 26–8)

In the Garden of Eden, there was no mine or thine; all things were enjoyed in common. But disobedience, according to Genesis, was man's first sin. Having rebelled against the authority of God and eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, humanity was banished from the Garden and condemned to a life of pain, toil and mortality. The whole of nature became corrupted.

Since man was a fallen and depraved creature it followed for many that he needed powerful rulers to curb his wayward behaviour. The Fall thus made law necessary for deceitful and weak Man required the restraint of positive law. 'Wherefore then serveth the law?' St Paul asked rhetorically. 'It was added because of transgression.' (Galatians 3: 19) As Christianity developed, there was a growing stress amongst certain theologians on the nothingness of sinful man and the omnipotence of God, a trend which culminated in Calvin who argued that the worst tyrant was better than the absence of civil power or anarchy.

Most European anarchists have followed Proudhon, Stirner and Bakunin in their rejection of Christianity. They are opposed to all forms of imposed authority, religious as well as political, and have been profoundly perturbed by the close historical link between Church and State. But this does not mean that they have all been atheists. Anarchism is not necessarily atheistic any more than socialism is. Indeed, the relationship between anarchism and religion is intricate and in many ways the appeal of anarchism lies precisely in the way it manages to combine religious fervour with philosophical rigour.

The legacy of Christianity is not moreover merely repressive. On the one hand, there is a conservative, quietist and authoritarian tendency originating in the Pauline Church in Rome; on the other, a radical, communal and libertarian one which emerged from the Jamesian church in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> Many anarchists have belonged to the latter trend. Tolstoy is the most famous, but not the only one to base his anarchism on a radical interpretation of Christianity. Indeed, Jacques Ellul has recently argued that 'biblical thought leads directly to anarchism, and that this is the only "political anti-political" position in accord with Christian thinking'.<sup>2</sup>

The teaching of the Old Testament about political power is that its use is invariably harmful. The Chronicles' account of the kings in Israel and Judaea shows that their rule was systematically bad. Daniel, for instance, who refused to bow to the king, was thrown into the lion's pit. There would seem to be little validation for political power in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, we find Paul's dictum: 'there is no authority except God.' (Romans 13:1) While from Constantine onwards this has been appealed to by the Church to justify the theology of the State, the Gospels and Revelation are consistently opposed to authority. Jesus's attitude is radically negative. He counsels his disciples not to imitate the kings of nations: 'kings and governors have dominion over men; let there be none like that among you.' In fact, Jesus consistently held political authority up to derision. When, for instance, he said 'Render unto Caesar', he did not necessarily mean, as it is usually understood, that subjects should obey their governors. The advice was made in relationship to taxes. Since Caesar, having created money, is its master, Jesus was in all probability implying that a Christian cannot serve Mammon and God at the same time.

Alongside the libertarian trend in Christianity has been a communal one. Jesus' voluntary poverty, his attack on riches (it is more difficult for a rich man to go to heaven than to pass through 'the eye of a needle'), and his sharing of goods (particularly bread and fishes) all inspired many early Christians to practise a form of communism. The communal life of the early Christian Church endured throughout the ministry of Paul.<sup>3</sup> These early Christian communists probably had connections with the Essenes, a Jewish sect who practised the community of goods and brotherly love. Wishing to release the soul from the prison-house of the flesh, they were ascetic but did not withdraw from the world. They despised marriage and the 'lasciviousness' of women but looked after the children of others. They cannot however be considered forerunners of anarchism for they kept strict religious observances and regarded themselves as a moral elite.<sup>4</sup>

There are solid grounds for believing that the first Christian believers practised a form of communism and usufruct. The account in Acts is explicit: 'And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possession and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.' (Acts 2: 44-5) Again Acts records: 'And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.' (Acts 4: 32) The early Christian fathers were clear on the matter too. Ambrose in the fourth century asserted in no uncertain terms: 'Nature has poured forth all things for all men for common use ... Nature therefore has produced a common right for all, but greed has made it a right for a few.' He anticipated Kropotkin by concluding 'in accordance with the will of God and the union of nature, we ought to be of mutual help one to the other'.<sup>5</sup>

In the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas summed up the principal teaching of the Christian fathers, attempting to combine the Christian and Greek traditions of thought in a new way. He recognized the right to property for personal 'use', but believed that any superfluity should be distributed to others who are in need. The right to property is therefore strictly speaking a right of administration or stewardship. The possessor of wealth is an administrator who should distribute it according to his judgement for the good of humanity. Possessions are not merely private property for personal enjoyment: 'Quantum ad hoc non debet homo habere res exteriores ut proprias, sed ut communes.' The holder of wealth therefore has a continual duty to practise almsgiving according to his individual conscience. Wealth is held in trust for the public good. Property is not an indefeasible right: where death threatens or there is no other source of sustenance, it is

permissible to take what is necessary for others. Such an act cannot be considered robbery or theft. It is a view that was to be later adopted by the father of anarchism, William Godwin.

In general, the position of the early Christian Church was not so much an endorsement of communism but a condemnation of the abuse of wealth. But the communistic tradition in early Christianity acted like the power of myth and had a considerable influence on the later development of anarchism and socialism. Developing the anti-political trend in Christ's teaching, the Church fathers of the late Roman world continued to separate Christianity from the State. But increasingly Christianity came to be interpreted in social and political terms. In the fifth century, Augustine in his *City of God* (413–26) offered the first Christian-inspired political utopia in history. Although he stressed the corruption of human nature through the fall of man, Augustine presented redemption as a historical event in the future, not as a memory of some 'golden age' in the past. Since all political power is a form of coercion, he denounced politics as evil, and saw that only with the coming of the kingdom of God would coercion cease.<sup>6</sup> His most subversive teaching was 'Love, and do what you will.'

The influence of Augustine led some to withdraw entirely from politics into monasticism; for others, it fired their millenarian hopes. The Apocalypse and the Second Coming were no longer considered as spiritual metaphors but imminent events in history. For an increasing number, particularly amongst the downtrodden and impoverished, the millennium of God's kingdom of earth was about to be realized.

An influential figure in this development was Joachim of Fiore (c.1145–1202), a Cistercian abbot and hermit from Calabria. After many years spent meditating on the scriptures, he developed a widely influential prophetic system. He was convinced that he had found a key to the understanding of the course of history. In a series of commentaries on the apocalyptic books of the Bible, he divided the history of humanity into three ages, corresponding to the three branches of the Holy Trinity. The first was the age of the Father, under the Jewish Laws of the Old Testament, laws based on fear and servitude; the second, of the Son, under the Gospel, the age of faith and filial obedience. In the coming third age of the Holy Spirit, he taught that all law would pass away since all people would act according to the will of God. All masters, both spiritual and temporal, would disappear and the Everlasting Gospel — a new understanding of the meaning of the Bible — would prevail. It would be the age of love and spiritual liberty for the Children of God, an age of joy and ecstasy. This state would prevail until the Last Judgement. This vision of the coming age of liberty was taken up by the Ranters during the English Revolution. The abolition of the monarchy was only the first act in a thorough-going change which would entirely transform society. At the time of the French Revolution, in Britain William Blake was preaching a similar message.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, the attempt of Francis of Assisi to return to the life of the historical Jesus also had revolutionary implications. As is well known he preached a sermon to the birds, wrote a hymn to the sun, and called the donkey his brother. He has become a symbol of Christian pacifism. Although no vegetarian, his love for animals reflects a mystical awareness of the unity of being which is generally alien to the main Judaeo-Christian tradition. His contemporaries described him as taking 'an inward and outward delight in almost every creature, and when he handled or looked at them his spirit seemed to be in heaven rather than on earth'.<sup>7</sup> He felt the same delight in water, rocks, flowers and trees, and by all accounts lived a life of ecstatic joy. For Francis, God is immanent in the world, and the Trinity through Christ has become the comrade of man.

With a small band of companions (a brotherhood of eleven), Francis tried to live like Christ in voluntary poverty. He repudiated all notion of property, including those things retained for personal use. His original affinity group was united in perfect communion, but once his followers were accepted into the Catholic Church, the Franciscans developed into a hierarchical monastic order like the rest, founded on poverty, chastity and obedience. Nevertheless, Francis' message of mystical poverty had a profoundly subversive influence: it showed up the Church and State to be lost in ostentation and opulence, and presented the poor as the only community capable of redemption. Those who wanted to follow Francis' personal example were called Spirituals and were eventually dismissed as heretics. By the end of the thirteenth century, they were also propagating Joachim's prophecies of the coming age of spiritual liberty.

The Spirituals were only one thread in a growing millenarian movement in the Middle Ages alongside the Brethren of the Free Spirit, the Taborites and Hussites, and the Anabaptists of the Reformation. It emerged in the radical wing of the republican movement in the English Revolution, especially amongst the Diggers and Ranters. These groups found inspiration from texts like Augustine's 'Love, and do what you will' and Paul's 'Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty'. (II Corinthians 2: 17) They rejected the Church and State and all temporal law because they felt they were in a state of God's grace and could commit no sin. They denied all earthly government, believing that God-given reason was sufficient to guide their actions. They looked to the Second Coming of Christ and the immediate realization of heaven on earth in which people would live in perfect freedom and complete equality.

This underground libertarian tradition within Christianity surfaced again at the end of the eighteenth century in the writings of William Blake. He too expressed his social aspirations in Biblical language, wishing to replace the Babylon of existing Church and State with the Jerusalem of a free society in which all people would live according to the Everlasting Gospel of forgiveness and love. Like Lao Tzu, he saw reality as a dynamic interplay of opposites. 'Without contraries is no progression.' But he hoped to realize a higher synthesis, a Marriage of Heaven and Hell which would bring about a reconciliation between mind and body, imagination and reason, conscience and desire, rich and poor, humanity and nature.

Blake did not separate religion from politics: indeed, he asked, 'Are not Religion & Politics the Same Thing?'; and insisted 'Brotherhood is Religion'. He drew inspiration from the mythical social paradise, the Garden of Eden, where man and woman lived in a condition of innocence and wholeness, without private property, class distinctions, or human authority. After the Fall, humanity was condemned to toil and suffering, weighed down by Church and State, oppressed by Lord and King. They were obliged to inhabit a world riddled with contradiction: between Nature and Man, State and Society, Capital and Labour, Church and Christianity. Optimistically, Blake looked to a world revolution which would usher in a new millennium in which such contradictions would be no more.

Like later anarchists, Blake regarded authority as the principle source of injustice: 'A Tyrant is the Worst disease & the Cause of all others.' It is the oppressive structures of the State which impede the divine potential within humanity. Blake felt not only that 'Every Body hates a King', but wrote also: 'Houses of Commons and Houses of Lords seem to me fools; they seem to me to be something Else besides Human Life.' The State had no right to make laws, especially as no law could be sufficiently extensive so as adequately to cover every case: 'One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression.' Moreover, law encourages crime and transgression, just as the State creates disorder in society: 'Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion.' Indeed, since

it is law which alone defines a crime, incites people to commit it, and promises dire punishment, Blake insisted: 'All Penal Laws court Transgression & therefore are cruelty & Murder'. As a great libertarian, he concluded: 'When the Reverence of Government is lost, it is better than when it is found.'<sup>8</sup>

When it comes to the Church, Blake is no less iconoclastic. The modern Church, he thought, 'Crucifies Christ with the Head Downwards'. He rejected all political and religious authority since human beings are made in the Divine Image and can govern themselves. He identified with the rebel Jesus against the tyrannical Jehovah God of the Old Testament: 'Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse, not from rules.' Since man is innocent and natural desires are beneficial, it followed for Blake that any hindrance is harmful and unnecessary. Indeed, at the heart of his visionary anarchism is the belief that 'The Gospel is Forgiveness of Sins & Has No Moral Precepts'. He looked forward to a time when every individual would be 'King & Priest in his own House' in a society of complete forbearance, for 'What is Liberty without Universal Toleration?'<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, Christianity influenced Blake's contemporary William Godwin in an indirect way and helped him become the father of anarchism. Godwin was an extreme Calvinist in his youth and was trained to become a Dissenting minister. As a young man, he concluded that the God of the Old Testament acted like a 'political legislator' in a theocratic State and yet had 'not a right to be a tyrant'.<sup>10</sup> When he wrote his *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793), he had under the influence of the French philosophes become an atheist, but his moral and economic beliefs had been largely shaped by his early Calvinism.<sup>11</sup> He developed Aquinas' notion of stewardship of the good things of the earth in a communist direction: the individual should distribute any surplus wealth he possessed to the most needy. Godwin's anarchism moreover resulted from a strict application of the Dissenters' right of private judgement from the religious to the political realm.

The great nineteenth-century anarchist thinkers Proudhon, Stirner and Bakunin were all imbued with the scientific spirit of the Enlightenment and identified Christianity with the existing authoritarian Church. Proudhon wanted to show that Catholicism was the counterpart of a hierarchical system of secular government. Since the Catholic God is considered the authority on which all other authorities rest, governments can be nothing less than 'God's scourges set up to discipline the world'. Even from a moral point of view, Proudhon was convinced that 'God is tyranny and poverty; God is evil'. It is therefore the first duty of the thinking free man to banish the idea of God from his mind. Since we acquire knowledge and social life in spite of God, 'Each step in our progress represents one more victory in which we annihilate the Deity'.<sup>12</sup> But although Proudhon was militantly anti-Catholic, he still interpreted the Christian doctrine of original sin as a symbol of man's ineradicable inclination towards evil and he sought to create a social order which would restrain his evil tendencies. Moreover, he talked of the idea of Justice inherent in nature as if it were a divine principle. In the form of natural law, it provided an ultimate reference point for his morality and operated as a kind of disguised Providence.

Stirner, on the other hand, thought God, along with the State and Morality, was just another spook to delude humanity. He argued forcibly that the State had come to be considered sacred like the Church, and laws were presented as if they were God's commandments:

If the Church had deadly sins, the State has capital crimes; if the one had heretics, the other has traitors; the one ecclesiastical penalties, the other criminal penalties; the one inquisitorial processes, the other fiscal; in short, there sins, here crimes, there

inquisition and here – inquisition. Will the sanctity of the State not fall like the Church's?<sup>13</sup>

Bakunin for his part was haunted by the problem of God's existence in his youth. But he eventually became a militant atheist, adopting the slogan 'Neither God nor Master'. For him, the Christian God, who judged every action and threatened eternal punishment, was the ultimate symbol of authority. Like Stirner, he argued that God does not exist but is an abstraction which men project into heaven to worship. Bakunin believed that Christianity taught:

God being everything, the real world and man are nothing. God being truth, justice, good, beauty, power, and life, man is falsehood, iniquity, evil, ugliness, impotence, and death. God being master, man is the slave ...<sup>14</sup>

Christianity had understood this better than all other religions. As a result, it was the absolute religion, and the Roman Church the only consistent and logical one.

Like Nietzsche, Bakunin declared the death of God and argued that we must transcend Christian values and create our own. The destruction of religion is a prerequisite of a free society since *'The idea of God implies the abdication of reason and of justice; it is the most decisive negation of human liberty, and necessarily ends in the enslavement of mankind, both in theory and practice.'* Bakunin was at his most passionate in his denunciation of Christianity, but he made his case for the death of God in the form of a syllogism: 'If God exists, man is a slave; now, man can and must be free; then, God does not exist. I defy anyone whomsoever to avoid this circle.' Loving human freedom and considering it to be the absolute condition for all he respected in humanity, Bakunin reverses the phrase of Voltaire to affirm: *'if God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish him'*.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, he praised Satan for being the first rebel and the 'emancipator of worlds'.

According to Bakunin, the Church represents the interests of the clergy, as the State represents those of the bourgeoisie. 'Does She', he asked rhetorically, 'not turn what is living into a corpse, cast aside freedom, preach the eternal slavery of the masses for the benefit of tyrants and exploiters? Is it not this implacable Church that tends to perpetuate the reign of shadows, of ignorance, of poverty and of crime?' He therefore affirmed that the abolition of the Church and the State must be 'the first and indispensable condition of the true liberation of society'.<sup>16</sup> These sentiments, particularly in Latin countries where the Catholic Church was so dominant, had a widespread influence. Bakunin was no doubt partly responsible for the militant atheism of the Spanish anarchists which led to many cases of church-burning during the opening period of the Spanish Revolution. Not all nineteenth-century anarchists were atheists; others inferred their philosophy directly from their Christian beliefs. The American Adin Ballou reached anarchist conclusions in his *Practical Christian Socialism* (1854) from a more rational route. Since man has only an obligation to obey God and his divine government, he has no obligation to obey the law of the land or human government. Human government is the will of man exercising 'absolute authority over man, by means of cunning and physical force'. God on the other hand divides his authority with no creature; he is the absolute sovereign. The will of man has therefore no intrinsic authority, 'no rightful claim to the allegiance of man'. Ballou therefore asks rhetorically about government: 'Is it not a mere cypher?'

Although he did not call himself an anarchist, Ballou preached against voting, office-holding, legislating, or punishing since 'Majorities often decree folly and inequity. Power oftener corrupts

its possessor, than benefits the powerless.' Instead, he argued that the true Christian should resist war and develop his moral power. And if 'non-resistants' should ever become the great majority of any community, he thought they could manage public affairs through voluntary assemblies in which the 'law of love and the counsels of wisdom will prevail without strife'.<sup>17</sup>

Tolstoy of course is the most well-known Christian anarchist, and it was a radical interpretation of the Gospels which led him to anarchist conclusions. He believed that they taught that one should live at peace with all men and not promise an oath nor resist evil. It followed for Tolstoy that all governments, laws, armies, and all protection of life or property are immoral: 'I cannot take part in any Government activity that has for its aim the defence of people and their property by violence; I cannot be a judge or take part in trials; nor can I help others to take part in law-courts and Government offices,' he declared.<sup>18</sup> Since *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* and you can be guided by the divine light of reason, governments are both unnecessary and harmful.

If people could but understand that they are 'sons of God', Tolstoy wrote, 'and can therefore be neither slaves nor enemies to one another — those insane, unnecessary, worn-out, pernicious organizations called Governments, and all the sufferings, violations, humiliations, and crimes they occasion, would cease.'<sup>19</sup> Tolstoy inspired a long tradition of anarchist pacifists, while his greatest disciple Gandhi developed his doctrine of civil disobedience into a highly effective form of non-violent direct action.

While Tolstoy rejected both Church and State, and was excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church for his views, Ammon Hennacy and Dorothy Day in this century have found it possible to be Catholic anarchists. Dorothy Day, who founded the *Catholic Worker* in 1933, became one of the staunchest advocates of Christian pacifism and anarchism. She felt that the authority of God only made her a better rebel. It gave her courage to oppose those who sought wrongly to carry over the concept of authority from the supernatural field to the social one where it did not belong. She did not think that it was contradictory or unethical to choose to obey the authority of God and reject the authority of the State since 'we were born into a state and could not help it, but accepted God of our own free will'.<sup>20</sup>

Influenced by Tolstoy and Proudhon, she sought with the anarchist Peter Maurin and the Catholic Worker Group to decentralize society and establish a community of families, with a combination of private and communal property. While most people associated the *Catholic Worker* with voluntary poverty and community, she stressed above all the need for love: 'We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.'<sup>21</sup>

Hennacy, for his part, was inspired by the 'true rebel Jesus' and his idea of God 'was not an authority whom I obeyed like a monarch but a principle of good as laid down by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount'.<sup>22</sup> If the forces of the State conflicted with his ideals, he would follow his ideals and disobey the State. Hennacy preached 'the one-man revolution within the heart' based on voluntary poverty and pacifism. Drawing out his legacy, he wrote: 'The way of Jesus, of St Francis, of Tolstoy, and of Gandhi teaches us to love our enemy, to establish justice, to abolish exploitation, and to rely upon God rather than on politicians and governments.'<sup>23</sup>

In the preface to his autobiography, Hennacy gave the clearest and most eloquent statement of his principles and their source in Christianity:

Christian-anarchism is based upon the answer of Jesus to the Pharisees when He said that he without sin was to cast the first stone; and upon the Sermon on the

Mount which advises the return of good for evil and the turning of the other cheek. Therefore, when we take any part in government by voting for legislative, judicial and executive officials, we make these men our arm by which we cast a stone and deny the Sermon on the Mount.

The dictionary definition of Christian is: one who follows Christ, kind, kindly, Christ-like. Anarchism is voluntary co-operation for good, with the right of secession. A Christian-anarchist is, therefore, one who turns the other cheek, overturns the tables of the moneylenders, and who does not need a cop to tell him how to behave. A Christian-anarchist does not depend on bullets or ballots to achieve his ideal; he achieves that ideal daily by the One Man Revolution with which he faces a decadent, confused and dying world.<sup>24</sup>

Where Day and Hennacy were primarily activists, the Russian philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev developed like Tolstoy a form of revolutionary Christianity which was non-institutional and liberating. Both saw the Kingdom of God as an existential condition rather than a social regime but for Berdyaev it took the form of creative autonomy rather than non-resisting love.

Berdyaev defined freedom as 'the duty of man to be a personality, to display the strength of the character of personality'. The free man is a self-governing being who transcends both State and society since 'The self-government of society, and of a people is still the government of slaves.' But for Berdyaev the concept of the free personality can only be understood in a religious context: Christ was the freest man bound only by love and 'God is the guarantee of the freedom of personality from the enslaving power of nature and society, of the Kingdom of Caesar and of the object world.'<sup>25</sup>

The anarchism of Berdyaev is based on the incompatibility of the Gospel and the State, between what he calls *The Realm of the Spirit and the Realm of Caesar* (1946). The ethics of the Gospel, he insists, are invariably opposed to the ethics imposed by the State. The prosperity of the State does not represent the community and always involves the death of innocents. 'The law of the State is that in order to save the State even the innocent must be sacrificed', Berdyaev writes, and yet 'the death of a single man is an event more important and more tragic than the death of a State or an Empire.' Moreover, the Church has become such an intimate partner of the State that it has turned the State into another Church. By recognizing the State, the Church has accepted the incumbent power, whatever it may be, so that 'Sovereignty and the divine character of power exist in equality!'<sup>26</sup> The remedy for this state of affairs is to deny the sovereignty of the State and anyone who claims political authority.

Like the non-resistant anarchists Tolstoy and Ballou, Berdyaev develops the Christian concepts of the Second Coming and the Divinity of Christ in a revolutionary direction. He does not look to any particular class as the agents of change: master and slave, ruler and ruled are victims of the same spiritual affliction. It is the unique individual who concerns him. He introduces into his philosophical framework the spiritual concept of the human 'personality' as our essential feature: man is a person, whose conduct is to be explained in terms of intentions and beliefs, not by his external behaviour or forces. For Berdyaev therefore it is creative autonomy, rather than non-resisting love, which constitutes the existential centre, the true inner kingdom: 'Personality in man is the triumph over the determination of the social group ... emancipation from dependence upon nature, from dependence upon society and the state.'<sup>27</sup>

Slavery in man is his sin, his Fall. Man seeks slavery as well as freedom. But the free man goes beyond the correlatives of master and slave 'to exist in himself', to become like Christ, the freest of the sons of men who was only bound by love. The truly free man is freed from psychological and physical violence, from the State and social pressures, to be entirely self-governing. As a complete person, he is creative in the 'ecstasy of the moment' which is outside time. It is only 'the gathering together of freedom, truth and love which realizes personality, free and creative personality'.<sup>28</sup> Berdyaev finally envisages the end of history, which for him is marked by the victory of 'existential time' over historical time, as the complete liberation of humanity.

It should be clear that despite the opposition of many of the classic anarchist thinkers to Christianity in the nineteenth century, and the close historical link between the Church and the State, anarchism is by no means intrinsically anti-religious or anti-Christian. Indeed, its forerunners were inspired by the minor libertarian and communal trend within Christianity, especially in the Middle Ages and during the Reformation. Tolstoy was the outstanding Christian anarchist thinker in the past, but this century has witnessed a remarkable flourishing of Christian anarchism from different traditions.

In fact it could be argued that Christian anarchism is not an attempt to synthesize two systems of thought but rather an attempt to realize the message of the Gospels. Like the mystical anarchists of the Middle Ages, Ciaron O'Reilly has recently claimed that the free society already exists in embryo: 'To the Christian the revolution has already come in the form of the resurrection. It is merely a matter of living out that promise, not living by the standards of the fallen world. The Kingdom of God exists within the social organism, it is our role to make it universally manifest.'<sup>29</sup>

To deny the authority of the State and Church does not necessarily mean a denial of the authority of God. The law of God, like natural law, can offer a standard by which to live and to oppose man-made law. We are coerced into accepting the latter, while we can accept or reject the former according to voluntary choice. Jesus undoubtedly provides an enduring libertarian example by refusing to collaborate with the Roman rulers, by rejecting the financial benefits of the Sadducees, and by encouraging people to liberate themselves and to form communities based on voluntary association and common property. Jesus dealt with wrongdoers by confronting them and then forgiving them. By suggesting that we should do unto others as we have done unto ourselves, he offered a universal moral principle which does not require the sanction of law. By not resisting evil, by turning the other cheek, he taught that we should not participate in violence to others. Since government is organized violence par excellence, a genuine reading of the Sermon on the Mount must logically lead to the rejection of all earthly government. As with the other major world religions, Christianity has left a mixed legacy, but it has been a source of great inspiration to anarchism as well as to socialism, and no doubt will continue to be so in the future.

# The Middle Ages

## Mystical and Millenarian Anarchists

TAOISM, BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY were not the only religious movements to produce libertarian thinkers and tendencies. In the Middle East, just before the birth of Muhammad, a prophet called Mazdak appeared around AD 487 in Persia.

Retaining Zoroaster's concepts of light and darkness, Mazdak preached a dualistic religion, but with socialist principles. He believed that all men are born equal but suffer from the unequal distribution of wealth and women, and since most fighting is caused by them, he proscribed private property and marriage. People should share their goods and women like water, fire and grazing. They should also maintain respect for animals, thereby putting an end to slaughter. Mazdak's ideal was a stoical and simple life, and he urged contentment and austerity.

Mazdak's followers took from the rich and gave what they did not need to the poor. They even called for the overthrow of the king. Amongst themselves, they had no private property and their children did not know their fathers.<sup>1</sup> Thousands joined the movement, but in AD 523 King Qobath arranged a massacre. Mazdak was arrested and executed in AD 528 or 529. His followers were virtually wiped out, although Babik tried unsuccessfully to revive the movement in the ninth century. Some of Mazdak's teachings later found expression in the Ismaeliya Movement in general, and in particular in the influential cultural organization known as Ikhwan al-Safa (the Brothers of Purity). They also may have influenced Al-Quramitta who established the first Islamic socialist society in southern Iraq and Bahrain. In the Middle East today 'Mazdak' is still used to describe someone who is rebellious and intractable.

In the Europe of the Middle Ages, as the established Church began to share power with temporal rulers and impose its own dogma, an underground movement developed within Christianity which often took on a revolutionary form in times of unrest and scarcity. It challenged the power of the both State and Church and tried to establish a society based on the community of the apostles. The most radical heresy came to be known as the Heresy of the Free Spirit. Although less known than the Catharist or Albigensian heresies, it was probably more important in the social history of Western Europe.<sup>2</sup>

The Heresy of the Free Spirit was one of many Christian millenarian groups in the Middle Ages which, inspired by Revelation 20: 4-6, looked forward to the Second Coming of Christ who would establish a messianic kingdom on earth and reign for a thousand years before the Last Judgement. While the original teaching held that only the Christian martyrs would be resurrected before the general resurrection of the dead at the Last Judgement, it came to be interpreted to mean that the suffering faithful would be resurrected in their own lifetime. This millenarian doctrine, spread by holy beggars, had considerable appeal for the rootless poor of Western Europe who came to believe in the imminent possibility of terrestrial, collective and total salvation. Unmarried women and widows, who had no clear social role, were particularly attracted to the movement. The Heresy of the Free Spirit as an identifiable heresy emerged at the close of the twelfth century

amongst a mystical brotherhood of Sufis in Islamic Spain, particularly in Sevilla. After a period of initiation in which they had to give blind obedience to a master, the members of the sect would enjoy total freedom in which every impulse was seen as a divine command. The heresy spread rapidly towards the end of the thirteenth century throughout Christian Europe and emerged in full view in the fourteenth century.

In the process, the heresy developed within a Neoplatonic metaphysical framework three principal doctrines. In the first place, its adherents believed that 'God is all that is' and that 'Every created thing is divine'. At the end of time, all will be reabsorbed into God like a drop of wine in the sea. Secondly, they thought that there is no afterlife of reward or punishment, but heaven and hell are merely states of the soul in this world. Thirdly, and this had most important moral and political consequences, they held that once a person has knowledge of God, he or she is in heaven and is incapable of sin: 'Every creature is in its nature blessed'. United with God, the individual rises above all laws, churches and rites and can do whatever he or she wishes. This view became linked amongst some groups to an Adam cult which saw its members (known as Adamites) restored to the state of innocence before the Fall.

In the fourteenth century Heinrich Suso, a disciple of the German mystic Meister Eckhart and an ex-flagellant, emerged from the miasmatic underground to record his encounter with an apparition of the Free Spirit in Köln around 1330:

Whence have you come?, Suso asked. 'I come from nowhere.' Tell me, what are you? 'I am not.' What do you wish? 'I do not wish.' This is a miracle! Tell me, what is your name? 'I am called Nameless Wildness.' Where does your insight lead into? 'Into untrammelled freedom.' Tell me, what do you call untrammelled freedom? 'When a man lives according to all his caprices without distinguishing between God and himself, and without looking before or after.'<sup>3</sup>

This deviant form of medieval mysticism (also found amongst contemporary Sufis) was spread by holy beggars who formed a restless intelligentsia. Their followers have been called mystical anarchists. Indeed, the adepts of the Free Spirit were distinguished from all other medieval sects by their total amorality: 'The free man is quite right to do whatever gives him pleasure', they taught. Another insisted: 'I belong to the Liberty of Nature, and all that my nature's desires I satisfy.'<sup>4</sup> It even became a proof of salvation to experience no conscience or remorse. As anti-nomians, they felt no longer bound by religious commandments, moral rules or civil laws. They rejected private property and shared their wealth. They were sexually promiscuous and rejected the marriage tie.

But for all their stress on self-deification and individual liberty, it is difficult to see them as anarchists in the modern sense for they formed an elite and exploited and oppressed people outside the sect. If anything, they are closer to those followers of Nietzsche who asserted themselves at the expense of others and lived beyond conventional definitions of good and evil. A female adept is reported to have argued in the fourteenth century that God created all things to serve a person who is 'one with God', adding 'A man whom all heaven serves, all people and creatures are indeed obliged to serve and to obey.'<sup>5</sup> Another female initiate was taught 'You shall order all created beings to serve you according to your will, for the glory of God.' They were thus convinced of their infinite superiority and believed that all things and beings were made to serve their purposes. In practice, they thought cheating, theft, and robbery with violence were all justified: 'Whatever the eyes sees and covets, let the hand grasp it.'<sup>6</sup>

Margu rite Porete, who was tried and burned in Paris in 1311, has left us *Mirouer des simples  mes*, the only complete work by a medieval adept to survive. She taught that at the seventh stage of illumination the soul becomes united with God and by his grace is liberated from sin. It needs no Church, no priesthood and no sacraments. She makes clear that those souls who are at one with God should ‘do nothing but what pleases them; or if they do, they deprive themselves of peace, freedom and nobility. For the soul is not perfected until it does what it pleases, and is not reproached for taking its pleasure.’ Again, this doctrine of amoral self-assertion is taught at the expense of others: ‘Such souls use all things that are made and created, and which nature requires, with such peace of mind as they use the earth they walk on.’<sup>7</sup> It is such teaching which could easily be used to justify immoralism or foster the kind of unrest which broke out in the medieval peasant revolts.

The Heresy of the Free Spirit formed a clandestine tradition which not only emerged in the great peasant rebellions of the Middle Ages and on the extreme left in the English Revolution, but welled up in the writings of William Blake. A modern version of the cult of the Free Spirit, with its stress on the total emancipation of the individual and call for universal peace and love, can be even recognized in the counter-culture of the nineteen sixties.

Clearly such libertarian beliefs had revolutionary implications for medieval society. By the middle of the fourteenth century, the profound economic and social changes were creating serious tensions. Unrest among peasants broke out not so much where they had been prosperous and relatively free, but where a multitude of petty civil and ecclesiastical lords were attempting to extend and formalize their jurisdiction at their expense.<sup>8</sup> Amongst the dispossessed and the rootless poor there was also a great yearning to return to the natural justice of the Garden of Eden. But the great mass insurrections which occurred – notably the English Peasants’ Revolt in 1381, the Hussite Revolution in Bohemia at Tabor in 1419–21, the German Peasants’ Revolt led by Thomas M nzer in 1525, and the M nster Commune of 1534 – were often contradictory. It is not always easy to uncover anarchist roots in them. While they certainly fostered millenarian and libertarian hopes, they usually had realistic and limited social aims. Their call for freedom was undoubtedly libertarian, but it often ended in authoritarian rule.

The Peasants’ Revolt in England in 1381 began as a mass protest of yeomen in Essex and Kent against increasingly heavy taxes – especially the Poll Tax that had been recently introduced. They feared that the nobles were trying to destroy the feudal status of the yeoman and reduce him to a serf. The obscure clergyman John Ball expressed their belief in a former era of equality and freedom in his famous distich:

When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then a gentleman?

Before the insurrection, John Ball delivered a revolutionary sermon, recorded by the French chronicler Jean Froissart:

Things cannot go well in England, nor ever shall, till everything be made common, and there are neither villeins nor gentlemen, but we shall be all united together, and the lords shall be no greater masters than ourselves. What have we deserved that we should be kept thus enslaved? We are all descended from one father and mother, Adam and Eve. What reasons can they give to show that they are greater lords than we, save by making us toil and labour, so that they can spend? <sup>9</sup>

Although he attacks private property and inequality, John Ball does not specifically attack government. He even argues that the people should appeal to the King and complain about their slavery, although he suggests pointedly: 'tell him we shall have it otherwise, or else we will provide a remedy ourselves.' The rebels in Kent elected Wat Tyler of Maidstone as their captain and appointed Jack Straw as his chief lieutenant. As they marched to London, 100,000 strong, they captured towns and castles in Essex and Kent and then entered the capital. When they arrived there, the people of London prevented the gates from being shut against the rebels, and joined forces with them. The men of Essex agreed to turn back when the king, Richard II, promised, at Mile End, that he would free the villeins and turn personal service into cash rent. But the men of Kent went on to destroy the Savoy Palace (then home of the chief royal advisor John of Gaunt), to burn Temple Bar, open the prisons (including John Ball's), and to kill the Archbishop of Canterbury and occupy his palace.

Their demands were not great, merely calling for wage labour, a reduction in taxes, free buying and selling, and an ending of feudal dues and obligations. Young King Richard met Tyler and Straw twice and granted most of their demands. At their second meeting at Smithfield, Tyler told the king that 'there should be no more villeins in England, and no serfdom or villeinage, but that all men should be free and of one condition.'<sup>10</sup> Behind the limited demands placed before Richard was a millenarian vision of the sudden restoration of a golden age of liberty and equality. This transpires in the burning of the Savoy Palace without it being sacked, and in Jack Straw's alleged declaration that in the end the rich and clergy (except the begging orders) would have to be killed off.

The hopes of the rebels were never to be realized. At the meeting at Smithfield, during the negotiations, William Walworth, the Mayor of London, wounded Tyler. Discovering that he had been taken to St Bartholomew's Hospital, the mayor had Tyler dragged out and beheaded. The king's promises were then revoked, John Ball and Jack Straw were executed with many others, and the rebellion crushed.

But it was not the end of it. John Ball's message was not forgotten:

In the beginning all human beings were created free and equal. Evil men by an unjust oppression first introduced serfdom against the will of God. Now it is the time given by God when the common people could, if they would, cast off the yoke they have borne so long and win the freedom they have always yearned for. Therefore they should be of good heart and conduct themselves like the wise husbandman in the scriptures who gathered the wheat into his barn, and uprooted and burnt the tares which had almost choked the good grain; for the harvest time was come. The tares were the great lords, the judges and the lawyers. They must all be exterminated, and so must everyone else who might be dangerous to the community of the future. Then, once the great ones had been cut off, men would all enjoy equal freedom, rank, and power, and share all things in common.<sup>11</sup>

William Morris was to revive *A Dream of John Ball* (1888) five hundred years later. The English Peasants' Revolt was based on the myth of a Golden Age, but in due course the Revolt itself took on the power of myth. Some of the anarchist participants in the anti-Poll Tax riots in London in 1990, for instance, were conscious of this earlier revolt against unjust taxation.

Despite Richard II's rearguard action, kings throughout Europe were unable to prevent feudalism from collapsing any more than the Church could stem the rising tide of the Reformation.

After the Peasants' Revolt in England, the most anarchic insurrection took place in Bohemia in the following century in 1419. It was part of a rebellion initially provoked by the execution of Jan Hus, a moderate reformer who had attacked the abuses of the church. He had also defended the British Protestant John Wycliffe who had argued that the Church would be better served without a pope and prelates. Wycliffe had declared in resounding Latin:

Firstly, that all good things of God ought to be common. The proof of this is as follows. Every man ought to be in a state of grace; if he is in a state of grace he is lord of the world and all it contains; therefore every man ought to be the lord of the whole world. But because of the multitudes of men, this will not happen unless they all hold all things in common: therefore all things ought to be in common.

During the unrest which followed in Bohemia, the insurgents called themselves Taborites after having given the biblical name Tabor to a town on a hill near Prague. They tried to establish an anarcho-communist order in which there was to be no private property or taxes and no human authority of any sort. They took the Bible as the sole authority for their faith and practice. They insisted that 'All shall live together as brothers, none shall be subject to another.' While calling for popular democracy, they still accepted the ultimate authority of God: 'The Lord shall reign, and the Kingdom shall be handed over to the people of the earth.'<sup>12</sup> They were extreme millenarians, believing that the Second Coming of Christ (disguised as a brigand) was imminent. All laws would then be abolished, the elect would never die, and women would bear children painlessly. Some even began acting as if the millennium had already arrived, wandering through the woods naked, singing and dancing; they claimed that they were in state of innocence like Adam and Eve before the Fall.

The Taborites set up communal chests and shared their wealth equally amongst themselves. Although their economic system has been called a communism of consumption, there is some evidence that they socialized production.<sup>13</sup> But they were unable to organize production on a large scale, or to exchange goods efficiently between the city and peasant communes. When their wealth ran out, they began to take from the neighbouring people. The experiment collapsed after a couple of years. Nevertheless, it has been called the first attempt to found a society on the principle that liberty is the mother and not the daughter of order.<sup>14</sup>

The Taborites were ready to fight. They called for a warrior Christ to make war on the Antichrist in Babylon, and declared: 'All lords, nobles and knights shall be cut down and exterminated in the forests like outlaws.'<sup>15</sup> Some however objected to such violence and withdrew under the guidance of Peter Chelšický to rural Bohemia to found a community of pacifists. He lamented how so-called servants of God carried the sword and committed 'all sorts of injustice, violence, robbery, oppression of the labouring poor ... Thereby all brotherly love is infiltrated with bloodlust and such tension created as easily leads to contest, and murder results.' Satan had seduced them into thinking that they were angels who must purify Christ's world of all scandals and judge the world; the result was that they 'committed many killings and impoverished many people'.<sup>16</sup>

In his principal work, *The Net of Faith* (c. 1450), Peter Chelčický opposed the 'two whales' of the Church and State. He believed that the State and political power were the result of original sin, and were necessary evils to keep order in an unregenerate world. But in any true community of Christians they were superfluous; love and peace would suffice. The community Chelčický

founded had no outward organization, and was held together only by love and by following the example of Christ and his apostles. The sect eventually became the Moravian Brothers. Rudolf Rocker later recognized Chelčický as a forerunner of Tolstoy, and Kropotkin acknowledged him as a precursor of anarchism.<sup>17</sup>

The Reformation, set in motion by the great reformers Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, unleashed forces which were difficult for the Church and State to control. It coincided with the breakup of the hierarchical feudal order with its network of rights and obligations, and freed the economy to competition and usury. The reformers' appeal to the Bible and their insistence of salvation by faith and predestination had enormous consequences. In the three score years following Luther's three great Reformation tracts of 1520, a tremendous movement at the core of Christendom got underway which has been called the radical Reformation. It marked a 'radical break from existing institutions and theologies in the interrelated drives to restore Christian Christianity, to reconstruct and to sublimate'.<sup>18</sup> It consisted of a loose movement of Anabaptists (who believed in adult baptism), Spiritualists (who stressed the divine immediacy), and Evangelical Rationalists. They believed on principle in the separation of the Church from the State, sought to spread their version of the Christian life through missions, martyrdom and philanthropy, and rejected all forms of coercion except the ban. They had an antinomian streak which in its mildest form meant a stress on grace over law, but in a more pronounced form led to the repudiation of all organization and ordinances in church life.

The Anabaptists in the sixteenth century were in many ways successors to the Brotherhood of the Free Spirit, cultivating brotherly love and sharing their goods. They regarded the State with suspicion, considering it irrelevant to true Christians like themselves. They refused to hold official positions in the State or to take up arms on its behalf. Although they were millenarians in that they looked forward to the coming of the Kingdom of God, they were prepared to wait for its arrival. They were mostly pacifists. This was not the case of Thomas Münzer who opposed Luther in Germany at the time of the Peasants' Revolt. The peasants were looking forward to a society of independent yeoman farmers and free labourers as well as a return to their common rights in land. Luther, who indirectly helped to provoke the unrest, came to defend the rulers who were introducing the new serfdom. 'The only way to make Mr Everyman do what he ought', he declared, 'is to constrain him by law and the sword to a semblance of piety, as one holds wild beasts by chains and cages.'<sup>19</sup>

In 1523, Thomas Münzer began organizing in secret a revolutionary army called the League of the Elect. Basing his vision on the apocalyptic Book of Daniel, he announced the immediate coming of the war between the forces of the Devil and the League of the Elect which would usher in the millennium. Taking the town of Mühlhausen in Thuringia, he made it his base and attracted support from the peasants. Because of Engels' praise of Münzer in *The Peasants' War in Germany* (1850), he has become a Marxist revolutionary saint, but in fact he only called for a community of goods in the last days at Mühlhausen and he ran away from the final battle in 1525 at Frankenhausen in which the peasant army was defeated.

After the debacle, itinerant preachers spread the gospel of violent millenarianism in the Low Countries and South Germany. The bookseller and printer Hans Hut, who had escaped from the battle of Mühlhausen, called for a social revolution, echoing both the views of John Ball and the Taborites: 'Christ will give the sword and revenge to them, the Anabaptists, to punish all sins, stamp out all governments; communize all property and slay those who do not permit themselves to be rebaptized.'<sup>20</sup> Hut was arrested and executed, but his message spread rapidly in

South Germany. Millenarian groups sprang up, many of them rejecting all rites and sacraments, living according to the Inner Light, and holding their possessions in common.

It was however in Münster, a small ecclesiastical city-state in north-west Germany, that the radical Anabaptists tried under the inspiration of Jan Bockelson (John of Leyderi) to establish a New Jerusalem in 1534. They called on their brothers and sisters to live in a community without sin and held together by love. They pooled their goods, including food, and gave up money. But the authoritarian tendencies in their teaching came to dominate: they burnt all books save the Bible. Although Münster had been governed by an elected council, Bockelson set up a new government of twelve elders. In their name, he introduced a new legal code which made practically every crime or misdemeanour a capital offence, from treason to answering back one's parents. Although an abundance of women led them to accept polygamy (based on the text in Genesis: 'be fruitful and multiply' [1: 22]), he imposed a strict morality with the death penalty for adultery.

In the end, Bockelson, the self-proclaimed Messiah of the Last Days, crowned himself King of the People of God and Ruler of the New Zion. A master of manipulating the people through pageants and feasts, his programmes met with little resistance and life seems to have been a round of constant exultation. Unlike the Taborites, he managed to introduce a communism of production as well as consumption, and guild members worked without wages. The sense of community was all-important in its success. But weakened by a prolonged siege and famine, Münster eventually fell in 1535.

The experience led the Anabaptists to become rigorous pacifists. They continued to set up communities, especially in Eastern Europe. Jacob Hutter, an extreme millenarian, communitarian and pacifist had a widespread influence in Moravia which led to his martyrdom. The Hutterite Chronicles record how his group moved to a village near Austerlitz in 1528 and 'spread out a cloak before the people, and every man did lay his substance down upon it, with a willing heart and without constraint, for the sustenance of those of necessity, according to the doctrine of the prophets and apostles (Isaiah 23, 18; Acts 2, 4-5)'.<sup>21</sup> Although the local prince said he would defend their refuge against Vienna, the leaders replied: 'Since you promise to resort to the sword, even to protect us, we cannot stay.' The Hutterite colonies were highly successful and although they believed in decent poverty the efficiency of their communist economy made them wealthy. The members of the colonies practised godly watchfulness on each other, and the marriages were arranged with the help of the elders. The Moravian nobles were forced by the Church and Empire to expel them from their estates in 1622. They scattered, eventually to find their way to the United States and Canada.

The peasant revolts of the Middle Ages cannot all be said to be entirely libertarian. They called for a freeing of feudal ties and rejected the new serfdom being imposed on them by the nobility in the form of heavy taxes. They appealed to their traditional rights under 'common law', but also wanted to become free labourers. The millenarian sects which emerged often channelled their discontent and aspirations, looking to divine law to replace man-made law. They rejected the claims of the upholders of political power as well as the ordinances of the moribund Church. The more extreme sects, like the Brethren of the Free Spirit, believed that once united with God, no law, divine or temporal, applied, and the individual could do what he or she would. While this celebration of freedom anticipates anarchism, in practice many of the Spiritualists were libertines who despised and exploited those who were not in 'a state of grace' like them.

The same ambivalence is to be found in the various millenarian attempts to realize heaven on earth. The Taborites came nearest to establishing an anarcho-communist order, but their commu-

nism did not go far beyond consumption and they were reduced to taking from their neighbours. The Anabaptists in Münster went farther in their communism, but ended up establishing a regime of terror. And while subsequent Anabaptists became pacifist, their communities were in many ways intolerant. Like Christianity itself, the legacy of the revolutionary millenarians and mystical anarchists of the Middle Ages is mixed.

# The English Revolution

WHILE THE GREAT MEDIEVAL rebellions clearly had libertarian and egalitarian aspirations, they took place within a world view which gave little importance to the individual. Every person had his or her allotted place in a hierarchical society which existed within a great Chain of Being which descended from God. The king was seen as God's representative on earth, and ruled by divine right. The community of peasants was based on mutual aid and shaped by custom, but they allowed little room for nonconformity or autonomy. Even the medieval cities with their guilds celebrated by Kropotkin had strict rules and codes of conduct. It was only with the Reformation and Renaissance in Europe that the individual was considered to be an autonomous person with a right of private judgement.

In the Civil War and Revolution in England in the seventeenth century, this new sense of the rights of the individual was added to the old demands for economic security and freedom from tyranny. For the first time, a recognizably anarchist sensibility can be discerned.

Just as in the periods of social unrest in the Middle Ages, millenarian sects came to the fore during the turmoil of the English Revolution. There was even a hectic if short-lived revival of the 'Free Spirit' amongst groups known as the Diggers and the Ranters who formed the extreme left wing of the republican movement. Unlike the constitutionalist Levellers who accepted the sanctity of private property and retained a faith in Parliament, they claimed they were True Levellers and demanded economic as well as political equality.<sup>1</sup> There had been communist theories before, but the Digger spokesman Gerrard Winstanley was the first to assert clearly that 'there cannot be a universal liberty till this universal community is established'.<sup>2</sup> They understand the crucial point that State power is intimately linked to the system of property.

The English Revolution was a time when it seemed possible to turn the world upside down, not only overthrow the existing State and Church but to end the Protestant ethic with its stress on work, ascetism and discipline, Winstanley and the Diggers were convinced that 'the present state of the old world is running up like parchment in the fire, and wearing away'.<sup>3</sup> There was a new mobility and freedom: 'masterless men', a hitherto unthinkable concept, stalked the land calling for the abolition of all masters; even some husbandless women were claiming the right to choose whom to kiss. They happily combined the myth of an equal society in the Garden of Eden before the Fall with the myth of Anglo-Saxon freedom before the Norman Yoke. As Christopher Hill has pointed out, there was a remarkable liberation of energy during the English Revolution: 'Men felt free: free from hell, free from priests, free from fear of worldly authorities, free from the blind forces of nature, free from magic'.<sup>4</sup>

Beneath the surface stability of rural England at the time, there was a seething underground of forest squatters and itinerant labourers and vagabonds. Many travellers went from city to city and congregated in London. These masterless men and women prized independence more than security, freedom more than comfort. They were like the beggars romanticized in Richard Brome's *A Joviall Crew* (1641) who have an authentic anarchist ring about them:

The only freemen of a common-wealth; Free above scot-free; that observe no law,  
Obey no governor, use no religion, But what they draw from their own ancient cus-  
tom Or constitute themselves.<sup>5</sup>

It was from their ranks that the supporters of the Diggers and Ranters emerged.

The Diggers, inspired by Gerrard Winstanley, tried to set up a colony on wasteland on St George's Hill near Walton-on-Thames in Surrey in April 1649. They declared in their manifesto *The True Levellers' Standard Advanced*: 'We may work in righteousness and lay the foundation of making the earth a common treasury for all.'<sup>6</sup> There were initially about forty people. They came in peace, dug up and manured the wasteland and planted beans, wheat, rye, parsnips and carrots. Winstanley prophesized that their numbers would soon swell to thousands.

Despite their peaceful and productive husbandry, not only the local clergy, landlords, and magistrates harassed them but also the neighbouring freeholders. Their seedlings were trampled on, their tools were taken away, their crude huts pulled down. Yet they persevered for almost exactly a year. They were summoned before General Fairfax to explain themselves and a band of troops was sent to intimidate them. In a sense, Cromwell was right to see their experiment as profoundly subversive for the motley band of Diggers threatened the very foundations of his totalitarian rule. Winstanley after all had warned in *A Watch-Word to the City of London* (1649) that 'All men have stood for freedom ... For freedom is the man that will turn the world upside down, therefore no wonder he hath enemies.'<sup>7</sup>

It was exhaustion from continued harassment which finally ground the Diggers down on St George's Hill (or rather George's Hill, as they called it, for the radical Protestant tradition rejected saints). It seems likely however that they were only the tip of the iceberg of True Levellerism. But while there were many more experiments throughout the Home Counties, none survived much later than 1650.<sup>8</sup>

Winstanley more than any other gave theoretical form to the Diggers' aspirations, and the Diggers in turn spoke 'for and in the behalf of all the poor oppressed people of England and the whole world'.<sup>9</sup> The son of a Wigan mercer, Winstanley had failed in the cloth trade in London. He was then obliged to become a hired labourer. He first began writing mystical religious pamphlets but rapidly moved from mysticism to a system of progressive and democratic rationalism. Like other radicals of his day, he expressed his social aspirations in religious terms and in a vigorous vernacular prose. Christ for him was a symbol of liberty: 'True freedom', he wrote, 'lies in the community in spirit and community in the earthly treasury, and this is Christ the true man-child spread abroad in the creation, restoring all things into himself.'<sup>10</sup>

Like the adepts of the Free Spirit before him, and like Tolstoy after him, Winstanley believed that God is not a personal deity or Supreme Being but a 'spirit that dwells in all mankind'. He identified God with Reason and Reason with the law of the universe: it is 'Reason that governs the whole Creation' and 'the spirit that will purge mankind is pure reason'.<sup>11</sup> Every person subject to Reason becomes the Son of God. They are no longer ruled from without but from within, by their conscience, love or reason. As Winstanley wrote in the *True Levellers' Standard*, 'the flesh of man being subject to reason, his maker, hath him to be his teacher and ruler within himself, therefore needs not run abroad after any teacher and ruler without him'.<sup>12</sup> It is the 'ruling and teaching power without [that] doth dam up the spirit of peace and liberty, first within the heart, by filling it with slavish fears of others; secondly without, by giving the bodies of one to be imprisoned, pounished and oppressed by the outward power of another'.<sup>13</sup> This is the key to Winstanley's

anarchism: external government is no longer necessary if people govern themselves according to their God-given reason.

Impressed by the interdependence of all human beings, Winstanley concluded that reason operates in society as a principle of order for the common preservation of humanity and that the government of rational beings is therefore superfluous. It is private property, not unruly human nature, which is the principal source of social conflict. From these premisses Winstanley in his early pamphlets attacked the social and political order and advocated an anarchist form of communist society, without the State, army and law.<sup>14</sup>

In his *The New Law of Righteousness* (1649), issued two months before the setting up of the colony on George's Hill, Winstanley recognized the close link between property and government: 'buying and selling earth from one particular hand to another saying this is mine, upholding this propriety by a law of government of his own making thereby restraining other fellow creatures from seeking nourishment from their mother earth'.<sup>15</sup> He also realized that once men gain power, they intensify exploitation and oppression:

everyone that gets an authority into his hands tyrannizes over others; as many husbands, parents, masters, magistrates, that live after the flesh do carry themselves like oppressing lords over such as are under them, not knowing that their wives, children, servants, subjects are their fellow creatures, and hath an equal privilege to share them in the blessing of liberty.<sup>16</sup>

Once established, the owners of property maintain their domination by government and law:

Let all men say what they will, so long as such are Rulers as call the Land theirs, upholding this particular propriety of Mine and Thine; the common-people shall never have their liberty, nor the Land ever [be] freed from troubles, oppressions and complainings; by reason whereof the Creator of all things is continually provoked.<sup>17</sup>

It was clear to Winstanley that the State and its legal institutions existed in order to hold the lower classes in place. Winstanley at this stage suggested that the only solution would be to abolish private property and then government and church would become superfluous. Magistrates and lawyers would no longer be necessary where there was no buying and selling. There would be no need for a professional clergy if everyone was allowed to preach. The State, with its coercive apparatus of laws and prisons, would simply wither away: 'What need have we of imprisonment, whipping or hanging laws to bring one another into bondage?'<sup>18</sup> It is only covetousness, he argued, which made theft a sin. And he completely rejected capital punishment: since only God may give and take life, execution for murder would be murder. He looked forward to a time when 'the whole earth would be a common treasury', when people would help each other and find pleasure in making necessary things, and 'There shall be none lords over others, but everyone shall be a lord of himself, subject to the law of righteousness, reason and equity, which shall dwell and rule in him, which is the Lord.'<sup>19</sup>

Winstanley did not call for mass insurrection or the seizure of the lands of the rich. He was always opposed to violence, although he was not an absolute pacifist and advocated an extreme form of direct action. He estimated that between half and two-thirds of the country were wastelands which the poor could work together. He was prepared to eat his bread with the sweat of

his brow and helped organize the mass squat on George's Hill. Out of the experience he wrote his famous *The Law of Freedom in a Platform, or True Magistracy Restored* (1652) which offered a plan to reorganize English society on the basis of a system of common ownership.

The work has been called by Christopher Hill 'a draft constitution for a communist commonwealth' but it appears more like a blueprint for a communist State.<sup>20</sup> In fact there are two clear phases to Winstanley's thought. In his early work, he depicted an anarchist society, but after the experience of the Diggers' colony at George's Hill he began to revise his views about the immediate possibility of a free society.<sup>21</sup>

In *The Law of Freedom in a Platform*, he thus offered a new and authoritarian version of communist society. His fundamental premisses were the same. He held firm to his belief in God as the principle of motion and interdependence in nature, and in the efficacy of love, reason and justice in human affairs. He continued to assert with his doctrine of inner light that human beings act rationally and in accordance with natural law. He saw the natural state of humanity to be a co-operative and united society held together by common preservation. Above all, he still celebrated freedom as the free development of every individual and saw it only possible where there was economic security: 'True freedom lies where a man receives his nourishment and preservation, and that is in the use of the earth'.<sup>22</sup>

But the experience of the Diggers' colony on George's Hill, especially of the Ranters within and the hostile freeholders without, made him have second thoughts about human nature. Man might be sociable and reasonable by nature, but in existing society he often appeared unruly and confused. Digger covetousness suggested to Winstanley the need for some form of external social control. Thus because 'transgression doth and may arise from ignorance and rude fancy in man', he now felt that law and government would be necessary in a commonwealth to regulate society.<sup>23</sup>

During the struggle to keep the colony on George's Hill together, Winstanley had already begun to argue that the Diggers were opposed to the government which locks up 'the treasures of the earth from the poor' and not against 'righteous government' as such.<sup>24</sup> Now he went so far as to assert 'Government is a wise and free ordering of the earth and the manners of mankind by observation of particular laws and rules, so that all the inhabitants may live peacefully in plenty and freedom in the land where they are born and bred'.<sup>25</sup> He further defended the need for law as 'a rule whereby man and other creatures are governed in their actions, for the preservation of the common peace'. An army, in the form of a popular militia would be needed to enforce the laws, to protect the community against the 'rudeness of the people' and 'to resist and destroy all who endeavour to keep up or bring in kingly bondage again'.<sup>26</sup>

Winstanley now proposed an annual parliament as the supreme governing body in the land and drew up a rigidly artificial code of laws. The subtitle of *The Law of Freedom* was 'True Magistracy Restored' and was dedicated to the arch-statist and general Oliver Cromwell because 'the power of the land [is] in your hand'.<sup>27</sup> He suggested that magistrates should be elected annually. All citizens had to work by law and only those who contributed to the common stock could benefit from it. The laws were based on the principle of revenge - 'an eye for eye' - although they were intended to be corrective rather than punitive. Sanctions would include whipping, forced labour and loss of civil rights. The death penalty was rehabilitated for murder, buying and selling, rape or following the trade of lawyer or parson. He upheld the authority of the father in the family and advocated 'overseers'(planners) to direct the economy and enforce the laws, and 'taskmasters' to reform criminals. While allowing complete freedom of religious belief and

opinion, he called for compulsory and general education. Winstanley had come to believe that the people were not ready to be free and a long process of education and preparation was first necessary before they were capable of governing themselves.

At his lowest ebb, he now defines freedom in the narrow economic sense of a 'freeman' enjoying the fruits of his labours, being capable of choosing or being a representative, and having young men or maids to be his servants in his family. Liberty was no longer universal. Clearly, Winstanley's libertarian genius had left him after his exhausting experience of practical communism. If *The New Law of Righteousness* is one of the first great anarchist texts, *The Law of Freedom* for all its rugged language reads like a proto-Marxist tract. Hill has suggested that it was a 'possibilist' document dedicated to Cromwell in the hope that he would implement its suggestions, but it seems unlikely that Winstanley could seriously believe that Cromwell would be converted to the cause of the true Levellers.<sup>28</sup>

Winstanley wrote nothing more after his communist utopia disintegrated, and he disappeared into obscurity; he seems to have become a prosperous farmer and possibly a Quaker. The Ranter Lawrence Clarkson accused him later of misusing his Reason to hold sway over others and to win personal fame: 'There was self-love and vainglory in his heart.' Clarkson also lamented Winstanley's 'most shameful retreat from George's-hill with a spirit of pretended universality, to become a mere tithe-gatherer of prosperity'.<sup>29</sup>

The libertarian communism of Winstanley and the Diggers was lost on the early anarchist and socialist movement. William Godwin, whose rationalist scheme of philosophical anarchism so closely resembles Winstanley's, dismissed the doctrines of Winstanley and the Diggers as 'scarcely indeed worthy to be recorded' in his mammoth *History of the Commonwealth of England* (1824-8).<sup>30</sup> It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that socialists rediscovered him, and only this century that the Diggers have been acknowledged as 'the earliest recognizably anarchistic movement'.<sup>31</sup>

It was the Ranters, whom Winstanley despised, who proved the most consistent libertarians and the true heirs of the Heresy of the Free Spirit. They are the most anarchistic individuals to emerge in the English Revolution. As antinomians, they sought total emancipation from all laws and rules, and advocated free love. They attacked private property and called for its abolition, and rejected all forms of government, whether ecclesiastical or civil. They hoped humanity would be returned to its original state where there would be no private property, class distinctions or human authority.

Because of their persecution from all sides, many Ranters adopted a private language and carried on a clandestine propaganda. They formed part of the 'lunatic fringe' in the English Revolution, and were quite happy to play out their radical madness in the darkness of Cromwellian sanity. They emerged after the defeat of the Levellers at Burford in 1649 which put an end to the most serious threat to Cromwell's rule from the Left. The most famous amongst the Ranters were Abiezer Coppe and Lawrence Clarkson, although Joseph Salmon and Jacob Bauthumely or Bottomley also left some writings.

The Ranters were often confused with the Quakers, and many may have crossed over from one group to the other. Both discarded outward forms of worship and believed that true religion was to be found in the 'indwelling spirit' or 'inner light' in the individual soul, and that the power of love would be enough to bring about a new era of peace and freedom. A contemporary, Thomas Collier, asserted that the doctrines of the Ranters and the Quakers were identical: 'no Christ but

within; no Scripture to be a rule; no ordinances, no law but their lusts, not heaven nor glory but here, no sin but what men fancied to be so.’<sup>32</sup>

Like the adepts of the Free Spirit, the Ranters adopted a kind of materialistic pantheism: God is essentially in every creature; all created things are united; there is neither heaven nor hell except in the human breast. A person with God could therefore commit no evil. Joseph Salmon, a former army officer, records how in a brief period of exaltation:

I saw heaven opened unto me and the new Jerusalem (in its divine brightness and corruscent beauty) greeting my Soule by its humble and gentle discensions ... I appeared to my selfe as one confounded into the abyss of eternitie, nonentitized into the being of beings; my Soule split, and emptied into the fountaine and ocean of divine fulness: expired into the aspires of pure life.<sup>33</sup>

Most Quakers and Diggers, however, thought they were far too extreme and turbulent. It was probably his experience of Ranters in the George’s Hill colony that led Winstanley to believe that some laws and rules were necessary in his ideal commonwealth to deal with the idle and the ‘self-ended spirits’.<sup>34</sup> After meeting some of them in prison, the Quaker leader George Fox complained that they claimed they were God and would ‘rant, and vapour, and blaspheme’. At one of his meetings, he found that they were ‘very rude, and sung, and whistled, and danced’.<sup>35</sup> William Penn further asserted that the Ranter wing among the Quakers ‘would have had every man independent, that as he had the principle in himself, he should only stand and fall to that, and nobody else’.<sup>36</sup> If the mainstream Quakers were shocked then it is no wonder that the upright Dissenting divine Richard Baxter should condemn their ‘Cursed Doctrine of *Libertinism*’ which led them to assert that ‘to the Pure all things are Pure, (even things forbidden)’.<sup>37</sup>

It was their total amoralism which most shocked their contemporaries. Lawrence Clarkson in his Ranter period believed that since all acts are from God, there can be no sinful act before God. He affirmed ‘there was no sin, but as man esteemed it sin, and therefore none can be free from sin till in purity it be acted as no sin, for I judged that pure to me, which to a dark understanding was impure, for to the pure all things, yea all acts, are pure.’<sup>38</sup> He recalled how he believed that ‘God had made all things good, so nothing evil but as man judged it; for I apprehended there was no such thing as theft, cheat, or a lie, but as made it so: for if the creature had brought this world into no propriety, as Mine and Thine, there had been no such tide as theft, cheat or a lie, for the prevention thereof Everard and Gerrard Winstanley did dig up the Common.’<sup>39</sup> He argued moreover that there was no evil in swearing, drunkenness, adultery and theft: ‘sin hath its conception only in the imagination’.<sup>40</sup> He advocated absolute self-exaltation:

Behold, the King of glory is come T’ reduce God, and Devil to their Doom; For both of them are servants unto Me That lives, and rules in perfect Majesty ...<sup>41</sup>

Clarkson joined a Ranter group called ‘My one flesh’ who were the most uncompromisingly antinomian sect, practising free love and revelling in bouts of drinking and feasting.

The same anarcho-communistic attitudes found in the Free Spirit continue amongst the Ranters. They felt the earth was a treasury for all to enjoy and that they should have one purse. Abiezer Coppe declared: ‘All things which God created are common!’<sup>42</sup> This extended not only to property but also to women. In Samuel Sheppard’s *The Joviall Crew, or, The Devill turn’d Ranter* (1651), his intended satire has an authentic ring when he describes their communism:

... our women are all in common. We drink quite drunk together, share our Oaths, If one man's cloak be rent, all tear their Cloaths.

and their rebellious spirit:

No hell we dread when we are dead No Gorgon nor no Fury: And while we live, wee'l drink and \*\*\*\* In spight of judge and jury.<sup>43</sup>

The Ranters in fact went beyond the Puritan sexual revolution which sought to replace property marriage by a monogamous partnership. Coppe declared 'give over thy stinking family duties', argued that fornication and adultery were no sin, and advocated a community of women.<sup>44</sup> The Ranters asserted the right of the natural man to behave naturally.

Without birth control, this call for freedom tended to be for men only. Nevertheless, many women, who had formed an important part of the Heresy of the Free Spirit, were quick to accept the arguments of the radicals who maintained that the soul knows no difference of sex. The Quaker George Fox asked: 'May not the spirit of Christ speak in the female as well as in the male?'<sup>45</sup> Winstanley had insisted that 'Every man and woman shall have the free liberty to marry whom they love.'<sup>46</sup> The Ranters however advocated and practised free love and refused to be possessive; they were notorious for their celebration of wine, women and song. Coppe felt that sex had a divine power: 'by wanton kisses, kissing hath been confounded; and externall kisses, have been made the fiery chariots, to mount me swiftly into the bosom of him whom the soul loves, [his excellent Majesty, the King of glory].'<sup>47</sup>

The Ranters offered a unique opportunity for women to become independent and voluntary beings with a right to sensual pleasure. Not surprisingly, the Ranter teaching which seemed to offer such a lively and joyful affirmation of life and freedom attracted many women. A description of a female Ranter in the hostile tract *The Routing of the Ranters* (1650) conjures up wonderfully their Dionysian exuberance:

she speaks highly in commendation of those husbands that give liberty to their wives, and will freely give consent that she should associate her self with any other of her fellow creatures, which she shall make choice of; she commends the Organ, Viol, Symbal and Tonges in Charterhouse-Lane to be heavenly musick[;] she tosseth her glasses freely, and concludeth there is no heaven but the pleasures she injoyeth on earth, she is very familiar at the first sight, and danceth the Canaries at the sound of a hompipe.<sup>48</sup>

The most celebrated Ranter was Abiezer Coppe who was born in Warwick in 1619. He left university at the outbreak of the Civil War and became an Anabaptist preacher in the Warwick area. He felt he was at one with humanity, especially the wretched and the poor. He recounts how he once met a strange, deformed man on the road, and his conscience — the 'wei-favoured harlot' — tempted him to give this man all he had, take off his hat and bow seven times to the beggar. Coppe was no elitist, and felt the greatest privilege was to be able to give and to share.

His first important work *Some Sweet Sips of Some Spirituall Wine* (1649) was extremely critical of formal Christianity. But it was *A Fiery Flying Roll* (bound together with *A Second Fiery Flying Roule*), dated 1649 but published in 1650, within a year of the execution of the king, which brought him notoriety. Subtitled 'A Word from the Lord to all the Great Ones of the Earth', in it Coppe not

only attacked organized religion but presented a vision of a purged society in which property was to be held in common. Where the Levellers had excluded servants and others from their notion of equality, Coppe extended it to embrace all men and women. Like the Diggers, he also advocated a form of voluntary communism which echoes the early Apostolic Church and the visions of John Ball: 'give, give, give, give up your houses, horses, goods, gold, Lands, give up, account nothing your own, have ALL THINGS common'.<sup>49</sup>

Like most Ranters, Coppe was a pacifist, rejecting 'sword levelling, or digging-levelling'.<sup>50</sup> He insists that he never drew a sword or shed one drop of blood: 'we (holily) scome to fight for any thing; we had as live be dead drunk every day of the weeke, and lye with whores i'th market place, and account these as good actions as taking the poor abused, enslived ploughmans money from him.'<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, he warned the wealthy and powerful: 'Kings, Princes, Lords, great ones, must bow to the poorest Peasants; rich men must stoop to poor rogues, or else they'l rue for it.'<sup>52</sup> He was adamant that it was necessary to chop at one blow 'the neck of horrid pride, murder, malice and tyranny, &c.' so that 'parity, equality, community' might bring about on earth 'universall love, universall peace, and perfect freedome'.<sup>53</sup> Coppe joined a group of Ranters who believed that all humanity was one and that we should recognize our brotherhood and sisterhood. He joyously declared the death of sin and called for a life beyond good and evil: 'Be no longer so horridly, hellishly, impudently, arrogantly wicked, as to judge what is sinne, what not ... sinne and trangression is finisht, its a meere riddle.'<sup>54</sup>

Coppe was not content to preach merely but turned himself into a surrealistic work of art. He became a master of happenings. In London, he would charge at carriages of the great, gnashing his teeth and proclaiming the day of the Lord had come. He wanted to make his listeners' ears 'tingle'. But it was always with a subversive aim: 'I am confounding, plaguing, tormenting nice, demure, barren *Mical* with  *Davids* unseemly carriage, by skipping, leaping, dancing like one of the fools; vile, base fellowes, shame-lessely, basely, and uncovered too, before handmaids.'<sup>55</sup> His supreme confidence was based on his conviction that his message came from 'My most Excellent Majesty [in me] who is universall love, and whose service is perfect freedome'.<sup>56</sup>

It was all too much for the government and the Protestant Establishment. It was not enough merely to dismiss Coppe as mad; he and his fellow Ranters posed a real threat to Cromwell's rule. The publication of the *Fierly Flying Rolls* prompted the government to pass an Act of Parliament against 'Atheistical, Blasphemous and Execrable Opinions'. They were condemned by Parliament to be publicly burned. Coppe was arrested and imprisoned in Newgate prison. When brought before the Committees of Examination, he apparently feigned madness, talking to himself, and 'throwing nut-shells and other things about the room'.<sup>57</sup> Obligated to recant he issued in 1651 A Remonstrance of the sincere and zealous Protestation and Copps Return to the wayes of Truth. Written in his best ranting manner, Coppe replied to his accusations, although he remained true to his social message.<sup>58</sup> The Wings of the Fierly Flying Roll were not entirely clipped. While denying the belief that there is no sin, he declares that all men are equally sinful in the eyes of God. Again, he reasserts that he will call nothing he has his own: 'As for community, I own none but that Apostolical, saint-like Community, spoken of in the Scriptures ... I own none other, long for none other, but the glorious (Rom. 8) liberty of the Sons of God. Which God will hasten in its time.'<sup>59</sup>

For all their enthusiasm and originality, the Ranters never developed into a coherent or organized movement. They mainly formed loose associations or affinity groups, probably with a dozen or score of people. They drew support mainly from the lower strata of the urban poor who

shared the aspirations of John Ball. The Ranters became quite numerous for a time, especially in London, and at their height there was no part of England which did not feel their influence. But their leaders were picked off in 1650 and 1651; five years later they were in serious decline. But their influence lingered on and was still strong enough in 1676 for the respectable Quaker Robert Barclay to publish an attack on *The Anarchy of the Ranters and other Libertines*. Fox also reported that Ranters were at work in New England in 1668.

The exact nature and influence of the Ranters is still open to dispute. The term 'Ranter' like anarchist today was often used in a pejorative way to describe anyone with extreme or dangerous opinions; Ranterism came to represent 'any anti-social manifestations of the light within'.<sup>60</sup> To a large extent, the image of the Ranter as an immoral rascal was developed by sensationalist pamphleteers working on behalf of established Protestantism who wanted to suppress its 'lunatic fringe'. In a similar vein, the Marxist historian A. L. Morton called them 'confused mystical anarchists' who drew support from 'the defeated and declassed' groups after Cromwell had crushed the Levellers.<sup>61</sup> But men like Coppe and Clarkson were far from despairing and for a time after the execution of the king it seemed possible in England that true levelling could lead to a genuine commonwealth of free and equal individuals. In the event, as in so many later revolutions, the military dictator Cromwell crushed the extreme left which had helped to bring him to power.

For all their mystical language, the Ranters expressed a wonderful sense of exuberant irreverence and earthy nonconformity. They are not only a link in the chain that runs between Joachim of Fiore and William Blake, but from peasant communism to modern anarcho-communism. They looked back to the Brotherhood of the Free Spirit of the Middle Ages and anticipated the counter-culture of this century.

# The French Renaissance and Enlightenment

ONE OF THE CONSEQUENCES of the Renaissance, with its interest in antiquity, and the Reformation, with its stress on the right to private judgement, was a revival of anti-authoritarian tendencies in secular matters. Of all the countries in Europe in the second half of the sixteenth century, it was France that produced the most powerful libertarian thinkers. This was doubtless a response to the centralizing tendencies of the French monarchy and the growth of a strong Nation-State.

## François Rabelais

The most colourful and rumbustious French libertarian was the incomparable François Rabelais. An ex-Franciscan and Benedictine monk who practised and taught medicine, Rabelais came to hate monks and scholasticism. In his masterpiece *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532–64) he delighted in satirizing the religious, political, legal and social institutions and practices of sixteenth-century France. The work contains a wonderful mixture of bawdy humour, sharp satire and zest for life.

At the same time, there is a serious side to Rabelais. He adopted a form of naturalistic optimism which led him to anarchist conclusions. He believed that human nature is fundamentally good and only corrupted by our education and environment. He therefore called for the full development of our faculties ‘because free people, well-born and well-educated, keeping good company, have by nature an instinct and incentive which always encourage them to virtuous acts, and hold them back from vice.’<sup>1</sup> It follows that if people are left to themselves their ‘honour’ or moral sense is sufficient to govern their behaviour without the need for any external rules or laws.

Rabelais gave flesh and blood to these abstract principles in Book I of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1534) where he describes the founding of the abbey of Thélème. Gargantua gives the abbey to Friar John (Frère Jean des Entommeures: Friar John of the Hearty Eaters) for his help in the war against the power-mad despot Picrochole, who has a ‘bitter bile’ (the meaning of his name in Greek). Friar John has all the faults of monks but none of their vices. He is ignorant, dirty and gluttonous, but also brave, frank and lusty. His abbey is built like a magnificent and luxurious country house without walls, the very opposite of a convent or monastery. Its name Thélème in Greek means ‘will’ or ‘pleasure’. The gifted and well-bred members are free to leave whenever they choose. There is no chastity, poverty and obedience: they can marry, be rich, and live in perfect freedom. They have no need for laws and lawyers, politics, kings and princes, religion, preachers and monks, money and usurers. All their life is spent ‘not in laws, statutes or rules, but according to their own free will and pleasure’. The only rule is ‘fais ce que voudras!’ (Do what you will!).

Rabelais’s ideal commonwealth anticipates the exuberant licence of Fourier’s phalansteries in which the satisfaction of all desire is considered positive and healthy. But it is primarily a utopia for the new aristocrats of the Renaissance like Rabelais himself who looked to a society based on

intelligence and knowledge rather than on power and wealth. His rebellion remains an individual and imaginative one and does not translate itself into action against the structure of society. While he opposed tyranny in all its forms, in the real world Rabelais hoped for nothing more than a peaceful and benevolent monarchy. He might have called for the freedom of noble men and women in his chivalric utopia, but it was not until the eighteenth century that *philosophes* asserted the natural nobility of all free men and women. Nevertheless, Rabelais, for his exuberant and joyful celebration of freedom, deserves an honourable mention in any history of libertarian thought.

## Etienne de la Boétie

Unknown to Rabelais, there was another writer in France at the same time asking why free-born people should so readily accept their servitude. His name was Etienne de la Boétie, and he was born in 1530, the son of a judge with powerful connections in Church and State. He went on to study law and became a counsellor in the Bordeaux *parliament* (assembly of lawyers) where he called for religious toleration for the persecuted Protestant Huguenots. A poet and classical scholar, he also was a friend of the great humanist Montaigne. In his short life, la Boétie appeared a devout member of the Catholic Church and a loyal subject to the king but as young man he wrote sometime between 1552 and 1553 a *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, one of the great libertarian classics. He undoubtedly admired all his life those classical writers who had defended liberty in ancient Greece and Rome. After his death in 1563, Montaigne, who was his literary executor, was too prudent and timid to publish the manuscript, although he admitted it was written 'in honour of liberty against tyrants'. He dismissed it as a youthful folly, a mere literary exercise, yet he admitted that la Boétie had believed in every word of it and would have preferred to be born in the liberty of Venice than in France.

The first full version of the essay appeared in Holland in 1576 and was used as propaganda by the Huguenots against the Catholic regime. It went largely unnoticed until the eighteenth century when it was read by Rousseau and reprinted at the beginning of the French Revolution. Since then it has been recognized as a minor classic of political theory for asking the fundamental question of political obligation: why should people submit to political authority or government?

La Boétie's answer contains not only a powerful defence of freedom but his bold reasoning led him to conclude that there is no need for government at all. It is only necessary for humanity to wish that government would disappear in order for them to find themselves free and happy once again. People however choose to be voluntary slaves: 'liberty alone men do not want, not for any other reason, it seems, except that if they wanted it, they would have it. It is as if they refuse to have this fine acquisition, only because it is too easy to obtain.'<sup>2</sup>

Although the style is rhetorical and repetitive, it is possible to discern three stages in la Boétie's argument. In the first part he argues that government exists because people let themselves be governed, and dissolves when obedience ends. In the next part he asserts that liberty is a natural instinct and a goal, and slavery is not a law of nature but merely a force of habit. Finally, it is shown that government is maintained by those who have an interest in its rule.

La Boétie bases his case on natural right theory. He believes that 'if we lived with the rights that nature has given us and with the lessons it teaches us, we would naturally obey our parents, be subjects to reason, and serfs of nobody'.<sup>3</sup> There is simply no point discussing whether liberty

is natural since it is self-evident; one cannot keep anyone in servitude without harming them. This is even true of animals, whether they be elephants or horses.

Although he does not accept the social contract theory of government, he suggests that people do behave as if there were a 'contract' to obey their rulers. But since their obedience is voluntary, they are equally able to act as if there were no contract, and thus disobey their rulers. The crucial point is that the people are the source of all political power, and they should choose to allocate this power to rulers or to remove it as they see fit. As such, la Boétie clarifies the nature of political obligation and develops the notion of popular sovereignty.

In his essay, he celebrates that 'liberty which is always such a pleasant and great good, that once lost, all evils follow, and even the goods which remain after it, lose entirely their taste and savour, corrupted by servitude'.<sup>4</sup> He then condemns tyrants and bad princes in swelling rhetoric full of classical allusions. In his view there are three types of tyrant: those who possess a kingdom through the choice of the people; those by force of arms; and those by hereditary succession. Although he thinks the first kind of tyrant is the most bearable, he nevertheless believes that all three types have the same effect: they swallow people up and hold them in servitude. And once enslaved, people forget their freedom so quickly and profoundly that 'it seems impossible that they will awake and have it back, serving so freely and gladly that one would say, to see them, that they have not lost their liberty, but won their servitude'.<sup>5</sup>

The principal reason for this voluntary servitude according to la Boétie is custom: 'the first reason why men serve voluntarily is because they are born serfs and are brought up as such'.<sup>6</sup> The support and foundation of tyranny moreover is not the force of arms but rather the self-interest of a group of people who find domination profitable: 'they want to serve in order to have goods'.<sup>7</sup> The result is that 'these wretches see the treasures of the tyrant shine and look in amazement at the rays of his boldness; and, attracted by this light, they draw near, and do not see that they put themselves in the flame which can only burn them'.<sup>8</sup> But there is a way out. Just as people give power to their rulers, they can take it back. Although he does not say as much, the whole drift of la Boétie's essay is to imply the need for political disobedience.<sup>9</sup>

Not long after the publication of Machiavelli's handbook for unscrupulous statecraft *The Prince* (1532), la Boétie brilliantly demonstrated the economic and psychological grounds for voluntary servitude. Human beings are born free and yet put chains on themselves and their children. They could cast them off if they so wished, but they do not. As a result, voluntary slaves make more tyrants in the world than tyrants make slaves. Montaigne rightly recognized the subversive message of la Boétie's essay — and wrongly tried to suppress it.

This highly original work does not easily fit into any one tradition of political thought. Its analysis of political power lay the groundwork for the concept of civil disobedience, and as such it can take an honoured place within the pacifist tradition. Emerson knew of it and wrote a poem to its author. Tolstoy was the first important anarchist to recognize the importance of the essay and translated it into Russian. Max Netdau is correct to include la Boétie in his list of early thinkers who envisaged a society without laws and government.<sup>10</sup> Since then the anarchists Gustav Landauer, Rudolf Rocker, Bart de Ligt, and Nicolas Walter have all recognized its honourable place within any history of anarchist thought. More recently, it has also appealed to libertarians of the Right like Murray N. Rothbard who appreciate its emphasis on personal initiative and improvement.<sup>11</sup> There can be no doubt that the *Discours de la servitude volontaire* reveals a profound anarchist sensibility and orientation.

## Gabriel de Foigny

In France in the seventeenth century, the process of creating a nation out of the many regional communities gathered momentum. Louis XIV in particular struggled to unite the country in a strongly centralized State symbolized in the person of the monarch. He proudly announced: 'L'État, c'est moi'. But not all were impressed by his passion for luxury and war which led to the neglect of agriculture and the misery and ignorance of the peasants.

Since it was too dangerous to express radical views directly, libertarian thinkers used the device of an imaginary voyage to a utopia to criticize existing society and suggest alternative institutions and practices. Gabriel de Foigny for one knew only too well how difficult it was to entertain radical ideas and to act independently. Born in Ardennes in 1630, he entered a monastery of the Order of the Cordeliers (Franciscans) and became a Catholic preacher. His unruly behaviour however led him to be unfrocked. He changed his religion and moved to Calvinist Geneva, but again he soon fell into difficulties with the authorities because of his penchant for girls and wine. On one occasion, he is said to have vomited in front of the altar while taking the service in a Temple. With little chance of becoming a solid French or Swiss citizen, he published anonymously in 1676 *Les Aventures de Jacques Sadeur dans la découverte de la Terre Australe*, translated in a truncated version in 1693 as *A New Discovery of Terra Incognita Australis*. The work landed him in jail, although he was eventually released on indefinite bail.

It is easy to see why the authorities of Geneva should be disturbed. In his utopia set in Australia, Foigny attacks all the foundations of religion. Although the inhabitants believe in God, they never mention him and spend their time in meditation rather than prayer. They are born free, reasonable and good and have as little need for religion as they do for government. They have no written laws and no rulers. Private property does not exist. Even sex amongst the 'hermaphrodite' Australians is no longer necessary and the family has no role. The imaginary traveller Jacques Sadeur, a hermaphrodite himself, never found out how they reproduced but reports:

I have only observed, that they loved one another with a cordial love, and that they never loved any one more than another. I can affirm I neither saw quarrel nor animosity amongst them. They know not how to distinguish between mine and thine and there is more perfect sincerity and disinterestment amongst them than exist between men and women in Europe.<sup>12</sup>

Education takes place in communal houses like monasteries from the age of two to thirty-five. They spend the first part of each day at school or in scientific research, the second part gardening, and the third part in public exercise. Since they only eat fruit, they have no need for agriculture beyond gardening, and since they wear no clothes and have little furniture there is no need for industry. The society is entirely egalitarian. As an Old Man explains to Jacques Sadeur: 'we make a profession of being all alike, our glory consists in being all alike, and to be dignified with the same care, and in the same manner.'<sup>13</sup>

But the most interesting thing about Foigny is that he is the first utopian to conceive of a society without government. The Old Man expounds what might be called a philosophy of anarchism:

It was the Nature of Man to be born, and live free, and that therefore he could not be subjected without being despoiled of his nature ... The subjection of one man in another was a subjection of the human Nature, and making a man a sort of slave to

himself, which slavery implied such a contradiction and violence as was impossible to conceive. He added that the essence of man consisting in liberty, it would not be taken away without destroying him ... This does not signify that he does not often do what others desire, but he does not do so because others compel or command him. The word of commandment is odious to him, he does what his reason dictates him to do; his reason is his law, his rule, his unique guide.<sup>14</sup>

These freedom-loving people have no central government and all the decisions about their lives are taken at the local assemblies of each district or neighbourhood. Each morning food is brought by the members of each district to the common storehouse when they meet for their morning conference. They are a peaceful people and never fight amongst each other, but they are ready to defend their country against foreign invasions. But even in war, they have no leaders or commanders and they take up positions without previous discussions. The order and harmony prevailing in their society results primarily from the 'Natural Light' of their reason: 'this adherence to strict reason, which unites them amongst themselves, carries them to what is good and just.'<sup>15</sup>

Foigny's Australians, with their commitment to reason, universal benevolence and perfect sincerity, anticipate Swift's Houyhnhnms in the fourth part of *Gulliver's Travels*; indeed, they are so close one wonders whether the Tory Dean was inspired by Jacques Sadeur's imaginary voyage. There is even a comparison at the end of Foigny's book between the virtue and reason of the Australians and our own Yahoo knowledge 'by the assistance of which we only live like beasts'.<sup>16</sup> Godwin too, if had discovered the work, would have been impressed by the Australians' practice of political justice in their society without government.

## Fénelon

Another priest in France, though considerably more illustrious, used the device of the imaginary voyage to express his moral and political views. He was the Archbishop François de Salignac de La Mothe Fénelon (1651–1715). He wrote the didactic novel *Télémaque* (1699) for his pupil, the duc de Bourgogne, grandson of Louis XIV, and the future king. Ostensibly relating to the adventures of Telemachus, the son of Ulysses, it uses an imaginative narrative full of classical mythology as an excuse to discuss politics, morals, education and religion.

There are two utopias embedded in the work, the first in the country of La Bétique, and the second in the city of Salente. In the idyllic country of La Bétique the sun always shines, and there is a natural abundance, but the citizens hold their goods in common and lead simple lives. It is puritanical compared to Rabelais' Abbey of Thélème; the natives are against vain riches and deceitful pleasures. At the same time, they live in a state of libertarian and pacifist communism and do not want to extend their dominion. They show no signs of pride, haughtiness or bad faith.

In the city of Salente, Telemachus's friend Mentor is asked to mend the administration. He does this by establishing a reign of frugal austerity: gold, foreign merchandise, even effeminate music, are banished. The puritanical tendency in Fénelon also comes to the fore and he argues that well-being is to be achieved by the restriction not the satisfaction of desires: 'Deceptive riches had impoverished them, and they became effectively rich in proportion as they had the courage to do without them.'<sup>17</sup>

No wonder Louis XIV was not amused; Fénelon lost favour at court and was exiled to his diocese. But *Télémaque* proved the model of many a religious and political dissertation disguised as a novel written by the philosophes in the following century. In addition, it profoundly influenced the young Godwin who argued in his *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793) that it is preferable to save a benevolent philosopher like Fénelon in a fire rather than his maid, even if she were one's own mother, because of his superior ability to contribute to human happiness.

## The Enlightenment

In the work of Foigny and Fénelon we can see the kind of audacious thinking which was to inspire the French Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. After Descartes had established his method of systematic doubt and rational enquiry, the *philosophes* went out of their way to challenge received ideas and prejudices and to analyse society in the light of reason. They took nature as their yardstick and reason as their guide.

Central to the world-view of the Enlightenment was a belief in the perfectibility of man. Man is not irretrievably fallen in a state of sin, the *philosophes* argued, but largely the product of his circumstances. If you change his circumstances, then you can change his conduct. And the best way to achieve that is through enlightenment and education. Man is therefore perfectible, or at least susceptible to continual improvement. History moreover shows that progress has taken place in the past, and there is no good reason to think that it should not so continue in the future.

But while all the *philosophes* believed in the progressive nature of man, they did not all reach anarchist conclusions. Voltaire introduced the liberal ideas of Locke into France in the eighteenth century and like him thought government necessary to protect life and property. He did not go beyond criticizing individual abuses and monarchical despotism. In public Diderot advocated with Voltaire a constitutional monarchy as long as the king made a social contract with the people, and only in private contemplated a society without government and law. While Rousseau was a product of the Enlightenment, he came to question the prevailing confidence in reason and science to bring about social and moral progress. People, he thought, are naturally good and have become depraved by existing institutions. But he did not call like later anarchists for the abolition of all such institutions but their replacement by a new social contract. Only less well-known thinkers like Jean Meslier and Morelly carried the *philosophes'* criticism of the existing regime to the borders of anarchism. Their works however were known only to a few and they did not exert much influence in their day.

## Jean Meslier

Little is known of Jean Meslier except that he was a country priest of Étrepigny in Champagne. He did not dare publish his atheistic and revolutionary beliefs in his own lifetime but wrote them down in a *Testament* in the 1720s for the edification of his parishioners after his death in 1729. Although some manuscript versions circulated in Paris in the middle of the century, Voltaire and Holbach were the first to publish a truncated version which only included his anti-clerical sentiments. The full text did not appear until 1864.

Written in an angry, unpolished and convoluted style, the argument of Meslier's *Testament* are set out in a series of 'proofs'. The title however gives the essence of his message: 'Memoirs of

the thoughts and sentiments of Jean Meslier concerning part of the errors and false conduct and government of mankind, in which can be seen clear and evident demonstrations of the vanity and falseness of all divinities and religions ...'

The village *curé* in fact reached the shattering conclusion that all religions are not only false but their practices and institutions are positively harmful to the well-being of humanity. In the name of reason and nature, he rejected the claims of Christianity and theism. God simply does not exist and no soul lives on after death. According to Meslier, the idea of the Fall of Man bringing about all the afflictions of this life simply because of a mild act of disobedience in eating some apple is quite incomprehensible.

Meslier has been called 'more of an anarchist than an atheist'.<sup>18</sup> He certainly thought that man is naturally drawn to appreciate 'peace, kindness, equity, truth and justice' and to abhor 'troubles and dissension, the malice of deceit, injustice, imposture and tyranny'.<sup>19</sup> But why, he asked, had the desire for happiness common to every human heart been frustrated? It was simply because some people were ambitious to command and others to earn a reputation for sanctity. As a result, two forces had come into being, one political and the other religious. When they made a pact between themselves the fate of the common people was sealed. The source of existing ills was not therefore to be found in the Fall of Man, but rather in the 'detestable political doctrine' of Church and State:

for some wishing unjustly to dominate their fellows, and others wishing to acquire some empty reputation of holiness and sometimes even of divinity; both parties have cleverly made use, not only of force and violence, but also of all sorts of tricks and artifices to lead the peoples astray, in order to achieve their ends more easily ... and by these means, one party has made itself honoured and respected or even adored as divinities ... and the members of the other party have made themselves rich, powerful and formidable in the world, and both parties being, by these kinds of artifices, rendered rich enough, powerful enough, respected or formidable enough to make themselves feared or obeyed, they have openly and tyrannically subjected their fellows to their laws.<sup>20</sup>

To end this state of affairs, Meslier calls on the poor and oppressed to exclude both ecclesiastical and political parties from society so that they can live in peace and virtue once again. He insists that the salvation of the common people lies in their own hands. Only a violent social revolution could eradicate evil from the face of the earth: 'Let all the great ones of the earth and all the nobles hang and strangle themselves with the priests' guts, the great men and nobles who trample on the poor people and torment them and make them miserable.'<sup>21</sup>

## Morelly

Meslier was not the only one to entertain such visionary thoughts. One Morelly, whose exact identity is still not known, wrote an allegorical poem called the *Basiliade* in 1753 which depicted an ideal society organized by Adam and Eve who are prudent enough not to commit any errors before founding a family. Morelly's *Code de la nature*, which appeared anonymously in 1755, elaborates the social theory implicit in the first work in an uneven and turgid style. The first

three sections attack the existing moral and political system, with its unequal property relations and class divisions, and the fourth section presents Morelly's own ideal pattern of laws.

governed by eternal laws. Unfortunately, men are not content to follow the dictates of nature; hence, 'you will see quite clearly the simplest and most excellent lessons of Nature continually contradicted by everyday morals and politics.'<sup>22</sup> In particular, the system of private property has aggravated the unnatural 'desire to possess' which is the basis and vehicle of all the other vices.

But it need not always be like this. Man is not born vicious and wicked. He is naturally social and benevolent, but corrupted by the institutions surrounding him. God or rather Supreme Wisdom (Morelly is a deist, not an atheist like Meslier) has created in man a sense of self-interest (*amour propre*) in order to preserve his existence, but existing institutions transform it into vicious selfishness. However, man is also capable of *attraction morale*; since he cannot always satisfy his needs alone, he feels benevolent affection towards those who help him. The desire to be happy is fundamental and if 'you want to be happy, be benevolent'.<sup>23</sup>

It follows for Morelly that if people would only obey the laws of nature and return to their original integrity and values, then no artificial laws would be necessary. And if they replaced the existing system of private property with communal ownership, there would be little cause for vicious conduct since 'Where no property existed, none of its pernicious consequences could occur'.<sup>24</sup>

Nothing, he concluded in his proposed code of laws, should belong to anyone individually as his sole property except such things as he puts to his personal use, whether for his needs, his pleasure or his daily work. He expected every citizen to contribute his share to the commonweal according to his abilities and be maintained at the public expense. Like later anarchists, Morelly felt that human beings are not lazy by nature, but are made so by social institutions.

By seeing private property rather than government as the main cause of evil, Morelly was a forerunner of communism. Moreover, he attempted to lay down in the fourth part of his Code de la nature a 'Model of Legislation conforming to the intentions of Nature', that is to say, laws of society which would correspond to natural laws. His proposed communist society was austere and authoritarian with strict education and compulsory labour and marriage. The family would be the base of a social hierarchy composed of tribes organized in cities and provinces. The administration of the economy would be merely a matter of accounting, with a minimal government periodically rotated. There would be a strict overall plan and the only philosophy taught would support the laws. The result would be a 'very fine order'. Those who oppose that order would be punished, the worst offenders being isolated in caverns which eventually would become their tombs. He thought a transitional society of 'some severity' may be necessary to achieve communism.

Morelly inspired the egalitarian and communist wing of the French Revolution. Gracchus Babeuf, who led the 'Conspiracy of Equals' claimed that the author of the Code de la nature was the true leader of the conspiracy; both certainly confused authority with security. At the same time, Morelly's insistence that institutions must conform to the intentions of nature has an authentic libertarian ring about it. His interest in creating circumstances to encourage benevolence and to bring about happiness anticipates Charles' Fourier. It was not without reason that Proudhon should praise his 'negation of government'.<sup>25</sup> Later anarcho-communists like Kropotkin drew more libertarian conclusions because they simply interpreted the lessons of nature in a different way.

## Denis Diderot

The case of Denis Diderot is also somewhat curious. As co-editor of the *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, he shared the philosophes' confidence in gradual progress through the diffusion of practical and theoretical knowledge. By presenting knowledge as a coherent whole, the *Encyclopédie* became a fountain of radical and subversive thought.

In his practical politics, Diderot accepted the monarchy, but in a more enlightened form. In his essay *Autorité politique* (1751) he argued that the king should have a contract with the people, consult them continually, and govern in their interest. In his memoir for Catherine II, Empress of Russia, he further recommended nationalizing church property, providing free universal education, and ensuring complete religious toleration. As a utilitarian, he argued that happiness is the only basis of all good legislation. Adopting Rousseau's notion of the general will, he maintained that the individual should bend to the interest of humanity as a whole.

Diderot was also an ambivalent thinker and could not always make up his mind on central philosophical issues. As a result, he felt most at ease in the dialectical genre of the dialogue which enabled him to destroy dogmatic opinion and encourage open discussion. He was strictly speaking a determinist and materialist but in his dialogue *Jacques le fataliste* (1796) found it difficult to accept the corollary of moral determinism with its rejection of responsibility. Jacques believes in fate but acts as if he were free. Again, Diderot sometimes felt that the animal instincts in man should be curbed, but more often than not he believed that the passions 'always inspire us rightly' and it is the mind which leads us astray.<sup>26</sup>

This theme runs through the story of *Le Neveu de Rameau* (written in 1762 but not published until 1823), a dialectical satire on contemporary society and conventional morality. Rameau's nephew is a musician and an amoral individualist who claims that happiness is living according to one's nature. He principally enjoys sensual pleasures and is insensitive to the 'charms of virtue'. He declares 'long live the wisdom of Solomon — drink good wine, blow yourself out with luscious food, have a tumble with lovely women, lie on soft beds. Apart from that the rest is vanity.'<sup>27</sup>

While drawn to such hedonism, Diderot still feels virtue brings its own reward. Like Morelly, he also hoped that man-made laws would mirror the laws of nature. The best legislation, he argued, conformed most closely to nature, and this is to be achieved not by 'opposing the passions of men, but on the contrary by encouraging and applying them to both public and private interest'.<sup>28</sup>

This was Diderot's public stance; in private, he entertained much more radical ideas. It was his belief that 'Nature gave no man the right to rule over others.' When he was offered, albeit as a party-joke, the opportunity to become a monarch and legislator, he refused. It so happened that for three years he found the bean in the traditional cake on Twelfth Night which according to French custom obliged him to present a code of laws. His initial response was to assert in a poem his wish to unite people, not divide them. He further expressed his love of liberty and called on others to feel the same:

Divide and rule, the maxim is ancient, It's not mine; it was made by a tyrant. I love freedom, to unite you is my will And if I have one wish It's that everyone make their own.<sup>29</sup>

On winning the bean for the third successive year, Diderot decided to abdicate the kingly role once and for all. He renounced even the right to decree like Rabelais' wayward monk 'each should

do what he wills'. With impeccable anarchist sentiments, he declared that he did not want to obey any law or make them for others:

Never for the public's sake Has man been willing to surrender his rights! Nature has made neither servant nor master; I neither want to give nor receive laws!<sup>30</sup>

In a short story called 'Conversation of a Father with His Children', Diderot makes the patriarch declare that 'no one is permitted to break the laws'. His son, the narrator, insists however that 'nature has made good laws for all eternity' and argues that one should follow the law of nature rather than man-made laws. He appeals to 'natural equity' as his guide in difficult moral problems. In the discussion that follows, the children rebel against paternal authority, and when the father breaks up the gathering his son asserts that 'there are no laws at all for the wise'.<sup>31</sup> Diderot, while seeing both sides of the argument, clearly sympathizes with the son. Moreover, he is prepared to extend moral and social freedom beyond the intellectual elite of his own circle.

In a more considered statement, Diderot, like Foigny and Swift, criticized existing European civilization by contrasting it with an imaginary society in the tropics. After Louis-Antoine de Bougainville had published in 1771 a description of his travels around the world, Diderot wrote a fictitious account of Bougainville's visit to Tahiti which he called *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*. His bold reasoning led him to entertain anarchist ideas but his prudence held him back from publishing them. Just as Voltaire did not want to discuss the existence of God in front of the servants, so Diderot did not want his daughter to live out his daring moral speculations. His *Supplément* did not see the light of day until after the French Revolution in 1796.

Diderot not only used the 'primitive' paradise in the Pacific to attack Western civilization with its repressive religion and warring States but presented an anarchist society without government and law. His Tahitians, though noble, are not savages; they effectively condemn by contrast the hypocrisy and meanness of Christian civilization. They follow the 'pure instincts of nature', have no distinction between 'mine' and 'thine', and have no private property in land or women. They enjoy free love and have no words for fornication, incest and adultery. They have no idea of crime or sin or jealousy. Having few wants and living in a fertile land, they have reduced the sum of their labours to the minimum, because nothing seems more preferable to them than repose. The entire island seems like one large family with each hut like an apartment in a great house.

Although the Tahitians' wants are simple, it is not a simplicity imposed by necessity but a rational code of conduct. The Tahitian Orou in a talk with the visiting chaplain appeals to nature and reason and argues that the only moral rule is the 'general good' and 'particular utility'.<sup>32</sup> A love of liberty is their deepest feeling. But it does not extend to sexual licence; there is a strict taboo on intercourse before maturity to avoid unwanted babies.

In a dialogue between Bougainville and a Tahitian elder, the Old Man laments how the newly arrived Europeans have spoiled their happiness, created dissension and shame amongst the women, introduced disease, guilt, 'artificial needs' and 'imaginary virtues'.<sup>33</sup> His indignation is fired by Western greed and bellicosity, but above all by their repressive sexual code. In a discussion of the island society that follows, Diderot suggests that 'by basing morality on the eternal relations which subsist between men, religious law perhaps becomes superfluous, and civil law must only be the enunciation of the law of nature', adding that 'the Tahitian who scrupulously holds to the law of nature, [is] closer to good legislation than any civilized people'.<sup>34</sup> The whole dialogue is a celebration of the natural law and natural order as preferable

to man-made law and civilized disorder. To the question whether it is necessary to civilize man or abandon him to his instinct, Diderot's spokesman replies:

I appeal to all political, civil and religious institutions: examine them thoroughly, and if I am not mistaken you will find the human species bent from century to century under the yoke which a handful of knaves have sworn to impose on it. Beware of the person who comes to put things in order. To order things is always to make oneself master of others by disturbing them: and the people of Calabria are almost the only ones who have not yet had the flattery of legislators imposed on them.<sup>35</sup>

And asked whether the 'anarchy of Calabria' is agreeable, he is ready to wager that 'their barbarism is less vicious than our urbanity'.

## Jean-Jacques Rousseau

If Diderot was cautious about publicizing his most radical views, Rousseau had no such qualms. He was, to boot, one of the most paradoxical writers of the eighteenth century. A product of the Enlightenment and a member of its party of philosophes, he remained an isolated figure and attacked some of its most fundamental premisses. While he used his own reason to magnificent effect, he declared 'the man who meditates is a depraved animal' and encouraged the cult of sensibility associated with Romanticism. He celebrated individuality and asserted his personal independence and yet hankered after authority. He appears as a great libertarian in his early writings only to call for a corporate State based on a totalitarian democracy in his later ones.

But this was not all. Although he was a righteous moralist who believed that conscience is a 'divine instinct', he gave his children away to the public orphanage. A lyrical advocate of natural religion, he changed his religious creed twice for political convenience. A great imaginative writer and powerful thinker, he was also the voice of Voltaire's *canaille* or mob.

Rousseau first came to prominence by winning the prize at the academy of Dijon in 1750 with *A Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Science*. It proved to be a thorough-going and hard-hitting critique of contemporary culture. But it is not an attack on all arts and sciences; if anything, it is a defence of virtue against useless knowledge. Rousseau criticizes the way the arts and sciences are misused by those in power to corrupt morals and taste, to encourage hypocrisy and to mislead people:

so long as power alone is on one side, and knowledge and understanding alone on the other, the learned will seldom make great objects their study, princes will still more rarely do great actions, and the people will continue to be, as they are, mean, corrupt, and miserable.<sup>36</sup>

Nourished by luxury, idleness and ambition, intellectuals will inevitably corrupt the populace. In his next work for the Dijon academy, *A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1754), Rousseau developed his central theme of man's tragic departure from his essential nature. He sets out with the intention 'to distinguish properly between what is original and what is artificial in the actual nature of man' but made clear that he was offering only 'hypothetical reasonings' and 'conjectures', not historical facts.<sup>37</sup> Like Meslier and Morelly, he argues that man is naturally

good but depraved by existing institutions. According to Rousseau, in his natural state man lived a solitary, independent and self-sufficient life. He was by nature gentle and compassionate, a purely instinctive creature devoid of intellectual and moral attributes. But man has two principles prior to reason, one which leads to self-preservation, and the other which makes him feel repugnance at the sight of another sensible being's suffering. It is this innate sense of compassion which supplies the place of 'laws, morals and virtues' in a state of nature.<sup>38</sup>

Above all, man is a free agent and perfectible, that is to say, he has the faculty of self-improvement. It is the latter which takes him out of his natural state. It produces in him his vices as well as his virtues and makes him at length 'a tyrant both over himself and over nature'. As human beings began to associate with each other to satisfy their wants, their natures further changed since the 'bonds of servitude are formed merely by the mutual dependence of men on one another'.<sup>39</sup> Co-operation sows the seed of man's downfall. The desire for self-preservation became transformed into *amour-propre*, a factitious feeling which leads each individual to make more of himself than of any other and fosters pride, ambition and competition. Thinking more-over only makes matters worse, for 'it is reason that engenders *amour-propre*, and reflection that confirms it'.<sup>40</sup>

According to Rousseau, the most important incident in human history and the chief cause of social inequality is the foundation of private property. The second part of his Discourse opens with the resounding statement:

The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying 'This is mine,' and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars, and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: 'Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody.'<sup>41</sup>

As people became more industrious, their simple wants multiplied into new needs. Agriculture and industry further depressed mankind: 'it was iron and corn which first civilized men, and ruined humanity.' Property, once recognized, gave rise to growing inequality and the first rules of justice. It also had disastrous psychological effects in encouraging dissimulation: 'it now became the interest of men to appear what they really were not.' Eventually the rich, in order to enjoy their property in peace, suggested the need for government as a supreme power to govern with laws. The people were duped into agreeing: 'All ran headlong to their chains, in hopes of securing their liberty; for they had just wit enough to perceive the advantages of political institutions, without experience enough to enable to foresee the dangers.'<sup>42</sup> Such was the origin of government and law which bound new fetters on the poor and gave new powers to the rich. Nations then entered into a state of nature with each other.

Rousseau considered liberty as the 'noblest faculty of man'; it is 'a gift which they hold from nature as being men'.<sup>43</sup> He rejected outright those apologists of slavery who argue that man has a natural propensity to servitude. With all the eloquence of sincere anger, Rousseau exclaims:

when I see free-born animals dash their brains out against the bars of their cage, from an innate impatience of captivity; when I behold numbers of naked savages, that

despise European pleasures, braving hunger, fire, the sword, and death, to preserve nothing but their independence, I feel that it is not for slaves to argue about liberty.<sup>44</sup>

Rousseau therefore argued that government is an artificial institution set up by free men in the hope of making life easier. But while government did not begin with arbitrary power, it eventually brought about 'just the law of the strongest, which it was originally designed to remedy'.<sup>45</sup> Rousseau further asserted that the different forms of government owe their origin to the differing degrees of inequality which existed between individuals when they were set up. The establishment of laws and the rights of property was the first stage, the institution of magistracy the second, and the conversion of legitimate into arbitrary power the third and last.

Rousseau's analysis of the origins of social inequality and government is brilliant, and most anarchists have followed him in seeing a close link between property and government. Indeed, he recognized in his *Confessions* that 'everything depended radically on politics' and 'no people would ever be anything but what the nature of its government made it'.<sup>46</sup> But despite his celebration of the natural state of man, and his favourable contrast between the 'savage' and the 'civilized', particularly since the former knows how to live within himself and the latter only knows how to live 'in the opinion of others', Rousseau did not call for a return to a primitive state of nature as is commonly supposed.<sup>47</sup> In his second *Discourse*, he suggested that the ideal state of humanity, the happiest and most stable of epochs, must have been in the youth of society when the expansion of the human faculties kept 'a just mean between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our *amour-propre*'.<sup>48</sup>

Godwin recognized the importance of Rousseau's insights and praised him for seeing that 'government, however formed, was little capable of affording solid benefit to mankind'. By a 'very slight mistake', he had unfortunately substituted 'as the topic of his eulogium, that period that preceded government and laws, instead of the period that may possibly follow upon their abolition'.<sup>49</sup> Far from calling for the abolition of government, Rousseau insisted on the need for a new social contract to set up a government which would express the general will and safeguard popular sovereignty. He tried to sketch the outlines of a legitimate State and give grounds why the citizen should obey it. He wanted to create a new moral man for a new moral society.

Rousseau undoubtedly gave priority to freedom as a basis of social life and celebrated individuality in many works.<sup>50</sup> He opened his treatise on education, *Emile* (1762), with the resounding statement: 'Everything is good as it comes from the hands of the author of nature, everything degenerates in the hands of man.'<sup>51</sup> To remedy this state of affairs, he called for a system of 'Veil-regulated freedom' to bring up a child in isolation from corrupting society. The aim of education, he insisted, must be to excite curiosity and to form the judgment, and the best way to encourage learning is by doing. It was a message which impressed Godwin and Kropotkin.

But despite his libertarian aims in education and his desire to create the autonomous individual, Rousseau falls back on authoritarian means. His ideal tutor is an all powerful puppet-master who manipulates the child without him knowing it, and tries to impose a certain cast of mind. In the end, *Emile* is psychologically bound to his master and cannot escape him. Although his tutor abdicates his authority and hands his charge over to his new wife – 'your guardian from now on' – the docile young couple ask him to continue to 'advise' and 'govern' them.<sup>52</sup>

Rousseau saw a close link between morals and politics and believed that we must study society through individuals, and individuals through society. In his *Social Contract*, published in the same year as *Emile*, he tried to find a way in which people could enjoy the advantages of common

association without being subjected to each other's will, 'and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain free as before'.<sup>53</sup> He found the solution to this paradox in a new social contract based on a constitution to ensure political legitimacy.

The democratic aspect to Rousseau's thought comes through in his defence of popular sovereignty. The people are the first and last voice; the legislative power remains with them. It is also apparent in his insistence that people must formulate and decide upon their own policies:

Sovereignty, for the same reason as makes it inalienable, cannot be represented; it lies essentially in the general will, and will does not admit to representation: it is either the same, or other; there is no intermediate possibility. The deputies of the people, therefore, are not and cannot be its representatives: they are merely its stewards, and can carry through no definitive acts. Every law the people has not ratified in person is null and void — is, in fact, not a law. The people of England regards itself as free; but it is grossly mistaken; it is free only during the election of members of parliament. As soon as they are elected, slavery overtakes it, and it is nothing. The use it makes of the short moments of liberty it enjoys shows indeed that it deserves to lose them.<sup>54</sup>

By making a social contract, the individual is obliged to alienate all his rights to the whole community and to put himself in common under the supreme direction of the 'general will' which will express their common interest and realize the general good. The exact nature of the general will remains ambiguous; it is more than the will of all or the sum of private interests, and emerges when people consider the common interest. With this notion, Rousseau believed he had discovered the way to ensure that popular sovereignty prevails. But the act of association according to Rousseau created a corporate and collective body, a 'public person' and a 'moral person' no less. In practice, it would mean the complete immersion of the individual in the community: every citizen would be obliged to give up all his natural rights (including his life and property) to 'society'.

Rousseau defines government as executive and revocable 'solely a commission ... an intermediary body set up between the subjects and the Sovereign' charged with the execution of the laws. He was not doctrinaire about calling for a particular type of government and suggested that different forms are appropriate for different countries. In practice, he preferred small States and proposed for Poland a federal State with an elected monarchy.

It soon becomes clear however that Rousseau's State would be all-encompassing. It is to be founded by the 'legislator', an exceptional man or group of men, who interprets the general will and manipulates like Emile's tutor the people for their own good. In addition, Rousseau argues that 'the larger the State, the less the liberty' since the government must be tightened. Censorship would be used to preserve morality and the death penalty would be imposed for anyone who shows by their actions that they do not believe the articles of the State's civic religion. His Eurocentricity comes out when he declares: 'despotism is suitable to hot climates, barbarism to cold countries, and good polity to temperate regions.'<sup>55</sup>

For all his concern with equality and popular sovereignty, Rousseau's proposed social contract hardly adds up to a 'society of free men'.<sup>56</sup> On the contrary, it is clearly a recipe to create an absolute and omnipotent State. He will allow no partial society in the corporate State and there would be no safeguards for minorities. He expects complete unanimity in which the individual

who differs from the majority is expected to blame himself and feel guilty for not conforming. Moreover, the man who boldly declared 'Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains' and 'To renounce liberty is to renounce being a man' goes on to provide an excuse for generations of tyrants by arguing that in order to make a refractory citizen realize his better self and to obey the general will 'he will be forced to be free'.<sup>57</sup> In Rousseau's hands, the general will becomes an all-consuming moral imperative, 'the voice of all for the good of all' – whether one likes it or not. It would be a society fit for Emiles, but not for free men and women.

As Godwin observed, 'the superiority of his genius' deserted Rousseau in his *Contrat social* (1762) and his *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne* (1771).<sup>58</sup> The great libertarian individualist ended up as an apologist for authoritarian and totalitarian democracy; in Bakunin's words, 'the true creator of modern reaction'.<sup>59</sup> Rousseau's notion of the general will is an abstraction which is impossible to discover and demands a terrifying unanimity. He not only advocates political imposture to maintain the rule of the State but also his writings abound with hymns to the rule of law.<sup>60</sup>

Rousseau insisted over and over again that freedom was more valuable to him than anything else. But what he meant by freedom is not always clear. He speaks of at least three kinds of liberty – natural, civil, and moral liberty – which prevail in different types of society.<sup>61</sup> In the natural state, men have natural liberty, that is to say, they are not dependent on one another. But they are not yet moral beings and can have no real conception of liberty. In civil society, Rousseau hoped to discover the form of association in which a person might unite with others while remaining free, and believed that he had found the solution in the case of a man obeying laws that he has made for himself. Civil liberty thus becomes the right to do what the laws do not forbid. Moral liberty which exists in moral society is on the other hand obedience to self-imposed laws – 'obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves'.<sup>62</sup>

But while Rousseau's treatment of freedom is undoubtedly subtle, it makes way for authoritarian sophists to masquerade as freedom-loving liberals. Rousseau failed to realize that being free and being subject at the same time is logical nonsense and practically impossible. Ultimately, he parts company with anarchists because for him law does not enslave but liberates. Some might accept a definition of freedom as a form of self-discipline, in the sense of being free from passions and instincts or being master of oneself, but none would accept it as obedience to a higher law enforced by the State.

It is possible to understand the paradox of Rousseau's love of freedom and his hankering after authority in the context of his personal revolt against his society. The son of a Swiss watchmaker, he experienced in his wandering life as a valet, secretary, and writer the modern anxiety of being an isolated individual born in a world which appears out of joint. He was always keen to assert his personal independence, yet longed for a supervising father-figure. Alienated and ostracized from his society, he sought the wholeness of true community. In his strengths and weaknesses, he speaks directly to our age.

Yet this does not excuse the authoritarian streak in his personality and thinking. It is clear in his view and treatment of women, for instance, that he had a strong patriarchal and chauvinist tendency. He not only resented the dominance of his mistress-patrons, but treated his servant-mistress abominably – sending her children by him to the public orphanage. He always considered women as the 'sex which ought to obey'.<sup>63</sup> Four of the five books of his treatise on education are devoted to the education of Emile, while only one deals with the upbringing of the girl who is to become his pliant handmaiden. Rousseau asserts that it is a law of nature that

‘woman is made to please and to be subjugated’ and ‘must make herself agreeable to man’.<sup>64</sup> Where men are active and strong, women are weak and feeble.

While Godwin turned away from the later Rousseau, it is not surprising that the dictator Robespierre in the bloodiest stage of the French Revolution should canonize him. Nevertheless, Rousseau deserves a prominent place in the anarchist tradition for his stress on the close link between property and government, his attack on social inequality, his criticism of elitist culture, his concern with popular democracy and sovereignty, his belief in the natural goodness of humanity, and his praise for the simple life close to nature. He was fully aware of the psychological disorders fostered by Western civilization, especially the ways in which it made people anxious, restless, competitive and hypocritical. He showed how history is a depressing record of humanity’s failure to realize its full potential and how modern man is alienated from his true self and society. In his writings and his life, Rousseau demonstrated that by nature men are free, but they readily enslave each other. More than any other writer of the Enlightenment, he thus revealed the tensions between a libertarian and an authoritarian approach to democracy which eventually led to the split between the anarchist and statist wings of the socialist movement in the nineteenth century.

# The British Enlightenment

AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF the English Revolution and the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, there was little social or intellectual room in Britain for the further development of libertarian theory. After the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 which checked the power of the king, parliamentary democracy was established in Britain and has held sway ever since. John Locke, the philosopher of common sense and moderation, justified the event and gave the ultimate liberal defence of government.

The 'state of nature' according to Locke, is a state of 'perfect freedom' but competition between roughly equal human beings would make life uncertain and property relations unstable. Hence the need for government and law to enable them to protect life, liberty and property. The latter was most important since for Locke life and liberty could be considered as a form of personal property. He therefore recommended that a social contract be made between people to set up a government to make common laws which would ensure the secure enjoyment of property: 'Political power, then, I take to be a right of making laws, with penalties of death, and consequently of all less penalties for the regulating and preserving of property, and employing the force of the community in the execution of such laws.'<sup>1</sup> While recognizing that it is only labour that creates wealth, he added that it is legitimate for owners to expropriate the wealth created by the labour of their servants and their slaves.

It was an advance on the theory of the divine right of kings, but Locke summed up the ideology of the emerging middle class who wished to wrest power from the landed aristocracy. As such it was a theory of 'possessive individualism', which saw the ownership of private property as sacrosanct.<sup>2</sup> The ideology was to find its ultimate expression in the American Constitution of 1776 which recognized that human beings (or rather male Europeans) are born free and equal and have a right to 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness'

## Jonathan Swift

While Locke developed the classic liberal defence of government by close reasoning, Jonathan Swift at the beginning of the eighteenth century entertained anarchist ideas in his imaginative writings. It might at first seem odd to consider the Anglo-Irish Tory Dean Swift as a libertarian thinker. By 'liberty', Swift principally meant a condition of the citizens in a parliamentary monarchy.<sup>3</sup> He shared this view with Locke but he wanted to restrict suffrage even further to only large landowners. Moreover, in his writings Swift often appears as a cynical misanthrope; he called, for instance, the bulk of the English nation 'the most pernicious Race of little odious vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth'.<sup>4</sup> But although Swift had a low estimate of humanity and used savage satire to lambaste their foibles and vices, he undoubtedly wrote for their betterment and enlightenment. He hated tyranny and consistently opposed British imperialism, especially in Ireland.

inspired by the new accounts of foreign lands by European travellers, Swift, in his *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), used the popular genre of the imaginary voyage to create a work of fantasy in which he violently attacked the values of his own society and age. Middleton Murry described *Gulliver's Travels* as 'the most savage onslaught on humanity ever written'.<sup>5</sup> Gulliver is a frustrated aristocrat who comes back to England from his voyages defeated, railing against the dominant values of his day.

Swift uses a series of utopias and anti-utopias to criticize the vices and follies of his own country. In Lilliput, for instance, there is a rigid division of society and absurd political pretensions. In Brobdingnag, the inhabitants are hard-working and live a life of few wants and simple virtue. No law is allowed to exceed the number of letters in the alphabet. The flying island of Laputa is a direct satire of the state of England and Ireland.

The most interesting voyage however is Gulliver's visit to the country of the Houyhnhnms in Book IV which mounts a direct attack on the European States with their law, government, commerce and war. The work has often been considered unremittingly anti-utopian, and Swift is as ironical and ambiguous as can be, but Godwin, for one, was profoundly influenced by this anarchist arcadia and maintained that Swift had 'a more profound insight into the true principles of political justice, than any preceding or contemporary author'.<sup>6</sup> Swift of course satirizes the depraved and bestial nature of some human beings in his portrayal of the Yahoos. These hairy creatures in human form are avaricious, perverse, restive, cunning, and passionate. They fight over food and shining stones and move around in packs waging war on each other. They live in a state of 'anarchy' in the negative sense of violent disorder and mayhem. They would be more at home in Hobbes' 'state of nature' than Locke's.

By contrast Swift presents the Houyhnhnms as dignified horses who believe that reason is enough to govern rational creatures: 'Nature and Reason were sufficient Guides for a reasonable Animal, as we pretended to be, in shewing us what we ought to do, and what to avoid.'<sup>7</sup> Their reason however is not so much a tool of analysis, or a power of drawing logical inferences from observed facts, but more like an organ of cool common sense. They live in a society practising universal benevolence and perfect sincerity. They also live in a golden age of primitive communism: they have no metal or clothes and few wants. Their fundamental maxim is that nature is very easily satisfied. Population is controlled by moral restraint and abstinence. Males and females receive the same education which encourages temperance, industry, exercise and cleanliness.

Since the Houyhnhnms can govern themselves they have no need for political authority, law and coercion. Government is reduced to a periodic representative council of the whole nation which meets for five or six days every fourth year to co-ordinate distribution and regulate the population growth. They try to reach unanimity in all decisions. The council does not make laws but only issues exhortations, for they have 'no Conception how a rational Creature can be *compelled*, but only advised, or *exhorted*; because no Person can disobey Reason, without giving up his Claim to be a rational Creature'.<sup>8</sup> The society is therefore not governed by law but by the dictates of 'reason' which everyone voluntarily accepts. In this anarchist society, Gulliver exalts in the fact that

I had no Occasion of bribing, flattering or pimping, to procure the Favour of any great Man, or his Minion. I wanted no Fence against Fraud or Oppression: Here was neither Physician to destroy my Body, nor Lawyer to ruin my Fortune: No Informer to watch my Words and Actions, or forge Accusations against me for Hire: Here

were no Gibbers, Censurers, Backbiters, Pickpockets, Highwaymen, Housebreakers, Attorneys, Bawds, Buffoons, Gamesters, Politicians, Wits, Spleneticks, tedious Talkers, Controvertists, Ravishers, Murderers, Robbers, Virtuoso's; no Leaders or Followers of Party and Faction; no Encouragers to Vice, by Seducement or Examples: No Dungeon, Axes, Gibbets, Whipping-posts, or Pillories.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, there are some strongly negative aspects to this anarchist utopia. The unit of society is a strongly patriarchal family and the economy is based on the labour of the Yahoos. The rational Houyhnhnms have no human warmth or passion and are strongly ascetic. They have no love in the sexual sense, or partiality for their own children. The economy is that of the stone age. No apparent interest exists in science and technology: there are no wheels or metals in the land. It would even seem that yet again Swift was being slyly ironic in presenting the Houyhnhnms as supposedly ideal beings. But it remains the case that when Gulliver returns home to England he comes to prefer the smell and company of his horse to his family, and tries to apply the 'excellent lessons of virtue' he had learnt among the Houyhnhnms.

George Orwell claims that Swift was intermittently 'a kind of anarchist' and that Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels* is a picture of an anarchistic society. But for him it also illustrates the totalitarian tendency which he claims is explicit in the anarchist or pacifist vision of society. The only arbiter of behaviour is public opinion which can be less tolerant than any system of law: 'When human beings are governed by "thou shalt not", the individual can practise a certain amount of eccentricity: when they are supposedly governed by "love" or "reason", he is under continuous pressure to make himself behave and think in exactly the same way as everyone else.'

It certainly is the case that the Houyhnhnms are unanimous on almost all subjects, have no word for 'opinion' in their language, and express no difference of sentiments in their conversations. But Orwell goes too far in suggesting that this is 'the highest stage of totalitarian organization'.<sup>10</sup> He uses the example of the Houyhnhnm society to attack anarchism and pacifism in general. Yet the Houyhnhnms do not persecute dissidents or force people to conform in thought or action.

Orwell's point about the potential tyranny of reason is more telling. In the rational society of the Houyhnhnms there would be no room for personal idiosyncrasies or bizarre tastes; no one would be able to stick out their tongue or tell their neighbours to go to hell. But Orwell overlooks the point that unlike Yahoo humanity, the Houyhnhnms are genuinely governed by reason. For them, there is no conflict between reason and passion, conscience and desire. Since truth for them is universal and self-evident it inevitably happens that as purely rational beings they recognize it and act accordingly. Godwin was to make a similar point at the end of the century.

Swift's position is undoubtedly ambivalent and paradoxical. He is a Tory Dean who appears at times as a rational anarchist. The son of English settlers in Ireland, he called for Irish economic independence. He despised the human race and yet was at great pains to improve it. Orwell catches the ambivalence of his position when he calls him 'a Tory anarchist, despising authority while disbelieving in liberty, and preserving the aristocratic outlook while seeing clearly that the aristocracy is degenerate and contemptible'.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Swift's picture of the country of the Houyhnhnms is genuinely libertarian, however flawed. Its view of the 'state of nature' in which spontaneous order prevails without government may well be more accurate than Hobbes' romantic myth of universal war. It is for this reason that the first great anarchist thinker William

Godwin described the Voyage to the Houyhnhnms as ‘one of the most virtuous, liberal and enlightened examples of human genius’.<sup>12</sup>

## Edmund Burke

Since most literary historians cannot understand the feasibility of anarchism, they invariably suggest that works by great authors advocating a free society must be ironic. This is the case with Swift, and Edmund Burke. Burke has been best remembered for his attack on all innovation in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), but it is often forgotten that as a young man he was a liberal Whig who supported American Independence and advocated economic reform. In addition, he wrote *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756) which offers one of the most powerful arguments for anarchist society made in the eighteenth century. His starting-point, which he shares with the Taoists and the French *philosophes*, is a confidence in nature which ‘if left to itself were the best and surest Guide’.<sup>13</sup>

Human beings in a state of nature originally lived ‘with their Brethren of the other Kinds in much equality’ and were wholly vegetarian. In the ‘natural’ society in which they lived, they followed their ‘natural Appetites and Instincts, and not in any positive institution’. Governed by reason, they had no need for external government: ‘We begin to think and to act from Reason and Nature alone.’<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, human beings invented artificial rules to guide nature. They created a political society held together by laws which became a violation of nature and a constraint on the mind. Since religion and government are closely connected, once government is considered to be necessary, it draws in an artificial religion and ‘Ecclesiastical Tyranny under the Name of Church Government’.<sup>15</sup>

Political regulations, Burke further suggests, create social conflict, and political society is responsible for war since in the state of nature it is impossible to form armies; thus ‘All Empires have been cemented in Blood.’ The artificial division of mankind into separate groups further produces hatred and dissension. And while in the state of nature man acquires wealth in proportion to his labours, in the state of artificial society with government it is an invariable law that ‘those who labour most, enjoy the fewest things; and that those who labour not at all, have the Greatest Number of Enjoyments.’<sup>16</sup>

Burke examines the different forms of government – despotism, aristocracy, and democracy – but finds them all wanting. Although democracy is preferable, he argues that all governments must frequently infringe justice to support themselves. He therefore draws the anarchist conclusion: ‘In vain you tell me that Artificial Government is good, but that I fall out only with the Abuse. The Thing! The Thing itself is the Abuse!’ Rejecting all artificial laws and the alliance of Church and State, Burke declares at the end of his eloquent and penetrating work: ‘We should renounce their “Dreams of Society”, together with their Visions of Religion, and vindicate ourselves into perfect liberty.’<sup>17</sup>

When Burke became a Tory after the French Revolution and thundered against all improvement, he disowned his *Vindication of Natural Society* as a youthful folly. Most commentators have followed suit, suggesting that he was trying to parody the manner of Bolingbroke. But Godwin, while recognizing Burke’s ironic intention, took him seriously. He acknowledged that most of his own arguments against political society in *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793) may be found in Burke’s work – ‘a treatise, in which the evils of the existing political institutions are

displayed with incomparable force of reasoning and lustre of eloquence'.<sup>18</sup> In the following century, the radical secularist George Holyoake reprinted Burke's work under the title *The Inherent Evils of all State Governments Demonstrated* (1858). The editor declared enthusiastically that it was 'one of the soberest productions ever-written' and referred in an appendix to the anarchists Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Josiah Warren for further clarification of Burke's 'great truth that State governments will never give real freedom to their subjects'.<sup>19</sup>

## Thomas Paine

The outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 sparked off one of the greatest political debates in British history. Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) fell as a bombshell amongst radicals like Thomas Paine, Thomas Holcroft, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Blake. Wollstonecraft made one of the first replies to Burke, in her *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), and then went on to write *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which established her reputation as the first great feminist. She made a powerful plea that mind has no gender and that women should become independent and educated beings. But although she attacked hereditary distinctions and economic inequality, she still looked to a reformed government to protect natural rights.

Paine also used the language of natural rights in his celebrated *Rights of Man* (1791–2), but his libertarian sensibility took him to the borders of anarchism. The son of a Quaker staymaker of Thetford, Norfolk, he had tried his trade in London before becoming an excise-man in Lewes, Sussex. His Quaker background undoubtedly encouraged his plain style and egalitarian sentiments, as well as his confidence in the 'inner light' of reason and conscience to lead him to truth and virtue. He liked to boast that 'I neither read books, nor studied other people's opinions. I thought for myself.'<sup>20</sup> He believed that man was fundamentally good, and saw the world as a garden for enjoyment rather than as a valley of tears. Above all, he valued personal liberty: 'Independence is my happiness,' he wrote in his maturity, 'and I view things as they are, without regard to place or person; my country is the world, and my religion is to do good.'<sup>21</sup>

Paine was a man of his industrial age. He adopted Newton's view of the world as a machine governed by universal laws. Applying the same analytical method to society and nature, he felt that both could be refashioned according to reason. Just as he spent many years designing an iron bridge, so he tried to redesign society on the same simple and rational principles. He was a mechanical and social engineer: 'What Archimedes said of the mechanical powers', he wrote, 'may be applied to Reason and Liberty: "Had we", he said, "a place to stand upon, we might raise the world."<sup>22</sup>

Dismissed from service in Lewes, Paine decided to try his luck in the American colonies. On his arrival, he rapidly threw himself into the social and political struggles of the day. He wrote articles in a direct and robust style which advocated female emancipation and condemned African slavery and cruelty to animals. In 1775, he called eloquently for an end to the legal and social discrimination against women:

Even in countries where they may be esteemed the most happy [women are] constrained in their desires in the disposal of their goods; robbed of freedom and will by the laws; slaves of opinion which rules them with absolute sway and construes the slightest appearances into guilt; surrounded on all sides by judges who are at once

tyrants and their seducers ... for even with changes in attitudes and laws, deeply engrained and oppressing social prejudices remain which confront women minute by minute, day by day.<sup>23</sup>

It was however only in the following year that Paine came to prominence with his pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776), the first work to argue for the complete independence of the thirteen colonies from England. He advocated a people's war to throw off the English yoke and hoped America would become a land of freedom, thereby offering an inspiration to the peoples living under European tyrannies. His internationalism and love of freedom come across in his rousing call:

O ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose, not only the tyranny, but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is over-run with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia, and Africa, have long expelled her. – Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.<sup>24</sup>

The experience of the American Revolution had a marked effect on Paine. He was deeply impressed by the orderly nature and decorum of American society after the dissolution of the colonial government before the establishment of a new constitution. In his famous opening to *Common Sense*, Paine like later anarchists distinguished between society and government. He felt that they are not only different, but have different origins:

Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is patron, the last a punisher. Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil; in its worse state an intolerable one; for when we suffer, or are exposed to the same miseries by a government, which we might expect in a country without a government, our calamities is heightened by reflecting that we furnish the means by which we suffer. Government, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence; the palaces of kings are built on the ruins of the bowers of paradise. For were the impulses of conscience clear, uniform, and irresistibly obeyed, man would need no other lawgiver.<sup>25</sup>

But despite the example of the American colonists organizing their own affairs peacefully without government, Paine believed that it was necessary for the people to make a social contract in order to set up a minimal government on the secure basis of a constitution which would guarantee the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

After the successful outcome of the American War of Independence, Paine returned to England with hopes of building his iron bridge. The outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 renewed his revolutionary fervour and Burke's apostasy led him to write his *Rights of Man*. It was, he recognized, 'an age of Revolutions, in which everything may be looked for'.<sup>26</sup>

Burke, in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, had maintained that government and society are complex, fragile and organic entities based on the wisdom of ancestors and could only be interfered with at great peril. He dismissed the 'clumsy subtlety' of a priori political theorizing

(which he had indulged in boldly in his *Vindication*) and suggested that if scholars no longer enjoyed the patronage of the nobility and clergy, learning would be 'trodden down under the hoofs of the swinish multitude'.<sup>27</sup>

Paine spoke on behalf of and to the 'swinish multitude', rejecting Burke's apology for 'the authority of the dead over the rights and freedom of the living'.<sup>28</sup> He was not a particularly original thinker and adopted the liberal commonplaces of eighteenth-century political theory developed from Locke. But he developed them in a more libertarian and democratic direction. If what he said was not particularly new, how he said it undoubtedly was. Where the accepted language of political discourse was elegant and refined, Paine chose to write in a direct, robust, and simple style which all educated working people could understand. He refused to be 'immured in the Bastille of a word' and threatened the dominant culture by his style as well as the ruling powers by his arguments.<sup>29</sup>

The First Part of the *Rights of Man* principally consists of a history of the French Revolution and of a comparison between the French and British constitutions. Paine is mainly concerned here to assert the rights of man against arbitrary and hereditary power. He bases his doctrine of natural rights on the alleged original equality and unity of humanity and argues that they include 'intellectual rights' and 'all those rights of acting as an individual for his own comfort and happiness'.<sup>30</sup> But Paine suggests like Locke that in the state of nature the individual does not have the power to enjoy these rights in security. He therefore recommends that individuals deposit their natural rights in the 'common stock' of civil society and set up a government which will protect them. The government itself has no rights as such and must be considered only as a delegated 'trust' which the citizens can always dissolve or resume for themselves. The only authority on which a government has a right to exist is on the authority of the people. The end of government is to ensure 'the good of all' or '*general happiness*'.<sup>31</sup> As for engendering the Church with the State, as Burke recommended, Paine dismisses such a connection as 'a sort of mule-animal, capable only of destroying and not of breeding up'.<sup>32</sup>

While these arguments were part of the common eighteenth-century liberal defence of government, in Part II of the *Rights of Man* Paine broke new theoretical ground which brought him to the verge of anarchism. At the end of Part I he acknowledged: 'Man is not the enemy of Man, but through the medium of a false system of government.'<sup>33</sup> He now returns to his distinction between society and government made at the opening of *Common Sense* and insists that:

Great part of that order which reigns among mankind is not the effect of government. It has its origin in the principles of society and the natural constitution of man. It existed prior to government, and would exist if the formality of government was abolished. The mutual dependence and reciprocal interest which man has upon man, and all the parts of a civilized community upon each other, create that great chain of connexion which holds it together ... Common interest regulates their concerns, and forms their law; and the laws which common usage ordains, have a greater influence than the laws of government. In fine, society performs for itself almost everything which is ascribed to government.<sup>34</sup>

In a Rousseauist vein, Paine further maintains that man is naturally good but depraved by governments: 'man, were he not corrupted by governments, is naturally the friend of man.' Human nature therefore is not itself vicious.

Not only is a great part of what is called government 'mere imposition', but everything that governments can usefully do has been performed by the common consent of society without government. Indeed, 'The instant formal government is abolished, society begins to act. A general association takes place, and common interest produces common security.'<sup>35</sup> Looking back on the riots and tumult in English history, Paine argued, like modern anarchists, that they had not proceeded from 'the want of government, but that government was itself the generating cause; instead of consolidating society it divided it ... and engendered discontents which otherwise would not have existed.'<sup>36</sup> But Paine does not look backward to some mythical golden age of social harmony, rather forward to a more civilized society. He suggests as a general principle that 'the more perfect civilization is, the less occasion has it for government, because the more does it regulate its own affairs, and govern itself.'<sup>37</sup> Since all the great laws of society are laws of nature, it follows for Paine that civilized life requires few laws.

But unlike his contemporary William Godwin, Paine did not carry his bold reasoning to the anarchist conclusion that government is always an unnecessary evil. He felt as long as the natural wants of man were greater than his individual powers government would be necessary to ensure freedom and security. He therefore proposed a minimal government — no more than a 'national association' — with a few general laws to protect the natural rights of man. Its end is limited and simple, to secure 'the good of all, as well individually as collectively'. Paine had a definite preference for republican and representative government based on majority rule, and he wished to anchor it firmly in a constitution. He even praised the American Constitution as 'the political bible of the state'.<sup>38</sup>

By calling on the British people to follow the American and French to form a new social contract and set up a limited government based on a constitution, Paine ultimately departs from the anarchist tradition. At the end of the *Rights of Man*, he even gives a distributive role to government by proposing that it helps to educate the young and support the old through a progressive inheritance tax.

While Paine has been called the father of English socialism, he was in fact a staunch advocate of business enterprise: universal and free commerce would extirpate war. He never advocated economic equality and thought private property would always remain unequal. His capitalist way of thinking led him to defend representative government in terms of a limited company with citizen shareholders: 'Every man is a proprietor in government, and considers it a necessary part of his business to understand. It concerns his interest, because it affects his property.'<sup>39</sup> In his last major work, *Agrarian Justice* (1797), he did not call, like his contemporary Thomas Spence, for the nationalization and common ownership of land but for a society of small landowners to be achieved through a land tax of ten per cent. Paine's final vision was of a representative and republican democracy of independent property owners in which every citizen has an equal opportunity to develop his talents.

Paine developed liberal theory to the threshold of anarchism but he did not cross over. In fact, he was the greatest spokesman for bourgeois radicalism, exhorting the rising middle class to take over the State from the monarchy and aristocracy. But, inspired by the American and French Revolutions, he recognized the ability of people to govern themselves and thereby contributed to the pool of ideas and values out of which anarchism and socialism were to spring.

## **PART THREE: Great Libertarians**

Government is begotten of aggression, by aggression. HERBERT SPENCER I call it the State where everyone, good or bad, is a poison-drinker: the State where universal slow suicide is called — life. FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE That government is best which governs not at all. HENRY THOREAU Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion. OSCAR WILDE

## French Libertarians

IN FRANCE THE DIFFERENCE between libertarian and anarchist was not clearly defined and the terms were often used interchangeably. De Sade and Fourier were both libertarian in the sense that they wished to expand human freedom, but they were not always anarchist in wanting to abolish the State completely. De Sade for a time during the French Revolution entertained the idea of a society without law, although in the end called for a minimal State. Fourier was one of the most original utopian thinkers of the nineteenth century and his vision of a free society inspired many later anarchists and anticipated social ecology.

### Marquis de Sade

The spirit of free enquiry sparked off by the Enlightenment led to increasingly bold questioning of existing social and moral laws in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The boldest thinker of them all was the Marquis de Sade. Donatien Alphonse François de Sade of course is remembered for his perversity, and sadism is associated with an abnormal pleasure in cruelty. In fact, the picture of de Sade as a monster is largely the work of prudish and puritanical moralists who have never read his books. The imaginary portraits of de Sade as a dashing Casanova are as inaccurate as his reputation: he was a plump little man with fair hair, blue eyes and a tiny mouth.

De Sade's writings were denied official publication by the French courts as late as 1957 and are still not widely available. This is unfortunate, for de Sade was not only an arch-rebel but a highly original thinker. His contribution to an understanding of sexual psychopathology is well-known; less recognized is his importance as a social philosopher. Poets have most appreciated his libertarian genius: Swinburne called him 'That illustrious and ill-requited benefactor of humanity', while Apollinaire declared that he was 'the freest spirit that has yet existed'.<sup>1</sup>

De Sade knew of the tyranny of men at first hand, both from within himself and from others. After completing a Jesuit education, which endowed him with a lifelong hatred of religion, he acquired various military ranks and served in the Seven Years' War. The experience made him a staunch opponent to offensive war. After his marriage at twenty-three in the presence of the King and Queen and most of the higher members of the Court, his sexual escapades landed him in prison in 1778.

Although de Sade conscientiously explored all imaginable extensions of sexual pleasure, his known behaviour (which includes only the beating of a housemaid and an orgy with several prostitutes) departs greatly from the clinical picture of active sadism.<sup>2</sup> From 1778, with no legal charge brought against him, de Sade spent all but ten of the remaining thirty-seven years of his life in close confinement. In prison, he drew on his experiences to write in earnest, partly in self-justification, partly in wish-fulfilment. Throughout this time, his wife supported him with courage and devotion.

At the outbreak of the French Revolution, de Sade had been held for five years in the notorious 'Tour de la Liberté' of the Bastille. One of seven prisoners left, he was removed eleven days before

the people of Paris stormed it. The Constituent Assembly released him on Good Friday in 1790. The relative freedom of the press at the time enabled him to publish the following year *Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu* which had been written in 1788.

De Sade actively supported the republicans, and served in the revolutionary 'Section des Piques' and was elected president of his group. In 1792, he wrote a pamphlet entitled *Idée sur la mode de la sanction des loix* which proposed that all laws brought forward by the representatives should be directly voted on by the populace at large. His proposal was based on his awareness of the ability of power to corrupt: 'I have studied men and I know them; I know the difficulties that they make in giving up any power that is granted to them, and that nothing is more difficult than to establish limits to delegate power.'<sup>3</sup>

In 1791, de Sade wrote *An Address of a Citizen of Paris to the King of France*, calling on Louis XVI to respect the powers entrusted to him by men who are 'free and equal according to the laws of Nature'. Ironically, the republican de Sade was arrested again for his alleged royalist sympathies. He was released after the fall of Robespierre in 1794. During the following seven years of freedom, he published in 1797 the ten volumes of his bombshell *La Nouvelle Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu suivie de l'histoire de Juliette sa soeur*. He was rearrested in 1801 and Napoleon's ministers had all the copies that could be found destroyed. No authoritarian government could allow the exposures of the mechanisms of despotism contained in them and de Sade was confined to an asylum for the rest of his life. A quarter of his entire output, ranging from plays to short stories were burnt during Napoleon's rule.

Although de Sade has been remembered for his erotica, he appears in his writings more preoccupied with religion than sex. Indeed, far from being an amoralist, he was not only obsessed by moral issues but had a powerful conscience. He called honour 'man's guiding rein'. He had a profound and continuous awareness of the difference between good and evil, had no delusions about the 'roses and raptures of vice'.<sup>4</sup> Like Blake and Nietzsche, he wanted to go beyond existing definitions of good and evil and to forge his own ethical code. And like the *philosophes*, he tried to follow nature, arguing that the experience of pleasure is a sign that we are acting in accordance with our own nature and nature as a whole: 'All acts which give pleasure ... must be natural and right.'<sup>5</sup> He who abandons himself most to the promptings of nature will also be the happiest. In this sense, de Sade was a consistent hedonist.

In his metaphysics, de Sade was a militant atheist and philosophical materialist, completely opposed to the tyranny of the Church and the repressive nature of Christian doctrine. The Christian God, with his threat of divine retribution, is for de Sade too immoral and base to be acceptable. In place of God, he puts Nature as the prime mover of the universe.

The attributes of nature are not entirely clear in de Sade's writing. At first nature appears as a beneficent force: the law of nature is interpreted as 'Make others as happy as you wish to be yourself.' But gradually in his work, nature begins to turn into a sort of malevolent goddess — a 'cruel stepmother' — so that the law of nature degenerates into: 'Please yourself, no matter at whose expense.'<sup>6</sup> De Sade eventually came to believe that nature is fundamentally destructive (its sole object in creation is to have the pleasure of destruction) and proceeds by corruption. It follows that by satisfying his destructive instincts man is following nature. This is the metaphysical and moral foundation of sadism: if making others feel pain gives pleasure, it is natural and right. To be moral in the conventional sense is to oppose nature; existing virtue is therefore unnatural and the result of a false education.

In his politics, de Sade challenged the fundamental premisses of European civilization. He had a very low opinion of politics; it is a 'science born of falsehood and ambition' which teaches 'men to deceive their equals without being deceived themselves'.<sup>7</sup> In every book, he stresses that society is divided into two antagonistic classes founded on property. Anticipating Proudhon, he defines property as 'a crime committed by the rich against the poor'. The origin of the right of property is in usurpation: 'the right is in origin itself a theft, so that the law punishes theft because it attacks theft'.<sup>8</sup> Speaking from direct experience, de Sade knew that the lawcourts only dispense justice in favour of the wealthy: 'The laws of a people are never anything but the mass and the result of the interests of the legislators.'<sup>9</sup> As for war between nations, it is simply authorized murder in which hired men slaughter one another in the interests of tyrants: 'The sword is the weapon of him who is in the wrong, the commonest resource of ignorance and stupidity.'<sup>10</sup>

In place of the existing class-ridden and unjust society, de Sade proposed several alternatives at different stages in his life. Before the outbreak of the French Revolution, in the second volume of *Aline et Valcour*, written in 1788 and published in 1795, he depicted a utopia in the city of Tamoe in the South Seas. The king Zamé had as a young man visited Europe and found that the greatest causes of misery were private property, class distinctions, religion and family life. He therefore chooses to avoid these ills by making the State control manufacture and employ all the people. All have equal commodities and comforts, and there is no prison or death penalty.

After witnessing the rise to power of Robespierre, the strengthening of the French State, and the Terror which followed, de Sade had second thoughts about the beneficial role of the State in society. In *Juliette*, written in 1794 and published in 1797, he tackled the question of government and law head on and concluded that anarchy is best. In a conversation between two Italians, one interlocutor rejects the social contract à la Rousseau since it serves only the general will but not particular interests. He goes on to reject the restraint of law:

Let us convince ourselves once and for all that laws are merely useless and dangerous; their only object is to multiply crimes or to allow them to be committed with impunity on account of the secrecy they necessitate. Without laws and religions it is impossible to imagine the degree of glory and grandeur human knowledge would have attained by now; the way these base restraints have retarded progress is unbelievable; and that is the sole service they have rendered to man.<sup>11</sup>

The passions, he maintains, have done more good to mankind than laws. Indeed, individuals who are not animated by strong passions are merely mediocre beings: 'Compare the centuries of anarchy with those of the strongest legalism in any country you like and you will see that it is only when the laws are silent that the greatest actions appear.' We should therefore do away with laws: if man returns to a state of nature, he would be far happier than is possible under the 'ridiculous yoke' of the law. There is absolutely no need for laws to obtain justice, for nature has given man the instinct and necessary force to get justice for himself. The universal law which nature imprints in every heart is 'to satisfy ourselves to refuse our passions nothing, whatever the cost to others'. If this means oppressing another, the oppressed would have the right to revenge himself, and could check the oppressor. As a result, 'I have far less reason to fear my neighbour's passion than the law's injustice.' Anarchy therefore has nothing to do with despotism and is best:

Tyrants are never born in anarchy, you only see them raise themselves up in the shadow of the laws or get authority from them. The reign of laws is therefore vicious

and inferior to anarchy; the strongest proof of my proposition is the necessity a government finds itself in to plunge itself into anarchy when it wishes to remake its constitution.<sup>12</sup>

In the last volume of *Juliette*, the theme is taken up again at length and another Italian declares: 'Give man back to Nature; she will lead him far better than your laws.'<sup>13</sup> It is the conclusion towards which the most daring thinkers of the Enlightenment were groping.

De Sade did not however leave it at that. Conscious of the immediate practical task of remaking French society, and concerned at the authoritarian direction the French Revolution was taking, he include in his *Philosophic dans le boudoir* (1795) a long address entitled *Frenchmen, a further effort if you wish to be Republicans!* It offers a political programme for a 'free State'; a State which he would like to keep to a minimum. As such it is a synthesis of his two earlier positions.

The address continues to reject religion completely. De Sade calls on his fellow countrymen to replace the 'theistic follies' introduced by the 'infamous Robespierre' with social precepts to be taught by a system of national education. Although he would give the State this task to perform it still would have little power as a legal order. A new society would develop new morals and in a State based on liberty and equality there would be practically no crimes to be punished. The laws which might remain should be 'so clement and so few that all men whatever their character can comply with them'.<sup>14</sup> At a time when the French government had just pronounced the respect of private property, de Sade maintained that there should only be a law which punishes not the robber but the man who is careless enough to let himself be robbed.

De Sade always insisted that crimes are committed out of want or passion, and the best way to avoid them is to eradicate the interest in breaking the law. As for those who commit crime because it is a crime, one should try and win them by kindness and honour. Above all, the death penalty should be abolished forever. Although murder is a horror, de Sade recognized that some killing may be necessary to defend a country and as such should be tolerated in a republic. As a crime of passion, however, it should not be revenged by another judicial murder.

As for those crimes motivated by lust (including rape, sodomy and incest), de Sade suggests that the 'it is less a question of repressing this passion in ourselves than in regulating the means by which it can be satisfied in peace.'<sup>15</sup> He therefore recommends public brothels where people can satisfy their wishes to command and be obeyed. To avoid public disorder, de Sade advocates unbridled promiscuity: 'give free play to these tyrannous desires, which despite himself torment him [man] ceaselessly'.<sup>16</sup> The satisfaction of physical love as a natural passion should not be bound by marriage bonds, false modesty or even that love – called the 'madness of the soul' – which is selfish and exclusive.<sup>17</sup> And consistent with his doctrine of complete equality, de Sade insists that women should have the equal opportunity and the same licence as men to satisfy their own desires:

no act of possession can ever be exercised on a free person; it is as unjust to possess a woman exclusively as it is to possess slaves; all humans are born free and with equal rights; let us never forget that; consequently no sex can have a legitimate right to the exclusive possession of another, and no sex or class can possess the other exclusively.<sup>18</sup>

De Sade's attitude to sex has often been misunderstood. He was the first to recognize the overwhelming importance of sex: 'Lust is to the other passions what the nervous fluid is to life;

it supports them all, it lends strength to them all.’<sup>19</sup> But sadism is not merely a branch of sex. It has been defined more broadly as ‘the pleasure felt from the observed modifications on the external world produced by the will of the observer’.<sup>20</sup> The crucial point is that the action is willed and that any act which produces visible and audible changes in another has a component of sexual pleasure. It so happens that for de Sade pleasure tends to be pain diminished, and pain is the absolute. It is easier to affect people by pain than pleasure, by destruction than creation, but this does not mean that constructive sadistic pleasure is not possible. And while he shows that the object of power is pleasure (which consists in applying sanctions to those in one’s control), de Sade’s egalitarian morality made him see all those who seek or acquire such power as evil.

Having witnessed the excesses of the nobles before the French Revolution and the Terror of the revolutionaries, he was fully aware of the desire for domination in human beings and wanted it to be channelled into sexual activity rather than cause social havoc. It is extremely difficult to follow de Sade in his fantasies of torture, murder and arson but at least he had the courage and frankness to recognize the existence of such desires and tried to sublimate them. Both the feminist Simone de Beauvoir and the novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet have acknowledged positively the cathartic function of the sexual cruelty described by de Sade.<sup>21</sup>

De Sade was also a revolutionary thinker in attacking the right to property. He saw the real struggle as lying between the people and the ruling class — made up of the crown, aristocracy, and clergy, as well as the bourgeoisie. For this he has been called the ‘first reasoned socialist’.<sup>22</sup> He undoubtedly anticipated Fourier in his project of a harmonious society based on the free play of passions.<sup>23</sup> Like Wilhelm Reich, he also realized that repressed sexuality can lead to tyrannical behaviour on a large scale and that a real democracy must be sexually liberated.

This knowledge forms the basis of de Sade’s libertarian philosophy: aware that men in positions of unrestrained power over others, whether in governments or prisons, will dominate and torture, he argued that they should not be given such power and their desires are best satisfied in play. His abiding passion was freedom from oppression. Indeed, no writer at the turn of the nineteenth century expressed more lucidly the incompatibility of traditional religion and conventional morality with the idea of freedom.<sup>24</sup>

## **Charles Fourier**

Charles Fourier was also one of France’s greatest libertarian thinkers. He not only influenced the young Proudhon (they both came from Besançon), but Kropotkin later acknowledged Fourier to be a ‘forerunner of Anarchy’.<sup>25</sup> Murray Bookchin has recently described him as ‘the most libertarian, the most original, and certainly the most relevant utopian thinker of his day, if not of the entire tradition’.<sup>26</sup> Fourier not only influenced the surrealists but his teachings found a direct echo in the counter-culture of the sixties and seventies.

Fourier was born in Besançon in 1772, and he studied at the local academy. He abandoned his studies to become a commercial traveller, covering Holland, France and Germany. During the revolutionary Terror, he was imprisoned and nearly guillotined, but emerged to do two years’ military service. He then pursued his desultory commercial career and developed a grandiose scheme to replace the corrupt civilization of his day which he knew so well.

Bookchin observes that Fourier was in many ways the earliest social ecologist to surface in radical thought. Certainly Fourier conceived of the universe as a vast living organism. In order to

complete Newton's work, he proposed his own 'law of passionate attraction' in which even stars have sexual proclivities. In his 'theory of universal analogy', he presents man as a microcosm of the universe: the universe is a unified system, a web of hidden correspondences, and man is at its centre. Man is not therefore separate from nature, but an integral part of it. Moreover, behind the apparent chaos of the world, there is an underlying harmony and natural order governed by universal law. If the universal law is understood it would 'conduct the human race to opulence, sensual pleasures and global unity'.<sup>27</sup>

Fourier went far beyond the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity put forward by the lawyers of the French Revolution. He recognized that social liberty without a degree of economic equality is meaningless. The *philosophes* of the eighteenth century were right to vaunt liberty – 'it is the foremost desire of all creatures' – but they forgot that in civilized societies liberty is illusory if the common people lack wealth: 'When the wage-earning classes are poor, their independence is as fragile as a house without foundations.'<sup>28</sup> While accepting the inequality of talents and remuneration according to work done, Fourier's utopia undoubtedly presupposes the gradual levelling of the privileges of the wealthy and the end of class antagonism.

Like de Sade, Fourier applied the notion of rights to women as well as men. It was Fourier and not Marx who first asserted as a general proposition that 'Social progress and changes of period are brought about by virtue of the progress of women towards liberty' and that the extension of the privileges of women is the fundamental cause of all social progress. Rejecting the degradation and bondage of women and conjugal slavery in modern civilization, he observes: 'A slave is never more contemptible than when his blind submission convinces the oppressor that his victim is born for slavery.' Fourier's egalitarian and libertarian vision even embraces animals. He does not recommend vegetarianism but it is a rule in his ideal society that 'a man who mistreats them is himself more of an animal than the defenceless beasts he persecutes.'<sup>29</sup>

The method Fourier adopted in his social analysis involved 'absolute doubt' and 'absolute deviation'.<sup>30</sup> The uncompromising application of this method led him to mount a devastating indictment of Western civilization and capitalism. His critique of its dehumanized market relations warped by deceit and falsehood, its punishing and repulsive work, and its psychic and sexual frustration are trenchant indeed. He rejected the whole economic system based on free competition and the work ethic itself. Freedom for Fourier not only meant free choice, but freedom from the psychological compulsion to work. In place of the existing order, he proposed a hedonistic utopia called 'Harmony' in which there would be agreeable and voluntary labour, non-repressive sexuality, communal education and communal living. Passion, pleasure, abundance, and love would all find their place in his new moral world.

Each community of Harmony would be a Phalanx housed in a palace or 'phalanstery'. Each Phalanx would consist of a self-managing and self-sustaining association of co-operative workers. The members would work in voluntary groups of friends or a series of groups who have gathered together spontaneously and who are stimulated by active rivalries. Work would be made as attractive as possible, and the division of labour would be carried to the supreme degree in order to allot suitable tasks to different individuals. While work would be co-operative and property enjoyed in common, members would receive dividends proportional to their contributions in capital, work and talent. Everyone would have a right to work and as a key principle Fourier insists on a 'social minimum', a guaranteed annual income. Every effort would be made to combine personal with social freedom and promote diversity in unity. The equality of unequals would prevail.

When it came to desire, Fourier was even more revolutionary. Although a rationalist, he rejected the mechanical rationalization of contemporary society which repressed the passions; they are natural and meant to be expressed. He stands as a forerunner of psychoanalysis in his understanding of the dynamics of repression: 'Every passion that is suffocated produces its counter passion, which is as malignant as the natural passion would have been salutary. This is true of all manias.'<sup>31</sup>

Rather than being disruptive in society, the gratification of individual desire and passion serve the general good: 'the man who devotes himself most ardently to pleasure becomes eminently useful for the happiness of all.'<sup>32</sup> In his notebooks collectively entitled *The New Amorous World*, Fourier called for the satisfaction of material and psychological needs, a 'sexual minimum' as well as a 'social minimum'. He was convinced that complete sexual gratification would foster social harmony and economic well-being. The only kind of sexual activity he condemned as vicious was where a person was abused, injured, or used as an object against his or her will. Only in Harmony could such 'amorous anarchy' prevail.<sup>33</sup>

Fourier's imaginary world is undoubtedly libertarian in many respects, but as it appears in his most succinct formulation in *Le Nouveau monde industriel et sociétaire* (1829) it contains many contradictions. Women are to be liberated from patriarchal constraints, but they are still expected to serve the men domestically and sexually. Again, Fourier's elegant tableaux of sexual and gastronomic delights reflect an aristocratic taste. His 'amorous code' manipulated by an elaborate hierarchy of officials in the 'Court of Love' is not for everyone. His description of sex appears somewhat mechanical and utilitarian. His child psychology is also naive and dogmatic. He not only denies infantile sexuality but asserts dogmatically that since 'Two thirds of all boys have a penchant for filth' they should be organized into 'little hordes' to do the disgusting and loathsome work.<sup>34</sup> Little girls of course like finery.

Finally, the arrangements of everyday life in 'Harmony' are described so minutely that its members are left little room for manoeuvre or renovation. Those who like privacy would not feel at home. While Fourier tried to foster individual autonomy and self-realization in allocating attractive work to suit particular tastes, the life he proposes is undoubtedly regimented. Communal life is so well-organized that to some it might appear more like a prison than a paradise. The whole is orchestrated by the puppet strings of the master.

Fourier distributed his works to the rich and powerful, but to little avail. By 1830, nonetheless, he had managed to attract a small band of followers in the area around Besançon. With the help of the young Victor Considérant, he then managed to turn the small Fourierist group into a movement, winning over some disenchanted followers of Saint-Simon in 1832. In the following year the first community was set up, only to collapse soon afterwards. Only after his death in 1837 did Fourierist movements spring up in most of the European countries and in the United States. In France, Considérant helped to turn Fourierism into a movement for 'peaceful democracy'; and it became a real political force in the last years of the July Monarchy and in the early phase of the 1848 French Revolution. In America, it spawned three dozen short-lived communities, including Brook Farm. Fourier's ideas even influenced Alexander Herzen and the Petrashevsky Circle in Tsarist Russia. But while communities failed, and his revolutionary message got watered down, he did have an influence on the developing co-operative movement, especially in Britain. Most authoritarian socialists, however, went on to dismiss Fourier's utopian visions, as Marx and Engels did, as a 'fantastic blueprint', despite its 'vein of true poetry' and satirical depiction of bourgeois society.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, despite all the regimented and static aspects of his utopia, Fourier was the most libertarian of the nineteenth-century French utopians. His wish to transform repulsive work into meaningful play, his call for the free satisfaction of sexuality, his stress on the social and sexual minimum, and his organic cosmology continue to inspire anarchists and ecologists alike.

# German Libertarians

THERE HAVE BEEN TWO remarkable libertarians in Germany who scotch the myth that the German character is intrinsically authoritarian and given to State worship. While Hegel was denying the distinction between society and the State and arguing that citizens could only realize themselves through the State, his near contemporary Wilhelm von Humboldt narrowly drew the limits of legitimate State action. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche too reacted against growing German nationalism and Bismarck's attempt to create a strong centralized State. He developed one of the most eloquent defences of individualism ever made, and deserves a central place in any history of libertarian thought.

## Wilhelm von Humboldt

Humboldt's reputation as a libertarian thinker rests on one book. But while *The Limits of State Action* (1792) came close to anarchism, Humboldt ultimately remained in the liberal camp.<sup>1</sup> The work was not published in English until 1854 as *The Sphere and Duties of Government*; it considerably influenced John Stuart Mill in his essay *On Liberty* (1859). However, the anarchist historian Max Nettlau has called Humboldt's work 'a curious mixture of essentially anarchist ideas and authoritarian prejudice'.<sup>2</sup> More recently, Noam Chomsky has been inspired by Humboldt and through him his ideas have reached a new generation of libertarians and anarchists.<sup>3</sup>

Humboldt absorbed the radical message of the Enlightenment, particularly Leibniz's theory of human perfectibility, Rousseau's belief that moral self-determination is the essence of human dignity, and Kant's stress on the need to treat each individual as an end and never simply as a means. To this, he added an idealized version of the ancient Greek model of the fully rounded and harmonious human personality.

Humboldt's starting-point is the creative individual and his ultimate aim is to achieve the greatest individuality with the widest freedom possible in a variety of situations. It is his belief that only the spontaneous and creative energies of the individual constitute the vitality of a society. Self-education is thus the key concept of his political theory.<sup>4</sup>

Humboldt wrote:

The true end of Man or that which is prescribed by the eternal and immutable dictates of reason and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole. Freedom is the first and indispensable condition which the possibility of such a development presupposes.<sup>5</sup>

The most desirable condition is therefore the one in which each individual 'enjoys the most absolute freedom of developing himself by his own energies, in his perfect individuality'.<sup>6</sup> This principle must be the basis of every political system.

While Humboldt saw the individual and society in organic and aesthetic terms — as flowering plants and works of art — he insisted that the State is nothing more than a piece of machinery. Like later anarchists, he distinguishes between the State and society, or what he calls the State constitution and the national community: ‘And it is strictly speaking the latter — the free cooperation of the members of the nation — which secures all those benefits for which men longed when they formed themselves into society.’ He further recommends small associations, since in a large one a person easily becomes merely an instrument: ‘The more a man acts on his own, the more he develops himself.’<sup>7</sup>

The basis of Humboldt’s criticism of government is that it restricts personal autonomy and initiative:

Whatever does not spring from a man’s free choice, or is only the result of instruction and guidance, does not enter into his very being, but still remains alien to his true nature; he does not perform it with truly human energies, but merely with mechanical exactness.<sup>8</sup>

Freedom, he argued, ‘is but the possibility of a various and indefinite activity’; Humboldt was therefore concerned with ‘greater freedom for human energies, and a richer diversity of circumstances and situations’.<sup>9</sup>

The paternalist State which seeks the positive welfare of the citizen is therefore harmful. By treating its subjects as children, it prevents them from learning from their own experience, it lessens the quality of their experience by imposing its own uniform character, and it weakens their initiative and independence. By trying to do good, it saps energy and weakens sympathy and mutual assistance. It can never improve the morals of its citizens since ‘all moral culture springs solely and immediately from the inner life of the soul’ and ‘The greater a man’s freedom, the more self-reliant and well-disposed towards others he becomes.’<sup>10</sup>

Rejecting unnecessary political regulations, Humboldt contemplates the possibility of an anarchist society:

If we imagine a community of enlightened men — fully instructed in their truest instances, and therefore mutually well-disposed and closely bound together — we can easily imagine how voluntary contracts with a view to their security, would be entered into among them ... Agreements of this kind are infinitely to be preferred to any State arrangements.<sup>11</sup>

Humboldt’s ideal society based on fellowship in which each individual is independent and yet part of society has something akin to libertarian socialism. It was precisely his aim to outline the kind of political organization which would allow ‘the most diverse individuality and the most original independence’ to coexist equally with ‘the most diverse and profound associations of human beings with each other — a problem which nothing but the most absolute liberty can ever help to solve’.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Humboldt retains the need for the nightwatchman State to stand guard over its citizens. Its principal role is negative: to maintain security, against both the external attacks of foreign enemies and internal dissension. Like Thomas Paine, he sees that State is a necessary means; ‘and since it is always attended with restrictions of freedom, a necessary evil’.<sup>13</sup> The only justification for State interference is to prevent harm to others. Thus, while

he came to the borders of anarchism, Humboldt ultimately remained in the liberal camp. This cannot be said of his compatriot Friedrich Nietzsche who came to anarchist conclusions quite independently.

## Friedrich Nietzsche

Despite his erroneous reputation as the inventor of fascism, Nietzsche may be counted amongst the great libertarians for his attack on the State, his rejection of systems, his transvaluation of values, and his impassioned celebration of personal freedom and individuality. His libertarian views formed only part of his revolutionary attempt to reorientate totally European thought and sensibility. As a result, his influence was far-reaching and complex.

At the turn of the century, Nietzsche's form of individualism won many converts in bohemian and artistic circles throughout Europe – much to Kropotkin's dismay as he considered it too epicurean and egoistic.<sup>14</sup> Amongst anarchist thinkers, Emma Goldman also welcomed him into the family and admired his 'giant mind' and vision of the free individual.<sup>15</sup> Rudolf Rocker admired his analysis of political power and culture.<sup>16</sup> Herbert Read acknowledged that he was the first to make people conscious of the importance of the individual in evolution.<sup>17</sup> But his influence was not only restricted to anarchist intellectuals – Salvador Seguí, the Catalan syndicalist who helped found the Spanish Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, was also deeply impressed by his message.

Nietzsche did not call himself an anarchist. He claimed that the anarchist of his day was, like the Christian, a decadent, 'the mouthpiece of a declining strata of society' because his complaints about others and society came from weakness and a narrow spirit of revenge.<sup>18</sup> Clearly this is true of some anarchists as well as some socialists. When the resentful anarchist demands with righteous indignation that his rights be respected he fails to see that his real suffering lies in his failure to create a new life for himself. At the same time, Nietzsche admired those anarchists who asserted their rights: many fail to assert rights to which they are perfectly entitled because 'a right is a kind of *power* but they are too lazy or too cowardly to exercise it'.<sup>19</sup>

With considerable psychological acumen, Nietzsche argued that anarchists of his day demonstrated that

The desire for *destruction*, change, and becoming can be an expression of overfull, future-pregnant strength (my term for this, as one knows, is the word 'Dionysian'); but it can also be the hatred of the misdeveloped, needy, underprivileged who destroys, who must destroy, because the existing, and even all existence, all being, outrages and provokes him.<sup>20</sup>

Nietzsche was probably thinking of Bakunin here, whom his friend Richard Wagner knew. Those followers of Bakunin and the terrorists who destroy and maim in the name of freedom and justice are clearly motivated by hatred. Most anarchist thinkers, however, especially Godwin, Proudhon, Kropotkin and Tolstoy, were motivated by a sense of the overflowing richness and vitality of life in their wish to overthrow existing values and institutions.

Nietzsche thought that literary decadence sets in when instead of a work of art forming a whole, there is 'an anarchy of atoms'.<sup>21</sup> As a child of his age, he too recognized that he was a decadent but he tried to resist it. His work does not form a coherent whole, indeed he deliberately

rejected system-making as a distortion of the truth. The will to construct a system shows a lack of integrity, and, moreover, ineradicable convictions are prisons.

Nietzsche's method is therefore experimental; he approaches his subjects tangentially. His style is aphoristic, rhapsodic and ironic. Engulfed in iconoclastic fervour, he is deliberately paradoxical. He wanted to soak his thoughts in blood, to show that knowledge has to be lived to be understood. It is not surprising that Nietzsche should often have been misinterpreted.

The most serious accusation against him is that he was a forerunner of Nazism. This accusation was made possible by the work of his sister, who selectively edited his works when he became mad towards the end of his life, and by Nazi ideologues who took certain of his phrases and redeployed them completely out of their context. It is only by radically distorting his message that Nietzsche can be seen as an anti-Semite, a racist, or a German nationalist.<sup>22</sup> He despised and detested German culture, was utterly opposed to German nationalism, and thought the State the poison of the people. One of the main reasons why he broke with Wagner was because of the composer's anti-Semitism. Nietzsche's metaphor of the 'blond beast' became a model for the elevation of the Aryan German, but he was no racist, and even recommended racial mixing. Certainly he celebrated war, but like Blake he was thinking of intellectual not physical strife; he was well aware that 'blood is the worst witness of truth'.<sup>23</sup>

Nietzsche's atrocious views on women however cannot be explained away. 'In woman,' he wrote in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 'a slave and a tyrant have all too long been concealed. For that reason, woman is not capable of friendship: she knows only love.' A woman should be trained 'for the recreation of the warrior: all else is folly'. In the same work, Nietzsche ironically makes an old woman say 'Are you visiting women? Do not forget your whip!'<sup>24</sup>

Like Proudhon's and Tolstoy's, Nietzsche's attitude to women is lamentable. But his rehearsals of traditional misogyny can at least be better understood when we remember that his childhood was dominated by his mother, sister, grandmother and two aunts; his life as a lonely bachelor visiting European spas was full of frivolous women; and his relationship with the only love of his life, Lou Salomé, ended in failure. His complex relationship with women was aggravated by the fact that he became infected with syphilis from prostitutes as a young man. The disease eventually made him mad in the last ten years of his life and finally killed him. Ironically, the great philosophical misogynist was once photographed pulling a cart with Lou Salomé holding a whip in her hand! Nonetheless, all his antics did not prevent Emma Goldman from admiring his libertarian insights.

The most important premiss of Nietzsche's philosophy is his uncompromising atheism. Kropotkin acknowledged that next to Fourier, Nietzsche was unequalled in undermining Christianity.<sup>25</sup> He not only popularized the slogan 'God is Dead' but joked that there was only one Christian and he died on the cross. Like Bakunin, Nietzsche believed that traditional Christianity is a form of slave morality, with its stress on humility, pity and piety. Above all, it was decadent because it tried to extirpate the passions.

Unlike Bakunin, however, Nietzsche did not believe that law or morality could be derived from nature. Nature is entirely arbitrary and contingent: Lord Chance rules. Indeed, Nature is so disordered that given infinite time, finite space and constant energy in the world, Nietzsche argued, everything is likely to recur eternally. In this scheme of things man appears as a 'thoughtless accident', standing on a rope stretched over an abyss. His mind and body are two aspects of one being. The will, not reason, is paramount and determines both his thought and action. In Nietzsche's view of history there is no rational pattern or moral purpose to be discovered.

The problem for Nietzsche was to find meaning in a godless and arbitrary world based on chance and eternal recurrence. But he did not give into nihilistic despair. In our own lives, we are free to decide whether we want to be sickened or exhilarated by the journey, whether we want to follow the herd and act out inherited beliefs or to create our own life and values. Coming from nowhere, and going nowhere, we can nevertheless create ourselves and shape the world around us.

As in nature so in art: out of chaos human beings can create order. At first Nietzsche called the emotional element in life and art 'Dionysus', and its antithesis 'Apollo'. He saw Greek tragedy as the upshot of Apollo's harnessing of Dionysus, that is to say the creative force overcoming the 'animal' in the individual. Dionysus came to epitomize the sublimated will to power, and was therefore synonymous in Nietzschean vocabulary with *übermensch*, the man in whom the will to power is sublimated into creativity.<sup>26</sup>

What most characterizes Nietzsche's work is his libertarian insistence that the individual can throw off inherited values and beliefs and create his own. Like Stirner, he recognized that values are not given by God or nature but are human creations: every people has its own language of good and evil. While all moral codes are relative, their common element is the will to power.

Nietzsche perceptively saw that vengeance or resentment is at the core of most moral codes, which reveal themselves in their stress on punishment. He also recognized that public opinion, which many anarchists rely on to replace law, inevitably checks the individual from realizing himself: the 'You' of the crowd is older than the T. In these circumstances, the love of one's neighbour is often a vicious form of selfishness, the result of bad love of oneself. In modern mass society, 'One man runs to his neighbours because he is looking for himself, and another because he wants to lose himself.'<sup>27</sup>

In higher and mixed cultures Nietzsche maintains that master and slave moralities have developed, and are often juxtaposed within one person. The rulers determine the master morality which exalts those states of being which determine the order of rank, such as severity and power. The ruled create a slave morality stressing pity, humility and patience to help them endure the burden of existence. Master and slave have contrary definitions of morality: according to the master, the 'good' man inspires fear; according to the slave, the 'evil' man inspires fear while the good man is harmless.<sup>28</sup> But Nietzsche would have us transcend these types of morality; the emancipated person goes beyond existing definitions of good and evil and creates his own anew. In his own moral revaluation, Nietzsche himself valued honesty, courage, self-discipline, strength, and generosity.

Nietzsche argued that our fundamental drive is the will to power. Even the pursuit of truth is often a disguised will to power. Nietzsche's concept of the will to power is one of his most misunderstood doctrines. He celebrates not power over nature or over others but over oneself. He considered the will to power over others to be the will of the weak: the really strong person seeks power only over himself in order to forge his own destiny. The only person one should obey is oneself, and great power reveals itself in self-mastery and is measured by joy. The will to power is therefore an 'instinct to freedom', to transcend and perfect oneself.

Nietzsche calls the developed person *übermensch*. It is usually translated as 'superman' but a more accurate translation is 'overman'. The 'overman' overcomes himself and sublimates his will to power into creativity. His greatest creation is himself. He is able to face the arbitrary nature of the world without pity, nausea and fear, and affirm life with all its suffering. Where for Hobbes

power is essentially a means of security, for Nietzsche it is 'the state of being that man desires for its own sake as his own ultimate end'.<sup>29</sup>

Nietzsche's ideal of transformed humanity is that of the individual who overcomes his feelings of pity and terror and makes a work of art out of himself. His call 'You must come who you are' is a call for every individual to reach his or her full stature, to realize their complete potential as an act of creative will: 'to become them who we are – the new, the unique, the incomparable, those who give themselves their own laws, those who create themselves'.<sup>30</sup> The emancipated human being is an egoist concerned with developing himself, but he helps the unfortunate not out of pity but because he overflows with generosity and strength. He values freedom, creativity, joy, and laughter. He lives dangerously and makes a Dionysian affirmation of life. His ultimate ideal is to realize in himself the 'eternal joy of becoming'.<sup>31</sup>

Freedom for Nietzsche is 'the will to self-responsibility'. He thought the struggle to achieve freedom more important than its attainment since it brings out the best in people. It can be measured in individuals and nations by 'the resistance which has to be overcome, by the effort it costs to stay *aloft*'.<sup>32</sup> Freedom is something one has and does not have, something one wants and achieves. To expand human freedom is a never-ending process of struggle in which one seeks mastery over desire for mere happiness or well-being. In politics and art, Nietzsche observed that the claim to independence, to free development, to *laissez aller* is advanced most heatedly by precisely those for whom 'no curb *could be too strong*'. Nietzsche thus understood progress in the sense of a return to nature but it is not a going back but a 'going-up into a high, free even frightful nature and naturalness, such as plays with great tasks, is *permitted* to play with them.'<sup>33</sup> The ideal for Nietzsche is complete self-creation and self-determination, to become a 'self-propelling wheel' who transforms chance into conscious intention.<sup>34</sup> The symbols of Zarathustra are the eagle and the serpent, creatures of power and knowledge who fly the highest and creep the lowest; a tree on a mountainside, the roots of which plunge deeper into the earth as the branches reach for the sky; and a laughing lion, a combination of strength, control and joy.

With these assumptions, it is no surprise that Nietzsche despised his contemporaries. His critique of European culture and politics is unparalleled in its spiteful vehemence:

Just look at these superfluous people! They steal for themselves the works of inventors and the treasures of the wise: they call their theft culture – and they turn everything to sickness and calamity. Just look at these superfluous people! They are always ill, they vomit their bile and call it a newspaper. They devour one another and cannot even digest themselves.

Just look at these superfluous people! They acquire wealth and make themselves poorer with it. They desire power and especially the lever of power, plenty of money – these impotent people!

See them clamber, these nimble apes! They clamber over one another and so scuffle into the mud and the abyss. They all strive towards the throne: it is madness they have – as if happiness sat upon the throne! Often filth sits upon the throne – and often the throne upon filth, too.<sup>35</sup>

Nietzsche makes clear that the new idol of his contemporaries was the State. There were still peoples and herds in the world, but in Europe there were only States. He defined the State in terms which no anarchist could deny:

The state? What is that? Well then! Now open your ears, for now I shall speak to you of the death of the peoples.

The state is the coldest of all cold monsters. Coldly it lies, too; and this lie creeps from its mouth: 'I, the state, am the people.'

It is a lie! It was creators who created peoples and hung a faith and a love over them: thus they served life. It is destroyers who set snares for many and call it the state: they hand a sword and a hundred desires over them.

Where a people still exists, there the people do not understand the state and hate it as the evil eye and sin against custom and law.<sup>36</sup>

Nietzsche goes on to say that the State was invented for the superfluous. 'I call it the State where everyone, good and bad, is a poison-drinker: the State where everyone, good and bad, loses himself: the State where universal slow suicide is called – life.' It beckons the 'preachers of death'. It claims that there is nothing greater on earth and that it is 'the regulating finger of God'. It is nothing less than a 'cunning device of Hell ... a horse of death jingling with the trappings of divine honours'. The church moreover is a kind of State and the State is a 'hypocrite dog' because it wants absolutely to be the most important beast on earth.<sup>37</sup>

Nietzsche did not restrict his criticism only to the Prussian State, for he attacked the whole conception of politics and political parties. Once they have been attained, he argued that liberal institutions immediately cease to be liberal and subsequently nothing is more harmful to freedom. Liberalism comes to mean the '*reduction to the herd animal*'.<sup>38</sup>

As for the relationship between culture and the State, Nietzsche insisted that the two are antagonists. Those who gain political power pay heavily for 'power *makes stupid*'. Culture and the State live off each other, one thrives at the expense of the other: 'All great cultural epochs are epochs of political decline: that which is great in the cultural sense has been unpolitical, even *anti-political*'.<sup>39</sup>

Certainly Nietzsche was no egalitarian. He despised the 'rabble' and saw his contemporaries as superfluous in their pursuit of wealth and status. They were utterly corrupted by *decadence* and *ressentiment* in their ethics of material comfort and envy. In thinking that there had been only a few truly developed human beings in the past, Nietzsche however was an elitist rather than an aristocrat. Ability is not related to blood. Even the slave can show nobility by rebelling. Humanity is not condemned forever: the earth still remains free for great souls who can lead free lives. In the final analysis, Nietzsche's philosophy is a song of freedom and creativity for the individual to make himself or herself anew. The individual and the moment have infinite value: 'so live that you must wish to live again.'

It cannot be denied that Nietzsche's extreme individualism leaves little room for community. His own experience of community was that it crushed individuality; he felt that a free life in his own time could only be possible for solitaries or couples. It is not unreasonable however to infer that his ideal of transformed humanity could exist like Stirner's union of egoists, a voluntary association of individualists who meet to fulfil their particular desires. Human beings for Nietzsche may not be equal in the sense of being uniform, but this does not mean they are not equally capable, regardless of race and sex, of creating themselves and society anew. He would have man fit for intellectual war and woman fit for bearing children, 'but both fit for dancing with head and heels'.<sup>40</sup> The dance for Nietzsche epitomized the union of creative energy with

form, a joyful affirmation against all those who would renounce living in gloomy abstractions under moribund rules and regulations.

Emma Goldman, who was strongly influenced by Nietzsche, rightly insisted that he should not be decried as a hater of the weak because he believed in the *übermensch*: 'It does not occur to the shallow interpreters of the giant mind that his vision of the *übermensch* also called for a state of society which will not give birth to a race of weaklings and slaves.'<sup>41</sup> His 'aristocracy', she pointed out, was neither of birth nor of wealth but of the spirit: 'In that respect Nietzsche was an anarchist, and all true anarchists were aristocrats.'<sup>42</sup> Because of this, Nietzsche still speaks directly and eloquently to all those who wish to develop their full individuality, overthrow accepted values and received ideas, and to transform everyday life. He remains an inspiration, offering the hardest task of all, to create a free work of art out of oneself.

# British Libertarians

WITH ITS STRONG LIBERAL tradition, Britain has produced many great libertarian thinkers. With their Protestant background, they are suspicious of authority and wish to defend the right of private judgement. They celebrate individuality and are fearful of the individual being lost in the community or overwhelmed by the oppressive State. They follow John Locke in seeing a negative role for government in guaranteeing the rights to life, liberty and property. With Adam Smith, they believe that if all people are allowed to pursue their own interests in the long run it will result in the general good.

Amongst the great nineteenth-century libertarians, only William Godwin extended liberalism to anarchism. Nevertheless, the philosophers John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer both persuasively defended the individual against the State while retaining a faith in limited government. Towards the end of the century, the writers William Morris, Edward Carpenter and Oscar Wilde all condemned private property and envisaged a world without government. Although they remained on the fringes of the organized anarchist movement, their libertarian vision, combining a love of beauty with a concern for personal freedom, remains one of the most inspiring and far-sighted.

## John Stuart Mill

John Stuart Mill in his essay *On Liberty* (1859) insisted that individuality is one of the essential elements of human well-being. To this end, he quoted the German libertarian Wilhelm von Humboldt that 'the end of man ... is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole' and that the two requisites for individuality are 'freedom, and variety of situations'.<sup>1</sup> He further acknowledged his debt to the 'remarkable American' individualist anarchist Josiah Warren for the use of the phrase 'the sovereignty of the individual'.<sup>2</sup>

But while being a great libertarian and individualist, Mill was no democrat. He dreaded the ignorance of the masses and was fearful of the tyranny of the majority which socialism might involve. He seems to have mistaken Bakunin for the whole of the First International, and associated its socialism with general revolutionary destruction. Of the socialists, he was most impressed by Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier who retained a degree of inequality in their systems.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, Mill was not a complete believer in *laissez-faire* and he wanted a fairer distribution of wealth. He came very close moreover to the anarchist goal of communal individuality in his famous formula:

The social problem of the future we considered to be, how to unite the greatest individual liberty of action with a common ownership in the raw material of the globe, and equal participation of all in the benefits of combined labour.<sup>4</sup>

Mill has played an important part in the philosophical and the practical defence of individual and social freedom. He defended liberty on the grounds of utility, truth and individuality. He

opposed the tyranny of government, of the majority, and of opinion. In his essay *On Liberty*, one of the great classics of libertarian thought, he insisted on an unbridled freedom of speech and thought. He did not, like Godwin, think that truth always triumphs over error, but he argued that free enquiry is best in pursuing truth. No one is infallible and can be sure that the opinion they are suppressing is true. Truth is most likely to emerge in the clash of opposing opinions. And only by defending and explaining our views can we have 'a living apprehension of a truth'.<sup>5</sup> Mill stands beside all those anarchists who believe that people should question authority and think for themselves.

Mill insists that 'The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it.'<sup>6</sup> It was on these grounds that he defended the liberty of conscience, of thought and feeling, of tastes and pursuits, of expression, and of association. In personal terms, he defined freedom in a negative way as doing what one desires - 'all restraint, qua restraint, is an evil.'<sup>7</sup> He even went further than most anarchists in pointing out the dangers of public opinion and social pressure in trying to make people conform, a tyranny which could be more oppressive than political authority. He celebrated individuality and diversity as good in themselves, and encouraged eccentricity and different 'experiments of living'.<sup>8</sup>

Making a distinction between self- and other-regarding actions, Mill argues that 'self-protection', either individual or collective, is the only legitimate reason for coercing anyone into doing something he or she does not want to do. People should only be interfered with when they intend definite harm or suffering to others; their own good does not offer sufficient grounds. We all have a right to be left alone: 'Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.'<sup>9</sup> Mill presents human beings as self-reliant and capable of responding to rational argument. On these grounds, he opposed 'a State which dwarfs its men, in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes — will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished.'<sup>10</sup> All this is admirably libertarian.

Although Mill often appears almost anarchistic, ultimately he remains, like Humboldt, in the liberal camp. He advocated women's suffrage and argued for proportional representation for minority voices. He was opposed to excessive regulation and centralization. He wanted to restrict government to the regulation of contracts and provision of public works. Yet in arguing his case for representative government, he called for plural voting in which the educated would have more votes than the ignorant. Above all, he followed Rousseau in arguing that 'Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians,' thereby justifying colonial rule.<sup>11</sup>

It is Mill's belief in the guiding role of an intellectual elite which prevents him from being regarded as an anarchist. He may have been a great libertarian in his defence of the freedoms of thought, expression and individuality, but he frequently stresses the need for intellectual authority rather than 'intellectual anarchy'.<sup>12</sup> He often pictured the happy society as one in which the people are voluntarily led by an elite of wise guardians. In the long run, the elitist in Mill gets the better of the democrat and the libertarian.

## **Herbert Spencer**

Herbert Spencer, a father of modern sociology, developed a very different organic and evolutionary philosophy from Mill's, but he shared the same concern for individual freedom and fear

of excessive government. In two classics of Victorian political thought, *Social Statics* (1851) and *The Man versus The State* (1884), he took up the defence of individuality and severely restricted the legitimate limits of the State. They were sufficiently libertarian to impress Kropotkin, who suggested that he had arrived at the same conclusions as Proudhon and Bakunin; and Emma Goldman, who thought that Spencer's formulation of liberty was the most important on the subject.<sup>13</sup>

Spencer tried like his contemporary Social Darwinists to ground his moral and political beliefs in a philosophy of nature. He was one of the first to apply Darwin's theory of natural evolution to social life and coined the phrase 'the survival of the fittest'. In his view, just as in nature the 'fittest' survive in the struggle for existence, so in society competition enables the best to emerge. But where Darwin defined the 'fittest' to be those most adapted to their environment, Spencer saw fitness in terms of the most successful individuals. The fittest societies are those of the fittest individuals.

At the same time, Spencer argued that societies operate like living organisms, growing more complex as their parts become more mutually dependent. Since they are inherently self-equilibrating, they need the struggles of their members for their further evolution. But where struggle took a military form in feudal society, Spencer would like to see the combination of competition and co-operation prevalent in industrial society take its place. In addition, he was confident that evolution operated as a kind of 'invisible hand' transforming private interest into the general good.<sup>14</sup> The long term direction of evolution was from egotism to altruism. In the process, social life would achieve the greatest development of individuality together with the greatest degree of sociability.

Drawing on contemporary anthropology, Spencer argued like Kropotkin that societies originally regulated their affairs by custom. On the other hand, 'Government is begotten of aggression and by aggression.'<sup>15</sup> A state of war established the authority of a chief who eventually developed into a king. Subsequent history was the record of aggressive war between States, and of class war within States. While all progress has depended on the efforts of individuals to achieve their private ends, governments have always thwarted the growth of society and never been able to enhance it. Rather than establishing rights, as Bentham argued, governments have merely recognized existing claims, especially the claim to property. Spencer concludes from all this that the future function of true liberalism will be that of 'putting a limit to the power of Parliaments'.<sup>16</sup> Like Mill, but from his own evolutionary perspective, he prophesized 'that form of society towards which we are progressing' is 'one in which *government* will be reduced to the smallest amount possible, and *freedom* increased to the greatest amount possible.'<sup>17</sup>

Spencer was equally critical of the socialism and liberalism of his day. He was hostile to representative government which he considered inferior to monarchical government because it results in the tyranny of the majority, the triumph of mediocrity, and inefficiency of administration. It is best only for securing justice, and worst for all other purposes.<sup>18</sup> The power of parliaments should therefore be restricted: 'The great political superstition of the present is the divine right of parliaments.'<sup>19</sup>

As for socialism, which he knew in its Marxist form via H. M. Hyndman, Spencer declared that 'all socialism involves slavery'. The essence of slavery is to make everything a possession; under socialism the citizen becomes owned by the State:

Judge what must under such conditions become the despotism of a graduated and centralized officialism, holding in its hands the resources of the community, and having behind it whatever amount of force it finds requisite to carry out its decrees and maintain what it calls order. Well may Prince Bismarck display leanings towards State-socialism.<sup>20</sup>

Spencer considered existing societies to be of 'the semi-militant semi-industrial type', whereas genuine freedom could only exist in an industrial society based on voluntary co-operation and competition. The socialists however wanted to recreate a military society based on compulsory cooperation. If they got their way, the ultimate result would be like the rigid and tyrannical society of ancient Peru.<sup>21</sup>

Spencer's criticisms of existing liberalism and socialism were made, like Mill's, from the point of view of individual freedom. In his political theory, he consistently opposed what he called 'Over-Legislation'(1853), so much so that T. H. Huxley accused him of 'Administrative Nihilism'.<sup>22</sup> In reply, Spencer claimed that the term might apply to Humboldt, whom he had never read, but certainly not to him.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, Spencer looked to a society in which *laissez-faire*, economic competition, voluntary co-operation, and the division of labour would ensure autonomy and general well-being.

But although Spencer pitches the individual against the State, he does not call for its abolition. As Kropotkin observed, he does not endorse all the conclusions about government which ought to be drawn from his system of philosophy.<sup>24</sup> Spencer's individualism was formulated in *The Proper Sphere of Government* (1842) where he argued like Humboldt and Mill that the duty of the State only lies in the protection of its citizens against each other. It may direct its citizens for security – both against external hostility and internal aggression – and for the enforcement of contract. But it should confer nothing beyond the opportunity to compete freely. Its function is 'simply to defend the natural rights of men – to protect person and property, to prevent the aggression of the powerful on the weak; in a word, to administer Justice'.<sup>25</sup>

Spencer wanted to make the State more efficient as a 'negatively regulative' body in preventing aggression and administering justice. Unlike Proudhon (whom he mentions), Spencer held that

within its proper limits governmental action is not simply legitimate but all-important ... Not only do I contend that the restraining power of the State over individuals, and bodies or classes of individuals, is requisite, but I have contended that it should be exercised much more effectually, and carried out much further, than at present.<sup>26</sup>

Later in his life, Spencer gave the State a more positive role in promoting the moral law, that is the 'law of equal freedom' in which 'every man has freedom to do all that he wills, provided he infringes not the equal rights of every other man.'<sup>27</sup>

Spencer was as far removed from socialism as he was from genuine anarchism. He may have been a bold critic of the excessive power of the State, but he remained true to his background of middle-class provincial radicalism.<sup>28</sup> He feared the demands of the working class which he felt would lead to 'degeneracy', and what is even worse, to 'communism and anarchism'. Any attempt to bring about equal return for labour, he argued, leads to communism – then would come 'anarchism and a return to the unrestrained struggle for life, as among brutes'.<sup>29</sup>

Spencer undoubtedly anticipates modern anarcho-capitalists in his individualism, his economic laissez-faire, and his distrust of the powers of the State. Possessive individualism is the final premiss of his political thought.<sup>30</sup> For all his fine libertarian expressions, Spencer ultimately remains a spokesman for early industrial capitalism rather than modern anarchism. But while it may be a small irony of history that his tomb opposite Karl Marx's resplendent bust in Highgate Cemetery, London, is neglected and overgrown, his libertarian vision still lives on.

## Edward Carpenter

Towards the end of the nineteenth century in Britain, anarchism exerted a considerable influence amongst radical literary circles. British intellectuals and artists were undoubtedly influenced by the liberal tradition of individualism found in the work of John Stuart Mill and Spencer, but their response to the triumph of capital and empire led them to a deeper analysis of exploitation and a more radical remedy. The clamour of the growing anarchist movement on the Continent also crossed the English Channel, and some of the more distinguished exponents like Prince Kropotkin took political refuge in the comparatively tolerant atmosphere of Britain.

Although the poet Edward Carpenter did not call himself an anarchist, his highly personal form of libertarian socialism comes very close to it. Kropotkin was the leading anarchist spokesman in Britain at the time, and Carpenter contributed to his journal *Freedom*, but the poet perceived in him a 'charming naïveté which summed up all evil in one word "government"'. Nevertheless, Henry W. Nevinson, to whom this remark was made, wrote about Carpenter: 'By temperament, if not by conviction, he was a complete anarchist, detesting all commandments, authority and forms of government.' He believed moreover that 'external law' must always be false and only acknowledged the internal law of self-expression.<sup>31</sup>

The key to Carpenter's libertarian socialism is to be found in his attitude to personal affections: he wanted a society in which men and women could be lovers and friends. He wanted to release what he called 'The Ocean of Sex' within each person. To this end, he urged the creation of 'The Intermediate Sex', a new type of being combining the male and the female, which would appear in *Love's Coming of Age* (1897) – dismissed predictably by Bernard Shaw as 'sex-nonsense'. Like many anarchists at that time, Carpenter turned to anthropology to back up his call for a new kind of humanity and he wrote a study of social evolution entitled *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk* (1914). While he was far more radical than Spencer, he shared his evolutionary outlook and belief in social progress.

In his analysis of the causes of modern civilization, Carpenter followed Rousseau and Shelley in thinking that it corrupted and disintegrated natural man. The institution of private property in particular broke up the unity of his nature and drew him away from his true self and made him prey to every form of disease. Civilization founded on property had introduced: 'slavery, serfdom, wage-labour, which are various forms of the domination of one class over another; and to rivet these authorities it created the State and the policeman'.<sup>32</sup> Having destroyed the organic structures of earlier society, the institution of property had thus given rise to strong central government which was 'the evidence in social life that man has lost his inner and central control, and therefore must result to an outer one'.<sup>33</sup> Crime moreover is a symptom of social illness, poverty, inequality and restriction.<sup>34</sup>

But all is not lost and there is a cure for civilization. If every person were linked organically to the general body of his fellows, then no serious disharmony would occur. Carpenter thought it possible for a free and communist society to exist without external government and law which are only 'the travesties and transitory substitutes of Inward Government and Order'. Anarchy could therefore exist with no outward rule as 'an inward and invisible spirit of life'.<sup>35</sup>

Carpenter returned to this theme in his *Non-Governmental Society* (1911), a work which deeply impressed Gandhi and Herbert Read. Like Kropotkin, Carpenter was convinced that human societies can maintain themselves in good order and vitality without written law and its institutions. Indeed, he felt that custom, which takes a gentler form and is adaptable to the general movement of society when exerting pressure on individuals, is far superior to law. A study of 'native races' showed that the competition and anxiety of modern society need not exist if people were left to themselves. A 'free non-governmental society' could then emerge which would be practicable because it was vital and organic:

a spontaneous and free production of goods would spring up, followed of course by a spontaneous free exchange — a self-supporting society, based not on individual dread and anxiety, but on the common fulness of life and energy.<sup>36</sup>

Work would be based on voluntary choice according to taste and skill and there would be common property. A non-governmental society would therefore be a free and communal society.

But while Carpenter put forward his case in reasoned arguments with careful evidence in his pamphlets, he was primarily a poet. As a young man, Shelley's libertarian world had been his ideal. When he came across Walt Whitman at twenty-five, he felt a great surge of joy. To these influences was added a deep reading of the *Bhagavadgita*. Carpenter went on to express his own vision of a free world in his extraordinary rhapsody *Towards Democracy* (1883) which embraced the sexual revolution, direct democracy, vegetarianism and pacifism. Whatever his contemporaries thought of him, he refused to still his song:

O Freedom, beautiful beyond compare, thy kingdom is established!  
Thou with the thy feet on earth, dry brow among the stars, for ages us thy children  
I, thy child, singing daylong nightlong, sing of joy in thee.<sup>37</sup>

In place of existing civilization, which pressed on people and left them 'cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd', Carpenter called for a simple life in a decentralized society of fields and workshops in which every person would have a cottage and sufficient land. Freedom emerges once the people love the land:

Government and laws and police then fall into their places — the earth gives her own laws; Democracy just begins to open her eyes and peep! and the rabble of unfaithful bishops, priests, generals, landlords, capitalists, lawyers, kings, queens, patronisers and polite idlers goes scuttling down into general oblivion.<sup>38</sup>

The individual would then live in harmony with himself, his fellows, and his natural environment. Carpenter hoped moreover that he would develop a higher form of consciousness in which the personal self is experienced as part of the universal Self in 'The Everlasting Now'. But the

Self can only find expression in Democracy — equality or freedom — for they come to the same thing.

Carpenter was no idle poet or mystic. He inherited a small independent income after being a teacher, but he tried to realize his ideal by building his own house, living off the land, and making sandals. It is for trying to practise what he preached that Carpenter has rightly been called the 'English Tolstoi'.<sup>39</sup> And while he remained on the fringes of the anarchist movement, and felt private property was more important than government in bringing about the downfall of humanity, his decentralized vision of free society without law is entirely anarchistic.

## William Morris

The poet and artist William Morris was a friend of Carpenter; he admired the simplicity of his lifestyle, while Carpenter respected his love of work and humanity. They were both involved for a time with the Democratic Federation and Socialist League in the 1880s and 1890s. But while Morris drew conclusions similar to those of Carpenter, he was more directly involved in the socialist movement and its political snuggles. At the same time, he developed an original form of libertarian socialism which stemmed from a hatred of modern civilization with its physical ugliness and emotional constraint. His aim was not only to create beautiful things but also a beautiful society. The 'idle singer of an empty day', as he appeared in his early epic poem *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–70), moved from idealizing the Middle Ages and elaborating Celtic and Norse mythology to an anarchist vision of a free society.

Morris claimed that as a middle-class Englishman he had to cross a 'river of fire' before becoming a socialist.<sup>40</sup> But his socialism began with an intense desire for 'complete equality of condition', and he became a communist, before he knew anything about the history of socialism.<sup>41</sup> Ruskin had taught him that art is primarily the expression of a person's pleasure in work; he became convinced that it would only be just if all humanity could find such joy in work. Since this was impossible under capitalism, Morris the cultivated pagan became a practical socialist and joined the aforementioned Democratic Federation and then the more left-wing Socialist League.

There is a strong libertarian temper to Morris's writings and he was well aware of the anarchist case against government and political authority. G. K. Chesterton wrote him off as 'a sort of Dickensian anarchist'. There is no doubt that he hated the centralized State. He had, as he noted in 1887, 'an English-man's wholesome horror of government interference & centralization which some of our friends who are built on the German pattern are not quite enough afraid of'.<sup>42</sup> It is not therefore surprising that many of his political essays have inspired anarchists. In 'Useful Work versus Useless Toil', he made a classic indictment of the capitalist division of labour which separated mental and manual work and reduced the worker to a mere machine operative. In clear and eloquent prose, he rejects capitalism, the 'society of contract', for its classes, its crude utilitarianism, its mass production, its machine domination and its compulsory labour. In its place, he advocates agreeable and voluntary work, with appropriate technology minimizing the time spent in unattractive labour.

In another essay, 'The Society of the Future', Morris sketched his libertarian ideal more boldly. His ultimate aim is 'the freedom and cultivation of the individual will'.<sup>43</sup> In place of existing political society, he calls like Kropotkin for a federation of self-governing communes. Life then would become unconstrained, simple and natural. It would be

a society which does not know the meaning of the words rich and poor, or the rights of property, or law or legality, or nationality: a society which has no consciousness of being governed; in which equality of condition is a matter of course, and in which no man is rewarded for having served the community by having the power given to injure it.

It is conscious of a wish to keep life simple, to forgo some of the power over nature won by past ages in order to be more human and less mechanical, and willing to sacrifice something to this end.<sup>44</sup>

In his utopian novel *News from Nowhere*, written in 1889 for successive issues of *Commonweal*, Morris offered one of the most persuasive glimpses of what a free society might be like. The revolution in England, we are told, has passed through two stages, not without bitter civil war, but a free and classless society has eventually emerged. Although for a time 'State socialism' doled out bread to the proletariat such a 'slough' was brought to an end.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the Committee of Public Safety set up to oppose the existing government at the beginning of the struggle was eventually dissolved.

There is nothing of the over-organized life and none of the centralized institutions obligatory in authoritarian utopias. For Morris, it is common sense, as clear as daylight, that government is unnecessary: 'a man no more needs an elaborate system of government, with its army, navy, and police, to force him to give way to the will of the majority of his equals, than he wants a similar machinery to make him understand that his head and a stone wall cannot occupy the same space at the same moment.'<sup>46</sup> The site of the Houses of Parliament has become a dung market, for there is no longer any need to house parliament ('a kind of watch-committee sitting to see that the interests of the Upper Classes took no hurt') since 'the whole people is our parliament'. Government, that 'machinery of tyranny' which protects the rich from the poor, has become obsolete in an equal society.<sup>47</sup>

In Morris's 'utopian romance', there is no government, private property, law, crime, marriage, money or exchange. Society consists of a federation of communes (based on the old wards and parishes). Affairs are managed by general custom reached by general assent. If differences of opinion arise, the Mote or assembly of neighbours meets and discusses the matter until there is general agreement which is measured by a show of hands; the majority will never impose its will on the minority, however small. If agreement cannot be reached, which is rare, the majority must accept the *status quo*.

It is a world in which Morris's ideal commonwealth has become a reality, in which human beings live in equality of condition, fully aware that harm to one would mean harm to all. They enjoy an abundance of life, and there is space and elbow-room for all. Factories have been replaced by workshops and people find joy in their work. Nothing is made except for genuine use and all work which is irksome to do by hand is done by improved machines. The only reward of labour is the reward of life and creation. Their happiness is thus achieved 'by the absence of artificial coercion, and the freedom for every man to do what he can do best, joined to the knowledge of what productions of labour we really wanted'.<sup>48</sup> They live simple yet beautiful lives in harmony with nature. The salmon leap in the river Thames which is only spanned by stone bridges. The picture Morris depicts is very reminiscent of Godwin's free society except that in place of lawcourts there is 'no code of public opinion which takes the place of such courts, and which

might be as tyrannical and unreasonable as they were ... no unvarying conventional set of rules by which people are judged; no bed of Procrustes to stretch or cramp their minds and lives'.<sup>49</sup>

While all this is entirely anarchistic, Morris has been called a Marxist dreamer.<sup>50</sup> He knew Engels and read Marx and certainly accepted the need for class struggle. He saw communism as completing socialism in which the resources of nature would be owned by 'the whole community for the benefit of the whole'.<sup>51</sup> However, his communist sympathies did not come from reading *Capital* – although he thoroughly enjoyed the historical part, its economic theories made him suffer 'agonies of confusion of the brain'.<sup>52</sup> They came from the study of history and it was the love and practice of art that made him hate capitalist civilization. He turned to Marx and aligned himself for a time with the authoritarian socialists Belfort Bax, H. M. Hyndman and Andreas Scheu because he wanted a 'practical' form of socialism which contrasted with his previous utopian dreams. He was, if anything, an original socialist thinker whose criticism of capitalism was merely reinforced by, if not 'complementary' to, Marxism.<sup>53</sup>

Morris liked Kropotkin, and his decentralized society is very similar to the one envisaged in Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories and Workshops*. He was also inspired by Carpenter's attempt to live a simple, communal and self-sufficient life in the country. Morris was always amiable in print towards those he called 'my Anarchist friends'. But just as he learned from Mill – against his intention – that socialism was necessary, so he joked that he learned from the anarchists, quite against their intention, that anarchism was impossible.<sup>54</sup> His disagreement with the anarchists came to a head in the Socialist League when the anarchist group (led by Joseph Lane, Frank Kitz and Charles Mowbray) secured a majority after the Haymarket Massacre in Chicago in 1888 and began to advocate acts of violence. Repelled by the terrorist outrages throughout Europe in the early 1890s, Morris asked his anarchist friend James Tochatti, who edited *Liberty*, to repudiate the recent anarchist murders, adding: 'For I cannot for the life of me see how such principles [of anarchy], which propose the abolition of compulsion, can admit of promiscuous slaughter as a means of converting people.'<sup>55</sup>

Morris's principal theoretical objection to anarchism was over the question of authority. In a letter to the Socialist League's journal *Commonweal* of 5 May 1889, he reiterated his belief in communism, but argued that even in a communist society some form of authority would be necessary. If freedom from authority, Morris maintained, means the possibility of an individual doing what he pleases always and under all circumstances, this is 'an absolute negation of society'. If this right to do as you please is qualified by adding 'as long as you don't interfere with other people's rights to do the same', the exercise of some kind of authority becomes necessary. He concluded: 'If individuals are not to coerce others, there must somewhere be an authority which is prepared to coerce them not to coerce; and that authority must clearly be collective.' Furthermore, in an equal society some desires could not be satisfied without clashing with 'collective society' and in some instances 'collective authority will weigh down individual opposition'.<sup>56</sup> He did not want people to do exactly as they please; he wanted them to consider and act for the good of the commonweal.

It is of course Mill's and Spencer's argument that some restriction of freedom in the form of political authority are necessary to protect freedom. But, unlike Mill and Spencer, Morris had faith in the ability of people to arrange their affairs through mutual agreement. In reality, the differences between Morris and the anarchists are very slight. When he attacks anarchism, he is clearly thinking of a Stirnerite or Nietzschean type of anarchist individualism. In an interview with *Justice* on 27 January, 1894, after a French member of the Autonomie Club blew himself up

while allegedly on his way to destroy the Royal Observatory at Greenwich, Morris made it clear that he had come to oppose the anarchists not only because of their inexpedient insurrectionary methods, but because anarchism ‘negatives society, and puts man outside it’.

But many anarchist communists, including Kropotkin, would also repudiate such a view. While sharing Morris’ concern with the problem of the anti-social individualist, they believe that persuasion rather than coercion is the best means of dealing with such people in the long run. In addition, many anarchists would not disagree with Morris’s view that there should be a ‘common rule of conduct’ or ‘common bond’ in any group, that is ‘the conscience of the association voluntarily accepted in the first instance’, although they would not call it ‘authority’ as Morris did.<sup>57</sup> Morris insisted that by authority he was not pleading for something arbitrary or unreasonable but ‘for a *public conscience* as a rule of action: and by all means let us have the least possible exercise of authority’.<sup>58</sup>

While Morris accepted reluctantly the need for a transitional socialist period of ‘collective authority’ before moving towards communism he wrote to Georgie Burne-Jones in 1888 that in itself it was a ‘pretty dull goal’. Moreover, his daughter May Morris emphasized that ‘he would no more accept the tyranny of a Collectivism that would crush individuality than he would accept the tyranny of Capitalism.’ He was fully aware in a post-revolutionary society of ‘the danger of the community falling into bureaucracy, the multiplication of boards and offices, and all the paraphernalia of official authority’.<sup>59</sup> Morris may have appreciated Marx’s view of history, and wanted to give a practical expression to his utopian dreams, but in the final analysis Morris belongs more to the extended anarchist family rather than to authoritarian socialism.

## Oscar Wilde

Wilde admired Morris as a poet and as a book designer, and they shared a common friend in the Russian revolutionary Stepniak. Their concern with freedom was mainly inspired by their concern for art and their desire to create a beautiful life. They both came to realize that art for art’s sake is an insufficient standard; it is not enough merely to call for the beautification of life, for there must be a political and social context to aestheticism. Wilde concluded that only in a free society without government would an artist be able to express himself fully.

From his early childhood, he had a strong utopian sensibility which led him to conjure up imaginary islands. He remained convinced that

a map of the world that does not include utopia is not worth glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of utopias.<sup>60</sup>

Wilde’s love of liberty was encouraged by his mother who saw herself as ‘a priestess at the altar of freedom’.<sup>61</sup> Unlike her, however, he saw nothing noble in suffering and sought to create a beautiful life without ugliness and pain and compulsion. As a student at Oxford, he came to the conclusion not only that ‘*La beauté est parfaite*’ but that ‘Progress in thought is the assertion of individualism against authority’.<sup>62</sup>

After leaving Oxford, Wilde wrote in his twenties a play called *Vera*; or, *The Nihilist* (1880). He was already calling himself a socialist, but it is clear from the play that he considered socialism to

be not a levelling down but the flowering of personality. Prince Paul declares: 'in good democracy, every man should be an aristocrat.'<sup>63</sup> The nihilists detest torture and martial law and demand the abolition of marriage and the right to labour. To make them as authentic as possible, Wilde even borrowed an oath from Nechaev's *Catechism of a Revolutionary* which Bakunin may have helped edit.

He later described agitators as

a set of interfering, meddling people, who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community, and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them. That is the reason why agitators are so absolutely necessary.<sup>64</sup>

Even though he hated violence, he admired sincere revolutionaries – 'these Christs who die upon the barricades'. Moreover, he saw a beneficial tendency in all rebellion:

Disobedience, in the eyes of any one who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion.<sup>65</sup>

But Wilde's anarchistic sentiments were not just limited to vague calls for liberty and disobedience. More than once he quoted Chuang Tzu to the effect that 'there is such a thing as leaving mankind alone; and there has never been such a thing as governing mankind.' Giving his own gloss to this ancient Chinese wisdom, Wilde wrote:

All modes of government are wrong. They are unscientific, because they seek to alter the natural environment of man; they are immoral because, by interfering with the individual, they produce the most aggressive forms of egotism; they are ignorant, because they try to spread education; they are self-destructive, because they engender anarchy.<sup>66</sup>

He was also convinced that the accumulation of wealth is the origin of evil by making the strong violent and the weak dishonest: 'The order of nature is rest, repetition and peace. Weariness and war are the results of an artificial society based on capital; and the richer this society gets, the more thoroughly bankrupt it really is.'<sup>67</sup>

Wilde not only had his genius to declare; he told an interviewer in France in the spring of 1894: 'I think I am rather more than a Socialist. I am something of an Anarchist, I believe, but, of course, the dynamite policy is very absurd indeed.'<sup>68</sup> He knew what he was talking about. He met Kropotkin and considered his life to be one of the two most perfect lives he had ever come across; indeed, Kropotkin was 'a man with a soul of that beautiful white Christ which seems [to be] coming out of Russia'.<sup>69</sup>

Wilde gave his own considered version of anarchism in his brilliant essay *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (1891), a work which was translated into many languages and proved particularly influential in Tsarist Russia.

Wilde had long been drawn to socialism and had expressed his sympathies publicly early in 1889 in a review of a book edited by Carpenter, *Chants of Labour: a Song-Book of the People*. He found in socialism a new motif for art and hoped art could help in the construction of an 'eternal city'. Yet he was clearly already concerned to make socialism humanitarian and libertarian, 'for

to make socialists is nothing, but to make socialism human is a great thing'. He took up the theme, two years later, in his great essay. It was initially inspired by a meeting on socialism which he attended in Westminster where the chief speaker was Bernard Shaw. But Wilde's socialism could not be more different from Shaw's for it is as pure an anarchism as you can get: 'there is no necessity to separate the monarch from the mob; all authority is equally bad', he declares.<sup>70</sup>

With the air of a paradox, Wilde argues that socialism is of value simply because it will lead to individualism. But this can be achieved only if socialism is libertarian. With prophetic acumen, he warns: 'If the Socialism is Authoritarian; if there are Governments armed with economic power as they are now with political power; if, in a word, we are to have Industrial Tyrannies, then the last state of man will be worse than the first.'<sup>71</sup> Such authoritarian socialism would mean the enslavement of the entire community instead of only a part.

According to Wilde, all modes of government are failures and social democracy means simply 'the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people'. Equally all authority is quite degrading: 'It degrades those who exercise it, and degrades those over whom it is exercised.' By bribing people to conform, authority produces 'a very gross kind of overfed barbarism'.<sup>72</sup> He therefore agrees with Chuang Tzu that there is 'such a thing as leaving mankind alone' and concludes with Thoreau that 'The form of government that is most suitable to the artist is no government at all.'<sup>73</sup>

Instead of governing, the State should become merely a 'voluntary association' that will organize labour and be responsible for the manufacture and distribution of necessary commodities. Wilde insists that all associations must be quite voluntary. Man should be free not to conform. In all this Wilde agrees with Godwin, but he takes leave of him when he declares categorically that public opinion – 'that monstrous and ignorant thing' – is of no value whatsoever to reform human conduct.<sup>74</sup> People are good only when they are left alone.

Wilde argues like Nietzsche that it is wrong for the rich to pity the poor and give charity, and that there is no point to the poor feeling gratitude: 'it is finer to take than to beg.'<sup>75</sup> But unlike most individualists he does not see that private property is a guarantee of personal independence; indeed, for Wilde, it crushes true individualism. It should therefore be converted into public wealth by 'Socialism, Communism, or whatever one chooses to call it' and co-operation substituted for competition to ensure the material well-being of each member of the community.<sup>76</sup> With the abolition of private property, there will no longer be any marriage; love will then be more beautiful and wonderful. In the long run, it is not material things that are important; what is really valuable is within.

There are other great advantages to follow from the dissolution of political authority. Punishment will pass away – a great gain since a community is infinitely more brutalized by the habitual employment of punishment than it is by the occasional occurrence of crime. What crime will remain after the eradication of its principal cause in property will be cured by care and kindness. No compulsion should be exercised over anyone and every person should be free to choose his or her work.

According to Wilde, it is nonsense to talk about the dignity of manual labour: 'Man is made for something better than disturbing dirt.'<sup>77</sup> Most of it is degrading and should be done by machines, the helots of the future, so that all can enjoy cultivated leisure. Useful things can thus be made by machines, beautiful ones by the individual. The value of art is immense for

Art is Individualism, and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value. For what it seeks to disturb is monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of the machine.<sup>78</sup>

or Wilde socialism is a means to an end; the goal is the full development of the personality. He insists that the artist would only be able to flourish in a society without government, but it is not only political authority that he is concerned with. He suggests that there are three kinds of despotism: 'There is the despot who tyrannizes over the body. There is the despot who tyrannizes over the soul. There is the despot who tyrannizes over the body and soul alike. The first is called the Prince. The second is called the Pope. The third is called the People.'<sup>79</sup> All three should be done away with.

Wilde admires Christ since he urged man to 'Be thyself.' But he made no attempt to reconstruct society and preached that man could realize a form of individualism only through pain or in solitude. Wilde insists that man is naturally social and the aim of life and art is joy. He therefore calls his new individualism a 'new Hellenism' which combines the best of Greek and Christian culture. It looks to socialism and science as its methods and aims at an intense, full and perfect life. If successful it will bring pleasure for 'When man is happy, he is in harmony with himself and his environment.'<sup>80</sup>

Wilde faces the stock objections to his ideal of anarchy that it is impractical and goes against human nature. Firstly, the only thing that one really knows about human nature is that it changes, and once existing conditions are changed human nature will change. Evolution is a law of life and the tendency of evolution is towards individualism. Secondly, Wilde claims that his form of individualism will not be selfish or affected. Man is naturally social. Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live, it is asking others to live as one wishes to live. It aims at creating an absolute uniformity of type. Unselfishness, on the other hand, is 'letting other people's lives alone, not interfering with them'.<sup>81</sup> When man has realized true individualism, he will also realize sympathy and exercise it freely and spontaneously. In a society without poverty and disease, man will have joy in the contemplation of the joyous life of others.

Daring to oppose conventional morality, Wilde was imprisoned for homosexuality. It broke his health, but not his spirit. The experience only confirmed his analysis of the judicial system and government. He wrote afterwards to a friend that he wished to talk over 'the many prisons of life – prisons of stone, prisons of passions, prisons of intellect, prisons of morality and the rest. All limitations, external or internal, are prisons.'<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, the experience inspired one of the most moving poems in the English language, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1896), the simple form of which expresses the deepest of emotions. The poem concerns a soldier who is about to be hanged for murdering his lover; the theme implied is that such cruelty is widespread ('each man kills the thing he loves'), but Wilde insists that the murderer's punishment by a guilty society is the greater cruelty. He directly sympathizes with the condemned man, drawing the inevitable conclusion:

But this I know, that every Law That men have made for Man, Since first Man took his brother's life, And the sad world began, But straws the wheat and saves the chaff With a most evil fan. The vilest deeds likes poison weeds Bloom well in prison-air, It is only what is good in Man That wastes and withers there: Pale Anguish keeps the heavy gate, And the Warder is Despair.<sup>83</sup>

Wilde is the greatest of all libertarians. He recognized that art by its nature is subversive and the artist must rebel against existing moral norms and political institutions, but saw that only communal property can allow individuality to flourish. He argued that every person should seek to make themselves perfect by following their own inner impulses. This could be made possible only by the break-up of habit and prejudice, a thorough transformation of everyday life. He placed art and thought at the centre of life, and realized that true individualism leads to spontaneous sympathy for others. He had a wonderful sense of play and wit, and was blessed with overflowing creative energy. As a result, Wilde's libertarian socialism is the most attractive of all the varieties of anarchism and socialism. Bernard Shaw observed that contemporary Fabian and Marxian socialists laughed at his moral and social beliefs, but Wilde as usual got the last laugh. He will be long remembered after they have been forgotten.

# American Libertarians

THERE IS A LONG TRADITION in North America of hostility to the State and defence of personal autonomy; the United States is after all the oldest liberal democracy in the world. The Protestant right of private judgement or conscience became a central part of American political culture, and formed the basis of the defence of freedom of thought and speech. It also accounts for the deeply ingrained sense of individualism in American society.

After the American War of Independence, the founding fathers of the new republic felt compelled to introduce government to protect private property and individual rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But they were keen to keep government interference to a minimum and adopted the principle of federation to spread political authority throughout the regions. Immediately after the Revolution, the Articles of Confederation established minimal government, libertarian and decentralized, although its powers were inexorably strengthened in the following decades.

The self-reliant settlers were well aware without reading Tom Paine's *Common Sense* (1776) that 'Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one'. They shared for the most part the maxim attributed to Thomas Jefferson: 'That government is best which governs least.' The principle has become a rallying-cry for libertarians ever since, although anarchists have added that the best government is that which governs not at all.

In the nineteenth century, American anarchism developed mainly in an individualist direction in the hands of Josiah Warren, Stephen Pearl Andrews, Lysander Spooner and Benjamin Tucker. While they came close to anarchism, the writers Emerson, Whitman and Thoreau expressed most keenly the libertarian ideal. Their independent stance directly inspired later anarchists and their combination of 'Transcendental Individualism' with a search for a creative life close to nature finds echoes in the counter-culture and Green movements of the late-twentieth century.

## Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson was the elder guru of the Transcendentalists of New England. After Harvard University, he entered the ministry, only to abandon it and sail to Europe, where he became a friend of Carlyle. He returned to Massachusetts and was soon installed as 'the Sage of Concord', attracting a literary-philosophical coterie. At Concord, he developed his philosophy — relying on intuition as the only access to reality — in prose of uncommon lyricism. Believing in the 'divine sufficiency of the individual', he refused to accept the inevitability or objective existence of evil. Emerson based his libertarian vision on a belief that 'reason is potentially perfect' in everyone and that 'a man contains all that is needful to his government within himself.<sup>1</sup> Conscience moreover is sacrosanct and capable of leading us to moral truth. 'Judge for yourself ... reverence yourself, he taught. An inevitable inference of his doctrine was that each man should be a State in himself; we should develop our individual character as rational and moral beings

rather than set up oppressive and superfluous State institutions. Indeed, in his essay on 'Politics' (1845), Emerson declared as a radical Jeffersonian:

the less government we have the better — the fewer laws and the less confided power. The antidote to this abuse of formal government is the influence of private character, the growth of the Individual ... To educate the wise man the State exists, and with the appearance of the wise man the State expires. The appearance of character makes the State unnecessary. The wise man is the State.<sup>2</sup>

He went on to advise Americans to 'give up the government, without too solicitously inquiring whether roads can still be built, letters carried, and tide deeds secured when the government of force is at an end'.<sup>3</sup> When in 1850 a fugitive slave bill was passed by Congress and supported by the President, he characteristically declared: 'I will not obey it, by God!' He once wrote the lines which the anarchist Benjamin Tucker was fond of quoting:

When the Church is social worth,  
When the State-house the hearth,  
Then the perfect state has come, —  
The republican at home.

In place of government by force, Emerson proposed the popular assembly of a town meeting as the forum for decision-making. It had served well in seventeenth-century New England, and could serve well again. But there were limits to Emerson's libertarianism. Having freely accepted to be bound by the rules of a society, he believed that one had an obligation to obey them or else try and change them from within or withdraw. On these grounds, Emerson upheld the Harvard regulation for compulsory chapel.

Emerson's social views were only a minor part of his Transcendental philosophy which stressed the unity of all things. Everything in this world is a microcosm of the universe and 'the world globes itself in a drop of dew'. The universe is also ordered by a Supreme Mind or Over-Soul. Since man's soul is identical with the Over-Soul, and human nature is divine, it follows that there is no need of external authority and tradition. Because there is a higher law in the universe, man does not need human law. The individual can therefore rely on his direct experience for guidance; hence Emerson's motto 'Trust thyself.'

## Walt Whitman

Walt Whitman was not a member of Emerson's literary circle in Concord, but the Sage recognized him immediately as a kindred spirit. When the first edition of his rhapsodic book of poems *Leaves of Grass* (1855) appeared, he greeted Whitman 'at the beginning of a great career', and wished him 'joy of your free and brave thought'.<sup>4</sup> After their meeting, Emerson went on to praise Whitman's lawless nature.

Whitman had a completely different background from Emerson. He left school at eleven and held several odd jobs, but gradually began earning a living through printing and journalism. He became the editor of the Brooklyn Democrat paper *Eagle*, but was sacked for supporting the

Freedom movement. He then founded his own paper the Freeman but it folded within a year. Little of his early writing anticipated the remarkable originality of his first volume of twelve untitled poems which became expanded in *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman intended his poetry, with its remarkable mixture of the earthy and the mystical, to be read by the working man and woman of America. Yet, apart from Emerson's approval, it was not well received.

A strong democratic and egalitarian impetus and sensibility fire all Whitman's work. He felt that the New World needed poems of 'the democratic average and basic equality'.<sup>5</sup> In 'A Thought by the Roadside', he wrote:

Of Equality — as if it harm'd me, giving others the same chances and rights as myself  
— as if it were not indispensable to my own rights that others possess the same.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, Whitman like Emerson was a great individualist. He sang a song of himself and offered an exposé of his own personality in his poems of freedom. But while he celebrated the sacredness of the self, he also praised the love of comrades. He therefore combined his love of comradeship with a strong sense of individuality; he wanted his poems to stress American individuality and assist it — 'not only because that is a great lesson in Nature, amid all her generalizing laws, but as a counterpoise to the leveling tendencies of Democracy'. It was the ambitious thought of his song to form 'myriads of fully develop'd and enclosing individuals'.<sup>7</sup>

As a journalist, Whitman knew at first hand the corrupting nature of everyday politics. He also directly suffered at the hands of the State. He served as a nurse in the military hospitals of Washington during the Civil War and revealed his sympathy for the common soldier and his hatred of war in *Drum-Taps* (1865). Afterwards, he became a clerk in the Department of the Interior until the Secretary discovered he was there and dismissed him as the author of a 'Vulgar' book.

Whitman therefore had good reason to consider politicians and judges as 'scum floating atop of the waters' of society — 'as bats and night-dogs askant in the capitol'.<sup>8</sup> He also advised the working men and women of America thus:

To the States or any one of them, or any city of the States, Resist much, obey little,  
Once unquestioning obedience, once fully enslaved, Once fully enslaved, no nation,  
no state, city of this earth, ever afterwards resumes its liberty.<sup>9</sup>

Whitman spoke on behalf of most anarchists when he asked 'What do you suppose will satisfy the soul, except to walk free and own no superior?' But although a radically democratic conception of society emerges from his poetry, he did not offer any clear or definite vision of a free society.

## Henry David Thoreau

This cannot be said of Henry David Thoreau, whom Whitman admired deeply. 'One thing about Thoreau keeps him very close to me', he remarked. 'I refer to his lawlessness — his dissent — his going his absolute own road hell blaze all it chooses.'<sup>10</sup>

Although Thoreau came under Emerson's direct influence, he combined mysticism with a Whitmanesque earthiness, and he took Transcendentalism in a more naturalistic direction. He also was not content merely to preach, but strove to act out his beliefs.

Thoreau was born at Concord, and while he spent most of his youth there, he eventually followed Emerson and became a student at Harvard University. After his studies he became a teacher, but he soon returned to Concord. The experience had not entirely been in harmony with his nature: he rapidly tired of modern civilization and sought a new way of life. For a while he lived under Emerson's roof as a general handyman and pupil, but still he was not satisfied. He therefore decided in 1845 to undertake what was to be his famous experiment in simple living: he built himself a shack on Emerson's land on the shores of Walden Pond. He lived and meditated there for two years, two months and two days. But the State would still not leave him alone and he was arrested and imprisoned for one night in 1845 for refusing to pay his poll tax. The experience led him to write a lecture on 'The Rights and Duties of the Individual in relation to Government'. Printed in a revised form, it became first the essay 'Resistance to Civil Government' and then finally *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* (1849). It proved to be Thoreau's greatest contribution to libertarian thought.

Thoreau's refusal to pay a poll tax was a symbolic protest against America's imperialistic war in Mexico. He could not bring himself to recognize a government as his own which was also a slave's government. He accepted his imprisonment on the moral principle that 'Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also in prison.'<sup>11</sup>

Emerson rightly called Thoreau a 'born Protestant'. He combined the Dissenters' belief in the right of private judgement with Locke's right to resist tyranny. He added to them and developed a highly personal and influential form of individualism which was to influence many anarchists and libertarians, including Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Thoreau's key principle is the absolute right to exercise his own judgement or moral sense: 'The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think is right.'<sup>12</sup>

Like Godwin, he opposed this individual right against man-made laws. If a person considers that a law is wrong, he has no obligation to obey it; indeed, he has a duty to disobey it. Morality and man-made law therefore have little to do with each other: 'Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice.'<sup>13</sup>

It was his belief that a person need only follow a higher law discerned by his conscience which led Thoreau to renounce external authority and government. He therefore went beyond the Jeffersonian formula 'That government is best which governs least' to the anarchist conclusion 'That government is best which governs not at all.'<sup>14</sup> Thoreau felt that the same objection against governments may be brought against standing armies: both oblige men to serve the State with their bodies as if they were mindless machines.

Beyond the close argument about moral and political obligation, what emerges most prominently from Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience is his passion for freedom: 'I was not born to be forced', he declares. 'I will breathe after my own fashion.' After leaving prison his first impulse was to walk in a nearby huckleberry field on the highest hill where 'the State was nowhere to be seen'.<sup>15</sup>

It was the same impulse which made him celebrate the wilderness as 'absolute freedom', an oasis in the desert of modern urban civilization.<sup>16</sup> Thoreau believed that the preservation of the world is to be found in the wilderness; his social ecology was so radical that he went beyond politics: 'Most revolutions in society have not power to interest, still less to alarm us; but tell me that our rivers are drying up, or the genus pine is dying out in the country, and I might attend.'<sup>17</sup>

Thoreau asked his compatriots:

Do you call this the land of the free? What is it to be free from King George and continue to be slaves of King Prejudice? What is it to be born free and not to live free? What is the value of political freedom, but as a means to moral freedom? Is it a freedom to be slaves or a freedom to be free, of which we boast? We are a nation of politicians, concerned about the outmost defences of freedom. It is our children's children who may perchance be really free.<sup>18</sup>

In *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854), he described the 'quiet desperation' or alienation of urban industrialized man, alienated from nature, himself and his fellows as a producer and a consumer. In the process of searching for profit and power, modern man had lost his way. Servitude not only took the form of Negro slavery, but many subtle masters enslaved society as a whole. Worst of all, people made slave-drivers of themselves. It was to overcome this state of affairs that Thoreau chose to live as self-sufficiently as possible by the pond at Walden. He went into the woods to confront only the essential facts of life, wanting to live in simplicity, independence, magnanimity and trust.

Thoreau had a singular yearning towards all wildness. He had a passion for the primitive. He delighted in the sensuous vitality of his body (while being unable to appreciate women) and was awed by the teeming life in nature. A chaste and literate loner, he was one of the first imaginary Indians. Yet he did not want to return to a primitive way of life and turn his back on all the gains of Western civilization. Although fascinated by the culture of American Indians, he was repelled on occasion by their 'coarse and imperfect use of nature'. Following an unhappy moose-hunt in Maine, he recalled: 'I, already, and for weeks afterwards, felt my nature coarser for this part of my woodland experience, and was reminded that our life should be lived as tenderly and daintily as one would pluck a flower.'<sup>19</sup>

Thoreau did not therefore reject all the achievements of so-called civilization. He not only condemned in *Walden* a 'Life without Principle' but called for a life according to 'Higher Laws' (the second name chosen for the same chapter). In the section on 'Reading' he recommended a study of the oldest and best books, whose authors are 'a natural and irresistible aristocracy in every society, and, more than kings or emperors, exert an influence on mankind'.<sup>20</sup> Thoreau was for the simple life, but not for a life without learning and manners.

He stood half-way between heaven and earth, the civilized and the wild, the railroad and the pond, a Transcendental savage who gloried in the primitivism of the lost race of American Indians and who sought the 'Higher Laws' of oriental mysticism. He was well aware of the dualism in his character and he found 'an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. I love the wild not less than the good.'<sup>21</sup> But he went beyond the alternative of 'civilization' and 'barbarism' to make a creative synthesis of the two. He wanted the best in nature and culture for himself and his fellow citizens.

While Thoreau was a great rebel, he saw rebellion largely in personal terms. But his individualism was not the rugged or narrow individualism of capitalism, but one which wished to preserve individuality in the face of the coercive institutions and conformist behaviour of modern civilization. Neither did he reject society nor the companionship of his fellows. In *Civil Disobedience*, he insists that he is 'as desirous of being a good neighbour as I am of being a bad subject'.<sup>22</sup> He served American society by trying to reveal its true nature to its citizens.

In place of the hectic and anxious life of commerce and the interfering force of the State, Thoreau recommended a decentralized society of villages. If people lived simple lives as good neighbours they would develop informal patterns of voluntary co-operation. There would then be no need for the police or army since robbery would be unknown. Such a society moreover need not be parochial. Like Kropotkin after him, Thoreau called for the leisure to develop our full intellectual and social potential: 'It is time that villages were universities ... To act collectively is according to the spirit of our institutions ... Instead of noblemen, let us have noble villages of men.'<sup>23</sup>

Apart from a brief foray into the campaign against slavery, Thoreau made no attempt to become involved in any organized political movement. He was exceptionally jealous of his personal freedom and felt that his connection with and obligation to society were 'very slight and transient'. He considered what is normally called politics so superficial and inhuman that 'practically I have never fairly recognized that it concerns me at all'.<sup>24</sup> He derided politics and politicians for making light of morality and considered voting merely 'a sort of gaming, like checkers or backgammon, with a slight moral tinge to it, a playing with right and wrong, with moral questions'.<sup>25</sup>

But while practising the 'one-man revolution', Thoreau did not deny his wider bonds with humanity. He called for acts of rebellion, of resistance and non-cooperation: 'let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine' – the machine of government, of war and of industrialization.<sup>26</sup> Despite his influence on Gandhi and Martin Luther King, he was not an absolute pacifist and defended direct action in *A Plea for Captain John Brown* (1860), after the famous abolitionist had seized Harpers Ferry in 1859 as a protest against Negro slavery.

Thoreau was fully aware of the coercive nature of the State. He met his government, he said, once a year in the person of the tax-gatherer, and if he denied the authority of the State when it presented him its tax bill, he knew it would harass him without end. But he did not try to overthrow it by force. He simply refused allegiance to the State, withdrew and stood aloof from it if it performed acts he did not agree with.

In fact, Thoreau was a gradualist and 'unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government.' He might not like the government and the State, but this did not mean that he would have nothing to do with it: 'I quietly declare war with the State, after my fashion, though I will still make what use and get what advantage of her I can.'<sup>27</sup> While he refused to pay tax to finance war, he was willing to pay tax for roads and schools. Like the Greek Stoics whom he admired, he considered himself beyond politics, and however the State dealt with his body, his mind would always be free: 'If a man is thought-free, fancy-free, imagination-free ... unwise rulers or reformers cannot fatally interrupt him.'<sup>28</sup>

Although Thoreau shares the ultimate anarchist goal of a society without a State, he is willing to make use of it in the present and believed that a long period of preparation would be necessary before it eventually withered away. Nevertheless, he anticipates modern anarchism by envisaging a world of free and self-governing individuals who follow their own consciences in a decentralized society. He is also a forerunner of social ecology in recognizing that by preserving the wilderness of nature, we preserve ourselves.

## **PART FOUR: Classic Anarchist Thinkers**

Our destiny is to arrive at that state of ideal perfection where nations no longer have any need to be under the tutelage of a government or any other nation. It is the absence of government; it is anarchy, the highest expression of order. ELISÉE RECLUS  
Once annihilate the quackery of government, and the most homebred understanding might be strong enough to detect the artifices of the state juggler that would mislead him. WILLIAM GODWIN  
Freedom without Socialism is privilege and injustice ... Socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality. MICHAEL BAKUNIN  
All governments are in equal measure good and evil. The best ideal is anarchy. LEO TOLSTOY  
Mind your own business. BENJAMIN TUCKER

# William Godwin: The Lover of Order

WILLIAM GODWIN WAS THE first to give a clear statement of anarchist principles. In his own day, his principal work *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793) had an enormous impact. 'He blazed', his fellow radical William Hazlitt wrote,

as a sun in the firmament of reputation; no one was more talked of, more looked up to, more sought after, and wherever liberty, truth, and justice was the theme, his name was not far off ... No work in our time gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country as the celebrated *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*.<sup>1</sup>

The Prime Minister William Pitt considered prosecuting the author, but decided against it on the grounds that 'a three guinea book could never do much harm among those who had not three shillings to spare.' In fact, the *Political Justice* was sold for half the price, and many workers banded together to buy it by subscription. Pirated editions appeared in Ireland and Scotland. There was sufficient demand for Godwin to revise the work in 1796 and 1798 in cheaper editions. It not only influenced leaders of the emerging labour movement like John Thelwall and Francis Place, but obscure young poets like Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge.<sup>2</sup>

The very success of Godwin's work, despite its philosophical weight and elegant style, shows how near the Britain of the 1790s was to revolution. The war declared by Pitt on revolutionary France however soon raised the spectre of British patriotism. His systematic persecution of the radical leaders and the introduction of Gagging Acts in 1794 eventually silenced and then broke the reform movement for a generation. Godwin came boldly to the defence of civil liberties and of his radical friends in a series of eloquent pamphlets, but by the turn of the century he too had fallen into one common grave with the cause of liberty. Thrown up by the vortex of the French Revolution, he sunk when it subsided. Most people in polite society, De Quincey wrote, felt of Godwin with 'the same alienation and horror as of a ghoul, or a bloodless vampyre'.<sup>3</sup>

But not all was lost. It was with 'inconceivable emotions' that the young Percy Bysshe Shelley found in 1812 that Godwin was still alive and he went on not only to elope with his daughter but to become the greatest anarchist poet by effectively putting Godwin's philosophy to verse.<sup>4</sup> Robert Owen, sometimes called the father of British socialism, became friendly soon after and acknowledged Godwin as his philosophical master. In the 1830s and 1840s, at the height of their agitation, the Owenites and Chartists reprinted many extracts from Godwin's works in their journals, and brought out a new edition of *Political Justice* in 1842. Through the early British socialist thinkers, especially William Thompson and Thomas Hodgskin, Godwin's vision of the ultimate withering away of the State and of a free and equal society began to haunt the Marxist imagination.

Godwin at first sight appears an unlikely candidate for the tide of first and greatest philosopher of anarchism. He was born in 1756 in Wisbech (the capital of North Cambridgeshire), the seventh of thirteen children. His father was an obscure independent minister who moved to the

tiny village of Guestwick in northern Norfolk soon after William's birth. But a strong tradition of rebellion existed in the area. There had not only been a peasants' revolt against the land enclosures in 1549, but during the English Revolution East Anglians had formed the backbone of the Independent movement. Godwin's father would sit in his meeting-house in 'Cromwell's chair', so named because it was said to have been a gift from the leader of the English Revolution.

Godwin moreover was born into a family of Dissenters who rejected the Church of England and its articles of faith. They defended at all costs the right of private judgement. Although officially tolerated since 1689, the Dissenters were unable to have their births registered, to enter the national universities, or to hold public office. The result was that they formed a separate and distinct cultural group and made up a permanent opposition to the State of England. Godwin was steeped in this tradition: his grandfather had been a leading Dissenting minister, his father was a minister, and he aspired from an early age to follow in their footsteps.

As a boy Godwin was deeply religious and intellectually precocious. It was decided to send him at the age of eleven to become the sole pupil of a Reverend Samuel Newton in the great city of Norwich. It was to prove the most formative period of Godwin's life. Newton's harsh treatment of Godwin left him with a hatred of punishment and tyranny. But Newton was also an extreme Calvinist, a follower of the teachings of Robert Sandeman, and the pious Godwin soon adopted his new tutor's creed.

Sandeman lay great stress on reason: grace was to be achieved not by good works or faith, but by the rational perception of the truth, the right or wrong judgement of the understanding. The Sandemanians interpreted the teachings of the New Testament literally: they sought to practise brotherly love and share their wealth with each other. They were also democratic and egalitarian, both rejecting majority rule in favour of consensus and annihilating the distinctions of civil life within the sect. All men and women, they affirmed, are equally fit to be saved or damned.

Godwin went on to pull the Calvinist God down from the heavens and to assert the innocence and perfectibility of man, but he retained much of the social and economic teaching of the Sandemanians. He not only traced his excessive stoicism and condemnation of the private affections to his early Calvinism, but specifically held Sandemanianism responsible for his belief that rational judgement is the source of human actions.

On leaving Newton's intellectual and emotional hothouse, at the age of seventeen Godwin entered the Dissenting Academy at Hoxton — one of the best centres of higher education in eighteenth-century England. Here he received a thorough grounding in Locke's psychology, which presented the mind as a blank sheet; in Newtonian science, which pictured the world as a machine governed by natural laws; and in Hutcheson's ethics, which upheld benevolence and utility as the cornerstones of virtue. At the same time, Godwin formed a belief in 'necessity', that is to say, that all actions are determined by previous causes, and in 'immaterialism', that is, that the external world is created by the mind. These twin pillars of his thought underwent little subsequent change.

Although the tutors were extremely liberal in religion and politics and encouraged free enquiry, Godwin left Hoxton as he entered: a Sandemanian and a Tory. He tried to become a minister, but three times he was rejected by rural congregations in south England. It proved a period of reassessment and self-examination. His intellectual development was rapid. The political debate raging over the American War of Independence at the time soon led him to support the Whig opposition to the war, and a reading of the Latin historians and Jonathan Swift made him a republican overnight.

The most important influence was to come from a reading of the French philosophes. In Rousseau, he read that man is naturally good but corrupted by institutions, that private property was the downfall of mankind, and that man was born free, but everywhere was in chains. From Helvétius and d'Holbach, he learned that all men are equal and society should be formed for human happiness. When he closed the covers of their books, his whole world-view had changed. They immediately undermined his Calvinist view of man, although for the time being he became a follower of Socinus (who denied the divinity of Christ and original sin) rather than an atheist. Realizing that he was not cut out to be a minister, Godwin decided to go to London and try to earn his living by teaching and writing.

In quick succession, Godwin wrote a life of William Pitt, two pamphlets supporting the Whig cause, a collection of literary imitations, and three short novels. Eager to get rid of his sermons, he published a selection as *Sketches of History* (1784), but not without the observation that God in the Bible acts like a 'political legislator' in a 'theocratic state', despite the fact that he has 'not a right to be a tyrant'. Godwin in this respect was deeply impressed by Milton's depiction of the Devil in *Paradise Lost* – 'a being of considerable virtue', as he later wrote, who rebelled against his maker because he saw no sufficient reason for the extreme inequality of rank and power which had been created. He continued to rebel after his fall because 'a sense of reason and justice was stronger in his mind than a sense of brute force'.<sup>5</sup>

The most important political work of this period was undoubtedly *An Account of the Seminary* (1783) which Godwin intended to open in Epsom for the instruction of twelve pupils in the Greek, Latin, French and English languages. Although no pupils turned up, the prospectus remains one of the most incisive and eloquent accounts of libertarian and progressive education. It shows Godwin believing that children are not only born innocent and benevolent, but that the tutor should foster their particular talents and treat them gently and kindly. The ex-Tory student and Calvinist minister had come to recognize that:

The state of society is incontestably artificial; the power of one man over another must be always derived from convention or from conquest; by nature we are equal. The necessary consequence is, that government must always depend upon the opinion of the governed. Let the most oppressed people under heaven once change their mode of thinking and they are free.

Government is very limited in its power of making men either virtuous or happy; it is only in the infancy of society that it can do anything considerable; in its maturity it can only direct a few of our outward actions. But our moral dispositions and character depend very much, perhaps entirely, upon education.<sup>6</sup>

Five years before the French Revolution, Godwin had already worked out the main outlines of *Political Justice*. His friendship with the radical playwright Thomas Holcroft further persuaded him to become an atheist and confirmed the evils of marriage and government.

Since none of his early works brought him much money, Godwin was obliged to work in Grub Street for the Whig journals to earn a living. He wrote about the oppression carried out by Pitt's government in Ireland and India. In a history of the revolution in Holland, he prophesied in 1787 that the 'flame of liberty' first sparked off by the American Revolution had spread and that 'a new republic of the purest kind is about to spring up in Europe'.<sup>7</sup>

When the French Revolution broke out in 1789, it was not entirely unexpected. Godwin was thirty-three, and, no less than William Blake's and William Wordsworth's, his 'heart beat high with great swelling sentiments of Liberty'.<sup>8</sup> He did not remain idle. When Tom Paine's publisher faltered, Godwin helped bring out the first part of *Rights of Man* (1791). He also wrote a letter at this time to the Whig politician Sheridan declaring that 'Liberty leaves nothing to be admired but talents & virtue ... Give to a state but liberty enough, and it is impossible that vice should exist in it.'<sup>9</sup> As his daughter Mary later observed, Godwin's belief that 'no vice could exist with perfect freedom' was 'the very basis of his system, the very keystone of the arch of justice, by which he desired to knit together the whole human family.'<sup>10</sup>

Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) had triggered off a pamphlet war, but Godwin decided to rise above the controversies of the day and write a work which would place the principles of politics on an immovable basis. As a philosopher, he wanted to consider universal principles, not practical details. He therefore tried to condense and develop whatever was best and most liberal in political theory. He carefully marshalled his arguments and wrote in a clear and precise style. The result was *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (1793).

As Godwin observed in his preface, the work took on a life of its own, and as his enquiries advanced his ideas became more 'perspicuous and digested'. He developed a theory of justice which took the production of the greatest sum of happiness as its goal and went on to reject domestic affections, gratitude, promises, patriotism, positive rights and accumulated property. His changing view of government further gave rise to an occasional inaccuracy of language. He did not enter the work, he acknowledged, 'without being aware that government by its very nature counteracts the improvement of individual mind; but ... he understood the proposition more completely as he proceeded, and saw more distinctly into the nature of the remedy.'<sup>11</sup> The experience of the French Revolution had already persuaded him of the desirableness of a government of the simplest construction but his bold reasoning led him to realize that humanity could be enlightened and free only with government's utter annihilation. Godwin thus set out very close to the English Jacobins like Paine, only to finish a convinced and outspoken anarchist – the first great exponent of society without government.

*Political Justice* was not the only work to bring Godwin instant fame. In 1794, he published his novel *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, a gripping story of flight and pursuit intended to show how 'the spirit and character of the government intrudes itself into every rank of society.'<sup>12</sup> It too was to be hailed as a great masterpiece. It is not only a work of brilliant social observation, but may be considered the first thriller and the first psychological novel which anticipates the anxieties of modern existentialism.

Godwin's *Political Justice* was published a fortnight after Britain declared war on revolutionary France – at a time when the public was 'panic struck' with 'all the prejudices of the human mind ... in arms against it'.<sup>13</sup> Pitt's government tried to crush the growing reform movement by arresting its leaders Holcroft, Home Tooke, Thelwall and others for High Treason. Godwin sprang to their defence in some well-argued *Cursory Strictures* (1794). Partly due to the influence of Godwin's pamphlet, a jury threw out the charge. Again, when the government introduced its notorious Gagging Acts to limit the freedom of speech, assembly and the press, Godwin responded with some incisive *Considerations* (1795) signed by 'A Lover of Order'. The pamphlet was mainly a denunciation of Pitt's policy of repression but it also criticized the methods of the new political associations, particularly the London Corresponding Society, for simmering the

‘cauldron of civil contention’ through its lectures and mass demonstrations.<sup>14</sup> While Godwin was as vigorous and uncompromising as ever in defending hard-won liberties, he believed that genuine reform was best achieved through education and enlightenment in small independent circles. Such circles anticipated the ‘affinity groups’ of later anarchists. His criticisms of the inflammatory methods of his contemporaries, however, meant that he was bitterly attacked by Jacobin agitators like Thelwall.

In the mean time, Godwin had become intimate with Mary Wollstonecraft, the first major feminist writer who had asserted in her celebrated *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) that mind has no sex and that women should become rational and independent beings rather than passive and indolent mistresses. Although Godwin was diffident and occasionally pedantic, Wollstonecraft recognized in him an independent spirit who was capable of deep emotion as well as high thinking. They soon became lovers, but aware of the dangers of cohabitation, decided to live apart.

Wollstonecraft had an illegitimate daughter by a previous relationship and had experienced the full force of prejudice in the rigid society of late eighteenth-century England. She had already tried to commit suicide twice. When she became pregnant again with Godwin’s child, she felt unable to face further ostracism and asked Godwin to marry her. Although Godwin had condemned the European institution of marriage as the ‘most odious of all monopolies’, he agreed. His enemies were delighted by this apparent turnabout, and the accusation that he had a hot head and cold feet has reverberated ever since. Godwin however as a good anarchist believed that there are no moral rules which should not give way to the urgency of particular circumstances. In this case, he submitted to an institution which he still wished to see abolished out of regard for the happiness of an individual. After the marriage ceremony, he held himself bound no more than he was before.

Although Governmental Terror was the order of the day, Godwin still believed that truth would eventually triumph over error and prejudice. He therefore revised carefully *Political Justice*, a new edition of which appeared in 1796. Wollstonecraft had helped him recognize the importance of the feelings as a source of human action and the central place of pleasure in ethics. Godwin also made his arguments more consistent by showing from the beginning of the work the evils of government and by clarifying the section on property. Kropotkin was therefore wrong to follow De Quincey in thinking that Godwin had retracted many of his beliefs in the Second Edition.<sup>15</sup> It not only retained the great outlines of the first but offered a more substantial and convincing exposition of his anarchism. In the Third Edition of 1798, he further removed a few of the ‘crude and juvenile remarks’ and added a ‘Summary of Principles’.

While revising the second edition of *Political Justice*, Godwin also wrote some original reflections on education, manners and literature which were published as a collection of essays called *The Enquirer* (1797). The work contains some of the most remarkable and advanced ideas on education ever written. Godwin not only argues that the aim of education should be to generate happiness and to develop a critical and independent mind, but suggests that the whole scheme of authoritarian teaching could be done away with to allow children to learn through desire at their own pace and in their own way.

Godwin’s thoughts on economics in *The Enquirer* are no less challenging. Indeed, the essay ‘Of Avarice and Profusion’ offered such a trenchant account of exploitation based on the labour theory of value that it inspired Malthus to write his tirade against all improvement, the *Essay on*

*the Principle of Population* (1798). Godwin's devastating survey 'Of Trades and Professions' in a capitalist society also led the Chartists to reprint it in 1842 at the height of their agitation.

The period spent with Wollstonecraft was the happiest in Godwin's life: it was a union of two great radical minds. Through them the struggles for men's freedom and women's freedom were united at the source. But it was to be tragically short-lived: Wollstonecraft died in giving birth to their daughter Mary. Godwin consoled himself by editing her papers and by writing a moving and frank memoir of her life which was predictably dismissed by the Anti-Jacobins as a 'convenient Manual of speculative debauchery'.<sup>16</sup> Godwin never got over the loss of his first and greatest love. All he could do was to recreate her in his next novel *St Leon* (1799) which showed the dangers of leading an isolated life and celebrated the domestic affections.

Godwin did his best to stem the tide of reaction in some calm and eloquent Thoughts. Occasioned by the *Perusal of Dr Parr's Spital Sermon* (1801), the apostasy of a former friend. He took the opportunity to clarify his notion of justice by recognizing the claim of the domestic affections. He also refuted his chief opponent Malthus by arguing that moral restraint made vice and misery unnecessary as checks to population. But it was to no avail. Godwin was pilloried, laughed at and then quietly forgotten. Never again in his lifetime was he able to capture the public imagination.

The rest of Godwin's life is a sad tale of increasing penury and obscurity. He married a neighbour called Mary Jane Clairmont who already had two illegitimate children and bore him a son, thereby increasing the family to seven. But there was no great passion or intellectual inspiration between the two, and she alienated his close friends like Coleridge and Charles Lamb. To earn a living, they set up a Juvenile Library which produced an excellent series of children's books but involved Godwin in endless worry and debt. A government spy correctly noted that he wished to make his library the resort of preparatory schools so that in time 'the principles of democracy and Theophilanthropy may take place universally'.<sup>17</sup>

Godwin continued writing in earnest with so many mouths to feed, producing disastrous plays as well as a fine life of Chaucer. He wrote some more powerful novels, especially *Fleetwood* (1805) which showed the shortcomings of the 'New Man of Feeling' and revealed a critical awareness of the new factory system, and *Mandeville* (1817), set in the seventeenth century but containing an astonishing account of madness. He returned in *Of Population* (1820) to attack his principal opponent Malthus, with a powerful critique of his philosophical principles and his ratios of population growth and food supply.

Although Godwin lived a quiet and retired life, younger spirits took up his message. A poet called Percy Bysshe Shelley, who had been expelled from Oxford for writing a pamphlet on atheism and spurned by his wealthy baronet father, burst into Godwin's life in 1812, with *Political Justice* in his pocket and fiery visions of freedom and justice in his imagination. Godwin was at first delighted with his new disciple, although he tried to check his ardour in fomenting rebellion in Ireland. His sympathy however changed to indignation when Shelley proceeded to elope with his sixteen-year-old daughter Mary (a 'true Wollstonecraft') in keeping with his own best theories of free love. His stepdaughter Mary Jane (also known as Claire) joined them and ended up having a child called Allegra with Byron. Mary went on to write *Frankenstein* (1818) and other impressive novels.

For his part Shelley raised vast loans for Godwin on his expected inheritance, in keeping with their view that property is a trust to be distributed to the most needy. On the other hand, Shelley's intellectual debt to Godwin was immense. What the Bible was to Milton, Godwin was to Shelley. The creed of *Political Justice* was transmuted into the magnificent and resounding verse of the

greatest revolutionary narrative poems in the English language. Indeed, in *Queen Mab* (1812), *The Revolt of Islam* (1818), *Prometheus Unbound* (1819) and *Hellas* (1822), Shelley openly professed an anarchist creed and systematically celebrated the Godwinian principles of liberty, equality and universal benevolence.

In his *Philosophical Review of Reform* (1820), he further warned against the 'mighty calamity of government', proposed in its place a 'just combination of the elements of social life', and declared like Godwin that poets and philosophers are the 'unacknowledged legislators of the world'.<sup>18</sup> Although Shelley was never an uncritical disciple and was increasingly drawn to Platonism, he remained to the end faithful to the radiant vision of Political Justice. If Godwin is the greatest philosopher of anarchism, Shelley is its poet.

The most impressive work of Godwin's old age was *The History of the Commonwealth* (1824–8) in four volumes which treated his favourite period. Although he only makes the briefest mention of Winstanley and the Diggers, whose thought resembled his own so closely, he asserts that the five years from the abolition of the monarchy to Cromwell's *coup d'état* challenge in its glory any equal period of English history. He defended moreover the execution of Charles I on the grounds that natural justice means that it is sometimes right 'to reinvest the community in the entire rights they possessed before particular laws were established'. There comes a point when 'resistance is a virtue'.<sup>19</sup>

Godwin wrote a collection of philosophical essays in *Thoughts on Man* (1831) which show that at the end of his life he still held firm to the fundamental principles of *Political Justice*. In his metaphysics, he recognizes that our feelings and sensations lead us to believe in free will and the existence of matter, but he remains strictly speaking a 'necessarian', upholding determinism, and an 'immaterialist', claiming that mind is all-pervasive in the world. In his politics, he points out to the reformers who were calling for the secret ballot that it is a symbol of slavery rather than liberty. He is still ready to imagine that 'men might subsist very well in clusters and congregated bodies without the coercion of law'.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, *Thoughts on Man* is a sustained celebration of the achievements and possibilities of the godlike being which makes up our species. After a long and difficult life, Godwin's faith in the perfectibility of humanity remained unshaken, and he ends the book in the confident belief that 'human understanding and human virtue will hereafter accomplish such things as the heart of man has never yet been daring enough to conceive'.<sup>21</sup>

Godwin found it increasingly difficult to squeeze out a living from his writing; so when the new Whig Prime Minister Grey offered him a pension at the age of seventy-seven, he reluctantly accepted. His official title was Office Keeper and Yeoman Usher, and he was given lodgings in the New Palace Yard next to the Houses of Parliament. It was the supreme irony of Godwin's complicated life that he should end his days looking after an obsolete institution which he wished to see abolished. But his story was not without a final twist. In October 1834, a great fire destroyed the old Palace of Westminster. Godwin was responsible for the fire-fighting equipment, but he had quietly absconded to the theatre at the time. No one thought afterwards to accuse him of succeeding where Guy Fawkes had failed!

Godwin eked out his last days with a small pension, his aged wife, his curious library, and his rich memories, principally cheered by visits from his daughter. He died peacefully in his bed on 7 April 1836. He had just turned eighty. Only a handful of friends attended his funeral and he left no organized movement of followers. His final request was to be buried next to his greatest love

Mary Wollstonecraft: in death as in life, the union of the first great anarchist and the first great feminist symbolized the common struggle for the complete emancipation of men and women.

## Philosophy

Godwin's principal aim was to examine the philosophical principles on which politics depended and to place the subject on an immovable basis. His approach was strictly deductive, proceeding by argument and demonstration, and he tried to express himself as clearly and precisely as possible. While he addressed the calm friend of truth, this did not prevent him from the occasional burst of fervent rhetoric.

As the full title of his principal work *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice, and its influence on General Virtue and Happiness* implies, Godwin was principally concerned with the relationship between politics and ethics. He further based his ethical principles on a particular view of the universe and human nature. Of all the anarchist thinkers, Godwin was the most consistent in trying to show the philosophical assumptions on which he based his libertarian conclusions.

Godwin's starting-point is a belief in universal determinism or 'necessity' as he called it: nature is governed by necessary laws. In history as in the lives of individuals, nothing could have happened otherwise. The regular succession of causes and effects has the advantage of enabling us to make predictions and to model our judgements and actions accordingly. At the same time, Godwin admits that we cannot know the exact nature of causality and that any prediction is based only on high probability.

It was Godwin's meditations on this doctrine of 'necessity' that led him to become an atheist whilst writing *Political Justice*. 'Religion', he concluded, is merely 'an accommodation to the prejudices and weaknesses of mankind'.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Godwin's early religious beliefs clearly affected his moral and political beliefs. His anarchism was largely the application of the Protestant right of private judgement from the religious to the moral and political sphere. His early exposure to the Sandemanian version of Calvinism encouraged his rationality and stoicism as well as his democratic and egalitarian sympathies.

Godwin only remained an atheist for a few years, and like most anarchists believed in a kind of cosmic optimism. Just as nature when left to itself flourishes best, so society thrives when least interfered with. Under the influence of Coleridge, Godwin adopted later in life a kind of vague theism, and came to talk of some 'mysterious power' which sustains and gives harmony to the whole of the universe.<sup>23</sup>

## Human Nature

Human nature no less than external nature is governed by laws of necessity. Godwin rejects the theory of innate ideas and instincts and asserts, as one of his chapter titles puts it, that the 'Characters of Men Originate in their External Circumstances'. We are born neither virtuous nor vicious but are made so according to our upbringing and education. Since we are almost entirely the products of our environment, there are also no biological grounds for class distinctions or slavery. It follows for Godwin that we have a common nature and substantial equality. From this physical equality Godwin deduces moral equality: we should treat each other with equal consideration and recognize that what is desirable for one is desirable for all.

But while Godwin argues that human nature is malleable, it does have certain characteristics. In the first place, we are social beings and society brings out our best abilities and sympathies. At the same time, we are unique individuals and cannot be truly happy if we lose ourselves in the mass. Secondly, we are rational beings, capable of recognizing truth and acting accordingly. In the great chain of cause and effect, our consciousness is a real cause and indispensable link. Thirdly, because we have conscious minds, we are voluntary beings, that is to say, we can choose our actions with foresight of their consequences. As Godwin puts it in another chapter title: 'The Voluntary Actions of Men Originate in their Opinions'. The most desirable condition in his view is to widen as far as possible the scope of voluntary action.

It is through reason that Godwin reconciles his philosophy of necessity and human choice. While every action is determined by a motive, reason enables us to choose what motive to act upon. Rather than making moral choices impossible, Godwin believed that the doctrine of necessity enabled us to be confident that real causes produce real effects, and that new opinions can change people's behaviour.

The fourth characteristic of our species is that we are progressive beings. Godwin based his faith in the 'perfectibility of man' on the assumptions that our voluntary actions originate in our opinions and that it is in the nature of truth to triumph over error. He made out his case in the form of a syllogism:

Sound reasoning and truth, when adequately communicated, must always be victorious over error: Sound reasoning and truth are capable of being so communicated: Truth is omnipotent: The vices and moral weaknesses of man are not invincible: Man is perfectible, or in other words susceptible of perpetual improvement.<sup>24</sup>

Since vice is nothing more than ignorance, education and enlightenment will make us wise, virtuous and free. Thus we may be the products of our environment, but we can also change it. We are, to a considerable degree, the makers of our destiny.

Several objections have been raised to Godwin's view of the perfectibility of man, but they usually overlook his own clarifications. In the first place, by perfectibility, he did not mean that human beings are capable of reaching perfection but rather that they can improve themselves indefinitely. Indeed, he was well aware of the power of evil, the disrupting force of passion, and the weight of existing institutions. Progress, he stressed, will be gradual, often interrupted, and may even have to pass through certain necessary stages.

Next, it is sometimes claimed that there is no immutable and universal truth and that truth does not always triumph over error. Although Godwin talked of immutable truths in a Platonic way, he made it clear that he did not mean absolute truth but 'greater or less probability'. He was moreover fully informed of the fragility of truth and the strength of prejudice and habit. Nevertheless, Godwin assumed like John Stuart Mill that truth can fight its own battles, and put error to rout. On this reasonable assumption, he based his eloquent defence of the freedom of thought and expression.

Finally, Godwin has been accused of being too rational. Certainly, in the first edition of *Political Justice*, he argued that an action can flow from the rational perception of truth and described the will as the last act of the understanding. But he also stressed that passion is inseparable from reason and that virtue cannot be 'very strenuously espoused' until it is 'ardently loved'. In subsequent editions, he gave even more room to feelings, and suggested that reason is not an

independent principle but from a practical view merely 'a comparison and balancing of different feelings'.<sup>25</sup> Although reason cannot excite us to action, it regulates our conduct and it is to reason that we must look for the improvement of our social condition. It is a subtle argument which cannot easily be dismissed.

## Ethics

From these substantial assumptions about human nature, Godwin developed his system of ethics. He considered it the most important of subjects; indeed, there was no choice in life, not even sitting on the left or the right hand side of the fire, that was not moral in some degree. Ethics moreover was the foundation of politics.

Godwin is a thoroughgoing and consistent utilitarian, defining morality as that 'system of conduct which is determined by a consideration of the greatest general good'.<sup>26</sup> He is an act-utilitarian rather than a rule-utilitarian. While he recognizes that general moral rules are sometimes psychologically and practically necessary, he warns against too rigid an application of them. Since no actions are the same, there can be no clearer maxim than 'Every case is a rule to itself'.<sup>27</sup> It is therefore the duty of a just man to contemplate all the circumstances of the individual case in the light of the sole criterion of utility. Such reasoning led Godwin to become an anarchist for he rejected all rules and laws except the dictates of the understanding.

In his definition of good, Godwin is a hedonist: 'Pleasure and pain, happiness and misery constitute the whole ultimate subject of moral enquiry.'<sup>28</sup> Even liberty, knowledge and virtue are not for Godwin ends in themselves but means in order to achieve happiness. But while he equates happiness with pleasure, some pleasures are preferable to others. Intellectual and moral pleasures are superior to the physical; indeed, Godwin dismisses sexual pleasure as a very trivial object. The highest form of pleasure is enjoyed by the man of benevolence who rejoices in the good of the whole. But Godwin does not think that the higher pleasures should exclude the lower, and he makes clear that the most desirable state is that in which we have access to all these sources of pleasure and are 'in possession of a happiness the most varied and uninterrupted'.<sup>29</sup>

As a utilitarian, Godwin defines justice as 'coincident with utility' and infers that 'I am bound to employ my talents, my understanding, my strength and my time for the production of the greatest quantity of general good.'<sup>30</sup> Combined with the principle of impartiality, which arises from the fundamental equality of human beings and is the regulator of virtue, Godwin's view of utility led him to some novel conclusions.

While all human beings are entitled to equal consideration, it does not follow that they should be treated the same. When it comes to distributing justice I should put myself in the place of an impartial spectator and discriminate in favour of the most worthy, that is, those who have the greatest capacity to contribute to the general good. Thus in a fire, if I am faced with the inescapable choice of saving either a philosopher or a servant, I should choose the philosopher. Even if the servant happened to my brother, my father, my sister, my mother or my benefactor, the case would be the same. 'What magic', Godwin asks, 'is there in the pronoun "my" that should justify us in overturning the decisions of impartial truth?'<sup>31</sup>

Godwin concluded that sentiments like gratitude, friendship, domestic and private affections which might interfere with our duty as impartial spectators have no place in justice. It might be more practical for me to prefer my friends and relatives, but it does not make them more worthy

of my attention. Godwin came to recognize the importance of the private and domestic affections in developing sympathetic feelings and apprehended them to be 'inseparable from the nature of man, and from what might be styled the culture of the heart'.<sup>32</sup> But while charity might begin at home, he always insisted that it should not end there and that we should always be guided by considerations of the general good.

Godwin's strict application of the principle of utility led him to an original treatment of duty and rights. 'Duty' he defined as 'the treatment I am bound to bestow upon others'; it is that mode of action on the part of the individual which constitutes 'the best possible application of his capacity to the general benefit'.<sup>33</sup> In order for an action to be truly virtuous, however, it must proceed from benevolent intentions and have long-term beneficial consequences. This duty to practise virtue has serious implications for rights.

While the American and French Revolutions had enshrined lists of rights and Tom Paine was vindicating the *Rights of Man* and Mary Wollstonecraft the *Rights of Woman*, Godwin on utilitarian grounds argued that we have no inalienable rights. Our property, our life and our liberty are trusts which we hold on behalf of humanity, and in certain circumstances justice may require us to forfeit them for the greater good. But while Godwin held that any active or positive right to do as we please is untenable, he did allow two rights in a negative and passive sense. The most important is the right to private judgement, that is a certain 'sphere of discretion' which I have a right to expect shall not be infringed by my neighbour.<sup>34</sup> Godwin also acknowledged the right each person possesses to the assistance of his neighbour. Thus while I am entitled to the produce of my labour on the basis of the right of private judgement, my neighbour has a right to my assistance if he is in need and I have a duty to help him. These rights however are always passive and derive their force not from any notion of natural right but from the principle of utility: they may be superseded whenever more good results from their infringement than from their observance.

Godwin's defence of the right of private judgement is central to his scheme of rational progress and leads him to reject all forms of coercion. As people become more rational and enlightened, they will be more capable of governing themselves, thereby making external institutions increasingly obsolete. But this can only happen if they freely recognize truth and act upon it. Coercion must therefore always be wrong: it cannot convince and only alienates the mind. Indeed, it is always a 'tacit confession of imbecility'.<sup>35</sup> The person who uses coercion pretends to punish his opponent because his argument is strong, but in reality it can only be because it is weak and inadequate. Truth alone carries its own persuasive force. This belief forms the cornerstone of Godwin's criticism of government and law.

On similar grounds, Godwin objects to the view that promises form the foundation of morality. Promises in themselves do not carry any moral weight for they are based on a prior obligation to do justice: I should do something right not because I have promised so to do, but because it is right to do it. In all cases, I ought to be guided by the intrinsic merit of the case and not by any external considerations. A promise in the sense of a declaration of intent is relatively harmless; a promise may even in some circumstances be a necessary evil; but we should make as few of them as possible. 'It is impossible to imagine', Godwin declares, 'a principle of more vicious tendency, than that which shall teach me to disarm future wisdom by past folly'.<sup>36</sup> It follows that all binding oaths and contracts are immoral.

Given Godwin's concern with the independent progress of the mind and rejection of promises, it comes as no surprise that he should condemn the European institution of marriage. In the first place, the cohabitation it involves subjects its participants to some inevitable portion of

thwarting, bickering and unhappiness. Secondly, the marriage contract leads to an eternal vow of attachment after encounters in circumstances full of delusion. As a law, marriage is therefore the worst of laws; as an affair of property, the worst of all properties. Above all, 'so long as I seek to engross one woman to myself, and to prohibit my neighbour from proving his superior desert and reaping the fruits of it, I am guilty of the most odious of all monopolies.'<sup>37</sup> The abolition of marriage, Godwin believed, would be attended with no evils although in an enlightened society he suggested that relationships might be in some degree permanent rather than promiscuous.

## Politics

Politics for Godwin is an extension of ethics and must be firmly based on its principles. Since these principles are universal, he felt it was possible to deduce from them the 'one best mode of social existence'.<sup>38</sup> Hence the enquiry into 'political justice'. The term however is somewhat misleading since Godwin does not believe that justice is political in the traditional sense but social: his idea of a just society does not include government. His overriding aim was to create a society which was free and yet ordered. His bold reasoning led him to conclude that ultimately order could only be achieved in anarchy.

Like all anarchists, Godwin distinguishes carefully between society and government. With Kropotkin, he argues that human beings associated at first for the sake of 'mutual assistance'. With Paine, he believes that society is in every state a blessing. Man by nature is a social being; without society, he cannot reach his full stature. But society does not create a corporate identity, or even a general will, but remains nothing more than an 'aggregation of individuals'.

It was the 'errors and perverseness of the few' who interfered with the peaceful and productive activities of people which made the restraint of government apparently necessary. But while government was intended to suppress injustice, its effect has been to embody and perpetuate it. By concentrating the force of the community, it gives occasion to 'wild projects of calamity, to oppression, despotism, war and conquest'. With the further division of society into rich and poor, the rich have become the 'legislators of the state' and are perpetually reducing oppression to a system.<sup>39</sup>

Government moreover by its very nature checks the improvement of the mind and makes permanent our errors. Indeed, government and society are mutually opposed principles: the one is in perpetual stasis while the other is in constant flux. Since government even in its best state is an evil, it follows that we should have as little of it as the general peace of society will allow. In the long run, however, Godwin suggests:

With what delight must every well informed friend of mankind look forward to the auspicious period, the dissolution of political government, of that brute engine which has been the only perennial cause of the vices of mankind, and which ... has mischiefs of various sorts incorporated with its substance, and not otherwise removable than by its utter annihilation!<sup>40</sup>

Not surprisingly, Godwin rejects the idea that the justification for government can be found in some original social contract. Even if there had been a contract, it could not be binding on subsequent generations and in changed conditions. Equally, the idea of tacit consent would make any existing government however tyrannical legitimate. As for direct consent, it is no less absurd

since it would mean that government can have no authority over any individual who withholds his or her approval. Constitutions are open to similar objections: they not only mean that people are to be governed by the 'dicta of their remotest ancestors' but prevent the progress of political knowledge.<sup>41</sup>

In fact, Godwin asserts that all government is founded in opinion. It is only supported by the confidence placed in its value by the weak and the ignorant. But in proportion as they become wiser, so the basis of government will decay. At present it is the mysterious and complicated nature of the social system which has made the mass of humanity the 'dupe of Knaves' but 'once annihilate the quackery of government, and the most homebred understanding might be strong enough to detect the artifices of the state juggler that would mislead him'. Godwin therefore looked forward to the 'true euthanasia' of government and the 'unforced concurrence of all in promoting the general welfare' which would necessarily follow.<sup>42</sup>

Laws no less than governments are inconsistent with the nature of the human mind and the progress of truth. Human beings can do no more than declare the natural law which eternal justice has already established. Legislation in the sense of framing man-made laws in society is therefore neither necessary nor desirable: 'Immutable reason is the true legislator ... The functions of society extend, not to the making, but the interpreting of law.'<sup>43</sup> Moreover, if the rules of justice were properly understood, there would be no need for artificial laws in society.

Godwin's criticism of law is one of the most trenchant put forward by an anarchist. Where liberals and socialists maintain that law is necessary to protect freedom, Godwin sees them as mutually incompatible principles. All man-made laws are by their very nature arbitrary and oppressive. They represent not, as their advocates claim, the wisdom of ancestors but rather the 'venal compact' of 'superior tyrants', primarily enacted to defend economic inequality and unjust political power.<sup>44</sup> There is no maxim clearer than this, 'Every case is a rule to itself,' and yet, like the bed of Procrustes, laws try to reduce the multiple actions of people to one universal standard. Once begun laws inevitably multiply; they become increasingly confusing and ambiguous and encourage their practitioners to be perpetually dishonest and tyrannical. 'Turn me a prey to the wild beasts of the desert', Godwin's hero in his novel *Caleb Williams* exclaims, 'so I be never again the victim of a man dressed in the gore-dripping robes of authority!'<sup>45</sup>

Punishment, which is the inevitable sanction used to enforce the law, is both immoral and ineffective. In the first place, under the system of necessity, there can be no personal responsibility for actions which the law assumes: 'the assassin cannot help the murder he commits, any more than the dagger.' Secondly, coercion alienates the mind and is superfluous if an argument is true. Punishment or 'the voluntary infliction of evil', is therefore barbaric if used for retribution, and useless if used for reformation or example.<sup>46</sup> Godwin concludes that wrongdoers should be restrained only as a temporary expedient and treated with as much kindness and gentleness as possible.

With his rejection of government and laws, Godwin condemns any form of obedience to authority other than 'the dictate of the understanding'.<sup>47</sup> The worst form of obedience for Godwin occurs however not when we obey out of consideration of a penalty (as for instance when we are threatened by a wild animal) but when we place too much confidence in the superior knowledge of others (even in building a house). Bakunin recognized the latter as the only legitimate form of authority, but Godwin sees it as the most pernicious since it can easily make us dependent, weaken our understanding, and encourage us to revere experts.

Godwin's defence of freedom of thought and expression is one of the most convincing in the English language. All political superintendence of opinion is harmful, because it prevents intellectual progress, and unnecessary, because truth and virtue are competent to fight their own battles. If I accept a truth on the basis of authority it will appear lifeless, lose its meaning and force, and be irresolutely embraced. If on the other hand a principle is open to attack and is found superior to every objection, it becomes securely established. While no authority is infallible, truth emerges stronger than ever when it survives the clash of opposing opinions. Godwin adds however that true toleration not only requires that there should be no laws restraining opinion, but that we should treat each other with forbearance and liberality.

Having established his own political principles. Godwin offered a resounding criticism of existing political practices. In the first place, he completely rejects Rousseau's idea that society as a whole somehow makes up a moral 'individual' in whose overriding interest certain policies must be pursued. The glory and prosperity of society as a whole, he declares, are 'unintelligible chimeras'. Indeed, patriotism or the love of our country has been used by impostors to render the multitude 'the blind instruments of their crooked designs'.<sup>48</sup>

Of all political systems, monarchy is the worst. By his upbringing and his power, 'every king is a despot in his heart', and an enemy of the human race.<sup>49</sup> Monarchy makes wealth the standard of honour and measures people not according to their merit but their title. As such, it is an absolute imposture which overthrows the natural equality of man. Aristocracy, the outcome of feudalism, is also based on false hereditary distinctions and the unjust distribution of wealth. It converts the vast majority of the people into beasts of burden. Democracy on the other hand is the least pernicious system of government since it treats every person as an equal and encourages reasoning and choice.

Godwin's defence of republican and representative democracy is however essentially negative. Republicanism alone, he argues, is not a remedy that strikes at the root of evil if it leaves government and property untouched. Again, representation may call on the most enlightened part of the nation, but it necessarily means that the majority are unable to participate in decision-making. The practice of voting involved in representation further creates an unnatural uniformity of opinion by limiting debate and reducing complicated disputes to simple formulae which demand assent or dissent. It encourages rhetoric and demagoguery rather than careful thought and the cool pursuit of truth. The whole debate moreover is wound up by a 'flagrant insult upon all reason and justice', since the counting of hands cannot decide on a truth.<sup>50</sup>

In Godwin's day, the secret ballot was for many reformers one of the principal means of achieving political liberty. Yet Godwin as an anarchist could scarcely conceive of a political institution which is a 'more direct and explicit patronage of vice'. Its secrecy fosters hypocrisy and deceit about our intentions whereas we should be prepared to give reasons for our actions and face the censure of others. The vote by secret ballot is therefore not a symbol of liberty but of slavery. Communication is the essence of liberty; ballot is the 'fruitful parent of ambiguities, equivocations and lies without number'.<sup>51</sup>

A further weakness of representative assemblies is that they create a fictitious unanimity. Nothing, Godwin argues, can more directly contribute to the depravation of the human understanding and character than for a minority to be made to execute the decisions of a majority. A majority for Godwin has no more right to coerce a minority, even a minority of one, than a despot has to coerce a majority. A national assembly further encourages every man to connect himself with

some sect or party, while the institution of two houses of assembly merely divides a nation against itself. Real unanimity can only result in a free society without government.

Godwin is quite clear that political associations and parties are not suitable means to reach that society. While the artisans were organizing themselves into associations in order to put pressure on parliament for reform, Godwin spelled out the dangers. Members soon learn the shibboleth of party and stop thinking independently. Without any pretence of delegation from the community at large, associations seize power for themselves. The arguments against government are equally pertinent and hostile to such associations. Truth cannot be acquired in crowded halls amidst noisy debates but is revealed in quiet contemplation.

## Economics

Godwin argued that it is not enough to leave property relations as they are. In this, he departs from the liberal tradition and aligns himself with socialism. Indeed, he considers the subject of property to be the 'key-stone' that completes the fabric of political justice.

Godwin's economics, like his politics, are an extension of his ethics. The first offence, he argues with Rousseau, was committed by the man who took advantage of the weakness of his neighbours to secure a monopoly of wealth. Since then there has been a close link between property and government for the rich are the 'indirect or direct legislators of the state'. The resulting moral and psychological effects of unequal distribution have been disastrous for both rich and poor alike. Accumulated property creates a 'servile and truckling spirit', makes the acquisition and display of wealth the universal passion, and hinders intellectual development and enjoyment.<sup>52</sup> By encouraging competition, it reduces the whole structure of society to a system of the narrowest selfishness. Property no longer becomes desired for its own sake, but for the distinction and status it confers.

To be born to poverty, Godwin suggests, is to be born a slave; the poor man is 'strangely pent and fettered in his exertions' and becomes the 'bond slave of a thousand vices'. The factory system, with its anxious and monotonous occupations, turns workers into machines and produces a kind of 'stupid and hopeless vacancy' in every face, especially amongst the children.<sup>53</sup> Painfully aware of the consequences of the Industrial Revolution, Godwin laments that in the new manufacturing towns if workers managed to live to forty, 'they could not earn bread to their salt'. The great inequalities in European countries can only lead to class war and incite the poor to reduce everything to 'universal chaos'.<sup>54</sup>

In place of existing property relations, Godwin proposes a form of voluntary communism. His starting-point is that since human beings are partakers of a common nature, it follows on the principle of impartial justice that the 'good things of the world are a common stock, upon which one man has as valid a title as another to draw for what he wants'.<sup>55</sup> Justice further obliges every man to regard his property as a trust and to consider in what way it might be best employed for the increase of liberty, knowledge and virtue.

Godwin recognizes that money is only the means of exchange to real commodities and no real commodity itself. What is misnamed wealth is merely 'a power invested in certain individuals by the institutions of society, to compel others to labour for their benefit'.<sup>56</sup> Godwin could therefore see no justice in the situation in which one man works, and another man is idle and lives off the fruits of his labour. It would be fairer if all able-bodied people worked. Since a small quantity

of labour is sufficient to provide the means of subsistence, this would inevitably increase the amount of leisure and allow everyone to cultivate his or her understanding and to experience new sources of enjoyment.

Godwin deepens his analysis by distinguishing between four classes of things: the means of subsistence, the means of intellectual and moral improvement, inexpensive pleasures, and luxuries. It is the last class that is the chief obstacle to a just distribution of the previous three. From this classification, Godwin deduces three degrees of property rights. The first is 'my permanent right in those things the use of which being attributed to me, a greater sum of benefit or pleasure will result than could have arisen from their being otherwise appropriated'. This includes the first three classes of things. The second degree of property is the empire every person is entitled to over the produce of his or her own industry. This is only a negative right and in a sense a sort of usurpation since justice obliges me to distribute any produce in excess of my entitlement according to the first degree of property. The third degree, which corresponds to the fourth class of things, is the 'faculty of disposing of the produce of another man's industry'.<sup>57</sup> It is entirely devoid of right since all value is created by labour and it directly contradicts the second degree.

Godwin thus condemns capitalist accumulation. On the positive side, he argues that all members of society should have their basic needs satisfied. But just as I have a right to the assistance of my neighbour, he has a right of private judgement. It is his duty to help me satisfy my needs, but it is equally my duty not to violate his sphere of discretion. In this sense, property is founded in the 'sacred and indefeasible right of private judgement'. At the same time, Godwin accepts on utilitarian grounds that in exceptional circumstances it might be necessary to take goods by force from my neighbour in order to save myself or others from calamity.<sup>58</sup>

Godwin's original and profound treatment of property had a great influence on the early socialist thinkers. He was the first to write systematically about the different claims of human need, production and capital. Marx and Engels acknowledged his contribution to the development of the theory of exploitation and even considered translating *Political Justice*.<sup>59</sup> In the anarchist tradition, he anticipates Proudhon by making a distinction between property and possession. In his scheme of voluntary communism, however, he comes closest to Kropotkin.

Godwin saw no threat from the growth of population to upset his communist society. Like most anarchists, he rested his hopes on a natural order or harmony: 'There is a principle in the nature of human society by means of which everything seems to tend to its level, and to proceed in the most auspicious way, when least interfered with by the mode of regulation'.<sup>60</sup> In addition, there is no evidence for natural scarcity; much land is still uncultivated and what is cultivated could be improved. Even if population did threaten to get out of hand there are methods of birth control. Malthus of course could not leave it at that and in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) he argued that population grows faster than food supply and that vice and misery must therefore remain in place as necessary checks. But Godwin counter-attacked with his doctrine of moral restraint or prudence, questioned the validity of Malthus's evidence, and rightly suggested that people would have fewer children as their living standards improved.

## Education

The principal means of reform for Godwin is through education and his original reflections on the subject make him one of the great pioneers of libertarian and progressive thought. God-

win, perhaps more than any other thinker, recognizes that freedom is the basis of education and education is the basis of freedom. The ultimate aim of education, he maintains, is to develop individual understanding and to prepare children to create and enjoy a free society.

In keeping with his view of human nature, he believed that education has far greater power than government in shaping our characters. Children are thus a 'sort a raw material put into our hands, a ductile and yielding substance'.<sup>61</sup> Just as nature never made a dunce, so genius is not innate but acquired. It follows that the so-called vices of youth derive not from nature but from the defects of education. Children are born innocent: confidence, kindness and benevolence constitute their entire temper. They have a deep and natural love of liberty at a time when they are never free from the 'grating interference' of adults. Liberty is the 'school of understanding' and the 'parent of strength'; indeed children probably learn and develop more in their hours of leisure than at school.<sup>62</sup>

For Godwin all education involves some form of despotism. Modern education not only corrupts the hearts of children, but undermines their reason by its unintelligible jargon. It makes little effort to accommodate their true capacities. National or State education, the great salvation of many progressive reformers, can only make matters worse. Like all public establishments, it involves the idea of permanence and actively fixes the mind in 'exploded errors': as a result, the knowledge taught in universities and colleges is way behind that which exists in unshackled members of the community.<sup>63</sup>

In addition, a system of national education cannot fail to become the mirror and tool of government; they form an alliance more formidable than that of Church and State, teaching a veneration of the constitution rather than of truth. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that the teacher becomes a slave who is constantly obliged to rehandle the foundations of knowledge; and a tyrant, forever imposing his will and checking the pleasures and sallies of youth.

Godwin admits that education in a group is preferable to solitary tuition in developing talents and encouraging a sense of personal identity. In existing society, he therefore suggests that a small and independent school is best. But Godwin goes further to question the very foundations of traditional schooling.

The aim of education, he maintains, must be to generate happiness. Now virtue is essential to happiness, and to make a person virtuous he or she must become wise. Education should develop a mind which is well-regulated, active and prepared to learn. This is best achieved not by inculcating in young children any particular knowledge but by encouraging their latent talents, awakening their minds, and forming clear habits of thinking.

In our treatment of children, we should therefore be egalitarian, sympathetic, sincere, truthful, and straightforward. We should not become harsh monitors and killjoys; the extravagances of youth are often early indications of genius and energy. We should encourage a taste for reading but not censure their choice of literature. Above all, we should excite their desire for knowledge by showing its intrinsic excellence.

Godwin, however, goes on to suggest that if a pupil learns only because he or she desires it the whole formidable apparatus of education might be swept away. No figures such as teacher or pupil would then be left; each would be glad in cases of difficulty to consult someone better informed, but they would not be expected to learn anything unless they desired it. Everyone would be prepared to offer guidance and encouragement. In this way, a mind would develop according to its natural tendencies and children would be able to develop fully their potential.

## Free Society

While Godwin does not offer a blueprint of his free society — to do so would be opposed to his whole scheme of progress and his notion of truth — he does outline some of the general directions it might take. In the first place, he is careful to show that freedom does not mean licence, that is to say, to act as one pleases without being accountable to the principles of reason. He distinguishes between two sorts of independence: natural independence, ‘a freedom from all constraint, except that of reasons and inducements presented to the understanding’, which is of the utmost importance; and moral independence, which is always injurious.<sup>64</sup> It is essential that we should be free to cultivate our individuality, and to follow the dictates of our own understanding, but we should be ready to judge and influence the actions of each other. External freedom is of little value without moral growth. Indeed, it is possible for a person to be physically enslaved and yet retain his sense of independence, while an unconstrained person can voluntarily enslave himself through passive obedience. For Godwin civil liberty is thus not an end in itself, but a means to personal growth in wisdom and virtue.

Godwin did not call himself an anarchist and used the word ‘anarchy’ like his contemporaries in a negative sense to denote the violent and extreme disorder which might follow the immediate dissolution of government without the prior acceptance of the principles of political justice. In such a situation, he feared that some enraged elements might threaten personal security and free enquiry. The example of the French revolutionaries had shown him that the people’s ‘ungoverned passions will often not stop at equality, but incite them to grasp at power’.<sup>65</sup> And yet Godwin saw the mischiefs of anarchy in this sense as preferable to those of despotism. A State despotism is permanent, while anarchy is transitory. Anarchy diffuses energy and enterprise through the community and disengages people from prejudice and implicit faith. Above all, it has a ‘distorted and tremendous likeness, of truth and liberty’ and can lead to the best form of human society.<sup>66</sup> It was always Godwin’s contention that society for the greater part carries on its own peaceful and productive organization.

In place of modern Nation-States with their complex apparatus of government, Godwin proposes a decentralized and simplified society of face-to-face communities. The ideas of ‘a great empire, and legislative unity’ are plainly the ‘barbarous remains of the days of military heroism’.<sup>67</sup> It is preferable to decentralize power since neighbours are best informed of each other’s concerns, and sobriety and equity are characteristic of a limited circle. People should therefore form a voluntary federation of districts (a ‘confederacy of lesser republics’) in order to co-ordinate production and secure social benefits.

In such a pluralistic commonwealth, Godwin suggests that the basic social unit might be a small territory like the traditional English ‘parish’ – the self-managing commune of later anarchists. Democracy would be direct and participatory so that the voice of reason could be heard and spoken by all citizens. Such a decentralized society need not however be ‘parochial’ in the pejorative sense since with the dissolution of Nation-States and their rivalries the whole human species would constitute ‘one great republic’.<sup>68</sup>

Godwin recognizes that in a transitional period a temporary co-ordinating body might be necessary in order to solve disputes between districts or to repel a foreign invader. He therefore suggests that districts might send delegates to a general assembly or congress of the federation, but only in exceptional emergencies. The assembly would form no permanent or common centre of authority and any officials would be unpaid and supported voluntarily.

At the local level, popular juries could be set up to deal with controversies and injustices amongst individuals within the community. Cases would be judged according to their particular circumstances in the light of the general good. In the long run, however, both assemblies and juries would lose any authority and it would suffice to invite districts to co-operate for the common advantage or to ask offenders to forsake their errors.

If the social system were simplified, Godwin is confident that the voice of reason would be heard, consensus achieved, and the natural harmony of interests prevail. As people became accustomed to governing themselves, all coercive bodies would become increasingly superfluous and obsolete. Government would give way to the spontaneously ordered society of anarchy. People would live simple but cultivated lives in open families in harmony with nature. Marriage would disappear and be replaced by free unions; any offspring would be cared for and educated by the community.

In such a free and equal society, there would be the opportunity for everyone to develop their intellectual and moral potential. With the abolition of the complicated machinery of government, the end of excessive luxuries, and the sharing of work by all, the labour required to produce the necessities of life would be drastically reduced – possibly, Godwin calculates, to half an hour a day.

Far from ignoring the Industrial Revolution, Godwin further looks to technology – ‘various sorts of mills, of weaving engines, steam engines’, and even one day to an automatic plough – to reduce and alleviate unpleasant toil.<sup>69</sup> Unlike Tolstoy, he sees no dignity in unnecessary manual labour. Appropriate technology would not only lessen the enforced co-operation imposed by the present division of labour, but increase the incomparable wealth of leisure in which people might cultivate their minds. Science, moreover, might one day make mind omnipotent over matter, prolong life, and, Godwin suggests in a rare flight of wild conjecture, even discover the secret of immortality!

Although Godwin’s decentralized society finds undoubtedly some inspiration in the organic communities of pre-industrial England, it is by no means a purely agrarian vision. His confidence in the potentially liberating effects of modern technology and science shows that he was not looking backwards but forward to the future. Indeed, while the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have seen increased centralization of production, the new technology may well as Godwin hoped lead to a dissolution of monolithic industries and a break-up of great cities. In this he anticipates Kropotkin’s vision in *Fields, Factories and Workshops*.

While he does not enter into details, Godwin implies that production would be organized voluntarily, with workers pursuing their own interests or talents. A certain division of labour might still exist, since people with particular skills might prefer to spend their time in specialized work. There would be a voluntary sharing of material goods. Producers would give their surplus to those who most needed them, and would receive what was necessary to satisfy their own wants from the surplus of their neighbours. In this way goods would pass spontaneously to where they were needed. Economic relationships however would always be based on free distribution and not on barter or exchange.

Godwin was anxious to define carefully the subtle connection between the individual and the group in such a free and equal society. His position has been seriously misunderstood, for he has been equally accused of ‘extreme individualism’ and of wanting to submerge the individual in ‘communal solidarity’.<sup>70</sup> In fact, he did neither.

It is true that Godwin wrote 'everything that is usually understood by the term co-operation is, in some degree, an evil.'<sup>71</sup> But the co-operation he condemned is the uniform activity enforced by the division of labour, by a restrictive association, or by those in power. He could not understand why we must always be obliged to consult the convenience of others or be reduced to a 'clockwork uniformity'. For this reason, he saw no need for common labour, meals or stores in an equal society; they are 'mistaken instruments for restraining the conduct without making conquest of the judgement'.<sup>72</sup>

It is also true that society for Godwin forms no organic whole and is nothing more than the sum of its individuals. He pictured the enlightened person making individual calculations of pleasure and pain and carefully weighing up the consequences of his or her actions. He stressed the value of autonomy for intellectual and moral development; we all require a sphere of discretion, a mental space for creative thought. He could see no value in losing oneself in the existence of another:

Every man ought to rest upon his own centre, and consult his own understanding. Every man ought to feel his independence, that he can assert the principles of justice and truth without being obliged treacherously to adapt them to the peculiarities of his situation and the errors of others.<sup>73</sup>

This recognition of the need for individual autonomy should be borne in mind when considering one of the major criticisms levelled at Godwin, namely that in his anarchist society the tyranny of public opinion could be more dangerous than that of law. Godwin certainly argues that we all have a duty to amend the errors and promote the welfare of our neighbours; that we must practise perfect sincerity at all times. Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that the 'general inspection' which would replace public authority would provide a force 'no less irresistible than whips and chains' to reform conduct.<sup>74</sup>

Now while this might sound distinctly illiberal, Godwin made clear that he was totally opposed to any collective vigilance which might tyrannize the individual or impose certain ideas and values. In the first place, the kind of sincerity he recommends is not intended to turn neighbours into priggish busybodies but to release them from their unnecessary repressions so that they might be 'truly friends with each other'. Secondly, any censure we might offer to our neighbours should be an appeal to their reason and be offered in a mild and affectionate way. Thirdly, Godwin assumes that people will be rational and independent individuals who recognize each other's autonomy: 'My neighbour may censure me freely and without reserve, but he should remember that I am to act by my deliberation and not his.'<sup>75</sup>

While Godwin certainly values personal autonomy, he repeatedly stresses that we are social beings, that we are made for society, and that society brings out our best qualities. Indeed, he sees no tension between autonomy and collectivity since 'the love of liberty obviously leads to a sentiment of union, and a disposition to sympathize in the concern of others'.<sup>76</sup> Godwin's novels show only too vividly the psychological and moral dangers of excessive solitude and isolation. His whole ethical system of universal benevolence is inspired by a love for others.

In fact, Godwin believes that people in a free and equal society would be at once more social and more individual: 'each man would be united to his neighbour, in love and mutual kindness, a thousand times more than now: but each man would think and judge for himself'. Ultimately, the individual and society are not opposed for each person would become more individually

developed and more socially conscious: the 'narrow principle of selfishness' would vanish and 'each would lose his individual existence, in the thought of the general good'.<sup>77</sup> One of Godwin's greatest strengths is the way he reconciles the claims of personal autonomy and the demands of social life. As such, Godwin's anarchism is closer to the communism of Kropotkin than the egoism of Stirner or the competition of Proudhon.

## Means of Reform

Having witnessed the French Revolution turn into the Terror, Godwin did not give his whole-hearted support to revolution in the sense of a sudden and violent transformation of society. Revolution might be inspired by a horror of tyranny, but it can also be tyrannical in turn, especially if those who seize power try to coerce others through the threat of punishment.

Godwin was not an absolute pacifist, but non-violence was his strategy of liberation. He did not think human reason sufficiently developed to persuade an assailant to drop his sword. Armed struggle might also be necessary to resist the 'domestic spoiler' or to repulse an invading despot.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, he accepted the minimal use of physical force only when all persuasion and argument had failed. It follows that the duty of the enlightened person is to try to postpone violent revolution.

Godwin thus looked to a revolution in opinions, not on the barricades. The proper means of bringing about change is through the diffusion of knowledge: 'Persuasion and not force, is the legitimate instrument of influencing the human mind.' True equalization of society is not to reduce by force all to a 'naked and savage equality', but to elevate every person to wisdom. The reform Godwin recommends (that 'genial and benignant power!') is however so gradual that it can hardly be called action.<sup>79</sup> Since government is founded in opinion, as people become wiser and realize that it is an unnecessary evil, they will gradually withdraw their support. Government will simply wither away. It is a process which clearly cannot be realized by political parties or associations.

Godwin looks to thoughtful and benevolent guides who will speak the truth and practise sincerity and thereby act as catalysts of change. The kind of organization he recommends is the small and independent circle, the prototype of the modern anarchist 'affinity group'. In the anarchist tradition, Godwin thus stands as the first to advocate 'propaganda by the word'. By stressing the need for moral regeneration before political reform, he also anticipates the idea that the 'political is the personal'.

While Godwin's gradualism shows that he was no naive visionary, it does give a conservative turn to his practical politics. He criticized the kind of isolated acts of protest that Shelley engaged in. He felt it was right to support from a distance any movement which seemed to be going in the right direction. In his own historical circumstances, he declared: 'I am in principle a Republican, but in practice a Whig. But I am a philosopher: that is a person desirous to become wise, and I aim at this object by reading, by writing, and a little conversation.'<sup>80</sup> He thought at one time during the 1790s that he might be in Parliament, but quickly dismissed the idea since it would infringe his independence and would grate against his character which was more fitted for contemplation than action.

Godwin failed to develop an adequate praxis. His cautious gradualism meant that he was obliged to abandon generations to the disastrous effects of that political authority and economic

inequality which he had so eloquently described. While he demonstrated vividly how opinions are shaped by circumstances, he sought only to change opinions rather than to try and change circumstances. He was left with the apparent dilemma of believing that human beings cannot become wholly rational as long as government exists, and yet government must continue to exist while they remain irrational. His problem was that he failed to tackle reform on the level of institutions as well as ideas.

As a social philosopher, Godwin is undoubtedly on a par with Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Mill. He was the most consistent and profound exponent of philosophical anarchism. With closely reasoned arguments, he carefully drew his libertarian conclusions from a plausible view of human nature. He believed that politics is inseparable from ethics, and offered a persuasive view of justice. His criticisms of fundamental assumptions about law, government and democracy are full of insight. From a sound view of truth, he developed one of the most trenchant defences of the freedom of thought and expression.

In place of existing tyrannies, Godwin proposed a decentralized and simplified society consisting of voluntary associations of free and equal individuals. In his educational theory, he showed the benefits of learning through desire. In his economics, he demonstrated the disastrous effects of inequality and outlined a system of free communism. If Godwin's practical politics were inadequate, it is because he was primarily a philosopher concerned with universal principles rather than their particular application. By the intrepid deduction from first principles, he went beyond the radicalism of his age to become the first great anarchist thinker.

# Max Stirner: The Conscious Egoist

MAX STIRNER STANDS FOR the most extreme form of individualist anarchism. He denies not only the existence of benevolence but also all abstract entities such as the State, Society, Humanity and God. He rebels against the whole rational tradition of Western philosophy, and in place of philosophical abstraction, he proposes the urgings of immediate personal experience. His work stands as a frontal assault on the fundamental principles of the Enlightenment, with its unbounded confidence in the ultimate triumph of Reason, Progress and Order.

Stirner's place in the history of philosophy is as controversial as his status as an anarchist. It has been argued that he is more of a nihilist than an anarchist since he destroys all propositions except those which fulfil a purely aesthetic function in the egoist's 'overriding purpose of self-enjoyment and self-display'. J Camus saw Stirner's metaphysical revolt against God leading to the absolute affirmation of the individual and a kind of nihilism which 'laughs in the impasse'.<sup>2</sup> Others place Stirner in the existential tradition, stressing his concern with the ontological priority of the individual; Herbert Read called him 'one of the most existentialist of philosophers'.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly Stirner offered a root-and-branch attack on existing values and institutions. Like Kierkegaard, he celebrated the unique truth of the individual and sought to liberate him from the great barrel organ of Hegelian metaphysics. In his attack on Christian morality and his call for the selfexaltation of the whole individual, he anticipated Nietzsche and atheistic existentialism. But while there are nihilistic and existentialist elements to his work, Stirner is not merely a nihilist, for he does not set out to destroy all moral and social values. Neither is he, strictly speaking, a protoexistentialist, for he rejects any attempt to create a higher or better individual. He belongs to the anarchist tradition as one of its most original and creative thinkers. While many may find his views shocking and distasteful, every libertarian is obliged to come to terms with his bold reasoning.

Marx and Engels took Stirner seriously enough to devote a large part of their German Ideology to a refutation of the infuriating thinker whom 'they dubbed 'Saint Max', 'Sancho' and the 'Unique'.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Stirner shares many points with Marx: his dialectical method, his criticism of abstractions and the 'human essence', his analysis of labour, his rejection of static materialism, and his stress on human volition in social change. Engels even admitted to Marx that after reading Stirner's book he was converted to egoism, and although it was only temporary, he still maintained that 'it is equally from egoism that we are communists'.<sup>5</sup>

In his principal work *Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum* (1845), usually translated as *The Ego and His Own*, Stirner offers the most consistent case in defence of the individual against authority. He presents a searching criticism of the State and social institutions, and proposes in their place a 'union of egoists' who would form contractual relationships and compete peacefully with each other. Stirner's defence of personal autonomy not only influenced Benjamin Tucker and the American individualists, but also the social anarchists Emma Goldman and Herbert Read in our own century. Kropotkin had little time for his anti-social thrust and what he called his 'superficial negation of morality', but the early Mussolini in his socialist days wanted to make

his celebration of the 'elemental forces of the individual' fashionable again.<sup>6</sup> Stirner continues to inspire and exasperate libertarians of both the Left and the Right.<sup>7</sup>

Max Stirner's life was as timid as his thought was bold. Born in 1806 at Bayreuth in Bavaria, his real name was Johann Kaspar Schmidt. His parents were poor. After the death of his father, his mother remarried and followed her husband around north Germany before they settled once again at Bayreuth. She eventually became insane. Her son attended the University of Berlin from 1826 to 1828 where he studied philosophy and listened to the lectures of Hegel. But his academic career was far from distinguished.

After a brief spell at two other universities, Stirner returned to Berlin in 1832 and just managed to gain a teaching certificate. He then spent eighteen months as an unsalaried trainee teacher, but the Prussian government declined to appoint him to a full-time post. In 1837, he married his landlady's daughter but she died in childbirth a few months later. It is difficult not to put down his misanthropy and egoism to a lonely childhood, unsuccessful career and bad luck. His fortunes only began to turn a little when he landed a post at Madame Gropius's academy for young girls in Berlin. During the next five years Johann Kaspar had a steady job and began to mix with some of the most fiery young intellectuals of the day. They called themselves *Die Freien* - the Free Ones - and met in the early 1840s at Hippel's Weinstube on Friedrichstrasse. Bruno Bauer and Edgar Bauer were the leading lights of the group but Marx and Engels occasionally attended. Engels has left a sketch of the Young Hegelians during a visit by Arnold Ruge which depicts Johann Kaspar as an isolated figure, looking on at the noisy debate.

It was during this period that he wrote 'The False Principle of Our Education', which was published in Marx's journal, *Rheinische Zeitung*, in 1842. The essay shows the libertarian direction Stirner was already taking. Distinguishing between the 'educated man' and the 'freeman', he argued that, in the former case, knowledge is used to shape character so that the educated become possessed by the Church, State or Humanity, while in the latter it is used to facilitate choice:

If one awakens in men the idea of freedom then the freemen will incessantly go on to free themselves; if, on the contrary, one only educates them, then they will at all times accommodate themselves to circumstances in the most highly educated and elegant manner and degenerate into subservient cringing souls.<sup>8</sup>

The Free Ones came to be known as the Left Hegelians because they met to discuss and eventually oppose the philosophy of the great German metaphysician. It was in reaction to Hegel and the habits of the Free Ones that Johann Kaspar wrote his only claim to fame, *The Ego and His Own*. The work is quite unique in the history of philosophy. Its uneven style is passionate, convoluted and repetitive; its meaning is often opaque and contradictory. Like a musical score it introduces themes, drops them, only to develop them at a later stage; the whole adds up to a triumphant celebration of the joy of being fully oneself and in control of one's life - something Stirner himself never achieved.

Stirner has an almost Wittgensteinian awareness of the way language influences our perception of reality and limits our world. 'Language', he writes, 'or "the word" tyrannizes hardest over us, because it brings up against us a whole army of *fixed ideas*. **He stresses that the 'thrall of language** is entirely a human construct but it is all-embracing. Truth does not correspond to reality outside language: 'Truths are phrases, ways of speaking . . . men's thoughts, set down in words and therefore "just as extant as other things.'<sup>9</sup> Since truths are entirely human creations

expressed in language they can be consumed: 'The truth is dead, a letter, a word, a material that I can use up.'<sup>11</sup> But since this is the case, Stirner recognizes the possibility of being enslaved by language and its fixed meanings. It also implies that it is extremely difficult to express something new. Ultimately, Stirner is reduced to verbal impotence in face of the ineffable, of what cannot be said or described. He calls the '!' 'unthinkable' and 'unspeakable': 'Against me, the unnameable, the realm of thoughts, thinking, and mind is shattered.'<sup>11</sup>

The author of *The Ego and His Own* adopted the *nom de plume* Max Stirner so as not to alarm Madame Gropius, the owner of the highly respectable academy for young girls where he taught. The German word 'Stirne' means 'brow', and the would-be philosopher felt that it was appropriate not only because he had a prominent forehead but because it matched his self-image as a 'highbrow'. His denunciation of all religious and philosophical beliefs which stood in the way of the unique individual earned him instant notoriety and inspired among others Ludwig Feuerbach, Moses Hess, and Marx and Engels to refute him.

Whilst writing his *magnum opus*, Stirner married Marie Diihnhardt, an intelligent and pretty member of the Free Ones. It proved the happiest period of his life. Madame Gropius was apparently unaware of the writings of the subversive and inflammatory thinker she was harbouring in her genteel establishment. But that still did not prevent her from firing her timid employee. He was then obliged to do hack work to earn a living, translating several volumes of the work of the English economists J. B. Say and Adam Smith. After the failure of a dairy scheme his wife left him, only to recall years later that he was very egoistical and sly. He spent the rest of his life in poverty, twice landing in prison for debt. He attended occasionally the salon of Baroness von der Goltz, where his radical philosophical opinions caused considerable surprise, especially as he appeared outwardly calm. The only work to emerge from this period was a *History of Reaction* (1852) (*Geschichte der Reaction*), as dull and ordinary as the author's own end in 1856. Stirner was the author of one great work: it proved to have been a desperate but unsuccessful attempt to escape from the stifling circumstances of his life and times.

## Philosophy

Stirner's philosophy can only be understood in the context of the Left Hegelian critique of religion that developed in Germany in the 1840s. Opposing the philosophical idealism of Hegel, which saw history as the realization and unfurling of Spirit, the Left Hegelians argued that religion is a form of alienation in which the believer projects certain of his own desirable qualities onto a transcendent deity. Man is not created in God's image, but God is created in man's ideal image. To overcome this alienation, they argued that it is necessary to 'reappropriate' the human essence and to realize that the ideal qualities attributed to God are human qualities, partially realized at present but capable of being fully realized in a transformed society. The critique of religion thus became a radical call for reform.

Stirner developed the Hegelian manner, including its dialectical progression of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, and adopted his theme of alienation and reconciliation. He saw his philosophy of egoism as the culmination of world history. Indeed, Stirner has been called the last and most logical of the Hegelians. Instead of attempting to replace Hegel's 'concrete universal' by any general notions such as 'humanity' or 'classless society', he only believed in the reality of the concrete individual.<sup>12</sup>

But Stirner went even further than the Left-Hegelians in his critique. Where Feuerbach argued that instead of worshipping God, we should try and realize the human 'essence', Stirner declared that this kind of humanism was merely religion in disguise: 'the Christian yearning and hungering for the other world'.<sup>13</sup> Since the concept of human essence is merely abstract thought, it cannot be an independent standard by which we measure our actions. It remains, like the fixed ideas of God, the State, and Justice, nothing more than 'wheels in the head' which have no more reality than a 'spook'.<sup>14</sup>

Although Stirner celebrates the primacy of the unique individual, he is not in metaphysical terms a solipsist. He recognizes the independent existence of the external world and of other people: 'I can make very little of myself; but this little is everything, and is better than what I allow to be made out of me by the might of others'.<sup>15</sup> The ego does not therefore create all, but looks upon all as means towards its own ends: 'it is not that the ego is all, but that the ego *destroys* all'.<sup>16</sup> Again; Stirner talks sometimes as if others are the property and creation of the ego, but he usually means that they should only be considered so: 'For me you are nothing but - my food, even as I too am fed upon and turned to use by you. We have only one relation to each other, that of *usableness*, of utility, of use.' <sup>17</sup> While the ego is not the only reality or all of reality, it is therefore the highest level of reality. It uses all beings and things for its own purposes.

The exact nature of the ego is not entirely clear in Stirner's work. The ego is prior to all supposition, neither a thing nor an idea, without enduring form or substance. As such, the ego is a 'creative nothing', not one self but a series of selves: 'I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but I am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything'.<sup>18</sup> The ego is therefore a process, existing through a series of selves. Unfortunately Stirner is not entirely explicit or consistent here. He does not explain how an enduring ego can become a series of selves. Nor does he tally his conception of the self-creating ego with his assertion that people are born intelligent or stupid, poets or dolts.

As well as being creative; the ego is also *einzig* unique. Each individual is entirely single and incomparable: 'My flesh is not their flesh, my mind is not their mind'.<sup>19</sup> Stirner thus has a completely atomistic conception of the self. But he does not suggest like Rousseau that man was originally independent: 'Not isolation or being alone, but society is man's original state . . . Society is our *state of nature*'.<sup>20</sup> But society is something which the individual should emancipate himself from to become truly himself. It is for this reason that Marx and Engels ironically dubbed 'Saint Max' as 'the Unique'.

As an atheist and materialist, Stirner considers the ego as finite and transitory and often seems to identify it with the body. To the question 'What am I?', Stirner replies: 'An abyss of lawless and unregulated impulses, desires, wishes, passions, chaos without light or guiding star'.<sup>21</sup> In addition, as the ego is corporeal, the products of the intellect or ideas can have no independent existence.

This leads Stirner to a nominalist position, rejecting universals or species since reality only consists of particular things. Abstractions or general ideas like 'man' are therefore only concepts in the mind, whatever Feuerbach or Marx might say. At times, Stirner seems to recognize that objective truth does exist, but it has no value apart from its uses for the ego. Stirner is principally concerned with the type of existential truth which is lived, not merely known. He does not say like Kierkegaard that truth is subjective, but holds subjectivity to be more important than truth.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike Godwin, Stirner is no perfectibilist. Indeed, the ego is completely perfect in its present state in every moment: *We are perfect*, altogether, and on the whole earth there is not one man who is a sinner!<sup>23</sup> What is possible is only what is. If this might seem paradoxical given his stress on development, it becomes less so if we interpret it to mean that the perfect ego can develop in the sense of becoming more aware of itself and other things as its property. It can thus develop its 'ownness' (*eigenheit*), its sense of self-possession. The problem still remains that if we are 'perfect', why do we need more knowledge and awareness? Although he does not, as Marx suggested, make a new God out of it, Stirner becomes almost mystical in his negative description of the ego. It is not only unspeakable but unthinkable, comprehensible through non-rational experience alone.

In his psychology, Stirner divides the self into desires, will and intellect. But it is the will which is the ruling faculty for to follow the intellect or desires would fragment the ego. The self is a unity acting from a self-seeking will : *'I am everything to myself and I do everything on my account.'*<sup>24</sup> But rather than achieving a balance between desire and intellect, the will seeks power over things, persons and oneself. Stirner thus anticipates Freud in his stress on the force of the desires to influence the intellect, and Adler in his description of the will as the highest faculty of the ego.

Stirner develops the psychological egoism of the eighteenth-century moralists to its most extreme form. It is in the nature of every ego to follow its own interest. Altruism is a complete illusion. The apparent altruist is really an unconscious, involuntary egoist. Even love is a type of egoism: I love 'because love makes me happy, I love because loving is natural to me, because it pleases me'.<sup>25</sup> The same applies to creativity, religion, and friendship. The argument however remains a tautology, and as such is no proof. Apart from mere assertion, Stirner offers no evidence to support his belief that universal self-interest is a true description of human conduct.

The corollary of psychological egoism for Stirner is ethical egoism. He tries to show that conscious egoism is better than egoism disguised as altruism since it allows the development of the will which gives one the dignity of a free man.

## Ethics

In his ethics, Stirner argues that the ego is the sole creator of moral order. There are no eternal moral truths and no values to be discovered in nature: 'Owner and creator of my right, I recognize no other source of right than - me, neither God nor the State nor nature nor even man himself.'<sup>26</sup> One has no duty even to oneself since it would imply a division of the ego into a higher and a lower self. Since this is the case, the conscious egoist must choose what pleases him as the sole good: the enjoyment of life is the ultimate aim. The question is not therefore how a person is to prolong life or even to create the true self in himself, but how he is 'to dissolve himself, to live himself out'<sup>27</sup> He has no moral calling any more than has a flower. If he acts, it is because he wants to. If he speaks, it is not for others or even for the truth's sake but out of pure enjoyment:

I sing as the bird sings  
That on the bough alights;  
The song that from me springs  
Is pay that well requites.<sup>28</sup>

In the public realm, moral right is just another ghostly wheel in the head. There are no natural rights, no social rights, no historical rights. Right is merely might: 'What you have the *power* to be you have the *right* to.' It is completely subjective: 'I decide whether it is the *right thing* in me; there is no right *outside* me.'<sup>29</sup> The dominant morality will therefore be furnished with the values of the most powerful. The individual has no obligation to law or morality; his only interest is the free satisfaction of his desires. The conscious egoist is thus beyond good and evil, as conventionally defined:

Away, then, with every concern that is not altogether my concern! You think at least the 'good cause' must be my concern? What's good, what's bad? Why, I myself am my concern, and I am neither good nor bad. Neither has meaning for me.

The divine is God's concern; the human, man's. My concern is neither the divine nor the human, not the true, good, just, free, etc., solely what is mine, and it is not a general one, but is - unique, am unique.

Nothing is more to me than myself!<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, Stirner goes so far as to place one's 'ownness' above the value of freedom. He recognized that his freedom is inevitably limited by society and the State and anyone else who is stronger, but he will not let 'ownness' being taken from him:

one becomes free from much, not from everything . . . 'Freedom lives only in the realm of dreams!' Ownness, on the contrary, is my whole being and existence, it is I myself. I am free from what I am *rid* of, owner of what I have in my *power* or what I *control*. My own I am at all times and under all circumstances, if I know how to have myself and do not throw myself away on others.<sup>31</sup>

With this stress on the primacy of the ego, Stirner goes on to develop a view of freedom which involves the free and conscious choice of the uncircumscribed individual: 'I am my *own* only when I am master of myself.'<sup>32</sup> Stirner's analysis of freedom is penetrating and profound. In the first place, to make freedom itself the goal would be to make it sacred and to fall back into idealism. Secondly, the negative freedom from physical constraint could not guarantee that one would be mentally free from prejudice and custom and tradition. Thirdly, the kind of positive freedom advocated by Hegel - serving a higher cause - would be no different from slavishly performing one's duty. As Stirner points out, the problem with all these theories is that they are based on 'the desire for a *particular* freedom', whereas it is only possible to be free if one acts with self-awareness, selfdetermination and free will.<sup>33</sup> But whatever stress Stirner places on individual freedom it is always subordinate to the ego, a means of achieving one's selfish ends. He therefore places ownness (*eigenheit*) above freedom. It follows for Stirner that 'all freedom is essentially - self-liberation - that I can have only so much freedom as I procure for myself by my ownness.'<sup>34</sup>

What is owned by the ego is property. This central concept in Stirner's thought is equated with actual possession, but the ego can also look on everything as a candidate for ownership. The only limit to property is the possessor's power: 'I think it belongs to him who knows how to take it, or who does not let it be taken from him.'<sup>35</sup> The egoist can, however, never forfeit what is most important - the ego. He can treat everything else 'smilingly' and 'with humour', whether he succeeds or fails in the battle to acquire property.<sup>36</sup> Thus, while Stirner usually urges the

maximum exploitation of others and the world, at times he implies an almost Stoic acceptance of the limitations of one's power.

## Politics

While most anarchists make a sharp distinction between the State and society, and reject the former in order to allow the peaceful and productive development of the latter, Stirner rejects both the State and society in their existing form. The State, he argues, has become a 'fixed idea' demanding my allegiance and worship. In practice, it is utterly opposed to my individuality and interest. Its sole purpose is always 'to limit, tame, subordinate the individual - to make him subject to some *generality* or other'<sup>37</sup> As such it is a 'stalking thistle-eater' and 'stands as 'an enemy and murderer of *ownness*'.<sup>38</sup>

Stirner finds no justification for the State in the theory of sovereignty and the Social Contract so dear to Rousseau. To claim that the State has a legitimate right to rule and make law because it expresses the will of the sovereign overlooks the irreducible fact that only the individual ego has a claim to sovereignty. Even if it could be shown that every individual had expressed the same will, any law enforced by the State would freeze the will and make the past govern the future. As for democracy based on majority rule, it leaves the dissenting minority in the same position as in an absolute monarchy. Since sovereignty inevitably involves domination and submission, Stirner concludes that there can be no such thing as a 'free State'. This criticism of the social contract theory is undoubtedly as trenchant as Godwin's.

In reality, the State is controlled by the bourgeoisie who developed it in the struggle against the privileged classes. The class of labourers therefore remains a 'power hostile to this State, this State of possessors, this "citizen kingship"'. The State also claims a monopoly of legitimate force: 'The State practises "violence", the individual must not do so. The State's behaviour is violence, and it calls its violence "law"; that of the individual, "crime"'.<sup>39</sup> But the State is not merely a legal superstructure imposed on society, issuing orders as laws; it penetrates into the most intimate relationships of its subjects and creates a false bonding; it is 'a tissue and plexus of dependence and adherence; it is a *belonging together*, a holding together...'<sup>40</sup>

Stirner makes it crystal-clear that 'I am free in *no* State', and declares that no one has any business 'to command *my* actions, to say what course I shall pursue and set up a code to govern it'.<sup>41</sup> But rather than turning to society as a healthy and beneficial alternative to the State, Stirner sees existing society as a coercive association, demanding that each member think of the well-being of the whole. Given the ontological priority of the individual, there is no organic society which can preserve individual freedom. The only way forward is therefore to transform both existing society and the State which by their very natures oppose and oppress the individual.

Given his account of human nature, Stirner, no less than Hobbes, sees society as a war of all against all. As each individual tries to satisfy his desires he inevitably comes into conflict with others: 'Take hold, and take what you require! With this, the war of all against all is declared. I alone decide what I will have'.<sup>42</sup> But while Stirner's view of human nature as selfish, passionate and power-seeking is close to that of Hobbes, they come to opposite conclusions. Where Hobbes called for an all-powerful State resting on the sword to enforce its laws and to curb the unruly passions of humanity, Stirner believed that it is possible and desirable to form a new association of sovereign individuals :

There we two, the State and I, are enemies. I, the egoist, have not at heart the welfare of this 'human society', I sacrifice nothing to it, I only utilize it; but to be able to utilize it completely I transform it rather into my property and my creature; that is, I annihilate it, and form in its place the *Union of Egoists*. 43

Unlike society which acts as a fused group, crystallized, fixed and dead, the union of egoists is a spontaneous and voluntary association drawn together out of mutual interest. Only in such a union will the individual be able to assert himself as unique because it will not possess him; 'you possess it or make use of it.'+! Although it will expand personal freedom, its principal object is not liberty but ownness, to increase the personal ownership of property. By voluntary agreement, it will enable the individual to increase his or her power, and by combined force, it will accomplish more than he or she could on their own. From an extreme individualist position, Stirner therefore destroys existing society only to reinvent it in a new form. Conscious egoists combine in a union because they realize that 'they care best for their welfare if they *unite* with others'.45 As in Adam Smith's market model of society, individuals co-operate only so far as it enables them to satisfy their own desires.

Although Stirner shares many of the assumptions of classical liberalism in his view of the self-interested, calculating individual, he did not in fact embrace its political theory. Political liberalism, he declared, abolished social inequalities; social liberalism (socialism) made people propertyless; and humanist liberalism, made people godless. While these goals were progressive to a degree all three creeds allowed the master to rise again in the form of the State.

Stirner does not endorse capitalism or the Protestant ethic behind it. The ascetic and striving capitalist is not for Stirner: 'Restless acquisition does not let us take breath, take a calm enjoyment: we do not get the comfort of our possessions.' He is extremely critical of the factory system which alienates workers from themselves and their labour: 'when every one is to cultivate himself into man, condemning a man to *machine-like labour* amounts to the same thing as slavery.' He accepts that only labour creates value. But when one performs mechanically a routine task a person's labour 'is nothing by itself, has no object in *itself*, is nothing complete in itself; he labours only into another's hands, and is *used* (exploited) by this other'.46 And to complete his remarkable analysis of alienation and exploitation, Stirner argues that just as work should be fulfilling and useful to oneself, so one should enjoy the fruits of one's labour.

At the same time, Stirner rejects the 'sacred' right of private property. He points out that Proudhon is illogical in calling property 'theft'; the concept 'theft' is only possible if one allows validity to the concept 'property' in the first place. He does not therefore call like Proudhon for possession as opposed to property but believes that they coincide since property is merely the expression for '*unlimited* dominion over somewhat (thing, beast, man)' which I can dispose of as I see fit. It is not right but only might which legitimizes property and I am therefore entitled 'to every property to which I - *empower* myself'.47

But surely if everyone tried to seize whatever they desired for themselves, an unequal society would result? Not so, says Stirner. In his proposed union of egoists, all would be able to secure enough property for themselves so that poverty would disappear. Stirner even urges workers to band together and strike to achieve better pay and conditions, and be prepared to use force to change their situation if need be. This did not make him a proto-communist, for he contemptuously dismissed the 'ragamuffin communism' of Weitling which would only lead to society as a whole controlling its individual members.48

While rejecting the social contract or liberal theory, Stirner reintroduces the notion of contract as the basis of social relations between egoists. Stirner's 'contract', however, is a voluntary agreement which is not binding. Egoists meet as rational calculators of their own interests, making agreements between each other. While Stirner claims that this would not involve any sacrifice of personal freedom, it would only be the case if all contracting parties had the same bargaining power, which they clearly do not. The idea of a relationship based on the gift is beyond Stirner's comprehension.

Since it is the law which defines a crime and the State which punishes the criminal, in a Stateless society comprising unions of egoists there would be no punishment for wrongdoers. Stirner rejects all idea of punishment; it only has meaning when it brings about expiation for injuring something sacred and there is nothing sacred in Stirner's scheme of things. Nor will he accept the idea of using curative means to deal with wrongdoers since this is only the reverse side of punishment. Where the latter sees in an action a sin against right, the former takes it as a sin of the wrongdoer against himself. This insight is overlooked by most anarchists who prefer 'rehabilitation' to punishment. Rejecting the notion of 'crime' and 'disease', Stirner insists that no actions are sinful; they either suit me or do not suit me.

In place of punishment, Stirner suggests that individuals take the law into their own hands and demand 'satisfaction' for an injury.<sup>49</sup> But while this suggests an authoritarian trend in Stirner's thought, he maintains that conscious egoists would eventually see the advantage of making peaceful agreements through contract rather than resorting to violence. The aim after all is to enjoy life.

The reason why the State and even formal institutions of society can be done away with and replaced by a union of egoists is because we are more or less equal in power and ability. It is enough for people to become fully and consciously egoist to end the unequal distribution of power which produces a hierarchical society with servants and masters. A long period of preparation and enlightenment is not therefore necessary, as Godwin argues, before establishing a free society. People simply have to recognize what they are: 'Your nature is, once for all, a human one; you are human natures, human beings. But just because you already are so, you do not still need to become so.'<sup>50</sup>

In the 'war of each against all', force might be necessary to change society and redistribute wealth. It might also be used to free oneself from the State. The State calls the individual's violence 'crime' and 'only by crime does he overcome the State's violence when he thinks that the State is not above him, but he is above the State.' But this is not the only way; we can withdraw our labour and the State will collapse of itself: 'The State rests on the - *slavery of labour*. If *labour* becomes *free*, the State is lost.'<sup>51</sup>

In the final analysis Stirner goes beyond any violent revolution which seeks to make new institutions in his famous celebration of individual selfassertion and rebellion. He calls on individuals to refuse to be arranged and governed by others:

Now, as my object is not the overthrow of an established order but my elevation above it, my purpose and deed are not a political and social, but (as directed myself and my ownness alone) an *egoistic* purpose and deed.

The revolution commands one to make *arrangements*; the insurrection demands that he *rise or exalt himself*.<sup>52</sup>

Stirner does not celebrate the will to power over others but rather over oneself. If all withdrew into their own uniqueness, social conflict would be diminished and not exacerbated. Human beings might be fundamentally selfish but it is possible to appeal to their selfishness to make contractual agreements among themselves to avoid violence and conflict and to pursue their own selfish interests.

The problem with Stirner is that, given his view of human beings as self-seeking egoists, it is difficult to imagine that in a free society they would not grasp for power and resort to violence to settle disputes. Without the sanction of moral obligation, there is no reason to expect that agreements would be enacted. If such agreements were only kept out of prudence, then it would seem pointless making them in the first place. Again, to say that because human beings have a substantial equality, a truce would emerge in the struggle for power seems unlikely. Finally, an extreme egoist might well find it in his interest to seize State power or manipulate altruists to serve his ends rather than form voluntary unions of free individuals .

Like Hobbes', Stirner's model of human nature would seem to reflect the alienated subjectivity of his own society. He applied the assumptions of capitalist economics to every aspect of human existence and reproduced in everyday life what is most vicious in capitalist institutions. As such his view differs little from that of Adam Smith, whose *Wealth of Nations* he translated into German, and he stands in the tradition of possessive individualism.<sup>53</sup>

In the final analysis Stirner is not consistent in his doctrine of amoral egoism. The consistent egoist would presumably keep quiet and pursue his own interest with complete disregard for others. Yet by recommending that everyone should become an egoist, Stirner implies a moral ground. A complete egoist might encourage others to act altruistically towards him, but Stirner asks others, 'Why will you not take courage now to really make *yourselves* the central point and the main thing altogether?'<sup>56</sup> Again, Stirner may reject all objective values, but he celebrates some values, even if they are only egoistic ones. He cannot therefore be called a nihilist for he takes some things seriously, especially the ego.

Although Stirner's egoist encounters another 'as an *I against* a You altogether different from me and in opposition to me', it implies nothing 'divisive or hostile'.<sup>55</sup> Again, love is selfish exchange, and should be based not on mercy, pity or kindness but 'demands *reciprocity* (as thou to me, so I to thee), does nothing "gratis", and may be won and - *bought*'.<sup>56</sup> Yet this cynical view did not prevent Stirner from feeling love and dedicating *The Ego and His Own* 'To my sweetheart Marie Diihnhardt'. In his later writing, Stirner even underplays the artificial and calculating nature of his proposed union of egoists, likening it to the companionship of children at play, or the relationship between friends or lovers in which pleasure is the principal motive.<sup>57</sup>

Stirner's corrosive egoism makes him reject society as an organic being, but his celebration of the individual does not lead him to deny the existence of others. Sartre may have found that 'Hell is other people', but for Stirner they are individuals who enable one to fulfil oneself by uniting with them. As Emma Goldman pointed out, Stirner is not merely the apostle of the theory ' *each for himself, the devil take the hind one* ' .<sup>58</sup>

Marx's and Engels' rightly accused Stirner of being still sufficiently Hegelian to have an idealist approach to history, believing that 'concepts should regulate life'.<sup>59</sup> Looking for the 'sacred' everywhere to overcome, he overlooked the material base of society. This led him to believe that it was only necessary to change ideas about the individual's relationship to the State for it to wither away. He was also guilty of doing precisely what he reproached Feuerbach for in his attack on the 'holy', implying that it is only a matter of destroying mental illusions to liberate humanity. Again,

while rejecting abstractions, Stirner's concept of the 'ego' is itself an abstraction and he fails to recognize that the individual is a set of relationships. Finally, Stirner does not go far enough in urging the workers merely to strike and claim the product of their labour. But while all this may be true, it is not enough to dismiss Stirner as a 'petit-bourgeois utopian' as Marxists have done, or to suggest that he was a harbinger of fascism.

Stirner is an awkward and uncomfortable presence. By stating things in the most extreme way, and taking his arguments to their ultimate conclusions, he jolts his readers out of their philosophical composure and moral smugness. His value lies in his ability to penetrate the mystification and reification of the State and authoritarian society. His criticism of the way communism can crush the individual is apt, and he correctly points out that a workers' State is unlikely to be any freer than the liberal State. Beyond this, he demonstrates brilliantly the hold 'wheels in the head' have upon us: how abstractions and fixed ideas influence the very way we think, and see ourselves, how hierarchy finds its roots in the '*dominion of thoughts, dominion of mind*'.<sup>60</sup> *He lifts the social veil, undermines the worship of* abstractions, and shows how the world is populated with 'spooks' of our own making. He offers a powerful defence of individuality in an alienated world, and places Subjectivity at the centre of any revolutionary project. While his call for self-assertion could lead to violence and the oppression of the weak, and his conscious egoism is ultimately too limited to embrace the whole of human experience, he reminds us splendidly that a free society must exist in the interest of all individuals and it should aim at complete self-fulfilment and enjoyment. The timid and nondescript teacher at a girls' academy turned out to be one of the most enduringly unsettling thinkers in the Western tradition.

# Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: *The Philosopher of Poverty*

PIERRE-JOSEPH PROUDHON WAS the first self-styled anarchist, deliberately adopting the label in order to provoke his opponents, who saw anarchy as synonymous with disorder. In *What is Property?* (1840), his first work to bring him notoriety, he presented his paradoxical position in the eloquent and classical French prose which earned him the admiration of Sainte-Beuve and Flaubert:

'You are a republican.' Republican, yes, but this word has no precise meaning. Res publica, that is, the public good. Now whoever desires the public good, under whatever form of government, can call himself a republican. Kings too are republicans. 'Well, then you are a democrat?' No. 'What, you cannot be a monarchist?' No. 'A Constitutionalist?' Heaven forbid! 'Then you must be for the aristocracy.' 'Not at all. 'Do you want a mixed government?' Even less. 'What are you then?' I am an anarchist.

'I understand, you are being satirical at the expense of government!' Not in the least. I have just given you my considered and serious profession of faith. Although I am a strong supporter of order, I am in the fullest sense of the term, an anarchist.'

As his famous maxims 'Property is Theft', 'Anarchy is Order', and 'God is Evil' imply, Proudhon gloried in paradox. He is one of the most contradictory thinkers in the history of political thought, and his work has given rise to a wide range of conflicting interpretations. He is also one of the most diffuse writers: he published over forty works and left fourteen volumes of correspondence, eleven volumes of notebooks and a large number of unpublished manuscripts.

To have a clear understanding of Proudhon is no easy task. He did not always digest his learning and he made no attempt to be systematic or consistent in the presentation of his arguments. He could appreciate both sides of any question but was often uncertain which side to adopt: truth for him tended to be the movement between two opposites. The exact meaning of his work is further obscured by the fact that he changed his mind several times throughout his career.

His style did not help matters either. At its best, it can be clear and eloquent, but it too often becomes diffuse and turbid. He was given to polemical exaggeration, and did not know when to stop. Much to the bemusement of his opponents and the confusion of his critics, he was a self-conscious ironist.

Like many social thinkers in the mid-nineteenth century, Proudhon combined social theory with philosophical speculation. He dived boldly into almost every sphere of human knowledge: philosophy, economics, politics, ethics and art were all grist to his mill. He held outrageous views on government, property, sexuality, race, and war. Yet behind his voluminous and varied output there was an overriding drive for justice and freedom.

He shared his century's confidence that reason and science would bring about social progress and expand human freedom. He saw nature and society governed by laws of development and

believed that if human beings lived in harmony with them they could become free. Freedom thus becomes a recognition of necessity: only if man knows his natural and social limits can he become free to realize his full potential. From this perspective Proudhon considered himself to be a 'scientific' thinker and wanted to turn politics into a science. But although he liked to think that his 'whole philosophy is one of perpetual reconciliation', the dialectical method he adopted often failed to reach a satisfactory resolution of its contradictory ideas.<sup>2</sup>

Proudhon would often present himself as an isolated and eccentric iconoclast. In 1848, he wrote: 'My body is physically among the people, but my mind is elsewhere. My thinking has led me to the point where I have almost nothing in common with my contemporaries by way of ideas!' He liked to think of himself as the 'excommunicated of the epoch' and was proud of the fact that he did not belong to any sect or party.<sup>3</sup> In fact, this was more a pose than a correct assessment.

After the publication of *What is Property?* in 1840, Proudhon soon began to wield considerable influence. Marx hailed it as a 'penetrating work' and called it 'the first decisive, vigorous and scientific examination of property'.<sup>4</sup> Proudhon began to haunt the imagination of the French bourgeoisie as *l'homme de fa terreur* who embodied all the dangers of proletarian revolution. As the French labour movement began to develop, his influence grew considerably. His ideas dominated those sections of the French working class who helped form the First International and the largest single group in the Paris Commune of 1871 were Proudhonians. After Bakunin's rupture with Marx, which marked the parting of the ways of the libertarian and statist socialists, the organ of the first militant anarchist group based in Switzerland asserted: 'Anarchy is not an invention of Bakunin . . . Proudhon is the real father of anarchy'.<sup>5</sup> And Bakunin himself was the first to admit that 'Proudhon is the master of us all'.<sup>6</sup> Proudhon's stress on economic before political struggle and his call for the working class to emancipate themselves by their own hands also made him the father of anarcho-syndicalism. Proudhon's disciples not only founded the Confederation Generale du Travail, the French trade union movement, but Fernand Pelloutier in his Federation des Bourses du Travail tried to educate the working class along mutualist lines as laid out by Proudhon.

Proudhon's influence was not only restricted to France. During the 1870s, his ideas inspired Pi y Margall and the federalists in Spain, and the narodniks in Russia. The great Russian socialist Alexander Herzen became a close friend. Tolstoy was struck by his ideas on property and government, sought him out, and borrowed the title of Proudhon's *War and Peace* (1861) for his great novel. In Germany, he had an enormous influence on the early socialist movement; in the 1840s, Lassalle was regarded as the greatest hope of Proudhonism in the country. In America, his views were given wide publicity, especially by Charles Dana of the Fourierist Brook Farm, and William B. Greene. Benjamin R. Tucker - 'always a Proudhonian without knowing it' - took Proudhon's *bon mot* 'Liberty is not the Daughter but the Mother of Order' as the masthead of his journal *Liberty*. In Britain, his ideas pervaded the syndicalist movement before the First World War, and even G. D. H. Cole's version of guild socialism closely resembled his proposals.<sup>7</sup>

This century Proudhon has remained as controversial as ever. His attempt to discover the laws which govern society has earned him the reputation as a founding father of sociology. His ideas have been adopted by socialist writers as applicable to developing countries in the Third World. He has also been taken up by the nationalists on the Right for his defence of small-property owners and French interests. He has not only been hailed as one of the 'masters of the counter-revolution of the nineteenth century', but as a 'harbinger of fascism'.<sup>9</sup> He continues to be most remembered, however, as the father of the historic anarchist movement.

Proudhon was born the son a tavern-keeper and cooper in Besancon in the department of Franche-Comte near the Swiss border. His family had been rugged and independent peasants in the mountainous region for generations and he boasted that he was 'moulded with the pure limestone of the Jura'.<sup>10</sup> He looked back to his early childhood as a lost golden age. From five to ten, he spent much of his time on his family's farm in the country, a life which gave a realistic base to his thinking. It probably encouraged his fiery individuality which led him later to declare: 'Whoever lays his hands on me to govern me is a usurper and a tyrant: and I declare him my enemy'.<sup>11</sup> It may also have fostered the puritanical and patriarchal attitudes which made him insist on chastity and see women primarily as subservient handmaids. What is certain is that the experience of growing up in the country left him with lifelong roots in the land and a powerful mystique of the earth. It fostered an ecological sensibility which led him to lament later the loss of 'the deep feeling of nature' that only country life can give:

Men no longer love the soil. Landowners sell it, lease it, divide it into shares, prostitute it, bargain with it and treat it as an object of speculation. Farmers torture it, violate it, exhaust it and sacrifice it to their impatient desire for gain. They never become one with it.<sup>12</sup>

At the age of twelve, the young Pierre-Joseph started work as a cellarboy in his father's business in Besancon. He managed however to get a scholarship to the College de Besancon, the best school in town with a fine academic reputation. Unfortunately, his father, better at brewing beer than doing business, was declared bankrupt when Pierre-Joseph was eighteen. He had to drop out of school and earn a living; in 1827 he decided to become a printer's apprentice. Proudhon's subsequent life as a craftsman gave him an independent view of society, while the personal control he exercised over his work only highlighted by contrast the alienation of the new factory system. It also gave him time and space to continue his studies. By 1838 he had not only developed a new typographical process but published an essay on general grammar.

Proudhon's workshop printed the publications for the local diocese and they inspired his own religious speculation. Not content to proof-read and set the writings of others, he started composing his own. He contributed to an edition of Bible notes in Hebrew (learning the language in the process) and later wrote for a Catholic encyclopaedia. The Bible became his principal authority for his socialist ideas. At the same time, his extensive knowledge of Christian doctrine did not deepen his faith but had the reverse effect and made him staunchly anti-clerical. He went on to reject God's providential rule and to conclude that 'God is tyranny and poverty; God is evil'.<sup>13</sup>

More important to his subsequent development, Proudhon came into contact with local socialists, including his fellow townsman Charles Fourier who rejected existing civilization with its repressive moral codes. He even supervised the printing of Fourier's greatest work *Le Nouveau monde industriel et social* (1829) which gave the clearest account of his economic views. It also advocated a society of ideal communities or 'phalansteries' destined 'to conduct the human race to opulence, sensual pleasures and global unity'.<sup>14</sup> Fourier maintained that if human beings attuned to the 'Universal Harmony', they would be free to satisfy their passions, regain their mental health, and live without crime. Proudhon acknowledged that he was a captive of this 'bizarre genius' for six whole weeks and was impressed by his belief in immanent justice, although he found his phalansteries too utopian and his celebration of free love distasteful.

Determined to strike out on his own, Proudhon left Besancon and spent several years as a journeyman wandering throughout France from town to town, finding work wherever he could.

His travels took him to Lyon, where he came into contact with workers advocating co-operative workshops, and to Paris, which he detested. His *tour de France* demonstrated only too well Alexis de Tocqueville's observation that authority in France at that time consisted of 'a single central power controlling the administration throughout the country' by means of rigid rules covering every administrative detail.<sup>15</sup>

Proudhon eventually returned to Besançon where he became a partner in a small printing firm. But he was not content to live the obscure life of a provincial printer; he could not make up his mind whether to become a scholar or to serve the working class. In 1838 he applied for a scholarship from the Besançon Academy to continue his studies, declaring himself to be 'born and raised in the working-class, and belonging to it in heart and mind, in manners and in community of interests and aspirations'.<sup>16</sup> Echoing the last testament of Henri de Saint-Simon, he asserted that he wanted to improve 'the physical, moral and intellectual condition of the most numerous and poorest class'.<sup>17</sup> He won the scholarship as well as the prize in a competition for an essay on *Sunday Observance*. The hero of the essay is Moses, founder of the Sabbath; he is depicted as a great social scientist for having laid the foundations of society based on 'natural' law and for discovering, not inventing, a code of laws. It was an achievement which Proudhon wanted to develop in drawing up the moral rules for people to live in equality and justice.

Proudhon dedicated his next work *What is Property? First Memoir* (1840) to the respectful scholars and burghers of the Besançon Academy. They were deeply shocked when they read the contents for the book questioned the twin pillars of their privilege: property and government. Not surprisingly, they insisted that the dedication be removed. As the obscure author later recalled, after a long; detailed and above all impartial analysis he had arrived at the astonishing conclusion that 'property is, from whatever angle you look at it, and whatever principle you refer it to - a contradictory notion! Since denying property means denying authority, I immediately deduced from my definition the no less paradoxical corollary that the true form of government is *anarchy*'.<sup>18</sup>

Proudhon replied to his own question 'What is Property?' with the bold paradox: 'Property is Theft'. It became his most famous slogan and its implications have reverberated ever since. But although Proudhon claimed that the principle came to him as a revelation and was his most precious thought, Morelly had expressed a similar idea in the previous century and Brissot had been the first to declare it during the French Revolution.

In fact, Proudhon had a very specific view of property and his slogan was not as revolutionary as it might appear. Stirner was quick to point out that the concept of 'theft' can only be possible if one allows the prior validity of the concept of property.<sup>19</sup> Proudhon did not attack private property as such; indeed, in the same work he called those communists who wanted to collectivize it as enemies of freedom. He was principally opposed to large property-owners who appropriated the labour of others in the form of revenue, "who claimed the *droit d'aubaine*. At this stage, he was in favour of property as long as it meant 'possession', with the privileges of ownership restricted to the usufruct or benefits accruing from it.

In *What is Property?*, Proudhon not only threw down a gauntlet at the capitalists but also at his contemporary socialists. He attacked bitterly communism as oppression and servitude. Man, he believed, likes to choose his own work, whereas the communist system 'starts from the principle that the individual is entirely subordinate to the collectivity'.<sup>20</sup> It therefore violates both the principles of equality and the autonomy of the conscience which are so close to Proudhon's heart.

Is there a way through the Scylla of accumulated property and Charybdis of communism? Can society exist without capital and government or a communist State? Proudhon thought he had discovered the answer. He was convinced that the authority man has over man is in inverse ratio to his intellectual development. In his own society, he believed that force and cunning were being limited by the influence of justice and would finally disappear in the future with the triumph of equality. He concluded:

Property and royalty have been decaying since the world began. Just as man seeks justice in equality, society seeks order in anarchy.

*Anarchy*, that is the absence of a ruler or a sovereign. This is the form of government we are moving closer to every day.<sup>21</sup>

Proudhon, as he acknowledged in a footnote, was fully aware that the meaning usually given to the word 'anarchy' is 'absence of principles, absence of laws', and that it had become synonymous with 'disorder'.<sup>22</sup> He deliberately went out of his way to affirm the apparent paradox that 'anarchy is order' by showing that authoritarian government and the unequal distribution of wealth are the principal causes of disorder and chaos in society. By doing so, he became the father of the historic anarchist movement.

*What is Property?* was under threat of being proscribed, but the Ministry of Justice eventually decided that it was too scholarly to be dangerous. Undeterred, Proudhon followed up his strident squib by a new memoir entitled *Warning to the Property Owners* (1842). He called for economic equality and insisted that the man of talent and genius should accept it gracefully. This time Proudhon was prosecuted but was acquitted by a jury who again thought the work was too complicated for ordinary people to understand.

In his desire to discover the underlying laws of society, Proudhon turned to philosophy and his next major work was *On the Creation of Order in Humanity* (1843). *His starting-point is similar to Lao Tzu's and Hegel's*. While we cannot penetrate to the essence of the universe, we can observe that it is in a state of flux. This constant movement in nature and society takes the form of a 'dialectical series', that is it operates through the reconciliation of opposing forces. Nevertheless, Proudhon is at pains to stress that he is not offering an idealist interpretation of the world in which creatures are just ideas. According to what he calls his 'ideo-realist theory', the 'reality of being' increases progressively from the mineral world through the vegetable and animal kingdoms to man. It reaches its highest peak in human society, which is 'the freest organization and least tolerant of the arbitrariness of those who govern it'. While stressing that 'Man is destined to live without religion', Proudhon argues that the moral law still remains eternal and absolute once its outer religious shell has been removed.<sup>23</sup>

Proudhon also began developing his view of history. He argued that a scientific study of history should be based on the influence of labour on society. But while recognizing that all events depend on general laws inherent in nature and man, Proudhon asserts that there is no inevitability in particular events which may 'vary infinitely according to the individual wills that cause them to happen'. The main facts are therefore arranged in a causal sequence, but history has little predictive value. Thus while progress in the long term is inevitable, there is room for human volition, deliberation and ingenuity: 'it is upon ourselves that we must work if we wish to influence the destiny of the world'.<sup>24</sup>

In the winter of 1844-5 Proudhon went to Paris to write his next mammoth onslaught against government and property. In the Latin Quarter, he met many political exiles, including Marx, Herzen and Bakunin, who all sought the acquaintance of the notorious author of *What is Property?* In their garrets and cafes, they discussed passionately Hegelian philosophy and revolutionary tactics. Bakunin and Herzen became permanent friends of Proudhon. Bakunin developed his ideas and spread them amongst the growing international anarchist movement, while Herzen took them to sow in the soil of Russian populism.

With Marx, relations were more problematic. At first Marx welcomed *What is Property?*, and he and Proudhon were friendly for a while in Paris. Indeed, Marx later claimed that he had introduced Proudhon to Hegel. Engels also wrote that Proudhon's writings had left him with the 'greatest respect' for the author.<sup>25</sup> Marx tried to get Proudhon to join their international communist group, but Proudhon became quickly disenchanted both with Marx's doctrinaire and dominating personality and his authoritarian communism. Their desultory correspondence ended when Proudhon agreed to collaborate on seeking the laws of society but insisted:

for God's sake, when we have demolished all *a priori* dogmas, do not let us think of indoctrinating the people in our turn . . . I wholeheartedly applaud your idea of bringing all shades of opinion to light. Let us have a good and honest polemic. Let us set the world an example of wise and farsighted tolerance, but simply because we are leaders of a movement let us not instigate a new intolerance. Let us not set ourselves up as the apostles of a new religion, even if it be the religion of logic or reason.<sup>26</sup>

No doubt angered by Proudhon's implied accusation of intolerance, Marx chose not to answer the letter. Instead, when Proudhon's next work *System of Economic Contradictions*, or *The Philosophy of Poverty* appeared in 1846, Marx took the opportunity to attack the author at length. He wrote soon after reading the book that it was a 'formless and pretentious work', singling out its 'feeble Hegelianism' and false hypothesis of 'universal reason'.<sup>27</sup> In his more deliberate reply written in French, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx continued to portray Proudhon as a petty-bourgeois idealist who failed to recognize that human nature is not an unchanging essence but a product of history. His principal argument was that Proudhon's individualistic economic model made him see humanity or society as a static 'final subject'.<sup>28</sup> Henceforth, Marx invariably referred to Proudhon in his writings as a 'bourgeois socialist' or as a socialist 'of the small peasant and mastercraftsman'.<sup>29</sup> It would seem that Marx either simply failed to understand Proudhon's book, or deliberately misrepresented it.

Proudhon was furious. He considered writing a reply for a time but contented himself with a note in his diary (23 September 1847) to the effect that 'Marx is the tapeworm of socialism!' Their parting of the ways marked the beginning of the split between the libertarian and authoritarian socialists which came to a head in the dispute between Marx and Bakunin within the First International. Marx continued to attack Proudhon for advocating class collaboration and proscribing trade-union and parliamentary activity, and he could never forgive him the fact that the French working class adopted his ideas rather than his own.

The two great volumes of Proudhon's *System of Economic Contradictions*, or *The Philosophy of Poverty* were published in 1846. As Marx observed, it was full of sub-Hegelian dialectics and Proudhon freely admitted later that at this stage in his life he was 'intoxicated with the dialectic'.<sup>30</sup> In *On the Creation of Order in Humanity* (1843), he had already adopted Fourier's notion

of a 'serial law' of development in both nature and society which he called the 'Serial Dialectic'. Now in the *Economic Contradictions*, he adopted the Kantian term of 'antinomies' to express Hegel's dialectic: the 'theory of antinomies', he wrote, 'is both the representation and the base of all movement in customs and institutions.'<sup>31</sup> By assuming that laws of development applied both to the material world and human society, Proudhon hoped that the discovery of these laws would turn politics and economics into a science. In practice, however, his use of the dialectic was invariably wooden and mechanical and Marx rightly observed that his antinomies were presented as mutually exclusive entities. It was all very well for Proudhon to assert that 'My whole philosophy is one of perpetual reconciliation', but in the *Economic Contradictions* he failed to reach a satisfactory synthesis, arguing for instance that property is 'liberty' as well as 'theft'.<sup>32</sup>

It was in this work that Proudhon declared that 'God is Evil' and that 'for as long as men bow before altars, mankind will remain damned, the slave of kings and priests'.<sup>33</sup> He also returned to his twin onslaught on government and property. He was critical of all forms of political democracy. While better than autocracy, constitutional government tends to be unstable and can become an instrument of bourgeois domination or degenerate into dictatorship. Even direct democracy is unacceptable since it often prevents subjects executing their own decisions; on occasion, it can be worse than autocracy since it claims legitimacy in oppressing its citizens. As for communism, Proudhon was particularly dismissive:

The communists in general are under a strange illusion: fanatics of State power, they claim that they can use the State authority to ensure, by measures of restitution, the well-being of the workers who created the collective wealth. As if the individual came into existence after society, and not society after the individual.<sup>34</sup>

Not surprisingly, *Economic Contradictions* brought Proudhon further notoriety and hostility from the Right and the Left.

On the positive side, Proudhon elaborated in the work his economic system of mutualism. It was intended to be a 'synthesis of the notions of private property and collective ownership' and to avoid the abuses of both. <sup>35</sup> In place of laissez-faire and State control, he put forward a 'natural' economy based on work and equality, a kind of socialism based on exchange and credit. Accepting the labour theory of value, he argued that workers should form associations to exchange the products of their work, the value of which would be calculated by the amount of necessary labour time involved.

He later described his system of mutualism as the 'ancient law of retaliation, *an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life*' applied to the tasks of labour and fraternity. The workers themselves would control their own means of production. They would form small as well as large associations, especially in the manufacturing and extractive industries. As mutualism developed economic organization would replace the political one and the State would eventually wither away. In this system 'the labourer is no longer a serf of the State, swamped by the ocean of the community. He is a free man, truly his own master, who acts on his own initiative and is personally responsible.'<sup>36</sup> As people began to reach one common level, social harmony would prevail.

It would not however be a state of complete equality, for the industrious would be rewarded more than the lazy. Proudhon had a strong Puritan streak which made him see idleness as a vice and work as a virtue in itself: 'It is not good for man to live in ease', he declared. He also

praised poverty for being clean and healthy: 'the glorification of poverty in the Gospel is the greatest truth that Christ ever preached to men'.<sup>37</sup> The positive aspect of Proudhon's frugality is the contention that if men limited their needs and lived a simple life, nature would provide enough for all. He did not moreover condemn luxury outright. He did not think that abundance would ever exist in the sense of there being more goods and services than were consumed, but he was ready to admit affluence into his mutualist scheme if it were spread fairly around.

It was not long before Proudhon had a chance to put his ideas into practice. He had moved to live in Paris in 1847, and a year later revolution broke out and the monarchy of Louis Philippe was overthrown. Concerned that it was a revolution 'made without ideas', Proudhon threw himself into the struggle. He spoke at many of the popular clubs and in February 1848 brought out *Le Representant du Peuple*. Its circulation soared to forty thousand. Closed by the public censor, it was resurrected three times under a different name. In his *Journal du Peuple*, he issued in November 1848 a mutualist manifesto which anticipated aspects of modern industrial 'selfmanagement'. While defending property and the family, he called for 'the free disposition of the fruits of labour, property without usury'. Above all, he insisted: 'We want the unlimited liberty of man and of the citizen, except for the respect of the liberty of others: liberty of association, liberty of assembly, liberty of religion, liberty of the press, liberty of thought and speech, liberty of work, commerce and industry, liberty of education, in a word, absolute liberty'.<sup>38</sup>

Proudhon also made a brief foray into parliamentary politics at the time. He was elected to the National Assembly for the Seine *departement* in June 1848, and in the autumn presidential elections supported the leftist candidate Raspail. In keeping with his principles, he voted against the new constitution of the Second Republic simply because it was a constitution which would prevent further progress. He tried to pose the social question before political issues, calling for a partial moratorium on debts and rents. It was all part of his scheme for reducing property to possession without revenue. The proposal however caused an uproar in the assembly. He not only told the deputies that 'in case of refusal we ourselves shall proceed to the liquidation without you', but when asked what he meant by 'we' he declared: 'When I say we, I identify myself with the proletariat, and when I say you, I identify you with the bourgeois class.'<sup>39</sup> 'It is the social war!' cried the horrified deputies and voted out his motion 691 to 2.

His parliamentary experience was not a happy one and it only confirmed his belief that economic reform was more important than political change. 'Universal Suffrage', he came to realize, 'is the Counter-Revolution.' Elected only a fortnight before the June insurrection, he completely failed to anticipate it. As he wrote of this time:

As soon as I set foot in the parliamentary Sinai, I ceased to be in touch with the masses; because I was absorbed by my legislative work, I entirely lost sight of the current of events . . . One must have lived in that isolator which is called the National Assembly to realize how the men who are most completely ignorant of the state of the country are almost always those who represent it . . . fear of the people is the sickness of all those who belong to authority; the people, for those in power, are the enemy.<sup>40</sup>

Having realized the impossibility of bringing about fundamental change through parliament, Proudhon tried to set up a People's Bank with free credit to show the way for a mutualist transformation of the economy. Its business was to be limited to the exchange of commodities for

an equivalent sum of money and to the issue of interest-free loans. The values of commodities would be based on the sum of labour and the expense involved in their production. It was clearly a consensual strategy for change, for it would have most benefited the small businessmen and workers who shared the same interests. Moreover it did not effect the driving force of capitalism for Proudhon continued to believe that competition is 'the spice of exchange, the salt of work. To suppress competition is to suppress liberty itself.'<sup>41</sup> In the outcome, the effectiveness of the People's Bank was never put to the test for although it managed to enlist twenty-seven thousand members, it collapsed within a year.

## Michael Bakunin. *The Fanatic of Freedom*

BAKUNIN IS A PARADOXICAL THINKER, overwhelmed by the contradictory nature of the world around him. His life too was fun of contradictions. He was a 'scientific' anarchist, who adopted Marx's economic materialism and Feuerbach's atheism only to attack the rule of science and to celebrate the wisdom of the instincts. He looked to reason as the key to human progress and yet developed a cult of spontaneity and glorified the will. He had a desire to dominate as well as to liberate and recognized that 'the urge to destroy is also a creative urge'. He called for absolute liberty, attacking all forms of institutionalized authority and hierarchy only to create his own secret vanguard societies and to call for an 'invisible' dictatorship.

Not surprisingly, Bakunin in his own lifetime inspired great controversy, and it continues until this day. On the one hand, he has been called one of 'the completest embodiments in history of the spirit of liberty'" On the other, he has been described as 'the intellectual apologist for despotism', guilty of 'rigid authoritarianism'.<sup>2</sup> Camus maintained that he 'wanted total freedom; but he hoped to realize it through total destruction'.<sup>3</sup> It is usual to present him as a man 'with an impetuous and impassioned urge for action', or as an example of anarchist 'fervour in action'" Yet it has also been argued that he was primarily an abstract thinker who elaborated a philosophy of action.<sup>5</sup> Far from being the intellectual flyweight dismissed by Marx as a 'man devoid of all theoretical knowledge'; he increasingly appears to be a profound and original thinker.<sup>6</sup>

What is indisputable is that Bakunin had great charisma and personal magnetism. Richard Wagner wrote: 'With Bakunin everything was colossal, and of a primitive negative power . . . From every word he uttered one could feel the depth of his innermost convictions . . . I saw that this all destroyer was the love-worthiest, tender-hearted man one could possibly imagine'.<sup>7</sup> His magnanimity and enthusiasm coupled with his passionate denunciation of privilege and injustice made him extremely attractive to anti-authoritarians. In the inevitable comparisons with Marx, he appears the more generous and spontaneous. But his character remains as enigmatic as his theory is ambivalent. He attacked authority and called for absolute freedom, but admired those who were born to command with iron wills. He rejected arbitrary violence, but celebrated the 'poetry of destruction' and felt unable to condemn terrorists. He had a strong moral sense and yet doted on fanatics who believed that the revolution sanctifies all.

The contradictory nature of his life and thought has been put down to his 'innate urge to dominate' alongside a desire to rebel.<sup>8</sup> Others have hinted more darkly that Bakunin's eccentricity tottered on the verge of madness, that he was a 'little cracked' and showed 'hints of derangement'.<sup>9</sup>

It has even been argued that his violence and authoritarianism were rooted in Oedipal and narcissistic disorders and that his concern with freedom was born of 'weakness, fear and flight'.<sup>10</sup> From this perspective, his most genuine voice is that of a frightened youth.

Certainly Bakunin was brought up in a very special situation, and his relationships with his parents and siblings played a major part in shaping his personality. But he also suffered from being a superfluous aristocrat and intellectual who had no positive role to play under the despotic rule of Nicholas II. Herzen correctly observed that Bakunin had within him 'the latent power of

a colossal activity for which there was no demand'.<sup>11</sup> His early longing to feel part of the whole, fired by his passionate involvement with German idealism, also left an indelible mark which led him to seek salvation in the cataclysmic upheaval of revolution.

Despite recent interest in him as a case study of utopian or apocalyptic psychology, Bakunin made an outstanding contribution to anarchist thought and strategy. He undoubtedly broke new ground. His critique of science is profound and persuasive. He reveals eloquently the oppressive nature of modern States, the dangers of revolutionary government, and, by his own lamentable example, the moral confusion of using authoritarian means to achieve libertarian ends, of using secret societies and invisible dictators to bring about a free society. He developed anarchist economics in a collectivist direction. He widened Marx's class analysis by recognizing the revolutionary potential of the peasantry and the lumpenproletariat.

In his historic break with Marx and his followers in the First International Working Men's Association, he set the tone of the bitter subsequent disputes between Marxists and anarchists. By rejecting the political struggle and arguing that the emancipation of the workers must be achieved by the workers themselves, he paved the way for revolutionary syndicalism. In his own life, he turned anarchism into a theory of political action, and helped develop the anarchist movement, especially in France, Frenchspeaking Switzerland and Belgium, Italy, Spain and Latin America. He has not only be called the 'Activist-Founder of World Anarchism' but hailed as the 'true father of modern anarchism'.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, he became the most influential thinker during the resurgence of anarchism in the sixties and seventies.<sup>13</sup>

It is extremely difficult to assess Bakunin as a thinker. He was more of a popularizer than a systematic or consistent thinker. He was the first to admit that: 'I am not a scholar or a philosopher, not even a professional writer. I have not done much writing in my life and have never written except, so to speak, in self-defence, and only when a passionate conviction forced me to overcome my instinctive dislike for any public exhibition of myself'.<sup>14</sup> His writings were nearly always part of his activity as a revolutionary and as a result he left a confused account of his views written for different audiences. As in his life, there is a bewildering rush in his writing; just as he is beginning to develop an argument well, he drops it to pick up another. He not only appeals to abstract concepts like justice and freedom without properly defining them, but he often relies on cliches: the bourgeoisie are inevitably 'corrupt', the State always means 'domination', and freedom must be 'absolute'. His mental universe is Manichean, with binary opposites of good and evil, life and science, State and society, bourgeoisie and workers.

He wrote when he could during a lifetime of hectic travelling and agitation, but when begun his works sprawled in all directions. He rarely managed to finish a complete manuscript, and of his main works only *Statism* and *Anarchy* was published in his lifetime and *God and the State* soon after his death. The bulk of his writings therefore remain unedited drafts. As a result, he often repeats himself and appears inconsistent and contradictory. He talks for instance of the need for the 'total abolition of politics' and yet argues that the International Working Men's Association offers the 'true politics of the workers'.<sup>15</sup> He uses the term 'anarchy' both in its negative and popular sense of violent chaos as well as to describe a free society without the State.<sup>16</sup> This can partly be explained by the inadequacy of existing political language for someone trying to go beyond the traditional categories of political thought, but it also resulted from a failure to correct his drafts or order his thoughts. Yet for all the fragmentation, repetition, and contradiction, there emerges a recognizable leitmotif.

Bakunin was born on 30 May 1814 in the province of Tver, north-west of Moscow. He was the son of a retired diplomat, a member of a longestablished Russian family of the nobility who had become landed gentry. His mother, nee Muraviev, came from a family ennobled by Catherine the Great. He was the third of ten children, but the eldest son, with two elder and two younger sisters, followed by five brothers. He therefore by sex and age enjoyed a dominant position in the family, and by tradition would have inherited the family's property. This did not prevent him from doting on his sisters with whom he shared his most intimate feelings and ambitions. He later became extremely jealous of their suitors.

His father had liberal sympathies, while one of his cousins on his mother's side had been involved in the Decembrist uprising in 1825 against Tsar Nicholas I by a group of aristocrats and poets under the influence of Western ideas. Bakunin was eleven at the time and like Herzen and Turgeven belonged to the unfortunate generation which reached adulthood under the despotism of Nicholas I.

Bakunin grew up in a fine eighteenth-century house on a hill above a broad and slow river. He spent a comfortable childhood playing with his sisters on the family estate which had five hundred serfs. Nettlau suggested that Bakunin's family circle was the most ideal group to which he ever belonged, the 'model for all his organizations and his conception of a free and happy life for humanity in general'.<sup>17</sup> In fact, it would appear far from ideal. His father was forty when he married his young mother and she always sided with the old man. Bakunin in later years attributed 'his passion for destruction to the influence of his mother, whose despotic character inspired him with an insensate hatred of every restriction on liberty'.<sup>18</sup>

He certainly seems to have been a timid, gentle and withdrawn boy, although it goes too far to assert that his mature anarchism reflected an 'elemental, permanent dread of society' and that he created secret organizations in order to submerge and lose himself in them. <sup>19</sup> Although he later married, he allowed the children to be fathered by a close friend. His intimate relationship with his sisters, especially Tatiana, may also have accounted for his sexual impotence owing to an incest taboo. Certainly his later fantasies of fire and blood would appear to offer an outlet for his sexual frustration, or at least a partial sublimation of his repressed libido. His apocalyptic visions undoubtedly fulfilled some profound psychological need.

Bakunin received a good education from private tutors, but when he reached fifteen, it was decided to send him to the Artillery School in St Petersburg. Here he experienced the pleasures of high society, and had his first love affair, although it seems to have been largely Platonic. In contrast to his 'pure and virginal' aspirations, he hated the 'dark, filthy and vile' side of barrack life.<sup>20</sup> He graduated and was gazetted as an ensign early in 1833, being posted to an artillery brigade in Poland.

The sensitive and thoughtful young aristocrat quickly found garrison life boring and empty. Everything in him demanded activity and movement, but as he wrote to his parents 'my strong spiritual urges, in their vain fight against the cold and insuperable obstacles of the physical world, sometimes reduce me to exhaustion, induce a state of melancholy . . .'<sup>21</sup> Taking his future into his own hands, Bakunin resigned from the army and decided to go to Moscow in 1836 to teach and to study philosophy.

He did much more of the latter. He found in German Idealism a meaning and purpose lacking in the lifeless chaos of the world around him. The new philosophy, he wrote to a friend is 'like a Holy Annunciation, promises a better, a fuller, more harmonious life'.<sup>22</sup> In August 1836, he wrote enthusiastically to his sisters that, strengthened by their love, he had overcome his fear of the

external world: 'My inner life is strong because it is not founded on vulgar expectation or on worldly hopes of outward good fortune; no, it is founded on the eternal purpose of man and his divine nature. Nor is my inner life afraid, for it is contained in your life, and our love is eternal as our purpose.' While he recommends the 'religion of divine reason and divine love' to be the basis of their life, he had already decided to devote his life to expanding the freedom of all beings:

Everything that lives, that exists, that grows, that is simply on the earth, should be free, and should attain self-consciousness, raising itself up to the divine centre which inspires all that exists. Absolute freedom and absolute love - that is our aim; the freeing of humanity and the whole world - that is our purpose.<sup>23</sup>

Whilst in Moscow, Bakunin came under the spell of Fichte, who believed that freedom is the highest expression of the moral law and saw the unlimited Ego as striving towards consciousness of its own freedom. He translated in 1836 Fichte's *Lectures on the Vocation of the Scholar*, his first publication. He was also intoxicated by Hegel who argued that the real is the rational and presented history as the unfolding and realization of Spirit in a dialectical reconciliation of opposites. He translated in 1838 Hegel's *Gymnasial Lectures* with an introduction: this was the first of Hegel's works to appear in Russian. Overwhelmed by their visions of wholeness, Bakunin began to swing from self-assertion and self-surrender: 'One must live and breathe only for the Absolute, through the Absolute . . .', he wrote to his sister Varvara. <sup>24</sup>

Like many of his generation, it was natural for Bakunin to search for enlightenment in Europe. After five years in Moscow, he decided in 1840 to go to Berlin to study Hegelianism at first hand. He made friends there with the radical poet Georg Herwegh and the publicist Arnold Ruge. Young intellectuals like Feuerbach, Bauer and Stirner were also involved in developing a left-wing critique of Hegel, rejecting his idealism and religion in favour of materialism and atheism. Bakunin was particularly impressed by Feuerbach's anthropological naturalism, and adopted his materialist and progressive view of history in which the human species gradually grows in consciousness and freedom. For many years thereafter, he apparently planned to write a book on Feuerbach, whom he called the 'disciple and demolisher of Hegel'.<sup>25</sup> The Left-Hegelians also found the existing State a principle which had to be negated in order to realize the higher synthesis of a free society. Bakunin, like Marx, was deeply influenced, and a reading of *Politics for the Use of the People* (1837) by the French religious socialist Lamennais further directed his energies towards the improvement of the human condition.

But it was not all study in Berlin. Bakunin moved in Russian *emigre* circles, and met Turgenev who later modelled the hero of his novel *Rudin* (1856) on the young Bakunin; and Belinsky, who believed in universal revolution and saw the young Bakunin as a bizarre mixture of comic poseur and vampire.

Bakunin also began to formulate his own ideas. In 1842, he went to Dresden in Saxony and published in April in Arnold Ruge's *Deutsche Jahrbucher* an article on 'The Reaction in Germany'. It advocated the negation of the abstract dialectic and rejected any reconciliation between opposing forces. It also called for revolutionary practice, ending with the famous lines:

Let us therefore trust the eternal Spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is the unfathomable and eternal source of all life. The passion for destruction is a creative passion, too!<sup>26</sup>

The article launched Bakunin on his revolutionary career. From now on he began to preach revolution to the people rather than universal love to his sisters. He experienced the period of 1841-2 as a watershed in his life: 'I finally rejected transcendental knowledge', he later wrote, 'and threw myself headlong into life.'<sup>27</sup> He saw it as marking an irreversible transition from abstract theory to practice: 'To know truth', he wrote to his family at the time, 'is not only to think but to live; and life is more than a process of thought: life is a miraculous realization of thought.'<sup>28</sup>

Bakunin in fact did not abandon philosophy for mere action, but rather began to develop a new philosophy of action. And far from recovering from the disease of German metaphysics, he retained much of its influence, particularly its dialectical movement and search for wholeness. The longing to become one with the Absolute was transformed into a desire to merge with the people. His yearning to be a complete human being and save himself now combined with a drive to help others. At the end of 1842, he characteristically had a discussion with Ruge about 'how we must liberate ourselves and begin a new life, in order to liberate others and pour new life into them'.<sup>29</sup> The need for movement and excitement was the same, only the object changed. As he wrote later in his *Confessions*:

There was always a basic defect in my nature: a love for the fantastic, for unusual, unheard-of adventures, for undertakings that open up a boundless horizon and whose end no one can foresee. I would feel suffocated and nauseated in ordinary peaceful surroundings . . . my need for movement and activity remained unsatisfied. This need, subsequently, combined with democratic exaltation, was almost my only motive force.<sup>30</sup>

Bakunin left Saxony in 1843 and went to Ziirich in Switzerland, where he met and was deeply impressed by Wilhelm Weiding. A self-educated German communist, Weiding preached a form of primitive Christianity which predicted the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. He had written in 1838 the first communist programme for a secret German organization called the 'League of the Just'. Bakunin wrote to Ruge about his 'really remarkable book' *Guarantees of Harmony and Freedom*, quoting the passage: 'The perfect society has no government, but only an administration, no laws but only obligations, no punishments, but means of correction.'<sup>31</sup> Coupled with a reading of the 'immortal Rousseau', Weitling helped Bakunin stride towards anarchism.

In an unfinished article on *Communism*, written in 1843, Bakunin was already laying the foundations of his future political philosophy with its faith in the people: 'Communism derives not from theory, but from practical instinct, from popular instinct, and the latter is never mistaken.' By the people, he understood 'the majority, the broadest masses, of the poor and oppressed'.<sup>32</sup> But he was not entirely under Weiding's sway for he criticized his ideal society as 'not a free society, a really live union of free people, but a herd of animals, intolerably coerced and united by force, following only material ends utterly ignorant of the spiritual side of life'.<sup>33</sup>

The relation between the ardent aristocrat and tailor was cut short when Weitling was imprisoned. Hearing of their connection, the Tsarist government called Bakunin back to Russia. He refused to comply, and after a short stay in Brussels, made his way to Paris early in 1844.

It proved a crucial period in his development. He met Proudhon, still basking in the notoriety of *What is Property?* (1840) and putting the finishing touches to his *Economic Contradictions*, or *Philosophy of Poverty* (1844). He exclaimed to an Italian friend while reading Proudhon: 'This is the right thing!'<sup>34</sup> They engaged in passionate discussions, talking all night about Hegel's

dialectic. Bakunin was impressed by his critique of government and property, and Proudhon no doubt also stressed the authoritarian dangers of communism and the need for anarchy. But it was Proudhon's celebration of freedom which most fired Bakunin's overheated imagination. By May 1845, Bakunin was writing home: 'My . . . unconditional faith in the proud greatness of man, in his holy purpose, in freedom as the sole source and sole aim of his life, has remained unshaken, has not only not diminished but grown, strengthened . . .'35

At the same time, while rejecting dictatorship and centralization, Bakunin still writes about a 'new revolutionary State' and the need for the 'secret and universal association of the International Brothers' to be the organ to give life and energy to the revolution. This anarchist vanguard movement would consist of 'a sort of revolutionary general staff, composed of dedicated, energetic, intelligent individuals, sincere friends of the people above all, men neither vain nor ambitious, but capable of serving as intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and the instincts of the people'.86

The rumbling dispute between Marx and his followers and Bakunin and his supporters came to a head in at the Basel Congress of the International in September 1869. Bakunin could only count on twelve of the seventy-five delegates but the force of his oratory and the charisma of his presence almost made the Congress approve his proposal for the abolition of the right of inheritance as one of the indispensable conditions for the emancipation of labour. The supporters of Marx argued that since the inheritance of property is merely a product of the property system, it would be better to attack the system itself. In the outcome, both the proposals of Bakunin and Marx were voted down but the issue led the partisans of collective property to split into two opposing factions. According to Guillaume, those who followed Marx in advocating the ownership of collective property by the State began to be called 'state' or 'authoritarian communists', while those like Bakunin who advocated ownership directly by the workers' associations were called 'anti-authoritarian communists', 'communist federalists' or 'communist anarchists'.87 The terms 'collectivist' and 'communist' were still used loosely; Bakunin preferred to call himself a 'collectivist' by which he meant that since collective labour creates wealth, collective wealth should be collectively owned. He believed that distribution should take place according to work done, not according to need. The orthodox Marxist view is that Bakunin tried to seize control of the International and was motivated by personal ambition.85 A Russian emigre called Utin in Switzerland fuelled the controversy and rumours were circulated from Marx's camp that Bakunin was a Russian spy and unscrupulous in money matters. Yet Bakunin still admired Marx as a thinker and even took an advance from a publisher to do a Russian translation of the first volume of *Capital*. The real dispute was not between an ambitious individual (Bakunin) and an authoritarian one (Marx), or even between conspiracy and organization, but about different revolutionary strategies.

Bakunin now devoted all his energies to inciting a European revolution which he hoped would eventually embrace the entire world. In a series of hastily written speeches, pamphlets and voluminous unfinished manuscripts, he tried to set out his views. In the process, he began to transform anarchism into a revolutionary movement. .

It was in Russia that he thought the world revolution could begin. Early in 1870, he criticized the attempt of his old friend Herzen to appeal to the Tsar and the Russian aristocracy to bring about reform. In particular, he asked him to reject the State, precisely because he was socialist: 'you practise State socialism and you are capable of reconciling yourself with this most dangerous

and vile lie engendered by our century - official democracy and red bureaucracy.'<sup>89</sup> According to Bakunin, the only way to transform Russia was through popular insurrection.

In his search for likely catalysts, Bakunin became involved at this time with a young revolutionary called Sergei Nechaev. It proved a disastrous relationship and did immense harm to the anarchist movement. Nechaev, who later inspired the character Peter Verkhovensky in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, was an extraordinary character: despotic, power-hungry, egoistic, rude and yet strangely seductive. He exemplifies the unscrupulous terrorist who will stop at nothing to realize his aim.

Nechaev managed to convince both Bakunin and Herzen's colleague Ogarev that he had a secret organization with a mass following in Russia. At first, he seemed to Bakunin the ideal type of the new breed of Russian revolutionaries, a perfect conspirator with a piercing mind and the *diable au corps*. '*They are charming these young fanatics*', Bakunin wrote to Guillaume, '*believers without a god, and heroes without flowering rhetoric*'.<sup>90</sup> Bakunin could not stop himself from being seduced by someone who seemed to have his own extreme energy and dedication, and that despite his tender years. He appeared to be a reincarnation of the legendary Russian bandits Stenka Razin and Pugachev.

Whilst in Geneva with Bakunin, Nechaev wrote between April and August 1869 a *Catechism of a Revolutionary* which proved to be one of the most repulsive documents in the history of terrorism. The guiding principle of this work is that 'everything is moral that contributes to the triumph of the revolution; everything that hinders it is immoral and criminal.' It calls upon the would-be revolutionary to break all ties with past society, to feel a 'single cold passion' for the revolutionary cause and to adopt the single aim of 'pitiless destruction' in order to eradicate the State and its institutions and classes. The second part of the pamphlet opens:

The revolutionary is a doomed man. He has no personal interests, no affairs, no sentiments, attachments, property, not even a name of his own. Everything in him is absorbed by one exclusive interest, one thought, one passion - the revolution.

The pamphlet not only recommends drawing up lists of persons to be exterminated but also declares that the central committee of any secret society should regard all other members as expendable 'revolutionary capital'.<sup>91</sup> Another unsigned pamphlet called *Principles of Revolution* written at the time, which has the stamp of Nechaev, declares in a similar vein:

We recognize no other activity but the work of extermination, but we admit that the forms in which this activity will show itself will be extremely varied - poison, the knife the knife, the rope etc. In this struggle, revolution sanctifies everything alike.<sup>92</sup>

Both works have been assigned jointly to Bakunin and Nechaev, and their alleged authorship has provoked bitter controversy.

Certainly Bakunin was impressed by the spontaneous energy of Russian brigands, and wrote to Nechaev 'these primitive men, brutal to the point of cruelty, have a nature which is fresh, strong and untouched!' He also came close to Nechaev's moral relativism when he declared that 'Where there is war there are politics, and there against one's will one is obliged to use force, cunning and deception.' The *Catechism of a Revolutionary* was written during a period of close co-operation between the two men, but though Bakunin may have helped with the writing, the

work most likely came in the main from Nechaev's hand. In the final analysis, Bakunin categorically repudiates Nechaev's 'Jesuitical system' and his unprincipled use of violence and deception. 'In your Catechism', he wrote unambiguously to Nechaev, 'you ... wish to make your own self-sacrificing cruelty, your own truly extreme fanaticism, a rule of life for the community.' He roundly condemns his 'total negation of man's individual and social nature'.<sup>93</sup>

Unlike Lenin who admired the *Catechism of a Revolutionary*, Bakunin would have no truck with Nechaev's nihilism. He came to doubt the existence of Nechaev's secret organization in Russia, and was repelled - while refusing to condemn - his political murder of a student called Ivanov. Bakunin finally broke with Nechaev after learning that his young protege had threatened with dire punishment the publisher's agent who had given an advance for a translation of *Capital* if he caused any difficulties. But the damage had been done. Their association earned Bakunin an unfounded reputation for terrorism, and the works were used selectively to justify the acts of later anarchist terrorists as well as to denigrate anarchist ideals. Bakunin went on to recommend the selective killing of individuals as a preliminary to social revolution and saw in Russian banditry the spearhead of the popular revolution, but he was undoubtedly repelled by Nechaev's total amorality.<sup>94</sup>

When the Franco-Prussian war broke out in July 1870, Bakunin's revolutionary hopes were aroused again for the first time since the Polish insurrection of 1863. Marx at first supported Prussia in its attempt to defeat a Bonapartist France he regarded as an obstacle to the working class. He wrote: 'If the Prussians are victorious, the centralization of the State power will be useful to the centralization of the German working class . . . On a world scale the ascendancy of the German proletariat over the French proletariat will at the same time constitute the ascendancy of our theory over Proudhon's'.<sup>95</sup> Bakunin on the other hand thought Prussian militarism even more dangerous than Bonapartism. He hoped that the defeat of the regime of Napoleon III would lead to a popular uprising of peasants and workers against the Prussian invaders and the French government, thereby destroying the State and bringing about a free federation of communes. To inspire such a revolutionary movement he wrote some draft Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis which made a unique contribution to the theory and practice of revolution.

Bakunin advocates the turning of the war between the two States into a civil war for the social revolution: a guerrilla war of the armed people to repulse a foreign army and domestic opponents in 'a war of destruction, a merciless war to the death'.<sup>96</sup> Once again, Bakunin expresses his love of destruction. His anarchy is not merely the peaceful and productive life of the community, the 'spontaneous self-organization of popular life' which will revert to the communes. It is also violent turmoil - nothing less than 'civil war'.<sup>97</sup> He argues that the only feasible alternative is to awaken 'the primitive ferocious energy' of the French people and to 'Let loose this mass anarchy in the countryside as well as in the cities, aggravate it until it swells like a furious avalanche destroying and devouring everything in its path'.<sup>98</sup>

On the more positive side, Bakunin emphasizes the revolutionary capacity of the peasantry while depicting them as noble savages: 'Unspoiled by overindulgence and indolence, and only slightly affected by the pernicious influence of bourgeois society'. He stresses the need for an alliance between peasants and workers but sees the city proletarians taking the revolutionary initiative. Although recognizing the key influence of economic conditions in bringing about social change, the voluntarist in Bakunin underlines the importance of the consciousness and will of the people in the process: 'the revolutionary temper of the working masses does not depend

solely on the extent of their misery and discontent, but also on their faith in the justice and the triumph of their cause.<sup>99</sup>

After the fall of the Second Empire and the establishment of the Third Republic, Bakunin went to Lyon in September 1870 with a few members of his clandestine Alliance to try to trigger off an uprising which he hoped would lead to a revolutionary federation of communes. It marked the beginning of the revolutionary movement which was to culminate in the Paris Commune the following spring. With the help of General Cluseret, Bakunin took over the Town Hall in Lyon and immediately declared the abolition of the State. On 25 September 1870, wall posters went up around town announcing:

ARTICLE 1: The administrative and governmental machinery of the state, having become impotent, is abolished.

ARTICLE 2: All criminal and civil courts are hereby suspended and replaced by the People's justice.

ARTICLE 3: Payment of taxes and mortgages is suspended. Taxes are to be replaced by contributions that the federated communes will have collected by levies upon the wealthy classes, according to what is needed for the salvation of France.

ARTICLE 4: Since the state has been abolished, it can no longer intervene to secure the payment of private debts.

ARTICLE 5: All existing municipal administrative bodies are hereby abolished. They will be replaced in each commune by committees for the salvation of France. All governmental powers will be exercised by these committees under the direct supervision of the People.

ARTICLE 6: The committee in the principal town of each of the nation's departments will send two delegates to a revolutionary convention for the salvation of France.

ARTICLE 7: This convention will meet immediately at the town hall of Lyon, since it is the second city of France and the best able to deal energetically with the country's defence. Since it will be supported by the People this convention will save France.  
TO ARMS!!!

In the event, the Lyon uprising was quickly crushed. But while it earned Marx's contempt, it was in keeping with Bakunin's strategy. As he explained in a letter to his fellow insurrectionist Albert Richard, Bakunin rejected those political revolutionaries who wanted to reconstitute the State and who gave Paris a primary role in the revolution. On the contrary:

There must be anarchy, there must be - if the revolution is to become and remain alive, real, and powerful - the greatest possible awakening of all the local passions and aspirations; a tremendous awakening of spontaneous life everywhere ... We must bring forth anarchy, and in the midst of the popular tempest, we must be the invisible pilots guiding the Revolution, not by any kind of overt power but by the collective dictatorship of all our allies, a dictatorship without tricks, without official tides, without official rights, and therefore all the more powerful, as it does not carry the trappings of power.<sup>100</sup>

In a fragment on 'The Programme of the Alliance' written at this time, Bakunin further elaborated on the correct relationship between his Alliance as a conscious revolutionary vanguard and the workers' movement in and outside the International. In the first place, he rejects class collaboration and parliamentary politics. Next, he attacks union bureaucracy in which the elected leaders often become 'absolute masters' of the rank-and-file, and replace popular assemblies by committees. Finally, he insists that his recommended libertarian organization is quite distinct from State structures since it involves the diffusion of power. Whereas the 'State is the organized authority, domination, and power of the possessing classes over the masses ... the International wants only their complete freedom, and calls for their revolt'. For Bakunin, the fundamental idea underlying the International is 'the founding of a new social order resting on emancipated labour, one which will spontaneously erect upon the ruins of the Old World the free federations of workers' associations'.<sup>101</sup> This rejection of parliamentary politics and insistence that the workers' organizations should reflect the structure of future society helped lay the foundations of the revolutionary syndicalist movement.

It is difficult not to conclude that Bakunin's invisible dictatorship would be even more tyrannical than a Blanquist or Marxist one, for its policies could not be openly known or discussed. It would be a secret party; it would operate like conspirators and thieves in the night. With no check to their power, what would prevent the invisible dictators from grasping for absolute power? It is impossible to imagine that Bakunin's goal of an open and democratic society could ever be achieved by distorting the truth and manipulating the people in the way he suggests.

It is not enough to excuse Bakunin's predilection for tightly organized, authoritarian, hierarchical secret organizations by appealing to his 'romantic temperament' or the oppression of existing States.<sup>102</sup> His invisible dictatorship is a central part of his political theory and practice, and shows that for all his professed love of liberty and openness there is a profound authoritarian and dissimulating streak in his life and work. His habit of simultaneously preaching absolute liberty in his polemics with the Marxists while defending a form of absolute dictatorship in his private correspondence with members of his clandestine Alliance would certainly seem to point to 'acute schizophrenia' on Bakunin's part.<sup>103</sup> His love of destruction and struggle also prevented him from realizing that it is impossible to employ violence and force as means to achieve libertarian and peaceful ends.

After the collapse of the Lyon uprising, Bakunin retreated to Locamo, deeply depressed. The Paris Commune in the spring of 1871, the greatest urban uprising in the nineteenth century, temporarily raised his hopes. It seemed to confirm his belief that a war could trigger off a social revolution. Harking back to the revolutions of 1793 and 1848, it also rejected centralized authority and experimented with women's rights and workers' control. Bakunin immediately recognized its decentralist and federalist tendencies; it was not Marx's proletarian dictatorship that it exemplified, but 'the bold and outspoken negation of the state', bringing about 'a new era of the final emancipation of the people and their solidarity'. In his essay *The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State*, Bakunin further wrote:

society in the future ought only to be organized from the bottom upwards, by the free association and federation of workers, in associations first, then in communes, regions, nations, and finally in a great international and universal federation. It is only then that the true and vital order of liberty and general happiness will be realized.<sup>104</sup>

The Lyon uprising and the Paris Commune inspired some of Bakunin's greatest writing. From the end of 1870 to 1872, he composed his first and last book, the sprawling *The Knouto-Gennanic Empire and the Social Revolution*. The strange title of the work was meant to suggest that there was an alliance between the Tsar of Russia on the one hand and Wilhelm I and Bismarck of the new German Empire on the other to use the Russian whip (*knout*) to prevent the social revolution. But the work went far beyond international politics and Bakunin developed his views on a whole range of subjects in an attempt to give a philosophical foundation to his anarchism. One section was published in 1882 as a pamphlet entitled *God and the State*; and became Bakunin's most famous work. For a long time, it was the only sizeable part of his writing translated into English.

## Philosophy

Although Bakunin was a philosophical idealist as a young man with a spiritual yearning to become part of the whole, he had since the early 1840s been a materialist and a determinist. But while he had become a militant atheist, he was not uncompromising; he did not want atheism to become a fundamental principle of the International for fear of alienating many superstitious peasants. Nothing, he felt, is more natural than that the people, especially in the country, should believe in God as the creator, regulator, judge, master and benefactor of the world. People would continue to believe in a Superior Being until a social revolution provided the means to realize their aspirations on earth and overcome their instinctive fear of the world around them. Religious beliefs are therefore not so much 'an aberration of mind as a deep discontent at heart. They are the instinctive and passionate protest of the human being against the narrowness, the platitudes, the sorrows, and the shame of a wretched existence'.<sup>105</sup>

Nevertheless, while recognizing religious belief as an inevitable consequence of the oppressive and miserable life here on earth, Bakunin goes out of his way to deny its metaphysical truth. He develops the Left-Hegelian critique of religion, to argue like Feuerbach that the religious heaven is nothing but a mirage in which man discovers his own image divinized. Christianity is for Bakunin the religion *par excellence* which exhibits the essence of every religious system, which is 'the impoverishment, enslavement, and annihilation of humanity for the benefit of divinity'.<sup>106</sup>

The idea of God implies '*the abdication of human reason and justice; it is the most decisive negation of human liberty, and necessarily ends in the enslavement of mankind, both in theory and practice*'. But since man is born free, slavery is not natural. As all Gods, according to Bakunin, desire to enslave man they too must be unnatural. Hence they cannot exist. Bakunin puts his ontological refutation of God in the form a syllogism: 'If God is, man is a slave; now, man can and must be free; then, God does not exist. I defy anyone whomsoever to avoid this circle.' Bakunin's sentiments might be admirable but his logic is faulty: he not only assumes paradoxically that God exists as an idea in order to disprove his existence, but his syllogism is only valid if we accept his initial premiss that the essence of God is always to enslave man. Be that as it may, Bakunin considers God to be such a threat to human liberty and virtue that he reverses the phrase of Voltaire to say '*if God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish him*'.<sup>107</sup>

Although dogmatically denying the existence of God, Bakunin is sceptical in his epistemology. There are inevitable limits to man's understanding of the world, and we must content ourselves with only 'a tiny bit of knowledge about our solar system'.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, Bakunin accepts the

reality of a Newtonian universe governed by natural laws. The laws are not known by nature itself, and are only of a relative character, but they are discovered by human reason as constant and recurrent patterns.

Yet Bakunin is not a mechanical materialist like Feuerbach. He adopts an evolutionary perspective and argues that the gradual development of the material world is a 'wholly natural movement' from the simple to the complex, from the lower to the higher, from the inferior to the superior, the inorganic to the organic.<sup>109</sup> But like Marx, he sees change occurring through the clash of opposite forces both in nature and society: 'the harmony of the forces of nature appears only as the result of a continual struggle, which is the real condition of life and of movement. In nature, as in society, order without struggle is death.'<sup>110</sup> There is thus a mutual interaction in nature which produces a 'natural authority' which dominates all life.

## Human Nature

When it comes to humanity's place in nature, Bakunin rejects all dualism which tries to separate the two. Indeed, far from being separate, 'Man forms with Nature a single entity and is the material product of an indefinite number of exclusively material causes.'<sup>111</sup> The human species is only one species amongst others, with two basic drives of sex and hunger. Nevertheless, Bakunin claims that the human world is the highest manifestation of animality. Our first ancestors, if not gorillas, were 'omnivorous, intelligent and ferocious beasts'.<sup>112</sup> But they were endowed to a higher degree than the animals of any other species with two faculties - the power to think and the desire to rebel. In addition, while denying free will in an absolute sense of some contra-causal autonomous power, Bakunin argues that man is alone among all the animals on earth in possessing a relatively free will in the sense of 'conscious self-determination'.<sup>113</sup> Due to his intelligence man can develop his will to modify his instinctive drives and regulate his own needs. It follows that moral responsibility exists but it is only relative.

It is the ability to think and to act deliberately which enables human beings to negate the animal element in themselves and to develop their consciousness and freedom. It is man's rational will which enables him to free himself gradually from the hostility of the external world. Whereas Jehovah wanted man to remain an 'eternal beast', ignorant and obedient, Satan urged him to disobey and eat of the tree of knowledge. As such, Satan is 'the eternal rebel, the first freethinker and the emancipator of worlds'.<sup>114</sup> Indeed, Bakunin believed that in general the vitality and dignity of an animal can be measured by the intensity of its instinct to revolt. The 'goddess of revolt', he declared in one of his resounding phrases, is the 'mother of all liberty'.<sup>115</sup>

As the human species revolts and rises from other animal species, they not only become more complete and free, but also more individual: 'man, the last and most perfect animal on earth, presents the most complete and remarkable individuality'.<sup>116</sup> Like Hegel, Bakunin saw the complete emancipation of the individual as the supreme aim of history which can only be achieved by growth in consciousness.

But while born with an innate ability to think and to rebel, Bakunin believed that human beings are almost entirely shaped by their environment, products of history and society. Every individual inherits at birth in different degrees the capacity to feel, to think, to speak and to will, but these rudimentary faculties are without content. It is society which provides the ideas and impressions which form the common consciousness of a people. It is the same with moral disposi-

tions. We are born with a capacity to be egoistic or sociable, but not innate moral characteristics. Our moral behaviour will result from our social tradition and education.

Man is therefore largely a product of his environment, but it does not follow that he is its eternal victim. In the final stage of his development, man, unlike other animal species, managed to transform the greater part of the earth, and to make it habitable for human civilization. Although an inseparable part of nature, man in the past came to conquer nature, turning 'this enemy, the first terrible despot, into a useful servant'. For all his evolutionary perspective and stress on the animal origins of man, Bakunin is no ecologist and believes that we must continually struggle against external nature: 'Man . . . can and should conquer and master this external world. He, on his part, must subdue it and wrest from it his freedom and humanity.'<sup>117</sup>

Although Bakunin refers to the human species in the habit of the day by the abstraction 'Man', he did not believe that he was merely an atomized creature. Indeed, 'Man is not only the most individual being on earth - he is also the most social being.' Bakunin totally rejects Rousseau's portrayal of primitive man as a self-sufficient individual living in isolation. Society is the basis of human existence: 'Man is born into society, just as an ant is born into an ant-hill or a bee into its hive.'<sup>118</sup> It is necessarily anterior to our thought, speech and will and we can only become humanized and emancipated in society. Outside society, not only would a human being not be free, he would not even become genuinely human, 'a being conscious of himself, the only being who thinks and speaks'.<sup>119</sup>

Society is also essential to our development. In the first place, the basis of morality can only be found in society, and the moral law to observe justice is a social fact, a creation of society. Secondly, human beings can only free themselves from the yoke of external nature through collective labour. Thirdly, a person can only realize his individual freedom and his personality through the individuals who surround him. Fourthly, solidarity is a fundamental law of human nature: 'All social life is nothing but the incessant mutual interdependence of individuals and of masses. All individuals, even the strongest and most intelligent, are at every moment of their lives both the producers and the products of the will and action of the masses.'<sup>120</sup>

## **Liberty and Authority**

Bakunin called himself 'a fanatical lover of Liberty; considering it as the only medium in which can develop intelligence, dignity, and the happiness of man'.<sup>121</sup> He invariably called for 'absolute liberty'. By liberty in this sense he did not mean the 'liberty' regulated by the State, nor the 'individual liberty' of the liberals who see the rights of individuals protected by the rights of the State. Nevertheless, Bakunin acknowledges that liberty has a natural and social context and is inevitably limited by certain boundaries. Without recognizing these limits, liberty remains an empty and abstract concept. Thus the only liberty which Bakunin believes worthy of the name is

the liberty which consists in the full development of all the material, intellectual and moral powers which are to be found as faculties latent in everybody, the liberty which recognizes no other restrictions than those which are traced for us by the laws of our own nature; so that properly speaking there are no restrictions, since these laws are not imposed on us by some legislator, beside us or above us; they are immanent in us, inherent, constituting the very basis of our being, material as well as

intellectual and moral; instead, therefore, of finding them a limit, we must consider them as the real conditions and effective reason for our liberty.<sup>122</sup>

Liberty for Bakunin is therefore a condition of being free from all external restraints imposed by man, but in keeping with natural laws. It cannot escape the Tao of things. Liberty thus becomes an inevitable consequence of natural and social necessity.

At the same time, liberty does not begin and end with the individual, as with Stirner, where the individual is a self-moving atom. Bakunin makes clear that 'absolutely self-sufficient freedom is to condemn oneself to nonexistence'; indeed such absolute independence is a 'wild absurdity' and the 'brainchild of idealists and metaphysicians'.<sup>123</sup>

Instead, Bakunin recognizes the social context of liberty; society is 'the root, the tree of freedom, and liberty is its fruit'.<sup>124</sup> He also acknowledges that the liberty of one must involve the liberty of all: I am truly free only when all human beings, men and women, are equally free, 'only in society and by the strictest equality'.<sup>125</sup> For Bakunin, liberty without equality means the slavery of the majority; equality without liberty means the despotism of the State and the unjust rule of a privileged class. Equality and liberty are therefore inextricably connected and confirm each other. It follows that the liberty of the individual 'far from halting as at a boundary before the liberty of others, finds there its confirmation and its extension to infinity; the illimitable liberty of each through the liberty of all, liberty by solidarity, liberty in equality ...'.<sup>126</sup> Bakunin correctly sees that liberty is meaningless unless people treat each other equally and have similar economic conditions in which to realize their potential.

Intimately connected with his notion of liberty is authority. Indeed, Bakunin defines liberty as an '*absolute rejection of any principle of authority*'.<sup>127</sup> Authority is the principal evil in the world: 'If there is a devil in human history, the devil is the principle of command. It alone, sustained by the ignorance and stupidity of the masses, without which it could not exist, is the source of all the catastrophes, all the crimes, and all the infamies of history'.<sup>128</sup> Since authority is the 'negation of freedom', Bakunin called for the revolt of the individual against all divine, collective and individual authority and repudiated both God and Master, the Church and the State.

But Bakunin was not so naive as to deny all power and authority at a stroke. All men possess a 'natural instinct for power' in the struggle for survival which is a basic law of life. This lust for power is however the most negative force in history and the best men amongst the oppressed necessarily become despots. Bakunin opposed power and authority precisely because they corrupt those who exercise them as much as those who are compelled to submit to them. No one therefore should be entrusted with power, inasmuch as 'anyone invested with authority must, through the force of an immutable social law, become an oppressor and exploiter of society'.<sup>129</sup>

Again, Bakunin may have rejected all imposed authority and usurped power in the form of the State and its laws, but he acknowledged that there was such a thing as the 'authority of society'. Indeed, the authority of society is 'incomparably more powerful than that of the State'. Where the State and the Church are transitory and artificial institutions, society will always exist. As a result, the action of social tyranny is 'gentler, more insidious, more imperceptible, but no less powerful and pervasive than is the authority of the State'. But while it is easier to rebel against the State than society around us, Bakunin is convinced that it is possible to go against the 'stream of conformity' and revolt against all divine, collective and individual authority in society.<sup>130</sup>

While this may be true of society, it is not of nature. Bakunin's political philosophy might well be an argument against 'the social institutionalization of authority', but he accepted 'natural'

authority as legitimate and efficacious. As a determinist, he accepts the natural laws governing phenomena in the physical and social worlds. It is impossible to revolt against the authority of these laws, for 'Without them we would be nothing, *we simply* would not exist.' <sup>131</sup> *Bakunin is not against all authority per se, but only against* imposed external authority. Thus it makes sense to talk about a man being free if 'he obeys natural laws because he has *himself* recognized them as such, and not because they have been externally imposed upon him by an extrinsic will whatever, divine or human, collective or individual'.<sup>132</sup>

When it comes to the authority of knowledge, Bakunin is more circumspect. For special matters, he will consult the appropriate expert: 'In the matter of boots, I refer to the authority of the bootmaker; concerning houses, canals, or railroads, I consult that of the architect or engineer.'<sup>133</sup> But he will consult several and compare their opinions and choose what he thinks is most likely to achieve his desired end. Bakunin recognizes no infallible authority and will not allow anyone to impose their will upon him. Like Godwin, Bakunin believed that the right of private judgement is paramount, 'my human right which consists of refusing to obey any other man, and to determine my own acts in conformity with my convictions'.<sup>134</sup> Bakunin is thus ready to accept in general the 'absolute authority of science' because it is rational and in keeping with human liberty. But outside this legitimate authority, he declares all other authorities to be 'false, arbitrary and fatal'.<sup>135</sup>

But even in the special case of science Bakunin had his reservations. At a time when confidence in science to interpret the world and bring about progress was at its height, whether in the form of Comte's positivism or Marx's scientific socialism, Bakunin raised doubts about its universality. Science, he argued, cannot go outside the sphere of abstractions, and cannot grasp individuality or the concrete; For this reason, science is inferior to art which is 'the return of abstraction to life'. On the contrary, it is 'the perpetual inunolation of life, fugitive, temporary, but real, on the altar of eternal abstractions'. Bakunin therefore preached the 'revolt of life against science, or rather against the government of science'. Bakunin set out not to destroy science but rather to reform it and keep it within legitimate boundaries. It would be better for the people to dispense with science altogether than be governed by savants, for 'Life, not science, creates life; the spontaneous action of the people themselves alone can create liberty'.<sup>136</sup>

Bakunin is not simplistically anti-reason or anti-science, but is principally concerned with the authoritarian dangers of a scientific elite. Instead of science remaining the prerogative of a privileged few, he would like to see it spread amongst the masses so that it would represent the 'collective consciousness' of society.<sup>137</sup> Yet even when science is in the reach of all, men of genius should be allowed to devote themselves exclusively to the cultivation of the sciences.

Bakunin thus called for freedom both in its negative sense as freedom from imposed authority and in its positive sense as freedom to realize one's nature. The latter is most important in his philosophy and Bakunin remained enough of a Hegelian to see freedom primarily in terms of a state of wholeness in which all duality between the individual and society, between humanity and nature, is dialectically overcome. But it is as misleading to claim that he had a yearning to identify with 'a universal, omnipotent force' as it is to assert that individualism is 'the essence of Bakunin's social and political system and his opposition to Marx'.<sup>138</sup> In the final analysis, Bakunin recognized man as an individual as well as a social being, and asserted that the freedom of one can only be realized with the freedom of all. Collective liberty and prosperity, he asserts, exist only in so far as they represent 'the sum of individual liberties and prosperities'.<sup>139</sup> At the same time, he stressed the need for human solidarity and international associations. More

than any other classic anarchist thinker Bakunin perceived that personal and social freedom are intertwined and that they can only be grounded in a form of communal individuality.

Bakunin was never a consistent or systematic thinker, but he was a powerful thinker nonetheless. After his conversion from German idealism to historical materialism he tried to give his abstract definition of liberty a social and natural dimension. He saw the intimate connection between liberty and authority and recognized natural and social boundaries to liberty. His notion of freedom is a form of collective self-discipline within the inescapable boundaries of nature and society. It was not so much a case of exerting 'maximum authority' over the conditions of one's life, but rather of accepting the context of freedom. 140 Far from offering a theory of liberty based on a 'hotchpotch of empty rhetoric' or 'glib Hegelian claptrap', Bakunin's position is both realistic and plausible.<sup>141</sup>

## The State

The supreme case of illegitimate and imposed authority for Bakunin is the State. It is an artificial growth which negates individual liberties. All States are by their very nature oppressive since they crush the spontaneous life of the people: 'The State is like a vast slaughterhouse or an enormous cemetery, where all the real aspirations, all the living forces of a country enter generously and happily, in the shadow of that abstraction, to let themselves be slain and buried.'<sup>142</sup> With it comes economic centralization and the concentration of political power which inevitably destroy the spontaneous action of the people.

All Bakunin's mature writings are devoted to showing how the State is hostile to a free existence. He never tires of asserting that the State means domination: 'If there is a State, there must be domination of one class by another and, as result, slavery; the State without slavery is unthinkable - and this is why we are enemies of the State.'<sup>143</sup>

Bakunin further develops his critique by arguing that the modern State is by its very nature a military State and 'every military State must of necessity become a conquering, invasive State; to survive it must conquer or be conquered, for the simple reason that accumulated military power will suffocate if it does not find an outlet.'<sup>144</sup> Bakunin concludes that

The State denotes violence, oppression, exploitation, and injustice raised into a system and made into the cornerstone of the existence of any society. The State never had and never will have any morality. Its morality and only justice is the supreme interest of self-preservation and almighty power - an interest before which all humanity has to kneel in worship. The State is the complete negation of humanity, a double negation: the opposite of human freedom and justice, and the violent breach of the universal solidarity of the human race. 145

Bakunin traces the origin of the State to a mutual understanding between exploiters who then used religion to help them in the 'systematic organization of the masses called the State'. It is only in this sense that 'The State is the younger brother of the Church'. Like Marx, he sees class struggle as inevitable in society between the privileged classes and the working classes, and the former will always control 'the power of the State' in order to maintain and enjoy their privileges.<sup>146</sup> Political power and wealth are therefore inseparable. But unlike Marx, he sees nothing but harm resulting from the conquest of political power by the workers.

The liberal defence of the State which portrays it as the guarantor and protector of political rights holds little water for Bakunin since he is convinced that the State will always be controlled by an exploitative and oppressive elite. He makes clear that 'right' in the language of politics is 'nothing but the consecration of fact created by force'. To call for 'equality of rights' therefore implies a flagrant contradiction for where all equally enjoy human rights, all political rights are automatically dissolved. The same is true of a so-called 'democratic State'. The State and political law denote 'power, authority, domination: they presuppose inequality in fact'.<sup>147</sup> Even in the most radical political democracy, as in Switzerland in his own day, the bourgeoisie still governs.

Although many workers believed at the time that once universal suffrage was established, political liberty would be assured, it inevitably leads, according to Bakunin, to the collapse or demoralization of the radical party. The whole system of representative government is an immense fraud since it rests on the fiction that executive and legislative bodies elected by universal suffrage represent the will of the people. Irrespective of their democratic sentiments, all rulers are corrupted by their participation in government and begin to look down upon society as sovereigns regarding their subjects: 'Political power means domination. And where there is domination, there must be a substantial part of the population who remain subjected to the domination of their rulers.' Even if a government composed exclusively of workers were elected by universal suffrage, they would become tomorrow 'the most determined aristocrats, open or secret worshippers of the principle of authority, exploiters and oppressors'. They would rapidly lose their revolutionary will. It follows that representative government is 'a system of hypocrisy and perpetual falsehood. Its success rests on the stupidity of the people and the corruption of the public mind.'<sup>148</sup>

Bakunin was opposed to universal suffrage because he felt that it would not fundamentally change the distribution of power and wealth. Whereas Marx believed that universal suffrage could eventually lead to communism, Bakunin quoted Proudhon approvingly to the effect that '*Universal suffrage is the counter-revolution*'.<sup>149</sup> Nevertheless, Bakunin was never dogmatic about general principles, and while he was in theory a determined abstentionist from politics, in the particular circumstances of Italy and Spain at the time of the Paris Commune, he advised members of his Alliance to become deputies or help the socialist parties. He held that the most imperfect republic would always be preferable to the most enlightened monarchy.

Bakunin not only distinguished between different kinds of States, but also between the State and government. Every revolutionary government represents the principle of the minority rule over the majority in the name of the alleged 'stupidity' of the latter. But it is impossible for such a dictatorship of the minority to bring about the freedom of the people since it only perpetuates itself and enslaves the people. In one of his resounding aphorisms, Bakunin declares: 'Freedom can be created only by freedom, by a total rebellion of the people, and by a voluntary organization of the people from the bottom Up.'<sup>150</sup> A People's State even in a transitional period is therefore an absurd contradiction in terms; 'If their State is effectively a popular State, why should they dissolve it? If on the other hand its suppression is necessary for the real emancipation of the people, why then call it a popular State?'<sup>151</sup>

The issue of revolutionary government in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat was the principal source of conflict between the 'revolutionary socialists' or anarchists in Bakunin's Alliance and the 'authoritarian communists' who followed Marx. As Bakunin acknowledged, their ultimate aim was similar - to create a new social order based on the collective organization of labour and the collective ownership of the means of production. But where the communists

looked to the development of the political power of the working classes, especially the urban proletariat in alliance with bourgeois radicals, the anarchists believed that they could succeed only through 'the development and organization of the non-political or antipolitical social power of the working classes in city and country, including all men of goodwill from the upper classes'.<sup>152</sup>

This led to a fundamental divergence in tactics. The communists wanted to organize the workers in order to seize the political power of the State, while the anarchists wished to liquidate the State. The former advocated the principle and practice of authority; the latter put their faith in liberty. Both equally favoured science, but the communists wanted to impose it by force, while the anarchists sought to propagate it so that groups could organize themselves spontaneously and in keeping with their own interests. Above all the anarchists believed that 'mankind has far too long submitted to being governed; that the cause of its troubles does not lie in any particular form of government but in the fundamental principles and the very existence of government, whatever form it may take'.<sup>153</sup> Bakunin concludes that the people were therefore left with a simple choice: 'the State, on one hand, and social revolution, on the other hand, are the two opposite poles, the antagonism which constitutes the very essence of the genuine social life of the whole continent of Europe'. And in one of his famous maxims, Bakunin insists that '*freedom without Socialism is privilege* and injustice, and Socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality'. <sup>154</sup>

## Free Society

Bakunin did not provide any detailed sketch of a free society and only elaborated its most general principles of voluntary association and free federation. Indeed, he singled out for criticism 'all those modern Procrustean who, in one way or another, have created an ideal of social organization, a narrow mould into which they would force future generations'. He insisted however that there "is no middle path between rigorously consistent federalism and bureaucratic government. The future social organization should be carried out 'from the bottom up, by the free associations, then going on to the communes, the regions, the nations, and, finally, culminating in a great international and universal federation'.<sup>155</sup> Land would be appropriated by agricultural associations and capital and the means of production by industrial associations.

Such communes would have little in common with existing rural communes. Bakunin was particularly critical of the Russian *mir* or peasant commune. Although the Russian peasants felt that the land belonged to the community and were hostile to the State, they were weakened by paternalism, which made the family patriarch a slave and a despot; by confidence in the Tsar, which followed from the patriarchal tradition; and by the absorption of the individual into the community.

By contrast, the new commune in an emancipated society would consist of a voluntary association of free and equal individuals of both sexes. Unlike Proudhon, who extended his anarchist principles to only half the human species, Bakunin insists on the complete emancipation of women and their social equality with men. Perfect freedom can only exist with complete economic and social equality: 'I am free only when all human beings surrounding me - men and women - are equally free. The freedom of others, far from limiting or negating my liberty, is on the contrary its necessary condition and confirmation.' Every person would be personally free in that he or she would not surrender his or her thought or will to any authority but that of reason. They would be 'free collectively', that is by living among free people. Thus freedom involves the

development of solidarity. Such a society would be a moral society, for socialism is justice and the basic principle of socialism is *'that every human being should have the material and moral means to develop his humanity'*. 156

Human relations would be transformed. With the abolition of the patriarchal family, marriage law and the right of inheritance, men and women would live in free unions more closely united to each other than before. The upbringing and education of children would be entrusted to the mother but remain mainly the concern of society. Indeed, an integral 'equal education for all' is an indispensable condition for the emancipation of humanity. Such a system of education would not only eradicate existing differences, but prepare every child of either sex for a life of thought and work, imbibe him or her with 'socialist morality', and encourage respect for the freedom of others which is the 'highest duty'. Children cannot, however, choose not to be educated or to remain idle.

Bakunin lays down the law here: *'Everyone shall work, and everyone shall be educated', whether they like it or not. No one will be able to exploit the labour of others. Every one will have to work in order to live, for 'social and political rights will have only one basis - the labour contributed by everyone'*. Without the use of positive law, the pressure of public opinion should make 'parasites' impossible, but exceptional cases of idleness would be regarded 'as special maladies to be subjected to clinical treatment'.<sup>157</sup> Such authoritarian statements open up a potential world of tyranny and oppression in Bakunin's so-called free society.

## Revolutionary Strategy

Bakunin is not only prepared to establish an invisible dictatorship but also to employ widespread revolutionary violence. Bakunin is quite frank about the issue: 'Revolution, the overthrow of the State means war, and that implies the destruction of men and things!' Although he regrets it, he insists that 'Philosophers have not understood that against political forces there can be no guarantees but complete destruction.' At the same time, he argues that terrorism is alien to a genuine social revolution; it should not be directed against individuals who are merely the inevitable products of society and history. Once the 'hurricane' has passed, true socialists should oppose 'butchery in cold blood'. 158

Bakunin further recommended certain forms of economic struggle, such as organizing strikes which train workers for the ultimate struggle. While not opposed to workers' co-operatives, he pointed out that they cannot fundamentally change society, cannot compete with big capital, and, if they are successful, they must result in a drop in wages as well as prices. As to the agents of change, Bakunin consistently called for an alliance between peasants and industrial workers. Although the city workers might take the initiative in the revolutionary movement, they should not underestimate the revolutionary potential of the peasantry and should try to win their support.

Even while elaborating his mature political philosophy, Bakunin was never one to rest in theory. He constantly searched for opportunities to put his ideas into practice, or at least have them confirmed by experience. The failure of the Lyon rising of 1870 in which he had participated left him with little confidence in the triumph of the social revolution, but the great social upheaval of the Paris Commune which followed shortly after from March to May in 1871 raised his hopes once again. Although the majority were Jacobins calling for a revolutionary government and centralized State, many of the communards were Proudhonians, and the most active members of

the committee of the twentieth *arrondissement* and the central committee of the National Guard were followers of Bakunin. Not surprisingly, Bakunin welcomed the Paris Commune as a striking and practical demonstration of his beliefs and called it 'a bold, clearly formulated negation of the State'. On its defeat, he wrote: 'Paris, drenched in the blood of her noblest children - this is humanity itself, crucified by the united international reaction of Europe' . 159

When Mazzini attacked the International for being anti-nationalist, decried the Commune for being atheistic, and declared that the State is ordained by God, Bakunin immediately took up his pen and wrote hundreds of pages against Mazzini. He defended his own version of atheism and materialism in a pamphlet entitled *The Response of an Internationalist*, which was followed up with a second pamphlet called *The Political Theology of Mazzini. Bakunin respected Mazzini as 'incontestably one the noblest and purest personalities' of the century and preferred him to Marx, but criticized him as 'the last high priest of an obsolescent religious, metaphysical and political idealism.'*<sup>160</sup> The pamphlets helped to extend the International in Italy and ensured that anarchism took firm root amongst the Italian working class.

Marx himself saw in the federalist programme of the communards a 'self-government of producers' and described it as 'the political form at last discovered under which the economic emancipation of work could be realized'.<sup>161</sup> Engels went on to call it the first demonstration of the 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat'. It is an irony of history that both Marx, Engels and Lenin all should hail the Paris Commune as a model of the proletarian revolution, while its attempt to abolish the machinery of the State at a stroke was clearly more in accord with the anarchist and federalist ideas of Proudhon and Bakunin.

Their common praise for the Commune did not prevent a new row breaking out between Marx and Bakunin in the International soon after. The defeat of the Paris Commune prevented the congress from taking place in Paris in 1871, and at the conference which was held in London the supporters of Bakunin from the Jurassian Federation were not invited. The two previous congresses had avoided any philosophical and political principles and merely asserted that 'the economic emancipation of the workers in the great aim to which must be subordinated every political movement' . Without the Bakuninist opposition, Marx now was able to get accepted the conquest of political power as an integral part of the obligatory programme of the International.

In addition, according to Bakunin, he managed to establish 'the dictatorship of the General Council, that is, the personal dictatorship of Marx, and consequently the transformation of the International into an immense and monstrous State with himself as chief. What Marx proposed with his scientific socialism, Bakunin wrote, was 'the organization and the rule of the new society by socialist *savants* . . . the worst of all despotic governments!'<sup>162</sup>

For his part, Marx wrote in November 1871 that Bakunin was 'a man devoid of all theoretical knowledge' and wanted to make his 'children's primer' of a programme the propaganda of his '*second International within the International*'. *His doctrine moreover was a secondary matter - 'merely means to his own personal self-assertion'*.<sup>163</sup> Engels also wrote that Bakunin's 'peculiar theory' was a medley of Proudhonism and communism. He saw the State as the main evil to be abolished, maintaining that it is the State which has created capital; hence his strategy of complete abstention from politics and his wish to replace the State with the organization of the International. For Marx and Engels, however, Bakunin had got it the wrong way round. To abolish the State without a previous social revolution is nonsense since 'the abolition of capital is precisely the social revolution'. <sup>164</sup>

The final battle took place at the Congress of the International held at the Hague in September 1872. Marx attended in person for the first time. He alleged with Engels in a note on Bakunin's secret Alliance to the General Council that 'these intransigent defenders of openness and publicity have, in contempt of our statutes, organized in the bosom of the International a real secret society with the aim of placing its sections, without their knowledge, under the direction of the high priest Bakunin.'<sup>165</sup> They accused him of founding with Nechaev a secret society in Russia and produced the latter's threatening letter to the publisher's agent who had commissioned the translation of *Capital*. They also claimed that he had tried to control his Alliance groups in France, Spain and Italy. Paul Lafargue, Marx's Cuban son-in-law, was the principal source of their information.

At the Congress, Bakunin and his closest collaborator James Guillaume were expelled from the International. The headquarters were then moved to New York to save it from the control of the non-Marxist majority but it soon collapsed. Engels went on to write in an essay 'On Authority' that it is impossible to have any organization without authority since modern technology imposes upon men 'a veritable despotism independent of all social organisation'. It is absurd to want to abolish political authority in the form of the State at a stroke for a 'revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other.'<sup>166</sup>

The anarchists set up in 1872 a new International at St Imier in Switzerland (with delegates from the Jura, Italy and Spain) as a loose association of fully autonomous national groups devoted to the economic struggle only. Its programme as outlined by Bakunin formed the basis of revolutionary syndicalism: '*the organization of solidarity in the economic struggle of labour against capitalism*'.<sup>167</sup>

While the tactics of character assassination employed by the Marxist camp, reviving claims that Bakunin was a Russian spy and unscrupulous with money, were contemptible, it is difficult to refute the main thrust of their accusation. At the height of his campaign against Marx's centralism and authoritarianism, Bakunin undoubtedly tried to establish a secret, centralized and hierarchical organization with the intention of directing the International. In a letter to his Spanish followers, he described the Alliance as 'a secret society which has been formed in the very bosom of the International in order to give the latter a revolutionary organization, to turn it . . . into a force sufficiently organized to exterminate all the political-clerical-bourgeois reaction and destroy all the economic, legal, religious and political institutions of the state',<sup>168</sup> The Alliance, as Guillaume asserted, might have been principally an 'informal revolutionary fraternity', held together by affinity rather than a rule-book, but they undoubtedly formed a secret network of cells within the International.<sup>169</sup> The anarchist historian Max Nettlau admitted that the Alliance was a 'secret society so to speak'.<sup>170</sup> Arthur Lehning, former editor of the Bakunin Archives, on the other hand insisted that the secret Alliance did not exist within the International, although he recognized that it may have been 'reconstructed in one form or another' after 1869.<sup>171</sup> But even if Bakunin's secret societies remained vague and unreal (in the sense that they did not have a coherent existence) they were still central to his notion of anarchist strategy.

Bakunin tried to justify his position and vented his anger against Marx and his followers in a letter to the Brussels paper *La Liberté* which was never sent. He reiterated his belief that the revolutionary policy of the proletariat should be the destruction of the State for its immediate and only goal. The Marxists on the other hand remained devoted Statists: 'As befits good Germans,

they are worshippers of the power of the State, and are necessarily also the prophets of political and social discipline, champions of the social order built from the top down'.<sup>172</sup>

He also qualified Marx's economic determinism. He had long argued that facts come before ideas. He followed Proudhon, by claiming that the ideal is a flower whose root lies in the material conditions of existence, and Marx, by asserting that 'the whole history of humanity, intellectual and moral, political and social, is but a reflection of its economic history.'<sup>173</sup> Now he argued that while the economic base determines the political superstructure, the superstructure can in turn influence the base. According to Bakunin, Marx says: ' " Poverty produces political slavery, the State." But he does not allow this expression to be turned around, to say: "Political slavery, the State, reproduces in its turn and maintains poverty as a necessary condition for its own existence; so that to destroy poverty, it is necessary to destroy the State!" '<sup>174</sup> And while recognizing the inevitable linking of economic and political facts in history, Bakunin refused to accept as Marx did that all events in the past were necessarily progressive, particularly if they revealed themselves to be in contradiction to the 'supreme · end' of history which is nothing less than '*the triumph of humanity, the most complete* conquest and establishment of personal freedom and development - material, intellectual, and moral - for every individual, through the absolutely unrestricted and spontaneous organization of economic and social solidarity'.<sup>175</sup>

Bakunin further qualified Marx's version of historical materialism by stressing the importance in history of the particular character of each race, people, and nation. He claimed, for instance, that the spirit of revolt is an instinct found in more intense form in the Latin and Slav peoples than in the German. He also felt that patriotism, love of the fatherland, is a natural passion - a passion of social solidarity. It involves an instinctive attachment to a traditional pattern of life, and hostility towards any other kind of life. It is thus 'collective egoism on one hand, and war on the other'. Its roots are in man's 'bestiality' and it exists in inverse ratio to the development of civilization. Again nationality, like individuality, is a natural and social fact, but it should be imbued with universal values. In the final analysis, we should place 'human, universal justice above national interests'. Bakunin therefore recommends a form of 'proletarian patriotism' which takes into account local attachments but which is internationalist in scope.<sup>176</sup>

Finally, Bakunin rejected Marx's designation of the urban proletariat as the most progressive and revolutionary class since it implied the rule of the factory workers over the 'rural proletariat'. To consider the city proletariat as the vanguard class is a form of 'aristocracy of labour' which is the least social and the most individualist in character. On the contrary, Bakunin considers the '*flower of the proletariat*' to be the most oppressed, poorest and alienated whom Marx contemptuously dismissed as the '*lumpenproletariat*'. 'I have in mind', he wrote, 'the "riffraff" , that "rabble" almost unpolluted by bourgeois civilization, which carries in its inner being and in its aspirations, in all the necessities and miseries of its collective life, all the seeds of the socialism of the future . . .'<sup>177</sup> Just as Marx idealized the proletariat, so Bakunin romanticized the lumpenproletariat.

In the last years of life, Bakunin grew increasingly pessimistic about the triumph of the social revolution. The Franco-Prussian war had not led to revolution in Europe and his attempts to foment rebellion in Russia achieved little. By 1872, his hopes for the political consciousness and spirit of revolt of the masses were at a nadir:

Alas! It must be acknowledged that the masses have allowed themselves to become deeply demoralized, apathetic, not to say castrated, by the pernicious influence of our corrupt, centralized, statist civilization. Bewildered, debased, they have contracted

the fatal habit of obedience, of sheepish resignation. They have been turned into an immense herd, artificially segregated and divided" into cages for the greater convenience of their various exploiters.<sup>178</sup>

By now Bakunin was prematurely old, his health ruined by his years in Russian prisons and by a precarious life of incessant movement. In a letter dated 26 September 1873, he announced his retirement as a professional revolutionary:

I feel I no longer possess either the necessary strength or perhaps the necessary faith to continue rolling the stone of Sisyphus against the forces of reaction which are triumphing everywhere. I am therefore retiring from the lists, and ask if my dear contemporaries only one thing - oblivion. <sup>179</sup>

With the help of his Italian comrade Carlo Cafiero a house was bought for him and his family near Locarno but peace still eluded him. The house proved too expensive and Bakunin was obliged to move on and spend the last two years of his life in Lugano. The sap of the old revolutionary could still rise however: he came out of retirement to join a final abortive insurrection in the province of Bologna in May 1874. It left him even more disillusioned, and in February 1875 he wrote to the anarchist geographer Elisee Reclus of his 'intense despair' since there was 'absolutely no revolutionary thought, hope, or passion left among the masses'. The only hope remaining was world war. 'These gigantic military states must sooner or later destroy each other. But what a prospect!' <sup>180</sup> The crumbling colossus, who had exhausted himself in the sisyphian task of inspiring a world revolution, eventually died in Berne on 1 July 1876, just before his sixty-second birthday. He was buried in the city.

But Bakunin's life and work were not in vain. While Marx may have won the initial dispute within the International subsequent events have tended to prove the validity of Bakunin's warnings about centralism, State socialism, and the dictatorship of the proletariat. He had prophetic insight into the nature of Communist States which have all become to varying degrees centralized, bureaucratic and militaristic, ruled by a largely self-appointed and self-reproducing elite. The string of Marxist regimes in Eastern Europe were overthrown in the 1980s by a mass display of the Popular Will, and progressive forces in the former Soviet Union are calling for a loose federation of independent republics. Bakunin, not Marx, has been vindicated by the verdict of history.

Soviet scholars liked to compare Bakunin's notion of invisible dictators with Lenin's concept of a disciplined elite of committed revolutionaries and saw it as a 'great step forward' in theoretical terms. <sup>181</sup> He certainly called like Lenin for violent revolution and shared a faith in a secret vanguard controlled by himself. But it is Bakunin's critique of Marxism which has been most remembered in the West. While the historical controversy between anarchists and Marxists has tended to exaggerate the differences between Bakunin and Marx, in fact they both adopted a form of historical materialism, accepted class struggle as the motor of social change, and saw the goal of history as a free and equal society. They both wanted the collective ownership of the means of production.

Their principal difference lay in strategy. Bakunin rejected parliamentary politics, called for the immediate destruction of the State, and insisted that the workers and peasants should emancipate themselves. Marx on the other hand dismissed as 'nonsense' his belief in the 'free organization of the working class from below upwards'.<sup>182</sup> Where Marx despised the peasantry as

rural idiots and the lumpenproletariat as riffraff, Bakunin recognized their revolutionary potential. To Marx's call for the conquest of political power, Bakunin opposed economic emancipation first and foremost. Bakunin further tempered Marx's determinism by stressing the role of the people's spontaneous will in bringing about revolution.

Beyond their theoretical differences, Bakunin and Marx became symbols of different world-views. Bakunin is usually presented as the more attractive personality - generous and spontaneous, the embodiment of a 'free spirit'.<sup>183</sup> Bakunin was the more impetuous and Marx doubtlessly envied him for his ability to charm and influence others. Bakunin possessed what he admired most in others: 'that troublesome and savage energy characteristic of the grandest geniuses, ever called to destroy old tottering worlds and lay the foundations of new.'<sup>184</sup> Yet for all his turbulent eccentricities and contradictions, he was invariably kind, considerate and gentle with his friends.

Among the most disconcerting of the contradictions which characterized Bakunin as man and writer was that while he called for the equality of all humanity, he remained sufficiently nationalist and racist to see Germans and Jews as authoritarian, and Slavs as spontaneous and freedomloving. His call for absolute liberty is counterbalanced by his authoritarian desire to lead and control other people in his secret societies. His eloquent advocacy of social harmony and peace was matched by his ferocious celebration of 'evil passions', 'blood and fire', 'complete annihilation', 'storm of destruction', the 'furious avalanche, devouring, destroying everything' and so on.<sup>185</sup> It comes as no surprise to learn that he advised Wagner to repeat in his music the same text in various melodies: 'Struggle and Destruction'.<sup>186</sup> It is difficult not to conclude that Bakunin's apocalyptic fantasies owed something to his sexual impotence.

Although he did not have a belief in the virtue of violence for its own sake, and 'a confidence in the technique of terrorism', there is something profoundly sinister in his celebration of the 'poetry of destruction'.<sup>187</sup> Bakunin stands at the fountainhead of a minor tradition of destructive and violent anarchism which prefers the gun to reason, coercion to persuasion. He confirms the popular view of anarchy as tumult and violent disorder in his indiscriminate use of the term 'anarchy' to describe both the violent and chaotic process of revolt and the goal of an ordered society without government. Indeed, by identifying anarchy with civil war and destruction, Bakunin is the shadow behind the later bomb-throwers and assassins who shook bourgeois society towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Bakunin's call for an invisible dictatorship and his belief in the importance of secret societies and small vanguard groups of militants are inescapably fraught with authoritarian and oppressive dangers. There is a fundamental contradiction between his awareness that 'Freedom can be created only by freedom' and his readiness to use a dictatorship in order to achieve 'absolute liberty'.<sup>188</sup> He dismally failed to realize that only libertarian means can be used to achieve libertarian ends. That the 'passionate seeker after Truth' and the 'fanatical lover of Liberty' should resort to dissimulation and fraud rather than reasoned argument and free choice in open association inevitably undermines his personal authenticity and moral example.<sup>189</sup> He was so thoroughly corrupted by the love of power that he singularly failed to see that the dangers he described in Marx's revolutionary dictatorship were equally applicable in his own.<sup>190</sup> Although his aim was to transform the instincts of people into conscious demands, there is no reason to think that his vanguard would wither away any more than Marx's.

Although not a great political philosopher, Bakunin nevertheless made a major contribution to anarchist and socialist theory. Far from being 'intellectually shallow and built on clichés',

Bakunin's anarchism broke new ground and pointed the way for others to follow.<sup>191</sup> He was the first Russian to preach social revolution in international terms. In his analysis of the State, he anticipated Max Weber who saw bureaucracy as an inevitable consequence of the modern division of labour, and Robert Michels, whose 'iron law of oligarchy' asserts that an elite of technical experts will emerge from any political organization. In his concept of class, his stress on the revolutionary potential of the peasantry has been confirmed by all the major revolutions this century in Russia, Spain, China, and Cuba. His faith in the revolutionary potential of the 'lumpen-proletariat' has become an essential part of the ideological baggage of the New Left. His critique of the authoritarian dangers of science and of scientific elites has been further developed by the Frankfurt School, notably Herbert Marcuse. During the 1968 rebellion in Paris, Bakuninist slogans reappeared on city walls: 'The urge to destroy is a creative urge.' It is Bakunin, not Marx, who was the true prophet of modern revolution.<sup>192</sup>

In the long run, the best image of Bakunin is not that of the revolutionary on the barricades calling for the bloody overthrow of Church and State, but the penetrating thinker who elaborated reasoned arguments for a free society based on voluntary federation of autonomous communes. His message, the message of the First International, was that the emancipation of the workers must be the task of the workers themselves. His historical importance was to have helped spread the ideas of anarchism amongst the working-class movement in the latter part of the nineteenth century. His influence, especially in France, Italy, Spain and Latin America, ensured that anarchism became a significant, if not dominating, influence amongst their labour movements well into the following century. The ideological roots of the Spanish Revolution reach deeply in Bakuninian soil, both in the libertarian aspirations of the anarchists as well as in the readiness of some to resort to aggressive vanguard organizations.

Since the Second World War, there has been a renewed interest in Bakunin, not only from the students' movements in the sixties but from intellectuals like Noam Chomsky. Bakunin's cult of spontaneity, his celebration of revolutionary win and instinctive rebellion, his advocacy of workers' control, his faith in the creative energies of the people, his critique of science - all have appealed to the rebellious young in modern technological States. Even Che Guevara was hailed as the 'new Bakunin'. Bakunin's search for wholeness in a divided society is not merely the product of a diseased form of romanticism or an unbalanced psyche, but rather a bold and inspiring attempt to reclaim one's humanity in an alienated world.

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Peter H. Marshall  
Demanding the Impossible  
A History of Anarchism  
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