

what is anarchism?

There cannot be a history of anarchism in the sense of establishing a permanent state of things called 'anarchist'. It is always a continual coping with the next situation, and a vigilance to make sure that past freedoms are not lost and do not turn into the opposite ...

(Paul Goodman, in *A Decade of Anarchy*, p. 39)

What do we anarchists believe? ... we believe that human beings can achieve their maximum development and fulfilment as individuals in a community of individuals only when they have free access to the means of life and are equals among equals, we maintain that to achieve a society in which these conditions are possible it is necessary to destroy all that is authoritarian in existing society.

(Vernon Richards, *Protest Without Illusions*, p. 129)

Anarchism is a doctrine that aims at the liberation of peoples from political domination and economic exploitation by the encouragement of direct or non-governmental action. Historically, it has been linked to working-class activism, but its intellectual roots lie in the mid-nineteenth century, just prior to the era of mass organization. Europe was anarchism's first geographical centre, and the early decades of the twentieth century marked the period of its greatest success. Yet the influence of anarchism has extended across the globe, from America to China; whilst anarchism virtually disappeared after 1939, when General Franco crushed the Spanish revolution to end the civil war, today it is again possible to talk about an anarchist movement or movements. The origins of contemporary anarchism can be traced to 1968 when, to the delight and surprise of activists – and disappointment and incredulity of critics – student

4 anarchism: a beginner's guide

rebellion put anarchism back on the political agenda. There is some dispute in anarchist circles about the character and composition of the late-twentieth and twenty-first-century anarchism and its relationship to the earlier twentieth-century movement. But all agree that anarchism has been revived and there is some optimism that anarchist ideas are again exercising a real influence in contemporary politics. This influence is detectable in numerous campaigns – from highly publicized protests against animal vivisection, militarization and nuclear arms, to less well-known programmes for urban renewal, the development of alternative media, free education, radical democracy and co-operative labour. Anarchist ideas have also made themselves felt in the anti-capitalist, anti-globalization movement – sometimes dubbed by activists as the pro-globalization movement or the movement for globalization from below.

Anarchists are those who work to further the cause of anarchism. Like activists in other movements, those who struggle in the name of anarchism fall into a number of categories ranging from educationists and propagandists to combatants in armed struggle. Anarchists work in local and international arenas, building networks for community action and showing solidarity with comrades locked in struggles in areas like Palestine and the Chiapas region of Mexico.

Because anarchists eschew party politics, their diversity is perhaps more apparent than it is in other organizations. The development of discrete anarchist schools of thought will be examined in some detail later on in the chapter. But as a starting point, it is useful to indicate three areas of difference to help to distinguish the concerns of contemporary anarchists. Some of those calling themselves anarchist consider anarchism to be a political movement directed towards the liberation of the working class. In the past, this struggle was centred on urban industrial workers, though in places like Spain it also embraced rural workers. Today, anarchists in this group also make appeals to women and people of colour within the working class and combine their traditional concern to overcome economic oppression with an interest to combat racism, sexism and fascism. Anarchists in this band include groups affiliated to the International Workers' Association (IWA): the Solidarity Federation in Britain and the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) in Spain. In contrast, other anarchists see anarchism as a vast umbrella movement, importantly radicalized by feminists, ecologists, gays and lesbians. Anarchists in this group, often suspicious of being categorized

by any *ism*, tend to see anarchism as a way of life or a collective commitment to a counter-cultural lifestyle defined by interdependence and mutual support. Variations of this idea are expressed by anarchists linked to the journal *Social Anarchism* as well as by European 'insurrectionists' like Alfredo Bonanno. A third group similarly downplays the idea of working-class struggle to emphasize the aesthetic dimension of liberation, building on an association with art that has its roots in the nineteenth century. For these anarchists, anarchism is a revolutionary movement directed towards the need to overcome the alienation, boredom and consumerism of everyday life. Its essence lies in challenging the system through cultural subversion, creating confusion to highlight the oppressiveness of accepted norms and values. Anarchists in this group include self-styled anti-anarchist anarchists like Bob Black and primitivists like John Moore.

Anarchy is the goal of anarchists: the society variously described to be without government or without authority; a condition of statelessness, of free federation, of 'complete' freedom and equality based either on rational self-interest, co-operation or reciprocity. Though there are fewer conceptions of anarchy than there are anarchists, the anarchist ideal has been conceptualized in a variety of ways. What holds them together is the idea that anarchy is an ordered way of life. Indeed, the origin of the familiar graffiti – the 'A' in a circle – derives from the slogan 'Anarchy is order; government is civil war', coined by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in 1848 and symbolized by the revolutionary Anselme Bellegarrigue. Notwithstanding the regularity with which Bellegarrigue's graffiti appears on bus shelters and railway lines, anarchists have not been able to communicate their ideas very effectively and, instead of being accepted as a term that describes a possible set of futures, anarchy is usually taken to denote a condition of chaos, disorder and disruption. Indeed, 'anarchy' was already being used in this second sense before anarchists like Proudhon adopted it to describe their ideal. Whilst studies of the origins of the word 'anarchy' are part and parcel of most introductions to anarchist thought, this well-trodden territory helps to explain the difficulty anarchists have had in defining their position. As G.D.H. Cole noted, 'the Anarchists ... were anarchists because they did not believe in an anarchical world'.¹ Common language, however, has always suggested otherwise.

6 anarchism: a beginner's guide

anarchy: origins of the word

Anarchism is an unusual ideology because its adopted tag has peculiarly negative connotations. Most ideological labels embrace positively valued ideas or ideals: liberalism is the ideology of liberty or freedom, socialism is associated with notions of sociability or fellowship, and conservatism with the conservation of established or customary ways of life. Even fascism has a positive derivation – from *fascio*, a reference to the symbol of Roman authority. In contrast, anarchism is the ideology of anarchy – a term that has been understood in both the history of ideas and in popular culture to imply the breakdown of order, if not violent disorder. Even after the mid-nineteenth century when the label was first adopted as an affirmation of belief, anarchy was used in political debate to ridicule or denounce ideas perceived to be injurious or dangerous. For example, in a seventeenth-century defence of absolute monarchy, Sir Robert Filmer treated calls for limited monarchy as calls for anarchy. In general usage the term is commonly used to describe fear and dread. The ‘great Anarch!’ in Alexander Pope’s *The Dying Christian to his Soul* is the ‘dread empire, Chaos!’ that brings ‘universal darkness’ to bury all. The eighteenth-century philosopher Edmund Burke considered anarchy as the likely outcome of the brewing American conflict and identified freedom as its cure. From his rather different political perspective, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley drew on ‘anarchy’ to describe the violent duplicity of government, yet like Burke he still conceived the term in a wholly negative sense to describe disorder and injustice. Writing in the nineteenth century, the social critic John Ruskin aptly captured the common view: ‘[g]overnment and co-operation are in all things the laws of life; anarchy and competition the laws of death’. This conception was the very reverse of Proudhon’s.

The anarchist idea of anarchy has its roots in a critique of revolutionary government advanced in the course of the French Revolution. In 1792, a group of revolutionaries known as the *enragés* (the fanatics), because of the zeal with which they entered into their campaigns, demanded that the Jacobin government introduce draconian measures to protect the artisans of Paris from profiteers. Banded around Jacques Roux, an ex-cleric, and Jean Varlet, a man of independent means, the group did not call themselves anarchists. Yet their programme (a call to the people to take direct action

against profiteers and the demand that the government provide work and bread), was labelled anarchist by their Jacobin opponents.² During their battle with the Jacobins, moreover, Varlet and Roux rejected the idea of revolutionary government as a contradiction in terms, importantly associating anarchism with the rejection of revolution by decree. As the revolution ran its course the revolutionary government continued to apply the term ‘anarchist’ as a term of political abuse and to discredit those political programmes of which it disapproved. Nevertheless, the idea that anarchy could be used in a positive sense and that anarchism described a political programme was now firmly established. The first four editions of the *Dictionary of the French Academy* (1694–1762) defined anarchy as an unruly condition, without leadership or any sort of government. The exemplification was taken from classical philosophy: ‘democracy can easily degenerate into anarchy’. In the fifth edition (1798) the definition of anarchy remained the same, but it was supplemented for the first time with an entry for ‘anarchist’ that distinguished ‘a supporter of anarchy’ from ‘a trouble-maker’. It was now possible to speak of ‘anarchist principles’ and an ‘anarchist system’.³

The revolutionary movement created by the *enragés* left its legacy in the history of ideas. Less than 100 years after the outbreak of revolution, the association between anarchy and the idea of popular revolution inspired the French writer Pierre-Joseph Proudhon to label himself an anarchist. In his first book, *What Is Property?* (1840, where he famously coined the phrase ‘property is theft’) he appropriated the term anarchy to define his egalitarian and libertarian ideal. Proudhon introduced the term in the following dialogue:

What is to be the form of government in the future? I hear some of my younger readers reply: ‘Why, how can you ask such a question? You are a republican!’ ‘A republican! Yes; but that word specifies nothing. *Res publica*; that is, the public thing. Now, whoever is interested in public affairs – no matter under what form of government – may call himself a republican. Even kings are republicans.’ – ‘Well! You are a democrat?’ – ‘No.’ – ‘What! you would have a monarchy?’ – ‘God forbid!’ – ‘You are then an aristocrat?’ – ‘Not at all.’ – ‘You want a mixed government?’ – ‘Still less.’ – ‘What are you, then?’ – ‘I am an anarchist.’

‘Oh! I understand you; you speak satirically. This is a hit at the government.’ – ‘By no means. I have just given you my serious and

8 anarchism: a beginner's guide

well considered profession of faith. Although a firm friend of order, I am (in the full force of the term) an anarchist. ...⁴

As George Woodcock noted, Proudhon delighted in paradox and fully appreciated the ambiguity of the term 'anarchy' when he adopted it to describe his politics. Tracing the origin of the word to the ancient Greek (*anarkhos*) he argued that anarchy meant 'without government', or the government of no one. Far from implying social ruin, it suggested progress and harmonious co-operation. Anarchy was the natural counterpart to equality: it promised an end to social division and civil strife. In the nineteenth century some anarchists inserted a hyphen between the 'an' and 'archy', in an effort to emphasize its derivation from antiquity, whilst also drawing implicit comparison with the better-known alternatives, monarchy (the government of one), and oligarchy (the government of the few). By hyphenating the word in this manner they hoped to challenge their detractors whilst encouraging the oppressed to re-examine their ideas about the nature of political organization and the assumptions on which these ideas were based.

Some anarchists have shared Proudhon's delight in the paradox of 'anarchy' and played up the positive aspect of chaos associated with the term. The Russian anarchist Michael Bakunin famously described the disordered order of anarchy in the revolutionary principle: 'the passion for destruction is a creative passion, too'.⁵ Another nineteenth-century Russian, Peter Kropotkin, followed suit. Order, he argued, was 'servitude ... the shackling of thought, the brutalizing of the human race, maintained by the sword and the whip.' Disorder was 'the uprising of the people against this ignoble order, breaking its fetters, destroying the barriers, and marching towards a better future.' Of course anarchy spelt disorder for it promised 'the blossoming of the most beautiful passions and the greatest of devotion': it was 'the epic of supreme human love'.⁶ Other anarchists have been less comfortable with the connotations of 'anarchy'. Indeed, much anarchist literature suggests that the ambiguity of 'anarchy' has forced anarchists onto the defensive. As many anarchists have pointed out, the problem of Proudhon's paradox is not only the confusion to which it lends itself, but its broadness: disorder can imply anything from disorganization to barbarism and violence. One of the most persistent features of introductions to anarchism is the author's concern to demythologize this idea. Examples from three different authors are reproduced below. The first is taken from

Alexander Berkman's *ABC of Anarchism*:

... before I tell you what anarchism is, I want to tell you what it *is not*. That is necessary because so much falsehood has been spread about anarchism. Even intelligent persons often have entirely wrong notions about it. Some people talk about anarchism without knowing a thing about it. And some lie about anarchism, because they don't want you to know the truth about it. ...

Therefore I must tell you, first of all, what anarchism is *not*.

It is *not* bombs, disorder, or chaos.

It is *not* robbery and murder.

It is *not* a war of each against all.

It is *not* a return to barbarism or to the wild state of man.

*Anarchism is the very opposite of all that.*⁷

The second comes from the Cardiff-based Anarchist Media Group:

There is probably more rubbish talked about anarchism than any other political idea. Actually it has nothing to do with a belief in chaos, death and destruction. Anarchists do not normally carry bombs, nor do they ascribe any virtue to beating up old ladies ...
... There is nothing complicated or threatening about anarchism ...⁸

Finally, Donald Rooum offers this in his introduction to anarchism:

Besides being used in the sense implied by its Greek origin, the word 'anarchy' is also used to mean unsettled government, disorderly government, or government by marauding gangs ...

Both the proper and improper meanings of the term 'anarchy' are now current, and this causes confusion. A person who hears government by marauding gangs described as 'anarchy' on television news, and then hears an anarchist advocating 'anarchy', is liable to conclude that anarchists want government by marauding gangs.⁹

Of course, anarchists have moved beyond these disclaimers to advance fairly detailed conceptions of anarchy and to highlight the success that anarchy has enjoyed, albeit on a temporary and proscribed scale. Yet anarchy remains a problematic concept because, unlike liberty for example, it so readily lends itself to the evocation of an unattractive condition. And whilst anarchists are happy to discuss the possibility of moving beyond existing forms of state organization they have been wary of employing 'anarchy' as an explanatory concept, preferring to define anarchism in other ways. The remainder of

10 anarchism: a beginner's guide

the chapter examines three alternative approaches to anarchism: the first looks at key personalities, the second at schools of thought and the third at history.

anarchist thought: key personalities

One popular approach to the study of anarchism is to trace a history of anarchist ideas through the analysis of key texts or the writings of important thinkers. Paul Eltzbacher, a German judge and scholar, was amongst the first to adopt this approach. His 1900 German-language *Der Anarchismus* identified seven 'sages' of anarchism: joining Proudhon were William Godwin (1756–1836), Max Stirner (1806–1856), Michael Bakunin (1814–1870), Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921), Benjamin Tucker (1854–1939) and Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910). Eltzbacher's list has rarely been treated as definitive, though George Woodcock's *Anarchism* (1962), which remains a standard reference work, largely followed Eltzbacher's selection, dropping only Tucker from special consideration in the family of key thinkers. Nevertheless, Eltzbacher's approach remains popular. Its discussion both provides an introduction to some of the characters whose work will be examined during the course of this book and, perhaps more importantly, raises an on-going debate about the possibility of defining anarchism by a unifying idea.

Arguments about who should be included in the anarchist canon usually turn on assessments of the influence that writers have exercised on the movement and tend to reflect particular cultural, historical and political biases of the selector. For example, in Anglo-American studies, Bakunin and Kropotkin are normally represented as the most important anarchist theorists; in Continental Europe, especially in France, Proudhon and Bakunin are more likely to be identified as the movement's leading lights. In recent years selectors have tended to widen the net of those considered to be at the forefront of anarchist thought. In *Demanding the Impossible* (1992), Peter Marshall not only restored Tucker to the canon, he expanded it to include Elisée Reclus (1830–1905), Errico Malatesta (1853–1932) and Emma Goldman (1869–1940). The same tendency is apparent in anthologies of anarchist writings. Daniel Guérin's collection, *No Gods, No Masters*, makes no reference to Godwin, Tucker or Tolstoy but includes work by Casar de Paepe (1842–90), James Guillaume (1844–1916), Malatesta, Ferdinand Pelloutier

(1867–1901) and Emile Pouget (1860–1931), Voline (the pseudonym of Vsevolod Mikhailovich Eichenbaum, 1882–1945) and Nestor Makhno (1889–1935). George Woodcock's *Anarchist Reader* shows a similar diversity, though it leans far more towards the North American tradition than Guérin's collection and also includes twentieth-century figures like Rudolf Rocker (1873–1958), Murray Bookchin (b. 1921), Herbert Read (1893–1968), Alex Comfort (1920–2000), Nicholas Walter (1934–2000), Colin Ward (b. 1924) and Paul Goodman (1911–1972).

The popularity of Eltzbacher's approach owes something to Kropotkin – one of his subjects – who in 1910 endorsed Eltzbacher's study as 'the best work on Anarchism'.¹⁰ One measure of the method's success is the distinction that is now commonly drawn between the 'classical' theoreticians of anarchism, and the rest. This distinction is particularly marked in academic work. Even whilst nominating different candidates to the rank of classical theorist, by and large academics treat nineteenth-century anarchists as a body of writers who raised anarchism to 'a level of articulation that distinguished it as a serious political theory' and disregard the remainder as mere agitators and propagandists.¹¹ In a less than hearty endorsement of anarchism, George Crowder maintained that the "great names" are indeed relatively great because their work was more original, forceful and influential than that of others.¹² Some writers from within – or close to – the anarchist movement have also supported the idea of a classical tradition. Daniel Guérin's guide to anarchism, *No Gods, No Masters*, includes only writings from those judged to be in the first rank of anarchist thought. The contribution of 'their second-rate epigones' is duly dismissed.¹³ A similar distinction is maintained in popular anarchist publications. Pamphlets and broadsheets produced by anarchist groups continue to focus on the work of Makhno, Kropotkin, Bakunin and Malatesta; and reprints of original work by this intellectual elite can be readily found at anarchist book-fairs and on websites. Some activists are also happy to publish as anarchist literature the work of leading academic social critics – notably Noam Chomsky – establishing a new tier to the intellectual hierarchy.

Yet Eltzbacher's method has not been accepted without criticism. Indeed, its success has prompted a good deal of debate and his approach has been attacked on a number of grounds. As Guérin noted, one problem with Eltzbacher's approach is that it can tend towards biography and away from the analysis of ideas. When the

12 anarchism: a beginner's guide

work of the masters is given less priority than the details of their lives, the danger is that the meaning of anarchism can be muddled by the tendency of leading anarchists to act inconsistently or sometimes in contradiction to their stated beliefs.¹⁴ Another problem is the apparent arbitrariness of Eltzbacher's selection. Here, complaints tend in opposite directions. Some have argued that the canon is too inclusive, composed of fellow travellers who never called themselves anarchists and those who adopted the tag without showing any real commitment to the movement. Others suggest that the approach is too exclusive and that it disregards the contribution of the numberless, nameless activists who have kept the anarchist movement alive.

The problem of inclusion has been exacerbated by the habit of some writers to treat anarchism as a tendency apparent in virtually all schools of political thought. Armed with a broad conception of anarchism as a belief in the possibility of society without government, anarchists from Kropotkin to Herbert Read have pointed to everything from ancient Chinese philosophy, Zoroastrianism and early Christian thought as sources of anarchism. The father of Taoism, Lao Tzu, the sixteenth-century essayist Etienne de la Boetie, the French encyclopaedist Denis Diderot, the American Transcendentalist David Henry Thoreau, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Oscar Wilde, and political leaders like Mohandas Gandhi, have all been included in anthologies or histories of anarchism. As Nicolas Walter argued, this inclusiveness can be misleading:

The description of a past golden age without government may be found in the thought of ancient China and India, Egypt and Mesopotamia, and Greece and Rome, and in the same way the wish for a future utopia without government may be found in the thought of countless religious and political writers and communities. But the application of anarchy to the present situation is more recent, and it is only in the anarchist movement of the nineteenth century that we find the demand for a society without government here and now.¹⁵

The reverse complaint, that the canon is too exclusive, is in part a protest about the restrictedness of the choices. Who decides which anarchists have made the most important contribution to anarchist thought or to history? In his account of the German anarchist movement Andrew Carlson criticizes theorists of anarchism like

Eltzbacher for wrongly suggesting that the German movement produced no writers of repute and that anarchist ideas exercised only a marginal influence on the German socialist movement.¹⁶ Neither view is supportable. Equally misleading is the view, sustained by the canon, that women have made little contribution to anarchism. The anarchist movement has boasted a number of women activists, apart from Emma Goldman, including Louise Michel (1830–1905), Lucy Parsons (1853–1942), Charlotte Wilson (1854–1944) and Voltairine de Cleyre (1866–1912). These women have made a significant contribution to anarchism and their exclusion from the canon is a sign of unreasonable neglect.

In the other part, the complaints about exclusivity touch on the abstraction involved in the process of selection. Many anarchists resent the way in which the study of anarchist thought has been divorced from the political context in which the theory was first advanced. Such a distinction, they argue, legitimizes the intense scrutiny of a tiny volume of anarchist writings and encourages the achievements of the wider movement to be overlooked or ignored. Some anarchists, it's true, have worked hard to elaborate a coherent anarchist world view: Kropotkin made a self-conscious effort to present himself as a philosopher. But even Kropotkin recognized that anarchism was defined by the countless newspapers and pamphlets that circulated in working-class circles, not by the theories spawned by people like himself. The vast majority of anarchists have worked as essayists and propagandists and it seems unreasonable and unnecessarily restrictive to assess anarchism through the examination of a tiny, unrepresentative sample of literature. The point is made by Kingsley Widmer:

The parochialism of thinking of anarchism generally just in the Baukunin-Kropotkin [sic] nineteenth-century matrix, even when adding, say, Stirner, Thoreau, Tolstoy or ... what turned-you-on-in-a-libertarian-way, just won't do – not only in ideas but in sensibility, not only in history but in possibility ... Either anarchism should be responded to as various and protean, or it is the mere pathos of defeats and the marginalia of political theory.¹⁷

Leaving the problem of arbitrariness aside, other critics have directed their fire at the conclusions Eltzbacher drew from his study. At the end of his book, Eltzbacher attempted to distil from the wide and disparate body of work he surveyed a unifying idea or core belief that would serve to define anarchism. The idea he settled upon

14 anarchism: a beginner's guide

was – as the French Academy suggested – the rejection of the state. Anarchists, Eltzbacher famously argued, ‘negate the State for our future’.¹⁸ In all the other areas Eltzbacher pinpointed – law, property, political change and statelessness – anarchists were divided. The controversy generated by this conclusion has centred on two points. For some critics Eltzbacher was right to identify anarchism with the rejection of the state, but mistaken in his attempt to classify anarchist families of thought by an apparently scientific method which imposed on anarchism concepts – of property, the state and so forth – that were drawn from legal theory. As one critic put the point, Eltzbacher’s ‘analysis and presentation possessed the finality of a court judgement’. Other critics have been more concerned with Eltzbacher’s general conclusion than with the means by which he purported to distinguish schools of anarchist thought. From this point of view, his mistake was the attempt to identify a common thread in anarchism. Marie Fleming has forcefully advanced the case. In her study of *Elisée Reclus* – a writer conspicuous by his absence from Eltzbacher’s study – Fleming argues that the study of sages imposes a putative, yet meaningless, unity of tradition on a set of ideas that are not only diverse but also often incompatible. As she points out, Eltzbacher himself admitted that his defining principle – the rejection of the state – was filled with ‘totally different meanings’. In his insistence that anarchists be drawn together in one school of thought, he wrongly prioritized philosophy over history. He encouraged the idea that ‘anarchism embodied a peculiar way of looking at the world’ and overlooked the extent to which it was ‘a movement that ... developed in response to specific social-economic grievances in given historical circumstances’.¹⁹

Fleming’s criticism of Eltzbacher’s method is important but it has not undermined the appeal of classical anarchism and should not be taken as a rebuttal of Eltzbacher’s leading conclusion that anarchism implies a rejection of the state. Individual anarchists will of course continue to centre their anarchism on a range of different concepts – usually more positive than the state’s rejection. Nevertheless the rejection of the state is a useful ideological marker and one that resonates in popular culture. Moreover, it’s possible to find a corrective for the general unease created by Eltzbacher’s legalism in two alternative methods of analysis. The first seeks to understand anarchism by distinguishing between different schools of thought. The second is based on a historical analysis of the anarchist movement. These approaches shed a more subtle light than

Eltzbacher was able to do on the nature of anarchist anti-statism. Specifically, the analysis of schools has helped to illustrate the broadness of this concept, and the historical approach its relationship to anti-capitalism.

anarchist thought: schools of anarchism

Anarchists have appended a dizzying array of prefixes and suffixes to 'anarchism' to describe their particular beliefs. Anarchism has been packaged in anarcho-syndicalist, anarcho-feminist, eco-anarchist and anarcho-communist, Christian, social, anarcho-capitalist, reformist and primitivist varieties.

Some anarchists treat these divisions lightly. One doubting sympathizer, the writer Harold Barclay, dubs himself an anarcho-cynicalist. Others find them more problematic. Some dismiss the seemingly endless subdivision of anarchism on the grounds that the labels are excessively sectarian and that they obscure the important bonds that exist between different groups. Others have been fearful that the divisions conceal an un-anarchist intolerance towards others. In the 1880s the Spanish anarchist Ricardo Mella called for an anarchism 'pure and simple', 'anarchism without adjectives' in an effort to avoid straight-jacketing the aspirations of the oppressed in a post-revolutionary situation.²⁰ Voltairine de Cleyre endorsed Mella's position. Since '[l]iberty and experiment alone can determine the best forms of society' she called herself "[a]narchist" simply'. Taking the different tack, some anarchists have argued that the division of anarchists into schools exaggerates the insignificant differences between anarchists whilst blurring the really significant ones. For example, Voltairine de Cleyre mapped her anarchism pure and simple onto a distinction between anarchism 'old' and 'young', where the old were those who had lost their enthusiasm for the cause, and the young were the often quite elderly comrades who continued to live 'with the faith of hope'.²¹ Writing from a rather different perspective John Moore invoked a similar distinction. Finding the existing '57 varieties' of anarchism un-edifying, he encouraged anarchists to adopt a new bi-polar categorization which distinguished the minimalist, reformist, nostalgic 'politics of "if only ..."' from the maximalist, revolutionary, dynamic 'anti-politics of "[w]hat if ...?''²²

Yet for all these complaints, anarchists continue to identify themselves by their particular affiliations and beliefs. In response to the

16 anarchism: a beginner's guide

question 'Who are the anarchists? What do they believe?' six interviewees for a 1968 BBC radio programme responded:

I consider myself to be an anarchist-communist, in the Kropotkin tradition.

I think ... I would say I was an anarchist-socialist, or libertarian socialist ...

I would describe myself as an anarcho-syndicalist ...

I don't call myself an anarcho-syndicalist. I could be called an anarcho-pacifist-individualist with slight communist tendencies ...

I'm an anarchist ... and also think that syndicalism is the anarchist application to organising industry.

I describe myself as a Stirnerite, a conscious egoist.²³

The remainder of this chapter will consider what these and other labels mean, and the relationship between anarchist schools. It begins with a review of some of the traditional typologies and then considers the development of some modern schools. At the end of the chapter, I consider what light the discussion of typology sheds on Eltzbacher's definition of anarchism as the rejection of the state.

The subdivision of anarchists into discrete schools began in the nineteenth century. At first anarchists tended to group themselves into one of two main schools: communist and non-communist. For example, in 1894 the English writer Henry Seymour identified two types of anarchism, one he called mutualistic and the other communistic. Seymour argued that these two doctrines were based on incompatible economic and social principles. The idea of mutualism was to ensure that all workers enjoyed an equal right to land and the means of production, and that monopoly – in the form of rent, interest, profit and taxation – was abolished. Mutualism also encouraged competition between producers, in accordance with the laws of the market. In mutualism, free producers would contract with one another and a special Bank of Exchange would advance credit and help facilitate exchanges between them. In anarcho-communism, by contrast, the community would control property, and the means of production and individuals would be equalized in terms of their comforts rather than their rights. There would be no market exchange. Instead, communists encouraged co-operation and mutual support. Whereas the principle of mutualism was 'the product to the producer and each according to his deeds', the idea of

communism was ‘the product to the community and each according to his needs’. In the social sphere, Seymour argued, the differences between the two doctrines were equally stark. Both mutualism and communism supported free love. But whereas mutualism supported marriage and the family (so long as it was based on the equal liberty and mutual responsibility of the contracting parties), communism challenged both institutions. In particular, communists charged the community with the care of children, not the biological parents, and it thereby encouraged the abandonment of social propriety.²⁴

Voltairine de Cleyre followed a similar system of classification, but instead of distinguishing anarcho-communism from mutualism, she labelled the competing position individualism. Anarchism, she argued, is

... [a] sort of Protestantism, whose adherents are a unit in the great essential belief that all forms of external authority must disappear to be replaced by self-control only, but variously divided in our conception for the form of future society. Individualism supposes private property to be the cornerstone of personal freedom; asserts that such property should consist in the absolute possession of one’s own product and of such share of the natural heritage of all as one may actually use. Communist-Anarchism, on the other hand, declares that such property is both unrealisable and undesirable; that the common possession and use of all the natural sources and means of social production can alone guarantee the individuals against a recurrence of inequality and its attendants, government and slavery.²⁵

In his 1905 entry for ‘anarchism’ in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* Peter Kropotkin expanded these typologies to distinguish six main schools of thought: mutualist, individualist, collectivist (also known as federalist or anti-authoritarian), communist (to which he aligned himself), Christian and literary. Kropotkin’s complex scheme was based on the consideration of ethical as well as economic criteria. For example, following Seymour, he agreed that mutualists and communists differed in their approach to the market, but he embellished his definition of anarcho-communism by identifying it with the moral principle: ‘do as you would be done by’. Pursuing a similar line of thought Kropotkin described individualism as the demand for the ‘full liberation of the individual

18 anarchism: a beginner's guide

from all social and moral bonds'. Individualist anarchists dreamed of the creation of a society of egotists. Theirs was a doctrine of 'complete "a-moralism"' and their ethic was 'mind your own business'.

Kropotkin argued that collectivism was closely aligned with communism and that it shared the same morality. Yet collectivism was particularly associated with the demand that state organization be replaced by a system of decentralized federation constructed through the free agreement of autonomous communities. Collectivism suggested that each collective in the federation would own its own property and the means of production – the land, machinery and so forth used to produce goods and services. It also suggested that each collective would be able to decide how goods and services would be distributed to individual members. This was a confusing idea, as Kropotkin recognized, since collectivism was usually understood by non-anarchist socialists to imply the principle of 'distribution according to work' – i.e. a system of individual, differential reward. However, Kropotkin's controversial view was that anarchist collectivism need not necessarily describe a collectivist system in this sense and that it was possible within the federal framework for collectivists to adopt the communist principle of distribution according to need.

Christian anarchism, as the name suggested, took its lead from Biblical teachings and was associated with an idea of fellowship and individual moral regeneration. Notwithstanding its religious foundation, Kropotkin believed that its vision of Christian fellowship dovetailed with anarcho-communism and that its moral principles could as easily be derived from reason as from God. Kropotkin's final school, literary anarchism, was by his own admission hardly a school at all, but a collection of intellectuals and artists – including J.S. Mill, Richard Wagner and Heinrich Ibsen – whose outpourings illustrated the receptiveness of the cultural elite to anarchist ideas. In other words, literary anarchism was an indication of the interpenetration of anarchist ideas with advanced thought.²⁶

Subsequent writers have considerably extended and modified Kropotkin's classification. Rudolf Rocker represented anarchism as an evolutionary system of thought. Whilst he accepted Kropotkin's idea that anarchist schools were based, at least in part, on a range of different 'economic assumptions as to the means of safeguarding a free community', he also suggested that they collectively described a

progressive movement in thinking. Tracing the evolution of anarchism, he believed that there had been a shift from individualism to collectivism and communism culminating in yet another school of thought: anarcho-syndicalism. This school inherited from collectivism and communism a concern to liberate industrial and rural workers from economic exploitation. What was distinctive about anarcho-syndicalism is that it linked the workers' struggle directly to post-revolutionary organization. Co-operating in unions, or syndicates, workers were organized both to fight against employers and to develop the skills required for them to assume direct control of their factories, workshops and land. In other words, syndicalist – or union – organizations were intended to provide a framework for anarchy.²⁷

Aligning himself more closely to Kropotkin than Rocker, Nicolas Walter preferred to see the schools of thought as alternatives rather than aspects of a single idea. However, he questioned Kropotkin's inclusion of individualism (or what he called libertarianism) in anarchism and added syndicalism and another new category – philosophical anarchism – to Kropotkin's original list. This category, Walter argued, appeared in the 1840s, but its most famous modern statement is Robert Paul Wolff's *In Defense of Anarchism*. Wolff's version purported to provide a 'pure theory' of anarchism without any consideration of 'the material, social, or psychological conditions under which anarchism might be a feasible mode of social organization'.²⁸ In other words, it identified anarchism with a commitment to individual decision-making (sometimes called private judgement) and divorced this commitment from the struggle to realize a particular socio-economic arrangement. Walter had a pithier view. Philosophical anarchism described a partial commitment to anarchy, the idea that 'society without government was attractive ... but not really possible ... anarchism in the head but not in the heart'.

What emerges from these treatments of anarchism? At first glance, the answer seems to be very little. In the matrix below some of the common typologies have been mapped onto the classical thinkers who have been identified by different writers with particular schools. Though there is some commonality in the table, what emerges from this matrix is a picture of confusion. The tendency of each new generation of writers is to have expanded the number of anarchist schools and to have redefined their membership, making the boundaries between schools increasingly diffuse.