MODERN REBELS:

THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF THE NEW ANARCHISTS

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Modern Rebels: The Political Thought of the New Anarchists

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This dissertation is the first sustained evaluation of postwar British and American

anarchist thought. I argue that British and American anarchist intellectuals like Herbert

Read, Alex Comfort, Colin Ward, Paul Goodman, and Murray Bookchin gave shape to a

distinct genre of anarchist thought in the middle decades of the 20th century by adapting

anarchism to non-revolutionary conditions. Their thought was both radical and reformist,

utopian and pragmatic, aimed at democratizing existing institutions no less than

constructing alternatives outside of the state system. It was inspired not only by

"classical" anarchist thinkers like William Godwin and Peter Kropotkin, but by

disciplines like psychology, sociology, and urban planning, as well as indigenous sources

of radicalism like Guild Socialism and Populism. I show how these figures made

anarchism relevant to the most pressing social and political issues of the postwar world:

the rise of the "managerial" welfare state, the threat of nuclear annihilation, the influence

of mass culture and mass education on a growing middle class, and burgeoning concerns

about environmental destruction. Their thought pointed towards a new approach to

political practice, giving theoretical expression to the "intuitive" anarchism of new social

movements like the nuclear disarmament and pacifist movements, the student movement, the ecology movement, and the community control movement. By revealing the political thought of the New Anarchists to be a coherent and inventive body of ideas, I overturn the common belief that the postwar era was unproductive for anarchist theory.

Acknowledgements

I have incurred many debts along the journey from the conceptualization to the completion of this dissertation. I owe thanks, first of all, to Steve Bronner for his many contributions to my intellectual development as an instructor and his guidance as an advisor. Andy Murphy was always ready to offer both expertise and empathy during this project, and he has been a personal confidant as well as an academic mentor throughout my graduate school experience. Dennis Bathory played an instrumental role in my early success at Rutgers, and has always been quick to offer his support whenever I have needed it. I must thank Leonard Williams of Manchester University as well for graciously agreeing to join the dissertation committee on short notice.

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Introduction

Resurrecting the "New Anarchism"

> To declare for a doctrine so remote as anarchism at this stage of history will be regarded by some critics as a sign of intellectual bankruptcy; by others as a sort of treason, a desertion of the democratic front at the most acute moment of its crisis; by still others as merely poetic nonsense.
>
> Herbert Read

The years immediately preceding, encompassing, and postdating World War II were the least promising in the history of the anarchist movement. The tone was set by the tragic events in Spain. In 1936, the northeastern part of the country was "caught in a world-historic revolution," poised to realize "the most generous, almost mythic dreams of freedom." During this "shimmering moment," revolutionaries around the world "stood breathlessly still, while the red banners of revolutionary socialism and the red-and-black banners of revolutionary anarchosyndicalism floated over most of Spain's major cities and thousands of her villages."[1] The "shimmering moment" was soon over. Even before the denouement of the civil war in 1939, the anarchist revolution was crushed by Communist betrayal. What had initially seemed like the renaissance of the anarchist movement took on the appearance of its epilogue, as anarchism was "deprived…of its only foothold in the world."[2] Herbert Read's pessimistic assessment, in a letter to Emma Goldman, was that "Spain was a turning point…it will probably be a century or more

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[1] Murray Bookchin, *To Remember Spain: The Anarchist and Syndicalist Revolution of 1936* (San Francisco, CA: AK Press, 1994), 57.

[2] Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 144.

before we recover from that tragedy."[3] Certainly the prospects of a libertarian revival were dim. The Spanish Republic's eventual capitulation to Franco not only served to seal the fate of the Spanish anarchists, it signaled the triumph of the combined forces of fascism on the Continent. With the advance of Hitler's armies, noted the anarcho-syndicalist Rudolf Rocker retrospectively, the labor movement "crumbled to dust," in "the worst debacle the workers of Europe ever had to suffer."[4] During the Spanish war, an extended network of workers' organizations had provided the backbone of the popular resistance to Franco. The next war against fascism would be fought under very different circumstances.

The outbreak of World War II brought the Allies into confrontation with the most monstrous abuse of state power in human history. The German state had not only sunk its roots into the general population to a unique degree, blurring the lines between public and private, individual and collective, it had mobilized its highly organized apparatus of coercion against its neighbors in an unprecedented mêlée of high-tech destruction. The irony, of course, was that the slayers of such an imposing Leviathan could only rise to the occasion with their own massive mobilization of centralized power. The converse of Germany's statist nightmare, it appeared, was not *anti*-statism but rather *benevolent* statism—that is, the centralization of power and authority in the state in the service of "freedom" and "democracy." Those were the very principles, however, which were in short supply during the war years, even in the countries which purported to act in defense of them. The wartime governments of both Britain and the United States made extensive

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[3] Goldman quotes from Read's letter in *Vision on Fire: Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution*, ed. David Porter (Edinburgh, UK: AK Press, 2006), 277.

[4] Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh, UK: AK Press, 2004), 109.

use of involuntary conscription, imposed heavy restrictions on civil society, and even herded their own citizens into concentration camps: in the U.S., some 112,000 Japanese-Americans were "relocated" in what was "the most systematic abuse of constitutional rights in twentieth-century United States history."[5] For anarchists who believed that the state did not readily cede back the power it accreted to itself, these developments were not reducible to mere wartime exigencies, but were instead forebodings of a lasting shift in the balance of power between state and society.

The shift towards statism was reinforced by the widespread feeling that if government mandarins could successfully wield the state during wartime to rid the world of the fascist menace, they could accomplish similar feats when directing it towards the peacetime needs of the domestic population. Primed by postwar triumphalism and optimism, never had the public at large been so ready to accept the legitimacy of an expanding state bureaucracy overseen by expert elites. In Britain, the newly-elected Labour government seized the opportunity to nationalize a number of key industries and establish the bedrock of postwar social policy, passing the National Insurance Act, the National Assistance Act, and the National Health Service Act in rapid succession. In the United States, the esteem enjoyed by the government after the war did not so much enable new reforms as solidify existing ones: for the foreseeable future, the legacy of the New Deal was safe from the many conservatives who would have readily attacked it under more favorable conditions. In both countries, economic regulation and planning were now deemed to be legitimate government activities, on the assumption that the government had proven its ability to coordinate complex social dynamics and enterprises

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[5] James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States 1945-1974* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.

from above. Thus, while the Allied victory interred the German, Italian, and Japanese states, it did not spell the end of statism *per se*, quite the contrary—it validated those states like Britain and America which managed (at least according to their own rhetoric) to combine strength with freedom, and which, increasingly, used that strength to corral market forces, plan social development, and distribute the fruits of the capitalist economy more equitably.

Although conservatives regained power in both Britain and the United States in the early 1950s, a broad political consensus ensured that their policies continued to tread the path marked out by the regimes that preceded them. This political holding pattern was aimed at preserving the trend towards economic recovery and affluence, which was by that time well in evidence. Confident in the abilities of their elected leaders, dissuaded from social criticism by Cold War hysteria, and preoccupied with the comforting inanities of mass culture and the panoply of consumer goods available with the end of wartime scarcity, Britons and Americans settled into a mood of political complacency. Far from arousing concern, their passivity comported with the prescriptions of the leading political thinkers of the era. Popular participation in political affairs was seen as an invitation to fascist demagoguery: better that the ship of state was piloted by elites who, though kept in check by electoral competition, would exercise wide prerogative in tending to the public's best interests. The premium placed on political expertise as against populist amateurism was reinforced by the behavioral revolution in the social sciences, which fostered the idea that politics was a "science," whose secrets were accessible only to those with special training. Compared to the experts privy to those secrets, the masses

were little better than a bewildered herd, their competence quickly stretched thin when asked to ponder matters beyond the most immediate, personal sphere of life.

This was the social and political climate that prevailed in the first decade after the war: unabashedly undemocratic, subtly repressive, and signally hostile to reform, much less revolution. For those who considered themselves part of the left—which, as C. Wright Mills put it, had a responsibility to expose ideology, to put forward "structural criticism and reportage and theories of society," and to focus these "politically as demands and programmes"—it was a time of great soul-searching.[6] Outside of the members of officially Communist organizations who had the temerity to offer their sympathies openly to "East" over "West," there was a crisis of political identity as well as political program. What did it mean, exactly, to be a "socialist" when the masses had bought into the system, when capitalism had developed in the direction of stability rather than crisis, and when "actually-existing" socialism and social democracy had proven so uninspiring?

In Britain, two events in particular—both taking place in 1956—helped to bring these kinds of questions out into the open and break the sense of political stalemate. The first was the Suez crisis of the middle of that year. When Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, he sparked a joint military invasion by Israeli, French, and British forces which was widely condemned by the international community. The crisis gave the British left the first issue of the postwar era it felt it could vociferously oppose, engendering a reawakening of political consciousness and inspiring the first mass political rally of the 1950s in Trafalgar Square. For socialists, it served as a

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[6] C. Wright Mills, *The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills*, ed. John H. Summers (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 260.

vivid reminder of the bankruptcy of the capitalist-imperialist system and the need to put forward a radical alternative. As the drama in Egypt played itself out, the second of the epochal events of that year, the brutal Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Revolution, riveted the world's attention. Coming in the same year as Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party, the actions of the Soviet Union in Hungary dissolved any hope that it had entered a new era of liberalization, and accelerated the drift of intellectuals like E. P. Thompson, Christopher Hill, and Eric Hobsbawm away from Communism and towards a more independent position. Unmoored from Party loyalties, these veterans of the Old Left established relations with a younger contingent of political radicals, centered in the universities, whose sensibilities were more firmly rooted in the politics of the postwar world, and who were similarly looking for a "third way" between Western capitalism and Eastern Communism. This meeting of the minds gave rise to the British "New Left," which eventually found its main organ in the *New Left Review*.

The New Left, seeking to break free from the dogmatism of the Old, prided itself on heterogeneity, but it was characterized by some common sentiments. First was the feeling that the socialist project needed to be reformulated in order to account for the changing nature of capitalism and the "corporatism" that had established an entente between Big Government, Big Business, and Big Labor. Second was the belief that, in contrast to the increasingly unconvincing idea that the working class (or its representatives) would make the revolution through the conquest of the state, it was necessary to expand the concept of the "political" to reflect the existence of many potential sites of contestation and agents of social change. Third was the newfound

interest in culture and ideology, "superstructural" phenomena once dismissed offhandedly by orthodox Marxists, but now recognized as crucial factors in shaping the political behavior and outlook of the masses. Finally, many believed it was time to rethink the relationship between short- and long-term objectives. Although the New Left criticized the reformism of the Labour Party and of social democrats generally, it did not oppose to it the timeworn conception of revolution as a catalytic uprising of working-class discontents. Rather, it hoped to bypass entirely what it saw as an unconstructive dichotomy between "reform" and "revolution" by seeking out modes of social action that possessed, simultaneously, the qualities of immediacy and long-term vision.[7]

The British intellectuals who comprised the New Left took their name from the *nouvelle gauche*, a political tendency in France associated with former member of the Resistance Claude Bourdet. Their ideas, however, were largely inspired by the genre of critical sociology emerging in the United States. American sociologists were beginning to poke holes in the idea that postwar affluence had ushered in a new Golden Age, raising nagging questions about juvenile delinquency, conformity, and the hegemony of self-interested elites who were having their way with an inert and oblivious populace. In books like David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1956), and C. Wright Mills's *The Power Elite* (1956), "the dissonant voices of the Fifties," Todd Gitlin writes, were beginning to show that the "individual was paying a steep price—in autonomy and meaning—for the security and comfort he was reaping from the managed, bureaucratically organized society."[8] Even more important in bringing the shibboleths of the era into question was John Kenneth

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[7] See Stuart Hall, "Life and Times of the First New Left" *New Left Review* 61 (Jan. – Feb. 2010): 177-96.

[8] Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 19.

Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (1958). Galbraith influentially argued that modern

industrialized nations, by overcoming scarcity, were outgrowing the assumptions and

values that had arisen out of early capitalism: the inevitability of poverty and inequality,

the materialistic imperatives to produce and acquire, the Protestant work ethic with its

attitude of scrimping and saving, and the individualistic model of private production and

consumption. Applied to societies capable of securing general affluence, these

assumptions and values yielded absurdities: they legitimized privation caused by the

lopsided distribution of wealth even though there was plenty to go around, they

encouraged production above and beyond what was necessary through the creation of

false needs, they counseled asceticism in the face of new opportunities for leisure and

enjoyment, and they enriched the private sphere while impoverishing the public sphere.

Once "conventional wisdom" (a term Galbraith popularized) was discarded and the

potential of the affluent society unlocked, it would be possible to fight poverty, eliminate

useless toil, cultivate non-materialistic ends, and invest in public institutions and

programs.[9]

Despite the novelty and even radicalism of some of his conclusions, Galbraith

remained attached to the liberal establishment. For the New Left, however, many of the

implications of his argument seemed to lend credence to its socialist inclinations. Thanks

in large part to the rising profile of the Frankfurt School, it became possible to apply

some of these insights within an explicitly socialist framework. Indeed, it was Herbert

Marcuse, the displaced German Marxist writing from the faux-paradise of San Diego,

California, who would elaborate the most influential theory of the affluent society. In his

One Dimensional Man (1964) he echoed Galbraith in many respects, arguing that "the

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[9] John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (New York: Mariner Books, 1998).

institutions which served the struggle for existence cannot serve the pacification of existence. Life as an end is qualitatively different from life as a means."[10] The technological advances that had made possible major improvements in productive capacity were still, Marcuse claimed, being organized by elites around the archaic objectives of conquering nature and generating ever more output. Like Galbraith, he recognized that in order for the system to stay afloat, it had to create artificial wants in order to absorb its surplus. Marcuse probed the consequences of this arrangement more deeply, however. By fabricating the desires it was supposedly created to satisfy, the system of production and distribution was beginning to determine not only means but ends. The result was that people were coming to see the false needs generated by capitalist culture as their own, binding their very emotions, sensibilities and aspirations to the existing order. Individuals, Marcuse wrote, had become "one-dimensional" because their entire way of life embodied the values and logic of industrial society—there was no longer an "outside" from which to critique the status quo. Imprisoned on the level of consciousness, it was increasingly difficult to envision these individuals pressing for social change. The consequence was a condition of social stasis which dissipated the potential of the affluent society in trivialities meant to placate the middle class, contained the discontent of those at the bottom of the social order, and kept power firmly in the hands of the captains of industry and government.

If there was a way out of this predicament, it could not, Marcuse realized, follow the script of orthodox Marxism. Traditional class distinctions, he argued, were becoming less relevant, as a sense of overriding common interests convinced the powerless majority

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[10] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 17.

that their well-being was bound up with that of the powerful minority. Marx's preferred agent of change—the working class—was more than ever before fueled not by a sense of indignation and irreconcilable contradictions between social strata, but by the very same set of values as the capitalist elite—indeed, its highest aspiration was to join the ranks of that elite. With the loss of the proletariat as the concrete historical agent of revolution, the unity of theory and practice that had characterized the early days of Marxism was sundered. The future, following the logic of Marcuse's argument, looked grim. Without an agent to bring about change, speculation about social alternatives could only be pure abstraction, utopianism in the most pejorative sense of the term.

Marcuse's conclusions offered more than just doom and gloom, however. He held both that "advanced industrial society is capable of containing qualitative change for the foreseeable future" *and* that "forces and tendencies exist which may break this containment and explode the society."[11] Like Galbraith, part of Marcuse's project was to reveal the alternative arrangements that "haunted" established society, possibilities for satisfying individual needs and fostering individual autonomy "with a minimum of toil and misery."[12] The first step in such a direction would have to come from those precious few who had resisted cooptation, who were alienated enough from the existing order to "refuse" it absolutely. Shades of Bakunin can be discerned in Marcuse's claim that the only hope of revolution rested with non-integrated "outsiders."[13]

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[11] Ibid., xv.
[12] Ibid., xi.
[13] Doug Kellner is right to stress that Marcuse's "notion of individualistic refusal and revolt" is in tension with "anarchist concepts of mutual aid, revolutionary mass upheaval [and] collective self-government." But Kellner fails to note the ways in which Marcuse's ideas were indebted to the more individualistic variant of anarchism that informed the artistic avant-garde of the early 20th century. *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 279.

By moving away from the class-based analyses of orthodox Marxism, highlighting the significance of domination in the "superstructural" realm, and pointing to new agents of social change outside of the working class, the political theory that most influenced the New Left created the intellectual conditions in which anarchist ideas could take on fresh relevance. Political practice was evolving in the postwar era as well. The so-called "new social movements" that came to be identified with the New Left were distinct from their predecessors in several important ways. They were less concerned with class struggle and more concerned with what the sociologist Wini Breines called "prefiguration," seeking "to create and sustain within the live practice of the movement, relationships and political forms that 'prefigured' and embodied the desired society."[14] They were wary of hierarchy and centralized organization, placing emphasis on participatory democracy and the construction of egalitarian communities and counter-institutions. They embraced ethical principles in a manner foreign to the realism of traditional Marxist groups, but managed at the same time to devise practical and effective methods of political engagement.[15] In mobilizing around previously neglected issues like race and gender, and illustrating the possibility of making an impact outside of official political channels, they showed that "often what appears unpolitical or apolitical is in fact political."[16] Most or all of the aforementioned qualities—implicitly, if not explicitly, informed by anarchist principles of organization and action—could be found in

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[14] Wini Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left, 1962-1968: The Great Refusal* (South Hadley, MA: J. F. Bergin Publishers, 1982), 6.

[15] Francesca Polletta enumerates the many ways in which the libertarian aspect of these movements made them stronger and more effective: maximizing participation and deliberation gave all members a feeling of ownership of decisions, encouraged people to recognize the legitimacy of each other's reasoning, kept organizations flexible and open to innovative suggestions, fostered a sense of agency and confidence, built skills in discussion and action, and balanced individual initiative with solidarity. See *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002).

[16] Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left*, xiii.

movements as diverse as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the civil rights movement (especially the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), the student movement (especially Students for a Democratic Society, whose Port Huron Statement was the era's most influential reveille for participatory democracy), the community control movement, and the burgeoning environmental and feminist movements.

The libertarianism that colored the social movements of the postwar era was complemented by wide-ranging changes that were taking place at the cultural level throughout society at large. The revelations that came out of New Left thought about the role of culture in protecting privilege and fostering quiescence suggested that one of the prerequisites of political radicalism was a transvaluation of values that freed consciousness from the grip of the Establishment worldview. The extent to which such a transvaluation actually took place during the 1960s is still striking. Virtually overnight, in historical terms, a generation of young people launched a major revolt against the technocratic, patriarchal, puritanical, and militaristic assumptions that their parents had taken for granted. For all of the ridicule that has been heaped upon the activities of the "counterculture"—its communal experimentation, its efforts to expand consciousness through drug use, its flouting of social conventions—those activities arguably had real political import. As Gitlin writes, "like the anarchist Wobblies," the counterculture "longed to create the new society in the womb (or ashes) of the old."[17] Its "beat-hip bohemianism," Theodore Roszak suggests, was "an effort to work out the personality structure and total life style that follow from New Left social criticism."[18] In other words,

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[17] Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 354.
[18] Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), 66.

the seemingly individualistic nonconformity of youth in the 1960s was linked, or at least

could potentially be linked, to utopian political ambitions.

Whether on the level of theory, organization and strategy, or cultural sensibility,

there were ample opportunities for anarchism to contribute to the revivified left after

1956. Most of the radicalism of that era was more aptly described as "anarchistic" than

"anarchist," however, flowing out of political intuition and personal proclivities rather

than patterning itself explicitly on the anarchist tradition. In his groundbreaking 1965

essay "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought," Murray Bookchin chalked up the "rejection

of the prevailing state of affairs" to precisely this "explosive growth of intuitive

anarchism among young people":

> Their love of nature is a reaction against the highly synthetic qualities of our urban environment and its shabby products. Their informality of dress and manners is a reaction against the formalized, standardized nature of modern institutionalized living. Their predisposition for direct action is a reaction against the bureaucratization and centralization of society. Their tendency to drop out, to avoid toil and the rat race, reflects a growing anger towards the mindless industrial routine bred by modern mass manufacture in the factory, the office or the university. Their intense individualism is, in its own elemental way, a *de facto* decentralization of social life—a personal withdrawal from mass society.[19]

To call this collection of attitudes and behaviors "intuitive anarchism" was to suggest that

it reflected a *sensibility* rather than a body of ideas, a demeanor rather than a doctrine, a

spontaneous and largely unreflective expression of resistance rather than a reasoned and

considered approach to social questions.

Acknowledging the existence of this sensibility and tracing its many permutations

in postwar Britain and America is vital if we are to assess the position of anarchism more

generally during this period. But were we to leave our investigation there, it would result

in a distinctly incomplete picture, a picture with little direct significance for political

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[19] Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (San Francisco, CA: Ramparts Press, 1971), 60.

theory. To focus exclusively on the anarchist "sensibility" that flourished in the politics and culture of this era is to ignore important efforts by anarchist thinkers to guide this sensibility into a coherent outlook, consciously informed by the anarchist tradition of political thought. Indeed, the central claim of this dissertation is that significant developments in anarchist *theory* took place in Britain and America during the postwar years. Many of the most interesting, important, and, from a contemporary perspective, relevant anarchist thinkers of the 20th century came to prominence and authored their most significant work during this period and within the milieu described in this Introduction. These figures did not merely recycle the ideas of the "classical" anarchists who came before them, but gave shape to a "New Anarchism"[20] which was fed by a rich variety of influences, and which sought to account for the new social realities of the postwar world. Yet the anarchist thought of this period has been largely overlooked, dismissed, forgotten, and misunderstood.[21] The failure to take full stock of not just the anarchistic tendencies, but of the anarchist *thought* of the postwar era, and to place its most representative figures in extended conversation with one another, has resulted in a woefully anemic understanding of the insights and contributions those figures had to offer. It may be going too far to claim that what has been missed, or at least underappreciated, is a distinctive "school" of anarchist thought—this would suggest more agreement and interconnection than was actually present, as well as a collective identity that was not always in evidence. The less extreme claim that informs this dissertation is

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[20] For an explanation of this term, see footnote 28 below.

[21] Notable exceptions include the recent work of David Goodway and Carissa Honeywell, although their studies are limited to the British context. One of the contributions this project seeks to make is to reveal the affinities between the British libertarian and anarchist tradition they have brought into scholarly focus and the most important figures within American anarchism during the same era. See David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2006) and Carissa Honeywell, *A British Anarchist Tradition: Herbert Read, Alex Comfort and Colin Ward* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

that the thinkers examined herein might fruitfully be considered representatives of a "genre" of anarchist thought distinguishable in notable ways from the anarchism that preceded and followed it.

It should be emphasized that the New Anarchism described in the following chapters did not encompass all of the Britons and Americans who self-identified as anarchists during this period. Some anarchists, assessing their options after the war, opted not to take their anarchism in a new direction but rather to get "back in the old routine," in Albert Meltzer's words.[22] For Meltzer, this meant resuming a combination of industrial agitation and support for revolutionaries internationally, particularly those exiled from Spain after Franco's ascendance to power. Meltzer, along with his eventual collaborator Stuart Christie, was probably the best example of what has been called the "class struggle" strain of postwar anarchism. Anarchists like Meltzer and Christie continued to focus on working-class industrial organization in the belief that "only productive classes can be libertarian," and carried over from the prewar era an avowedly revolutionary, combative, and uncompromising attitude.[23] They were generally hostile to efforts to intellectualize anarchism, being far more interested in direct action than theory. Indeed, they resented any suggestion that worker consciousness needed to be developed in an "intellectual" direction before workers were able to govern themselves competently.[24]

It is hardly surprising, then, that not the class struggle anarchists, but the anarchists who preferred to rework, revise, and supplement traditional anarchist ideas made the most significant contributions to anarchist theory during the postwar era. These

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[22] Albert Meltzer, *I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels: Sixty Years of Commonplace Life and Anarchist Agitation* (Edinburgh, UK: AK Press, 1996), 121.

[23] Stuart Christie and Albert Meltzer, *The Floodgates of Anarchy* (London: Sphere Books, 1970), 28.

[24] Ibid., 36.

New Anarchists include, firstly, Herbert Read (1893-1968), who at the peak of his fame

was the leading art critic in Britain and one of the most enthusiastic champions of the

avant-garde. The oldest of the New Anarchists by a considerable margin, Read's political

sensibilities were shaped by early-20th century debates within English modernism, by his

experiences as a soldier in World War I, and by his reading of libertarian thinkers like

Kropotkin, Edward Carpenter, and the Guild Socialists. An eclectic thinker whose

anarchism was aesthetic, psychological, pacifistic, and pragmatic, Read exerted an

important influence on both the British and American wings of the New Anarchism. One

of the anarchists most influenced by Read was the scientist, physician, and poet Alex

Comfort (1920-2000). Although best known for his writings on sexuality (he authored the

phenomenally successful *The Joy of Sex*), Comfort was a distinguished pacifist who in his

Authority and Delinquency in the Modern State linked the terrors inflicted by the state

abroad to the intolerance of "delinquency" at home. Perhaps the most individualistic of

the New Anarchists (he was the only one who did not identify as a socialist), Comfort

articulated an anarchism which embodied the refusal to acquiesce to the mass insanity

that was World War II and the need to preserve individual responsibility—to the self and

the species—during one of the darkest periods in the history of Western civilization.

Colin Ward (1924-2010) was the most emblematic figure of the New Anarchism in

Britain. An architect, educator, and prolific social historian, Ward first came into contact

with anarchism during his military service in Glasgow, and like the other British

anarchists represented in this study, he was eventually drawn into the Freedom Press

circle which revolved around Vernon Richards and Marie Louise Berneri. After co-

editing the British anarchist movement's flagship journal *Freedom* in the 1950s, he went

on to edit *Anarchy*, which from 1961-70 was the leading journal of the New Anarchism. Ward's wide-ranging body of work and mentorship of young activists and writers earned him the title, as his obituary in *The Guardian* put it, of "Britain's most famous anarchist for nearly half a century."[25]

Three other British figures, although they receive less attention in what follows, also made important contributions to the New Anarchism. As a student of the Guild Socialist G. D. H. Cole, the political scientist Geoffrey Ostergaard (1926-1990) provided the New Anarchism with a direct link to earlier traditions of British radicalism. A faculty member at the University of Birmingham throughout his career, Ostergaard contributed numerous articles to *Freedom* and *Anarchy* on workers' control. He also produced two pioneering studies of the connection between anarchism and Gandhian nonviolence, stemming from his firsthand experience with the Sarvodaya movement in India as a Visiting Professor at Osmania University, Hyderabad. The journalist Nicolas Walter (1934-2000) was known in Britain as an outspoken humanist and secularist as well as an anarchist. Walter was the author of the widely-read *About Anarchism* and one of the boldest anarcho-pacifists of his day, participating in the Spies for Peace affair and serving time in prison for protesting the Vietnam War. George Woodcock (1912-1995) edited the anarchist cultural review *Now* during the 1940s, and although he left Britain for British Columbia in 1949, his subsequent work was highly influential amongst New Anarchists. Woodcock was the author of the first major postwar history of the anarchist movement, and his series of authoritative biographies of great anarchists as well as his many introductions to reprints of their work were instrumental in making the anarchist tradition available to a new generation of readers.

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[25] Ken Worpole, "Colin Ward Obituary," *The Guardian* 22 February 2010.

In the United States, the most important figures of the New Anarchism were Paul Goodman (1911-1972) and Murray Bookchin (1921-2006). Goodman, who variously wore the hats of novelist, poet, literary critic, professor, and clinical psychologist, was the most famous American anarchist of his day. Coming of age in the interwar years amongst bohemian New York radicals, he was a vocal champion of anarchist politics even during the height of the Second World War, a fact which helped to stall his literary career. A decade-and-a-half later, he was launched into the national spotlight with the stunning success of his book *Growing Up Absurd*, which became one of the seminal texts of the New Left. As one of the most respected radical intellectuals of his day, Goodman served as an unofficial mentor to the student movement, and his ideas on education drew interest from the mainstream as well as the radical fringe. Bookchin was a lifelong revolutionary who began his political career as a stalwart Communist, propagandizing on behalf of the Party as a teenager on the streets of New York City. Gradually evolving from a Stalinist into a Trotskyist into an anarchist, he developed an innovative blend of anarchism and ecology in the 1960s that helped turn him into one of the central figures in the green movement. Building an ambitious body of work over the course of four decades, Bookchin emerged as the New Anarchism's most important theorist, integrating his anarchism into an original theory of nature, and formulating a distinctive reimagining of direct democracy he called "libertarian municipalism."

Aside from these two all-important American New Anarchists, several others are worthy of mention. The editor and cultural critic Dwight Macdonald (1906-1982), before settling into an identity as a "conservative anarchist," followed a political trajectory not unlike Bookchin's. A Stalinist until the Moscow Trials, he served as the editor of the

Troskyist *Partisan Review* before abandoning Marxism altogether in the mid-1940s,

embracing pacifism, and founding the journal *politics*, which he edited until it folded in

1949. In the 1950s, Macdonald shifted to cultural criticism, establishing himself as "the

Lord High Executioner of middlebrow culture."[26] During the 1960s, he developed a

reputation as a leading defender of student rebellion and supporter of community control.

Dorothy Day (1897-1980), "head Anarch" of the Catholic Worker movement (as one of

her fellow Workers called her), was, along with co-founder Peter Maurin (1877-1949),

responsible for the movement's distinctive blend of anarchism, pacifism, personalism,

and orthodox Catholicism. The Catholic Worker movement under their leadership helped

to give shape to an ethical anarchism focused as much on developing new models of

community as on contesting the state. Finally, the linguist Noam Chomsky (1928-), as the

world's most famous social critic and public intellectual, is by far the best-known and

most widely-read of anyone who might be classified as a New Anarchist. His first

political book, 1969's *American Power and the New Mandarins*, revealed him to be a

"fellow-traveler" (his preferred designation) of the anarchist tradition. Although his

intellectual temperament has prevented him from engaging in anarchist "theory" *per se*,

he has brought a consistently libertarian perspective to a seemingly endless stream of

books on American foreign policy and the mass media.

Despite the diversity of this assemblage of personalities, a number of shared

characteristics justify our grouping them under the heading of the "New Anarchism."[27]

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[26] Louis Menand, "Introduction" in Dwight Macdonald, *Masscult and Midcult: Essays against the American Grain* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2011), vii.

[27] The use of the phrase "New Anarchism" is, admittedly, beset by difficulties, for it has been applied in a variety of contradictory ways: some have used it simply to refer to the most recent crop of anarchist thinkers, some (like Robert Graham) have used it to capture all anarchist thought since 1939, and some (like Paul McLaughlin) have used it more narrowly to signify a "non-dogmatic and open-ended form of anarchism inspired by Malatesta." Paul McLaughlin, *Anarchism and Authority: A Philosophical*

Firstly, although many of these figures first came to prominence in the 1960s, their political sympathies evolved considerably earlier, within a climate far less sympathetic to libertarian ideas. Consequently, their attraction to anarchism was borne of deep-seated intellectual affinities that had little to do with its immediate viability or its popularity as a doctrine. They entered the 1960s having already evolved thoughtful and informed understandings of anarchism, which insulated them from the tempestuous fluctuations in political ideology that claimed many of the libertarians of that decade. Secondly, when these figures drew inspiration from the "classical" anarchist tradition—which, when defined most expansively, extended from Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* of 1793 to the demise of Spanish anarchism in the late 1930s—they were attracted above all to thinkers like Kropotkin who were communalistic, intellectual, peaceful, and pragmatic. Thirdly, all of them attempted to expand the horizons of anarchism beyond its traditional concerns with economic exploitation and state domination, opening up new areas of social life to anarchist influence. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, they all recognized the need to move beyond anarchism's longstanding preoccupation with violent insurrection and apocalyptic revolution. They were interested in nonviolent, gradualist strategies of social change, and they attempted to make anarchist principles directly relevant to everyday life.

Chapter One of the dissertation introduces some of the main themes of the New Anarchism by way of a comprehensive overview of the political thought of Herbert Read. Read's innovative anarchism anticipated, and to some extent influenced, many of the

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Introduction to Classical Anarchism (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 167. What we mean by the "New Anarchism" most closely approximates the category of anarchist thought that Ruth Kinna labels "practical anarchism," a genre she associates with Read, Ward, Woodcock, and Goodman. See *Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2005), 142-47.

concerns of later New Anarchists. Although his preferred terminology of "classicism" and "romanticism" was somewhat idiosyncratically informed by his background in aesthetics, he like other New Anarchists sought to strike a balance between reason and emotion, order and spontaneity. His fusion of pacifism and anti-statism helped to make anarcho-pacifism the default position of many anarchists during and after World War II. His interest in psychology established the importance of examining the subjective conditions of individual freedom and social solidarity. His interest in pedagogy and identification of educational institutions as the most promising sites of social change helped to imbue education with paramount importance. And finally, his effort to reconcile pragmatism and utopianism captured the New Anarchists' ambitions of linking immediate, practical activity to far-reaching social ideals.

Chapter Two traces the emergence of "anarcho-pacifism" in the lead up to World War II, its influence on conscientious objection, and its role in the anti-nuclear movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the 1930s, anarchists like Bart de Ligt began to break openly with the violent, insurrectionary model of revolution predominant at that time, finding common ground with the more radical, sociologically-grounded pacifism that emerged in the interwar years. Anarchists and radical pacifists alike were convinced by Gandhi's example that nonviolence had the potential to be more "revolutionary" than violence, and New Anarchists began to repurpose traditional anarchist tactics like "propaganda by deed" and "direct action" on behalf of nonviolent individual resistance and collective struggle. Once anarchist militancy was conceptualized along nonviolent lines, they found, there arose the possibility of reconciling means and ends, establishing consistency between anarchism's combative and constructive aspects. Acts of principled,

nonviolent resistance—whether on an individual level, like the wartime dissent of Alex Comfort, Paul Goodman, and Dorothy Day, or on the collective level of social movements like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament—could be linked to prefigurative efforts to anticipate in the actions and organizations of the present a future social order in which principle and practice were harmonized.

Chapter Three examines the New Anarchists' approach to the welfare state, showing how they sought to apply the logic of "socialization" and popular control not just to the realm of production, but to postwar social policy as well. The New Anarchists were some of the sharpest critics of the bloated bureaucracies, the institutional mentalities, and the paternalistic policies that plagued the British and American states during the middle of the century. They denounced the dehumanizing and undemocratic consequences of treating people as "personnel," and called for the decentralization and democratization of public institutions. At the same time, they understood that they were not dealing with the highly repressive and authoritarian states that prompted the uncompromising hostility of 19th-century anarchists. The welfare state incorporated—however imperfectly and incompletely—pieces of the socialist ideal, and state provisions like health care, social security, and universal education could not be simplistically opposed by those who believed—as the New Anarchists did—that social welfare was integral to individual autonomy and well-being, and that the market could not be trusted to provide it. Committed to finding ways of working within the new landscape created by the welfare state, they found that in some cases state activity could, if properly exploited, be put in the service of libertarian ends. This was especially true in the 1960s and 1970s, when the state began acting in some instances to promote decentralization and grassroots

involvement in social policy. Even as New Anarchists like Colin Ward called for a "welfare society" rather than a "welfare state," they adopted a nuanced position that made the best of what the system had to offer while consistently reiterating the need to build radical alternatives.

Chapter Four demonstrates the centrality of education to the New Anarchism. The New Anarchists roundly excoriated the "compulsory mis-education" of their time, which they believed was oriented towards turning students into obedient and functional cogs tailored to the needs of private and public bureaucracies. They stressed the need to reorient education pedagogically and institutionally so as to foster qualities of individual autonomy and social solidarity. Herbert Read, in his *Education through Art*, showed how innate aesthetic sensibilities could be steered by the gentle interventions of educators to encourage freedom of individual expression as well as a sense of organic connection to the natural and social world. He was the first of the New Anarchists to propose that education play a central role—*the* central role, in fact—in preparing people for self-government and stimulating social change. In the 1960s, Paul Goodman developed the most comprehensive educative ideal to come out of the New Anarchism. That ideal both inspired and was inspired by the libertarian educational experimentation of that decade and the rise of student radicalism. Goodman emphasized the need to decentralize educational institutions, to give children a role in decision-making, to provide a range of options for students of different interests and temperaments, and to extend education beyond the walls of the schoolhouse into the surrounding environment. On the level of higher education, he called for a "community of scholars" which was self-governed, in critical but constructive tension with the surrounding society, and which combined the

intimacy of face-to-face interaction with a "universal culture" comprised of a shared set of humanistic ideals. By looking to educational institutions as founts of social change and models of community, New Anarchists like Read and Goodman invested education with a degree of significance unparalleled in the history of the anarchist tradition.

Chapter Five evaluates Murray Bookchin's "social ecology," his ambitious attempt to show how the drive to dominate nature, which had been identified as the Achilles heel of the Enlightenment by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, could be eliminated by putting an end to its root cause: the domination of human being by human being. This was the basis of the special affinity he posited between ecology and anarchism, for anarchism, unlike Marxism, placed emphasis on eradicating domination in all its forms. Hopeful that the emergence of the "new social movements" offered an unprecedented opportunity to further that objective, Bookchin urged them to unite around a shared project of confronting domination. The philosophy of nature he developed in his magnum opus *The Ecology of Freedom* was meant to provide that project with greater coherence by showing how a libertarian politics could be inspired by tendencies that were present in the natural world.

Chapter Six shows how the New Anarchists sought to rescue the utopian tradition from its association with totalitarianism by combining their visions of an ideal anarchist society with a democratic model of social planning. They rejected the idea that the pursuit of ambitious social ideals was doomed to degenerate into authoritarian social engineering, as the anti-utopians of the postwar era believed. Drawing from what Marie Louise Berneri called the "libertarian" strain of the utopian tradition, as well as the modern incarnation of the "ideal city" tradition exemplified by Ebenezer Howard's

Garden City, they found in utopian thought not reckless social idealism but admirable principles of limit and moderation. Seeking practical ways of uniting the real with the ideal, they looked to decentralist planners like Patrick Geddes who placed emphasis on respecting democratic input and local diversity when implementing social plans, and pursuing social improvement through cautious "conservative surgery." New Anarchist utopianism was, in many ways, "conservative" and pragmatic: rather than seeking to implant social blueprints forcefully into a messy reality, they sought utopian potential within social existence as given, and insisted upon keeping the anarchist vision open-ended and adaptable.

The Conclusion of the dissertation looks at the New Anarchists as "public intellectuals," radicals operating after the waning of traditional understandings of revolutionary politics, whose social criticism and theoretical offerings comprised, for the most part, their main contributions to social change. The New Anarchists were as concerned with raising anarchist thought to the level of intellectual respectability as they were with building a new anarchist movement. They believed that anarchists had to find ways of adjusting to the reality of a pluralistic society, in which the anarchist perspective had to prove itself within the discursive arena of the public sphere and demonstrate its superiority to other political perspectives in practice. This meant that it was necessary, not to engage in a "great refusal" of the System, but to find constructive ways of working within it. This the New Anarchists did on a personal as well as a political level. None of them belonged to Marcuse's category of unintegrated "outsiders"—they generally came from bourgeois backgrounds and depended for their livelihoods to a great extent on the very System they opposed. Yet they managed to be "in" the System without being "of" it,

evidencing a "peculiar resiliency" against its corruptions and temptations and maintaining a sense of critical detachment and radical vision.[28]

The main objective of this dissertation is to bring to light the coherence, consistency, and contributions of New Anarchist thought within its historical setting. A full assessment of the New Anarchism's relevance to the present would require carefully situating it amongst the anarchist alternatives that have been opposed to it. This, unfortunately, is beyond the scope of the present project. Nevertheless, we may state briefly the potential limitations of the New Anarchism from the standpoint of competing anarchist perspectives. To "class struggle" anarchists like Meltzer and Christie, for example, the revisionist, pragmatic anarchism that developed in the postwar years was little more than "militant liberalism."[29] It was unable "to comprehend the class struggle," and was smitten with ineffective tactics of protest and persuasion.[30] The anarchist movement, they lamented, was being taken over by students and bourgeois intellectuals, a veritable "pacifist-liberal Mafia who sought to re-invent anarchism in their own image."[31] There were two, mutually exclusive, ways of understanding anarchism, wrote Meltzer: "Either it was a marble effigy of utopian ideals, to be admired and defined and even lived up to by some chosen individuals within the framework of a repressive society, or it was a fighting creed with a programme for breaking down repression."[32] From the perspective of the class warriors, then, the New Anarchism was robbing the anarchist tradition of its unique identity and fighting spirit by phasing it into liberalism.

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[28] Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 96.
[29] Christie and Meltzer, *The Floodgates of Anarchy*, 59.
[30] Ibid., 60.
[31] Philip Roff, "Introduction" to Meltzer, *I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels*, 5.
[32] Ibid, 104.

From the perspective of contemporary strains of anarchism like primitivism and postanarchism, too, the New Anarchists appear insufficiently radical, not only in their general political orientation, but in their underlying theoretical assumptions. For primitivists, New Anarchist thinkers were still beholden to the modern dogma of progress, retaining at least implicit faith in the value of civilization and the human species' increasing ability to shape the world in its own image. For postanarchists, New Anarchist thought was fatally compromised by its humanism and naturalism. Its outdated "essentialism" presumed that it was both possible and desirable to take "human nature" as a starting point for radical politics, and it continued to conceive of "nature" more generally as a realm outside of power and domination that could provide grounding for political ideals. Both the primitivist and postanarchist perspectives are inclined towards the view that anarchist thought in the mid-20th century was not qualitatively "New" at all, but represented, rather, the last insignificant gasps of the "classical" tradition, whose Enlightenment outlook it largely shared. Thus the conclusion by Todd May that "[e]xcept for the periodic upsurges of anti-authoritarian thought in the twentieth century…there is little in the way of an anarchist theoretical tradition to be found after the Russian Revolution."[33]

When contemporary anarchist thinkers look back on the anarchist tradition, then, they tend to see everything before the emergence in the late 20th century of qualitatively new anarchist paradigms like primitivism and postanarchism as the gradual petering out of classical anarchism. This goes a long way towards explaining why the New Anarchism has been overlooked. Indeed, the failure to treat the New Anarchism as a distinct

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[33] See his introduction to Nathan J. Jun and Shane Wahl, eds., *New Perspectives on Anarchism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books), 3.

tendency and to state its claims and contributions fully has rendered it virtually invisible, and allowed the competing strains of anarchism mentioned above to exert a predominant influence upon new anarchist-tinged movements like the so-called "anti-globalization" movement and the Occupy movement (the continuing presence of Chomsky notwithstanding). This dissertation cannot hope to mount a full defense of the New Anarchism against these anarchist alternatives. But by treating it with a thoroughness and respect it has rarely been accorded, we can at the very least hope to inject the New Anarchism's unique perspective back into political consciousness.

Chapter 1

The Rational Romantic:
Herbert Read and the Beginnings of a New Anarchism

When you died, I was in France.
Supposing you were sad,
Listen. I saw the students
Tread the streets in dance.
Their heels struck fire.
Their hands uprooted pavements.
Their mouths sang the chant
Of a poet's final hour:
Imagination seizes power.

The poem that forms the epigraph of this chapter was composed by the English poet Stephen Spender upon the death of Herbert Read in June of 1968, the month that saw the last gasps of the student-worker rebellion that shook the French state to its core. That the events transpiring in the streets of Paris should be thought to embody the mantra of a figure so far removed from the action is, to be sure, counterintuitive.[34] Already a septuagenarian when the social conscience of the 60s generation caught fire, Read's declining health and social engagement traced an inverse arc to that of the rising tide of social activism; by the spring of 1968, the recurrent cancer that was to claim his life had

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[34] Lest the wording of that mantra—calling for the "seizure" of "power"—seem foreign to Read's libertarian instincts, we must recall what this meant to the participants: the Sorbonne uprising, write Andrew Feenberg and Jim Freedman, "fought not only against the regime, but against the revolution, or at least the revolutionary tradition. It was the libertarian valve of the movement, open wide, imposing no order and very little opinion, refusing no one the floor, denying nothing but constraint…Here was the revolution within the revolution…a revolution without dictatorship, ruled only by imagination." *When Poetry Ruled the Streets: The French May Events of 1968* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 38.

set to work for the last time. The desire for renewed activity he experienced during a trip to Cuba earlier that year was to remain, alas, unrealized.[35]

Furthermore, Read himself had indicated that he felt out of sync with the spirit of the times. Despite having made his reputation as a champion of all that was new in art, and having linked this embrace of novelty to a call for social regeneration, in the 1960s Read finally found himself unable to endorse either the artistic or the political avant-garde. Both, it seemed, had accepted the logic of the spectacle—pop-art through its ironic, and yet oddly uncritical, appropriation of mass culture, and political protest through its increasingly theatrical and combative skirmishes with the state and bourgeois society. Read himself had promptly terminated his last bout of activism—as a high-profile member of the anti-nuclear Committee of 100 early in the decade—upon concluding that its strategies of confrontation were becoming overly aggressive and unconstructive. Through no direct channel did Read's ideas insinuate themselves into the psyches of the Parisian students. If anything it was the spirit of Guy Debord and the Situationists that was immortalized in the famous graffiti that served as the calling card of the uprising, signaling in satirical and playful language a revolution built not on ascetic self-sacrifice but on ebullient *joie de vivre*.

But Spender is, of course, suggesting an affinity rather than an influence, a moment in time when the ideals of a senescent radical seemed, perhaps, more relevant than ever. The Situationists, after all, were descended from a lineage that included the avant-garde movements with which Read was most deeply engaged when he emerged as

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[35] George Woodcock, *Herbert Read: The Stream and the Source* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 2008), 21.

one of Britain's leading critics of art and literature in the 1920s and 1930s.[36] The most

radical movements of that era, Dada and Surrealism, had announced the very agenda that

the Situationists self-consciously tried to rehabilitate in the 1960s; they aimed, as Peter

Bürger influentially argued, "to reintegrate art into the praxis of life."[37] Bourgeois art, so

the thinking went, had culminated in pure aestheticism, an effort to preserve in art ideals

which could not be realized in society. Like Hegel's "beautiful soul," the Aesthetics had

sought to protect their purity by fleeing from the ills of modernity. Their doctrine, *l'art*

pour l'art, was an effort to excuse and even valorize this retreat from social engagement.

By positioning itself in this rarefied space, bourgeois art as a social institution helped to

prop up the social order by channeling the twin phenomena of discontent and idealism

onto the page and the easel, where they could do little harm. The way to combat the

Aesthetic tendency, for the Dadaists and Surrealists, was not to quibble over artistic

styles, or even the content of specific works, but to explode art as an *institution*, releasing

the ideals of aestheticism from this artificial firmament so that they might once again

inform everyday life, replacing the means-end rationality of bourgeois society with

values like "humanity, joy, truth, solidarity."[38] It was the reimagining of that enterprise in

the 1960s that accounted for much of that era's utopian coloring. To bring art into the

everyday was to revolutionize one's way of being-in-the-world; it called for a reordering

of subjectivity no less than a reordering of institutions.[39]

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[36] See Greil Marcus, "The Long Walk of the Situationist International," in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

[37] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 22.

[38] Ibid., 50.

[39] See Stephen Eric Bronner, *Modernism at the Barricades* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

There is no question that Read's thought was sympathetic to these ideas in important ways, and when Surrealism first emerged onto the British art scene in the 1930s, he too was apt to stress affinities. Indeed, he became for a time "the chief theoretician of surrealism in England."[40] Not only was he one of the organizers of the International Surrealist Exhibition in London in 1936 ("the first of the large international surrealist exhibitions"[41]), he eventually went so far as to identify himself as a Surrealist. It was immediately clear to those within the movement, however, that this identification rested upon an idiosyncratic interpretation of Surrealism (Read even coined his own term for it: "superrealism").[42] In his introduction to the edited volume that commemorated the London exhibition, Read's main agenda was to emphasize not the novelty of the movement, but its continuity with romanticism—or, more accurately, the romantic "principle," which applied not only to the English Romantics, but to tendencies of subjectivism and irrationalism that had even deeper roots in the English literary tradition.[43] Read's attempt to cast Surrealism in an English mold clashed with the pretensions of the movement to originality and internationalism and bespoke a respect for tradition that was, to put the matter kindly, not exactly the chief attitude that other "Surrealists" were eager to convey. But even more telling was the way in which Read's

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[40] Paul C. Ray, *The Surrealist Movement in England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), 108.

[41] Ibid., 134.

[42] Read, it should be pointed out, seems to have been temperamentally no less than philosophically unsuited to Surrealism: those who attended the London Exhibition saw Salvador Dali nearly suffocate while delivering a talk in full diving gear; Read could only be coaxed into "standing uneasily on a spring sofa." Ray, *The Surrealist Movement in England*, 138.

[43] See "Surrealism and the Romantic Principle," in *Selected Writings: Poetry and Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963). Read was by no means the only one to argue for this continuity. For a sampling of similar approaches to the relationship between romanticism and modernism, see Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), and Michael Löwy, *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2009).

interpretation of Surrealism harkened to an older set of debates—namely, those which characterized the peak years of English modernism during the first two decades of the twentieth century. It was as a young man of still-inchoate sentiments that Read entered into the company of men like Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and T. S. Eliot, edited the papers of the late T. E. Hulme, and took part in some of the most important literary journals of the period. It was in that crucible that Read's aesthetic sensibility was forged, and the concerns and priorities he developed at that time stuck with him even as he strove to accommodate new movements and ideas with characteristic open-mindedness and enthusiasm.[44]

English modernism was borne of the sense of spiritual and social crisis that the Victorians had feebly papered over with custom and propriety—a crisis stemming from the decline of tradition, the withering of religious faith, and the rise of mass politics and culture. Early on in the development of English modernism, the collapse of the artificiality and hypocrisy of Victorianism was seen as a kind of liberation. One of the prominent motifs of the English modernism of this period, as in modernist movements elsewhere, was that of the individual ego breaking free of all constraint. The philosophy of untrammeled egoism was nurtured by the revival of Max Stirner's 1845 opus *The Ego and Its Own*, which advocated an explosive brand of philosophical anarchism, hostile to secular humanism no less than traditional religion, society no less than the state.[45] Stirner,

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[44] Read would later admit that he had gotten carried away in declaring himself a Surrealist, but he nevertheless defended his temporary overenthusiasm as an outgrowth of his poetic sensibility. Ray, *The Surrealist Movement in England*, 121.

[45] The main organ of Stirnerism in England at the time was the influential modernist journal *The Egoist*, which published the work of Joyce, Eliot, and Lewis, amongst others. Numerous studies have examined the influence of individualist anarchism on modernism in a number of countries. For examples, see Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), Theresa Papanikolas, *Anarchism and the Advent of Paris Dada: Art*

along with Nietzsche and Bergson, provided the main source of inspiration for those who

sought to dispense with metaphysics, materialism, and humanistic and democratic

platitudes in favor of an elitist philosophy of will and instinct. That philosophy chafed at

all efforts to impose normative and institutional constraints on individual uniqueness,

preferring to leave human behavior to the dictates of fleeting impulse and self-interest.

However exhilarating the sense of individual freedom may have been, it was soon

accompanied by the sense that humanity had been brought to a precarious position at the

edge of a cultural, religious, and political void. That the subjective shift at the heart of

egoism could inspire great art was already clear, but it was doubtful whether it was

capable of generating an alternative framework of social order. As Michael Levenson has

argued, egoism was a kind of decomposed liberalism: "where liberal ideology had made

the individual the basis on which to construct religion, politics, ethics and aesthetics,

egoism abjured the constructive impulse and was content to remain where it began: in the

sceptical self."[46] The individual consciousness, figures like Hulme, Pound, and Lewis

soon concluded, was incapable of providing the reliable locus of order and value

necessary for social reconstruction. Thus, though Hulme grounded his early doctrine of

Imagism in radical individualism and personal expression, he soon declared war on

"romanticism"—a tendency he characterized, famously, as "spilt religion"—for having

invested human capabilities with an inflated, God-like aura.[47] Hulme was the first of the

English modernists to declare for "classicism" as against "romanticism." Classicism, in

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and Criticism, 1914-1924 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), Richard D. Sonn, *Sex, Violence, and the Avant-Garde: Anarchism in Interwar France* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).
     [46] Michael H. Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908-1922* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 68.
     [47] See his influential essay "Romanticism and Classicism," in *Speculations*, ed. Herbert Read (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1936).

his formulation, rejected the vagaries of subjectivity in favor of impersonal, law-like order; its aesthetic expression was geometric abstraction. Hulme, in fact, ultimately went beyond classicism in formulating a deeply anti-humanistic aesthetic doctrine that privileged rigid, dogmatic austerity as against all vitalistic or organic tendencies. Even T. S. Eliot's more tempered classicism, however, preached the need for restraint, authority, tradition, and hierarchical order as a means of reining in the destructive tendencies of individualism.

English modernists did not hesitate to draw analogies between their aesthetic and political sensibilities. The search for order that became one of their principal obsessions manifested itself politically as a sharp rejection of the paltry, bare-bones order of liberalism, which could offer little solace to the spiritually adrift and which was, at any rate, already well on the way to being submerged by dilettantish democracy. Hulme's admiration for the "classicism" of Pierre Lasserre and the proto-fascist *Action Française* provided an early indication that the paradoxical combination of radical aesthetics and reactionary politics would find a home in England, just as it did in France and Germany. Over the next several decades, the reputations of figures like Lawrence, Pound, Lewis, and Eliot would all be tarnished by implicit and explicit endorsements of fascism and anti-Semitism.

Read was reluctant to conclude that those he liked and admired—like his close friend Eliot, and Lawrence, the hero of his teenage years—had ever been true fascists. Although, unlike Read, they were deeply anti-democratic, they at least had some sympathy for the small, tightly-knit societies that he himself favored.[48] Within this

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[48] See Read's essays on Eliot and Lawrence in *The Cult of Sincerity* (New York: Horizon Press, 1969).

modernist milieu, however, Read's anarchism was patently unique. Read was alone in thinking that an articulated, cooperative social order—not merely Stirner's "union of egoists"—could be evolved organically from below rather than being imposed from above. This belief depended on the proposition that individualism and community were reconcilable, that what seemed to be competing ideals of modernism—subjectivity and sensibility versus objectivity and reason, for example—could be synthesized through naturally evolving relationships. Having been tempered by the back-and-forth of the debates over romanticism, classicism, and the various qualities and ideals bound up with them, Read's anarchism was not a leap into unmediated Stirnerian egoism, but rather an attempt at synthesis—a synthesis of the best of romanticism and classicism, novelty and tradition. This could lead him into seemingly absurd contortions: he was a "Surrealist" who argued for that movement's compatibility with an English literary tradition stretching back to Shakespeare, and an anarchist who found inspiration in both modern syndicalism and the social institutions of the Middle Ages. But for Read, anarchism, like modern art, had to be as much about preservation, recovery, and synthesis as about breaking with the status quo. If we are willing to accept Read's claim that his aesthetics and his politics were intertwined, as I believe we should, then to understand what he owed to the cultural atmosphere of his formative years—as well as what distinguished him from most of his contemporaries—is to begin to understand what made him a different kind of anarchist. Indeed, once we distinguish Read's core concerns from his temporary enthusiasms, we can begin to trace in his political no less than his aesthetic development many of the themes and priorities of the New Anarchism.

The background of Read's anarchism

It was the context of the Spanish Civil War that provided Read with the platform he needed to announce his anarchism to the world, but he had evolved his political sensibilities considerably earlier. As a *bona fide* farm boy who spent his youth in an anachronistic pocket of agrarian life still outside the reach of British industrialization, Read had developed a deep appreciation for the rhythms of the natural world, and a tactile sense of connection to the earth that would remain a central component of his personality.[49] Born in 1893 near Stonegrave in Yorkshire, Read was one of that ill-fated generation whose coming-of-age was punctuated by the onset of the Great War. As a member of the Leeds University Officers' Training Corps well before the outbreak of the conflict, his journey to the front lines was an inevitability, but not altogether unwelcomed by a young man from the country tempted by the allure of adventure. Thus it was that despite his pacifist inclinations, Read, like so many others, entered the war with a sense of enthusiasm and expectation, swollen with the philosophy of Nietzsche. The letters he composed during his period of service, later collected in the autobiographical *The Contrary Experience*, reveal in Read's own words "an evolving philosophy of individualism, and alongside it, a growing sense of comradeship, of sympathy for and identity with the men with whom the individualist was sharing the experience of war."[50] It is this sense of unity forged in shared struggle, the preservation of individuality in the midst of a tightly-knit collective, that helped to explain his "instinctive beliefs in small

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[49] Read described himself as a "peasant," at bottom. *Anarchy and Order: Essays in Politics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954), 58.

[50] Herbert Read, *The Contrary Experience: Autobiographies* (New York: Horizon Press, 1963), 65. After the Second World War, Read expressed a similar sentiment: "The feeling of relatedness, of union, which we all experience spontaneously when threatened by invasion, or air raids, or the blockade, should be realized for positive purpose, for the creation of a just society, a natural way of life." *To Hell with Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 58-59.

independent units of production, in guild socialism, in anarchism, in a complete rejection of any ideal that compromised human freedom."[51]

As this passage suggests, Read's search for a way of reconciling individuality and solidarity led him first to Guild Socialism, whose chief exponents wrote for the *New Age* and *The Guildsman* (both publications to which Read would eventually contribute).[52] Although it first emerged as a political philosophy in the first decade of the 20th century, Guild Socialism was a long-gestated child of the earliest intellectual reaction to British industrialization. In its earliest formulation, Arthur Penty's 1906 *The Restoration of the Gild System*, it was envisioned quite literally as an effort to make practicable the wistful ideals that writers like John Ruskin, Thomas Carlyle, and later William Morris had begun to put forward a half-century earlier as alternatives to the utilitarian logic of industrial capitalism. Those ideals were exemplified in the guild, the institution through which artisans of the Middle Ages exercised direct control over the production of goods. Reflecting an almost spiritual appreciation of the centrality of labor to human fulfillment, the guilds emphasized quality over quantity, offered work that was pleasurable and fulfilling, integrated individual and community by grounding individual craftsmanship in a common language of design, and privileged mutual aid over crass competition. In the medieval world that Ruskin and Penty celebrated, artistic beauty was assimilated into everyday life. Even the most innocuous implements showcased the loving care and exquisite technique of the skilled craftsman. Unlike Marx's proletarian, the labor of the medieval craftsman was unalienated, for he was able to shape his world in accordance

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[51] Ibid., 66.

[52] For general accounts of Guild Socialism, see S. T. Glass, *The Responsible Society: The Ideas of the English Guild Socialists* (London: Longmans, 1966), Bertrand Russell, *Proposed Roads to Freedom* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1919), and the discussion in Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991).

with his values, realizing his individual potential and enjoying substantial autonomy even as he contributed to a shared cultural enterprise. Against the narrow focus on political and economic rearrangement that was by that time typical of Fabianism, Guild Socialism envisioned a thoroughgoing spiritual regeneration that would restore the wholeness of human beings.

As subsequent guildsmen like S. G. Hobson and G. D. H. Cole began to retool Penty's unabashedly reactionary proposals for a modern, industrial setting, they drew not only from the medieval template of the 19th-century social critics, but also from modern syndicalism's campaign for industrial democracy. Like syndicalism, Guild Socialism identified the industrial sphere as an important locus of change, envisioning modern guilds evolving out of extant trade unions. Industrial self-government would be facilitated by national worker-controlled guilds, and a relatively minimal state structure would allow for the territorial representation of individuals in their capacity as consumers. This territorial representation was important because, unlike syndicalists, the Guild Socialists conceived of the interests of producers as partial interests that needed to be balanced against others. Although they aimed above all at creating conditions under which working people could participate in both economic and political life as active citizens, their principle was not "all power to the soviets," but a balance of powers that would guard against potential abuses of the industrial monopolies enjoyed by producers. It is hardly surprising, then, that the guildsmen pictured social change coming about not through an apocalyptic general strike resulting in the violent expropriation of the means of production and the absolute sovereignty of the workers, but through peaceful evolution characterized by accretion of power in the trade unions and some limited nationalization

on the part of the state. In forging a middle ground between the syndicalist emphasis on workers' control and the state socialism espoused by the Fabians, Guild Socialists crafted a political vision that both moderates and utopians could appreciate—informed, wrote Bertrand Russell (a guildsman himself at the time), by "the English love of compromise."[53]

Read's attraction to Guild Socialism peaked during the war, but afterwards he had reason to question some of its core assumptions. Although he held fast to the principle of workers' control, he began to doubt that industrial action was a plausible route to socialism. Despite the hope on the socialist left that the workers might hinder the war effort or make use of the crisis to push for radical change, at no time did they demonstrate the requisite militancy. In fact, as Read noted with dismay, following the cessation of hostilities "[t]he Trade Unions that, transformed into guilds, were to be the revolutionary agents of a new world, returned to a profitable strife with employers and the State."[54] Whereas syndicalist activity had peaked in the prewar years, after the war the working class was forced into a defensive position, and the failure of the General Strike of 1926 effectively put an end to the notion that direct industrial action could produce revolutionary change. Furthermore, Read, fresh off the experience of international slaughter, had grown wary of Guild Socialism's compromise with the state. The state structure proposed by the Guild Socialists was to retain many important functions pertaining to the national interest, including national defense. Read was now convinced that the nation-state was the chief purveyor of violence in the modern world, and he thought the persistence of competing national sovereignties, even when they were divided

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[53] Russell, *Proposed Roads to Freedom*, 115.
[54] Read, *The Contrary Experience*, 67.

and democratically accountable internally, would preclude any serious attempt to put an end to war permanently. Read was hardly alone in pointing to the role that national divisions had played in triggering the war, but he envisioned the dismantling of national sovereignties internally rather than the superimposition of an international structure like the League of Nations. Humanity's best hope, he now believed, was a full-fledged anarchism that dispensed with all centralized coercion.

Read's writings from this transitional period in his political sentiments leave little doubt that a strong individualist streak underpinned his interest in anarchist ideas—in his war diary, he calls for a "revolt of the individual" against all constraining associations, against the mob.[55] But Read's anarchism, at heart, was not the anarchism of Stirner but much more nearly the anarchism of Kropotkin. The society that Kropotkin outlined in books like *Fields, Factories, and Workshops* seemed to offer all that was most appealing about Guild Socialism: it was sensitive to the plight of the industrial worker and insistent upon the need for workers' control, but it was also deeply concerned with figures like peasants and craftsmen who fit uncomfortably into an industrial schema, and like G. D. H. Cole's more refined conception of Guild Socialism,[56] it avoided the overly sentimental medievalism of the Ruskinites, bringing together agriculture and industry and retaining an important role for technology. But Kropotkin combined these characteristics with an insistence upon the complete dismantling of the state, and the self-government of autonomous communes. His anarcho-communism was infused with a communal spirit that bore a far more striking resemblance to the priorities of Guild Socialism than it did Stirnerian egoism. It is a testament to the sharp difference between Read and many of his

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[55] Ibid., 124.

[56] See, for example, *Guild Socialism Restated* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1980).

modernist contemporaries that he saw this communalism not as a threat to the individual, but as an essential foundation for free individual activity.

Retrospectively, Read would see his mature anarchism as the culmination of anarchist sympathies dating back to his discovery of Edward Carpenter's *Non-Governmental Society* as a teenager in 1911 or 1912.[57] The strength of the British anarchist movement itself seems to have had little to do either with this initial attraction or with Read's affirmation of his anarchism after the war. In fact, the same postwar years that found Read confirming his anarchist philosophy found the anarchist movement in Britain slipping into a state of virtual dormancy from which it would not awaken until the late 1930s.[58] But Read's anarchism from the beginning was premised chiefly not on its popularity or practicability, but on its intellectual appeal. He was not, as yet, involved in political activity or outspoken in his political views, owing in part to his civil service in the Ministry of Labour, the Treasury, and as Assistant Keeper at the Victoria and Albert Museum through the 1920s. Read's resignation from the latter position in 1931 freed him up to express his political sympathies openly, and 1935 saw the appearance of his first political pamphlet, *Essential Communism*, which defended a social ideal "virtually identical with that of Kropotkin."[59] When the British anarchist movement was revived by the onset of the Spanish Civil War, Read began to associate with the London anarchist community, becoming a sporadic but steady contributor to its publications. At Emma Goldman's prompting, he became involved in the English Section of the Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista (SIA), whose purpose was to provide humanitarian aid to

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[57] Read, *The Cult of Sincerity*, 76.

[58] For an account of these lean years, see John Quail, *The Slow-Burning Fuse: The Lost History of the British Anarchists* (London: Paladin, 1978), 302-306.

[59] George Woodcock, *Herbert Read: The Stream and the Source* (Montreal, CA: Black Rose Books, 2008), 17.

Spanish anarchists and civilians who were fighting against Franco or who had been affected by the war's consequences. He published, spoke, and donated money on behalf of the anarchist cause.[60]

One of the journals to which Read contributed was *Spain and the World*, the latest organ of the Freedom Press group. Read's relationship with the Freedom Press group, which served as the intellectual nucleus of British anarchism, would prove to be his most fruitful, generating both a long line of articles[61] and some of Read's most significant political activity. Founded in 1886 by a group which included Peter Kropotkin and Charlotte Wilson as a corollary to their anarchist paper *Freedom*, the Freedom Press owed its renewed vibrancy towards the end of the 1930s (the original *Freedom* had folded in 1927) to the leadership of the Anglo-Italian anarchist Vernon Richards. Clustered around Richards was a collection of more or less traditionally syndicalist anarchists and anarchist sympathizers, not least of which was his captivating wife Marie Louise Berneri, who helped make "neither East nor West" the slogan of anarchists who rejected Soviet Communism just as vigorously as Western capitalism. Although the group's flagship journal passed through numerous incarnations through the 30s and 40s (from *Spain and the World*, to *Revolt!*, to *War Commentary*, to a renewed *Freedom* in 1945), Freedom Press remained the most important platform in Britain for anarchist ideas during this era.

In 1944, the Freedom Press offices were raided by Scotland Yard, resulting in the confiscation of membership rolls. February of the next year saw the arrest and

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[60] David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 182.

[61] See the collection *A One-Man Manifesto and Other Writings for Freedom Press* (London: Freedom Press, 1994).

prosecution of the editors of what was at that point *War Commentary*.[62] They were

accused, on the flimsiest of evidence, of inciting military personnel to disobedience and

encouraging armed revolt. (A young Colin Ward, then a serviceman and a subscriber to

War Commentary, testified along with others that he "had not been disaffected."[63]) The

trial became a major cause célèbre that focused a significant amount of mainstream

attention on anarchism and united a broad swath of the Left behind the accused, including

Bertrand Russell, George Orwell, and Benjamin Britten. The organizational vehicle

behind this showing of solidarity was the Freedom Defence Committee, headed by Read.

Read endeavored to keep the organization broad-based by giving it a civil libertarian

rather than a narrowly anarchist thrust. While its specific concern was with the acquittal

of the Freedom Press editors, its broader agenda was to contest the extension of wartime

restrictions on free speech into a postwar world. On the issue of civil liberties, the

ominous growth of state power proved to be an issue that could unite both anarchists and

liberals.

Although the Freedom Defence Committee failed to accomplish its short-term

agenda—all the defendants except for Berneri were convicted and sentenced to nine

months in prison[64]—it had at least provided a rallying point that could be used to build

bridges between British anarchists and their fellow-travelers, and to unite the movement

internally. This unity was to prove short-lived, however. Within the Freedom Press

group, a fissure began to widen between traditional syndicalists, who saw themselves as

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[62] That these incidents were part of a more general campaign of harassment is made clear by Colin Ward's account in *Talking Anarchy*, 29-31.

[63] Colin Ward and David Goodway, *Talking Anarchy* (Nottingham, UK: Five Leaves Publications, 2003), 32.

[64] Carissa Honeywell, *A British Anarchist Tradition: Herbert Read, Alex Comfort and Colin Ward* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 141.

inheritors of the spirit and tactics of 19th-century radicalism, and more intellectual and unorthodox anarchists like Read. Indeed, the anarchism of the 1940s was still dominated by those who George Woodcock later called "bellicose barricaders."[65] In contrast, Read's thought gestured towards a new anarchism, and as its influence began to spread into the next generation of British and American anarchists, it helped to set in motion a new wave of anarchist thought more at home in the postwar world.[66]

Despite this fact, Read would not enjoy the esteem of the broader British anarchist movement for long. His acceptance of a knighthood in 1953 for his literary contributions to British culture was, with few exceptions, seen as the ultimate betrayal of the cause by his anarchist comrades.[67] Read found himself disowned by the very movement whose most prominent advocate he had been less than a decade before. But though Read's decision may have discredited him personally and contributed to his declining involvement in anarchist causes, his intellectual influence ultimately transcended his political infidelities. And while his decision may not have been entirely consistent or excusable from the standpoint of his stated ideals, it was indicative of a more general move beyond the black-and-white world of classical anarchism, and towards the complex and pragmatic new anarchism which he had begun to articulate.

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[65] George Woodcock, "Anarchism Revisited" in Terry Perlin, ed., *Contemporary Anarchism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1979), 27.

[66] Read's influence on his fellow Britons has been well-established by Goodway, Honeywell, and others. But his influence touched American anarchists of the postwar era as well: Paul Goodman called him an "excellent anarchist," and Murray Bookchin cited him as the anarchist thinker who most influenced his drift away from Trotskyism in the 1950s. For the Goodman quote, see *Drawing the Line: Political Essays*, ed. Taylor Stoehr (New York: Free Life Editions, 1977), 20. Bookchin's acknowledgement of Read is in *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future of the Left: Interviews and Essays, 1993-1998* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2001).

[67] In his autobiography, Albert Meltzer recounts that the anarchist Frank Leech, upon reading of Read's decision in *Freedom*, "dropped dead of apoplexy." *I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels: Sixty Years of Commonplace Life and Anarchist Agitation* (Edinburgh, UK: AK Press, 1996), 126.

An outline of Read's political thought

As a thinker and writer, Read did his interpreters few favors in the way of rigor and consistency. For one thing, his books and articles spanned a wide range of subjects, spreading his respectable talents too thin to produce work of reliable quality. For another, he flitted from influence to influence as ideas captured his attention, and, as a champion of the avant-garde, from allegiance to allegiance with virtually every major modernist art movement that came along. It may be that Read's affirmative attitude was a central factor in his popularity and influence, turning him into a kind of spokesman for whatever new trend happened to have gained the public spotlight. But from the perspective of his critics, Read's notorious capriciousness was a sign that he lacked depth as a thinker. Indeed, he never managed to pull together a formal philosophy or aesthetics to give systematic coherence to his often sparkling small-scale insights. Read himself, however, tended to embrace his own fickleness. An anti-systematic thinker by nature, he saw his wandering interests as a sign of an active and vibrant sensibility that lived in the moment and refused to ossify into ideology. His eclecticism was a testament, he thought, to his poetic, romantic openness to experience and impulse.[68]

Nevertheless, once one approaches Read's temporary enthusiasms with a critical eye, it is not far-fetched to seek out unifying themes within his body of work. Indeed, although he was conscious of his own limitations, Read insisted that there was more unity to be found in his work than was evident on the surface. And his anarchism in particular, he maintained, had been underappreciated as a connecting thread, particularly in his work

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[68] As Read put it in one of his articles, "the poet and the artist is a creature of intuitions and sympathies and by his very nature shrinks from definiteness and doctrinaire attitudes." *A Coat of Many Colours* (New York: Horizon Press, 1956), 218.

on education. Accepting Read's claim that his aesthetics and his politics were intertwined, one can, with the anarchist historian David Goodway, approach his anarchism "not as an embarrassing aberration, but as a central, integrating component" of his thought as a whole.[69] If Read's anarchism was fed by many tributaries, it fertilized other areas of his thought in turn. To account for what made Read an unusual anarchist is to account for what made him an unusual modernist, and vice versa. It is also to identify many of the core concerns of the New Anarchists: the search for a balance between classicism and romanticism, reason and emotion; the fusion of pacifism and anti-statism; the interest in human psychology; the linking of respect for individual persons with the need of community; the advocacy of education as a principal means of social reform; and the reconciliation of pragmatism with utopianism.

Classicism and romanticism

The English modernists fought many of their aesthetic battles in the language of "classicism" and "romanticism," with T. E. Hulme initiating an attack on romanticism that was later taken up by T. S. Eliot.[70] This debate, as Read understood it—the terms, after all, meant different things to different people—continued to inform his interpretation of new movements even when the literary and artistic avant-garde had moved on. Beginning with his very first book of criticism, 1926's *Reason and Romanticism*, it was Read's "declared purpose to seek some reconciliation or 'synthesis' of these opposed faiths."[71] Read took from classicism, most importantly, a cosmological outlook that was grounded in objective and universal form. Certain patterns and

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[69] Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow*, 191.
[70] See Hulme's essay "Romanticism and Classicism" in *Speculations*, ed. Herbert Read (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1936).
[71] Read, *The Cult of Sincerity*, 107.

relationships, he maintained, recur throughout both art and nature; he wrote of "the geometrical proportions which are common to forms of organic life as well as to the forms of art—the so-called Divine Proportion, etc.—and those invariable qualities of harmony and serenity to which mankind returns after every period of storm and stress."[72] Whether one's medium is the canvas, the written word, or social institutions, creation does not take place in a vacuum, but rather in the presence of a pre-constituted, formal framework that gives an objective character to the beautiful, the good, and the true.[73] From these assumptions it was not much of a leap to the traditional anarchist belief in natural order: "There is an order in Nature and the order of Society should be a reflection of it, not only in our way of living, but also in our way of doing and making."[74] This is the ontological underpinning of Read's belief that law and order—in this cosmological sense—would be present even in a rulerless society; because form and nature are intertwined, what is allowed to operate "naturally" will order itself of its own accord.[75]

The great limitation of this kind of classical formalism, with its emphasis on eternal verities, is that it is of little use in explaining variation and change. For this reason, Read supplemented it with a historicism that could account for fluctuations in style from era to era. Piled on top of this ultimate formal reality, Read argued, were particular "Zeitgeists" which determined the predominant modes of expression during any given period. In this way, Read attempted to accommodate both culture and nature.

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[72] Herbert Read, *The Tenth Muse* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), 319-20.

[73] This claim comported with Hulme's and Eliot's understanding of classicism insofar as it implied that, to use Eliot's language, "men cannot get on without giving allegiance to something outside themselves." See "The Function of Criticism," in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 70.

[74] Read, *To Hell with Culture*, 14.

[75] Although ostensibly a rationalistic faith grounded in the Enlightenment, this perspective shared with the theological worldview which preceded it the belief in a fundamentally orderly cosmos, which Read despite his atheism did not hesitate to call "God's order." *Anarchy and Order*, 107.

This entailed the possibility of tension between the natural/formal foundation and the

particular cultural genius operative in any given place and time: "There is always a

conflict between the formative principle and the *Zeitgeist*: between the will to a form that

is absolute and universal, and the will to a mode of expression that is immediately

effective or acceptable."[76] That tension is illustrated most vividly, perhaps, by Read's

lament that elitism was preventing the formation of a democratic culture in the postwar

era more attuned to natural verities: culture, he argued, was percolating from the top

down rather than arising organically from the bottom up, and as a consequence was cut

off from the basic human sensibilities that were most in tune with nature's underlying

rhythms and forms.[77] Earlier on, of course, when Dada and Surrealism had declared war

on the Zeitgeist embodied in bourgeois society, it had seemed that the avant-garde elite

was in fact most adept at diagnosing and combating the stifling qualities of the

predominant cultural atmosphere. This evolution of (or inconsistency) of Read's thought

aside, he maintained throughout that when culture had grown corrupt beyond repair,

coming into conflict with nature, the prerequisite to any constructive action was

*de*structive action.[78]

For Read, as for Hulme, the exemplary aesthetic manifestation of the classical

principle was abstract, non-representational art. Abstraction was a way of tapping into a

transcendent reality, of pursuing ontological essence. Despite its disintegration of the

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[76] Read derived from this insight a warning against reification, the tendency to conflate the culturally contingent with the "natural": "It is beyond our power to avoid this conflict, for the simple reason that we are most firmly in the grip of the *Zeitgeist* when we are least aware of its presence in our consciousness…Even the self-assured objectivity of the scholar may be the *Zeitgeist* in disguise." *To Hell with Culture*, 138.

[77] This argument is developed in *To Hell with Culture*.

[78] Echoes of Bakunin can be heard in Read's claim that "[i]n order to create it is necessary to destroy," though the difference between the insurrectionary and the aesthetic anarchist is immediately apparent: "and the agent of destruction in society is the poet." *Anarchy and Order*, 58.

object into its component elements, abstract art has a positive rather than a negative function, for "[i]t keeps inviolate, until such time as society will once more be ready to make use of them, the universal qualities of art—those elements which survive all change and revolutions."[79] Whatever turmoil and folly is generated by human history and culture, it can never lead to a bottomless abyss. In an authority as ancient as Heraclitus, Read found justification for his belief that surface turbulence need not preclude stiller waters running deep—beneath the flux of human life, he insisted, are "certain universal laws—a formal structure of matter and a calculable behaviour of energy."[80]

Read's search for a "beautiful anarchy" was, however, informed by more than just nature's eternal outline, for Read's homages to classical form were counterbalanced— and indeed often overshadowed—by his romanticism.[81] If classical art sought a kind of Platonic correspondence between itself and the formal building blocks of the cosmos, romanticism was an affair of individual feeling, vital precisely because it dealt in the unexpected, the unknown, the unpredictable. Although romantic expression may abide by laws of proportion and rhythm up to a point, ultimately "[t]he laws themselves are contradicted, or are entirely disregarded; and a new reality is created, requiring a sudden passage from perception to intuition, and carrying with it a heightened mode of consciousness."[82] The importance of the historic Romantic movement was that it had effected an expansion of consciousness "into realms of subjectivity not previously accessible to the human imagination." Read sought in his own work "to maintain the

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[79] Read, *To Hell with Culture*, 132.
[80] Read, *A Coat of Many Colours*, 13. The "Heraclitean principle of flux, of chance, of fortuity," Read wrote elsewhere, "issues out of the tragedy of war, and is basic to my anarchism and romanticism…That I can combine anarchism with order, a philosophy of strife with pacifism, an orderly life with romanticism and revolt in art and literature—all this is inevitably scandalous to the conventional philosopher." *The Cult of Sincerity*, 55.
[81] Read, *The Contrary Experience*, 124.
[82] Ibid., 347.

impetus of that revolution," which goes some way towards explaining his tendency to group artistic movements (like Surrealism) which privileged expression and subjectivity under the heading of romanticism.[83] The egoist in Read reveled in the disruption and the spontaneity that this artistic strain entailed. But as usual, he placed those qualities in the service of a more fundamental commitment to harmony. Romantic spontaneity could unite—in a flash, for example, of artistic genius—form with substance. It represented an organic, intuitive level of perception that combined the head and the heart, reason and emotion. Thus, Read's understanding of romanticism no less than his understanding of classicism kept open the possibility of reconciling order and flux, nature and culture, form and feeling, reason and emotion.

Reason, intuition, imagination

Read could at times be found stating bluntly that anarchism was "a rational ideal."[84] Reason, in Read's thought, tends to play its traditional role of connecting human beings to a transcendent order: "A realistic rationalism," he writes, "establishes a universal order of thought" which is "not man-imposed, but natural; and each man finding this order finds his freedom."[85] Modern anarchism seeks to make this universal order operative on a social level; it "is a reaffirmation of this natural freedom, of this direct communion with universal truth. Anarchism rejects the man-made system of government, which are instruments [sic] of individual and class tyranny; it seeks to recover the system of nature, of man living in accordance with the universal truth of

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[83] Read, *The Tenth Muse*, 162.
[84] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 103.
[85] Ibid., 107-8.

reality."[86] Read warned against excessive subjectivism on both an individual level (where it engendered megalomania and mysticism), and a social level (where it fueled destructive phenomena like nationalism and fascism), and saw reason as a quality that could exert a moderating influence. In this sense, Read upheld the standard, Platonic understanding of reason as exercising a benevolent and noncoercive rule over both the individual and society, and was not averse to the idea of philosophical elites helping to give direction to the social whole.[87]

But even perfect synchronization with rational, natural laws would not eliminate the importance of imagination and inspiration in human life. "Wisdom," Read writes, "is the needle which comes to rest between reason and romanticism (a word which comprises instinct, intuition, imagination, and fantasy)."[88] Read argued somewhat counterintuitively that the "rule of reason," which consists of living in accordance with "natural laws," is "also the release of the imagination." Even as we "surrender our minds to universal truth," he maintains, "our imagination is free to dream; is as free as the dream; is the dream."[89] During Read's formative years, the concept of "intuition" was associated with Bergson's critique of materialism and rationalism. But, true to form, Read in his mature writing put it, too, in the service of synthesis. The "intuition of absolute values," he argued, represented a means of reconciling emotion and instinct with their "dialectical opposites," reason and understanding.[90] The most illustrative precedent

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[86] Ibid., 108. It should be noted, though we cannot hope to solve the problem here, that Read sometimes adopted an apparently contradictory psychological understanding of objective truth as a construct of the superego. See *The Cult of Sincerity*, 23.

[87] Read calls Plato's proposal in the *Republic* for philosopher kings a "rational proposition," though his main concern is to contrast their hypothetically wise and benevolent rule with the power-driven elites that tend to predominate in actuality.

[88] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 171.

[89] Ibid., 108.

[90] Read, *A Coat of Many Colours*, 221.

for that reconciliation was the work of Percy Shelley, which in its sublation of Godwin and Plato brought together "a rational understanding of man and society" and "an insight into the transcendental universe, the pattern underlying experience and determining thought."[91] In this sense, Read linked intuition in a familiar way to the operation of poetic genius, though the ostensibly poetic insights it generates are just as real, he contended, as those acquired through scientific observation.[92]

Intuition's ability to provide epistemological support to reason had direct implications for Read's political theory. Intuition played a crucial social role because the ability to intuit the meaning of concepts like right and justice provided the basis for common law, which Read thought would serve as one of the pillars of order in an anarchist society. Common law would provide a means of grassroots social regulation grounded in the kind of common-sense cognition that was accessible to all. The notion that not only the inspired genius but the common man can make use of the faculty of intuition to arrive at certain basic insights is the central assumption of the populism that always provided a counterweight to Read's more elitist, aristocratic tendencies.[93]

Science and technology

In an essay in the *Spectator* in October 1963, C. P. Snow famously claimed that a cultural rift existed in Britain between literary intellectuals and scientists; as elites obsessed about preserving Britain's traditional literary culture and directed resources thereto, Britain lagged further and further behind the rest of the first world in scientific

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[91] Ibid., 124.

[92] Read, *The Contrary Experience*, 188-9.

[93] "If goodness can be made a matter of feeling or sensation," Read writes, "then duty or obligation can become a habit." *Anarchy and Order*, 195. Read thought that the ability to discriminate spontaneously between good and evil could be instilled through sentimental education, as discussed below.

and industrial development.[94] Despite his firm grounding in the first of these "two cultures," Read denied that there need be a conflict between them at all. Like his anarchist predecessors, Read was happy to claim the support of modern science for his political and aesthetic ideals, and had no intention of regressing to a social condition that predated the tremendous accomplishments of the scientific revolution. Those accomplishments were in part material—major improvements in quality of life—and in part intellectual. On the level of thought, science had offered the modern mind some of its most compelling ideas, and corners of Read's thought are undoubtedly colored by their influence. This is not to say, however, that Read was always a faithful transmitter of these ideas. Indeed, like those scientifically-minded anarchists who preceded him (Bakunin, Kropotkin, Reclus), and like many anarchists who would follow, Read's appropriation of scientific insights was, on the whole, selective and opportunistic. He followed the decidedly heterodox reading of evolution offered by Bergson, which found in natural evolution a model for the evolution of consciousness, art, and culture. And he embraced the conclusions of quantum physics because they seemed to undermine the mechanical determinacy that in some versions of evolutionary thinking threatened to negate Bergson's "creative" motor of change, though he did not explore the implications of these findings for the rather Newtonian understandings of "natural law" which occasionally appeared in his work.

If Read was, with respect to scientific ideas, characteristically quick to embrace novelty, his attitude towards technology was somewhat more considered. In its material aspects, technology was by no means the *bête noir* it was made out to be in William Morris' medieval romance. Rather, it was the *logic* of technology that Read saw as a

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[94] C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

potential threat to his libertarian values. Technology was functional and mechanistic, in contrast to those mental processes most highly valued by Read—perception and the creative imagination, which he thought to be more crucial to human flourishing than any purely material factor. As the 20th century progressed, it was increasingly clear that the instrumental logic of technology had begun seeping into spheres of life where it did not belong—even into the language of ultimate ideals, where quantifiable "standards" had replaced qualitative "values."[95] Rationality and functionalism were capable of producing great things, but no human society, Read argued, could base itself on these alone. Without "moral or aesthetic foundation," he worried, the products of the technological revolution could be used for "anti-vital and inhuman ends."[96] Read's thinking on technology prefigured the preoccupation in later New Anarchist writings with the rise of technocracy, and hinted at the possibility—most fully explored by Murray Bookchin—of reimagining technology so as to bring it into line with respect for nature, rather than the drive for domination, and biological need, rather than the maximization of productivity for its own sake.

Psychology

If there was one modern science Read found to be of special relevance to anarchism, it was psychology, and in this respect he anticipated the work of Paul Goodman. Read was "the anglophone pioneer of the application of psychoanalytical theory to literary and art criticism,"[97] publishing his first article to that effect in 1925.[98]

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[95] Read, *To Hell with Culture*, 180.
[96] Ibid., 182.
[97] David Goodway, ed. *Herbert Read Reassessed* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 1998), 2.

Initially it was the work of Freud which exerted the strongest influence on Read. From Freud, he absorbed a number of ideas that would stay with him: the notion that potentially destructive instinctual energy can be transformed, sublimated, and diverted into creative channels; the notion that reason does not exercise hegemonic control over the psyche and that behavior is influenced by unconscious processes;[99] the recognition that the mass is especially susceptible to unconscious drives; and the postulation of innate aggressive instincts that manifest themselves in the desire for power. The modern science of the self had generated new understandings of "the unconscious processes that cause fear and aggression, envy and crime." Any adequate scheme of education, Read held, has to take into account these parts of the psyche, "bringing to consciousness what is undeveloped, unrecognized, misunderstood or despised," and thus helping to make us "whole men."[100]

Perhaps the most important revelation of Freud's psychology, however, was the extent to which the individual's thoughts and behavior were bound up with the social context in which the individual operated. The life of the individual was in large part an unconscious product of adherence to habits, traditions, and superstitions reflective of social conditioning rather than autonomous agency. Such a realization mandated, Read believed, a more complex conception of individuality: "The psychology of the individual cannot be separated from the psychology of the group, and for that reason alone the old conception of individuality will not serve for the new order of society."[101] This did not

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[98] That article, "Psycho-analysis and the Critic," is reprinted in *Reason and Romanticism: Essays in Literary Criticism* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963).

[99] As against Eliot, Read argued that the operation of unconscious influences on conscious behavior necessitated a "genetic" approach to criticism which took account of the circumstances under which cultural artifacts came into existence.

[100] Read, *The Cult of Sincerity*, 48.

[101] Read, *To Hell with Culture*, 130.

imply, of course, an automatic reconciliation between the individual and the collective. For Freud, social norms were impositions upon individual instinct, and alienation was an inextricable corollary of civilization. The concern that informed much of the psychological literature that appeared during Read's lifetime, from Gustave le Bon's *The Crowd*, to Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*, to Eric Hoffer's *The True Believer*, was that individuals would seek to overcome their feelings of discontent by immersing themselves wholly in the group, bringing about an artificial resolution by extinguishing individuality entirely.

A healthy society would have to effect a delicate equipoise between individual freedom and group integration. For Read, it was ultimately the psychology of Jung, rather than Freud, that pointed the way towards a satisfactory balance. Whereas Freud saw harmony between individual and group as the artificial result of a repressive process of socialization, Jung posited a deeper connection between the phenomena present in the individual psyche and what he described as a "collective unconscious." Jung was principally concerned with the ways in which individuals differentiate themselves into coherent units without severing themselves from the collective unconscious that brings together humanity's shared psychic inheritance. This process of "individuation," Read thought, was "that part of individual psychology that has most relevance to a philosophy of anarchism."[102] It demonstrated the necessity that each individual develop a coherent sense of self, but by characterizing that development as an integration of the personal and collective aspects of the psyche, it showed it to be distinct from egoistic isolation. If psycho-therapy was, in many cases, an essential means of bringing about integration on the level of the individual psyche, education played an analogous role on a social level.

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[102] Read, *The Cult of Sincerity*, 86.

Thus, the socially-oriented anarchist "must think of the process of individuation as an educational one."[103] Democracy itself, Read claimed, depends upon the ability to mediate between the individual consciousness and the collective unconsciousness[104]—not as a way of striking the "uneasy balance" typical of Freud, but of achieving "a separate indivisible unity or 'whole', with firm foundations in education and creative activity."[105]

The individual and the community

Whether couched in aesthetic or psychological terms, Read consistently viewed expressions of individuality as tethered to some underlying bedrock of commonality and universality, characterized variously as "form," "nature," or "archetype." The key to psychological health no less than artistic greatness was some sort of integration of opposed terms—individual consciousness and collective unconscious, classicism and romanticism, reason and emotion, and so on. That integration was by no means directly realizable in all circumstances—sometimes the romantic principle had to assert itself *against* the classical principle, sometimes the individual had to declare his independence from the collective—but it is that vision which provides the persistent utopianism that runs through Read's thought for all its fluctuations. The same search for synthesis informed Read's social and political thought.

In his writings on anarchism, Read often played up the individualistic aspects of his thought. "Progress," he proposes in "Poetry and Anarchism," should be "measured by the degree of differentiation within a society."[106] "[T]he value of a civilization," he writes in "The Philosophy of Anarchism," "is dependent on the freedom and variety of the

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[103] Read, *The Cult of Sincerity*, 90.
[104] Read, *To Hell with Culture*, 5.
[105] Read, *The Cult of Sincerity*, 86.
[106] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 37.

individuals composing it."[107] In the same essay, his celebration of individuality reaches

an extreme that would seem to undermine his social commitments: "The future unit is the

individual, a world in himself, self-contained and self-creative, freely giving and freely

receiving, but essentially a free spirit."[108] It is lines like these which have led some to

conclude that Read's thought owes a considerable, if not decisive, debt to the egoism of

Max Stirner. There is no doubt that Read had appreciation for what he saw, in a strikingly

Jungian vein, as Stirner's attempt to integrate the personality (this, Read claimed, was the

main point of Stirner's *The Ego and Its Own*, not selfishness).[109] But there could hardly

be a better example than Stirner of a thinker who denies fundamentally the possibility of

reconciling individual and society. This is why the ultimate consequence of his

philosophy is a schizophrenic divide between ownness and otherness, a disconcerting

sense of isolation that can be assuaged only by the doubtful comforts of an unconstructive

hedonism.[110] It was not that Read did not see value in individual impulses tugging against

social complacency, but the "union of egoists" envisioned by Stirner had no centripetal

stability.

For Read, the ultimate value of the self-love Stirner advocated was as a stepping

stone to the love of others. Ultimately, he was far more influenced by the line of thinking

that sought to turn Stirner's ego back towards the community than he was by Stirner

himself—a line which ran through Gustav Landauer to Martin Buber and Nikolai

Berdyaev. For these later thinkers, uniqueness was not an end-in-itself as it was for

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[107] Ibid., 39.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Read also thought that Stirner had illustrated "the realism, the anti-idealism that is at base of the anarchist position." *The Cult of Sincerity*, 85.

[110] Read, *The Contrary Experience*, 348. "[T]he individual," Read writes, "is inexorably compelled to find a place in society and undergo some process of integration simple because otherwise he will lapse into schizophrenia. The individual may possess his self, become his 'own', only to find that the result is an intolerable sense of isolation." *The Cult of Sincerity*, 91.

Stirner, but was valued rather for its ability to generate an even deeper communion between individuals who were recognized and respected in all of their distinctiveness.[111] For Buber, this meant a kind of dialogue and reciprocity that went beyond conventional morality's Good and Evil, and whose social manifestation was community (a binding together) rather than collectivity (a bundling together). This kind of community recognized people as *persons* rather than as mere *individuals*—a distinction central to Berdyaev and to Read's friend, the Catholic writer Eric Gill. Read called it "a distinction fundamental to anarchism, and the basic reason for our rejection of all forms of collectivism and state capitalism."[112] An aloof and mechanical state cannot account for the particularity of persons. The state's tendency to conceive of its citizens abstractly only facilitates the use of authoritarian means, coercing people into a common mold and enforcing a sterile and arbitrary rather than organic order. Because "the anarchist recognizes the uniqueness of the person," he "only allows for organization to the extent that the person seeks sympathy and mutual aid among his fellow."[113]

According to personalism, uniqueness is an inherent quality of human individuals as such, and thus not dependent upon any particular person's capabilities or distinctions. But individuality in the fullest sense, for Read, went beyond the individual's fundamental claim to moral respect as a unique soul. It also implied self-realization through the

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[111] Read does not deny that the presence of otherness constitutes a constraint on the freedom of individual action. But here, as elsewhere, the transcendence of oppositions produces a richer, more productive outcome than would be possible under conditions of mere negative liberty. Read illustrates this in the following passage in terms both epistemological and social: "the relation between mind and reality, between the individual and the community, is not one of precedence; it is more one of action and reaction, a process of tacking against the wind. The current of reality is strong, and troubles the mind; but the mind embraces this contrary force, and is lifted higher, and carried away farther, by the very opposition. And so with the individual and the community: complete freedom means inevitable decadence. The mind must feel an opposition—must be tamped with hard realities if it is to have any blasting power." *To Hell with Culture*, 129-130.

[112] Read, *A Coat of Many Colours*, 9-10.

[113] Ibid., 63.

cultivation of abilities and interests. Read assumed that this kind of development could

not take place in the absence of a communal support structure, and in this sense

community provided the soil out of which individual distinction would grow.[114] The

individual, he argues, "can only realize himself in the community; or rather, the

difference between realizing oneself *in* the community and realizing oneself *in spite of*

the community is precisely the distinction I want to make. In the one case, the uniqueness

of the individual becomes part of the pattern of society; in the other case, the individual

remains outside the pattern, an unassimilated and therefore essentially neurotic

element."[115] Read often made recourse to organic metaphors like the Tree of Life to

illustrate this dependence of the part on the whole.[116] The ideal kind of society "is an

organic being—not merely analogous to an organic being, but actually a living structure

with appetites and digestions, instincts and passions, intelligence and reason."[117] "Such a

society," he writes, "itself reflecting the organic rhythms and balanced processes of

nature, would give the individual the greatest degree of liberty consistent with a group

organization. A group organization is itself a necessity only in order to guarantee this

liberty." In contrast to this organicism, government is mere "machinery."[118]

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[114] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 65.

[115] Read, *To Hell with Culture*, 55.

[116] "My favourite symbol is the Tree of Life. The human race is the trunk and branches of this tree, and individual men are the leaves which appear one season, flourish for a summer, and then die. I am like a leaf of this tree, and one day I shall be torn off by a storm or simply decay and fall, and become a pinch of compost about its roots. But meanwhile I am conscious of the tree's flowing sap and steadfast strength. Deep down in my consciousness is the consciousness of a collective life, a life of which I am a part and to which I contribute a minute but unique extension. When I die and fall, the tree remains, nourished to some small degree by my brief manifestation of life. Millions of leaves have preceded me and millions will follow me; the tree itself grows and endures." *The Contrary Experience*, 185.

[117] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 50. What this organic metaphor implies about social organization confirms conclusions reached elsewhere in this chapter: forging an anarchist society is neither a matter of striving for perfect rationality, nor of simply taking the lid off of repressed instincts, but rather requires an arrangement that allows all aspects of the human character (including the basest passions) to find their appropriate outlet.

[118] Read, *The Contrary Experience*, 352.

Education

Of all the myriad subjects Read addressed in his diverse body of work, his work on education, according to his own insistence, bore the strongest ties to his anarchism. He later regretted that the thoroughly anarchist intent of his educational recommendations in books like *Education through Art* was never sufficiently appreciated by those who incorporated those recommendations into their pedagogy. Read's educational writings were among the most influential work he ever produced, inspiring the UNESCO-sponsored International Society for Education through Art. It was by means of this society that Read's theories of aesthetic education were spread widely, though George Woodcock's claim that they "became for a while the gospel of thousands of teachers in many countries" seems a trifle overstated.[119]

The psychological and sociological task of education, according to Read, was to stimulate the individuation of the self and to facilitate the integration of individual uniqueness and society. Individuation, as has been established, meant the development of "qualities which distinguish the individual from his group or environment." But this was only the first step: "in itself this kind of education is socially disintegrating, and it should be accompanied by some process which corrects the tendency towards disintegration, and brings the individual back into the social unit."[120] Education, then, "should be balanced by initiation—a drawing of the individual into the community, making him conscious of its collective life, its collective ideals and aspirations."[121]

Read's "education through art" took its direction from the tradition of shaping moral character through aesthetics that began with Plato's *Republic* and found its greatest

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[119] Woodcock, *Herbert Read*, 19.
[120] Read, *To Hell with Culture*, 79.
[121] Ibid., 79-80.

modern exponent in Schiller. For Plato, art could be used to condition human beings for both individual and social harmony, teaching them to associate pleasure with truth, goodness, and beauty, and pain with their opposites. Read's vision of a Platonic "total" education was aimed at the body as well as the mind, habitual conditioning as well as intellectual understanding.[122] Rather than the fleeting triumphs of purely "moral suasion," what was needed, Read felt, was to change minds "permanently and universally."[123] Art "is not only a civilizing agency (the 'order' of society being an aesthetic concept, as Plato argued); it is also a progressive agency, in that it can modify (direct, concentrate, focus) human sensibility. The organism remains the same—the same nervous system, the same recording brain—but it is 'tuned' to a different pitch, and this pitch determines our ability to create a 'world vision'."[124] The idea that the human organism could be "tuned" was also the core assumption of the related tradition of "sentimental" education. From this tradition Read took the notion that the senses must be educated no less than the mind: "The foundations of a civilization rest not in the mind but in the senses, and unless we can use the senses, educate the senses, we shall never have the biological conditions for human survival, let alone human progress." Artistic activity worked towards that end by channeling direct, tactile interaction with the world into "the constructive shaping of materials."[125]

However smitten Read was with a roughly Platonic idea of education, he is not susceptible to the charges of behaviorism sometimes leveled at Plato. Human beings for Read were not infinitely malleable: there was an "innate spirit" in an individual that could

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[122] Ibid., 187.
[123] Ibid., 188.
[124] Read, *The Cult of Sincerity*, 19-20.
[125] Read, *Selected Writings*, 356.

not be changed by education or environment, however much these influences might enable or hinder the development of natural capabilities.[126] Read often described this as a kind of primordial aesthetic sensibility: the creative potential of human beings, he believed, was built into human nature.[127] This belief accounted for Read's interest in and advocacy for child art, which he thought evidenced an unpolluted subjectivity that had to be protected against the traditional educational overemphasis on "objectification."[128] Taking care to preserve the "virgin sensibilities" present at birth,[129] education must train, discipline, and channel capabilities that are already present into "aesthetic and moral ends."[130] Education is fundamentally about *cultivation*, coaxing out inborn tendencies rather than inculcating information from on high. Thus, teachers should be "guides and comrades rather than masters and headmasters."[131]

Like the New Anarchists that were to follow his lead, Read sought ways to connect up both the process of learning and the effects of education with the surrounding society. Education ought not to be confined to the schoolhouse, but should extend into the "workshop," the "playing field," the environment at large. Indeed, the environment itself should be educative, which means the social system must be arranged to facilitate rather than hinder individual development.[132] Read also envisioned large-scale cultural change and a general elevation of popular taste coming about as a result of this approach to

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[126] Read, *The Contrary Experience*, 212.
[127] See, for example, *A Coat of Many Colours*, 152. If we understand "human nature" as "those aspects of human beings that are unsusceptible to environmental influences," it is no stretch to suggest that Read, like other New Anarchists, was sensitive to the libertarian implications of the concept. To deny human nature is to imply that human beings are infinitely malleable and manipulable, a notion that is far more conducive to tyranny than to individual freedom. Read states bluntly that human nature is "a fact of nature, socialized, civilized, domesticated, but not changed in any basic sense from prehistoric times." *The Cult of Sincerity*, 20.
[128] Read, *A Coat of Many Colours*, 101.
[129] Read, *Selected Writings*, 336.
[130] Read, *To Hell with Culture*, 46.
[131] Ibid., 69.
[132] Ibid., 73.

education. He called for a society not just of free people, but of tasteful people as well. This meant that skill in production and taste in consumption had to be inculcated not only on an individual level, but on a social level: "We must create a public standard of taste (decent design) comparable to the public standard of behaviour (decent conduct—which does exist though it is not always observed)."[133] *Prima facie*, that democratic optimism seems a long way from the cultural elitism of early British modernism. But it is important to emphasize that Read's conception of democracy is not populist, but aristocratic; to borrow a phrase from Benjamin Barber, he envisioned education creating an "aristocracy of everyone."[134]

Read's modern reinvention of anarchist education was one of his most important contributions to the tradition, helping to point the way to an anarchism that could accommodate itself to an era in which the revolutionary rhetoric of immediate social upheaval had little purchase. Read thought that standard objections to anarchism which highlighted its supposed impracticability failed to understand the central role that education had to play in anarchism's long-term agenda. Anarchism's critics often failed to consider anarchism as "a long-term process of individuation, accomplished by general education and personal discipline."[135] And insofar as accusations of impracticability invoked anarchists' naïveté about human nature, an approach emphasizing sustained educational influences could answer these as well. Objections to the anarchist approach

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[133] Ibid., 82.

[134] See Benjamin R. Barber, *An Aristocracy of Everyone: The Politics of Education and the Future of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). This is not, of course, to suggest that his means coincide with Barber's: Barber is far more optimistic about the prospects of public schools.

[135] Read, *The Cult of Sincerity*, 91.

which cited "innate human depravity" and "selfishness" would be "obviated by the anarchist's insistence on reformative education and environmental transformation."[136]

Pragmatic utopianism

As his comments on education suggest, Read meant to convince his audience of the immediate practical potential of anarchism as an approach to social reform. This meant, first of all, that anarchism could not get sucked into the rigidity and abstraction of ideology: "the type of anarchist I am does not fight for ideas: he is not an ideologist of any kind, but rather a pragmatist."[137] Anarchism is about principles, not plans—it is a "Weltanschauung"[138]:

> Anarchism is…a philosophy, not a system of politics; but once its principles have been accepted, they can be applied at any point. Anarchism does not rely on plans, which are rational constructions that tend to leave out the imponderable and elusive factors of human feeling and human instinct. There is only one plan—the plan of nature. We must live according to natural laws, and by virtue of their power which comes from concentrating upon their manifestation in the individual human mind.[139]

Rather than building *a priori* political constitutions, "[t]he main thing is to establish your principles—the principles of equity, of individual freedom, of workers' control. The community then aims at the establishment of these principles from the starting-point of local needs and local conditions."[140]

Like other New Anarchists, Read was wary of social planning that was overly ambitious and abstract. Such planning, he warned, is apt to pervert natural tendencies of mutual aid and overlook "imponderable and elusive factors of human feeling and human

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[136] Ibid., 91-92.
[137] Ibid., 77.
[138] Read, *The Contrary Experience*, 207.
[139] Read, *A Coat of Many Colours*, 16.
[140] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 51.

instinct."[141] In many ways, he was amenable to Karl Popper's notion of an "open" society

and his critique of the "blueprint" model of utopianism. Read agreed with Popper that

human rationality generates potentially authoritarian tendencies in its desire to see

everything neat and tidy, and similarly felt that this insight helped to illuminate 20th-

century totalitarianism: "totalitarianism is nothing but the imposition of a rational

framework on the organic freedom of life, and is more characteristic of the scientific

mind than of the poetic mind."[142] Skepticism about rational planning, however, need not

imply the evacuation of all idealism from social reform. We are all idealists, Read

argued, so long as we believe that

> man is what he makes of himself. The difference is between those who believe
> that a particular ideal should predetermine man's existence (which is the official
> communist line) and those who believe (as the existentialists and anarchists do)
> that the personality of man, that is to say, his own subjectivity, is the existing
> reality and that the ideal is an essence towards which he projects himself, which
> he hopes to realize in the future, not by rational planning, but by inner subjective
> development. The essence can only be grasped from the particular stage of
> existence which you and I have at any particular moment reached. Hence the folly
> of all so-called 'blue-prints for the future'; the future will make its own prints, and
> they won't necessarily be blue.[143]

If anarchism was not in the business of drawing up prints for the future, it was

distinct in important ways from Popper's piecemeal liberalism, and not just because it

rejected the typically liberal notion that institutions are "the safeguards of personal

liberty." The anarchist, Read argues with a certain Sorelian flourish, "cannot abandon the

revolutionary myth, much as he may realize with Popper that revolutionary *methods* can

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[141] Read, *The Contrary Experience*, 207.
[142] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 22. Presumably, Read is critiquing the *over-application* of rationality rather than a fundamental incompatibility between the rational and the organic, for elsewhere he writes that anarchism as a theory "relies on reason alone, and if the conception of society which it thus arrives at seems utopian and even chimerical, it does not matter, for what is established by right reasoning cannot be surrendered to expediency." *A Coat of Many Colours*, 59.
[143] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 148.

only make things worse."[144] Social ideals are necessary means of tugging (though not forcing) social change in a given direction: "you cannot move one step without moving in a specific direction; and…if you do not keep looking at a fixed point on the horizon, you walk in circles." Anarchism, then, "is a point on the horizon: it has no plan to be put into being tomorrow or the next day," following only "the plan of nature."[145] This does not mean, however, that ideals have to remain vague and detached—they can be rendered concrete without tempting their exponents to embark upon too-literal efforts to instantiate them. As usual, art has an important role to play: "An ideal has to be 'realized' in artistic or poetic form before it can become actual enough for discussion and application."[146] Although ideals could indeed be dangerous, when made "imaginatively concrete" they could give "vitality to the social body."[147] Read seems to have had in mind the kind of libertarian utopias offered up by writers like Rabelais, Diderot, and Morris, whose utopian imaginings retained, in his view, "a sense of organic freedom."[148]

Although Read was an admirer of libertarian utopias, he never produced one of his own. Nevertheless, scattered throughout his many books, Read offered enough scraps of an ideal society to be assembled into a loose utopian stew. These scraps were derived principally from the guild socialism and syndicalism that had influenced him since he was a young man. Read assumed that any free society worthy of the title would, firstly, be organized along distinct geographical and industrial lines. Regional organization would begin with the family unit (Read was unusually attached to the model of the bourgeois family for a champion of the avant-garde) and center on the regional collective,

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[144] Read, *The Cult of Sincerity*, 92.
[145] Read, *The Contrary Experience*, 207.
[146] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 20.
[147] Ibid., 21.
[148] Ibid., 22.

which would put into place whatever limited institutions were necessary to administer common law.[149] These local associations would have as their chief task the gauging of and provision for immediate, everyday needs, and would stress universal and direct participation, along the lines of what Rousseau envisioned by the term "democracy."[150] Social organization would be on the basis of function (as in the Middle Ages), and functions which were equally necessary would be valued equally. Those that were not necessary, like the military and state bureaucracy, would have no place. In the realm of production, classes would be abolished, production would be for use rather than profit, and industry as a whole would be humanized, reflecting the hope Read inherited from writers like Ruskin and Morris that the distinction between art and work could be erased, and that art could be integrated into everyday life.[151] With this accomplished, culture will arise organically as "the natural product of economic circumstances," rather than being dependent upon a detached elite.[152] Read followed the guild socialists in favoring trade rather than craft unions. These self-governing collectives of industries would send representatives to a parliament of industry which would oversee economic relations, and higher-level questions could be dealt with by syndicates and federations.[153] With respect to questions of property and distribution, Read was much closer to Kropotkinian

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[149] Read, *A Coat of Many Colours*, 65.

[150] Read writes that "real politics are local politics. If we can make politics local, we can make them real. For this reason the universal vote should be restricted to the local unit of government, and this local government should control all the immediate interest of the citizen." *Anarchy and Order*, 88.

[151] Read assumed that a "hierarchy of talent" and "a division of labor" would continue to exist within each functional group. *Anarchy and Order*, 88. But work would be done out of enjoyment and geared towards the satisfaction of basic needs, "each an artist according to his kind, all men artists participating in the work that has to be done, all work being done as art." *To Hell with Culture*, 191.

[152] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 88.

[153] Ibid., 105. Like the later Guild Socialists, Read was sensitive to the risk that guilds would abuse their privileged roles in the productive process. He proposed an Economic Council whose function would be "to safeguard society as a whole against a policy of restrictionism in any particular guild, to direct the general volume of production and to maintain a balanced output among its tributary guilds." *To Hell with Culture*, 46.

communism than Proudhonian mutualism. He took it for granted that an anarchist society would abolish money and incomes, holding all things in common.[154]

In his speculations about who would be called upon to give such a society direction, Read's views reflected a characteristic mixture of democratic and aristocratic sentiments. There would undoubtedly be a need for coordinators but they would not, Read insisted, have special status. Leaders would "express" rather than "impress" the group through the assertion of authority, like the poets and artists whose social role was to direct the community's attention to its shared values.[155] Rather than reducing the population to its lowest common denominator through social leveling, in an anarchist society qualifications will be rewarded and "[t]he seer, the visionary, the poet will be respected and honoured as never before in the history of mankind." Although a "natural aristocracy" of sorts might emerge in an anarchist society, however, there would be no cultural leisure class, because "that dreadful confusion between the man of imagination and the man of action will be avoided."[156] Furthermore, the elevation of cultural standards, through the mechanism of education, would extend to the population as a whole, providing everyone with the means necessary "to acquire the essentials of a decent life at the highest level of cultivated taste."[157] If Read did not quite reach the breathless heights of Trotsky in anticipating everyday cultural achievements under socialism, he did believe more modestly that classless society would give "the mind of every individual…the opportunity to expand in breadth and depth."[158]

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[154] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 176. The sharing of wealth, Read asserts hopefully, "would not produce a uniformity of life, simply because there is no uniformity of desire." Ibid., 88.

[155] Read, *To Hell with Culture*, 68.

[156] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 103.

[157] Read, *Selected Writings*, 351.

[158] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 88.

Utopianism, in the final analysis, was for Read a necessary stimulant of social progress:

> It is the poeticization of all practicalities, the idealization of everyday activities. It is not a rational process: it is an imaginative process. The Utopia fades the moment we attempt to actualize it. But it is necessary; it is even a biological necessity, an antidote to societal lethargy. Society exists to transcend itself, and the progressive force of its evolution is the poetic imagination, the teleological instinct that moves with the organic principle of all evolution, to take possession of new forms of life, new fields of consciousness.[159]

Thus, "[t]he task of the anarchist philosopher is not to prove the imminence of a Golden Age, but to justify the value of believing in its possibility."[160] "What moves us, inspires us, incites us," Read writes, "is not satisfaction, but curiosity, wonder, endless search for an ideal perfection. Such ideal perfection cannot be limited by necessity or contingency (by functional needs); it must of necessity ignore and transcend the practical."[161] A practical and realistic orientation toward the present and a long-term mythology of illimitable progress were, in Read's view, the two indispensable prongs of anarchist praxis. It was a corollary of the latter belief that utopia could not, as the Popperian caricature would have it, posit an end to history and the final realization of social perfection. Utopia for Read was not characterized by the stasis of a crude formalism, but was instead closer to the openendedness and dynamism of the romantic sensibility. "A final or fixed state of goodness," Read writes, "would be lifeless—as mortal as a fixed and final state of evil."[162] Thus "[t]he ideal condition of society is the same as the ideal condition of any living body—a state of dynamic tension. The yearning for safety and

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[159] Ibid., 23.
[160] Ibid., 14.
[161] Read, *The Tenth Muse*, 278.
[162] Read, *The Cult of Sincerity*, 37.

stability must be balanced by impulses towards adventure and variety. Only in that way can society be stirred into the vibrations and emanations of organic growth."[163]

Read did not, unlike traditional anarchist revolutionaries, call for a large-scale, violent campaign to overturn the status quo. He was far more supportive of efforts to create, adopting the terminology of his friend Eric Gill, "cells of good living." Anarchists must engage in "the politics of preaching and propaganda—of thought and of work—the politics which consist of trying 'to make a cell of good living in the chaos of our world.'"[164] Admittedly, such a cell is but "a microscopic unit in the immensity of the world," but "the world is made up of such units and upon the health of each individual cell depends the health of society."[165] A thoroughly anarchist society, no less than Gill's Christian community, was a remote contingency, "in no sense immediately realizable."[166] Nevertheless, it was possible "to realize the anarchy of life in the midst of the order of living."[167] The way to do this, as Colin Ward would later stress in *Anarchy in Action*, was to apply the principle of mutual aid to existing society:

> This we do tentatively by taking the voluntary organizations which already exist and seeing to what extent they are capable of becoming the units in a democratic society. Such organizations are trade unions, syndicates, professional unions and associations—all those groups which crystallize around a human function. We then consider the functions which are now performed by the state, and which are necessary for our well-being, and we ask ourselves to what extent these functions could be entrusted to such voluntary organizations. We come to the conclusion that there are no *essential* functions which could not thus be transferred. It is true that there are functions like making war and charging rent which are not the expression of an impulse towards mutual aid, but it does not need much consideration of such functions to see that they would naturally disappear if the central authority of the state was abolished.[168]

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[163] Read, *A Coat of Many Colours*, 207.
[164] Ibid., 10. The quoted passage is from Gill.
[165] Ibid., 15.
[166] Ibid., 12.
[167] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 125.
[168] Read, *A Coat of Many Colours*, 63.

Aside from serving as a pragmatic strategy of reform, this approach to social change reflected Read's search for an "integral" socialism that would unite radical principles with the ways in which individuals went about their everyday lives.

Approaching anarchism as a bundle of guiding principles rather than as an ideology or a specific institutional configuration was, in part, a means of expanding its potential relevance. In several suggestive passages in his corpus, Read hints that however distant an anarchist utopia may be, anarchist principles might at least in the short term exert a healthy influence on liberal or social democratic politics. "In short," he writes, "anarchism is the 'mystique' which I propose for a democratic society. I do not pretend that anarchism is an idea of society which can be realized as immediately as democratic socialism."[169] Immediate problems like poverty, unemployment, slums, malnutrition, aggression, war,

> must be solved. Let us solve them in the manner suggested by democratic socialism—that seems the fairest and most practical method, but only if we keep the anarchist principle in mind at every stage and in every act. Then we shall avoid the fatal mistakes that have been made in Russia. We shall avoid creating an independent bureaucracy, for that is another form of tyranny, and the individual has no chance of living according to natural laws under such a tyranny. We shall avoid the creation of industrial towns which separate men from the fields and from the calming influences of nature. We shall control the machine, so that it serves our natural needs without endangering our natural powers. Thus in a thousand ways the principle of anarchism will determine our practical policies, leading the human race gradually away from the state and its instruments of oppression towards an epoch of wisdom and joy.[170]

Conclusion

If we first encountered Read on his death bed, precisely at the moment when the utopian hopes of the 1960s were reaching their climax, we leave him at the opening of

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[169] Ibid., 317.
[170] Read, *The Contrary Experience*, 208.

the postwar era, when nothing could have seemed less plausible than a renewal of radical democracy. In those bittersweet years after the defeat of the Axis Powers, Read was a utopian living in an anti-utopian age. The hardships of war had hammered into the World War II generation a taste for moderation and a readiness to accept the reassuring "consensus" about the efficacy of extensive state intervention into social life. The rise of totalitarian regimes in Russia and China was bringing social idealism into disrepute, and the radical left in both Britain and America was in a state of virtual hibernation. Read, like many of his contemporaries, recognized that the world as a whole, and Western civilization in particular, was living through a time of crisis—indeed, it was precisely this recognition in his writings that would provide impetus to the "Apocalyptic" British poets—Alex Comfort amongst them—who found in Read their principal inspiration. But Read was able to remain optimistic for two reasons. Firstly, this crisis, for all of its seriousness, had some comprehensible causes—most notably, what the historian Alfred Cobban had labeled the "German conception of sovereignty" which made the state the source of all morality and law, and turned sovereignty itself into a kind of political religion.[171] As a political philosophy which had always raised the most strenuous objections to the very concept of state sovereignty, anarchism, Read believed, could be of special relevance in combating the ever increasing consolidation of state power and the violence, both domestic and international, that was its inevitable concomitant. The connection he perceived between state sovereignty and the plague of war formed the foundation of Read's renewed pacifism, and it underpinned the burgeoning philosophy of anarcho-pacifism—examined in the next chapter—that he helped to inspire.

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[171] See Read's discussion of Cobban's 1941 book *The Crisis of Civilization* in *A Coat of Many Colours*, 65-66.

Secondly, despite the ravages wrought by the twin terrors of war and political oppression, the state that the West was in, Read hoped in one of his more optimistic moments, was but the nadir in a narrative of redemption, a condition from which something beautiful could emerge: "Spiritually the world is now one desert, and prophets are not honoured in it. But physically it still has a beautiful face, and if we could once more learn to live with nature, if we could return like prodigal children to the contemplation of its beauty, there might be an end to our alienation and fear, a return to those virtues of delight which Blake called Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love."[172] From his youthful zeal in the context of the Great War to the utopian aspirations that doggedly stayed with him to the end of his life, Read never lost the basic Nietzscheanism that called for a life-affirming response to crisis. The anarchist, he writes, "rejects the philosophical nihilism of the existentialist."[173] Read's anarchist vision for the postwar era was borne more of a stubborn Nietzschean faith in regeneration than of sociological reality. But it is fitting that we should leave him here, for the challenge of the New Anarchism was to figure out whether, and how, anarchist principles could be put into effect under the conditions that prevailed in the postwar world.

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[172] Read, *The Contrary Experience*, 69.
[173] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 154.

Chapter 2

Against War, Against the State:
The Political Theory of Anarcho-Pacifism

The more violence, the less revolution.

Bart de Ligt

A society organised and run on the basis of complete non-violence would be the purest anarchy.

Gandhi

How much better is "propaganda by deed" when it is *against* bombs instead of *with* them?

Nicolas Walter

What brought Herbert Read into the British anarchist movement was the same event that awakened the slumbering anarchist movement around the world: the outbreak of civil war in Spain. The military coup of July 19, 1936 that threatened to topple the Popular Front government triggered a call to arms across a broad swath of the left, as everyone from Stalinists to anarchists mobilized to defeat Franco and fascism. Within Spain itself, an alliance of trade unions and popular militias formed a defensive front that scored impressive victories early on in the conflict, like the defense of Madrid in November of 1936. Outside of Spain, volunteers from around the world rushed to the Republic's defense. While Britain and the United States adopted positions of official and unofficial neutrality, respectively, many of their citizens refused to sit idly by. Some, like Read and Emma Goldman, worked domestically to raise funds for the anti-Franco forces and for general humanitarian relief. Others joined the International Brigades and fought Franco directly. Regardless of the individual contribution, the urgency of the need for

collective resistance to fascism inspired a sense of purpose and unity across different factions of the left—even amongst those, like the anarchists, who had earlier balked at the Comintern's cynical "popular front" policy.

The Spanish Civil War was, as George Orwell observed, perceived as "a left-wing war."[174] It was a conflict even the most romantic of intellectuals could embrace, a battle between socialist idealism and belligerent reaction, epitomized by the neo-feudalism of Franco and his allies. Although the Comintern gradually extended its influence within the resistance, steering it towards Stalinist objectives, early on that resistance was strikingly organic and democratic, never more so than in the popular militias that Orwell himself described so memorably in *Homage to Catalonia*. In northeastern Spain, where these militias were strongest, anarchosyndicalists initiated an extraordinary period of libertarian experimentation, which saw factories taken over by their workers and property collectivized in popularly-controlled communes. From the anarchists' perspective, the civil war had become a revolution. To fight that war was to fight both against fascism and for anarchism simultaneously. Rarely had social idealism and violent struggle coexisted so comfortably.

The struggle, of course, was a failure: the anarchist insurrection was crushed when the Communists turned their guns on their erstwhile allies in May of 1937. By the end of March, 1939, the Communists had been overrun by the fascists. Franco would rule Spain until 1975. Elsewhere, the fascist governments in Germany and Italy that had provided him with invaluable support began to make bold moves of their own, with the

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[174] The quote comes from an article Orwell wrote for *Partisan Review* in 1941. See *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters, vol. 2 (My Country Right or Left, 1940-1943)* (Boston: David R. Godine, 2000), 52.

Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia and the signing of an official entente, the so-called Pact of Steel.

When the next fight against fascism was launched, its feel and conduct could hardly have made for a sharper contrast with the halcyon days of the Spanish struggle. The left-wing intellectuals who envisioned "a sort of enlarged version of the war in Spain," Orwell remarked, were confronted with a very different beast indeed, "an all-in modern war fought mainly by technical experts…and conducted by people who are patriotic according to their lights but entirely reactionary in outlook."[175] It was a campaign directed, in the West anyway, by the two preeminent representatives of the capitalist world order: Britain and the United States. In both of those countries, the war effort was orchestrated from above by state bureaucrats, who tightly managed the mobilization of domestic resources on an extraordinary scale. Many anarchists, though anti-fascist as ever, found that they could sympathize neither with those running the war nor with the means that were being used to fight it. The political logic was different from that which prevailed during the Spanish conflict: to support the war effort against the Axis powers was not to further but to imperil the anarchist cause, for it meant legitimating both the capitalist overlords holding the reins and the domestic state apparatus they were inflating beyond all precedent. Ever cognizant of the anarchist maxim that the state does not readily cede back power it has acquired, anarchists like Marie Louise Berneri warned that the "total" state that was arising as a means of waging "total" war would persist into the postwar era. Plans for postwar reconstruction, she noted,

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[175] Ibid., 39-40.

all envisage extended control by the State over everything that concerns the lives of men and women and even children, from questions of unemployment to questions of charity. Military and industrial conscription, and compulsory semi-military youth organisations to absorb the leisure of the young, are all put forward and extolled, not as the attributes of a Fascism they really represent, but as benefits conferred by wise leaders of a benevolent State. Freedom becomes ever and increasingly an abstract conception, with a smaller and smaller place in the life of to-day, and still less, apparently, of to-morrow.[176]

As Allied propaganda had it, to fight a war against the Axis powers was to fight a war against "fascism" in the name of "democracy," a dichotomy that had been widely accepted during the civil war in Spain. Anarchists in Britain and the United States, however, argued that the distinction obscured more than it revealed about the present struggle. As Berneri, writing in London, implied, fascism was a threat at home no less than abroad. In the name of defeating the enemy, the governments of the two strongest bastions of freedom and democracy were conscripting citizens against their will, cracking down on dissent, extending their control over economic production and distribution, putting citizens and residents of German, Italian, and Japanese descent into concentration camps, and making use of their wartime legitimacy to insinuate the state into ever more areas of social life through the "benevolent" institutions of what would come to be known as the "welfare state." Wartime exigencies aside, British and American anarchists felt that they were witnessing a fundamental and potentially irreversible shift in the balance of power between state and society.

That shift was complimented by the even more insidious fact that "the principle of obedience to authority" was being "enormously strengthened."[177] That principle would be illustrated most vividly after the war during the trial of Adolf Eichmann, who provided,

[176] Marie Louise Berneri, *Neither East Nor West* (London: Freedom Press, 1952), 56.
[177] Ibid.

as George Woodcock put it, "the negative justification of Civil Disobedience" by demonstrating the terrible consequences of elevating obedience and conformity over morality and responsibility.[178] Indeed, it was a loss of the sense of *responsibility* above all that was manifest in the bureaucratic organization of mass destruction, the gratuitous atrocities committed by both sides, and the failure of the vast majority of the citizenry to voice any protest. The nihilism that characterized the behavior of state elites, anarchists like Alex Comfort warned, was beginning to seep into the population, eroding any sense of tension between the actions of the state and the moral imperatives of the individual. This was, in many ways, the most troubling fact of all, for fascism had been built not solely—or even mostly—on the basis of a powerful centralized state, but on the acquiescence of the public at large.

What all this amounted to was that the phenomenon of fascism (or, more generically, and perhaps accurately, "totalitarianism") was not conveniently limited to those countries which openly embraced it. The battle lines had been improperly drawn. Fascist tendencies were gaining an ever-stronger foothold in the Allied countries as well, and a war against fascism, the anarchists insisted, should not be fought with fascist means or have fascist consequences.

On the surface, these objections were similar in many ways to objections that anarchists had always raised to wars waged by capitalist powers. Anarchists had been consistently skeptical of official rationales for conflagrations involving self-interested nation-states, and had long believed, as the American intellectual Randolph Bourne put it during the First World War, that "war is the health of the state." But coming off of the

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[178] George Woodcock, *Civil Disobedience* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1966), 4.

defeat of the Spanish resistance, anarchists had special reason to wonder about the

efficacy, and the consequences, of violent struggle in any conceivable modern context.

Modern war, by all appearances, was inherently "antithetical to libertarian principles,"

and anarchists were, it seemed, incapable of competing on the level of violence

anyway.[179] This was the context that lent plausibility to the idea of "anarcho-pacifism."

The term implied, first of all, that to resist war, especially in its modern incarnation, was

to resist the state, and vice versa. That proposition was basically in keeping with anarchist

attitudes that had existed up to that point, though there was reason to emphasize it even

more strongly now that states were not only making war, but growing fatter off of it than

ever before. What was far more radical was the subsidiary implication of the term—

namely, that violent struggle of any kind, even on behalf of anarchism, was to be

eschewed in favor of nonviolent alternatives. To call oneself an "anarcho-pacifist," as we

will see, did not necessarily connote an absolutist insistence upon nonviolence. But there

is no question that it communicated more than simply an opposition to "capitalist" and

"imperialist" wars, to invoke the terminology that was often used. Rather, it signaled a

major shift in thinking about how the struggle for an anarchist society was to be

conducted.

   Developments not only within anarchism, but within pacifism, helped to create an

atmosphere conducive to the emergence of anarcho-pacifism. The pacifist movement had

its origins in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, when the first national peace

societies were founded in Britain and the United States. The predominant tenor of

pacifism up to World War I was moralistic, focused on the ways in which violence

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[179] George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Company, 1962), 392.

compromised the spiritual integrity of individuals and nations. In the interwar years, pacifism began to develop into a much more radical doctrine, privileging socioeconomic accounts of the causes and consequences of war, and growing ever more sympathetic to the idea that radical social change was the only means through which modern war could be curtailed.

Thus, both anarchists, reacting against the failures of violent insurrection, and pacifists, in search of a more radical method of putting their principles into effect, had reason to embrace the idea of "nonviolent revolution" which, thanks largely to Gandhi and his popularizers, caught the attention of the British and American left in the 1930s. Gandhi's notion of *satyagraha* held out the possibility of combining the principle of nonviolence with tactics militant enough to generate real social change. The affinity of many of those tactics with traditional anarchist concepts like direct action and propaganda by deed gave anarchists reason to believe that their political philosophy might be reimagined to comport with the strategy of revolutionary nonviolence. Indeed, nonviolence seemed to provide a missing link of sorts which allowed these tactics to be successful on their own terms, for it imbued them with a compelling dignity that commanded the respect of the (increasingly bourgeois) masses, and an efficacy that violent resistance could never have had under the conditions created by the modern state. It required a reckoning with anarchism's past, however. To align anarchist tactics with the theory of nonviolence meant that it was necessary to subvert the deeply-entrenched association of anarchism with violence and terrorism in favor of a utopian, yet effective, approach to social change that reflected the logic of prefigurative exemplarity—that is, the fusion of *is* and *ought* in individual behavior and organizations that anticipate in the

present a future social order in which principle and practice have been reconciled.[180] This prefigurative attitude encouraged greater receptivity to forms of civil disobedience that placed emphasis on principled conduct and symbolic demonstration, but also to experiments with libertarian education and the construction of alternative communities and institutions—endeavors which had long interested anarchists but had too often been obscured and sidelined by the movement's reputation for unconstructive violence. Once anarchist militancy was conceptualized along nonviolent lines, there arose the possibility of establishing consistency between anarchism's combative and constructive aspects.

This was the nexus, then, at which anarcho-pacifism came together as a coherent phenomenon: the intersection of tendencies within anarchism away from violent insurrection and tendencies within pacifism towards more radical socioeconomic critiques and ambitions, to which was added the promise of a groundbreaking model of nonviolent revolution and the urgency of an international context in which total war and the total state were embroiling humanity in unprecedented catastrophe and despotism. New Anarchists like Herbert Read, Alex Comfort, Paul Goodman, and Nicolas Walter not only helped to solidify the logic of this phenomenon conceptually, but took an active part in the peace and anti-nuclear organizations that were most indebted to it. Their anarcho-pacifism reflected the trajectory of pacifism during and after World War II. It combined individual acts of principled refusal—what Paul Goodman called "drawing the line"—with a socio-political theory of war that focused on the inherently violent and

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[180] To take one notable example, in 1951 four members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation—Dave Dellinger, Ralph Digia, Art Emery, and Bill Sutherland—attempted to bicycle across Europe into the Soviet Union without passports in protest of the Cold War. As James Tracy points out: "This plan reflected the utopian tradition of American dissent upon which radical pacifism drew. Acting within the world as if a higher reality were already present, the bicyclists intended to flagrantly ignore political boundaries." *Direct Action: Radical Pacifism from the Union Eight to the Chicago Seven* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 70.

coercive nature of the state, and claimed that ending war depended upon dismembering the state and putting a revolutionary social alternative in its place. Informed by the anarchist belief in the power of "deeds" to exert a radiant, exemplary influence, they could imagine how the quixotic conscientious objection of the war years might eventually snowball into collective resistance. Anarchists shared with pacifists the hope that the persistence of committed individuals and small groups in the postwar era would ultimately transform popular consciousness, generate mass opposition to war and injustice, and produce major political change. Their optimism was validated not only by the rise of a revivified pacifist movement in the 1950s, but by the adoption by other social movements, like the civil rights movement, of the tactics championed and pioneered in Britain and the United States by radical pacifists.

Most New Anarchists were not, like some radical pacifists, nonviolent absolutists—they were generally willing to accept that violence might manifest itself in "natural" (and therefore basically harmless) ways. But they understood that within modern states nonviolent strategies of resistance, aside from allowing for ethical consistency, were quite simply the only sensible and effective means of change imaginable. This allowed them to mobilize the whole arsenal of anarchist strategies for peaceful revolution—both combative and constructive—without feeling like they were compromising a central insurrectionary struggle. Their approach, they believed, was both a profounder and more realistic expression of revolutionary ambition than those means— like terrorism, parliamentarism, and proletarian dictatorship—that contradicted the ends they were supposed to realize and, in practice, never seemed to engender the promised results.

Thus, with an opportunity to contrast their perspective with the unprecedented militarization of the "warfare state," and with the hope of retooling of traditionally anarchist tactics to make them more consistent and effective, the New Anarchists seized upon the chance to reenergize anarchism and make it freshly relevant to a new generation of activists and political thinkers. They were not the first to make the connection between anarchism and nonviolence, or peace and statelessness—there were notable precedents in figures like William Godwin and Leo Tolstoy. But in their efforts to fuse opposition to war and the state with a constructive vision of nonviolent change, and to link individual refusal to collective resistance, the New Anarchists were the first true theorists of anarcho-pacifism.

Anarchism and violence

Given its later association with violence, it is perhaps ironic that the emergence of the historic anarchist movement owed so much to the founding of an international pacifist society. The League of Peace and Freedom, as that society was called, represented "the first attempt to marshal what may be called international public opinion for the creation of a war-proof 'collective system' of international life."[181] In terms that anarchists of the 1940s could have appreciated, the participants who traveled to Geneva in September 1867 for the first meeting of the League called for a "United States of Europe" that would put an end to war amongst the European powers and establish the reign of "liberty, justice, and peace" on the continent.[182] The means by which that was to be effected were, by any measure, exceedingly vague, and much dissention prevailed amongst the

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[181] E. H. Carr, "The League of Peace and Freedom: An Episode in the Quest for Collective Security" *Royal Institute of International Affairs* 14, no. 6 (Nov. - Dec., 1935), 837.
[182] Ibid., 838.

attendees over even the modest efforts to find a lowest common denominator within the mélange of political sensibilities represented there. Nevertheless, one cannot but wonder whether Mikhail Bakunin—who, after Garibaldi, was the most illustrious personage to take part in the Congress—wasn't violating the spirit of the gathering by proclaiming that no United States of Europe would be possible without the abandonment of "the false principle of nationality" and the system of "centralised States."[183] This would mean, after all, not "uniting" states, but rather destroying them. When, eighty years later, anarchists were confronted with proposals to prevent future wars by creating a body of "United Nations," their feelings about what international arrangement would in fact be most conducive to peace were strikingly similar to Bakunin's.

Bakunin's obvious rejection of some of the basic premises of the League might have been reason enough to part ways with it. But, still hopeful that he could push the League in a libertarian direction, he returned for its next Congress in Berne the following year. At that gathering, Bakunin urged the League to accept that the emancipation of workers and the equalization of classes were essential prerequisites to peace. When that resolution was rejected overwhelmingly, Bakunin left the League for friendlier pastures, taking the germ of the international anarchist movement with him. He found them in the International Workingmen's Association, which, under the direction of Marx, had steered clear of the League from the beginning. Marx's basic objection to the League was essentially the same as that which had prompted Bakunin to abandon it: namely, its refusal to acknowledge that international peace was impossible without social revolution. What Bakunin left unsaid, but what was clear to Marx, was that that proposition, aside from being too radical for many of the League's supporters, sat uncomfortably with the

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[183] Ibid., 841.

"Peace Windbags" (as Marx liked to call them) because it implied that violent struggle in one form or another would be necessary.[184] Peace, Marx believed, should be understood not as a guiding principle, but as the outcome of a particular kind of war—the "class war."

Bakunin might not have employed those terms, but he, like Marx and most revolutionaries of their generation, assumed that revolutions were made—if not wholly at least partially—through violence. It was difficult to imagine a scenario in which the owners of the means of production would abjure their private property voluntarily, or (for Bakunin more so than Marx) in which the state would willingly dissolve its power. There was no general consensus on what form revolutionary violence would take—surely it would depend greatly upon particular circumstances and considerations. But the vision of revolution that fired Bakunin's imagination was predicated on the outbreak of local insurrections which were largely[185] spontaneous. These insurrections, if successful, would, he believed, spark a general uprising amongst the lowest rungs of society, whose innate dissatisfaction with the status quo would be transmuted into revolutionary fervor as soon as the oppressive regimes which ruled over them had been delegitimated.

In the idea that small-scale insurrections—prompted (more than likely) by a handful of plucky revolutionaries—will snowball into a large-scale uprising, we can begin to discern the logic of what would come to be called "propaganda by deed."[186] In

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[184] Paul Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 303. It should be said that Marx believed it might be possible to effect revolution peacefully in more democratic states like Britain, the United States, and possibly Holland. But to treat peace as a principle rather than as an outcome of class struggle was to substitute vacuous moralizing for revolutionary realism.

[185] Helped along, perhaps, by one of the many conspiratorial groups of revolutionaries he tried to establish throughout Europe.

[186] For general accounts of propaganda by deed, see: Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, 1872-1886* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ch. 4; James Joll, *The Anarchists* (New York: Grosset & Dunlop, 1964), ch. 5.

its original form, the concept was inspired by the example of the most celebrated

insurrection of the 19th century, the Paris Commune of 1871, when Parisians took

advantage of the disorder caused by the Franco-Prussian War to declare the municipality

autonomous and revolutionize its system of government. Although the eventual defeat of

the Commune had devastating consequences for much of the radical left throughout

Europe, its memory was still strong enough to serve as the main point of reference for

Paul Brousse, who, writing in 1873, was the first to articulate the idea of propaganda by

deed in any detail. Brousse "envisioned the establishment of communes in cities

throughout Europe" which would act as beacons of revolution, inspiring "local

demonstrations, insurrections, and other forms of collective direct action" elsewhere.[187] It

was clear to most would-be revolutionaries after the fall of Paris, however, that

insurrection was increasingly ill-suited to urban environments, as militaries developed

more powerful weaponry and governments learned to structure urban space so as to erect

structural impediments to sustained collective resistance. That explains, perhaps, why

Errico Malatesta, operating in the relatively backwards country of Italy, became the

figure most closely associated with the theory and practice of propaganda by deed during

its insurrectionary phase. In the Italian province of Benevento, Malatesta offered the

world a paradigmatic example of propaganda by deed. Accompanied by Carlo Cafiero,

the Russian anarchist Stepniak, and a band of fellow revolutionaries, he entered the town

of Letino "on a Sunday morning, declared King Victor Emanuel deposed and carried out

the anarchist ritual of burning the archives which contained the record of property

holdings, debts and taxes." Although the locals initially supported the insurgents, who

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[187] Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 243. The term was used in this sense in Brousse's *Arbeiter-Zeitung* throughout 1876-77.

were able to spread their insurrection to the nearby town of Gallo, government troops soon reclaimed the liberated territory.[188] The rebellion does not seem to have inspired any notable imitators.

When, in 1877, Malatesta's revolt was stymied prematurely, it was merely one in a long line of similar failures. But one of the most attractive aspects of the notion of propaganda by deed was precisely its ability to accommodate failure. To understand why, it is necessary to tease out the underlying logic of the idea, as Brousse and others conceptualized it. Propaganda by deed, it was argued, was often more effective than traditional propaganda (i.e. propaganda by written word) because the best way of directing popular attention and sympathy toward radical ideas was by dramatizing them in action. Propaganda by deed sought to render abstract concepts and ideals concrete, enabling everyday people to confront them in a tactile, empirical way. Carrying out propagandistic actions was a practical means of communicating with people who were unable (because of illiteracy or other limitations) or unwilling to absorb ideas in written form. Even if an action failed to attain its stated goals, it could still have an educative effect.

Insofar as propaganda by deed was interpreted to mean insurrection, it was assumed to entail certain kinds of violent and illegal behavior. But the concept was not innately violent at base. Brousse, for example, cited as illustrations of the concept not only Malatesta's abortive rebellion, but his own insistence upon the provocative display of a red flag during a workers' demonstration in Bern. When early examples of propaganda by deed involved violence, it was as a component of a larger struggle or symbolic display. As reaction set into most European countries in the late 1870s and

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[188] Joll, *The Anarchists*, 122.

1880s, however, there were fewer opportunities either for collective uprising or for peaceful demonstration. Radicals impatient for revolution began to channel their energies into ever narrower and more individualistic acts of revolt. Group insurrection gradually condensed into isolated cadres of clandestine conspirators, and finally into the lone revolutionary wolf, whose plans might not be known to any but himself. So began an era of spectacular assassinations—the high point, perhaps, being the dynamiting of Tsar Alexander II in March 1881. Anarchists were not responsible for that particular success,[189] but in that same year that the breakaway Bakuninist faction of the First International officially endorsed such tactics, urging anarchists to educate themselves in the latest methods of bomb-making. Violence was moving from the margins to the center of propaganda by deed, for it provided the most obvious means by which an individual or small group of conspirators could create a big impact. When directed at people like tsars, kings, presidents, and police captains, violence of this sort not only garnered attention for the revolutionary cause, but took the fight straight to those in the upper echelons of the political elite who were usually insulated from the consequences of the suffering they inflicted upon others.

With the invention and proliferation of dynamite, which became the subject of appreciative odes in anarchist newspapers,[190] it became possible for individuals to exact

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[189] The group responsible was Narodnaya Volya, whose ideology cannot quite be characterized as anarchist. For an account of how the group fits into the rather complicated landscape of 19th-century Russian populism, see Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960).

[190] Albert Parsons penned the most famous of these in his *Alarm*: "*Dynamite!* Of all the good the good stuff, that is the stuff! Stuff several pounds of this sublime stuff into an inch pipe…plug up both ends, insert a cap with a fuse attached, place this in the immediate vicinity of a lot of rich loafers who live by the sweat of other people's brows, and light the fuse. A most cheerful and gratifying result will follow. In giving dynamite to the downtrodden millions of the globe science has done its best work. The dear stuff can be carried in the pocket without danger, while it is a formidable weapon against any force of militia, police, or detectives that may want to stifle the cry for justice that goes forth from the plundered slaves…It is a

significant damage, undermining (so they believed) the state's monopoly of the means of coercion. To privilege violent and illegal tactics which were within the grasp of even the isolated individual, however, was to invite the participation of any degenerate, discontented social outcast who fancied himself a revolutionary. The line began to blur between idealistic freedom fighter and common criminal. Ravachol, whose myriad nefarious deeds included grave robbery and the murder of a miserly hermit, became the archetype of the revolutionary dynamiter after carrying out attacks on a judge and prosecuting attorney who had been involved in the conviction of several anarchists; his name, in fact, was converted into a verb (*ravacholier*) which became synonymous for a time with "to dynamite." Even more significant was the vanishing distinction between revolutionary activity and outright terrorism, as seen in the shift towards indiscriminate targets—a shift exemplified by Émile Henry's casual bombing of a busy café in Paris in February 1894. At his trial, Henry, like other dynamiters of the time, exuded the hardened revolutionism that had become a substitute for humanity, sneering at his crippled victims and expressing no remorse for his actions.[191]

The smaller the scale of the "deeds" in question, the uglier the consequences of the violence, and the more objectionable the perpetrators responsible for them, the further this purportedly revolutionary activity got from the original spirit of propaganda by deed. Far from awakening the masses to the injustice of the prevailing order and inspiring them to revolt, these incidents gave rise to the caricature of the bomb-wielding, amoral anarchist, devoid of either noble purposes or constructive goals. This was an image that

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genuine boon for the disinherited, while it brings terror and fear to the robbers. A pound of this good stuff beats a bushel of ballots all hollow—and don't you forget it!" Quoted in Louis Adamic, *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America* (New York: The Viking Press, 1931), 47.

[191] John Merriman, *The Dynamite Club: How a Bombing in Fin-de-Siècle Paris Ignited the Age of Modern Terror* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009).

permeated culture both high—from Dostoyevsky's pseudo-Nechaev in *Demons* to Joseph

Conrad's account in *The Secret Agent* of a failed bombing in London—and low, as the

seedy, nihilistic anarchist became a stock character of political cartoonists and a familiar

scapegoat in the popular consciousness. And as "revolutionary" violence became more

individualistic and detached from the broader aims of a movement, it was carried out for

pettier and pettier motives. The actions of Ravachol and Henry were spurred mainly by

the desire to revenge fellow anarchists rather than any hopes of fomenting an uprising.

Even that justification, however, seemed to mask a deeper, unacknowledged rationale:

irrespective of its objective effects, a spectacular, self-sacrificing act on the part of an

individual could offer a kind of subjective comfort, serving as a sign of revolutionary

authenticity when more constructive opportunities for effecting change were not

forthcoming. To employ violence coldly and ruthlessly, and to bring violence upon

oneself in the process (Ravachol and Henry, like others, paid with their heads), was the

ultimate proof of one's revolutionary mettle.

If the logic of inspirational exemplarity that informed the initial formulations of

propaganda by deed survived at all in these actions, it was now being stretched to the

breaking point. Although figures like Ravachol and Henry inspired some hero-worship

within the anarchist movement itself, they had only discredited the anarchist cause in the

eyes of the general public, sacrificing innocent lives in the bargain.[192] Anarchist

intellectuals like Kropotkin now advised against such violence and expressed remorse

over the loss of life. But neither he nor anyone else in the anarchist movement had yet

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[192] It was true, as the theory of propaganda by deed suggested, that the impression made by a dramatic incident, even if it resulted in the denunciation, arrest, or deaths of those involved, could long outlast the incident itself. The folly was in thinking that the meaning of such actions would be straightforward to those who witnessed them, especially if it was necessary to infer a constructive agenda from destructive behavior.

solved the fundamental problem: anarchists had not yet figured out how to behave under conditions in which revolution was not imminent, and could not be made imminent through superhuman acts of will.

That point can be usefully illustrated by contrasting the trajectory of anarchism with the trajectory of Marxism during this same period. The insurrectionary mentality which had begun with collective struggle and ended with acts of individual desperation led the anarchists in a much different direction than the Marxists. Whatever sympathies Marx had ever had for insurrection were dampened by the failure of the 1848 revolutions, and ever since he had assumed that the forceful expropriation of the means of production would take place only at the end of a long period of struggle. The failure of the Paris Commune and other insurrectionary adventures only further confirmed Marx in his belief that whatever violent methods may be necessary in the future, they could not be used to shoehorn a revolutionary society into unfavorable conditions. Towards the end of his life, he made it clear that in the absence of a revolutionary situation, the proper way to conduct the class struggle was through parliamentary political activity. This provided the impetus for the development of social democratic parties that would help to organize the working class in preparation for the collapse of capitalism. The efficacy of this method aside, the socialists were a step ahead of the anarchists in that they were learning how to be socialists during periods of retrenchment, without self-immolating in paroxysms of revolutionary frustration. In fact, from certain perspectives—including that of the average anarchist—they learned too well, shrinking their goals to fit the political possibilities of the moment, and overlaying their reformist practices with increasingly phony revolutionary rhetoric. But Marx, and Engels after him, had at least opened up the

possibility of sustained activity on the part of socialists that would lay the groundwork for the revolution even under non-revolutionary conditions.

The rise of revolutionary nonviolence

The emergence of anarchosyndicalism towards the end of the 19th century, particularly in France, Spain, and Italy, offered anarchists a new vehicle for revolutionary agitation. Anarchosyndicalism was the radical alternative to trade unions. Trade unions were notoriously short-sighted in their objectives and narrow in their focus, fighting battles for small reforms mainly having to do with wages and the working day. That they were immune to concerns about workers' control was obvious from their hierarchical structure. Anarchosyndicalists, by contrast, were far-sighted—they envisioned workingmens' organizations as the seeds of a future society, and sought to unite workers not so that they could expend their energy on measly struggles over whatever scraps the capitalists were willing to hand over, but so that they could strike when the time was ripe and expropriate the expropriators in one grand climactic showdown. This vision of revolution, which advocated the conversion of unions into agents of revolutionary class struggle, was closer to that of the Marxists in the sense that it cast the working class in the central role, in contrast to earlier anarchists' preference for peasants and the lumpenproletariat. But unlike the Marxists, anarchosyndicalists rejected the idea that it was necessary for the working class to conquer the state as a preliminary to taking control of industry. Rather, they argued for direct action within the economic realm itself, believing that if a workers' uprising was widespread enough, if it could balloon into a mass strike that thoroughly paralyzed industrial operations, the workers would be able to

take over the means of production directly and would be strong enough to fend off their enemies. This, in effect, was the old theory of insurrection dressed up to fit more modern, industrial conditions—it relied on the same spontaneity, the same assumption that a powerful example of revolt could spread the revolution like wildfire, and the same apocalyptic faith that if only a determined act of revolutionary will would set events into motion, the pieces of a total transformation of society would somehow all fall into place.

Like the insurrectionists who preceded them, anarchosyndicalists tended to assume that violent means would be indispensable in a struggle of this kind. Some, like Georges Sorel, went so far as to imbue violence with "mythical" significance. Sorel argued that only uncompromising, violent acts could reaffirm the fundamental irreconcilability of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Violence would shake the workers out of their lethargy, injecting a renewed sense of militancy into a class war which had flagged ever since the socialist movement had opted for the parliamentary road to socialism and the bourgeoisie had decided to placate workers with modest reforms rather than fighting them head-on. The idea of the general strike was to be the millennial "myth" that would inspire the working class to heroic, warlike action by tapping into subrational sources of motivation. If workers could be inspired to abandon all reservations about the use of violence, they could be forged in the heat of battle into a new breed of human being free of the confines of traditional morality. Sorel was far more interested in the possibility of this sort of Nietzschean regeneration than in materialistic objectives, and he had few ideas about what revolution would consist of beyond the no-holds-barred revolt of the proletariat; indeed, the shape that a socialist society would take did not interest him, and he had nothing but contempt for rationalist-utopian efforts to

spell it out in any detail. Ironically, for Sorel no less than for Eduard Bernstein, the ends were nothing and the means everything—except that while Bernstein's means sunk humanity into mediocre, democratic decadence, Sorel's raised humanity (so he believed) to a higher plane of existence.[193] Sorel's theories ultimately lent themselves more to the authoritarian populism of fascism than they did to the traditional aims of anarchism. But in their violent, irrational apocalypticism, they did represent one possible, if extreme, interpretation of the anarchosyndicalist attitude towards the class struggle.

It is against this backdrop that the contributions of the Dutch anarchist Bart de Ligt to what would become anarcho-pacifism stand out in bold relief. De Ligt was hopeful that anarchosyndicalist tactics could be repurposed for peaceful ends, put in the service of a nonviolent revolutionary struggle. The general strike, he wrote in *The Conquest of Violence*, "is in itself a way of action foreign to the traditional violent methods."[194] Although most who embraced the idea of the general strike assumed that it would involve violence at one point or another, it represented an advance over certain insurrectionary tactics of the 19th century, like the construction of defensive barricades in urban areas and the progressive, forceful liberation of territory. The main aim of the general strike was the stoppage of work so as to bring society to a standstill and render its continued operation dependent upon the will of the workers themselves. This pointed towards the logic of noncooperation rather than the logic of violence, the idea that withdrawing from active participation in the system on a large enough scale would be tantamount to overthrowing it. De Ligt went so far as to hope that if the general strike

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[193] See Irving Louis Horowitz, *Radicalism and the Revolt against Reason: The Social Theories of Georges Sorel* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961).

[194] Bart de Ligt, *The Conquest of Violence: An Essay on War and Revolution* (New York: Dutton, 1938), 113.

could be extended into the barracks as well as the factories, it would neutralize the threat

of military repression and obviate any need for armed resistance. Noncooperation meshed

nicely with the longstanding anarchist belief that authority is propped up not, mainly, by

guns, but by the voluntary obedience of those subject to it.[195]

De Ligt's theory of nonviolent revolution rested upon a dynamic that was

diametrically opposed to Sorel's notion of a zero-sum conflict between bitter class

enemies. It was necessary, de Ligt wrote, for opponents of the status quo "to recognize

the moral values in the men and the social phenomena which they are obliged by their

convictions to combat."[196] Nonviolence aimed not at the obliteration of the antagonist,

but at reconciliation, and it counseled against oversimplified dichotomies that ruled out

the possibility of finding common ground. It did not, however, imply the complete

absence of conflict. De Ligt, like other pacifists of the time, was prone to using language

borrowed from the vocabulary of war: he urged his readers to wage a "pacifist battle."[197]

But to fight such a battle with violence, he argued, is to create a dangerous rift between

means and ends. "[E]very end," de Ligt writes, "suggests its own means"; "freedom must

be awakened and stimulated by freedom and in freedom. It can never be born of

violence."[198] To use violence, especially given the destructiveness of modern weapons, is

to undermine one's humanity, to make one not more but less moral, to reduce one to the

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[195] As Geoffrey Ostergaard explains: "The syndicalist strategy represented a significant move towards nonviolent revolution. Although the syndicalists were still far from being pacifists—as they envisaged armed workers defending the revolution—the theory of the revolutionary general strike was based on the same fundamental premise that underlies nonviolent action: that the power of rulers depends, in the last analysis, not on physical force but on the consent and cooperation, however reluctant, of the ruled. In essence, the syndicalist general strike represented the total noncooperation of workers in the continuance of rule by the capitalists." *Non-violent Revolution in India* (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1985), xiv.

[196] De Ligt, *The Conquest of Violence*, 23.

[197] Ibid., 135.

[198] Ibid., 72.

very barbarism one wishes to oppose. Like Sorel, de Ligt believed that a free society must be created and sustained by human beings operating on a higher moral plane. Their morality must indeed be formed and reinforced through struggle, but precisely for this reason the struggle must not be violent.

De Ligt was not the first anarchist to suggest that nonviolent means both could and should lead the way to a peaceful, stateless society. William Godwin and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon—both of whom found violent struggle of all stripes abhorrent—had, in their early formulations of anarchism as a political philosophy envisioned change coming about through a protracted, nonviolent process. They had been plagued by their own means-ends problem, however, for their opposition not only to violence but to militancy of any kind left them few avenues through which their radical ends might have been advanced. Godwin pictured coercive social institutions dissolving with the gradual spread of enlightenment, as exemplified by the dissemination of truth through polite conversation. Proudhon thought that human relationships would be transformed along the lines of mutuality through free contract and free credit (which is why for Marx he was little more than a particularly idealistic bourgeois economist). Like Godwin and Proudhon, de Ligt accepted that nonviolent change would be a prolonged process, and in this sense he broke with one of the main assumptions of the general strike. But de Ligt believed that anarchists now had at their disposal methods that could hardly have been anticipated by the revolutionaries of earlier generations, methods which were "both new and truly worthy of men," methods of *militant* nonviolence.[199]

Those methods were pioneered, of course, by Mohandas Gandhi in South Africa and India beginning around the turn of the century. By the 1930s, when de Ligt's book

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[199] Ibid., 135.

appeared, Gandhi had been active for decades, but his ideas were just starting to catch on with the left in Britain and America—thanks in no small part to their popularization by de Ligt and other acolytes like Richard Gregg and Krishnalal Shridharani.[200] Gandhi's innovation, as Westerners understood it, was principally tactical. His *satyagraha* was a method for disarming one's enemies without using arms oneself, of dismantling power and authority through noncooperation and civil disobedience, a kind of "moral jiu-jitsu," as Gregg put it. Gandhi's successes—the civil rights movement in South Africa, the campaign on behalf of untouchables in Vykom, the Salt March—proved that it was possible to put nonviolent tactics to use on a mass scale, to great effect. This was an approach to social change that was without obvious precedent in human history, and it was received as a kind of revelation.

The potency of Gandhi's approach, and its symbolic impact in particular, lay in its combination of principle and pragmatics. Gandhi understood that the character and conduct of the nonviolent revolutionary greatly impacted how the latter's actions were received, and he had personally shown that it was possible to subvert the social order while simultaneously commanding respect and admiration. In Gandhi's case, the steadfast commitment to principle was no doubt authentic—the appearance for the most part matched the reality. Nevertheless, Gandhi's actions evidenced a canny appreciation, like the advocates of propaganda by deed, for the power of spectacle, of performative and dramatic behaviors that could catch and hold the public's attention. Although Gandhi placed great importance on rational discourse and common understanding, he, too,

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[200] See Richard Gregg, *The Power of Nonviolence* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966) and Krishnalal Shridharani, *War without Violence: A Study of Gandhi's Method and Its Accomplishments* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1939).

understood that it was necessary to connect with his audience more viscerally, through striking images of exemplary conduct.

Anarchists had many reasons to be sympathetic to Gandhi's approach—its insistence upon adhering to the dictates of conscience over and above obedience to authority, its tendency to privilege direct action taken outside of official political channels, its anti-ideological, action-oriented, experimental character. Furthermore, Gandhi's conversion of the ancient doctrine of *ahimsa* ("nonviolence" or "non-harm") into a social principle logically placed him at odds with the very idea of the state, which, like Tolstoy, he saw as predicated on the law of violence rather than the law of love.[201] Even more significantly, the strategy of *satyagraha* was, in his own mind, subordinated to the "Constructive Programme" of *sarvodaya*, a program that bore a strong resemblance to anarchist ideas about social organization. Gandhi's promotion of village industry, communal property, social regulation through moral authority rather than coercion, and the confederal organization of village republics all reflected the fact that his "ideal society was a condition of enlightened anarchy."[202]

In practice, Gandhi made some puzzling compromises that troubled his admirers, and many British and American pacifists took issue with his asceticism and (avowed) absolutism. But here, for the first time, was a seemingly viable way of making revolution using neither state power nor violent insurrection, and linking that process to a vision of a stateless society, in a manner predicated on the consistency of means and ends.[203] Gandhi

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[201] Leo Tolstoy, *The Law of Love and the Law of Violence* (New York: Rudolph Field, 1948).
[202] Geoffrey Ostergaard, *The Gentle Anarchists: A Study of the Leaders of the Sarvodaya Movement for Non-violent Revolution in India* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1971), 28.
[203] In her influential explication of Gandhi's thought, Joan Bondurant argues that nonviolent resistance offers the solution to anarchism's persistent means-ends problem: see *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 171-86.

showed that "means and end are part of a continuous process, and are morally

indistinguishable. Put in another way, means are never merely instrumental: they are

always end-creating. What is regarded as the objective is conceptually only a starting-

point: the end can never be predicted and must necessarily be left open. All that is certain

is that from immoral or even amoral 'means', no moral 'end' can result." What this

implies, contrary to traditional theories of revolution both Marxist and anarchist, is that it

is never acceptable to suspend one's principles during a "transitional" period (however

short, however spontaneous) when the revolution is being made. Rather:

> every period is one of transition. With Truth and Non-violence as both the means and the end, the Gandhian acts *now* according to these principles, as far as he is able, and thereby achieves the goal he is striving for. For him, as for Bernstein and Sorel, 'The movement is everything; the final goal is nothing.' The Sarvodaya 'utopia', one might say, is not something to be realized in the distant future: it is something men begin to achieve here and now. The important thing is not to 'arrive' at utopia: it is to make a serious attempt to travel in that direction. And this can be done only by men behaving *now* in the way they want people in utopia to behave: truthfully, lovingly, compassionately. Such a utopia, one might suggest, is not really a goal at all: it is a convenient way of thinking about, ordering, systematizing, and concretizing one's values, a guide not to the future but to *present* activity.[204]

It is this utopian quality to the notion of nonviolent revolution that must be

stressed just as emphatically as whatever practical efficacy it may offer. To be sure, some

of the effects nonviolent revolutionaries aimed at were "direct," geared towards making

an immediate impact by impeding the smooth functioning of an unjust and oppressive

social order. But through the power of exemplarity, they also aimed to produce indirect

effects geared towards longer-term, utopian possibilities. They sought to live out

principles in the present world that gestured towards the kind of world they wished to

bring into being. This kind of exemplary action, writes the critical theorist Alessandro

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[204] Ostergaard, *The Gentle Anarchists*, 41.

Ferrara, overcomes the "dichotomic view of our world as split between *facts* and *values*, *facts* and *norms*, *Sein* and *Sollen*, *is* and *ought*." Exemplars are "entities, material or symbolic, that are as they should be, atoms of reconciliation where *is* and *ought* merge and, in so doing, liberate an energy that sparks our imagination."[205] It is hardly surprising that the exemplary politics of nonviolent revolution caught the attention of anarchists like de Ligt, for there was plenty of precedent within the anarchist tradition for this kind of "prefiguration." The anarchist movement's spiral into violence had not only tarnished anarchism's image, but had overshadowed other, peaceful, tactics of change in which anarchists had always taken an interest. Most anarchists realized that even if violence played a decisive role in the revolutionary struggle, the revolution could not be made by violence alone. Many supported efforts to create alternative institutions, like cooperatives, communes, and schools, that could help to transform individuals into revolutionaries and prefigure the coming social order. With the rise of revolutionary nonviolence, it became possible to imagine revolution as the cumulative product of a variety of peaceful endeavors—some aimed at disruption, others at transforming popular consciousness and preparing people for a new kind of social order. Amongst anarchists and pacifists both, there was renewed interest in things like alternative education and the postwar experiments with communal living that George Woodcock called "a kind of peaceful version of the propaganda by deed."[206]

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[205] Alessandro Ferrara, *The Force of the Example: Explorations in the Paradigm of Judgment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), ix-x.

[206] Woodcock, 18. These communities ranged from Catholic Worker "Houses of Hospitality" to the agricultural cooperatives set up in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Catholic Worker itself was involved in some of these agricultural ventures; other examples included the colony of Macedonia (in Georgia), the Hutterian Society of Brothers in Rifton, New York, and St. Francis Acres (originally the Glen Gardner Cooperative Community), near Glen Gardner, New Jersey. This last, founded by Dave Dellinger, his wife, and several other couples in 1947, became not only a model example of communal living but an important center of radical publishing through its Libertarian Press, which printed amongst other things

The radicalization of pacifism

In the lead up to the First World War, the mainstream of the socialist movement under the Second International (which had officially expelled the anarchists in 1896) had been best positioned to unite an anti-war attitude with a commitment to revolutionary politics. With its commitment to internationalism and its firm grounding in mass-based socialist parties in the major European states, many believed that it had both the principles and the muscle necessary to prevent the outbreak of war. Thus, when on August 4, 1914 the International's most valued affiliate, the German Social Democratic Party, voted for war credits, the decision was greeted with shock and disbelief. As the other major social democratic parties across Europe began to follow suit, it became clear that most socialists were more interested in legitimizing their parties within their national contexts by supporting the war effort than they were in holding out for international revolution. Although this was explained as a temporary policy of "defensism" necessitated by pressing external threats to national survival, it in fact signaled a shift towards electioneering and reform that had been long in the making. As the moribund Second International saw its credibility evaporate, anti-war sentiment within the socialist movement fell to the extreme left under the direction of Lenin, after his perspective triumphed at the anti-war conferences at Zimmerwald (1915) and Kienthal (1916).[207] It quickly became clear, however, that the "Zimmerwald Left's" opposition to war was merely opposition to *capitalist* war, and was certainly not premised on any innate

"the newsletter *Cooperative Living*, the chief organ of the intentional community movement in the 1950s." Timothy Miller, *The Quest for Utopia in Twentieth-Century America, vol. I (1900-1960)* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 170. For a firsthand account see Dave Dellinger, *From Yale to Jail: The Life Story of a Moral Dissenter* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

[207] See Craig R. Nation, *War on War: Lenin, the Zimmerwald Left, and the Origins of Communist Internationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989).

objection to the use of coercion in human affairs. When the Bolsheviks triumphed in

October 1917 and Lenin got his wish for a Third International, a sizable Communist anti-

war movement did arise, but it effectively became an extension of Soviet foreign policy.

Its reputation among radical pacifists outside of the Comintern's sphere of influence was

for hypocrisy and dishonesty.

Far more important in shaping the context that gave birth to anarcho-pacifism was

the radicalization of the pacifist tradition during the interwar years. Herbert Read charted

this development sympathetically because it mirrored, in certain aspects, his own

progression from willing combatant in World War I to outspoken anarcho-pacifist.

Read's pacifist impulses as a young man had coexisted uneasily with a romantic view of

war as a testing ground for one's courage and honor, a ticket to manhood to which not

every generation had easy access. Read soon discovered that there was nothing romantic

or ennobling about the mechanized mass slaughter that now passed for warfare—the

archaic, aristocratic conception of war to which he and so many others had initially

ascribed was overtaken by barbed wire, poison gas, and the trenches. Pacifism had, of

course, existed before the war, but it was up to that time "an idealistic doctrine: it had not

yet been tempered by universal war, and war had not yet reached the dimensions of

universal horror."[208] The years following the culmination of the war saw the publication

of numerous accounts in fiction, poetry, and personal memoirs of the atrocious brutality

of trench warfare.[209] Such depictions of the war produced in their readers a sense of

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[208] Herbert Read, *The Contrary Experience: Autobiographies* (New York: Horizon Press, 1963), 62.

[209] The most influential included offerings from Erich Remarque, Henri Barbusse, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, and Edmund Blunden, not to mention Ernst Jünger's decidedly less pacifistic but nevertheless powerful *Storm of Steel*. Read himself became a "war poet" of some importance. For a fabulous account of this literature and its lasting significance, see Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

revulsion sharply at odds with the "Johnny get your gun" mentality that had generated

early wartime enthusiasm, and they signaled an important cultural shift that would help

pacifism to carve out a durable nook for itself at the margins of the mainstream. One of

the most telling and hopeful signs of this shift was the rise of student pacifism, which

manifested itself in peace pledges and massive campus walk-outs in both Britain and the

United States, and seemingly betokened a new, anti-militarist generation.[210]

The great limitation of this pacifism, however, was that—fueled as it was by

revulsion—its main concern was to take a negative stance *against* war rather than

offering a positive vision of peace. Discussing the origins of the interwar peace

movement and the emergence of the Peace Pledge Union in Britain, Read wrote that

> from the beginning there was something specious about this youthful pacifism. It
> was based on negation, whereas a true belief is always positive and affirmative.
> Further, this negation was the negation of an abstraction—war. War, thanks to the
> books [of Remarque et al], was vivid enough to the imagination of these young
> men: it was a nightmare of senseless killing. But war acquires its reality from
> psychological and economic forces, and it is useless to protest against war unless
> at the same time there is some understanding of the workings of these primary
> forces and some attempt to control them.[211]

Vivid depictions of battle could inspire proclamations of pacifist sentiment and maybe

even conscientious objection, but they could not offer the kind of substantive critique of

war and violence needed to stimulate sustained and effective resistance. Read himself

found the psychological roots of war in a deep-seated destructive impulse that manifested

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[210] The British elite was horrified when the members of Oxford's debating society, the Oxford Union, voted overwhelmingly in 1933 in favor of a motion "that this House will in no circumstance fight for its King and country." What became known as the Oxford Pledge spread to other British universities, and an Americanized version was picked up by student assemblies throughout the United States. A poll taken at the time indicated that 39 percent of American students opposed participation in any war whatsoever, and another 33 percent approved of participation only if the United States itself was invaded. See the account in Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young: Student Radicals and America's First Mass Student Movement, 1929-1941* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), ch. 4.

[211] Herbert Read, *A Coat of Many Colours* (New York: Horizon Press, 1956), 73.

itself in "a love of vicarious suffering and violence."[212] As demonstrated below, he shared this readiness to accept the presence of destructive tendencies in human nature with other anarcho-pacifists of his generation. But whatever the significance of violent human impulses, they were allowed to express themselves in damaging ways thanks to particular kinds of social organization. Thus, rather than merely fueling indignation through the depiction of atrocities, eliminating war called for a much more fundamental project of reshaping human nature and institutions through deliberate, long-term psychological and sociological methods. "War," Read wrote, "is not a spirit that can be exorcised by any form of incantation. It is an impulse that must be eradicated by a patient course of treatment."[213] In his critique of the revisionist literature that appeared during the interwar years, Read not only hinted at the need to tie anti-war sentiment to a radical social vision, but called for a more hardheaded mode of analysis that could provide an empirical and theoretical grounding for pacifism.

This was one way of making the broader point that pacifism needed to move beyond its religious, moralistic roots if it was adequately to comprehend and challenge modern war. Although secular rationales had long coexisted with religious ones in giving weight to antiwar sentiment, outside of the socialist movement outwardly secular peace perspectives in the years leading up to World War I belonged predominantly to business and governmental elites invested in creating a stable and profitable world safe for capitalism, democracy, and Anglo-American hegemony. More accurately termed "internationalism" than "pacifism," early secular perspectives tended to focus on erecting mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of conflicts between nations, including

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[212] Ibid., 74.
[213] Ibid., 75.

"international law and justice, arbitration and conciliation, and multinational peacekeeping machinery."[214] Rarely did they peer inside nations to examine the economic and political dynamics that made belligerence likely.

In contrast to this narrow and non-confrontational approach, writes Scott Bennett, "the modern, post-1914 peace movement—characterized by citizen peace activists, women's peace organizations, and a progressive reformist impulse—was a more militant grassroots movement that sought both peace and social justice." The new, radical, secular pacifism—exemplified in Britain by the London-based War Resisters' International (WRI) and in the United States by the War Resisters' League, a subsection of the WRI— was the product of social reformers, who gradually integrated their opposition to war with a broader set of concerns and agenda for social change.[215] The participation of activists whose political sentiments verged explicitly or implicitly on anarchism and libertarian socialism in the War Resisters' League and similar groups has been well-documented by Bennett and others. For self-identified anarchists like Read, Comfort, Goodman and Walter, the shift of the peace discourse away from its overreliance on moral exhortation and towards questions of economics, sociology, and psychology, as well as its increasingly ambitious goals of far-reaching social reform, set the stage for a pacifism that was both secular in inspiration and anarchist in ambition.

The religious route to anarcho-pacifism: the Catholic Worker

Read and other secular anarcho-pacifists were hopeful that a more mature pacifism was in the making, a pacifism that would privilege rational critique over

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[214] Scott Bennett, *Radical Pacifism: The War Resisters League and Gandhian Nonviolence in America, 1915-1963* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), xii.
[215] Ibid.

absolutist moral principle and proactive, collective resistance over individualistic nonresistance.[216] Before examining their contribution to that evolution, however, it is important to acknowledge that religious pacifism itself was undergoing a radicalization during the interwar years. This can be seen as early as 1914 in the founding of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) in Cambridge (its American branch was founded the next year) and the increasing prominence of Christian socialism within the peace movement. Figures like A. J. Muste, whose personal journey took him from Christian pacifism to Trotskyism and back again, called on pacifists to "build our vision into economic and political reality" and pointed to Gandhi's successes with nonviolent resistance as evidence that it was both possible and necessary to integrate an agenda of spiritual regeneration with a commitment to radical social change.[217]

Of the variants of anarcho-pacifism that took shape in the 1930s and 1940s, the Catholic Worker movement remained most closely wedded to the longstanding tradition of religious dissent and nonresistance, though it drew from that tradition's most radical currents and allied itself with hardline, social justice-oriented organizations like the FOR. The great novelty in the Catholic Worker's case, of course, was to have found a way of making its radical stance plausible from within Catholicism, as opposed to the many strains of liberal Protestantism that had already compiled long records of social dissent

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[216] Such criticisms should not lead one to underestimate the contribution of religious pacifism historically. Christian pacifists had bravely broken with a "just war" tradition dating back to Augustine in adopting an absolutist stance against war. They had organized the earliest local and national peace societies, including the London Peace Society (1816) and the American Peace Society (1828), in an effort to lay the groundwork for peace through cultural change and social reform, and they were the first to link the cause of peace to other social concerns like the abolition of slavery. They had refused military service and, by engaging in tax resistance, had avoided contributing to war financially as well. Some of them, like William Lloyd Garrison and his followers, even supported "a kind of Christian anarchism" which left little to no room for state activity. Charles Chatfield, *The American Peace Movement: Ideals and Activism* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 8.

[217] A. J. Muste, "The World Task of Pacifism" in *The Essays of A. J. Muste*, ed. Nat Hentoff (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1967), 221.

and activism. Founded by Dorothy Day[218] and Peter Maurin, the Catholic Worker (whose eponymous flagship newspaper first appeared in 1933) pioneered a radical, praxis-oriented reading of Catholic social teaching, supplemented by a variety of influences from within and without the faith, from the personalism of Emmanuel Mournier and Nicholas Berdyaev, to the "active love" of Dostoevsky, the ethical anarchism of Peter Kropotkin, and the "distributism" of Hilaire Belloc, G. K. Chesterton, and Father Vincent McNabb.

In their uncompromising pacifism, however, the Catholic Workers took their direction chiefly from the religious anarchism of Tolstoy and his reading of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. In his widely-read political writings from later in life like *The Kingdom of God Is within You* (1894), Tolstoy argued that obeying the commands of the state more often than not required disobedience to the commands of Christianity. Like anarchists religious and secular, he highlighted the inherently coercive nature of the state and its intimate connection with violence, best illustrated by the wars it waged and the forcible conscription needed to sustain them. (In its own time, the Catholic Worker made it a central part of their mission not only to oppose war, but to support draft resisters and conscientious objectors.[219]) But Tolstoy's—and the Worker's—objections to the state went far deeper: "All state obligations," Tolstoy wrote, "are against the conscience of a Christian—the oath of allegiance, taxes, law proceedings, and military service. And the

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[218] Mel Piehl goes so far as to claim that American Catholic radicalism "was Dorothy Day's invention, and she pervaded its history for so long that a social, religious, and intellectual history of American Catholic radicalism up to 1965 turns out to be, in significant measure, an interpretation of the social outlook, religion, and ideas of this one person." *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1982), x.

[219] The Catholic Worker formed an organization of conscientious objectors called Pax in 1937, later the Association of Catholic Conscientious Objectors. See William D. Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (New York: Liveright, 1973).

whole power of the government rests on these very obligations."[220] Across the full range

of its activities, the state itself—not merely its wars—was tarnished with the taint of sin.

The Tolstoyan approach began, as the well-known Catholic Worker Ammon

Hennacy put it, by prompting a "one-man revolution within the heart," a conscious

decision to live in imitation of Christ and to adopt an attitude of nonresistance towards

the state and the demands it placed on individuals.[221] Sometimes this was formulated in a

manner scarcely distinguishable from familiar Christian concerns with "personal moral

hygiene"—Hennacy once quipped that "The question is not 'Can we change the world?'

but 'Can we keep the world from changing us?'"[222] But Catholic Workers were

determined to project their protest outward as well, in proactive activity. From the start

they sought to maximize the exemplary effects of their positions of principle, trumpeting

them loudly and proudly (Hennacy not least of all) in print and public demonstrations.

Their more confrontational tactics especially—the open refusal to pay taxes, to register

for conscription, and (later on) to take part in civil-defense drills—were propagandistic

deeds aimed at awakening consciences and effecting change just as surely as they were

expressions of personal principle. In their "Houses of Hospitality" and communal

agricultural experiments, Catholic Workers also sought to construct model communities

that put Christian love into immediate operation, and into bald contrast with the workings

of the state. By treating people as "persons" rather than cannon fodder, decentralizing

authority and decision-making in defiance of the growing militarization of everyday life

(Catholic Worker communities arose spontaneously and functioned autonomously), and

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[220] Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God Is within You* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 230-31.

[221] See Ammon Hennacy, *Autobiography of a Christian Anarchist* (New York: Catholic Worker Books, 1954).

[222] Quoted in Tracy, *Direct Action*, 52-53.

directing resources to immediate needs and utopian experimentation rather than destruction, Catholic Worker communities aimed to invert the logic of the warfare state and embody a fundamentally different set of values.

Although the Catholic Worker and other radical religious pacifist groups ascribed to certain theological doctrines unattractive or even repugnant to their secular counterparts, substantial areas of agreement facilitated a constructive alliance in the postwar years.[223] While anarchists had begun with a commitment to revolution, and moved only gradually toward an appreciation of nonviolence, religious pacifists had begun with a commitment to nonviolence, and moved only gradually toward an appreciation of revolution. By the late 1930s and into the postwar years, however, their respective trajectories were effectively moving along parallel tracks—their convergence facilitated, as has been emphasized, by the idea that nonviolence itself could be made revolutionary. Most importantly, the religious anarcho-pacifists of the Catholic Worker agreed with secular anarcho-pacifists like Read, Comfort, Walter, and Goodman that to combat war was to combat the state, and that eliminating war meant implementing a positive vision of a stateless society. Furthermore, their understandings of what kind of resistance was called for, particularly as the international situation erupted into yet another global conflict and states began to clamp down on domestic dissent, were fundamentally similar. In one form or another, individual conscience had to be preserved in the face of collective insanity, principled refusal had to begin if nowhere else than at the individual level. If individuals could bear witness during periods of greatest trial, their

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[223] As Charles Chatfield notes, the Catholic Worker combined a "value orientation" with "a rigorous analytical and issue emphasis" that was more sociological and situational than its absolutist rhetoric would tend to reflect. See "The Catholic Worker in the United States Peace Tradition" in Anne Klejment, and Nancy L. Roberts, eds., *American Catholic Pacifism: The Influence of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 12.

defiance might gradually exert an exemplary influence—its effects multiplied, to use Dorothy Day's favorite metaphor, like the loaves and fishes of scripture, building into an ever-stronger current of nonviolent struggle.

The state and war: anarcho-pacifism versus the Leviathan

One of the things that made anarcho-pacifists distinctive was their attempt to marshal the full force of anarchist anti-statism in support of the idea that any serious critique of war had to begin with a critique of the state. Alex Comfort made the most explicit effort to challenge traditional assumptions about the nature and role of the state on the level of political theory. The standard (Hobbesian) narrative of state formation, he pointed out, begins by positing that humans are innately aggressive, irrational, and emotional beings, whose natural tendencies generate antisocial behavior and create the need for a centralized, coercive force sufficiently powerful to maintain social order. The state arises, according to this hypothetical account, as a peacekeeper, whose only alternative is violent anarchy (in the most pejorative sense of the term). Adopting the same logic at the international level (as in Kant's theory of "perpetual peace"), war between nations can be explained by the absence of an analogous set of international institutions muscular enough to keep the peace on that scale.[224] Neither Comfort nor other New Anarchists objected to the idea that any theory of human association must begin by acknowledging the existence of innate aggressive drives. Informed as they were by modern psychology, they did not hesitate to describe some manifestations of violence as "natural," and certainly did not think pacifism would spring unaided out of naturally

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[224] The New Anarchists, Comfort especially, were skeptical of calls for international government in large part because such proposals adopted the same logic used to justify the nation state itself.

benign tendencies.[225] Betraying the influence of Freud, Herbert Read went so far as to suggest that pacifism might be understood as "the science of diverting aggressive instincts into creative channels."[226]

The problem with the standard political theory narrative of state formation, then, was not so much that it got human nature wrong as that it lacked an understanding of how potentially destructive human tendencies might be directed and controlled without the oversight of a coercive state apparatus. Whether taking the direct route of Hobbes, or the more circuitous route of Locke or Rousseau, the inevitable conclusion of social contract theory was that centralized power was an indispensable means of holding society together. The principal, and fundamentally erroneous, assumption of political science, writes Comfort, is that "power in the hands of government is an instrument, if not the main instrument, through which human beings implement their will to sociality and order." What was needed was "a revolution in our thought about power" that would tear down some of the most time-honored dogmas of western political thought.[227]

If the New Anarchists were content to accept that aggression in human beings is a "natural" phenomenon, they were eager to demonstrate that war—least of all in its oversized modern iteration—is not. Modern warfare, far from being an instinctive reaction to an immediately experienced offence (the paradigm of "natural" violence for

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[225] See Paul Goodman's comments about "natural" violence in Colin Ward, ed., *A Decade of Anarchy, 1961-70* (London: Freedom Press, 1987), 15-16.

[226] Herbert Read, *The Cult of Sincerity* (New York: Horizon Press, 1969), 39. Comfort went so far as to claim that "man is, in primate terms, not so much a social animal liable to fits of irrational aggression, as an irrationally aggressive animal capable of fits of sociality." *Authority and Delinquency* (London: Zwan Publications, 1988), 95.

[227] Alex Comfort, *Writings against Power & Death*, ed. David Goodway (London: Freedom Press, 1994), 148.

Goodman), is an affair orchestrated on a very high level of sophistication.[228] Wars, they

believed, should not be understood as outbursts of mob feeling, or as products of group

conflict, for national publics are not naturally or impulsively warlike. The public's taste

for war—insofar as it exists at all—is implanted and cultivated by elites. Rather than

ascribing motives of political and economic gain to these elites, Read and Comfort

preferred the language of psychology; Read wrote of a "psychosis of power" that

threatened to take hold of those who possessed it,[229] while Comfort wrote of the "warlike

impulses of a particular group of personalities which have become deviant as a result of

forces acting in childhood."[230] Their explanations blended a psychologized variant of

Lord Acton's axiom that power corrupts with the insight that power hierarchies tend to

attract those who are *already* corrupt, and who will jump at the opportunity to give their

antisocial proclivities free reign.[231]

Comfort took this latter line of thinking furthest in his most important piece of

anarchist writing, *Authority and Delinquency* (1950). While persecuting small-scale

delinquency, Comfort argued, the state was perfectly happy to accept—indeed, to

encourage—delinquent and lawless behavior on a large scale. The centralization of power

"attracts inevitably towards the administrative centre those for whom power is an end in

itself," and who are unusually aggressive and acquisitive by temperament.[232] The

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[228] Goodman's "natural" violence is best illustrated by an organic, face-to-face interaction like a schoolyard fist fight, but he also saw a kind of "natural" inevitability in struggles of oppressed people— blacks in the US, the French under Nazi occupation, even Third-World guerrillas—that included some component of violence. Nevertheless, he believed that under modern conditions, "*any* violent means tends [sic] to reinforce centralism and authoritarianism." Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: HarperPerennial, 1993), 599-600.

[229] Herbert Read, *Anarchy and Order* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954), 121.

[230] Comfort, *Writings against Power & Death*, 152.

[231] David Goodway makes the connection between Acton and Comfort in *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow*, 251.

[232] Comfort, *Authority and Delinquency*, 28.

likelihood that power will be abused increases with the size of the state as the "gap between governors and governed" widens.[233] War removes whatever fetters remain by offering "full indulgence for aggressive behaviour"[234] and encouraging "a distortion of reality in which abnormal impulses may pass as normal, and irrational ideas achieve unquestioning acceptance."[235] On the level of national politics and foreign policy especially, then, there is a perpetual risk of sociopathic power elites running wild, of the patients taking control of the asylum.[236] The root problem, however, is not the errant elites—who are, after all only doing what comes naturally to them—but the structure of the "asylum" itself, which makes this outcome both possible and likely. The immense power concentrated in the state serves as a perpetual invitation to insane behavior, and renders that behavior significantly more destructive than it might be otherwise. The ultimate goal of any social reformer committed to rationality and sanity can only be to dissolve it entirely.

The New Anarchists went further than anyone else in the radical pacifist milieu in arguing that the state, by its very nature, was not an agent of peace and order, as the Hobbesian narrative would suggest, but the main source of war and disorder. Thus, the main problem, as they saw it, was the state *itself*, not simply the "militarization" of the state, or the capture of the state by self-interested or psychopathic elites, though those factors certainly amplified the disastrous consequences of state violence. "War," as Herbert Read wrote in a particularly succinct formulation, "will exist as long as the State

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[233] Ibid., 85.
[234] Ibid., 63.
[235] Ibid., 64.
[236] War crimes, Comfort suggests, can generally be traced to "the invention and planning of individual psychopaths in office." Ibid., 67.

exists."[237] He and other New Anarchists hoped that the radical pacifist movement would adopt the insight voiced almost thirty years earlier by Randolph Bourne: "We cannot crusade against war without crusading implicitly against the State."[238]

The role of individual resistance

Aside from arguing that the crusade against war must also be a crusade against the state, New Anarchists like Alex Comfort and Paul Goodman also provided an anarchist account of the need for resistance at the individual level. There was special need during the historical moment generated by World War II, Comfort felt, to proclaim the importance of individuality, because it was under threat like never before, as individuals were encouraged to embrace the "herd" mentality so ably critiqued by Bourne, identifying their own interests with those of the state and adopting the reasoning of state elites as their own. Comfort was generally careful to pin the blame for the "insanity" of that era on the psychopaths at the top of the political hierarchy, contrasting the heroic acts performed by common folk during war with the "bestiality, corruption and idiocy of their governments."[239] But in places, his wartime writings give one the sense of a world itself gone insane, in which the most barbarous and inhuman actions meet with the highest praise, and in which the collective sense of shame has been suspended at all levels. The worst of the lunacy may be orchestrated from above, but the mentality it reflects threatens to overtake society as a whole. We all, Comfort warned, possess "the seeds of madness" within ourselves, and the percolation of insanity into the public at large can initiate a

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[237] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 121.
[238] Randolph Bourne, *War and the Intellectuals: Collected Essays 1915-1919* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964).
[239] Comfort, *Writings against Power & Death*, 38.

general slide into barbarism, in which the general population becomes a willing

participant in the decline.[240]

Nevertheless, Comfort believed that individual resistance was still possible.

Indeed it was even, albeit to a very limited extent, a reality; there were notable examples

of draft resistance and conscientious objection during the war.[241] Comfort's response to

the problem of war, then, began with a call for individual "responsibility"—not from

those at the top, for whom there was little hope—but from those whose everyday sense of

humanity had not been warped and undermined by power. As the countries of Europe

descended into their second major conflagration of the century, responsibility was now

only possible in "the single, isolated, unarmed partisan, relying on his wits."[242] Comfort's

exhortation to individual responsibility had an existential quality that was somewhat

more pronounced than in the writing of other New Anarchists. Adopting Read's notion of

alternating eras of classicism and romanticism (see Chapter One), he saw the wartime

Zeitgeist as thoroughly romantic, reflecting a breakdown of faith in human nature,

progress, and the orderly character of the universe—"[h]istory," he wrote of the World

War II era, "had driven us from classicism to romanticism."[243] The insecurity and

violence escalating throughout Europe had brought about a sharp awareness of human

tragedy and death, and a sense of the disjuncture between the spiritual aspirations of

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[240] Ibid., 61. This pessimism was at the root of Comfort's "apocalypticism." Comfort was the best known of the so-called British "Apocalyptic" poets, who looked to Read as their principal muse.

[241] One famous example in the American context was the so-called "Union Eight," a group of students from the Union Theological Seminary, including Dave Dellinger, who refused to register for the Selective Service in protest of President Roosevelt's declaration of the first peacetime military draft in U.S. history. See Tracy, *Direct Action*.

[242] Comfort, *Writings against Power & Death*, 40.

[243] Ibid., 52. Comfort, as Read was apt to do from time to time, argued that anarchism was the "offspring" of romanticism. Ibid., 65.

human beings and a universe that was seemingly indifferent to them.[244] During such times, deference to the natural forms that anchor the classicist worldview is ineffectual—what is needed, rather, are acts of individual will that acknowledge the central role that human beings themselves play in creating and sustaining their ideals and values. The imperative of individual responsibility, for Comfort, comes from the need to defend ideals precisely because there is no certainty that they will triumph.

Comfort's understanding of individual responsibility was informed by the personalism he shared with his muse, Read, the Catholic Worker movement, and other New Anarchists. To view oneself as an irreducible, inassimilable *person* was to reject the idea that one's own ends could ever be subsumed in the ends of any collective entity, including the state. This sense of self, Comfort argued, should inform the way that individuals understand their duty not only to themselves, but to others. One is responsible, most fundamentally, not to abstractions like "country" or even the "common good" but as a *person* to other *persons*. Comfort was calling for what he termed "responsible humaneness,"[245] not abstract idealism: "We have boundless responsibility," he wrote, "to every person we meet."[246]

As was true of the 19th century anarchists who devolved "revolution" into acts of individual resolve, there was a certain social despair that informed Comfort's perspective. It reflected a breakdown of faith in human collectives generally, the pessimistic conclusion that "society" no less than the state had become the enemy of the individual: "Society is rooted today in obedience, conformity, conscription, and the stage has been

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[244] There was, at least, a certain solidarity to be found in the shared sense of existential peril; the fact that humanity was "afloat on the same raft" lent itself to an "alliance of all human beings against the hostility of the universe." Ibid., 65-66.

[245] Ibid., 64.

[246] Ibid., 61.

reached at which, in order to live, you have to be an enemy of society."[247] If the world

had no sensible place for the individual, Comfort wrote, the individual would have to

become his own world; if government offered no inlets for popular influence, people

would have to focus on governing themselves. At his most pessimistic, he argued that all

"corporate allegiances" had been discredited:

> There are no corporate allegiances any longer, only individuals and groups at
> continual variance with the corporate, and with all who are prepared to delegate
> their minds, whether to a single ruler or to a committee of rulers. That is to say,
> we are each of us, intellectually though not practically, a one man nation. It looks
> as though the sole remaining factor standing between the possibility of living a
> sane life and its destruction by lunatics is the disobedience of the individual.[248]

Comfort's call to "individual responsibility" was, then, something of a defensive action, a

retreat. But by no means was it meant to culminate in quietism: "I am responsible," he

averred, "for seeing that I do nothing which harms any other human being, and I leave

nothing undone which can reduce the amount of preventable suffering and failure."[249] At

the very least, then, to accept responsibility was to commit oneself not only to

conscientious objection but to proactive struggle against war, militarism, and social

injustice.[250] To be sure, Comfort was less inclined than Read to indulge in hopes of

utopian redemption,[251] but his anarcho-pacifism certainly did not wallow in defeatism

and despair.

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[247] Ibid., 39. Comfort warned against imputing humanity to groups and institutions: "It is with [the] whole idea of society as a super-person that responsibility is at war, and class struggles are superseded by this struggle." So-called "classless" societies, he believed, "can be as preposterous in their demands on the individual conscience as any others, and as heavily impregnated with barbarism." Ibid., 68-9.

[248] Ibid., 35.

[249] Ibid., 113.

[250] For much of his life, Comfort was himself "a foremost campaigner against war and the preparations for war: as a speaker and pamphleteer for the [Peace Pledge Union]; as a sponsor of the Direct Action Committee (Against Nuclear War) (and its precursors); as an activist in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND); and as a member of the Committee of 100." Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow*, 243.

[251] Arthur Salmon, the author of the only book-length treatment of Comfort's thought, argues that "[w]hat is distinctive in Comfort's anarchism is the absence of any optimistic belief that individual

Comfort was not alone amongst the New Anarchists in arguing for principled

individual refusal as a means of affirming responsibility, contesting the impunity of the

state, and creating the preconditions of any potential collective resistance. In his earliest

political writings (collected in the so-called "May Pamphlet" of 1945), Paul Goodman

wrote of the need for each individual to "draw a line" beyond which his accession to and

cooperation with the demands of state and society would not extend. As in Comfort's

case, this recommendation presumed the existence of hostile conditions, in which the

innate, libertarian urge to live naturally is heavily constrained by coercion and arbitrary

authority. Establishing a limit to one's compliance is a means of empowering the

individual within a context not of his making: "We draw the line in their conditions,"

Goodman writes, but "we proceed on our conditions."[252] Carving out a space for

individual autonomy, then, does not require one to withdraw from public life, only to

orient oneself properly within it. This explains why Goodman thought it possible to

"wage peace" even when conditions seemed to foreclose any possibility of a libertarian

course of action:

> Obviously a man cannot act rightly with regard to bad alternatives by simply not
> committing himself at all, for then he is in fact supporting whichever bad
> alternative happens to be the stronger. But the free man can often occupy an
> aggressive position outside either alternative, which undercuts the situation and
> draws on neglected forces; so that even after the issue has been decided between
> the alternatives, the issue is still alive…This is the right action when the presented
> alternatives are frozen fast in the coercive structure.[253]

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redemption will necessarily result in the ultimate redemption of society generally." *Alex Comfort* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), 29. None of the New Anarchists, however, operated with faith in the historical or logical "necessity" of any social development. If Comfort's thought is distinctive in this sense, it is only because he was focused so intensely on protecting and reaffirming the individual during a time of great peril. Unlike the other major figures of the New Anarchism, his individualism was only minimally balanced by visions of reconciliation between individual and society; indeed, he was the only one not to identify as a socialist.

[252] Paul Goodman, *Drawing the Line: The Political Essays of Paul Goodman*, ed. Taylor Stoehr (New York: Free Life Editions, 1977), 10.

[253] Ibid., 39.

Goodman's perspective had a touch of the existential to it as well, privileging the *decisiveness* of the individual stand rather than its specific content, and accepting that "[n]o particular drawn line will ever be defensible logically."[254] But Goodman was less the romantic than Comfort, seeing in acts of individual refusal the protest not so much of a unique *will* against absurdity and hopelessness, as of *nature* against artificiality, coercion, and constraint. "Let us work not to express our 'selves,'" he cautioned, "but the nature in us. Refuse to participate in coercive or merely conventional groups, symbols, and behavior. The freedom of the individual is the expression of the natural animal and social groups to which he in fact belongs."[255] Freedom of individual action, assuming one's social environment to be flawed, means "*to live in present society as though it were a natural society.*"[256]

Acting in accordance with nature, Goodman argued, means becoming comfortable acting in ways which, though they flow out of natural instincts, are considered "criminal"; advocating for individual freedom means advocating "*a large number of precisely those acts and words for which persons are in fact thrown into jail.*"[257] Part of the challenge of pacifists who felt compelled to behave illegally, Goodman realized, was to get the public to associate law-breaking not with vice, but with virtue, not with depravity but with the imperative expression of an irrepressible human nature. Effecting this shift in public perspective was, of course, integral to shaping the way in which the actions of militant pacifists would be received. This image control was

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[254] Ibid., 9.

[255] Ibid., 20. Both anarchism and pacifism, Goodman argued, "require a nature of things to give order, and a trust in other people not to be excessively violent; they cannot rely on imposed discipline to give the movement strength, nor on organized power to avert technological and social chaos." *New Reformation: Notes of a Neolithic Conservative* (New York: Vintage, 1971), 145-46.

[256] Goodman, *Drawing the Line*, 3.

[257] Ibid., 18.

important, because the payoff of feats of individual assertion was not just the self-satisfaction and integrity of the persons involved, but was to be found in their radiating effects: "When the peace is waged, when there is individual excellence and mutual aid, the result is exemplarity: models of achievement."[258] Echoing his anarchist predecessors, Goodman held that "our acts of liberty are our strongest propaganda."[259]

The New Anarchists' conclusions about the unprecedented importance of individual refusal were related to their assessment of the modern state. For all of its military might, they argued, the modern state depended more than ever before on public acquiescence. The herd mentality allows the state to tighten its grip on the whole of society, as individuals caught up in wartime patriotism voluntarily come to adopt the state's logic and ends as their own. As troubling as this phenomenon was, it meant that assertions of individual autonomy even at the level of civil society could undermine the "health" of the state, which rests upon the unity of purpose it seeks to impute to its subjects. Indeed, Comfort was convinced that he was living in a society which was "more vulnerable to individual resistance than any which has gone before."[260] He hoped that spreading an attitude of disobedience and a readiness to resist war and conscription would create a community incapable of being "absorbed or overawed," a community of responsible individuals who were unwilling to cede decision-making to those in power by default.[261] "The safeguard of peace," Comfort argues, "is not a vast army, but an unreliable public, a public that will fill the streets and empty the factories at the word

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[258] Ibid., 44.
[259] Ibid., 19.
[260] Comfort, *Writings against Power & Death*, 51.
[261] Ibid., 51.

War, that will learn and accept the lesson of resistance."[262] Here Comfort expresses

clearly the hope that acts of individual refusal could become, to borrow the language of

Herbert Marcuse, one big "Great Refusal" that would render the state's highly

coordinated violence unlikely or impossible. "[T]he only effective answer to total

regimentation," Comfort writes in language that could be Marcuse's, "is total

disobedience."[263]

Although it was not immediately clear during the war years how resistance on an

individual level would grow into resistance on a collective level, New Anarchists like

Comfort and Goodman envisioned individual disobedience not as a mere expression of

authenticity but as a symbolic and exemplary activity, indicative of deep responsibility to

others as well as to the integrity of the self. However close to despair it hovered,

especially in Comfort's case, their attitude was one of proactive engagement, not defeatist

retreat or puritan nonresistance. This, they realized, was the only way of keeping hope

alive.

Fascism and democracy: the debate over World War II

Comfort and Goodman wrote their paeans to individual responsibility in the

context of World War II, after they had settled into firmly anti-war positions. For

Goodman's part, he had managed to slip through the fingers of the local draft board by

feigning incompetence, and he did not hesitate to endorse in print similar acts of

individual refusal. His pacifist articles resulted in his blacklisting by *Partisan Review*—

an action which, to Goodman's mind, was instrumental in stalling his literary career and

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[262] Ibid., 83.
[263] Ibid., 79-80.

contributed directly to his obscurity throughout the late 1940s and 1950s. Comfort

received a similar response to his wartime pamphlets, which document an extraordinary

commitment to principled dissent under the most hostile of conditions, and taken

collectively stand as the most impressive expression of anarcho-pacifism in print during

the war. For his efforts—in particular, for circulating a declaration protesting Allied

bombings—Comfort was banned from the BBC.

The Catholic Worker also experienced backlash after taking a pacifist stance

against the war. Dorothy Day's unwillingness to compromise the Worker's pacifism had

already been amply demonstrated by her controversial insistence upon neutrality during

the Spanish Civil War. Her unflinching rejection of violence continued right through

Pearl Harbor and the American declaration of war in 1942. The *Catholic Worker* initially

urged men not to register for the draft[264] but then backed off to a position of non-

interference.[265] Nevertheless, Day and the *Worker*'s principled opposition to the war

resulted in a massive loss of subscribers and the shriveling of many Catholic Worker

communities. As Fred Boehrer notes, "70% of the Catholic Worker communities closed

within two and a half years" and "[t]he Los Angeles Catholic Worker went so far in their

disagreement with Day as to burn all their issues of *The Catholic Worker* newspaper."[266]

As these examples suggest, to affirm one's pacifism at this time was to risk

making oneself a pariah in the eyes of the left no less than the right. The anti-war

sentiment embodied in the peace pledges of the 1930s had quickly evaporated once the

gravity of the fascist threat became clear. Whether or not one clung to the hope, like some

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[264] See Dorothy Day, *Loaves and Fishes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 63.
[265] See Day's article of January, 1942 in *By Little and By Little*, 261-63.
[266] Fred Boehrer, "Diversity, Plurality, and Ambiguity: Anarchism in the Catholic Worker Movement," in William Thorn, Phillip Runkel and Susan Mountin, eds., *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement: Centenary Essays* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001), 105.

on the socialist left, that war would pave the way for revolution, it was clear to most that the political options had resolved themselves into pro-Allies or pro-Axis, and the time had come for taking sides.

Every aspect of the anarcho-pacifist critique of war, however, from its universalistic personalism to its emphasis on the common denominators of coercion and violence shared by all states, worked against the Schmittian logic that inclined even some radicals to divide the conflict into a democratic "us" and a fascist "them." If, as Carl Schmitt influentially argued in *The Concept of the Political*, all meaningful politics depends upon an "us/them" dichotomy, this dichotomy can be seen in its sharpest outline during wartime, when states seek to foster internal unity by setting the nation as a whole against an external enemy. Moral evaluations tend to follow the lead of this political distinction: everything "we" do takes on the aura of righteousness and everything "they" do takes on the aura of ultimate evil. The national interest is turned over to those figures most effective at providing for national security, and figures brought in especially to fight the war, like Winston Churchill, become the defenders of "democracy" against the fascist aggressors. In his wartime pamphlets, one of Comfort's main concerns was to break down precisely these kinds of dichotomies. He argued that from a sociological perspective, the state, whether "our" state or "their" state, is always on some level the enemy of the people. It was no inconsistency, then, that the state would actively perpetuate social injustice at home even as it supposedly fought the good fight abroad.[267]

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[267] Of course, activists during and after the war got considerable mileage out of painting this as a contradiction, as it indeed, in some sense, was. Nowhere was this clearer than in the domestic oppression of African Americans in the United States. It was no accident that conscientious objectors helped to initiate the struggle for racial justice, beginning with the desegregation of the prisons that held them during the war, carrying into the early activities of CORE, and ultimately blossoming into the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

Moreover, the us/them dichotomy cannot help but lend credence to moral hypocrisy by encouraging people to turn a blind eye towards outrages perpetrated by their own government while denouncing the crimes of others. Comfort liked to point out that the atrocities of the Allies were often just as barbaric as those of the Axis powers.[268] "In all wars we are neutral," he wrote, "not because we ignore wrongdoing, but because as individuals we must apply identical standards to the actions of both sides."[269] Comfort lambasted the nationalist hypocrisy that called for unquestioning obedience at home while in the same breath chastising the German people for their own obedience.

For George Orwell, who pounced on Comfort in the pages of *Partisan Review*, his position, far from an illustration of "responsibility," was an illustration of its opposite. Disparaging the war effort from "behind a screen of guns" was intellectual posturing at its most cowardly—it was to cast oneself in the role of the saint, to make a show of one's moral purity even as others made the ultimate sacrifice, all while enjoying the relative freedom and security that only armed struggle could guarantee.[270] As intellectuals like Comfort prated on about being better democrats than those who had stepped up to fight the war, their actions were in fact "[o]bjectively…pro-Nazi."[271] Anything which weakened the resolve of the British public at this critical time was, irrespective of its motivation, a boon to Hitler. The pacifists' attempt to avoid complicity in Allied violence rendered them complicit, by default, in Axis violence. Furthermore, their attempt to disassociate themselves from the war campaign because they objected to those waging it was a childish avoidance of political reality, a refusal to choose between lesser evils, a

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[268] See the laundry list of offenses cited by Comfort as he "accuses the accusers" during the Freedom Press trial in *Writings against Power & Death*, 47.

[269] Ibid., 69.

[270] Orwell, *Collected Essays*, 299.

[271] Ibid., 167.

position taken by "frivolous people who have never been shoved up against realities."[272]

The "realities" denied by the pacifist went beyond the need to support the wartime

regime, however. The pacifist—and particularly the anarcho-pacifist—wanted to believe

that the world was a place in which freedom and nonviolence went comfortably hand-in-

hand. The problem with that charming idea was that civilization itself "rests ultimately on

coercion."[273] Just as opposing the British soldier means supporting the Nazi soldier,

"whoever is not on the side of the policeman is on the side of the criminal."[274] Law,

order, and freedom itself were inseparable from coercion not just during extraordinary

times, but during ordinary times as well. Orwell's argument was, then, as much about

anarchism as about pacifism. Anarchism, he implied, was a political philosophy of denial,

its means-ends problem embedded not only in its understanding of how the ideal society

it proposed would come into being, but in the vision of that society itself.

Comfort and Orwell were, in fact, in substantial agreement with respect to their

assessments of the regime that had been entrusted with the war. Those leading a

sanctimonious campaign against fascism, Comfort argued, were too often hypocrites.

What genuine anti-fascism existed in Britain, he maintained, was a product of the

grassroots (one might think here of Orwell's affection for the Home Front). Fascist

tendencies could be found at home as well as abroad, not least in the very figures quick to

condemn the actions of Hitler. These claims were not in dispute. Where Comfort and

Orwell parted ways was when the former argued that "no government—least of all the

one we had then—could be trusted to fight a war of principle." By fighting the Nazis on

their own terms the Allies would have to match their tactics with tactics equally

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[272] Ibid., 107.
[273] Ibid., 166.
[274] Ibid., 167.

objectionable; the war would "by its own logic turn into genocide," and at home the populace would have to be mobilized and controlled in much the same manner as in Nazi Germany.[275]

For Orwell, such claims were examples of irresponsible exaggeration and falsification. For Comfort, however, they were a means of keeping people awake and alive to the dangers that confronted them at home no less than to those stemming from abroad. Indeed, Orwell and Comfort made use of fascism in very different ways. In *The Lion and the Unicorn*, Orwell used it as a foil to the homespun virtues and fundamentally democratic culture of small-town Britain, arguing that the British combatant should fight not merely *against* fascism but *for* his way of life, out of love of country as much as hatred of Hitler. Comfort, by contrast, argued that it offered a magnified glimpse of the very dangers posed by the bloated and militaristic British state. The behavior of fascist states was an example of "irresponsibility" carried to its extreme, but in this respect quantitatively and not qualitatively distinguishable from the behavior of the warfare state emerging at home. "Fascism," Comfort argued, "was the conscious and voluntary adoption of an irrationalism which lies at the root of *all* irresponsible societies."[276] The growth of hierarchical, bureaucratic institutions in so-called "democratic" states was making possible on an ever increasing scale an "institutional abrogation of responsibility" not unlike what was being seen in fascist countries, in which passing of the buck and obedience to the authority of superiors could be used to circumvent the dictates of conscience.[277] It was becoming increasingly unclear where "democracy" ended and totalitarianism began. The abuses of the British state in particular were already evident in

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[275] Comfort, *Writings against Power & Death*, 158.
[276] Ibid., 50. My italics.
[277] Comfort, *Authority and Delinquency*, 75.

its military conscription, indefinite internment, and suppression of free speech. Its disregard for civil liberties, justified in the name of national security, was amply illustrated during the trial of the *War Commentary* editors (see Chapter 1). Comfort, as did Read in his efforts on behalf of the accused, argued that anarchists no less than their liberal sympathizers had reason to stand up for the rule of law if only to stem the state's slide into utter lawlessness and government by unaccountable bureaucrats.[278]

The war, Comfort warned, would be used as a distraction against government abuses at home, taking citizens off their guard against state infringement into their everyday lives: "When the ordinary man acquiesces in war, he does so because he has been persuaded that he is defending himself—and in doing so he fails to recognise the urgent need to defend his home, his person and his family against his own government."[279] Adopting the "patriotic" position Orwell called for usually meant glossing over the fact that there were internal as well as external enemies, enemies who had something to gain from the expansion of state power and the enervation of democracy. Victory in the war, Comfort cautioned, would be a victory not for the people but for, at least primarily, the state and its elites.

Re-envisioning revolution: direct action and civil disobedience

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[278] Comfort went even further, in fact, in arguing for the affinity between anarchism and law: "If anarchism is the recognition of ultimate personal responsibility, then anarchism is also the origin and quintessence of law, not its opponent. The emphasis of anarchist thought is upon the original principle of all jurisprudence—that the individual human being has, by virtue of his existence and his manhood, rights which are inalienable and responsibilities which cannot be delegated." *Writings against Power and Death*, 43-44. Indeed, Comfort, like Read, found much to appreciate in both the idea of "natural" law and the English tradition of common law. "The liberal tradition of Europe," he argued, "rests without exaggeration in the hands of those who are ready to resist war and conscription, and every invasion of the rights and responsibilities of man." Ibid., 51.

[279] Ibid., 40.

Orwell and Comfort would both, to some extent, be vindicated by developments after the war. As revelations about the depth of Nazi atrocities emerged, the reputation of World War II as the "Good War" was forever cemented in many minds. At the same time, there is no doubt that the role of the British state in social life was profoundly strengthened by the war, as a triumphant Labour Party made use of an atmosphere friendly to state intervention to implement its agenda of social welfare and nationalization. The policies of that same Labour regime demonstrated that if the state was transforming in certain respects into a "welfare" state, it was by no means done being a warfare state, as the Attlee government actively pushed Britain down the fateful road towards nuclear weapons.

If Comfort was inclined to see the ascent of fascism not as an aberration but as an intensification of characteristics evident in other modern, bureaucratic states, he applied the same logic to the rise of nuclear weapons. His claim that nuclear weapons were not qualitatively different from the weapons that preceded them, while probably overstated, was meant to keep the focus where he thought it belonged: on the fundamentally warlike character of the modern state. Like others who were pacifists before the emergence of the Bomb, Comfort and his fellow anarcho-pacifists preferred to emphasize the broader conditions which enabled war, treating nuclear weapons merely as their most troublesome outgrowth.

It was precisely the apparent novelty of the Bomb, however—the fact that it seemed to represent an unprecedented threat to human survival—that made mainstream Britons and Americans somewhat receptive to anti-militarist ideas in the postwar years. Now that the prospect of universal nuclear annihilation loomed, even the most apolitical

housewife or white-collar working stiff had reason to reflect upon the destructive

potential of modern war.[280] The mainstreaming of anti-militarism was also bolstered by

the development of strong anti-Bomb sentiments within the scientific community, with

internationally famous scientists like Albert Einstein and Linus Pauling lending their

highly respectable voices to the growing chorus of concern about nuclear weapons. This

shift in the public mood was important in creating an atmosphere favorable to the

development of a mass movement out of what had been isolated pockets of resistance

during and immediately after the war years. By the mid-1950s it was clear that the issue

of nuclear weapons was the new node around which the pacifist movement might be

reinvigorated.

Critics of such weapons from the beginning, the New Anarchists eagerly

supported the burgeoning nuclear disarmament movement that began to coalesce at this

time in groups like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in Britain and the

Committee for Non-Violent Action (CNVA) in the United States. Indeed, the upsurge of

anti-nuclear activity was enough to prompt even the elderly Herbert Read (now knighted

and out of favor with most of his former anarchist comrades) to resume his activism, if

only briefly. He and Comfort both signed on with the high-profile Committee of 100, the

"militant direct action wing" of the CND, overseen by Bertrand Russell.[281] The group

grew out of the dissatisfaction many felt with the more mainstream, liberal approach that

had been adopted by the CND itself, which was directing the bulk of its energies towards

convincing the Labour Party to adopt a platform of unilateral disarmament. The

Committee of 100 distinguished itself not only by the militancy it injected into the anti-

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[280] Ibid., 49.
[281] Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow*, 190.

nuclear campaign, but by its highly libertarian structure and tactics: as David Goodway writes, it was "the most important anarchist—or at least near-anarchist—political organization of modern Britain, with its collective decision-making and responsibility (in a form of direct democracy) and almost exclusive emphasis on direct action as the means of struggle."[282]

In the United States, the CNVA was the main organization to sponsor radical direct action and civil disobedience, while its liberal counterpart, the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), focused on winning over the middle class and intellectuals. The CNVA's 1957 "Golden Rule" action, in which a ship by that name attempted to sail into a restricted zone near the Marshall Islands in protest of nuclear testing, was one of the shining successes of direct action during that era, sparking a surge in organizing activity and garnering sympathetic coverage in the press. Catholic Workers were also instrumental in pioneering collective direct action and civil disobedience around this time. In 1955, they took the lead in organizing a demonstration against civil defense drills in New York City, during which they illegally gathered outside City Hall when city authorities commanded residents to hunker down for a mock nuclear attack. The demonstration attracted national media attention, pulled in leading luminaries of the peace movement like A. J. Muste, Dave Dellinger, and Bayard Rustin, and became an annual event, growing to 2000 protesters by 1962 and rendering the ordinance which pertained to such drills unenforceable.

Along with the early American civil rights movement, the anti-nuclear movement was the testing ground for collective tactics of nonviolent struggle in the United States and Britain. Conscientious objectors in the U.S. federal prison system during the war had

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[282] Ibid., 261.

been the first to experiment on a notable scale with nonviolent direct action and civil

disobedience, waging fierce campaigns against degrading prison conditions and the racial

segregation of the inmate population. Such tactics gradually became integral to the peace

movement in both the United States and Britain as they came to be embraced by more

respectable public figures and were able to command more participation and attention.

In two pamphlets first published in the spring of 1962 ("Direct Action and the

New Pacifism" and "Disobedience and the New Pacifism"), Nicolas Walter offered the

most sophisticated and extended assessments of the new tactics from the vantage point of

the New Anarchism. Walter, who was associated with the Freedom Press group from the

late 1950s onward, and the author of the widely-read *About Anarchism*, was one of the

most militant peace activists of his era (indeed, he was highly critical of figures like Read

who left the movement when its actions became more confrontational).[283] Most notably,

he was one of the so-called "Spies for Peace," a clandestine group affiliated with the

Committee of 100 which managed to break into the Regional Seat of Government at

Warren Row in 1963, uncovering amongst the documents they stole secret government

plans detailing how the country would be ruled in the event of a nuclear war.[284] The

episode was one of the most sensational of its time and received front-page press

coverage until the British government pressured the media to drop the story.

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[283] Read resigned from the Committee of 100 in 1961 over what he saw as an overly aggressive mass action at the Wethersfield air-base. Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow*, 190.

[284] See Walter's essay "The Spies for Peace and After" in *Damned Fools in Utopia: And Other Writings on Anarchism and War Resistance*, ed. David Goodway (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011). Also see his daughter Natasha Walter's "How My Father Spied for Peace," *New Statesman*, 20 May 2002. As she points out in that article: "Although it had long been common knowledge among the elite that there was a secret system for wartime government survival, it came as a shock to ordinary people that their rulers were making detailed plans to fight a nuclear war and to ensure the survival only of the politicians and civil servants, without any democratic consent."

In the aforementioned articles, Walter sought to flesh out the political theory underpinning the new tactics. Walter assumed with other New Anarchists that the parliamentary and vanguardist strategies of the Old Left were bankrupt; the gravitation of social movements towards direct action and civil disobedience, he argued, represented a break with the traditional models of "revolution." If social democrats had revealed themselves to be middling careerists at heart, revolutionaries who seized state power through violence had revealed themselves to be authoritarians through and through. By the early 1960s there was plenty of empirical evidence to show that classical anarchists had been prophetic in their warnings against hitching the revolution to state coercion. Such a revolution would be doomed to betrayal, they realized, as the allure of power eroded revolutionary principles, as party leaders masked their machinations behind rhetoric about the will of the "people" or the "working class," and subversive ideals like freedom and justice took a back seat to conservative concerns about law and order.

Where Walter went further than classical anarchists—who never quite shook off the idea that a catalytic event or series of events would inspire the masses to do away with the existing order in one fell swoop—was in his rejection of the idea that revolution had to connote a sharp break with the status quo, resulting in change that was both large-scale and expeditious. This model of revolution, he argued, perpetually tempted its adherents to conclude that extraordinary force was necessary in order to bring about such a break. Revolution should instead be conceptualized as an ongoing and indeed never-ending process, a steady source of revitalization and progress.[285] "The libertarian revolution," Walter wrote, "is permanent protest, permanent disobedience, refusing

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[285] As inspiration for this view, Walter cited Gustav Landauer's notion of revolution as the period between ever-alternating successions of "topia" and "utopia," and Yevgeny Zamyatin's analogy between revolution and the cosmic laws of thermodynamics.

assent to superiors without demanding it from inferiors, the utopia without any topia."[286]

This echoed Comfort's much earlier claim that revolution "is not a single act, it is an unending process based upon civil disobedience."[287] Furthermore, revolution in this sense is as diffuse as it is persistent—its motive force is not congealed in a privileged agent like Marx's proletariat or Lenin's intellectual vanguard, but flows out of the decisions of responsible individuals to take revolutionary agency upon themselves.

For this reason, the new model of revolution depended in the first instance on the attitude of individual resistance that Comfort in Britain and Goodman in the United States had tried to inspire during the war years. Walter hesitated to apply the term "revolution" directly to such individual resistance, however. More satisfactory were the concepts that figures like Max Stirner and Albert Camus had juxtaposed to that term: "insurrection" (Stirner), and "rebellion" (Camus). Stirner and Camus kept resistance firmly planted in the autonomous and creative activity of the living individual, rather than distorting and enervating it with ideology, institutions, and coercion—the usual concomitants of revolution as traditionally conceived. But Camus in particular helped provide a means of thinking about individual rebellion as an expression of humanistic solidarity, rescuing it—philosophically, at least—from the kind of myopic egoism more typical of Stirner. Against apocalyptic revolutionism, Camus argued that "the suffering imposed by a limited situation" is always superior to "the dark victory in which heaven and earth are annihilated."[288] Rebels must be concerned with placing *limits* on their rebellion that will prevent it from degenerating into the futility of total destruction. Recognizing this, "the very first thing that cannot be denied is the right of others to

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[286] Walter, *Damned Fools in Utopia*, 40.
[287] Comfort, *Writings against Power & Death*, 69.
[288] Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 7.

live."[289] The commitment to a principled form of rebellion that places intrinsic value on

the existences of others is the key factor that links individual resistance to collective

solidarity, for "the individual is not, in himself alone, the embodiment of the values he

wishes to defend. It needs all humanity, at least, to comprise them. When he rebels, a

man identifies himself with other men and so surpasses himself."[290] From the beginning,

the decision to rebel implies the recognition that suffering is a "collective experience";

once this is understood, "[t]he malady experienced by a single man," Camus wrote,

"becomes a mass plague."[291] This kind of existential grounding of rebellion, which

situated the individual's actions within the broadest possible sphere of concern, was

similar in many ways to Comfort's romantic notion of a common struggle by the friends

of humankind against death and its purveyors. Its most important implication from

Walter's perspective, however, was that the individual's commitment to what Max

Weber called "ultimate ends" did not rule out a complementary ethic of

"responsibility."[292]

Even conscientious objection, Walter believed, could function more as

propaganda by deed than indulgent individualism, as long as it was projected outward.[293]

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[289] Ibid., 8. Camus, too, arrived at his theory of rebellion through a reconsideration of traditional propaganda by deed. See his play *The Just Assassins* in *Caligula & Three Other Plays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1958).

[290] Ibid., 17.

[291] Thus, the famous statement: "I rebel—therefore we exist." *The Rebel*, 22.

[292] See Weber's "Politics as a Vocation" in *The Vocation Lectures* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2004). Although he rejected the idea that the state could ever be dismantled entirely, Camus felt a strong affinity for anarchist politics, particularly as manifested in syndicalism. Anarchism, he realized, "celebrates spontaneity but not mindless activism, political participation but not organicism. It is compatible with political authority, but only when such authority is proximate, responsive, and above all provisional." Like the anarchists, Camus was "interested in opening up spaces for political agency that tend to be closed by the modern state, nurturing forms of public identity that defy the boundaries of sovereign nation-states." Jeffrey C. Isaac, *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 148.

[293] Walter writes that "non-resistance in theory only means non-resistance in practice when it remains silent. The mere declaration of conscientious objection to violence is a form of resistance, since it

But ultimately what was needed was "not so much a negative programme of non-resistance or non-violent passive resistance as a positive programme of non-violent active resistance." This meant moving beyond Goodman's "drawing the line" or Hennacy's "one-man revolution" to mass "non-violent direct action."[294] Walter's call to action, which by the early 1960s had some plausibility, betokened the fulfillment of Comfort's hope, expressed fifteen years earlier, that pacifism would "become politically relevant" by "taking the offensive."[295] Comfort had opined at that time that "[t]he specifically 'anarchist' concept most relevant today is that of direct action, constructive combativeness—the bypassing and defiance, where necessary, of the 'usual channels', both by *ad hoc* organization and in purely demonstrative or negative forms."[296] The disarmament, civil rights, and, later, anti-Vietnam War organizations that emerged in the late 1950s and 1960s provided hope that this "constructive combativeness" was developing a more lasting and effective organizational form.

What begins as individual rebellion, Walter insisted, must grow into sustained activity, carried out in concert with enough like-minded individuals to give conscientious objection and civil disobedience real force. When large numbers of people engage in civil disobedience, he argued, it has effects analogous to direct action, because it moves beyond symbolism to actual interference with the state's ability to operate. It is in this respect that Gandhi's *satyagraha* (stripped of its religious aspect and spirit of ascetic renunciation) was taken to be a model of what non-violent resistance might be. Satyagraha managed to unite means and ends, milk sacrifice and suffering for its

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implies non-co-operation with the State's key functions of punishment and war." *Damned Fools in Utopia*, 55.

[294] Ibid., 63.

[295] Comfort, *Writings against Power & Death*, 85.

[296] Comfort, *Authority and Delinquency*, 109.

propagandistic value in an effort to convert others, and emphasize the strength wielded by the practitioners of non-violence, whose resistance—by exerting gentle coercion where conversion was unlikely—could have the immediate effects associated with direct action. Ideally, mass resistance, as an amalgam of principled individual commitments, would mimic individual resistance on a large scale, staying true to the humanistic impulse at the root of rebellion while mustering more direct and indirect (i.e. propagandistic) force than possible on an individual level. With respect to the specific aims of the anti-nuclear movement, Walter hoped that by compelling the British government in this way to accept a policy of unilateral disarmament, Britons would "offer a sort of national *satyagraha* to the world."[297]

Conclusion: pacifism and prefiguration

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the left in Britain and the United States was beginning to reinvent itself after a period of dormancy. The acts of individual rebellion during the war did not smoothly or steadily crescendo into mass resistance. But they did in many ways set the tone for the next wave of political activism. 19th-century propaganda by deed marked the end of an era, the concentration of violent insurrectionary anarchism into futile acts of individual vitriol. By contrast, the principled protest both theorized and put into practice by wartime dissidents was an annunciation of a new era, an era in which militancy was complemented by responsibility, in which means were integrated with ends, and in which individual rebellion was attached to the hope, at least, of a resurgent collective struggle. In both its direct and its indirect aspects, the theory of nonviolent revolution that informed that struggle represented a reimagining

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[297] Walter, *Damned Fools in Utopia*, 69.

of traditionally anarchist tactics—taking direct action outside of official political channels in ways both combative and constructive, bringing attention to the injustice of the law by breaking it, and attempting to project to the masses exemplary models of revolutionary behavior that would inspire a new sense of possibility and kindle new pockets of resistance. The model of nonviolent struggle seemed so promising that to express sympathy for violent methods, even within the anarchist movement, was to risk harsh condemnation. Vernon Richards discovered this directly when, after a failed assassination attempt on South African Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd in 1960, he wrote an editorial for *Freedom* entitled "Too Bad He Missed." During the ensuing controversy, one respondent called it "a crumbling monument to the bad old days."[298]

The virtual hegemony of nonviolent struggle in Britain and the United States did not, however, last for long. As the 1960s progressed, many grew disillusioned with the tactic of the nonviolent demonstration, which was by that time old news to both the police and the media, easily corralled and easily dismissed or ignored. Some began to question the humanist message and the emphasis on reconciliation that informed the early activism of the decade: whether clothed in religious or secular language, its proclamations of unity seemed wrapped up in an optimism borne of white, male, bourgeois privilege, insufficiently attentive to the different histories, conditions, and obstacles of marginalized groups. Some groups, like King Mob and Up Against the Wall, Motherfucker! experimented with a form of symbolic protest that gleefully dispensed with propriety and focused more on cultural disruption than on movement-building. Others took their inspiration from the fact that the strategy of violent insurrection seemed to be producing stunning successes in the Third World. For them, Che Guevara became

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[298] Vernon Richards, ed., *Violence and Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1983), 11.

the new exemplar of an older version of the professional revolutionary. Che's theory of

guerrilla warfare proved highly suggestive to the young, would-be revolutionaries

spinning off from the crumbling mass student organizations of the late 1960s.[299] To call

the groups they formed—like the Angry Brigade in Britain and the Weather Underground

in the United States—"urban guerrilla" organizations is to glorify their activities

considerably, since these groups (unlike guerrilla warriors elsewhere) did not aim at the

liberation of territory, nor were their actions in support of a broader guerrilla movement

that did.[300] In fact, their bombings of targets like the homes of government ministers,

government buildings of various kinds, foreign embassies, and emblems of bourgeois

decadence (like the 1970 Miss World competition in London) most resembled those of

the revolutionary desperados of the late 19th century who had associated propaganda by

deed with sporadic outbreaks of small-scale, symbolic terror and assassination.[301] The

terminology used was the same,[302] as well as the logic; as a famous publication by the

Weather Underground wishfully put it in 1974: "A single spark can start a prairie fire."[303]

Although that fire failed to ignite, nonviolence never regained the stature it had

attained during the formative years of the New Anarchism. A vocal contingent of the

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[299] Also noteworthy was the influence of Régis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution?: Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

[300] The point is made by Walter Laqueur in *The Age of Terrorism* (Boston: Little & Brown, 1987). For general histories of these groups, see Gordon Carr, *The Angry Brigade: A History of Britain's First Urban Guerilla Group* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010) and Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the 60s and 70s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004). The Angry Brigade, it should be mentioned, did have links to the First of May Group, an international revolutionary organization led by exiled Spanish anarchists. Its principal objective was the overthrow of the Franco government, but it carried out attacks in numerous European countries, including Britain, in an effort to encourage revolutionary activity outside of Spain as well.

[301] We should not overlook some important differences, however: these groups were discriminating in their choice of targets, they attributed to groups rather than individuals, and directed primarily at property rather than people—

[302] See Mark Rudd, *Underground: My Life with SDS and the Weathermen* (New York: Harper, 2009), 143.

[303] See the group's self-published, book-length manifesto *Prairie Fire*.

anarchist movement has remained severely critical of nonviolence for what it sees as its saccharine moralism, its racist disapproval of the more forceful tactics employed by people of color in their especially urgent struggles, its proven inefficacy.[304] Pacifism and nonviolence, argue their detractors, all too frequently lend themselves to "symbolic" radical posturing that obviates true sacrifice, and to an intolerant, "holier-than-thou" attitude towards those with different views. White bourgeois radicals excuse themselves from the need to struggle and suffer violently, justifying their actions as "prefiguration" of a new social order, and thus implicitly putting themselves into the comfortable vanguard of social progress while the oppressed are left to fight their own battles in the ghettoes and the Third World. Furthermore, there is a tendency to attribute to nonviolent action solely outcomes that are in fact consequences of a constellation of factors, including violent pressure on the status quo. These critics reject the very idea of "revolutionary nonviolence," for the state, they maintain, cannot be transformed unless violent tactics play some role, and is only strengthened when its opponents disarm themselves voluntarily.[305]

There is, of course, truth in many of these criticisms. It is true that nonviolent protest perpetually runs the risk of becoming predictable and nonthreatening. It is true that it rarely has the decisive influence that its adherents like to claim for it. It is also true that the figures associated with the golden age of revolutionary nonviolence were in many ways overly convinced of the objectivity of their principles and the purity of their motives, and were insensitive to the special characteristics of the oppression suffered by

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[304] For examples, see Ward Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 1998), Peter Gelderloos, *How Nonviolence Protects the State* (Boston: South End Press, 2007) and Derrick Jensen, *Endgame, vol. 2 (Resistance)* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006).

[305] As Peter Gelderloos writes: "nonviolence ensures a state monopoly on violence…Pacifists do the state's work by pacifying the opposition in advance." *How Nonviolence Protects the State*, 45.

certain subaltern groups.[306] But the plausible claim that social change is a product of diverse factors should lead, logically, not to the disparagement or abandonment of nonviolence, but to a recognition of its integral importance. Even if we accept the idea that historically nonviolence has had no hope of creating significant social change without the indirect assistance of violence, we must admit that the opposite is also true: violence alone is not capable of effecting positive and lasting social change, and history is replete with evidence that it continually threatens to undermine the original principles and objectives that inspire its use in the first place.

Furthermore, the idea of "prefiguration" was never simply a euphemism for cowardice. The New Anarchists, along with their pacifist allies, realized that in any social struggle there must be people whose role is to put into evidence a different way of living, to adhere to principles even when they are in tension with political pragmatism, and to start building a new society within the shell of the old, rather than subordinating everything to the agenda of destruction. This was not because they simply presumed that bourgeois white liberals had access to universalizable principles that needed only to be spread outwards. They believed that individuals, in the act of resisting, in the solidaristic experience of unity in a common cause, in participation in activist organizations and communities that stressed direct democracy, would themselves be transformed. The only kind of revolution worthy of the name, New Anarchists believed, was one which transmuted individual character at the most fundamental level, not one which simply generalized the morality of bourgeois privilege. This transformation is possible because nonviolent direct action, properly understood, is not simply a tactically effective way of

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[306] For a less polemical critique of these figures from a feminist perspective, see Marian Mollin, *Radical Pacifism in Modern America: Egalitarianism and Protest* (Pennsylvania, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

influencing the modern state. Rather, it embodies a set of democratic values above and

beyond nonviolence itself. It is, in fact, training in direct democracy. As Murray

Bookchin, himself a veteran of the anti-nuclear movement, wrote in *The Ecology of

Freedom*: "direct democracy is ultimately the most advanced form of direct action…To

exercise one's powers of sovereignty—by sit-ins, strikes, nuclear-plant occupations—is

not merely a 'tactic' in bypassing authoritarian institutions. It is a sensibility, a vision of

citizenship and selfhood that assumes the free individual has the capacity to manage

social affairs in a direct, ethical, and rational manner."[307] By adopting the new

revolutionary means theorized by the New Anarchists, activists would be educated in the

direct democracy needed to underpin an anarchist society even as they focused on

hindering the operations of the existing state.

The New Anarchists themselves were not, with the possible exception of the

Catholic Worker, nonviolent absolutists, and were in fact not far removed from those

who now support a "diversity of tactics."[308] Their advocacy of nonviolence was in large

part a response to a contingent historical context in which the state, having grown to a

monstrous size, could not plausibly be confronted on its own terms. Rather than lashing

out feebly with whatever bits of coercive power one had at one's disposal, it was better to

invert the violent logic of the state, in the hopes of creating veins of nonviolent activity

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[307] Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005), 438. With respect to the connection between direct action, civil disobedience, and popular sovereignty, consider also this suggestive passage from Paul Goodman: "The vague concept that sovereignty resides in the People is usually meaningless, but precisely at critical moments it begins to have a vague meaning. American political history consists spectacularly of illegal actions that became legal, belatedly confirmed by the lawmakers. Civil rights trespassers, unions defying injunctions, suffragettes and agrarians being violent, abolitionists aiding runaway slaves, and back to the Boston Tea Party—were these people practising 'civil disobedience' or were they 'Insurrectionary'? I think neither. Rather in urgent haste they were exercising their sovereignty, practising direct democracy, disregarding the apparent law and sure of the emerging law." Quoted in April Carter, *Direct Action and Liberal Democracy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 139.

[308] See David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009).

that would grow through gradual accretion and radiant influence. The New Anarchists privileged a model of social change that did not center on an all-important rupture with the status quo either through the actions of a revolutionary vanguard or through a spontaneous mass uprising. They had in mind a new version of the revolutionary "myth." As Comfort proposed: "The historical 'revolution' is usually only the coming to a head of…a process of gradual attitude-change. Decisive action may be required, but not as an element in a revolution-fantasy. The transition from asocial to social living takes place at the level which religious apostles term 'life changing' rather than at the barricades."[309] The New Anarchist vision of social transformation was practical and utopian all at once. Although it placed heavy emphasis on individual rebellion and gradual change, it did not shun utopian ambitions. Most importantly, it united means and ends by offering an illustration of people working together in committed, nonhierarchical groups, promoting mutual aid, asserting popular sovereignty directly. It offered a premonition of the society anarchists wished to see rather than a mere affirmation of individual authenticity. This constructive aspect of anarcho-pacifism was most succinctly expressed by Walter when he wrote that "you must not only *renounce* war, and not only *resist* war, you must also *replace* war."[310] The New Anarchists were convinced that in order to "replace" war it was necessary to replace the state—with a democratic society held together by mutual aid rather than coercion, where war in its ghastly modern guise was an impossibility.

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[309] Comfort, *Authority and Delinquency*, 103.
[310] Walter, *Damned Fools in Utopia*, 59.

Chapter 3

Re-envisioning Welfare:
Mutual Aid Meets the Modern State

[T]here is a fairly straight line running upward through the history of the West…the means of oppression and exploitation, of violence and destruction, as well as the means of production and reconstruction, have been progressively enlarged and increasingly centralized.

C. Wright Mills

In the society of today, the state of dependence that results from existing economic and social conditions renders an ideal democracy impossible.

Robert Michels

A free society cannot be the substitution of a 'new order' for the old order: it is the extension of spheres of free action until they make up most of social life.

Paul Goodman

On Thursday the 5th of July, 1945, with the war in the Pacific winding down, British voters went to the polls for the first general election since 1935. Confounding expectations, they handed Clement Attlee's Labour Party a decisive victory with 48.3% of the vote, allowing the Party to form its first ever majority government. The result delivered a death blow to the Conservative consensus that had persisted in various guises throughout the interwar years. In its election manifesto, Labour had cautioned the British electorate against making the same mistake as was made after the First World War, when voters restored the Conservatives to power. That vote had signaled a desire to return to a semblance of normalcy after the duress of war, the feeling that stability was best maintained by cautious management of the status quo. At that time, the authors of the Labour manifesto lamented retrospectively, the British people "lacked a lively interest in

the social and economic problems of peace."[1] Consequently, the people had won the war but lost the peace: the Conservatives' timid approach to social reform had allowed poverty and discontent to fester, and their orthodox economic policies, like the return to the gold standard, had wrecked the economy. This time around, with bolder leadership in place, there would be a "prosperous peace" that would build upon the new, "positive and purposeful" consensus that had united the coalition wartime government in common cause against the Axis powers.[2] Featured most prominently in Labour's plan to set Britain on the road to that prosperity was a call for "public ownership" of a number of industries. Fuel and power, iron and steel, inland transport: all would be "socialised," taken out of private hands and put to work on behalf of the public interest.[3]

Prima facie, Labour's victory represented an unprecedented popular mandate for socialism. The Party's platform, after all, identified its "ultimate purpose at home" as "the establishment of the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain."[4] The popular mood was one of expectancy and hope, colored by the feeling that if British institutions were hardy enough to fend off fascism, they could, in the right hands, work wonders domestically no less than internationally. Admittedly, even a landslide electoral success did not yet mean that the revolution was at hand. But many within the Party were inclined to believe, as Paul Addison wrote in his classic account *The Road to 1945*, that "Westminster was…but a station on the line to the new Jerusalem."[5]

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[1] Iain Dale, ed., *Labour Party General Election Manifestos, 1900-1997* (London: Routledge, 2000), 51.

[2] Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945* (London: Quartet Books, 1977), 14.

[3] Dale, ed., *Labour Party General Election Manifestos*, 55-56.

[4] Ibid., 55.

[5] Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 271.

The anarchists of the *Freedom* group, however, saw little worth celebrating. Even if Labour's intentions matched its rhetoric—a dubious proposition, given the notorious two-facedness of social democrats—its understanding of what constituted "socialism" was fatally flawed. The Party described its proposed transfer of industry from private to public ownership as "socialization." The term it ought to have used, however, was "nationalization." Ownership was to be vested not in *society* but in the *state*, a crucial distinction conveniently, and disingenuously, overlooked by the authors of the Labour platform. Replacing private ownership with state ownership was little more than a cosmetic change, for it neglected to address the more fundamental issue of *control*. What counted was not who *owned* the means of production, but who *controlled* the means of production, and nowhere did Labour pledge to make the management of production any more democratic than it was under the capitalists. Rather, it asked its gullible supporters to believe that the top-down management of industry by state-appointed overseers would be substantively different from the top-down management of industry by lackeys of the bourgeoisie. Very little would change for the working class, warned the *Freedom* anarchists, even if Labour were to accomplish its most ambitious goals. Although overlaid with a socialist veneer, the Party's policies represented "the salvation rather than the death of capitalism," and they would only perpetuate exploitation in a new mien.[6]

The criticisms of the Labour *arrivistes* that filled the pages of *Freedom* in the immediate postwar years reflected the tenacity of syndicalist principles within the British anarchist movement. For syndicalists, the measure of "socialization" was not public ownership but workers' control. A socialist society was one in which economic

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[6] Vernon Richards, ed. *Neither Nationalisation nor Privatisation: An Anarchist Approach, Selections from the Anarchist Journal* Freedom *1945-1950* (London: Freedom Press, 1989), 11.

production was run democratically by workers themselves, not by bureaucrats or representatives no matter how noble their professed intents. Worker-run industry would, syndicalists assumed, fundamentally reorient the productive process so as to conform to socialist standards of justice and freedom rather than capitalist standards of efficiency maximization. When the *Freedom* anarchists accused the Labourites of being the saviors of capitalism, it was because State Socialism, from a syndicalist perspective, was actually State Capitalism in disguise. State-run enterprises would merely replace one set of masters with another. Workers would find themselves subjected in familiar ways to hierarchical and alienating conditions. Industries would continue to operate in a capitalist fashion, privileging productivity and the generation of surpluses rather than equality and empowerment.

When the Labour Party conflated nationalization and socialization in its party literature, it was—self-consciously, no doubt—exploiting the slipperiness of those terms so as to cloak its statist, managerial brand of "socialism" in an aura of democratic legitimacy. The precise meaning of "socialization" had been heatedly disputed within the socialist movement for almost three decades. The absence of consensus was a legacy of the fact that, up until the end of World War I, socialization had been sorely under-theorized, for it required giving a more detailed account of the features of a hypothetical socialist society than socialists were accustomed to providing. Socialists who took their direction from Marx and his orthodox interpreters had learned to avoid speculation about the exact shape socialism would take. To elaborate the contours of an imagined socialist society in detail, as the readers of Engels knew, was to commit the same error as the "utopian" socialists, whose intricate social blueprints were the products of their own

fantasies rather than outgrowths of objective conditions.[7] The "scientific" socialist, although just as confident of socialism's viability and eventual triumph, abstained from predicting the concrete circumstances, institutions, and policies in which socialism would manifest itself, for these would depend heavily upon the characteristics of specific national contexts. His attention was directed, rather, towards the first of the two phases of revolutionary struggle outlined by Marx. In his Inaugural Address to the First International in 1864, Marx had averred that "the great duty of the working class is to conquer political power."[8] Only after gaining control of the state would the proletariat be in a position to confront the "social power" of the capitalist class and to begin transforming society in the direction of socialism. There were, of course, bitter disagreements about how that initial victory was to be achieved, in no small part because Marx himself had fluctuated between sympathy for insurrection (as in 1848 and, more circumspectly, 1871) and the hope that socialists would be able to pursue their objectives within the legal framework of bourgeois democracy. There was also debate over whether the bourgeois state had to be "transformed" in order to make it suitable to the implementation of socialism (as it was under the Paris Commune), or if it could simply be utilized in its present form. Despite these differences of opinion, however, there was general agreement within the Marxist strain of the socialist tradition that securing political power was an essential precondition of socialization.

For reasons of both "scientific" agnosticism and political priority, then, there was little discussion of socialization by Marxist thinkers up through the First World War.

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[7] See Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (New York: International Publishers, 1985).

[8] Karl Marx quoted in Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 7-8.

Consequently, the workers' parties that had been convinced of the need to take control of the state had only the fuzziest ideas about what they were supposed to do upon coming to power. Few would have disagreed with Eduard Bernstein's generic formulation of the thinking behind socialization: "the basic issue of socialization is that we place production, economic life, under the control of the public weal."[9] But generalities like these were open to a wide range of interpretations. The only thing that seemed clear to most social democrats of the early 20th century was that in one way or another, the means of production would have to be wrested from private hands and subjected to public administration, one or both of which steps would require the working class to make use of the state.

As syndicalism emerged as a distinct phenomenon around the turn of the century, it positioned itself outside even this modest consensus. Syndicalists rejected the idea that the only feasible route to socialism was through the state, whether it was conquered progressively through electoral processes or in one fell swoop during an insurrectionary situation. The use of the state, they contended, was unnecessary either as a means of expropriating the private property of capitalists or as a means of organizing and managing industrial output thereafter. For the syndicalist, workers' control was both a means and an end. Workers themselves would make the revolution by converting trade unions into radical, fighting organizations that gathered together the strength of the working class in preparation for the direct seizure of economic power—most probably, during a general strike. By promoting self-management in the workplace, these radical unions would have an educative function as well, encouraging workers to develop the skills that would be necessary to oversee production under socialism. The councils

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[9] Eduard Bernstein quoted in Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, 38.

established by workers were to be the building blocks of the socialist order, ensuring that production was managed not only consciously (in contrast to the blind operation of the market), but democratically, with the rank-and-file closely supervising the actions of their appointed delegates. Thus, for syndicalists, "socialization" was to take place not through the agency of the party and the state, but through direct action by workers in the economic sphere itself.

It is one of the ironies of history that this stridently anti-parliamentary perspective began to be taken seriously within the mainstream of the socialist movement at precisely the moment when the parliamentary approach looked more promising than ever before. That unlikely coincidence was a product of the political reshuffling caused by the First World War, and was illustrated most clearly in Germany. Just as the Social Democratic Party found itself thrust for the first time onto the political center stage with the collapse of the Hohenzollern Dynasty in 1918, workers' and soldiers' councils were emerging spontaneously throughout the country. The question for the fledgling regime, then, was how radically to proceed in the direction of a socialist revolution, and how to factor in the bottom-up initiative that had been demonstrated in the formation of the councils. In short, the time had finally come to get specific about what was meant by "socialization," to spell out the measures that were to be taken by the state and the role to be played by the workers themselves. In part because of the context created by the councils, even those who envisioned the state taking the lead were prepared to humor the possibility that nationalization and some measure of workers' control could go hand-in-hand.[10] Thus

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[10] As Michael Harrington points out, this idea was by no means novel, even if it had become particularly salient—as early as 1894 Jean Jaurès had proposed to combine nationalization of the mines with a central council that included representatives of the workers; Otto Bauer, for his part, had argued that

Rosa Luxemburg called for the immediate nationalization of "the most important means of production," but hastily added that these should then be placed "under the control of society," and that "the fundamental transformation of the entire economic relations" should begin straightaway.[11] That sort of revolutionary gusto was too impetuous for the more reserved Karl Kautsky, who stressed that socialization would be a long, drawn-out process. But even he wrote of the need to prioritize the "democratization of industry" and held that, with respect to municipal enterprises, it would be possible "to replace bureaucratic autocracy by a type of management which would accord a wide measure of self-government to the workers."[12]

Events in Britain after the war were not nearly as dramatic as in Germany. But there, too, syndicalism had enough of a presence to influence debates over socialization and factor into the political calculus of a rising social democratic party. Radical industrial unionism had appeared in Britain as early as 1903, when a breakaway faction of the Social Democratic Federation, inspired by the ideas of the American unionist Daniel De Leon, formed the Socialist Labour Party and the British Advocates of Industrial Unionism. The evolution of those groups mimicked that of the Industrial Workers of the World, which De Leon co-founded in 1905, but while the IWW's revolutionary rhetoric and dogmatic opposition to the structure and aims of traditional trade unions proved to have some appeal in the United States, particularly amongst itinerant workers in the West, the same militant approach transplanted to the other side of the Atlantic made little impression on the British working class during the first decade of the 20th century. Thus,

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"we social democrats have never demanded the statification, but rather the socialization, of industry." See *Socialism* (New York: Bantam, 1970), 242-43.

[11] Rosa Luxemburg, *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, eds. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 346.

[12] See Karl Kautsky, *The Labour Revolution* (London: National Labour Press, 1925).

it was something of a surprise when, in the context of growing industrial unrest, syndicalism underwent a "meteoric" rise in Britain between1910-13. Its sudden eruption was largely the result of an intensive propaganda campaign launched by the engineer Tom Mann and carried out through his journal *Industrial Syndicalist and the* Industrial Syndicalist Education League. Mann and his fellow syndicalists met with more success than their predecessors, thanks to their more inclusive attitude and willingness to involve themselves in the short-term struggles being fought by already-existing trade unions, if only to radicalize those unions further wherever possible and encourage their amalgamation into larger industrial unions. From 1913 into the early 1920s, however, the evolving ideas of the Guild Socialists, rather than strict syndicalism, predominated amongst radical unionists, influencing the Shop Stewards' movement that flourished in a variety of industries during the war years.[13] As in Germany, the uptick in radical unionism converged with the advancing prospects of parliamentary socialism. After the war, the Labour Party was transformed from a marginal political phenomenon dependent upon Liberal support into the main party of the left. It took the opportunity to clarify its platform, inserting into its constitution in 1918 the famous "Clause IV," drafted by Sidney Webb, which called for "common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service." Although this was meant to connote above all the nationalization of industry, under the sway of the ideas of the syndicalists and the guildsmen, the Labour Party—along with, it should be mentioned, the Trades Union

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[13] See Branko Pribićević, *The Shop Stewards' Movement and Workers' Control 1910-1922* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1959).

Congress as the representative of British unionism—accepted, for the time being anyway, the idea of worker participation in management.[14]

As syndicalist activity died down in the factories during the first half of the 1920s, however, interest in workers' control began to wane amongst social democrats. Even when radical unionism was enjoying its heyday, the most that social democrats were willing to consider was "joint control" between workers' councils, consumers, and the state. That already represented a compromise that hardline syndicalists refused to accept. But even from that starting point, the notion of workers' control was steadily enervated in the ensuing years, shading into less radical concepts like workers' "representation," and then workers' "consultation." Syndicalists saw such ideas as mere tokenism, but without empirical evidence of worker radicalism to lend credibility to its approach, syndicalism began to look like wishful thinking at best, and deluded dogmatism at worst. Indeed, just when it seemed in the early 1920s that the road to socialism might have at least two plausible fronts, options constricted into just one: the parliamentary route, which meant approaching the problem of socialization predominantly, if not wholly, through the state. Although some lip service was generally paid to workers' control thereafter, it was little more than a lingering vestige of what once was a lively strain within the socialist movement. Syndicalist spirits were revived briefly by the events in Spain in the mid-1930s, when radical unionists led the charge against Franco's fascist coup and anarcho-syndicalists in the northeast occupied factories and began to run them autonomously. But just as the hope of effecting revolutionary change through insurrection was buried by the

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[14] Geoffrey Ostergaard, *The Tradition of Workers' Control*, ed. Brian Bamford (London: Freedom Press, 1997), 81.

tragic defeat of the anarchists in Spain (see Chapter 2), so were any serious hopes of large-scale syndicalism.

Nevertheless, syndicalism had made such a powerful impact on the radical socialist left that it still provided the main point of reference for the anarchists associated with *Freedom* in the years following the Second World War. Some continued to assume that the anarchist's main objective, farfetched as it now appeared, was to foment radical democracy in the workplace and rally the working class behind a revolutionary agenda. At the very least, anarchists now saw themselves as virtually the lone standard-bearers of the principle of workers' control, and they endeavored to keep the concept alive despite the sharp downturn in radical unionism. As a consequence, the idea of workers' control was still very much in the air within the anarchist movement as the New Anarchism began to take shape, and Colin Ward returned to the topic numerous times in *Anarchy* throughout the 1960s.

The political scientist Geoffrey Ostergaard, who contributed articles on syndicalism, Guild Socialism, and workers' control to both *Freedom* and *Anarchy*, provided the most careful assessment of their significance and continuing relevance from the standpoint of the New Anarchism. It is telling that in his effort to sift through the history of radical unionism in Britain for nuggets of lasting value, Ostergaard was drawn more to Guild Socialism than to syndicalism proper. Syndicalism had been deeply bound up with the revolutionary myth of a sudden, explosive break with the status quo. Although syndicalists, for their own purposes, had in some cases made use of the workers' most immediate struggles, they had accorded little innate value to reforms and halfway measures. As George Woodcock put it, they were still attached to a vision of

social liberation as "indefinitely postponed until the millennial day of reckoning; it was a

kind of revolutionary pie-in-the-sky, and one was expected to fast until mealtime."[15]

Furthermore, they had placed so much emphasis on the capture of economic power

through an apocalyptic mass strike that they, like many of their socialist brethren, had

given insufficient thought to difficult questions about what the implementation of

socialization would actually entail.[16] In both respects, Ostergaard suggested, Guild

Socialism's approach was more relevant to the predicament of the working class in the

postwar world. Guild Socialists like S. G. Hobson and especially G. D. H. Cole had

delineated their proposals with considerable specificity, tackling challenging matters of

social organization that most syndicalists had been content to dismiss as details.

Furthermore, the Guild Socialists were not working-class revolutionaries but idealistic

intellectuals who thought the transition to socialism could be effected peacefully.

Accordingly, they were more willing than syndicalists to accept the idea that workers'

control might expand in gradual, creeping fashion. Ostergaard proposed that their notion

of "encroaching control" might provide inspiration for anarchists working to radicalize

existing trade unions. By negotiating "collective contracts" with employers—as

illustrated by isolated efforts in places like Coventry and Durham to establish a "gang

system" or system of "composite work"—workers could establish footholds of

autonomy, taking over the management of pieces of the productive process and running

them cooperatively, even while remaining accountable to the owners and managers of the

overall enterprise. These islands of workers' control could then be expanded, when

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[15] Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 471.

[16] It must be said that there were notable exceptions, like Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget's *Syndicalism and the Co-operative Commonwealth* (Oxford, UK: The New International Publishing Company, 1913) and Diego Abad de Santillán's *After the Revolution* (New York: Greenberg Publishers, 1937).

possible, through pressure on those same owners and managers to hand over even more of the workshop in similar fashion. Strategies like these had, Colin Ward suggested, "the great merit of combining long-term and short-term aims." But he, like Ostergaard, realized that they were, at best, merely a "starting point."[17]

Such was the state of workers' control in the first two decades after the war. There were, at best, only flutters of syndicalist activity through the late 1940s, 1950s, and most of the 1960s.[18] Ward and Ostergaard agreed that to try to launch a properly syndicalist movement under such conditions was to court pure irrelevancy. Working within extant unions in the minute ways they recommended was a means of restoring at least a faint pulse to the idea of workers' control. But on the whole, the realm of production in the postwar era was an unwelcoming place for anarchists looking to operationalize the principle of self-determination. In the early 20th century, anarchists disillusioned with the insurrectionary strategies of the 1800s had been attracted to the burgeoning syndicalist movement because it seemed to offer an alternative. They had put their faith in the working class as the most likely agents of revolution and had reinvented insurrection in the form of the revolutionary general strike. And they had hinged their entire social outlook, not unlike Marxists, on a radical restructuring of the realm of production, from which new patterns of social life would almost effortlessly flow. Now, with the syndicalist avenue effectively closed off, if anarchists wished to make themselves relevant once again they would have to expand their field of vision.

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[17] Colin Ward, "Workers' Control and the Collective Contract" *Anarchy* 4 no. 6 (June 1964), 184.

[18] The only activity worth noting is the establishment of the London League for Workers' Control in the late 1940s and the National Rank and File Movement in 1961. Both were small and ineffectual. There were some flickers towards the end of the 1960s of renewed syndicalist activity, like the founding of the Institute for Workers' Control in 1968 Ken Coates and Tony Topham, but not until the 1970s did the ideal of workers' control rear its head again in a meaningful way in Britain.

This required a more complex view of the political and economic changes that had taken place since the debates over "nationalization" and "socialization" had first gripped the socialist movement in the 1920s. Those debates were informed by the implicit assumption that the options facing socialists lay somewhere between the poles of "state socialism" and "libertarian socialism." What that discursive framework obscured was the emergence of an entirely new phenomenon that few had foreseen: the socio-political configuration that Michael Harrington called *socialist capitalism*.[19] In some ways, Labour's "public ownership" agenda after World War II, presented as a daring move in a new direction, was stuck in the socialist past. That agenda was not unique—there were similar nationalizations in France and Austria—but the policy of nationalization was already the subject of considerable skepticism, even on the socialist left. The handful of industries chosen for nationalization were, almost universally, only those which could not be made profitable under private ownership and which were, for structural reasons, highly amenable to state control. In other words, even this most socialistic of policies could be justified in capitalist terms (and indeed similar measures had long been proposed by elites with no sympathy whatsoever for the socialist movement). It was soon clear that nationalizations were not to be stepping stones on a journey towards full-blown socialism. Not only was that hypothetical a political impossibility even under the best of conditions, discontent soon developed over mismanagement of the industries that had been taken over, and calls arose from influential Party members like Anthony Crosland to abandon nationalization altogether. Nationalization was, in fact, something of a sideshow to a more important story: the development of a system of managed capitalism. Most social democrats, including many

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[19] Harrington, *Socialism*, ch. 9.

within the Labour Party, had already come around to the view that it was possible to implement socialistic reforms and to mitigate the most destructive excesses of capitalism without literally taking over the means of production.

What was lacking up until 1936 was a systematic economic theory to back up that position. That was the year when John Maynard Keynes published the mature version of his economic thought in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*. Although much of the logic of Keynes' proposals had already been intuited by policymakers improvising innovative responses to the economic depression, its effect was in some sense revelatory, for it offered a coherent framework with which to justify what had been up to that point *ad hoc* experiments with economic intervention. One of the main reasons for Keynes's popularity was that he offered something to capitalists and socialists alike. In his own mind, he was saving capitalism from itself, by showing how the state could use anti-cyclical fiscal and monetary policy to prevent crises and maintain high levels of employment. But his demand-side approach, through which the state acts to stimulate investment by boosting the purchasing power of average citizens, helped to legitimate policies that favored the working class. Keynesian economics provided essential theoretical impetus to the three-pronged economic model that came to be embraced, or at least accepted, by social democrats, liberals, and even many conservatives during the postwar era: "(1) the state operates those activities which are unprofitable for private firms but necessary for the economy as a whole; (2) the state regulates, particularly by pursuing anti-cyclical policies, the operation of the private sector; and (3) the state mitigates, through welfare measures, the distributional effects of

the operation of the market."[20] Having assumed these three responsibilities, all of which had been denied to it by classical economics, the state earned a new moniker: it was now the "welfare state." For better or worse, it was the *fait accompli* over which the political battles of the postwar world would be fought.

The consolidation of the welfare state sparked a full-scale identity crisis amongst parliamentary socialists, whose *de facto* role was now to fight not for socialism but for a more humane capitalism, by defending and, when possible, expanding the state apparatus that kept the economy in check and apportioned a piece of the capitalist pie to the public welfare through entitlements, social services, and income transfers. The initial pangs of that crisis were evident during the interwar years, when social democrats in Germany, Britain, and France first got a taste of governing and had to rationalize opting for ameliorative rather than revolutionary policies. Some, like Léon Blum, who distinguished between the "exercise" and the "conquest" of power, devised ways of accounting for the seeming contradiction in the short-term.[21] But it was increasingly clear that, in the long-term, there would have to be a more serious reckoning with the evolving gap between theory and practice—a gap that became painfully evident every time a social democratic party managed to get into power. Not until the late 1950s and early 1960s, however, did some social democrats begin to swallow their socialist pride and fess up to the reality, leading to fierce internecine debates, as in the Labour Party over Clause IV, and the German SPD over the Godesberg Program.

Taking the path of parliamentary compromise not only condemned the social democrats to a conflicted and schizophrenic existence, it turned them into the punching

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[20] Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, 40.
[21] Harrington, *Socialism*, 238-39.

bags of revolutionary socialists like anarchists. Indeed, anarchists had always punched the hardest—in Britain, their unmitigated contempt for the Labour Party dated back to its earliest electoral bids. From an uncharitable perspective, the eventual capitulation of the social democrats to the idea of capitalism with a happier face could be interpreted as confirmation of what the anarchists had known all along: parliamentary socialists were spineless sell-outs, whose legacy would be to buy off the working class on behalf of the bourgeoisie, duplicitously intoning revolutionary credos all the while. That attitude had a certain logic to it in the days when anarchists could legitimately (if a little optimistically) feel that they were fighting for a genuine alternative that had a chance of succeeding. In the early decades of the 20th century, when there was a real choice to be made between siding with councils and siding with parties, anarcho-syndicalists could, with some plausibility, claim that they were fighting for the true interests of workers by advocating for workers' control rather than endorsing efforts to bandage the very system that was the source of the workers' exploitation. In the post-World War II years, however, unqualified opposition to the use of the state to improve quality of life for everyday people was harder to defend. This was not only because of the lack of a revolutionary alternative, but because the population, by all indications, resoundingly supported much of what the welfare state represented. When the New Anarchists surveyed the new terrain created by the welfare state—an institution which was, to be sure, not wholly or even mostly a product of social democratic treachery, but the outcome of a wide range of political intentions and initiatives—they realized that they had to adopt a more nuanced stance than their precursors.

This is not to suggest that the New Anarchists were tepid in their criticisms of the welfare state. On the contrary, their work is full of ringing indictments of the welfare state's shortcomings. Fresh off the experience of war, they could not fail to notice the symbiotic relationship between the welfare state and the warfare state—which, as Herbert Marcuse put it, were coming together in a "productive union."[22] That was literally true insofar as a "military-industrial complex," to use Dwight D. Eisenhower's famous phrase, was turning the state's military arm into an invaluable source of corporate profits. But the affinity was even more striking when one considered the militaristic cast being given to public institutions. Government was becoming ever more hierarchical and bureaucratized, removed from the texture of everyday life and ignorant of the needs and preferences of citizens. An "institution-mentality" of passivity, dependence, and respect for authority was being cultivated in the many areas of social life now within the province of state managers. Social policy was being used as a means of control and pacification—a strategy of "regulating the poor," in the words of Francis Fox Piven and Richard Cloward—rather than as a means of uplift, and the paternalistic administration of social services was undermining the agency and autonomy of those on the receiving end. The welfare state's supporters liked to argue that it was enhancing democracy by freeing people from the turbulence of market forces and creating a standard of living that enabled democratic participation. However admirable that ideal, in practice, the New Anarchists argued, the welfare state counteracted democracy in deeply troubling ways. It was dominated by a rising managerial class which viewed the public with disdain and suspicion. It made administration a matter of specialized, scientific expertise rather than

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[22] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 19.

popular input and control. And it lulled people into complacency with materialistic comforts and relentless propaganda that reinforced elite priorities and "manufactured" consent in place of authentic democratic deliberation.

New Anarchist criticisms of the welfare state reflected the same political sensibility that informed their belief in workers' control. A free society worthy of the name, they maintained, was not one that was efficiently and benevolently managed on behalf of the people, but one that was controlled and administered by the people themselves. The New Anarchists realized that, with the dimming of hopes for revolutionary change in the productive sector, it was no longer possible to wait for a central campaign of economic socialization to implant popular control into the industrial bedrock of society and then to spread it outward from that bastion. Rather, it was time to apply the logic of socialization directly to the distributive edifice that had been erected by the modern state, directly to the programs and institutions that had been placed in the service of the general welfare.[23] In considering how the provision of social welfare might be placed under popular control, the New Anarchists not only asked how existing practices might be democratized, but sought to recover and revitalize popular traditions of mutual aid that lay beyond the province of the state entirely. In the long run, they were hopeful that democratically-administered mechanisms of social welfare could be developed that would obviate the need for state involvement of any kind, creating a "welfare society" held together by solidarity rather than coercion. But they understood that the welfare state, complex phenomenon that it was, had created a social infrastructure that could, in many instances, be exploited for democratic ends. They did

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[23] For a similar characterization of this enterprise, see Michael Walzer's essay "Socializing the Welfare State" in Amy Gutmann, ed., *Democracy and the Welfare State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

not, out of doctrinal puritanism, refuse all cooperation or collaboration with state enterprises. And they accepted, at the very least, that the interventionist state for all of its limitations could serve as a bulwark against even more dangerous forces within the private realm.

The New Anarchists, sensibly enough, did not believe that a full-blown alternative to the welfare state was on the immediate horizon. Furthermore, they believed in much of what the welfare state stood for: rational, collective social planning (see Chapter 6); vigilant regulation of market forces; communal responsibility for a basic standard of living; and common ownership and management of public goods. Consequently, they did not seek to extricate themselves from the system entirely in favor of monkish self-reliance, nor did they simply call for the dismantling of state services which provided tangible, if far from unimpeachable, protections and benefits for average people. For some anarchists still enamored with the class-warfare mindset of the Old Left, this made them little better than liberals—"radical" liberals, perhaps, but liberals nonetheless. But the New Anarchists were convinced that they had staked out a position as distinct from liberalism, with its tendency to defer to governmental solutions, as it was from social democracy, with its penchant for political realism and opportunism, and also from that brand of "libertarian" conservatism which, in the late 1970s, inspired an explicitly anti-social reaction against not just the welfare state, but the idea of social welfare itself. Indeed, if the New Anarchists' favorite targets of scorn from the late 1940s through the 1970s were the liberal and social democratic elites who presided over the new managerial state, their favorite targets thereafter were the conservatives who hoped to abolish its most progressive features and re-commodify social life. Clearly, the New

Anarchists were in search of a perspective that was not adequately captured by any of the standard categories of political life—a perspective consistent with anarchist principles, but more responsible and pragmatic than the rigid anti-statism of old. They may not always have articulated that perspective clearly and convincingly, but their efforts generated some of the most significant and heterodox anarchist thinking of the era.

The political theory of the welfare state

The welfare state was stumbled into rather than theorized, planned, and consciously implemented. As a historical artifact, it was an amalgam of disconnected social initiatives, pieced together by regimes from virtually every position on the political spectrum, acting out of a wide range of motivations. Only after the term "welfare state" was incorporated into common parlance in the late 1940s was it possible to look back at those initiatives as rivulets feeding, with a kind of historical inevitability, into the same stream. Consequently, justifications for the welfare state as a coherent and systematic approach to social organization—as distinct from the piecemeal justifications given for specific policies—lagged behind the measures that were taken to bring it into being. Right through the 1930s, everyone from socialists to conservatives clung to economic orthodoxies that were highly inimical to state intervention in the economic sphere, even as they sponsored policies that undermined those same orthodoxies in practice.

Despite the fact that the welfare state evolved behind the backs, as it were, of the political actors responsible for it, certain trends within both socialist and liberal theory anticipated the arguments that would be used to justify it, and created a context in which it could be received favorably. Beginning in the 1890s, Eduard Bernstein developed a revisionist version of Marxian socialism which challenged social democrats to rethink

their attitudes towards the bourgeois state, the democratic process, and piecemeal social reforms. At a time when even those socialists who supported the activities of labor parties and efforts to win small-scale improvements in working conditions believed that all was preparation for open class warfare, Bernstein voiced the heretical opinion that the socialist cause might be gradually, and peacefully, advanced within the framework of the bourgeois democratic state. His perspective was not unlike that of certain non-Marxist socialists like the British Fabians, who were waging their own campaign to decouple socialism from the revolutionary tradition, and who seem to have influenced his thinking during his exile in London.[24] But Bernstein's was a predominantly Marxist audience, and that audience was scandalized by his claim that socialism should be understood, not as a decisive break with liberalism, but as an outgrowth of it. This was true, he argued, not only in a temporal sense, but in a "spiritual" sense, for socialism's task was not only to preserve the liberal ideal of freedom, but to deepen it and expand it by creating economic conditions conducive to "the development and protection of the free personality."[25]

What this implied was that socialists needed to aim at developing liberal institutions rather than destroying them. Once a certain level of democratization was reached, Bernstein argued, revolution by force became a crude and inappropriate means of effecting social change. Rather than adopting the parliamentary approach begrudgingly, or in order to further concealed revolutionary objectives, socialists should embrace it sincerely and enthusiastically. It was a violation of the spirit of democracy to imagine, as many Marxists did, that building up electoral strength was merely a method

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[24] Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 16.
[25] Eduard Bernstein, *The Preconditions of Socialism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 147.

of conquering political power and forcing the interests of a proletarian majority upon a recalcitrant minority. That may have been one of the milder interpretations of the "dictatorship of the proletariat"—it was certainly preferable to the capture of political power through *coup d'état* and the imposition of minority interests on an unreceptive majority—but it was still undemocratic at heart. Modern theories of democracy, Bernstein pointed out, rejected the idea that "tyranny of the majority" was compatible with democratic principles, and emphasized the importance of protecting the rights of minorities. He favored a negative definition of democracy as the absence of class rule, which would forbid the domination of a majority class over a minority class even if it was conceived as a temporary expedient in a longer-term effort to abolish classes entirely. Adopting the parliamentary road to socialism meant adopting all of its implications: playing by democratic rules necessitated moderation and compromise, the forging of partnerships across class lines rather than the highlighting of class divisions. The objective was not to proletarianize society, but to turn proletarians into citizens, able to participate fully in the political order and to enjoy the same opportunities and advantages of their fellows. It was towards this universalistic conception of all-inclusive community, rather than to proletarian hegemony, that Bernstein's thought ultimately pointed.

Bernstein believed that his revisionist perspective was not only more ethically consistent (he famously urged socialists to abandon "cant" in favor of "Kant") but that it was better-suited to the needs of an actual movement. For too long, socialists had been waiting for social reality to start conforming to their theoretical preconceptions—for capital to concentrate into hermetic, centralized blocs, for the proletariat to congeal into a radical majority, for the inborn contradictions of capitalism to engender a definitive crisis

and open a seam that revolutionaries waiting in the wings could tear into. Such preoccupations had blinded them to the fact that the immediate interests and struggles of the proletariat were almost always more powerful than abstract theories about workers' ultimate interests or prophecies of a revolutionary future. Especially unhelpful were those theories and prophesies which predicted, following a debatable reading of Marx, the increasing "immiseration" (or "pauperization") of the working class, and envisioned mounting desperation serving as a catalyst of revolution. In fact, Marx had the perspicacity to recognize the value of gradual improvements in the condition of the working class, like the pioneering reforms instituted in England in the mid-19th century, which he hoped would be emulated on the Continent. Fighting for such reforms did not, as some socialists seemed to believe, have the effect of sapping revolutionary zeal by assuaging the workers' sense of injustice, but rather of ensuring the relevance and vibrancy of a socialist movement whose success could be measured in concrete terms.

Despite being maligned by most socialists and officially condemned by the Second International, Bernstein's revisionism was a refreshingly honest assessment of the most fruitful, and most probable, trajectory of social democracy. Bernstein made it possible to envisage pieces of a socialist agenda being enacted and sustained by a liberal state within a capitalist context. Sixty years later, it was still difficult for many social democrats to swallow his main insights, but after Bernstein it was at least possible to put a socialist spin on the policies associated with the welfare state.

If Bernstein suggested the possibility of the socialist movement nestling itself into the *mise-en-scène* of the liberal state, liberal thinkers around the same time were reformulating liberalism so as to make it more receptive to socialistic objectives. In both

Britain (T. H. Green, L. T. Hobhouse, J. A. Hobson) and the United States (John Dewey, Herbert Croly, Walter Weyl), a generation of liberal thinkers was reacting against the atomistic, self-interested individualism of 19th-century *laissez-faire*.[26] The lingering social ills of that era, they believed, made it clear that the market, left to its own, "natural," devices, was ill-equipped to confront the so-called "social problem." These "new" liberals sought to craft a liberalism that was sensitive to the ways in which individuals were shaped by and grounded in their social environments. Rather than celebrating the self-sufficient individual whose overriding priority was material gain, they stressed the importance of membership in supportive communities that provided platforms for individual agency. Informed by analogies which likened society to an interconnected natural organism, they embraced the notion of a "common good" which encompassed both the whole and the part simultaneously. This implied that the individual pieces of the social whole could not be conceived as completely autonomous and sovereign over themselves or their property. Sometimes, as in any organism, the claims of the whole had to trump the claim of the part, the community had to take precedence over the individual. But the same organic metaphor also implied that tending to the common good involved care for the individual pieces, not their transcendence or sacrifice on behalf of the collective.

Indeed, these liberals did not lose sight of the interests of the individual, resting their argument for a stronger state that would reign in market forces and provide social guarantees to citizens upon the claim that, far from stifling individualism, this kind of social organization would enhance it beyond anything conceivable within the framework

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[26] For a relevant account of this body of thought, see James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

of *laissez-faire*. Only in society could individuals find the springboards they needed to realize their potential and attain their highest ends. A political guarantee of negative liberties along the lines of classical liberalism, while important—particularly with respect to intellectual and religious freedom—was insufficient for the vast majority of the population. The new liberal understanding of freedom was "positive" in that it emphasized not the absence of restraint but the availability of publicly-provided resources that enabled individuals to make effective use of their abilities. Classical liberalism had made the market the motor of social life, and had drastically curtailed the scope of the public sphere so as to allow market forces to operate freely. What the new liberalism amounted to was a rediscovery of the public, informed by the feeling that social relationships had to be de-commodified, and that private gain had to be subordinated to common interests. The practical effect of this trend in political thought was to open up areas of social life that had been deemed "private" by classical liberalism to public concern, scrutiny, and intervention.

As these synopses suggest, there were signs of a convergence between the socialist and liberal traditions as early as the turn of the century, and it was from the intersection of those traditions that much of the normative justification for the welfare state would later be drawn. If the New Anarchists were reluctant to reject the welfare state out of hand, it was in part because that same intersection was the nexus at which they, too, attempted to theorize the proper relationship between individual and community, public control and private initiative. Like both socialists and new liberals, they rejected the idea that provision of social goods could simply be left to the mechanism of the market. Colin Ward favorably invoked the ideas of Richard Titmuss to

demonstrate the inability of the market to supply certain kinds of products reliably and safely.[27] The phenomenon of market failure pointed to obvious areas in which social control could be used to rationalize distribution and ensure the availability of vital goods and services. Most importantly, there was a communal responsibility to guarantee a basic standard of living, or what Murray Bookchin referred to in his work as an "irreducible minimum," drawing from anthropological literature which showed that a sense of social obligation to those in need had been integral to even the earliest human societies. When New Anarchists considered what they took to be fundamental requirements for human preservation and fulfillment, from essential welfare needs, to care for the sick and aged, to education, they assumed them to be matters of public and not merely private or charitable concern. And they agreed wholeheartedly with the socialist/new liberal consensus around the idea that individual self-realization was the product of the constructive interaction of individual and society—as Herbert Read put it, ideally the individual would realize himself "*in* the community" rather than "*in spite of* the community."[28]

For all of these reasons, New Anarchists did not adopt a purely cynical attitude to state-sponsored welfare reforms. "The positive feature of welfare legislation," Ward writes, "is that contrary to the capitalist ethic, it is a testament to human solidarity."[29] If nothing else, agrees Noam Chomsky, social security policies institute "the idea that it is a community responsibility to ensure that the disabled widow on the other side of town has

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[27] See his discussion of Titmuss's influential book *The Gift Relationship* in *Social Policy: An Anarchist Response* (London: Freedom Press, 1996).

[28] Herbert Read, *To Hell with Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 55.

[29] Colin Ward quoted in Ruth Kinna, *Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2005), 146.

food to eat, or that the child across the street should be able to go to a decent school."[30]

The significance of such policies is not merely symbolic, however: they clearly make a

palpable impact on the well-being of everyday people, as reflected in the overwhelming

public support they have enjoyed since their inception. No anarchist of democratic

pretensions could simply dismiss that perdurable popular mandate. And, as Kropotkin

proposed in reflecting upon the budding growth of free public services in the early

twentieth century, these policies could even be seen as gestures, however limited, in the

direction of a society in which all individuals could satisfy their needs from the common

stock.[31] Chomsky, commenting from a considerably more advanced historical vantage

point, voices similar sentiments:

> A lot of the progressive social change of the past century isn't anarchist.
> Progressive taxations, Social Security isn't anarchist, but it's a reflection of
> attitudes and understandings which, if they go a little bit further, do reflect
> anarchist commitments. They are based on the idea that there really should be
> solidarity, community, mutual support, mutual aid and so forth-opportunities for
> creative action…They are subdued, channeled and modified so they never take
> real libertarian forms, but they are there and they lead to social change.[32]

If positive features of welfare legislation are to be found in its embodiment of

social solidarity and its mitigation of pressing hardships, its principal negative feature is

"precisely that it is an arm of the state."[33] An important part of the novelty of both the

revisionist socialism and the reformed liberalism described above is their softening of the

attitudes of their parent traditions towards the state. State socialism had, of course, long

been a prominent strain within the socialist movement, and Marxists, as already

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[30] Noam Chomsky, *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 250.

[31] Ward, *Social Policy*, 69.

[32] Noam Chomsky, *Chomsky on Anarchism*, ed. Barry Pateman (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005), 231.

[33] Ward quoted in Kinna, *Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide*, 146.

discussed, took it for granted that the state would have to be commandeered by the representatives of the working class in one way or another before socialization could begin in earnest. Bernstein's controversial innovation was to suggest that a bourgeois state was a viable organ through which to pursue a socialist agenda. In fact, he went even further in his unorthodoxy: to the extent that full enfranchisement obtained, the very notion that the state was a "bourgeois" state—in other words, a state which served as the "executive committee" of the ruling class, as one of the rhetorical flourishes of the *Communist Manifesto* had it—was nonsensical, for it had been democratized to the point where it was effectively a neutral instrument susceptible to the fullest possible range of influences. State power, to put it another way, was not simply under the domination of capital, and it did not have to undergo a dramatic transformation before it could be wielded effectively by socialists.

If this was true, a subsidiary implication followed: state power, being distinct from the power of capital, could be used to constrain and counteract the latter. That insight was shared with the new liberals, who, disabused of the 19th century's faith in the *laissez-faire* utopia that had wreaked social havoc in both the United States and Britain, sought to strengthen the position of the state relative to market forces. As Karl Polanyi outlined in *The Great Transformation*, the state became the primary vehicle through which "society" protected itself against the ravages of the free market.[34] That liberals were beginning to accept that idea represented an even profounder deviation than Bernstein's, for it meant they implicitly repudiated Adam Smith's optimistic claim in the *Wealth of Nations* that if individuals were left free to pursue their self-interest the

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[34] See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944), from which I have taken the idea of a *laissez-faire* "utopia."

common good would be provided for, even without any specific individual or agency being specially charged to look after it. There was compelling evidence, the new liberals now felt, that to adhere to that proposition was to condemn a large proportion of the population to an existence of economic precariousness, and to imperil political liberty by rendering it defenseless against the influence of big capital. In a world transformed by industrial capitalism, in which unaccountable private power took ever larger and more intimidating forms, preserving liberal principles necessitated a departure from standard liberal practice with respect to government. Individual freedom itself, the new liberals argued, required a robust public agency acting deliberately and proactively in the service of the common good if it was to be protected from the robber barons whose insidious influence was becoming all-pervasive. State coercion, according to this view, could be employed not merely for the sake of law and order, as classical liberals argued, but for the furtherance of social welfare. The new liberals did not think there was need to fear that this enlargement of the state's role was a threat to individual freedom, for they continued to conceive of the state, acting on behalf of "society," as an organic outgrowth of the popular will. The state was the designated agent of the community and was "no more than the largest and most rational version of the various associations [like trade unions and co-operative societies] which existed for the benefit of their members." The only difference that distinguished it from voluntary cooperation was the "legally established machinery" involved: "state activity was simply voluntary activity universalized and carried out under law."[35] Consequently, there was nothing inherently objectionable about state action—it could be trusted now that it was concerned with the

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[35] Rodney Barker, *Political Ideas in Modern Britain: In and After the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1997), 27.

common interest rather than the narrow interests of the aristocracy or bourgeoisie. As in

Bernstein's rosy picture of political life under universal suffrage, the new liberal state

owed its legitimacy to its universalistic character, serving the "common good" of the

"citizens." Admittedly, liberals had long bought into the idea that the state was a

manifestation of universal interests, but now its universalistic aspect could no longer be

dismissed as mere ideological patina—it was *earned*, through active and ongoing

intervention against threats to the well-being of society as a whole.

This was the kind of thinking that encouraged some socialists and big-government

liberals to treat every extension of state power as a victory for the public interest. As

Geoffrey Ostergaard points out: "With the acceptance of the democratic State went the

tendency to identify it with the community. Such an identification made it possible to

regard State control and State ownership as control and ownership by the community in

the interests of 'the community as a whole.'"[36] This was particularly evident in Britain,

where the unapologetically statist Fabians effectively equated state management with

socialism itself. Suggestively, the Labour politician Anthony Crosland once went so far

as to describe what was happening in Britain as the supplanting of capitalism not by

socialism, but by "statism."[37]

But proclamations of the state's universality and conflations of the state with the

community were no less ideological now that the state had a hand in providing for the

general welfare. This was true even, perhaps especially, in those states like Britain which

had self-consciously incorporated the principle of universalism into their welfare

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[36] Geoffrey Ostergaard, "The Managerial Revolution" in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, vol. 2 (The Emergence of the New Anarchism)*, ed. Robert Graham (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 2009), 154.
    [37] In fairness, he later regretted the term. See the discussion in *The Future of Socialism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1956), 34.

institutions.[38] The "social" citizenship (to use T. H. Marshall's phrase) now offered by

the state did have the effect of alleviating the condition of the worst off and eliminating

some of the stigma once attached to the individual's receipt of social benefits.[39] And

there was some truth to the claim that "[j]ust as universal suffrage extended political

rights to all citizens, universal social rights break down further barriers to full

membership of a community."[40] But just as *de jure* universalism with respect to political

rights privileged, in practice, those individuals and groups who had more resources with

which to exert a political influence, *de jure* universalism with respect to social rights

tended to obscure the fact that deep social divisions continued to undermine the official

agenda of egalitarianism.[41] Colin Ward put the matter bluntly: universalism is "an

unattainable idea in a society that is enormously divided in terms of income and access to

employment."[42] The state's affirmations of universalism were premised on the

assumption that there was a common, identifiable "national interest." This concept played

an ideological role by encouraging individuals to identify their own interests with those

of the nation and, in so doing, to embrace national elites as the shepherds of their well-

being and overlook the structures of privilege and exploitation that the state continued to

uphold.[43] Additionally, the dependence of a universalistic (or, more accurately,

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[38] That principle, which has come to be identified chiefly with the "Scandinavian" system of welfare, was embodied in the case of Britain in the National Insurance Act of 1946 and the establishment of the National Health Service in 1948.

[39] See T. H. Marshall and Tom Bottomore, *Citizenship and Social Class* (London: Pluto Press, 1992).

[40] Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, 146.

[41] As Richard Titmuss reflected retrospectively: "Many of us must…now admit that we put too much faith in the 1940s in the concept of universality as applied to social security. Mistakenly, it was linked with economic egalitarianism. Those who have benefited most are those who have needed it least." See "The Irresponsible Society," in *The Philosophy of Welfare: Selected Writings of Richard M. Titmuss* (London: Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1987), 71.

[42] Ward, *Social Policy*, 16.

[43] For the New Anarchists, to presume to have identified policies which could cut through the extraordinary heterogeneity encompassed by modern nation states was—whether it applied to social policy

nationalistic) approach to social welfare on a general sense of national unity helps to explain its indebtedness to war. It was a patriotic, wartime mentality that, in Britain, had first made the "quantity and quality of the population" a matter of national concern during the Boer Wars, and had transferred popular support for the government's war effort during World War II to Labour's expansion of the state's domestic role in the war's aftermath.[44] Just as, during wartime, the notion of a "national interest" was, as Bakunin might have put it, one of those "pitiless abstractions" used to justify the "immolation" of human beings, during peacetime it could be invoked to legitimate the sacrifice of individual autonomy and popular control to the expansion of state power over internal affairs.[45]

Now that the state was portrayed as the custodian of the general welfare in times of peace as well as times of war, support for its efforts to restructure domestic life and forge a more integrated national community could be interpreted as a matter of civic duty. It could manage its social programs, moreover, in a manner not unlike its wartime campaigns, with little fear of offending popular sensibilities. Thus, in postwar Britain and America, a hierarchical, top-down, bureaucratic approach became the default method of addressing problems that might otherwise have been solved democratically. Indeed, when social democrats and liberals proclaimed the need to regulate society through rational human agency, they were quick to accept state bureaucrats as the most suitable executors of that agency.

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or anything else—an attitude of extraordinary political hubris. Like Rousseau, they were inclined to believe that the concept of the "common good" or "general will" was only really meaningful when applied on a much smaller scale, to geographically and culturally intimate societies. To speak of a "national interest" that encompassed Exeter and Aberdeen—much less Juneau and Tallahassee—was to employ a basically meaningless abstraction that could be used to justify almost any particular policy.

[44] See Richard Titmuss, "War and Social Policy" in *The Philosophy of Welfare*.

[45] See Michael Bakunin, *God and the State* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 59.

For the New Anarchists, by contrast, bureaucracy was a kind of cancerous excrescence on social life, a "parasitic body" that had "nothing in common with the people" and thus had to be "maintained by taxation and extortion."[46] Like a parasite, it tends to take on a life of its own, treating its own growth and perpetuation as ends-in-themselves, and "los[ing] touch with its ostensible function and with the environment."[47] Furthermore, it is highly prone to calcification, for "[o]nce established," it does "everything possible to consolidate its position and maintain its power."[48] Aloof from social life, bureaucrats are unable appreciate its intricacies, forced to approach qualitative problems quantitatively and to treat "people" as "personnel." While they like to believe that they have a privileged, Archimedean perspective on society, they in fact lack knowledge essential to decision-making: "being one man or a small group," Paul Goodman writes, "top-management does not have enough *mind* to do an adequate job."[49] Consequently, bureaucrats are forced to oversimplify social problems, imposing inorganic, rationalistic schemata onto the organic complexities of human interrelations, and rearranging society physically, when possible, so as to make it "legible" through standardization and regularization.[50] The irony is that bureaucracies in this way undermine the very purpose for which they are brought into being—the rational and efficient utilization of all available resources—by marginalizing or disregarding resources which cannot be rendered "legible." This includes the "tacit knowledge"

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[46] Herbert Read, *Anarchy and Order* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954), 100.

[47] Paul Goodman, *People or Personnel and Like a Conquered Province* (New York: Vintage, 1968), 82.

[48] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 100.

[49] Goodman, *People or Personnel*, 76.

[50] I take the idea of social "legibility" from the anthropologist James Scott's explicitly anarchist argument in *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998). What is "legible," Scott argues, can be more easily recorded, monitored, and manipulated by those in a position to "read" and control society, whether for the sake of taxation, conscription, the prevention of rebellion, or social welfare.

embodied in many of the social phenomena over which bureaucratic planners tend to run roughshod: the everyday customs, habits, and intuitions of ordinary people who have absorbed in their thinking and behavior the intangible flavors of local patterns of life.[51]

Elite democracy and the managerial class

For the New Anarchists, the welfare state's growing bureaucracy was the preeminent example of a broader tendency to ossify the management of social affairs into institutions overseen by paternalistic administrators. An "institution-mentality," warned Colin Ward, was taking hold of both the administrators and the administered. From the perspective of the bureaucrat, society was seen as an interconnected system that had to be carefully regulated so as to prevent disruption and deviation, and putting social welfare under the direction of the state could be viewed as an integral means to that end. Historically, most social welfare policies could be attributed as much to considerations of social control as to considerations of social justice. The earliest examples of state-provided social welfare (or "poor relief") in 16th-century Britain were unabashed efforts to avert social strife, and they placed stringent restrictions on the mobility of the recipients in order to prevent vagrancy. Far from offsetting the exploitation inherent in the wage-labor that arose with the Industrial Revolution, the English Poor Laws operated in harmony with early capitalism, maintaining a pool of potential laborers so close to the level of bare subsistence that they would willingly accept even the most degrading work rather than rely solely on public assistance. The unfortunate souls desperate enough to depend on the "indoor relief" of workhouses were boxed into the most degrading and

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[51] The philosopher Michael Polanyi provided the seminal account of "tacit knowledge," but Scott also points to the Greek concept of *metis* as a possible analogue. Anarchists, he argues, have throughout their history been unusually attentive to this concept, which might be translated as "practical knowledge." *Seeing Like a State*, 7.

dehumanizing of institutional settings, stripped of all semblance of citizenship and autonomy. Some narratives of the transition to the modern welfare state laid emphasis on qualitative advances over those heartless practices: thus, T. H. Marshall wrote of the gradual absorption of "social rights" into the definition of citizenship during the 20th century, the de-stigmatization of the beneficiaries of state aid through the universalization of social services, and the evolution of social welfare from a minimalist effort to stave off destitution and discontent to a means of ensuring a "reasonable maximum" of civilized living. Ward's narrative of that same transition, however, placed far more stress on continuity. For him, the story of state welfare was primarily one of increasing centralization and coordination administration at the national level, not of qualitative change in the purposes of public assistance, however much its outward aspect may have been altered. In this sense, his argument bore strong similarities to the pioneering work of Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward on the American welfare system.[52] Piven and Cloward demonstrated that the expansion of state provisions for the poor, even in the 20th century, coincided in every major instance with periods of profound social unrest. In the face of widespread demands for radical social change, they showed, the American state had maintained stability by adopting more moderate reforms.[53] What this suggested was that the welfare state was not oriented towards transforming society, but rather towards stabilizing it and pacifying it. In the hands of the state, Ward lamented, social welfare became a tool of elite domination, proffered more often than not as a "substitute for

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[52] It is perhaps easier to see in the American case the persistence of Poor Law practices and assumptions: scanty provisions (relative to European welfare states), emphasis on means-tested relief, and stubborn stigmatization of the "undeserving poor."

[53] See Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

social justice."[54] To adopt one of Alex Comfort's insights, the institutionalization of welfare administration made it easy to confuse the "organizational aspect" of the state's work with the "repressive and the regulative," as the attempts to make the system more rational and efficient came to overlap (or vice versa) with the imperative of social control.[55]

With respect to those who were the targets of social control, the "institution-mentality" manifested itself as an attitude of obedience and acquiescence to encroachments upon individual autonomy. The modern individual was becoming accustomed to being treated more as subject than citizen, steered by higher authorities at every turn. This was contributing not only to the spiritual impoverishment of individual life, but to the "growth of an asocial public, dependent on central direction for the standards it lacks."[56] Many democratic theorists in the first half of the 20th century, perversely, endorsed the disengagement of citizens from public life. Advocates of so-called "elite" democracy like Joseph Schumpeter maintained that discouraging popular participation in the management of public affairs was a boon to democratic ends even if it meant the sacrifice of democratic means. The classical doctrine of democracy, Schumpeter argued, naïvely sought an institutional arrangement which "realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will."[57] That formulation of democracy was compromised by several faulty assumptions. First, the very idea of a "common good" was an illusion because of the innate incompatibility of differing

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[54] Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: Freedom Press, 1996), 120.
[55] Alex Comfort, *Authority and Delinquency* (London: Zwan Publications, 1988), 87.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1976), 250.

individual evaluations of what qualified as social desiderata. Furthermore, even if broad principles were agreed upon they would by no means provide straightforward guidance with respect to the continuous stream of idiosyncratic situations faced by public decision-makers. In reality, social consensus was rare to begin with, and insofar as there was such a thing as "public opinion," it was prone to fickle and irrational preferences at odds with public utility. The caprice and incoherence that characterized public opinion was the inevitable outcome of the aggregation even of a multitude of definite and rational wills, for reasonable people disagreed, especially about questions of a qualitative nature. But modern psychology and sociology were destroying the idea that rationality prevailed even at the individual level, for they were revealing individuals to have unstable conceptions of even their own desires, and to be highly susceptible to suggestion and manipulation. Tempered by experience, individuals could develop a sufficiently sound understanding of that with which they were in closest contact. But beyond the immediacy of everyday life, it was difficult for the average person to maintain an accurate perception of reality, which meant that most matters of political concern were utterly beyond the capacity of the typical citizen. When mobilized politically, the masses were little better than a bewildered herd, highly malleable and capable of atrocities, their moral compass unable to function effectively when removed from the sphere of intimate personal relations.

That was the popular tinderbox that had been set alight by the fascists, and if similar developments were to be avoided in the future, Schumpeter suggested, it would be necessary to substitute hard facts for romantic political ideals that threatened to unleash the democratic "beast" of which Plato warned. The rise of mass society had

turned the classical theory of democracy, whatever its original merits, into a hopeless anachronism. If democracy was to be realized in any form, it would have to be democracy *for* rather than *by* the people. The political role of the citizen was to apply an electoral rubber stamp to one of a select number of elites who distinguished themselves through competition for the people's vote. Up to and beyond that point, democracy from a popular perspective was to be a matter of spectatorship, if not indifference.

By the time the liberal elites of the 1960s came to power—the technocrats of the Wilson administration and the Kennedy intellectuals—these beliefs had been thoroughly inculcated through three decades' worth of admonishments by the new democratic realists, who counseled their readers to beware of "democratic dogmatisms about men being the best judges of their own interests" (Harold Lasswell), who held democracy requires the "engineering of consent" through subtle mechanisms of persuasion and suggestion (Edward Bernays), and who insisted that the general population, acting out of faith rather than rationality, must be guided by "necessary illusions" and "emotionally potent oversimplifications" (Reinhold Niebuhr).[58] By the 1960s, the idea that big government could act as agent of the public interest and the realism that forbade giving the public a hand in its administration were mingled in the same stream of thought. Not only liberal but socialist ideas, as has already been suggested, contributed to the same trend. Leninist vanguardism was similar to liberal elitism in its vision of an enlightened minority acting on behalf of a hapless popular constituency, and the Soviet Union served as one of the New Anarchists' favorite illustrations of a purportedly "popular" state

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[58] The quotes are taken from Noam Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies* (London: Pluto Press, 1989), 30-31.

which had placed all matters of social consequence under the direction of bureaucrats.[59]

In Britain, however, the more important influence was Fabian socialism, which, as

Ostergaard points out, transformed "socialism from a moral ideal of the emancipation of

the proletariat to a complicated problem of social engineering, making it a task, once

political power had been achieved, not for the ordinary stupid mortal but for the super-

intelligent administrator armed with facts and figures which had been provided by

diligent research."[60]

Equating social administration with social engineering turned it into a matter of

specialized training and expertise, a view which meshed well with the ascent of

behaviorism in the 1950s and 1960s and the idea that politics was a "science," best

understood by qualified professionals. By mid-century, such professionals were

prominently represented within the state's swelling bureaucracy. The promotion of these

"new mandarins" to political power, Chomsky claimed in 1967, confirmed the prescience

of Bakunin's warnings in the 1870s about the rise of a "new class" of intellectuals,

scientific "savants" who in the capacity of state engineers would "meddle with

everything" and dry up "the sources of life…under the breath of their abstractions."[61]

James Burnham's theory of the "managerial revolution," first published in 1941, offered

one of the most influential accounts of the emergence of this elite. His argument rested

upon even earlier sociological insights, like those of Robert Michels, which showed that

the bigger the organization—whether public or private, and regardless of the

organization's ideology—the more likely it was to develop a bureaucracy and to fall

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[59] Chomsky, *Chomsky on Anarchism*, 184.
[60] Geoffrey Ostergaard, "The Managerial Revolution," 156.
[61] Bakunin, *God and the State*, 63. Chomsky's reference to Bakunin is in *American Power and the New Mandarins* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

under the sway of a select few; as Michels put it, "the increase in the power of the leaders is directly proportional with the extension of the organization."[62] With the rise of Big Business and Big Government in the first half of the 20th century, the logic of managerial centralization had taken hold of both the public and private sectors, and a hard managerial crust had formed at the top of the major institutions of social and political life. The most provocative part of Burnham's thesis was that managers now constituted a class to themselves, complete with a class interest all their own which was opposed in certain respects to the interests of capitalists and workers alike. A "revolution" was taking place in the sense that this managerial interest was becoming hegemonic, as managers amassed social power formerly belonging to the owners of capital, and as collectivist managerial values emphasizing power, status, and control supplanted capitalist values of wealth creation and self-interested individualism. Like the world-historical classes that preceded it, the managerial class identified its interests with those of humanity, for without the expert guidance of managers human beings were, as the theory of elite democracy suggested, liable to bumble into social catastrophe. With the triumph of managerialism, Burnham argued, the old class conflicts of industrial capitalism faded in significance, and the dialectical clash between the fundamentally opposed worldviews of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat was replaced by lower-stakes competition between elites over who could best administer the existing state.

Ostergaard stressed the import of Burnham's argument twenty years later in his contributions to *Anarchy* because he thought the time had come for anarchists to reconceptualize their struggle. Anarchists had always opposed both the power of capital

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[62] Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 71.

and the power of the state, but once anarcho-syndicalism became the dominant current within the anarchist movement, most anarchists focused on mounting a direct challenge to the bourgeoisie within an industrial setting. Now, however, "[t]he political élite and the industrial managerial élite are merging," and "[w]hen the merger is complete, State and industry will be simply different aspects of the same Establishment."[63] Although Ostergaard continued to hold out hope for a syndicalist revival, the implications of his argument clearly pointed to the need for anarchists to diversify their approach. His argument suggested that, as Paul Goodman liked to say, the "System" as a whole needed to be opposed, rather than resistance funneled towards any one aspect of it, for private and public power were progressively coagulating into one all-encompassing web, suffused with the same bureaucratic, institutional, managerial logic and a ubiquitous deficit of democracy. That deficit had to be addressed not only in the workplace, but in public education, municipal housing, the administration of welfare, social planning—in every enterprise that played a role in providing for public needs.

The New Anarchists countered the managerial perspective not with democratic dogmatism, but with what might be described as democratic optimism. At the core of that optimism was the belief that, when given the opportunity and the right conditions, people were perfectly capable of managing their own affairs. This assumption of basic competence is what tied together their support for workers' control with their support for popular control in other areas of life. Goodman makes the connection explicit:

> There are two kinds of municipal affairs that concern people closely: local functions like policing, housing, schooling, welfare, street services and garbage collection—primarily, the locale in which family life occurs; and the jobs and professions that people work at, and by which they make a living…And in these

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[63] Ostergaard, *The Tradition of Workers' Control*, 115-16.

matters…people know the score and are competent to govern themselves directly, or could soon become so by practice.[64]

When it comes to social and political affairs, writes Chomsky, "virtually everything…is right on the surface."[65] Even anarchist principles are hardly distinct from "ordinary common sense."[66] What a democratic society most sorely needs is not special training or superior intelligence but an empowered and informed citizenry, whose aptitude for self-government will only improve the more control it exercises over social affairs. The often *a priori* assumption made by skeptics of participatory democracy that ordinary people are incapable of managing their own social lives, that they need paternalistic supervisors to watch over them and discipline them, becomes, as Comfort points out, a self-fulfilling prophecy, for by rendering people helpless it "ensures that the time will never be ripe for any return of function to the public at large."[67]

Like many of their New Left contemporaries, the New Anarchists conceived of their positive objective as the reconstitution of a democratic public sphere and the promotion of forms of social organization amenable to direct democratic control. They knew that the viability of participatory democracy had to be demonstrated in practice. Liberal realist and socialist arguments for placing social initiative in elite hands were grounded in utility—it was simply thought that the alternative to elite control, however desirable, was unworkable. That assumption could only be disproven through experimentation, which would have to begin with the demand that popular administration be implemented in as many walks of life as immediately feasible. This did not, it must be

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[64] Paul Goodman, *New Reformation: Notes of a Neolithic Conservative* (New York: Vintage, 1971), 179.
[65] Chomsky, *Chomsky on Anarchism*, 216.
[66] Ibid., 181.
[67] Comfort, *Authority and Delinquency*, 87.

emphasized, mean completely dispensing with expertise: ways would have to be devised of keeping experts "on tap but not on top," as the onetime Labour chairman Harold Laski once put it.[68] But even more vital would be the liberation of the ingenuity of those everyday people whose abilities and ideas had no place in the managerial model. Their instincts of creativity and mutual aid, directed towards problems of social welfare, promised not only to democratize existing practices and institutions, but to reinvigorate popular traditions of social solidarity that had been crowded out by the modern state.

Revitalizing mutual aid

"[G]iven a common need," Colin Ward writes in *Anarchy in Action*, "a collection of people will, by trial and error, by improvisation and experiment, evolve order out of the situation—this order being more durable and more closely related to their needs than any kind of externally imposed authority could provide."[69] This for Ward was the essence of the anarchist theory of "spontaneous order," and it underpinned the New Anarchist conviction that bottom-up solutions to questions of social welfare were naturally forthcoming if not actively stifled, as well as more effective in taking stock of the fine-grained texture of individual and social life. That belief had a theoretical basis insofar as it rested upon a distinction between the logic of "society" and the logic of the "state": drawing from Martin Buber, Ward argued that privileging society over the state meant privileging association over subordination, fellowship over domination, equality over hierarchy, autonomy over authority, organic unity over coercion.[70] The state, according to this perspective, was an artificial, suffocating imposition hostile to the rhythms of society

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[68] Ostergaard, *The Tradition of Workers' Control*, 103.
[69] Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, 31.
[70] See Martin Buber, "Society and the State" in *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, ed. Maurice Friedman (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957).

and biased towards vertical rather than horizontal forms of social organization. Society was a much more faithful expression of what the New Anarchists, like their classical ancestors, tended to assume was a more fundamental "natural" harmony.

But the New Anarchist argument for spontaneous social organization purported to be more empirical and historical in nature than philosophical. Kropotkin, in his classic *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* had chronicled the ways in which the rise of the modern state involved the gradual usurpation of voluntary associations, which according to his narrative had reached a peak of sorts in the medieval free cities. Having taken over many of the functions once managed by the people themselves, the state had effectively forced mutual aid out of domains in which it had once thrived. Ward told a similar story in his discussion of the history of social welfare. There were two traditions to be distinguished: "One of these traditions is that of a service given grudgingly and punitively by authority, another is the expression of social responsibility, or of mutual aid and self-help. One is embodied in *institutions*, the other in *associations*."[71] The "mutual aid road" was, for Ward, "the welfare road we failed to take."[72] Ward points out that "social welfare in Britain did not originate from government, nor from the post-war National Insurance laws, nor with the initiation of the National Health Service in 1948. It evolved from the vast network of friendly societies and mutual aid organizations that had sprung up through working-class self-help in the 19th century."[73] In Britain, the working class "built up from nothing a vast network of social and economic initiatives based on self-help and mutual aid. The list is endless: friendly societies, building societies, sick clubs, coffin clubs, clothing clubs, up to enormous federated enterprises like the trade

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[71] Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, 109.
[72] Ward, *Social Policy*, 9.
[73] Ward, *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 27.

union movement and the Co-operative movement."[74] Tragically, this tradition was

neglected during the building of welfare state. The "great tradition of working class self-

help and mutual aid was written off, not just as irrelevant, but as an actual impediment,

by the political and professional architects of the welfare state…. The contribution that

the recipients had to make to all this theoretical bounty was ignored as a mere

embarrassment—apart, of course, from paying for it." By cutting popular initiative and

participation out of the picture, the architects of the modern welfare state had crafted an

exceedingly "vulnerable utopia" highly susceptible to political manipulation and popular

dissatisfaction.[75] Ward insists that there had been alternatives:

> Alternative patterns of social control of local facilities *could* have emerged, but
> for the fact that centralized government imposed national uniformity, while
> popular disillusionment with the bureaucratic welfare state coincided with the rise
> of the all-party gospel of managerial capitalism. Anarchists claim that after the
> inevitable disappointment, an alternative concept of socialism will be
> rediscovered. They argue that the identification of social welfare with
> bureaucratic managerialism is one of the factors that has delayed the exploration
> of other approaches for half a century.[76]

For Ward, the anarchist alternative began with the idea that "[p]eople care about

what is theirs, what they can modify, alter, adapt to changing needs and improve

themselves. They must have a direct responsibility for it."[77] Institutions had to be broken

down "into small units in the wider society, based on self-help and mutual support."[78]

Ward thought that "[a] multiplicity of mutual aid organisations among claimants,

patients, victims, represents the most potent lever for change in transforming the welfare

state into a genuine welfare society, in turning community care into a caring

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[74] Ward, *Social Policy*, 2.
[75] Ibid., 3.
[76] Ward, *Anarchism*, 27.
[77] Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, 73.
[78] Ibid., 120.

community."[79] Rather than a "mass" solution, he called for "a mass of…local, small-scale solutions that draw upon the involvement, the ability and the ingenuity of people themselves." "There will," he warned, "be muddle and confusion, duplication of effort, wasted cash and misappropriation of funds."[80] But an anarchist society would make no pretense of perfect efficiency, treating inefficiency as a natural part of the democratic process rather than as a social blight that needed to be stamped out through regularization and centralization. Nevertheless, Ward was still sure that the waste generated by a mutual aid approach would be nothing compared to the waste of money and resources that plagued state enterprises. Quoting Kropotkin, he summed up the main task of the anarchist working in the area of social welfare as the need to "find new forms of organisation for the social functions that the state fulfils through the bureaucracy."[81]

A more concrete picture of how mutual aid principles could be brought to bear on already existing welfare state practices emerges from Ward's work on municipal housing, an area of social policy with which he had firsthand acquaintance as an architect and officer for the Town and Country Planning Association. Housing policy was in many ways diagnostic of a society's commitment (or lack thereof) to democracy because it dealt with the exercise of control over the most intimate and immediate of environments. Ward always insisted that the lack of quality, affordable housing was a symptom of market failure: ultimately, securing "adequate, healthy and pleasant homes" was not possible "without the destruction of the capitalist system."[82] But if leaving housing up to

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[79] Ibid., 121.

[80] Colin Ward, *Talking Houses* (London: Freedom Press, 1990), 142.

[81] The quote can be found in Kinna, *Anarchism*, 146. Herbert Read similarly argued that the state would wither away by "liquidat[ing] the bureaucracy…by federal devolution," handing over to syndicates its administrative functions—"fixing of prices, transport, and distribution, health, and education." *Anarchy and Order*, 101.

[82] Colin Ward, *Housing: An Anarchist Approach* (London: Freedom Press, 1976), 15.

the market had helped to generate the housing crisis that plagued Britain after World War II, efforts to shift responsibility for housing initiatives to state bureaucrats had proven equally disastrous. Municipal housing had created "a syndrome of dependence and resentment" because the mentality informing it was "still stuck in the groves of nineteenth-century paternalism."[83] Tenants of public housing were seen "as numbers, as abstractions, as 'housing units,'"[84] as "the raw material of policy."[85] The planning of housing developments was conducted by professionals with little-to-no input from the populace, leading to projects that were overly complex and detailed and that treated people's actual needs as incidental to the grand schemes of planners.[86] As for the administration of such developments, it was a textbook case in which the state had merely substituted one set of rulers for another, taking the place of the landlord in the antagonistic landlord-tenant relationship. Ward often quoted the Dutch architect John Habraken's pithy encapsulation of this dynamic: "Man no longer houses himself: he is housed."[87]

If the "housing" of voiceless clients was the standard approach of state bureaucrats, the operative principle of mutual aid in the area of housing was *dweller control*. In outlining this principle, Ward preferred to quote his friend and fellow anarchist John Turner:

> When dwellers control the major decisions and are free to make their own contribution to the design, construction or management of their housing, both the process and the environment produced stimulate individual and social well-being. When people have no control over, nor responsibility for key decisions in the

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[83] Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, 73.

[84] Ward, *Housing*, 40.

[85] Ibid., 94.

[86] In the United States, the absurdly wasteful consequences of this hierarchical approach were best exemplified by the demolition of public housing projects like the infamous Pruitt-Igoe development in St. Louis in the early 1970s.

[87] John Habraken quoted in Ward, *Housing*, 80.

housing process, on the other hand, dwelling environments may instead become a barrier to personal fulfillment and a burden on the economy.[88]

Dwellers' control was but a specific instance of "the same principle of autonomy and responsibility that anarchists apply to industry, education, social welfare and every other sphere of human activity."[89] Ward often wrote of the need to give dwellers the ability "to attack their environment, to modify it and make it their own. Otherwise they will always be like moujiks, gingerly camping out in the drawing room of the Tsar's palace, half awed and half resentful of the load of architecture that has been handed out to them."[90] The control one has over one's living space, Ward suggested, should approximate the kind of control one has over a personal possession. He was not inclined to condemn the emphasis on home ownership that is so characteristic of the United States and was increasingly characteristic of Britain in the postwar years as reactionary and "petty-bourgeois." Affording individuals control over personal space and personal objects was not only a crucial means of facilitating their happiness and fulfillment, but of activating a sense of autonomy, responsibility, and connection to the manmade environment.

As with any other activity, the best way for people to learn housing was by doing it themselves, which meant suspending the obsession with efficiency long enough to allow for experimentation and mistakes. Ward celebrated direct action takeovers of unoccupied houses by the homeless (and indeed the entire "hidden history" of "cotters and squatters"[91]), the self-build movement, the formation of housing associations and cooperatives, and efforts to educate the public through handbooks and guides about the

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[88] See John Turner and Robert Fichter, eds., *Freedom to Build: Dweller Control of the Housing Process* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 241.

[89] Ward, *Housing*, 8.

[90] Ibid., 55-56.

[91] See his *Cotters and Squatters: The Hidden History of Housing* (Nottingham, UK: Five Leaves, 2005).

planning process so as to demystify it and enable greater popular participation. If the state

was to provide assistance to housing endeavors, it had to be pressured into maximizing

the potential for tenants to modify their surroundings, rather than constraining their every

move with rules and restrictions, as was generally the case. Along with Turner, Ward

believed that it was better for the state to provide tenants with "site and services" and

allow them to construct their own domiciles than it was to bestow cookie-cutter

prefabricated housing from on high.[92] Barring this arrangement, Ward advocated

involving tenants in the management of existing housing projects in such a way that they

could gain the experience necessary in order to gradually take full control.[93]

Although he was sympathetic to the desire for private ownership of individual

homes, Ward pictured most residences being placed under "social" ownership. But this

required avoiding the confusion of society with the state. Social ownership of housing

meant *co-operative* ownership, rather than municipal or state ownership.[94] And it

presumed that the owners and the managers would be one and the same: the tenants

themselves. The proliferation of such co-operative arrangements, Ward writes, "is not

anarchy, but it is one of its ingredients."[95]

Long-term antagonisms, short-term alliances

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[92] Ward described the "site and services" approach as follows: "Provide roads and services and a service core: kitchen sink, bath, WC and ring-main connection, put up some party walls (to overcome the fire-risk objection) and you will have long queues of families anxious to build the rest of the house for themselves, or to employ one of our vast number of unemployed building workers to help, or to get their brother-in-law or some moonlighting tradesman or the Community Industry to help, within the party walls. Such a carnival of construction would have important spin-offs in other branches of the social problems industry: ad hoc jobs and training for unemployed teenagers, turning the local vandals into builders, and the children into back-yard horticulturalists." *Talking Houses*, 25.
[93] As a paradigmatic example of this idea, Ward pointed to a successful arrangement of just this kind between tenants and the municipal government of Oslo, Norway.
[94] Ward, *Housing*, 156.
[95] Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, 73.

Ward's approach to the problem of social welfare endeavored to strike the same balance between "short-term" and "long-term" strategies that he and Ostergaard had called for in the realm of production. The idea was to carve out ever-wider spheres of popular control and to work towards the establishment of completely autonomous, democratically-run enterprises. The long-term goal, however distant, was the complete supersession of the welfare state by a welfare "society." But as some of the above examples suggest, in the short-term it was at times advisable to work with the state rather than eschew it entirely. Even the rather austere "site and services" approach that Ward and Turner endorsed in the area of housing retained an important role for centralized state power, which was necessary, wrote Turner, to ensure "equitable access to resources which local communities and people cannot provide for themselves."[96] Aside from making use of the state's resources, it was increasingly possible in the 1960s and 1970s to make use of its cooperation, as the British and American governments began to experiment in various ways with involving citizens in the planning and administration of state-funded projects. Many of these experiments were notorious failures, but they did help to stimulate community control initiatives that persisted beyond the demise of the official programs.[97]

   It was in this context that Paul Goodman imagined a kind of neo-New Deal arising that would establish a more active partnership between federal government and local communities. He found inspiration for this idea in the history of American

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[96] John F. C. Turner, *Housing by People: Towards Autonomy in Building Environments* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), xiv.

[97] For the American case, see Daniel P. Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty* (New York: The Free Press, 1969) and Noel A. Cazenave, *Impossible Democracy: The Unlikely Success of the War on Poverty Community Action Programs* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007).

populism, which included notable instances of popular efforts to garner the support of national power for local initiatives. As Kevin Mattson writes, Goodman "wanted the New Left to follow the populists—to work through local power channels in order to reform the entire society along democratic lines. If the federal government could help by playing a role, Goodman argued, it should."[98] He envisioned "local direct action" complementing "more conventional politics—including electoral and coalition politics as well as political structures ensuring stability." And (like Ward) he found much to admire in the Scandinavian system, which balanced state initiatives with popular associations.[99]

The decidedly pragmatic attitude typical of both Ward and Goodman was informed by the idea that, whatever its managerial tendencies, the modern state was too vast and complex to be completely "monolithic." It was inaccurate and irresponsible, then, to construe its activities as wholly inimical to anarchist objectives. Rather, the state "contains particular interests that happen to be ours, in making the legislation work." The key is to "[use] every loophole in *their* legislation for *our* purposes."[100] Ward constantly reiterated the need to find anarchist possibilities within the existing order. He advocated, for example, Claimants' Unions that would exert popular pressure on the welfare bureaucracy in order to take fullest advantage of the services made available by the state.[101] Although exploiting state-sponsored social welfare, Ward writes, "is no substitute for social justice…until we can achieve the latter we have to make use of the former."[102]

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[98] Mattson, *Intellectuals in Action*, 133.
[99] Ibid., 134.
[100] Ward, *Talking Houses*, 136.
[101] See Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, 120. This was a strategy that had much in common with the tactics of the Welfare Rights movement in the United States. See Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage, 1977).
[102] Colin Ward, *Tenants Take Over* (London: The Architectural Press, Ltd, 1974), 120.

The most emphatic New Anarchist argument for state intervention, however, is that which Noam Chomsky has made repeatedly ever since the conservative reaction of the 1980s in Britain and the United States began threatening to unravel the most progressive aspects of the state welfare system. Chomsky argues that under the conditions created by contemporary capitalism, particularly with the deregulations of the Thatcher-Reagan era, the threat to democracy from concentrated private power now greatly outweighs the threat from concentrated public power. Corporate destruction of the world's resources has grown so severe that the very survival of the human species has been called into question. This is the grave situation that anarchists must face up to, and it is hard to escape the conclusion that only vigorous state power will be enough to cut the legs out from under the corporate beasts roaming the earth. Although it is true that Big Business and Big Government often make common cause, there is still potential for using the latter to counteract the former. Adopting a phrase used by South American workers' unions, Chomsky argues that under present conditions, it is sometimes necessary to "expand the floor of the cage," in the sense of broadening state regulations and provisions in order to counteract greater threats from private power and to alleviate suffering in the short term. As he explains:

> We know we're in a cage. We know we're trapped. We're going to expand the floor, meaning we will extend to the limits what the cage will allow. And we intend to destroy the cage. But not by attacking the cage when we're vulnerable…You have to protect the cage when it's under attack from even worse predators from outside, like private power. And you have to expand the floor of the cage, recognising that it's a cage. These are all preliminaries to dismantling it. Unless people are willing to tolerate that level of complexity, they're going to be of no use to people who are suffering and who need help, or, for that matter, to themselves.[103]

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[103] David Barsamian, "Expanding the Floor of the Cage: An Interview with Noam Chomsky" *Z Magazine* 10, no. 3 (April 1997): 36-43.

Compared to the preeminent form of private power—the corporation, whose organization is as hierarchical and totalitarian as the worst political tyranny—the state is at least minimally responsive to popular pressures. To eliminate it prematurely is to place society entirely under the domination of corporate tyrants and to forestall any conceivable campaign to construct a democratic alternative. This is what allows Chomsky to conclude that "protecting the state sector today is a step towards abolishing the state because it maintains a public arena in which people can participate, and organize, and affect policy, and so on, though in limited ways."[104] Even the anarchist, Chomsky suggests, must come to the defense of the state when it is under attack by an even less acceptable alternative. One can only assume that in Chomsky's eyes this responsibility does not preclude simultaneous efforts to extend the sphere of popular control in myriad ways, since he has consistently supported such efforts. But it does lead to a rather more pessimistic outlook than one finds in earlier New Anarchist writing. When Ward distinguished between short-term and long-term goals, he, too, assumed that the state would persist into the indefinite future and that it might be better to work with it in some instances than always to work against it. But his was a much more qualified version of that position, and he placed his overall emphasis on the need to start building up the new society within the shell of the old. When Chomsky makes a similar distinction between "goals" and "visions," his hopes for realizing a stateless society appear exceedingly dim next to the pressing need to protect and even expand the embattled welfare state. Nevertheless, his position represents not a qualitative break with the commitments we have identified with other New Anarchists, but a contingent reordering of priorities stemming from a

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[104] Chomsky, *Chomsky on Anarchism*, 213.

particularly gloomy assessment of contemporary prospects for advancing the anarchist cause.

Conclusion

Whatever social advances it could claim to its credit, the system of managed capitalism that resulted in the welfare state was a paltry substitute for the vision of socialist revolution that fired the imagination of early anarchists. With the rise of the welfare state, Colin Ward writes, "[t]he socialist ideal was rewritten as a world in which everyone was entitled to everything, but where nobody except the providers had any actual say about anything."[105] In practice, of course, even the purported "entitlements" of state welfare were not as generous or egalitarian as their sponsors made them out to be. But it was the second aspect of the welfare state that was most troubling to the New Anarchists: its contribution to the steady attrition of the public sphere and the enervation of democracy. It was that quality more than any other that made the state-sponsored affluence of the postwar era a "vulnerable utopia." The very material security the welfare state helped to guarantee drove a shift in popular attitudes towards an emphasis on "spiritual" rather than "material" values and a more robust conception of self-realization. Accordingly, the economic achievements of the welfare state came to look insignificant next to its glaring shortcomings with respect to democratic empowerment. The managerial style of the state bureaucracy became a source of profound alienation and dissatisfaction for a generation of young people revolting against paternalistic authority in the name of individual freedom and self-determination. In the 1960s their "Great Refusal" of the entire managerial apparatus had a constructive quality to it, for it was

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[105] Ward, *Social Policy*, 12.

combined with the reinvigoration of the ideal of participatory democracy and the effort to create a more egalitarian public sphere and mode of public administration. The backlash against the managerial elite during that era, however, helped to pave the way for the rise of a new paradigm during the next that sought a wholesale break with the aims no less than the methods of the welfare state.

The 1970s saw in both Britain and the United States the reemergence of the so-called "New Right" of *laissez-faire* liberalism, assumed by the social theorists of the prior three decades to be dead and buried. The main objective of the conservative administrations that came to power at the end of that decade was to effect a dramatic reduction in the welfare bureaucracy and in government regulation of the private sector. But in the process of changing the political culture they also managed to pull off a kind of discursive coup, appropriating for their pro-capitalist ideology many of the terms once associated with the socialist left—terms like "mutual aid," "self-help," "individual autonomy," "community," and the appellation "libertarian." In so doing, they stripped them of much of their critical power while preserving their anti-statist connotations. "Individual autonomy," for example, has come to be identified with self-ownership and with an absolutist form of sovereignty over personal property. Concepts like "community" and "mutual aid," on the other hand, have been interpreted by conservatives to imply a throwback to a more culturally, religiously, and racially integrated order, rooted in parochial lifeways and hostile to disruptive efforts to secure social justice for all strata of the population.

"The political Left has," Ward argues, "committed an enormous psychological error in allowing this kind of language to be appropriated by the political Right." He

leaves no doubt as to the identity of the culprits: "It was those clever Fabians and academic Marxists who ridiculed out of existence the values by which ordinary citizens govern their own lives in favour of bureaucratic paternalising, leaving those values around to be picked up by their political opponents."[106] This has led to the general belief that the notions like self-help and mutual aid are "Conservative platitudes," and it has allowed the right to use such language as "a smokescreen to conceal the abdication of governmental responsibilities." "I cannot imagine," muses Ward, "how these phrases came to be dirty words for socialists since they refer to human attributes without which any conceivable socialist society would founder."[107]

Despite his deep objections to the New Right, Ward found value, at least, in the fact that their onslaught on political orthodoxy had forced people to reexamine their assumptions about the role of government. The task of the anarchist was not to aid the right's cause, but to exploit the situation it had created in order to raise questions about the state from an anarchist perspective. Most importantly, it was vital that anarchists break down the false "choice" the conservatives were positing between big, bureaucratic government and unrestrained capitalism:

> What the anarchist has to attempt is to change the terms of the debate, to change the way in which people perceive the issue, to suggest a different and libertarian way of stating the problem. The assumption in the kind of welfare capitalist society we live in, is that the magic of the market will satisfy most ordinary human needs, and that government-administered welfare bureaucracies will meet the rest. The ideology of the passive consumer is assumed in both sectors.[108]

Anarchists were positioned like no other group on the political spectrum to talk about the need for a "visible" hand to administer social affairs consciously and rationally, but to

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[106] Ward, *Talking Houses*, 58.
[107] Colin Ward, *When We Build Again: Let's Have Housing that Works!* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), 27.
[108] Ward, *Housing*, 8.

define that public agency in terms of cooperative popular control rather than paternalistic bureaucratic management. This did not mean that working towards an anarchist alternative would be straightforward or easy, however: "The appalling problem," writes Ward, "is the question of how we get back on the mutual aid road *instead of* commercial health insurance and private pension schemes."[109]

No longer was furthering the anarchist alternative a matter of banking all hopes on a central revolutionary struggle. Instead, anarchists had to cast their gaze over the full range of social institutions and relationships, looking for openings into which they might drive wedges of democracy, and for already-existing tendencies of mutual aid that might be cultivated and extended. Indeed, mutual aid was too deep-seated and resilient a human tendency to be extinguished entirely, even during the darkest times. In fact, as Ward describes it, it is ever-present, springing up in gaps where the state is not active, leavening institutional arrangements which might otherwise be barren of human solidarity, and otherwise continually enriching human relationships with reminders that cooperation, rather than coercion or competition, is the sturdiest foundation of the general welfare.

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[109] Ward, *Social Policy*, 17.

Chapter 4

Towards an Anarchist *Paideia*:
The Place of Education in the New Anarchism

[A] democratic method of education is the only guarantee of a democratic revolution.

Herbert Read

The chief function of a political society is to educate its young.

Paul Goodman

The term Paul Goodman liked to use for the managerial dystopia taking shape in the 1940s and 1950s was the "Organized System," an interlocking structure of private and public institutions overseen by elites whose role was to ensure its "smooth functioning."[1] That functioning was assured by organizing political and social life in a rigidly ordered, predictable way, conducive to the social scientist endeavoring to understand it and the social engineer endeavoring to manipulate it. Disorder within the System was neutralized through fine-tuning rather than qualitative change, and all sense of social possibility was firmly reined in by the assumption that the status quo would persist indefinitely in its main outline. Systemic equilibrium was realized when potentially disruptive individual elements were functionally integrated with the needs of the whole; in the case of the human inhabitants of the System, this was achieved through a process of "socialization"[2] aimed at conditioning them into conformity with the prevailing culture.

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[1] Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd* (New York: Vintage, 1960), 128.
[2] This sociological concept of "socialization" is, of course, distinct from the concept employed in the preceding chapter.

The novel approach that Goodman adopted in his *Growing Up Absurd*, serialized by Norman Podhoretz in *Commentary* and then published in paperback by Random House in 1960, was to evaluate this System from the standpoint of the young people who were expected to take it seriously, to obey it, and to find fulfillment in it. The fact that disaffection was on the rise amongst youth was already well known to the System's technicians, who were in the midst of debates about the causes of "juvenile delinquency." But these debates, unfailingly, portrayed disaffected youth as "deviants" from a default condition of assimilation; in other words, their failure to behave as the System expected of them was the main "problem" to be solved, chiefly through the development of more reliable techniques of socialization. Goodman turned the predominant perspective on its head. Instead of asking how young people could be better reconciled to the existing social order, he asked whether they were being offered a society worth growing up into at all. The real question, as he phrased it, was "socialization into *what*?"[3] Putting the matter into those terms yielded the conclusion that

> our abundant society is at present simply deficient in many of the most elementary objective opportunities and worth-while goals that could make growing up possible. It is lacking in enough man's work. It is lacking in honest public speech, and people are not taken seriously. It is lacking in the opportunity to be useful. It thwarts aptitude and creates stupidity. It corrupts ingenuous patriotism. It corrupts the fine arts. It shackles science. It dampens animal ardor. It discourages the religious convictions of Justification and Vocation and it dims the sense that there is a Creation. It has no Honor. It has no Community.[4]

It was hardly surprising, then, that young people joined gangs, that they "dropped out" in order to form subcultures like the Beats, that they were apathetic with respect to their futures. These were not the irrational responses of defective people mysteriously incapable of appreciating the bounty that society laid before them, but the *rational*

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[3] Ibid., 11, my emphasis.
[4] Ibid., 12.

responses of individuals who knew, if only intuitively, that the social order they were supposed to adopt as their own was spiritually bankrupt.

The "problem," in short, was not with those who resisted the System's enticements, but with the System itself. Juvenile delinquency was a sign of human vitality, an expression, however crude, of natural needs and impulses that the System was unable or unwilling to accommodate. Seriously addressing the causes of youth discontent required breaking free of the "consensus" mentality that had predominated since the end of the war and putting fundamental social change back on the table. Young people needed to have opportunities not to fit themselves into a pre-constituted social order, but to take control of their own individual and social lives, shaping a shared world that not only provided for their material well-being, but offered more existential satisfactions in the form of meaningful relationships, prospects for self-realization, and individual freedom.

Having captured an as-yet inchoate generational Zeitgeist, *Growing Up Absurd* went on to become "one of the campus bibles of the sixties."[5] This was only fitting, for in that book, and in several other books to follow during the decade after its publication, Goodman located the most promising possibilities of resistance and regeneration in education and educational institutions. Education in the hands of the managerial mandarins who oversaw the System was oriented towards molding plastic human material into a productive and compliant form, "adjusting" individuals as necessary so as to fit them into specific roles within the social division of labor. Education as Goodman conceived of it, by contrast, began with the presumption that there were innate tendencies within the human organisms in question, tendencies whose cultivation was essential to

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[5] Norman Podhoretz, *Making It* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), 220.

human development and happiness, and which were often at odds with the requirements of the System. If the "absurdity" of the controlled, artificial, materialistic world of the managers was to be overcome, education would have to be reinvented as a force for liberation rather than "adjustment." It would have to be directed towards humanistic ends, grounded in natural human needs irreducible to the System's functional imperatives. It would have to be concerned with awakening the capacities necessary for a rich sense of social agency. And, finally, it would have to be overseen by self-governing communities which, by creating exemplary models of democracy and fostering autonomy in their members, would encourage the extension of those principles into the wider social world.

Goodman's work on education was the most prominent example of a trend within the left, and within the New Anarchism specifically, to look to educational reform as perhaps the most favorable avenue through which to effect social change. For those who identified with the anarchist tradition, this was less of an innovation than it was a fresh affirmation of a current within anarchist thought and practice whose pedigree dated all the way back to William Godwin. Godwin was not only the first modern thinker to put forward an articulate vision of a stateless society, but one of the most forward-looking critics of the educational practices of his time. Indeed, Godwin's anarchism and his educational unorthodoxy were interdependent, for he envisioned education as the principal vehicle of social transformation, a strategy of reform which would be not only more peaceful, but more profound and lasting in its effects than revolution on the French model.

In order for education to play that transformative role, Godwin argued, it was necessary to protect it from colonization by the means and ends of the state. In his 1793

Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, he opposed contemporary calls for a system of public education on the grounds that placing education under state control would turn it into an instrument of social stabilization and domination. State-run education would take as its main objective the shaping of obedient and patriotic citizens who would associate "freedom" with existing political institutions and practices. In state schools, he warned, students would be taught to venerate constitutions and established authorities rather than the pursuit of truth. They would be inculcated with existing prejudices rather than developing a critical mindset guided by reason, augmented by evidence, and geared towards present utility. Their individual self-realization, furthermore, would be sacrificed to the ends of the state, which relied for its very existence on the ignorance and dependency of the population. Implicitly, state elites knew they would be rendered superfluous were individuals trained to use their rational faculties and exercise their innate potential for autonomous thought and action. They had a vested interest, then, in denying people the knowledge and autonomy that would empower them to take charge of their own affairs. By adopting the state's ends as its own, a state-run educational system would, effectively, institutionalize ignorance rather than foster enlightenment.[6]

Godwin took issue not only with the proposed fusion of educational institutions with the state, however, but with the standard pedagogical approaches of his era. Educators were principally concerned with imparting a rigid, preordained curriculum divorced from everyday life. They treated children as passive receptacles of knowledge with little to contribute to their own learning, and they assumed that information was best

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[6] The notion of the state as an enemy of enlightenment (and, by inversion, the anarchist as an agent of enlightenment) runs through the anarchist tradition. Arguably, it received its most forceful statement in the 20th century in Robert Paul Wolff's *In Defense of Anarchism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

communicated to disciplined and obedient subjects. Instead, Godwin argued, teachers should build off of the interests and abilities of their students, teasing out, encouraging, and guiding internal wellsprings of motivation into constructive channels. Imposing constraints and punishments in an effort to confer a standardized body of knowledge was absolutely inimical to this process. Rightly understood, teaching was about removing obstacles to natural inclinations and encouraging "habits of intellectual activity" rather than fitting students into a particular mold.[7] In order to maximize the liberty of the child, knowledge should be communicated "without infringing, or with as little as possible violence to, the volition and individual judgment of the person to be instructed."[8]

In all of these respects, Godwin's educational philosophy was virtually a carbon copy of that limned by his muse Rousseau in the *Emile*. But Godwin's estimation of the capabilities of children was even more radical than Rousseau's. Rousseau distinguished emphatically between the capacities of the child and the capacities of the man, cautioning in particular against imputing the rationality of adults to children. Children were not to be overly disciplined, but neither were they to be reasoned with. Rather, the art of pedagogy, as Rousseau imagined it, was to steer the pupil towards his best interests through various contrivances, masking the operation of the master's will so that the process appeared to happen "naturally." He explicitly justified this approach not only on the basis of its pedagogical efficacy, but on the grounds that it would prevent pupils from becoming "disputatious and rebellious" by denying them the possibility of questioning or challenging the master's actions directly.[9] It was for these reasons that Godwin called the

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[7] William Godwin, *The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature* (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1797), 5.
[8] Ibid., 76.
[9] Rousseau, *Emile*, 89.

Emile highly "pernicious" as a "guide of practice"[10] and accused Rousseau's system of education of being "a series of tricks, a puppet-show exhibition, of which the master holds the wires, and the scholar is never to suspect in what manner they are moved."[11] Godwin argued, in contrast to Rousseau, that teachers should endeavor to establish relationships of "perfect sincerity," striving for openness and honesty in all things, admitting their fallibility, and treating their pupils, as far as possible, as equals. Deception and manipulation on the part of the instructor were never justified, not only because of their innate immorality, but because, being easily detected, they were highly corrosive to any attempt to build a relationship of trust. Rather than a duplicitous performance concealing ulterior motives, instruction should be closer in nature to a *discussion*, in which the reasoning of teacher and pupil alike is recognized as valid. Reasoned moral judgment being the most essential skill of individuals in a free society, rational communication was to be privileged in every possible instance, creating continuity and reciprocity rather than Rousseau's qualitative gap between a childlike state of tutelage and a mature state of autonomy. As Colin Ward notes in an essay on Godwin (one of nine people he considered his major influences), "[t]he revolution in attitudes to childhood which Rousseau initiated asserted the right of the child to be valued as a child and not as a diminutive or imperfect adult. Godwin values the child as a *person* who is a child and who will be an adult."[12] Rousseau's influence, more than that of any other figure, was paramount within later traditions of "progressive" and "libertarian" education, which seized upon the idea that children should be allowed to be children, and that the responsibility of the educator was to foster the growth of the child in response to the

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[10] Ibid., 108.

[11] Ibid., 106.

[12] Colin Ward, *Influences: Voices of Creative Dissent* (Hartland, UK: Green Books, 1991), 42.

latter's most immediate needs and interests, rather than piling on expectations and information properly suited to the world of adults. But Godwinian ideas about respecting the child's moral autonomy, avoiding deception, and protecting education from being subordinated to state ends, also came to be taken for granted by many later educational thinkers (though rather more by "libertarians" than "progressives").[13]

Like later libertarian educators, Godwin recognized that education was about much more than the intentional efforts of instructors. He had a much broader understanding of educative influences than could be encompassed in the teacher/student relationship, holding that any "incident that produces an idea in the mind," was in some sense educative, helping to determine the mental growth of the individual. One implication of this was that "accidental education," deriving from the innumerable stimuli present in everyday life, played a major role in shaping character.[14] While for Godwin this fact seems to have been a matter of concern (he predicted that rightly-directed intentional education "would have a decisive advantage over the desultory influence of accidental impression"),[15] New Anarchists like Goodman and Ward invoked it in stressing the importance of creating an educative *environment* rather than restricting education to a sharply-delineated classroom.

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[13] In this chapter, I follow the precedent of Joel Spring and Michael D. Smith in treating anarchist education as a subset of a broader "libertarian" tradition. See Joel Spring, *A Primer on Libertarian Education* (Montreal, Quebec: Black Rose Books, 1975) and Michael D. Smith, *The Libertarians and Education* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983). That "libertarian" tradition itself overlaps in many ways with what is often called "progressive" education (in fact, they are not often distinguished), whose towering figure in the 20th century was John Dewey, and which reaches back into the work of educators like Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Montessori. I take "libertarian" education to signify education that approximates—often implicitly rather than explicitly—anarchist principles of organization and decision-making, and/or is linked to a radically decentralist and democratic agenda of political change. Thus, one might include in the category of "libertarian" educational figures like A. S. Neill and Paolo Freire, whose work was not consciously anarchist but more radical in practice than much of what passes for "progressive" education.

[14] William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (London: Penguin, 1976), 111.

[15] Ibid., 112.

Godwin was convinced that the transformative effects of education would extend far beyond individual pupils. The gradual preparation of minds for the exercise of moral autonomy would help to reform society peacefully from within. Breaking the hold of ignorance and nourishing reason through the proper pedagogical guidance would dissolve arbitrary authority and indirectly delegitimize the state. The state's edifice of rules, regulations, institutions, and ceremonies would be deadweight in a society populated by rational individuals, whose relationships would be direct and nonhierarchical. Reason would easily discern which behaviors were necessary to the preservation of society, and artificial conflict would be supplanted by sincere dialogue amongst equals. Godwin looked to education, then, as a peaceful means of effecting radical change that would obviate the need for violent revolution.

Godwin's thoroughgoing rationalism was not always embraced by later libertarians, but variants of his ideas can be discerned in the thought and practice of almost all subsequent libertarian educators. Most radicals of the 19th century, however, were concerned less with using education to undermine the state than to counteract the dehumanizing effects of capitalist production, particularly the specialization that funneled all of a worker's training and ability into a limited number of tasks and rendered workers highly susceptible to fluctuations in the labor market. Godwin's concern with moral autonomy was supplemented by socialists with a set of somewhat earthier objectives. They advocated an "integral education" that united mental and manual work, combined theoretical with practical knowledge, and offered generalized vocational training that would allow individuals to move between different crafts. An integral education was one which "developed all aspects of a person's potential—physical, emotional, intellectual

and imaginative."[16] Passing from Fourier into the French socialist and anarchist traditions via Proudhon, the concept was eventually endorsed by the First International (it was favorably invoked by both Marx and Bakunin), and was part of the program of educational reform sponsored by the Paris Commune. Popular amongst anarchists in the 1890s who were disillusioned with violent tactics and increasingly interested in peaceful and gradual means of change, integral education was also the subject of the last section of Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories, and Workshops*, which greatly influenced New Anarchists like Goodman, Ward and Herbert Read.

The late 19th century saw numerous attempts to put libertarian educational ideas into practice. Not all of these were directly tied to socialism or anarchism; Tolstoy's school at Yasnaya Polyana, for instance, became one of the most famous examples of the libertarian approach in operation. Generally speaking, however, educational experiments of this kind fed off of, and sought to contribute to, the socialist and anarchist movements. Some, like Fernand Pelloutier, sought to set up schools within the anarcho-syndicalist movement itself, encouraging syndicates to create an educational network that ran parallel to the state. For various reasons, these schools had trouble sustaining themselves. More successful were schools established by sympathetic individuals who operated independently. Particularly influential was Paul Robin's school at Cempuis, which inspired many similarly-structured "free schools" outside of the state system (though it operated, unusually, within it). These included Madeleine Vernet's L'Avenir Social, Sébastien Faure's La Ruche, and, most famously, Francisco Ferrer's Escuela Moderna in Barcelona. After Ferrer's politically-motivated execution by Spanish authorities in 1909 sparked outrage around the world, his approach became the preeminent model of

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[16] Smith, *The Libertarians and Education*, 11.

libertarian education, inspiring imitators in many different countries. This included

numerous experiments in the United States, where Emma Goldman and others helped to

set up a Ferrer Association to spread his ideas.[17] It was during this period that

"libertarian" education was, effectively, synonymous with *anarchist* education.

Because of its great influence, it is useful to use Ferrer's school as a model of an

anarchist educational institution. Although some free schools catered mainly to the

children of the working class, the Escuela Moderna was as inclusive as possible, boasting

an educational agenda that was not strictly proletarian in character. It did, however, make

a special effort to ensure access to families of restricted means by offering sliding tuition

fees. And like other free schools, it was proudly coeducational. Attendance at the Escuela

Moderna was not compulsory, and those students who chose to attend class of their own

volition enjoyed an atmosphere of great freedom. There were no rigid timetables, no

rewards or punishments, no examinations or grades. There was no emphasis on fear or

competition. Students were given a role in the administration of the school, along with

their parents. The school did have a curriculum, but it was specially commissioned by

Ferrer after he could find no suitable textbooks already in existence. In the tradition of

"integral education," Ferrer eschewed distinctions between manual and mental labor and

tried to guide students towards theoretical knowledge through practical activity. He used

field trips (highly innovative at the time) to get students outside of the classroom and into

their environment, where they could learn about subjects firsthand.

The educational agenda of the school made no pretense to neutrality. Lessons

actively sought to inculcate values of brotherhood, cooperation, and social justice, while

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[17] The longest-running and most famous Modern School, in fact, was the Stelton Modern School in New Jersey, which endured from 1915-1953. See Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006).

promoting critical attitudes towards capitalism, militarism, royalism, and the state. But the school was never intended to be an isolated refuge for like-minded libertarians. Its reach was meant to extend beyond its students and beyond its walls. It sponsored lectures by prominent scholars that parents as well as children were encouraged to attend, and during the second year of the school these evolved into regular evening classes for adults. The school became a community meeting place, and Ferrer ran a radical publishing house out of the same building, producing books for all ages.

Like other libertarian educators, Ferrer had his idiosyncrasies—his virulent rationalism and secularism, for example, seem to have been reactions against the unusually strong influence of the Catholic Church in Spanish society—but in its general outline his school shared a great deal with other free schools. It goes without saying that these schools did not directly influence a large number of students—they were small and generally short-lived. But far from merely enabling an alienated minority to "drop out" of the state system, they were meant to serve as the seeds of a revolutionary transformation of society. Their goal was to shape individuals who were capable of, and committed to, changing the world—not through indoctrination but through the development of natural inclinations and abilities that were discouraged by the surrounding social environment. In their internal organization and operation, they sought to offer models of radical democracy and community. In living out rather than merely teaching ideals, they were meant to project a radiating influence through the propaganda of deeds. Their ends were political rather than personal.[18]

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[18] As Judith Suissa writes: "Anarchist educators, although they did indeed aim to create a community that represented a particular way of social organization and a way of life different from that typical of the surrounding society, nevertheless saw themselves as constantly engaging the outside world—

However indicative educational experiments like Ferrer's were of a broader tactical shift within the anarchist movement at the end of the 19th century, they still took place during an era of great revolutionary excitement. For most classical anarchists, education took a backseat to more direct strategies of revolutionary agitation. The most pressing need was to "awaken" the masses so that they would rise up and cast off their chains; few envisioned setting off on a long and arduous journey of cultivation that would gradually transform society from the inside out. In the decidedly less optimistic atmosphere of the postwar era, however, the New Anarchists were, understandably, far more inclined to embrace precisely this kind of approach to social change. Herbert Read, in his introduction to *The Redemption of the Robot*, went so far as to claim that "the only hope of changing the world is through those processes of physical and mental training we call *education*."[19] Overstated though it may be, the sentiment was an apt reflection of the shift from traditional models of revolution to a new search for gradual, peaceful methods that could bore holes into the status quo and radiate outwards.

The timeliness of the New Anarchists' interest in education was not, however, solely a product of shifting revolutionary strategy. The middle decades of the century saw a massive expansion of higher education and a general growth of administrative bureaucracy that turned schools into hierarchical, impersonal machines, programmed to churn out "organization men" who would be productive and obedient members of society. In Goodman's terms, the school's traditional role of socialization had, under the sway of the Organized System, degenerated into behaviorist social engineering that was

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as, indeed, involved in an ongoing process of interaction with it in their efforts to bring about the social change they saw as so essential." *Anarchism and Education* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 97.

[19] Herbert Read, *The Redemption of the Robot: My Encounter with Education through Art* (New York: Trident Press, 1966), xxvii.

wholly captive to the needs of state and market. Pedagogically, managerial and technocratic values informed the curriculum and the teacher-student relationship was pervaded by inequality and paternalism. More than ever before, there was desperate need of an anarchist antidote that would mount a Godwinian challenge to the cooptation of education by elite interests.

That did not mean dispensing with state-run, or at least state-funded, educational institutions entirely (certainly not in the short term), although New Anarchists did support educational experimentation outside of the state system. In the 1960s, new opportunities emerged in places like New York City to promote decentralization within already-existing public school districts. Furthermore, with the growth of student radicalism in public and private institutions of higher education in both the United States and Britain, there was hope that college campuses might be democratized—managed by, or at least with the participation of, students and faculty. That hope was reflected in Goodman's renovation of the medieval ideal of the university as a "community of scholars," a self-governing, independent, and humanistic body which stood in tension, in certain respects, with its surrounding society.

The libertarian philosophy of education informing the New Anarchists' critiques of the wayward educational practices of their time, and the "practical proposals" they offered as alternatives, received its most extended exposition in the work of Herbert Read and Paul Goodman. In shifting education from the supplementary role it played during the bygone days of insurrectionary and syndicalist anarchism to the center of the struggle to liberate individuals from the System and enact radical social change, Read and

Goodman invested it with philosophical and practical significance unrivaled in the thought of any anarchist thinker since Godwin.

Read's education through art

Herbert Read believed his educational writings, beginning with 1943's *Education through Art*, to be his most significant contributions to anarchist theory. This belief is somewhat counterintuitive, for nowhere in those writings does Read make explicit reference to anarchism (aside from directing his readers in a footnote to his *Poetry and Anarchism*). Furthermore, his heavy emphasis on art—he argued that "art should be the basis of all education"—suggests, on the surface, a rather idiosyncratic position. But Read's educational thought fits squarely into the libertarian educational tradition, and despite his conscious effort to downplay politics in his educational writings (which were intended for wide audiences), there is no doubt that he saw the implications of his educational proposals as thoroughly anarchist in nature.

When Read called for "education through art," he had a strikingly expansive definition of "art" in mind. Human beings are born into the world, he believed, with an innate aesthetic sensibility. This sensibility helps humans to appreciate patterns and to pattern their own perception as a means of giving order to experience. For this reason, it is at the heart of the learning process, which Read suggested might be understood as the "acquisition of pattern behavior."[20] As an organic outgrowth of human evolution, this faculty has a biological component, arising out of "an animal instinct for fitness and harmony."[21] But Read was more concerned with linking it to what were at that time the cutting-edge insights of Gestalt psychology. This school of thought held that reality itself

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[20] Read, *The Redemption of the Robot*, 22.
[21] Ibid., 238.

was apprehended in an aesthetic manner, in accordance with an inborn need to integrate and order our experience. "Balance and symmetry, proportion and rhythm," many of the qualities we identify with art, "are basic factors in experience: indeed, they are the only elements by means of which experience can be organized into persisting patterns."[22] A "natural" education is nothing less, Read argued, than "the progressive assimilation and co-ordination of the child's sense impressions, as he begins to explore the world of things around him."[23]

While some of our perceptual organizing takes place consciously, it is also going on unconsciously, as the structures evolved in the course of our interaction with the world embed themselves in the deeper recesses of our minds. Here they "become the physically determined patterns of perception, and beyond our awareness control the habits of the mind," serving as "moulds into which our feelings and fantasies automatically fit."[24] This lattice of order provides a channel into which emotive and imaginative aspects of the human psyche are directed, giving their expression a directed, aesthetic character. Despite substantial variation in individual personality and experience, all of humanity shares the most fundamental substrata of this psychic bedrock. Read believed, following Jung, that the personal unconscious is linked to a "collective" unconscious which gathers together the most universal kinds of patterns and constantly works to organize the "*irregular or rudimentary images*" present in individual organisms.[25] These "archetypes" are the common inheritance of the human race—evident, Read claimed, in even the children's drawings and paintings he incorporated into *Education through Art*.

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[22] Herbert Read, *Education through Art* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), 61.
[23] Read, *The Redemption of the Robot*, 237-38.
[24] Ibid., 246.
[25] Read, *Education through Art*, 191.

The two main functions of education, then—learning and the integration of the individual with collective patterns of life—are at root natural processes which would largely take place automatically if allowed. The first concern of the educator should be to avoid actions that impede natural growth, to "learn the secret of action in non-action."[26] Read's faith in the patterned growth of young organisms was informed by his classicist faith in natural order (see Chapter One). The patterns that help to order perception are not unique to the subject (whether the subject is considered on an individual or a "collective" level), but reflective of the order that exists in the *object* (i.e., nature). With Plato, Read believed nature itself to be pervaded by an aesthetic principle which unites order with growth.[27] Insofar as it provides the young with positive guidance, education should seek "to give the individual a concrete sensuous awareness of the harmony and rhythm which enter into the constitution of all living bodies and plants, which is the formal basis of all works of art, to the end that the child, in its life and activities, shall partake of the same organic grace and beauty."[28] The principal aim of early education, in other words, is "to develop generic qualities of insight and sensibility" and to link these to the shaping of character.[29] At the beginning of the Western educational tradition, Plato had not only recognized this, the proper end of education, but had uncovered the appropriate means of realizing it. By no means a proponent of lifeless abstraction, Plato understood that it is education's task to render cosmic harmony *concrete*, embodying it in "things" (Rousseau's term) which could be experienced sensorily and activities which engaged the whole person—music, poetry, dance, painting, and (added the craftsman in Read) "the

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[26] Ibid., 192.
[27] The aesthetic principle, for Plato, "pervades, not only man-made things in so far as these are beautiful, but also living bodies and all plants, nature and the universe itself." Ibid., 64.
[28] Ibid., 69.
[29] Ibid., 221.

making of useful objects."[30] All of the "arts"—not just the "fine" arts, but everything

falling under the more inclusive archaic connotation of that term—are intimately linked

to the organizing, patterning activity that forms the basis of human perception and helps

to integrate the individual into the natural rhythms of the universe. But even subjects

outside of the purview of the arts can be infused with the same spirit, for art (in Read's

even broader understanding of the term) "is a way of education—not so much a subject to

be taught as a method of teaching any and all subjects."[31]

The *formal* aspect of aesthetic sensibility and artistic activity links the individual

to the most transcendent cosmic order. But art, for Read, is also a means of individual

expression which, in its variety, reflects differences in individual temperament.

Analyzing children's art, he believed, could help educators categorize children into

different personality types, each of which has its own legitimate mode of artistic

expression. This individual differentiation, Read believed, should be encouraged, for it is

a natural feature of organic development, integral to the health of the species. Teachers

have to be in a position to recognize individual differences and to guide individuals

accordingly, bringing about "the highest degree of correlation between the child's

temperament and its modes of expression."[32] The principal challenge faced by teachers is

fostering the development of individual uniqueness and the social integration of the

individual simultaneously.

In its emphasis on the development of sensibility, the approach to primary

education that Read endorsed, not unlike Rousseau's, consciously put aside the direct

cultivation of reason and logic for a later stage of growth. Read, like Rousseau, justified

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[30] Read, *The Redemption of the Robot*, 11.
[31] Ibid., 8.
[32] Read, *Education through Art*, 104.

this approach by stressing the differences between children and adults. Introducing

abstract, logical thinking to children younger than fourteen can harm early development,

dulling the vivid "eidetic" images young children form in order to process their

experience. But this does not mean that different stages of development are disconnected.

Childhood may represent "the sleep of reason," but one of the goals of aesthetic

education during this stage is to "prepar[e] a path for her."[33] Images are ultimately aids

rather than hindrances to rational thought, and there is, in fact, such a thing as a "concrete

visual mode of 'thinking.'" The Western tradition of education, Read believed, had

developed a bias towards intellectual virtue, adopting a logical approach from an early

age that split the personality between the immediacy of experience and the pallid

abstractions of standard curricula. The purpose of education through art is "to preserve

the organic wholeness of man and of his mental faculties, so that as he passes from

childhood to manhood, from savagery to civilization, he nevertheless retains the unity of

consciousness which is the only source of social harmony and individual happiness."[34] A

proper education would reconcile the senses with intuition, feeling, and thought,

achieving "the integration of all biologically useful faculties in a single organic

activity."[35] This means developing "an integrated mode of experience…in which

'thought' always has its correlate in concrete visualization—in which perception and

feeling move in organic rhythm."[36] Those who are subjected to the predominant Western

educational model emerge with "divided selves" (to adapt R. D. Laing's term), with the

development of their innate sensibilities stunted and warped. Read hoped that reforming

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[33] Ibid., 283.
[34] Ibid., 69.
[35] Ibid., 11.
[36] Ibid., 105.

educational methods would have the effect of extending the most vital aspects of childlike perception into adulthood, linking sensibility and reason together in smooth continuity.

Read's careful distinction between the faculties of children and adults distinguishes him from Godwin and from other libertarian educators who took the opposite approach, stressing the child's ability to reason and exercise judgment in a manner coequal with, or at least analogous to, his or her elders. Read was very much in agreement with Godwin, however, with respect to the latter's claim that education was at base a "moral process," and he envisioned no less than the secular rebirth of moral education in the 20th century. Education, he believed, is about the shaping of moral character before it is about the transmission of knowledge, for "[i]t is only onto a stock of goodness that knowledge can be safely grafted."[37] But the teaching of morality, having been commandeered by Christianity, had been warped into a rigid didacticism which elevated precept over practice and relied upon relationships of obedience and authority. Rightly understood, moral education dated back to Plato, who sought to cultivate an inner moral disposition using aesthetic methods. Plato recognized that "all grace of movement and harmony of living—the moral disposition of the soul itself—are determined by aesthetic feeling: by the recognition of rhythm and harmony."[38] In the modern era, Schiller, and to some extent the German educator Johann Friedrich Herbart, had attempted to resurrect this approach, premised on the notion that the appreciation of beauty precedes the apprehension of goodness and truth. An aesthetic education, Read believed, would "make the child aware of that 'instinct of relationship' which, even

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[37] Read, *The Redemption of the Robot*, 6.
[38] Read, *Education through Art*, 62.

before the advent of reason, will enable the child to distinguish the beautiful from the

ugly, the good from the evil, the right pattern of behaviour from the wrong pattern, the

noble person from the ignoble."[39] This did not, of course, mean simple cognizance of

traditional standards of beauty and codes of morality. The moral insight Read had in

mind would penetrate "beyond good and evil" as traditionally defined.

In arguing that the aesthetic method could orient individuals to the good and the

true just as it could pattern perception and feeling, Read was led to the claim that it could

help regulate human relationships organically. He was heartened by evidence from the

empirical studies of Piaget which seemed to suggest that children were capable of

evolving patterns of cooperation in their mutual interactions when left to themselves in

small groups. The only proper role of teachers in such instances is to "encourage their

children to carry out their own co-operative activities, and thus spontaneously to

elaborate their own rules." In this way, moral discipline "will not be imposed, but

discovered—discovered as the right, economical and harmonious way of action."[40]

Strong shades of Schiller's *Spieltrieb* are evident in Read's hope that play, the "most

obvious form of free expression in children," could be a source of integration that would

bring individuals into harmony with each other and the world around them, especially if

given gentle coherence and direction by teachers.[41] Read found in children's playful self-

organization inspiration for the reorganization of society as a whole; in the

"spontaneously evolved patterns" that emerge from children's free interactions with one

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[39] Ibid., 69-70. Plato, Herbart, and Nietzsche all agreed, Read argued, on the importance of : "(a) The recognition of the necessity of an order of discipline beyond morality itself; (b) the admission that the only necessity of this kind is aesthetic harmony; (c) the instinctive nature of the obedience to be achieved by moral education." *The Redemption of the Robot*, 137.

[40] Read, *The Redemption of the Robot*, 43.

[41] Read, *Education through Art*, 109. Like Schiller, Read believed that play, like perception, had an innately aesthetic character to it; it was one way through which individuals sought to integrate themselves with the organic rhythms of the universe.

another "lies hidden the pattern of a society in which all persons are free, but freely consenting to a common purpose."[42]

For all of his emphasis on spontaneity and freedom, Read was not opposed to certain kinds of habituation. The most fundamental basis of morality was not faith or reason, after all, but a "sensibility" that required a particular kind of conditioning. In the tradition of "sentimental education," Read was concerned with "how best to train the physical senses with which each individual is endowed so that they mature to that state of temperance, harmony and skill which will enable the individual to pursue the intellectual virtues in freedom of will and singleness of mind."[43] His belief in the need to "tune" the senses in this way reflected Aristotle's contention that moral virtue is a product of habit, and attracted him to Plato's proposal in the *Laws* "to associate feelings of pleasure with what is good and feelings of pain with what is evil."[44] What prevents such an approach from degenerating into arbitrary behaviorism is the fact that the "habits" Read had in mind, the rhythms and proportions which were to be associated with the good, are (so he claimed) to be found in nature itself.

The role Read envisioned for the teacher in his educational proposals necessarily represented a complex negotiation of respect for innate tendencies and the need for noncoercive guidance. Some things, he suggested, are by their very nature not amenable to "teaching" per se—notably, self-expression. But a wholly *laissez-faire* approach "has

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[42] Read, *The Redemption of the Robot*, 40. Morality, Read argued, is strongest when it evolves within the context of these mutual relationships. It is a morality not of obedience but of "attachment or reciprocity"—"the morality of harmonious societies." *Education through Art*, 277. Morality as mutuality, he writes, is focused on "the sharing of a common ideal" and "the creation of an empathetic relationship with our fellow citizens by means of common rituals, by means of imitation of the same patterns." Were this to be achieved it would obviate the need for leaders, for it would unite people "in the impersonal beauty of art." *The Redemption of the Robot*, 142.

[43] Read, *The Redemption of the Robot*, 5.

[44] Ibid., 12.

no place in the school where life is a tender shoot, to be protected, shielded, guided, led

into the light."[45] In some respects, the teacher must be to the child "as one of the

elements," effectively blending into the environment and exerting an invisible influence,

while at other times adopting a more palpable and proactive attitude.[46] At the very least,

the teacher should serve as an "attendant, guide, inspirer, psychic midwife," who helps

see to fruition development in the child that is already taking place.[47] This requires

developing an intimate sense of the unique developmental trajectory of each student, and

striving to "preserve an organic continuity" between different stages so that they merge

into one another "insensibly."[48] But in order to exert any influence at all, the teacher first

has to establish "a wholly personal relationship with his pupil, one which is based on love

and understanding for the unique personality which has been entrusted to his care."[49] The

teacher should try "to establish a relationship of reciprocity and trust between himself and

his pupil, and one of co-operation and mutual aid between all the individuals within his

care."[50] This means the teacher "must be primarily a person and not a pedagogue, a friend

rather than a master or mistress, an infinitely patient collaborator."[51]

The most important task of the teacher, however, is to create the right atmosphere,

"an atmosphere of spontaneity, of happy childish industry." The creation of such an

atmosphere "is the main and perhaps the only secret of successful teaching."[52] The

aesthetic principle should enter into "all the social and practical aspects of school life.

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[45] Ibid., 88.
[46] Read, *Education through Art*, 288.
[47] Ibid., 209.
[48] Ibid., 212.
[49] Read, *The Redemption of the Robot*, 38.
[50] Ibid., 39.
[51] Ibid., 56.
[52] Read, *Education through Art*, 295. In fact, at the primary level the teacher does "not need more than a minimum of technical or academic qualifications," only "the gift of understanding or 'enveloping' the pupil."

From the very beginning the aesthetic principle must be applied to the building of the school and its decoration, to every item of its furniture and utensils, to all the organized aspects of work and play."[53] On a small scale, Read envisioned much teaching taking place through "projects," activities that would call forth the creative powers of students even as they communicated information. On a large scale "the school must itself be conceived as a project—as, indeed, the final integration of all the activities taking place within its confines."[54] Read, like other libertarian educators, advocated an atmosphere within the schoolhouse that allowed students a great deal of freedom—"freedom of movement, freedom to roam," for "[t]he senses are only educated by endless action."[55] But the individual freedom he called for assumed that children would be enveloped in a highly educative environment, with beneficial influences on all sides, down to the physical structure of the school itself.

Primary education was Read's chief focus, for its all-important task was to lay the "foundations of natural wisdom." At this level, he argued, subjects should not be differentiated from one another, merging instead "in a total constructive or originating activity." In this sense the approach adopted in the primary school would be continuous with the approaches typical of infant and nursery schools.[56] The primary stage should morph seamlessly into the secondary stage, at which point students can start to be differentiated according to their individual propensities. Although some kind of curriculum becomes increasingly necessary, it must be kept flexible enough to respond to the emerging needs of individuals. A curriculum should be seen "as a more or less

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[53] Ibid., 215.
[54] Ibid., 247.
[55] Ibid., 298.
[56] Ibid., 222.

infinite scale of *interests* upon which the individual mind of the growing child can play its melody, according to its impulse to self-expression, self-realization."[57] It is not a "collection of subjects" but rather "a field of creative activities."[58]

Read had little more than this to say about education beyond the primary level. But he consistently looked ahead to the ultimate integration of the individual into society at large. Although the school itself should be as autonomous as possible—"an organic community, to every practicable extent self-supporting"—the final purpose of education is to prepare students to occupy a meaningful place in society.[59] This means preparing the individual child "not only vocationally but spiritually and mentally…it is not information he needs so much as wisdom, poise, self-realization, zest—qualities which can only come from a unified training of the senses for the activity of living."[60] With Martin Buber, Read envisioned the teacher's responsibility as facilitating integration, helping the child to overcome "oppositeness." The teacher "becomes the uniter, the mediator between the individual and his environment, the midwife through whose agency the individual is reborn into society, guided into its most vital currents."[61] Read was not, of course, imagining that individuals would simply be slotted into utilitarian social roles like cogs in a machine. The reconciliation of individual and society he proposed took place on a more fundamental level. If education could habituate human beings from an early age to "a way of life based on the knowledge of organic relationships,"[62] fostering "an organic

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[57] Ibid., 241.
[58] Ibid., 243.
[59] Ibid., 247.
[60] Ibid., 231.
[61] Ibid., 294. The teacher should be a citizen first and foremost, ever conscious of "the rights and responsibilities which belong to us as citizens" and concerned with "the creation of well-being in the community." Ibid., 296.
[62] Ibid., 69. As Read writes elsewhere: "What is common to the psychic structure of mankind is the only secure foundation for a community of behaviour and aspiration. It is the neglect of this fact which

social consciousness,"[63] people would cohere on a social level without the need for political ideology, national identities, or coercive means of social control.

Read did not, then, mean by "integration" that individuals would simply be brought into conformity with preexisting social conditions. Although the teacher is to serve as a mediator between child and environment, he should not "be satisfied with a passive acceptance of this environment. The efficiency of our mediation is to some extent dependent on our ability to modify that environment."[64] In keeping with the apolitical tenor of his writings on education, Read was vague in this context about what this "modification" would ultimately entail (though by referring his readers to his other writings he implied that the anarchist politics outlined therein might serve as an illustration). He was more explicit, however, about the *means* by which the social environment could be transformed. "[T]o introduce a democratic method of education," he writes, "is the only necessary revolution."[65] It was impossible, of course, to do this all at once. "[W]e must begin," Read suggests, "with small things, in diverse ways."[66] In "small units" like the classroom and the school, "harmony and health" might be achieved that would be a model for society as a whole.[67] And though educational alternatives will initially be developed in "separate cells," eventually these "will be joined to one another, will manifest new forms of social organization and new types of art. From that

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explains the weakness and unreality of all idealistic philosophies and political theories. The rational systems of state socialism will always remain unreal and unsuccessful precisely because they are logical and organic patterns. The superior cohesion of primitive communities (and even of animal communities) is due to the fact that they evolve their patterns from their collective unconscious." Ibid., 194.

[63] Ibid., 280.

[64] Ibid., 296.

[65] Ibid., 304.

[66] Read, *The Redemption of the Robot*, 232.

[67] Ibid., 54.

multiplicity and diversity, that dynamic interplay and emulation, a new culture may arise, and mankind be united as never before in the consciousness of a common destiny."[68]

Read's strategy for educational reform was, as passages like these make clear, one manifestation of his belief that "molecular" forms of action could bring about piecemeal changes—small-scale ruptures in the status quo that through accumulation and exemplary influence could trigger larger-scale transformation.[69] A considerable degree of inference, however, is needed in order to conclude with David Goodway that Read's intent was "to identify the school as the primary arena for anarchist action," and that he was calling on anarchists "to bring about the social revolution by becoming schoolteachers."[70] Read explicitly regretted the fact that the anarchist implications of his educational philosophy were not more widely recognized, but his own contributions to educational reform did little to convey his purportedly radical intentions. Indeed, Read's most notable practical efforts in the realm of education involved willing collaboration with the state. During World War II, Read was enlisted by the British Council—a royally-chartered organization founded with the purpose of spreading British culture abroad—to visit schools throughout the country and collect drawings by British children for exhibitions. It was this hands-on experience that prompted *Education through Art*, which in turn led to the founding of the Society for Education in Art in 1947. Read helmed the organization as president until his death.[71] Beginning in 1954, UNESCO sponsored an International

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[68] Ibid., 232.
[69] Ibid., 228.
[70] Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow*, 199.
[71] Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow*, 185.

Society for Education through Art inspired by Read's work to promote art education

worldwide. The still-extant organization continues to acknowledge its debt to Read.[72]

Libertarian education in the 1960s

Read's work on education, written chiefly during and immediately after World

War II, reflects the predominant concerns of that time. As his collaboration with

UNESCO suggests, he offered aesthetic education in part as a means of training children

in an international "language" that could cross cultural boundaries and promote peace.

His political convictions were muted so that he could accommodate the widest possible

audience. And though he believed his recommendations to have "revolutionary"

implications, the word took on a generic ring in this context; concretely, he advocated

working within the system.[73] When Paul Goodman rose to prominence as an educational

thinker in the 1960s, the social context was much different. Primed by the debates about

juvenile delinquency that had been ongoing since the 1950s, and troubled by growing

unrest on college campuses, the American public was unusually receptive to educational

alternatives. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw important reforms within the system,

particularly at the level of higher education, where students and faculty inspired by the

resurgent ideal of participatory democracy fought to institute free speech on campus and

reform administration. There were also notable examples of educational experimentation

outside of the system—particularly at the level of primary education—which often had

strong ties to the counterculture.

Radical education in the United States was at this time associated chiefly with two

related trends, neither of which was self-consciously anarchist, but which belonged to the

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[72] See http://www.insea.org/insea/about.
[73] Read, *Education through Art*, 303.

broader libertarian tradition. First was the movement inspired by A.S. Neill's

experimental school Summerhill, founded in 1921 and settling ultimately in Leiston,

England. Like earlier free schools, Summerhill was noncompulsory, loosely structured,

and run though the shared decision-making of teachers and students. Although

Summerhill had already been in operation for nearly four decades, it was not until the

release in 1959 of a collection of Neill's writings by an American publisher that the

school's public profile skyrocketed. In the United States, Summerhill's example helped

to spawn hundreds of similar free schools, which

> brought together small groups (generally around twenty to forty people) of
> families and idealistic young educators who, in the spirit of the time, believed that
> learning should be intimate, spontaneous, and joyful—specifically not controlled
> by textbooks, curricula, instructional methods, or rigid rules of behavior. Free
> schools had no use for grading, testing, or hierarchical authority, and they
> represented a shared desire to make learning relevant and responsive to the lively
> social and political issues of the day.[74]

Free school ideology was "explicitly countercultural," involving a rejection of corporate

capitalism, the authority of the state, and the personality type of the well-adjusted

citizen/consumer. Freeschoolers "believed that in their tiny enclaves they could escape

the influence of modern culture and begin building a new society founded on values of

love, joy, passion, freedom, and spontaneity." Their model of education was "entirely

devoted to the happiness of the individuals who lived, loved, and played within each

intimate community."[75]

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[74] Ron Miller, *Free Schools, Free People* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 3.

[75] Ibid. Some, like Jonathan Kozol, tried to politicize the mission of the free school, and were critical of schools that placed too much emphasis on disengagement from society. But overall the "countercultural" free schools that Kozol criticized were predominant. See his *Free Schools* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

If Summerhill and its offshoots represented the era's most significant attempts to create educational alternatives in a libertarian spirit, the so-called "deschoolers" attempted to direct that libertarian spirit against the existing school system. The term owed its origins to Ivan Illich, whose *Deschooling Society* became a touchstone for others writing in the same vein and helped touch off a flurry of sensationalistic media attention.[76] Reacting to the dramatic expansion of schooling in the postwar decades, which had more people spending more time in school than ever before, Illich warned of a "schooled" society dominated by the values and beliefs characteristic of mass, institutionalized education. These assumed, he argued, that education was something to be heavily regulated, standardized, and confined within the walls of the classroom. It was to be overseen by professionals who had been certified in officially-sanctioned pedagogical practices. It was to be rendered quantifiable and measurable through examinations and grades, whose importance as indicators of the health of the system tended to grow with the size of the student body. *More* teaching rather than qualitatively *different* teaching had become the default answer to ignorance, and educational "reform" had come to mean tweaking the system rather than questioning it fundamentally. The educational bureaucracy had developed ends of its own unrelated to the well-being of the pupils in its care, who were effectively stripped of all agency and taught to be passive consumers of information. Although Illich did not advocate cursorily dispensing with all schools, he envisioned a society in which contractual agreements between instructors and

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[76] Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

pupils replaced specially-demarcated spaces of education to which children were sent compulsorily, or to which they were "seduced" by freeschoolers.[77]

Goodman was strongly associated with both the Summerhill model and with deschooling, expressing support for both at various times. Unlike Goodman, however, the freeschoolers and the deschoolers—including leading lights like Neill and Illich—were largely unaware of, or unconcerned with, the links between their educational approaches and the libertarian (much less the specifically anarchist) tradition. Their refusal of standard models of education was closer to the "intuitive anarchism" that flourished during this era than it was to the grounded libertarian socialism that informed Goodman and his anarchist predecessors.[78] The attitude of most freeschoolers and deschoolers was basically negative and individualistic, far more focused on liberating individuals from technocratic conformity than in constructing democratic communities. The educational enclaves they created, from free schools to home schools (to which leading deschooler John Holt ultimately devoted his energies) were ultimately more about opting out of the system in order to be surrounded with like-minded comrades than they were about using education as a means of transforming the status quo and constructing a radical social alternative.

The politics that informed these enterprises rarely transcended vague anti-authoritarianism, and their "drop-out" mentality was foreign to the anarchist strain of the libertarian tradition to which Goodman belonged. Restructuring education, for Goodman,

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[77] Illich was so skeptical of educational institutions that he rejected even free schools. "Free schools," he writes, "which lead to further free schools in an unbroken chain of attendance, produce the mirage of freedom. Attendance as the result of seduction inculcates the need for specialized treatment more persuasively than reluctant attendance enforced by truant officers." See Alan Gartner, Colin Greer and Frank Riessman, eds., *After Deschooling, What?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 14-15.

[78] I take the phrase from Murray Bookchin's influential essay "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought," but many others have also remarked upon the same phenomenon. See *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (Berkeley, CA: Ramparts Press, 1971).

was not simply a means of liberating individuals from the "System," but a means of

constructing radical democratic communities. Like other anarchists, including Read, his

advocacy of individual freedom and self-realization was consistently tempered by his

search for ways of orienting the individual back to the community and directing

educational efforts towards an agenda of revolutionary social change. Lacking these

commitments, freeschooling and deschooling ultimately played into the hands of the New

Right, helping to break the public consensus around universal public schooling while

failing to distinguish their alternative adequately from outright privatization.[79]

Goodman's educational philosophy shared much with Read's, but it was far more

explicitly political in character, for he made it the counterpart of a fierce excoriation of

"compulsory mis-education" and derived from it an agenda aimed at radically

decentralizing the public education system and open to working outside of it altogether.

While he was perhaps best known for his proposals for the restructuring of primary

education, Goodman made his most significant contributions to anarchist theory in his

work on higher education, in which he elaborated an ideal of the self-governing

"community of scholars" as a model of anarchist organization.[80] Goodman failed to draw

careful connections between these two areas of his educational thought, which helps to

explain why they have rarely been treated in tandem. But only by considering the ways in

which they might cohere into an integrated educational philosophy is it possible to show

how he sought to reconcile the twin agendas of making education freer and more

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[79] For commentary, see Miller, *Free Schools, Free People*, 5, and Smith, *The Libertarians and Education*, 142.

[80] Unlike Read, Goodman put his anarchist commitments front and center, unabashedly describing his book on higher education, *The Community of Scholars*, as "a little treatise in anarchist theory," inspired by Kropotkin's narrative of the demise of self-governing medieval institutions. *Compulsory Mis-Education* and *The Community of Scholars* (New York: Vintage, 1964), 162.

responsive to individual proclivities, and using it as a means of creating the communal

cement needed to hold an anarchist society together without organized coercion.

Goodman on early education

A practicing psychotherapist throughout the 1950s, Goodman tended to think

about the most fundamental problems of human development in psychological terms.

Like Read, he was influenced by Gestalt psychology, the main insights of which had to

do with the efforts of the psyche to bring order to experience and integrate the individual

organism with its environment. The so-called "Gestalt therapy" he developed along with

Fritz Perls and Ralph Hefferline sought to make those insights more relevant to everyday

experience by applying them in a clinical setting and relating them to the socio-political

context in which individuals operated. Gestalt therapy was, as Taylor Stoehr has written,

"the psychological mode of Goodman's anarchism," aiming to shift the emphasis within

psychology away from fostering adjustment to "normalcy" and towards encouraging the

expression, rather than the sublimation, of natural instincts.[81] Feelings of unhappiness and

"absurdity," it held, were not simply to be blamed on the individual, but were most likely

signs that society was suppressing and diverting those instincts. Invoking Wilhelm

Reich's notion of "organismic self-regulation," Goodman and the co-founders of Gestalt

therapy held that "[i]f we remove or relax the unnatural pressures of coercive institutions,

and replace them with face-to-face community and mutual aid, the individual organism

may heal itself—or at least find its limp and pain easier to bear."[82] The ultimate solution

to individual maladjustment was to bring society into sync with human nature. Gestalt

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[81] Taylor Stoehr, *Here, Now, Next: Paul Goodman and the Origins of Gestalt Therapy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994), 94.
[82] Stoehr, *Here, Now, Next*, 17.

therapy gave patients—and Goodman himself—a means of envisioning how the social environment might be changed to better suit human needs.

Gestalt therapy presumed that human organisms would flourish naturally if placed in environments that facilitated their instincts and interests and responded to their agency. For Goodman, schools had to be environments of precisely this kind. To thrust children into the clutches of educational machines bent on implanting a predetermined set of ideas and behaviors and churning out processed products is to stunt their development and deny them the possibility of shaping a world in accordance with their needs. The child's natural inclinations and capabilities, he held, should serve to guide the educational agenda rather than a prefabricated curriculum tailored to the demands of state and market. The school ought to be, as Goodman's disciple George Dennison put it in his libertarian classic *The Lives of Children*, "an environment for growth."[83]

Although Goodman was generally supportive of free schools (like the First Street School at which Dennison taught), the educative "environment" he had in mind was by no means limited to the schoolhouse. Like Godwin, Goodman recognized the importance of "accidental" (or what he called "incidental") education—education derived not from the conscious efforts of a learned instructor, but from the everyday engagement of human organisms with their natural and social context. While Godwin fretted about these incidental influences—as he did about all contingency—Goodman believed that an individual could absorb much of value if left to his own devices in even a suboptimal

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[83] George Dennison, *The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School* (Reading, MA: Merloyd Lawrence, 1969), 4. The influence of John Dewey should also be acknowledged here, for he more than any other thinker encouraged both Goodman and Dennison to think about how education could be tailored "to the needs of present growth," staying as close as possible to the immediate needs and experiences of the child. John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1962), 3.

environment.[84] For Goodman, confining education to schools was like boxing up art in a museum—it was to lose sight of the educative potential present in many other areas of life. The fact that educative influences are virtually ubiquitous, he maintained, means that education is as much about what is *not* as what *is* done. Much learning (even the development of literacy, according to one of Goodman's more controversial claims) takes place, or could conceivably take place, "inevitably," and "[e]ven neglect of the young…has an educational effect—not the worst possible."[85]

Goodman was not, of course, endorsing outright neglect as an educational ideal, only pointing out the ways in which education might arise out of the child's own volition and self-directed activity. Nor was he arguing that educators should satisfy themselves with turning children loose in whatever environment happens to be at hand. From the Greek educational ideal of *paideia*, Goodman took his proposition that we "structure all of society and the whole environment as educative."[86] This helps to explain his lifelong interest in social planning and his own contribution to the ideal-city tradition: *Communitas*, co-authored with his architect brother Percival in 1947. In that work, Goodman writes that physical environments—at least in their humanmade aspects—are incarnations of ideas, of ways of thinking, of social values and interests, just as gothic

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[84] This point is illustrated most vividly in Goodman's novel *Empire City* (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow Press, 2001). Of the main character Horatio Goodman writes: "when it came time to go to school and be systematically retarded like the rest, he tore up the records, roamed the streets, and learned to read and write from the headlines in the newspapers." (p. 149) The beginning of the book finds Horatio (age 11) roaming in precisely this way, eagerly absorbing his environment and accumulating knowledge both practical and theoretical. In the chapters titled "An Educational Romance" (I & II) Goodman has the character Mynheer articulate an educational vision in which boys explore the city with loose guidance, observing and participating in the most varied activities, with a sprinkling of teaching when it would help to illuminate direct experiences.

[85] Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education* and *The Community of Scholars*, 16. For Goodman's discussion of literacy, see pp. 25-26.

[86] Ibid., 126. For the seminal account of *paideia*, see Werner Jaeger's three-volume *Paideia* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1986). The gist of Jaeger's argument is that for the Greeks, education was a thoroughly communal enterprise which infused every aspect of social life.

cathedrals communicate worldly grotesqueness and the overwhelming power of God, and Quaker meetinghouses embody ascetic piety and humility. The structure of the anarchist society the Goodmans envisioned in Scheme II of the book embodied values of mutual aid, human scale, face-to-face interaction of fellow citizens (to be stimulated by attractive civic spaces and public institutions), and the harmonization of city and countryside. Even in its physical outlines, it projected the importance of the "community and its way of life."[87]

The highest goal of any society concerned with the education of children, maintained Goodman, ought to be offering a social order worth growing up into—a social environment structured even in its physical aspects to reflect the needs and inclinations of real human beings, where socialization and self-realization go hand-in-hand. "Fundamentally," Goodman wrote, "there is no right education except growing up into a worthwhile world."[88] For this reason, his educational vision was ultimately oriented not towards extant social arrangements but towards others which might be brought into being: "A decent education aims at, prepares for, a more worthwhile future, with a different community spirit, different occupations, and more real utility than attaining status and salary."[89] Were such a future to be realized, schools could be relegated to "the much more particular and traditional role of giving intensive training when it is needed and sought, or of being havens for those scholarly by disposition."[90]

Goodman's criticisms of standard educational practice, or what he called "compulsory mis-education," paralleled those of contemporaries like Illich, Holt, and

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[87] Paul Goodman and Percival Goodman, *Communitas: Ways of Livelihood and Means of Life* (New York: Random House, 1960), 224.
[88] Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education* and *The Community of Scholars*, 59.
[89] Ibid., 60.
[90] Ibid., 126.

Kozol, and flowed out of his broader critique of the "Organized System." Schools had

become instruments of mass socialization into a society that was irrational, unjust, and

inimical to human flourishing. Largely unaccountable private and public elites

determined the grid of needs and opportunities into which individuals were expected to

plug themselves, reducing education to a purely functional means of getting ahead

according to rules that had already been established. Goodman believed that education

had been stripped of its most vital, transcendent, and humanistic purposes: "The schools

less and less represent *any* human values, but simply adjustment to a mechanical

system."[91] Internally, the means by which schools "educated" their students were as

corrupt as the ends they served: they were compulsory, hierarchical, and authoritarian,

more conducive to babysitting and policing than authentic learning. The lessons schools

inculcated (whether directly or through an unacknowledged "hidden curriculum")

encouraged a submissive attitude that took systemization, standardization, hollow

practicality, and alienation for granted. They taught that "there is no place for

spontaneity, open sexuality, free spirit." Instilled from the earliest age, such assumptions

found their way into all spheres of life, economic, political, and cultural.[92] "At a childish

level," Goodman wrote, "all this adds up to brainwashing. The components are (a) a

uniform world-view, (b) the absence of any viable alternative, (c) confusion about the

relevance of one's own experience and feelings, and (d) a chronic anxiety, so that one

clings to the one world-view as the only security."[93] The ultimate conclusion of

Goodman's educational jeremiad was grim: "Unfortunately, the pervasive philosophy to

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[91] Ibid., 21.
[92] Ibid., 23.
[93] Ibid., 67.

which children are habituated as they grow up is the orthodoxy of a social machine not interested in persons, except to man and aggrandize itself."[94]

Goodman's attempts to dispel the "bland faith in the school" in books like *Compulsory Mis-education* were not directed at eliminating schools entirely (whatever his affinities with the "deschoolers"). In fact, he called for a varied strategy of educational reform that retained an important place for schools. For the youngest children, he envisioned a decentralized system of "mini-schools" with roughly twenty-five children staffed by four teachers, mostly non-professionals. Instruction would, as far as possible, take place outside of the classroom in the surrounding environment, and the students would be intimately involved in the administration of the school.[95] Adolescents, he believed, had more need of structured, institutional settings. The conditions of modern life, he wrote, "are far too complicated for independent young spirits to get going on their own. They need some preparation, though probably not as much as is supposed." Most importantly, "they need various institutional frameworks in which they can try out and learn the ropes."[96] There is a need to offer "*various* means of educating and paths of growing up, appropriate to various talents, conditions, and careers. We should be experimenting with different kinds of school, no school at all, the real city as school, farm schools, practical apprenticeships, guided travel, work camps, little theaters and local newspapers, community service."[97] Goodman assumed that a traditional academic education would have little appeal for most adolescents, who would be more drawn to practical options like apprenticeships. But "many points of quitting and return" would

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[94] Ibid., 68.

[95] See "Mini-schools: A Prescription for the Reading Problem," in *Deschooling: A Reader*, ed. Ian Lister (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

[96] Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education* and *The Community of Scholars*, 59.

[97] Ibid., 141.

allow students to experiment with different subjects and approaches before committing to any one track.[98]

At both the primary and the secondary level, then, Goodman advocated a considerable amount of individual choice, but his proposals did not dispense entirely with either the schoolhouse or the expert guidance of instructors. And most importantly, he envisioned children operating in an environment that not only offered ample opportunity for "incidental" educative influences, but in which the community as a whole took responsibility for the upbringing of its youth: "Probably more than anything," he argues, "we need a community, and community spirit, in which many adults who know something, and not only professional teachers, will pay attention to the young."[99] It is precisely this kind of community, however, that he has been accused of undermining. Goodman's educational vision, Robin Barrow has suggested, would fail to provide children with a common stock of knowledge and values, preventing any shared sense of identity or mutual responsibility. His recommendations for primary education and secondary vocational training would leave children with only "fragmented and narrow skills and bits of knowledge, with never a thought for communal points of reference,"[100] effectively "magnify[ing] the differences between people and minimis[ing] communal feeling."[101] His ideal society would be filled with people used to doing their own thing and going their own way, who would have difficulty finding common ground or even understanding one another given their different specializations. Although Goodman clearly believed that all children should be well versed in certain subjects (like science),

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[98] Ibid., 153.
[99] Ibid., 141.
[100] Robin Barrow, *Radical Education: A Critique of Freeschooling and Deschooling* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), 107.
[101] Ibid., 193.

his resistance to standardized curricula, Barrow charges, left him with no way of providing for this.

Barrow's criticisms raise real questions about the practical mechanisms by which Goodman would provide for the "community" he envisions holding his libertarian approach together. But Barrow's critique is premised on an incomplete assessment of Goodman's thought. Most strikingly, Barrow neglects the fact that the educational system Goodman proposes would be embedded in a broader democratic community in which citizens were constantly engaged in the joint management of social affairs in face-to-face assemblies. Democratic values would suffuse this social environment, and they would be absorbed by the young with little need for concerted instruction. Whatever special interests children and adolescents developed, they would be amply educated in democratic citizenship; for them, democracy would be a lived experience that integrated the autonomy they enjoyed in the classroom with the self-government they observed all around them. Furthermore, Goodman's proposals for primary and secondary education cannot simply be severed from his work on higher education. Higher education has rarely received the kind of attention from libertarians that Goodman gave it, and it is here that he provides the most illuminating articulation of his educational ideal, as well as clues about how his outlook might reconcile individual aspirations and social needs.

The community of scholars

Higher education as Goodman found it in the 1950s and 1960s was subject to many of the same objections he directed at primary and secondary education—it was overburdened by bureaucracy, its standardization stifled individuality, its hierarchical structure was inimical to democracy and spontaneity. The erstwhile ideal of the

"community of scholars" had been transformed into "a community of administrators and scholars with administrative mentalities, company men and time-servers among the teachers, grade-seekers and time-servers among the students."[102] Aimed at turning out "education products," administration had rendered relationships that should be organic faceless and mechanical. It had weakened community "by keeping the teachers out of contact with the students, the teachers out of contact with one another and with the world, and the students imprisoned in their adolescent subculture and otherwise obediently conformist." By organizing the university as a collection of compartmentalized functions, administration "isolates the individuals, the groups, and the studies and, by standardizing and coordinating them, reconstructs a social machine."[103] The logic of administration had destroyed the tension that was supposed to exist between the scholarly community and the outside world, converting the university into an assembly line that spit out "human capital" designed to meet the needs of the gargantuan institutions that had overtaken both the public and private sectors.

Like primary and secondary education, Goodman thought that higher education should, instead, feed as much as possible off of the initiative of the student, serving as a kind of academic apprenticeship in which would-be disciples proactively sought skilled masters with reputations for expertise. This was the kind of arrangement that underpinned the medieval *studium generale*, which, from geographical centers like Bologna and Paris, had attracted a steady stream of students "from all corners of Europe, drawn by the prospect of sitting at the feet of a famous teacher."[104] The *studium generale* epitomized

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[102] Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education* and *The Community of Scholars*, 238.
[103] Ibid., 227.
[104] Olaf Pedersen, *The First Universities: Studium Generale and the Origins of University Education in Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 132.

the interplay of voluntary seeking and scholarly authority that Goodman was looking for. If a "personal relation" could be established between teacher and student, free of compulsion and sustained by common interests, it would foster a general sense of involvement in a shared enterprise. And this spirit, Goodman assumed, would transcend disciplinary boundaries, for whatever specialization arose organically would occur "*in a community of general studies, a little city*." Both the culture and the organization of the university community would prevent it from degenerating into a cacophony of dissimilar, self-contained pursuits: a "universal" culture and *lingua franca* would predominate both within and between universities (which, ideally, would be limited in size and linked by federation), and organizationally, universities would be self-governing, run by the teachers and students themselves. This would necessitate ongoing interaction and dialogue; specialists would "learn to communicate by talking to one another."[105] With the "good will" and "encounter…of teachers with teachers, students with students, and teachers and students" that would flourish in a modern *studium generale*, "there is bound to be a kind of humanism."[106]

In this way, Goodman envisioned individual choice strengthening rather than destabilizing an academic community, for it would ensure that relationships were organic outgrowths of mutual needs and interests and that the university was seen as an institution in which students were invited to participate rather than a soulless instrument of their socialization. With the development of their own abilities, students would ultimately shed the constraints of the master-apprentice relationship, but not before they had firmly situated themselves within the world of shared knowledge to which they had been

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[105] Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education* and *The Community of Scholars*, 184.
[106] Ibid., 314.

initiated. Goodman's ideal, then, was one in which learned adults offered willing students access to a world worth entering, but allowed them to pick out their own way within it. By no means is the authority of experience and wisdom unimportant according to this conception—it would guide individuals towards paths that put them in the service of humanity rather than the wealthy and powerful. There would be a kind of socialization involved in this process, with "commencement" representing the transition into adulthood, but it would be made possible by the agency of the inductee and result in integration to "the universal and potential culture" rather than the status quo.[107]

With the assistance of learned instructors, students would come to recognize civilization not as an alien imposition but as their own. This would only happen if they were empowered to shape it: "The idea of education is to bring up the young to be new centers of initiative; they are not merely trainees. They grow up by identifying with the adult society and culture, taking it over, renewing it, and transforming it."[108] From "social animals," the young would evolve into "free citizens." They would "grow into civilization in a way rational to themselves," and develop a sense of responsibility for that civilization.[109] In a particularly apt phrase, Goodman described his ideal of the university as an "appropriable city," whose ultimate goal was, following Coleridge, "civilization with freedom."[110] This reflected Goodman's belief that the most "radical" freedom was freedom with *roots*, not untrammeled individual license, and he went far beyond most other libertarian educators in distinguishing the two. The grounded freedom he sought would disentangle individuals from the demands of a preexistent and inflexible

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[107] Ibid., 170.
[108] Ibid., 292.
[109] Ibid., 337.
[110] Ibid., 339.

system while ensuring that they had every opportunity to draw guidance and inspiration from the hard-won inheritance of humanist wisdom.

The community of scholars, then, was to be an environment in which individuals of disparate backgrounds and inclinations could find common ground through a shared humanistic culture and democratic self-governance. This kind of community, more than Goodman's "mini-school," was a model of the kind of society in which, ideally, the university would itself be embedded. In the real world, however, a university striving to be a humanistic, self-governing community of scholars would not be able to count on a harmonious relationship with its surroundings. It would constantly be at risk of being thwarted in its intentions—or, more insidiously, colonized—by the ends of state and market. It needed "walls"—figuratively, at least—which would demarcate it as a space protected from considerations of political prudence, national interest, economic efficiency, and material gain. The very universality nourished by such a community necessitated its *separateness*:

> The wall itself, the separateness, is inevitable—until society itself becomes an international city of peace. For the culture of the scholars is inevitably foreign: it is international and comprises the past, present, and future. The language, even though the scholars speak English instead of Latin, has different rules of truth and evidence that cannot be disregarded when it happens to be convenient. The scholars come from all parts and do not easily abide the local prejudices. They cannot always fly the national flag.[111]

As an outpost of humanistic values and concerns, the university cannot be subordinated to any particular cultural or social logic. It must be *in* the society but not *of* the society, operating on the basis of transcendent principles in tension (in all but the most ideal circumstances) with the cultural, political, and economic norms that prevail in society at large.

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[111] Ibid., 169.

Inevitably, then, the goals of the university will sometimes come into conflict

with the goals of the surrounding society. But far from resulting in intractable town-and-

gown conflict, Goodman envisioned a large-scale, mutual calibration of the specialized

academic community and its social environment that mimicked the organic interaction

between individual and environment called for by Gestalt therapy:

> If the schools are used for free growth, criticism, and social experiment, the
> socializing of the young becomes a two-way transaction: the young grow up into
> society, and society is regularly enlivened, made sensible, and altered by the fact
> that the young must grow up into it. Such social purposes preserve the community
> of scholars from becoming incestuous and merely academic. And with such
> purposes, society has its growth as organically part of itself, like the cambium of a
> tree.[112]

This speaks to the fact that figurative walls of the community of scholars do not denote

mere isolationism—they are permeable, allowing the university to serve as a launching

pad for academically-minded youth who will carry their knowledge into the wider world.

The humanistic ideas stewing within the academic community will radiate outward and

find legs in political practice and cultural criticism; "[f]ree and learned thought,"

Goodman opines, ought to be "a social force among us."[113] In a passage on Goodman and

his admirer Robert Paul Wolff in her *Democratic Education*, Amy Gutmann makes the

mistake of conflating this community's call for autonomy with a call for isolation.[114]

What is absent in Gutmann's account is any recognition of the connection between

Goodman's educative ideal and emergent anarchist ideas about how social change was

best to be effected. Goodman was by no means proposing to build remote enclaves in

which learning was pursued for its own sake in monastic solitude. Rather, he was

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[112] Ibid., 216.

[113] Ibid., 251.

[114] Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 187-89.

proposing educative communities which could serve as examples to the wider world of mutual aid and self-government, which could keep alive a common stock of values and knowledge unpolluted by compromise with the powers-that-be, and which could provide a kind of base from which individuals, like the many student activists inspired by Goodman, could work peacefully to transform the surrounding environment. The community of scholars, he writes, should be "active in the world."[115] It has to "confront society, often in conflict."[116]

Goodman did hold that some outright secessions of bands of scholars from the public system of education, in the tradition of the English dissenting Academies, would be salutary (the New School and Black Mountain College, where Goodman taught for a short time, were examples of what he had in mind). Federation could link together smaller educative institutions along the lines of ancient universities, which had achieved an "anarchic universalism of local associations, communities and scientific academies."[117] "But more hopefully," he opined, "our democracy and affluence, and the present expansion and turmoil of the colleges in any case, are unusually open to experiment."[118] However far modern colleges and universities had fallen from the autonomous and humanistic medieval institutions which had spawned them, they still retained the ghost of the divine image with which they were created. Modern institutions of higher learning for Goodman represented the virtual last gasp of the ideal of face-to-face community. Largely self-contained and self-sufficient, with a self-selected population sharing certain basic characteristics, universities were in many ways the

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[115] Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education* and *The Community of Scholars*, 189.
[116] Ibid., 295.
[117] Ibid., 299.
[118] Ibid., 327.

closest modern approximation of the small, walled city of yore. Consequently, however strong Goodman's impulse to deschooling was in certain contexts, he had plenty of reason to defend the institution of the university. As Wolff pointed out in his Goodmanesque *The Ideal of the University*, for better or for worse, the university was still society's "most progressive institution." His warning to would-be revolutionaries reflects Goodman's pragmatic approach to reform: "the fact remains that only next steps are ever possible; final steps can never be taken. So those of us who can still sustain a concern for the partial amelioration of social evils must rely upon the actual institutions which offer us the most assistance. In America today, the university clearly heads that list."[119]

Rescuing the Western tradition

The humanistic idiom Goodman used to describe his ideal of higher education was by no means, of course, embraced universally by the radicals of his generation—it was, for example, language far more typical of anarchists than Marxists. But it was not glaringly at odds with the kind of ethos that informed the early struggles of the postwar era, when radicals confronting the dangers of the Bomb and the iniquities of Jim Crow readily made recourse to notions of universality and shared humanity. In the last years of his life, however, Goodman was deeply shaken by the recognition that the new generation of radicals were coming to reject the idea of a common human nature, a common humanist tradition, even a common objective reality about which some measure of consensus was possible. In 1971's *New Reformation*, he noted with dismay the moment when he realized that the youth of this era "did not believe there was a nature of

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[119] Robert Paul Wolff, *The Ideal of the University* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1992), 57.

things" or that "there was such a thing as simple truth." "Not only all institutions," he

wrote, "but all learning had been corrupted by the Whore of Babylon."[120] Young radicals

seemed to believe that the Western tradition as a whole was defunct along with the

outdated worldview of their parents. When Goodman began to call himself a

"conservative anarchist" towards the end of his life, it was in response to the failure of

the Sixties generation to find a mode of constructive rebellion that made use of the best of

the Western tradition rather than rejecting it outright.[121] The youth subculture had fallen

into the mistake of defining itself by what it opposed. Its approach to politics represented

a half-baked reaction to alienation ("a poor basis for politics," Goodman notes,

"including revolutionary politics") and it was short on vision; the resounding "No" that

had vocalized Marcuse's "Great Refusal" had failed to develop into a "Yes" that took

responsibility for enacting a positive project.[122]

Goodman was in many ways sympathetic to the critique of the Western tradition

as insufficient, incomplete, and oppressive. As a bisexual and a political radical, he was

too intimately acquainted with the experience of liminality to dismiss subaltern demands

for recognition and respect out of hand. But from Goodman's perspective, the reason why

the shortcomings of the Western canon had to be confronted was in part so that the gems

of wisdom and learning scattered throughout the tradition could be recognized and

transmitted better than before. To find one's way within an inherited tradition, Goodman

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[120] Paul Goodman, *New Reformation: Notes of a Neolithic Conservative* (New York: Vintage, 1971), 48.

[121] When Goodman used the term "conservative" he took care to distinguish himself from those who used the term to justify knee-jerk deference to whatever ideas and customs were taken to be "traditional" at a particular moment in time. The distinction comes through when Goodman comments on the irony that "the wildest anarchists are generally affirming the most ancient values, of space, sun, and trees, and beauty, human dignity, and forthright means, as if they lived in neolithic times or the Middle Ages, whereas the so-called conservatives are generally arguing for policies and prejudices that date back only four administrations." Goodman and Goodman, *Communitas*, 10.

[122] Goodman, *New Reformation*, 52.

believed, did not have to entail sacrificing one's individuality or submitting to an oppressive cultural hegemony, as the counterculture seemed to believe. Rather, a shared tradition gave people a set of narratives with which to identify, a set of accomplishments they could—to some extent—feel to be their own, and a set of ideals with great power not only to relativize and critique the existing order but to guide those who sought to bring a new society into being. The Western tradition was a repository of ideas and wisdom rich and deep enough that it had plenty to offer radicals and reactionaries alike. While Goodman acknowledged the value in critiquing, complicating, expanding, and supplementing the canon, dismissing the inheritance of the West altogether was another matter entirely. It not only signified a failure to recognize the inherent worth of the tradition, it left young radicals hankering for freedom stupid and impotent, susceptible to whatever brand of hip radicalism happened their way (Goodman was particularly concerned about the embrace of Leninist vanguardism within Students for a Democratic Society as the 1960s progressed). The urge to be "radical" too often replaced any sense of connection with the human story.[123] Goodman sometimes described himself as a modern-day Erasmus not out of egotism, but because the analogy communicated a stance of immanent criticism that mobilized the best aspects of the Western tradition in order to combat its follies, biases, and shortcomings.

Goodman argued that it was precisely because humanity had fallen so far short of realizing its enduring ideals that those ideals retained their critical force in the present. He

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[123] Goodman was dismayed, for example, when all his fellow progressives could do in response to the moon landing in 1969 was to criticize the spectacle of it all, or the Cold War mentality which had inspired it, or the diversion of resources from more pressing priorities, or the massive mobilization of state power it represented. Surely an individual filled with a humanistic empathy for the strugglings, sufferings, and hard-won accomplishments of the humble but dignified creature called *homo sapiens* would at least *begin* with a sense of awe and wonder not only at the marvel of the extraterrestrial environment but at the extraordinary human achievement such an expedition represented?

liked to describe history as a series of "unfinished revolutions," opportunities for large-scale social change which to some extent had been missed and which it was the current generation's task to carry forward. Goodman ultimately viewed himself not as a utopia-builder in search of a blank sheet of paper upon which to scribble his fantasies, but as part of a "new Reformation" which sought to rattle the privilege and lifelessness out of the old order and reinvigorate the latent wisdom that had been marginalized and obscured because it did not serve the interests of power. Goodman, as Henry Pachter wrote upon his death, "defended the great tradition of culture against all—its middle-class bowdlerizers, its corporate destroyers, and the young barbarians who, to make the more charitable assumption, despise what they do not know." He "cared deeply to preserve and to continue that cultural chain which generations of human societies had labored to string together for us."[124]

Education in action

Taking a comprehensive view of Goodman's work on education dispels, at the very least, the charge that he had no concern for "communal points of reference" or "communal feeling." In the sphere of education as in other spheres of life, the removal of unjustified impositions on individuals was for Goodman but the first step in a general movement towards the integration of individual and community. Like other New Anarchists, he believed that substantial interconnections would emerge organically from the operation of human nature under conditions of individual freedom. Beyond this,

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[124] Henry Pachter, "Paul Goodman—A 'Topian' Educator" *Salmagundi* no. 24 (Fall 1973), 58. "The culture I want to teach," Goodman writes, "is our Western tradition: the values of Greece, the Bible, Christianity, Chivalry, the Free Cities of the twelfth century, the Renaissance, the heroic age of Science, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, early nineteenth century Utilitarianism, late nineteenth century Naturalism." *Compulsory Mis-education* and *The Community of Scholars*, 114.

individuals would be trained in coordination and negotiation with others through the practice of democracy from a young age, gradually learning how to participate in a shared social world. And this practical experience would be supplemented by the more concerted transmission of common values and traditions by those particularly adept at academic pursuits. Goodman may not have detailed all of the links in this chain, but he unquestionably viewed education as an integral part of communal no less than individual well-being. In the real world, educational institutions would provide concentrated models of the kind of community he wished to extend into society at large. Additionally, they would stimulate social change by upholding transcendent principles against the vagaries of the existing order and fostering the social agency of teachers and students. In an ideal world, they would function against the backdrop of a much broader community structured so as to maximize the positive educative influences of environment and populated by citizens used to thinking of the education of the young as everyone's responsibility.

In advocating for his educational agenda, Goodman was characteristically balanced in his approach. He saw no contradiction in calling for more money to be spent on public education while simultaneously endorsing experimental schools like the First Street School which functioned outside of the public school system entirely. As Pachter points out, even as Goodman campaigned for autonomy and decentralization he "chided the city for not building the most beautiful modern schoolhouses, and in another context he would insist on the most rigid sanitation code or defend the teachers' union."[125] Indeed, it was Goodman's defense of the New York chapter of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) during the famous Ocean Hill-Brownsville dispute that speaks most

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[125] Henry Pachter, "Paul Goodman—A 'Topian' Educator," 56.

highly, perhaps, of his undogmatic style and his willingness to make tough decisions under non-ideal political circumstances. When the New York Board of Education launched an experiment with "community control" in Brooklyn's predominantly African-American Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district in 1968—a page right out of the Goodman playbook—it sparked a conflict between local residents and the teachers' union that developed into one of the most significant battles over education in American history. Given limited powers over hiring and curriculum, the local school board proceeded to make a number of highly controversial decisions, hiring principles with questionable credentials (including Herman Ferguson, then under indictment for—and later convicted of—conspiring to kill moderate civil rights leaders), and firing nineteen white teachers and supervisors, in many cases without obvious cause. When the discharged employees tried to return to work, they found a wall of black residents and teachers barring their way, and in some cases violent altercations ensued. The board's actions triggered a series of strikes on the part of the UFT, who considered the firings to represent gross violations of workers' rights and dangerous precedents that would destroy the collective bargaining arrangement the union had with the city administration and place critical decision-making in the hands of biased and unqualified civilians. As the conflict dragged on, it not only ignited racial tensions and engendered a major political realignment, with formerly hostile Catholics and Jews banding together against the city's black population, it divided the left, with labor leaders and social democrats like A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, and Michael Harrington taking the side of the union, and those with more anarchistic leanings like Dwight Macdonald typically taking the side of the local residents.[126]

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[126] I have taken the essentials of this summary from Jerald E. Podair, *The Strike that Changed New*

The terms of the debate that emerged between Harrington and Macdonald nicely capture that split. In an open letter to Harrington in the *New York Review of Books*, Macdonald accused the UFT of adopting a "rule-or-ruin course," of holding the city school system hostage, of failing to see the value in decentralization, and of largely fabricating the racial issue. Having visited several of the schools, he wrote, had "reinforced" his "prejudice…in favor of amateurs who don't know how to do it but…love doing it."[127] Harrington's reply was both measured and cutting. The New York City school crisis, he wrote, was "an Antigone-like tragedy," with worthy principles informing both sides. The fundamental problem was that "the version of community control being urged in Ocean Hill-Brownsville gave unwitting support to a conservative, and even reactionary, position." Radical decentralization, he warned, would institutionalize segregation, enabling blacks to establish hegemony in majority black districts, but also enabling whites to do the same in majority white districts in order to resist integration. It would turn local school boards over to the domination of small groups of activists just as likely to stem from the right as from the left. It would be inefficient and wasteful, furthermore, leading to reduplication of effort. Harrington chided advocates of community control like Macdonald for acting as if the only meaningful consideration was between centralization and decentralization, and that the obvious choice was for the latter. People on the left, he argued "should certainly understand that the exercise of such equal rights to education within a profoundly unequal economic and social structure will shore up privilege and intensify

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York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

[127] Dwight Macdonald, "An Open Letter to Michael Harrington" *New York Review of Books* (December 5, 1968).

discrimination." Some measure of financial centralization was necessary if only to assure that historically disadvantaged districts would receive the kind of resources that they would be unlikely to pull together on their own. Changing the structure of the school board, in and of itself, would not effect a transfer of resources from rich to poor, and would in fact only entrench inequalities more deeply.[128]

The lessons of Ocean Hill-Brownsville were sobering. Treating community control as a panacea, it seemed, invited highly relativistic outcomes that hinged upon the attitudes of local residents. Implemented under conditions of deep-seated economic and racial division, community control fostered antagonistic competition rather than cooperation, and allowed local majorities to tyrannize over local minorities. Abandoning centralization for decentralization, furthermore, jeopardized any chance of realizing social justice in the sense of lasting economic restructuring. In short, the "empowerment" offered by community control risked becoming a nostrum that arbitrarily privileged means over ends, no matter how problematic the consequences.

Goodman had been one of community control's most outspoken advocates, and to watch the Ocean Hill-Brownsville experiment degenerate so ignominiously was deeply disappointing. For all of his decentralist impulses, he could not escape the conclusion that the right thing to do was to support the union. Nevertheless, he managed to stake out a middle ground between Harrington and Macdonald, scolding the union not for its defense of its members, but for its unwillingness to compromise. "Being powerful," he wrote in the *New York Times Magazine*, "the union should have been magnanimous. Though

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[128] Michael Harrington, "A Reply" *New York Review of Books* (January 2, 1969).

much in the right, it did not have to insist on its rights against these opponents, who needed to win."[129]

Conclusion

Ironically, the principle of decentralization triumphed in New York City—in a limited way, at least—despite the debacle of Ocean-Hill Brownsville, informing the reorganization of the school system that went into effect in 1969 and lasted until 1996. The principle of community control, however, was explicitly rejected by the architects of that reorganization.[130] The defeat contributed, perhaps, to the weary tone that pervades Goodman's writing from the last years of his life (he died of heart failure in 1972). Endeavoring as always to be both "practical" and "utopian" simultaneously, he saw few outlets for either impulse at the end of the 1960s: the possibilities for meaningful reform within the system were drying up, it seemed, at the very same time that the "radical" wing of the student movement was decomposing into hackneyed revolution-speak and useless violence.

The contributions that Goodman, and to a more modest degree Read, made in shifting education into the foreground of anarchist thought were, however, rich enough to transcend these developments. On the level of practice, Goodman, especially, offered many ways of thinking about how change could be encouraged both within the educational system and without. On the level of theory, both he and Read restored to its rightful place a piece of the anarchist puzzle that was unduly marginalized as long as revolutionary fantasies comprised the centerpiece of anarchist praxis. For all of their faith

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[129] Goodman quoted in Kevin Mattson, *Intellectuals in Action: The Origins of the New Left and Radical Liberalism* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press), 136, f53.

[130] Podair, *The Strike that Changed New York*, 146.

in human nature, anarchists had always understood, at least implicitly, that simply removing all coercive hindrances to individual behavior and putting ordinary people, unlettered as they may be, in charge of running social institutions was not a convincing vision of a future worth living in. It was necessary to explain how a sense of communal identity would be instilled in the young, how the expertise needed to run a complex society would arise, even how the basic skills and knowledge necessary to live a fulfilling life at the individual level would be communicated. Although an anarchist society might give freer rein to certain innate proclivities, the development of the individual would not cease to be bound up with the influence exerted by the community upon that individual. Consequently, it was necessary to think carefully about what form that influence would take, with the objectives of both individual autonomy and communal flourishing firmly in view. An anarchist society, in other words, could not afford to leave the character of its members to chance.[131] Accordingly, while the New Anarchist philosophy of education allowed for substantially more individual freedom and choice than standard educational practices, it was by no means *laissez-faire*, maintaining a vital role for learned guides who knew when to intervene and when not to, and providing for mechanisms by which the individual would be integrated into the community. The Greek idea of *paideia* captures their vision admirably, for the New Anarchists envisioned society not as a neutral space in which individuals were left wholly to their own devices, but as an environment oriented in every possible aspect towards helping individuals to realize their potential.

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[131] Judith Suissa makes a similar argument in her *Anarchism and Education: A Philosophical Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

The burst of interest in education during the formative years of the New Anarchism was another example of the decline of revolutionary dogmas opening up new opportunities. Education had always belonged at the center of anarchist thought—now it was placed there once again, on a firmer footing than ever before.

Chapter 5

The Depth of Domination:
Murray Bookchin's Social Ecology and the
New Horizons of Modern Anarchism

The color of radicalism today is no longer red; it is green.

[H]umanity is faced with immense social and ecological dislocations not because there is too much civilization but rather because we are *not civilized enough*.

Murray Bookchin

In *Growing Up Absurd*, Paul Goodman listed the Enlightenment as one of the "unfinished revolutions" which had accumulated like geological strata over the course of human history, their ambitions of total transformation undercut by compromise and missed opportunities. The Enlightenment bequeathed to the modern world the principle of challenging authority through rational critique, holding up reason as a solvent which could break down the dogmas of religion, politics, and metaphysics. It showed that conscience and intellect were innate tendencies in human beings that had to be respected and nurtured, provided with a sociopolitical environment in which to "grow," rather than being sacrificed to the purposes of behavioral engineers.[1] It made the idea of a common human nature the foundation of its universalism, providing a basis for human solidarity that cut across cultural, geopolitical and even temporal boundaries.[2] When Goodman ranked the Enlightenment as a manifestation of the "the greatness of mankind" he placed it, to be sure, within a sizable catalogue of human achievements, all of which were part of

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[1] Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-Education* and *The Community of Scholars* (New York: Vintage, 1964), 82.
[2] Ibid., 114.

the broader Western, humanist inheritance with which he identified.[3] But it is telling that, towards the end of his life, he chose to describe himself quite simply as "a loyal son of the Enlightenment."[4] For it was the Enlightenment, more than any other piece of that inheritance, that was coming under attack by a new generation of disillusioned youth and philosophical iconoclasts.

Indeed, from a certain perspective, the 20th century was the graveyard of the Enlightenment's highest hopes for the modern world. The humanism and cosmopolitanism that had fired the American and French revolutionaries was frustrated by the resurgence of ethnic and racial loyalties. The ideal of "perpetual peace," which had seemed to be within the grasp of 19th-century Europe, was shredded by the renewal of the enthusiastic slaughter that had plagued the continent for most of its history. The notion that the state could serve as an unobtrusive guarantor of individual freedom was undermined by its growth into an all-pervasive system of social control. The faith in science and technology as vehicles of social rationalization was shaken by the development of destructive capabilities that threatened to extinguish human existence itself. The idea that individual self-interest and social well-being could be reconciled under a market economy was contradicted by the persistence of poverty and inequality in the capitalist countries of the West. And the claim that the socialist tradition could offer an alternative route to the realization of Enlightenment ideals was discredited by the sordid record of "actually existing" socialism in the East.

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[3] Paul Goodman, *New Reformation: Notes of a Neolithic Conservative* (New York: Vintage, 1971), 88.

[4] Paul Goodman quoted in Kevin Mattson, *Intellectuals in Action: The Origins of the New Left and Radical Liberalism, 1945-1970* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 98.

For these reasons and more, by mid-century the teleological sense of progress that informed the radicals of the late-18th and 19th centuries was definitively shattered. Rather than Western civilization coming to full fruition in the modern world, it seemed to the pessimistically-inclined to be writing its own epitaph. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the most emblematic examples of what Oswald Spengler called "the decline of the West" were the Holocaust and the looming threat of nuclear war, both of which seemed to capture a distinctly modern kind of rational irrationality, evident in the careful administration of genocide and the contribution scientific ingenuity had made to the threat of ultimate destruction. In the 1960s and 1970s, evidence emerged that modern society was sowing the seeds of its own downfall in more insidious ways as well. Growth-oriented economics, consumerism, and the scientific control of nature for the sake of comfort and efficiency—all of which were wrapped up into the postwar understanding of progress—were shown to have resulted in the poisoning of the human environment and the potentially devastating destruction of the natural environment. It seemed that the modernist ambition to transform the Earth into a rational paradise of freedom and human welfare would culminate in the destruction of the very material preconditions of human, and even animal, existence.

It was for good reason, then, that this era saw a reconsideration of the philosophical and political ideals that were supposed to provide modernity with its sense of purpose and direction. Questions that would have gained little purchase in the atmosphere of 19th-century optimism were now unavoidable: To what extent were the ills of the modern world—capitalist exploitation, rampant industrialization, state domination, persistent conflict and violence, etc.—separable from the *ideas* and *ideals* that had been

bestowed upon the modern world by the Enlightenment? Had the "project of modernity" merely been sidetracked, as Goodman wanted to believe, or was it developing its own inner logic? Did the way forward necessitate a break with this "project," or a reimagining of it?

Few attempts to grapple with these questions were more influential than Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's 1944 *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Horkheimer and Adorno unwittingly anticipated one of the core concerns of the environmental movement by arguing that the fundamental flaw in Enlightenment thinking was its equation of "progress" with the domination of nature. The Enlightenment, they argued, fostered the idea that unrestrained nature was inimical to the realization of human ideals and potential. Consequently, nature had to be brought under human control, mastered through instrumental rationality, in order to replace the "necessity" of the natural world with the "freedom" of a manmade social world. Paradoxically, then, human freedom was to be realized through mastery and control. This agenda of mastery and control not only applied to the way in which human beings related to nature externally, but to the way in which they related to one another—the imperative of natural domination necessitated the regulation, regimentation, and hierarchicalization of human interaction so as to bridle all potentially deviant and disruptive tendencies. The same imperative called for the careful management of the Self, the suppression of subjectivity and individuality in the name of instrumental objectives. The grand ambitions of the Enlightenment had been whittled into a narrowly instrumental enterprise, an enterprise shot through with domination that extended even into the recesses of the mind, constraining the possibilities of human liberation from the level of society down to the level of everyday life. Indeed,

Horkheimer and Adorno believed they had demonstrated that Enlightenment thinkers and their offspring had polluted their vision of "freedom" with potentially fatal contradictions.

Despite their pessimistic interpretation of the trajectory of Enlightenment thought, Horkheimer and Adorno did not propose to discard the Enlightenment legacy outright. They held out the hope that the Enlightenment might be saved from itself, that another approach to the mobilization of the Enlightenment project might arise that would cure the tradition of its contradictions and avoid the pitfall of domination. They left little indication, however, as to what such an approach might entail. Responses to the aporia generated by their work have ranged from Jürgen Habermas's attempt to develop a full-bodied alternative in the form of his theory of communicative rationality,[5] to the efforts of Stephen Eric Bronner to rehabilitate the image of the Enlightenment directly.[6]

Although the fact has received little attention, Murray Bookchin, too, envisioned his work in large part as a response to the questions raised by Horkheimer and Adorno. His ecological formulation of anarchism—or "social ecology," as he called it—sought to build off of, and transcend, the themes they raised in several ways.[7] Firstly, Bookchin sought to make domination the central concern of radical social theory, emphasizing the need to uncover its origins and to expose its manifestations in human relationships of all kinds. Secondly, Bookchin sought to formulate a new natural philosophy which would redefine the way in which human beings understood their relationship to nature,

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[5] See, especially, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vols. 1 and 2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).

[6] See *Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

[7] As Bookchin put it, "[t]he power of these thinkers lies in the problematical nature of their work, not in the solutions they had to offer." *The Philosophy of Social Ecology: Essays on Dialectical Naturalism* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1990), f.132.

illuminating the organic continuities between "first nature" and humanmade "second nature" and the ways in which the realization of natural and human potential could advance symbiotically. Finally, Bookchin sought to bridge theory and practice by offering a concrete vision of social reconstruction along non-dominating, ecological lines, and a strategy for attaining that vision that could counteract Horkheimer and Adorno's quietist despair.[8]

It was with respect to the second of those ambitions that Bookchin made his most significant theoretical contribution. Horkheimer and Adorno's dissection of the "dialectic" of Enlightenment had shown how reason could turn against itself by letting instrumentalities overwhelm the ends that it was supposed to serve. The result was the complete abandonment of what Horkheimer called "objective reason."[9] Objective reason saw rationality as "an inherent feature of reality" rather than "merely an unthinking efficient technique."[10] Unlike instrumental reason, which was means-oriented, objective reason could be used to set broad goals for humanity, to provide orientation for human activities through speculative insights into the objective structure of reality. As Bookchin wrote in his *magnum opus*, 1982's *The Ecology of Freedom*, solving the dialectical paradox identified by Horkheimer and Adorno meant answering the following question: "how can reason, conceived as a *tool* or method for achieving ethical goals, be integrated with reason conceived as the inherent feature or *meaning* of these ethical goals?"[11]

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[8] The specifics of the "political" side of social ecology, as fleshed out in Bookchin's writings on "libertarian municipalism," will be examined in the next chapter.

[9] See Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Continuum, 1974). Like Bookchin, I use the term "instrumental reason" in preference to Horkheimer's own term, "subjective reason."

[10] Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005), 360.

[11] Ibid., 159.

The only way to counteract the hegemony of instrumental reason, Bookchin believed, was to reinvigorate the search for rational ends through a reconsideration of *nature*. It was necessary, he argued, "to invoke the claims of nature against the failures of society"—a move that Horkheimer and Adorno were unwilling or unprepared to make.[12] A reconceptualization of nature would help to expose the fallacy that the path to a rational society was through the domination of the human species *over* nature. But Bookchin inverted Horkheimer and Adorno's argument about the causes of domination. Rather than the domination of human by human arising out of the broader project of dominating nature, Bookchin claimed that "the very notion of the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human."[13] The way we conceptualize and treat nature, he argued, reflects our attitudes towards human beings and the social structures we erect around these attitudes. Thus, Bookchin aimed at "a reharmonization of nature and humanity through a reharmonization of human with human."[14] A new natural philosophy, he believed, would reveal that domination was not inherent in "nature" but rather an invention of human beings. By showing nature to be, in fact, full of potentialities that work against domination, Bookchin sought to establish the continuity between natural tendencies and a social project of human freedom.

Developing the core of his ideas in the mid-1960s, Bookchin stressed the timeliness of a politics premised on opposition to domination and a renewed sense of connection to the natural world. New social movements were arising to challenge the domination of whites over minorities, of men over women, of state technocrats over ordinary citizens. All of these movements reflected an explicit or implicit rejection of the

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[12] Ibid., 362.
[13] Ibid., 65.
[14] Ibid., 76.

class-centered politics of the Old Left, and gave rise to the hope that a New Left might unite around the imperative of ferreting out domination in all its forms. Furthermore, a paradigm shift in attitudes towards the natural world was underway (fostered in part by Bookchin's pioneering work on environmental degradation), and the rise of the environmental movement raised the possibility that a new ecological sensibility might be translated into effective political action.

It was with dismay, then, that Bookchin witnessed the downward spiral of the left in the late 1960s and 1970s. Squandering its early promise, the New Left swung capriciously from empty-headed action to the shallow and fickle appropriation of the radical theory of the Old Left, culminating in complete organizational disintegration. Its collapse ushered in an era of political pragmatism, on one hand, and individualistic "lifestyle anarchism," on the other. The loss of credibility suffered by the Enlightenment tradition, revolutionary teleologies, and Western civilization as a whole generated the antihumanism and antirationalism of postmodernism and primitivism. This last development was the most troubling of all to Bookchin, for it actively undermined the ideals of rationality and coherence which, from his perspective, were the only things that could thread together a renewed liberatory project out of the different strands of the left. Against those who sought to consign the philosophical and institutional legacy of Western civilization to the trash bin of history, Bookchin sought to demonstrate that a critical theory of domination, an ecological understanding of nature, and an anti-authoritarian political *praxis* were possible from within the framework of Enlightenment thought, and from within the framework of the Western tradition more generally.

In arguing these points over the course of forty years, Bookchin amassed the most theoretically-sophisticated, integrated *oeuvre* of any of the New Anarchists. Indeed, his goal was nothing less than to supply "a theoretical framework for a new politics."[15] The endeavor was expressive not only of greater theoretical ambitions but of a higher valuation of *theory* in general than other New Anarchists.[16] Although, as we have seen, other figures of the New Anarchism engaged self-consciously in anarchist theory, they often preferred to appeal to "common sense" and moral intuitions, believing it generally sufficient to let the efficacy of anarchist solutions speak for itself. Bookchin was alone in insisting on the need to develop a theory that was as rigorous, structured, and comprehensive as possible—a theory that engaged not only the anarchist and libertarian socialist traditions, but contemporary developments in philosophy and political theory as well. Only a reinvigorated radical theory, Bookchin believed, could provide the consciousness necessary to escape the snares that had derailed the Enlightenment project and to confront the profound challenges involved in rendering human life free and sustainable in the modern world.[17]

The ecological turn and the shift from exploitation to domination

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[15] Murray Bookchin, *From Urbanization to Cities* (London: Cassell, 1996), 10.

[16] As for actual American anarchist groups, they "offered little in the way of theory but contented themselves with ad hoc revolutionism based on blind instinct, impassioned zeal, and inchoate militancy. Street fighting was the tactic and strategy of choice, often organized around extremely narrow issues." *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future of the Left* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2001), 108.

[17] Whether Bookchin managed to offer a "theory" of domination by Frank Lovett's standards in his recent *A General Theory of Domination and Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) is another matter. Bookchin's dialectical approach worked against attempts to reduce domination—or any other phenomenon—to an analytic definition (he was more interested in pinning down the causes and tracing the history of domination than in defining the concept against other concepts). Lovett's complete neglect of Bookchin (as well as the entire tradition of anarchism) in a book which purports to have surveyed the literature on domination comprehensively, however, is inexcusable, especially given Lovett's proclamation of the "need for a progressive political doctrine that can effectively compete with common-sense [right] libertarianism." (p. 7)

The gloom that pervaded Horkheimer and Adorno's later work was one symptom of a broader crisis of Marxism in the middle decades of the 20th century. The breakdown of the Marxist paradigm provided the theoretical backdrop for Bookchin's body of work and served as the main impetus of his personal development. Bookchin's self-extraction from this paradigm took him from the Old "Stalinist" Left to Trotskyism to anarchism over the course of three decades. As a young man, he was active in the Communist youth groups the Young Pioneers and the Young Communist League, cutting his teeth as a debater and propagandist in the vibrant radical atmosphere of New York City in the 1930s. Like other radicals of his generation, he broke with the Stalinist Third International over the cynical compromises of the Popular Front, the callous charade of the Moscow Trials, and the brutal suppression of the Spanish Revolution in Catalonia, aligning himself with the Trotskyist movement throughout the Second World War. With Trotsky, Bookchin initially believed the war would create an opening for a riptide of revolutionary insurrections that would spell the final downfall of capitalism. But after the war it was not capitalism but Marxism that was thrown into crisis, evacuated of its teleological power and taken seriously by few outside the rapidly shrinking membership of official Communist organizations. Concurrently, Bookchin's experiences as a foundryman, autoworker, and trade union organizer in northern New Jersey were dispelling what hopes he still harbored that the working class could be relied upon to spearhead a revolutionary transformation of society. Repulsed by the thought of becoming a social democrat no less than the defection of many disillusioned radicals to the right, Bookchin realized that both he and the left were in need of new inspiration.

This sentiment was shared, of course, with those in Britain and America who sought to arouse interest in a "New Left." The beginnings were promising: the New Left had grown up in the anti-nuclear and civil rights movement, and it traded in populist imagery and grassroots empowerment rather than historical materialism and apologetics for the revolutionary "motherland." But by the end of the decade, the "New" Left was starting to look depressingly "Old," as it increasingly turned to the idiom (if not the substance) of Marxist-Leninism and Maoism. Bookchin's widely-read pamphlet "Listen, Marxist!" appeared at precisely this time, written for (and distributed at) the 1969 SDS national convention, at which Maoists tried to take control of the organization.[18] "All the old crap of the thirties," he warned in its caustic opening line, "is coming back again."[19] Invoking Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Bookchin lambasted a new generation of radicals for yet again rooting their revolution in the ideas and imagery of the past. Capitalism, he argued, had changed in fundamental ways, and Marxism's 19th-century assumptions were hopelessly anachronistic: "Marxism has ceased to be applicable to our time not because it is too visionary or revolutionary, but because it is not visionary or revolutionary enough."[20] Marxism was haunted by outdated presumptions about the utility of centralization, the inevitability of economic crisis, the need to secure abundance through economic growth, and the supposed radical potential of the working class. Far from

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[18] In fact, the faction that Bookchin and the *Anarchos* Group set up at the convention, according to his account, ended up attracting about ten percent of the participants. It was the only alternative to the Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism that had overtaken other factions within the SDS. The group argued against the Gorzian notion of the students as workers, and for "an antihierarchical viewpoint rather than a sectarian third world and proletarian point of view." It urged SDS to focus on "broader issues like ecology, community, libertarian forms of political organization," and to "orient itself primarily toward American problems." *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future of the Left*, 101. It was of little use, of course, as SDS rapidly disintegrated. In his recollections of the aftermath, Bookchin recounts a briefly promising opportunity to create an alternative libertarian student organization, but it quickly slipped away.

[19] Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (San Francisco, CA: Ramparts Press, 1971), 173.

[20] Ibid., 177.

offering a compelling alternative to capitalism, Marxian socialism had turned out to be "in large part the very state capitalism that Marx failed to anticipate in the dialectic of capitalism."[21] This was to suggest that Marxism in fact shared much of the economistic logic that had shaped capitalist ideology. Marx and his followers wanted to show not only that that socialism was more compatible with freedom, rationality, and justice than capitalism, but that it could outperform capitalism even in its areas of strength. Marxist states were just as obsessed as capitalist states with expanding productivity by mastering nature and subjecting it to rational planning, and they had few qualms about subordinating other aspects of life to this enterprise.

The development of ecological consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s revealed this agenda, whether overseen by socialist bureaucrats in the East or corporate CEOs in the West, to be fatally contradictory. Bookchin was among the first to sound the alarm about the rampant environmental degradation that had resulted from the campaign to subject nature to rational control. His 1962 *Our Synthetic Environment* (published under the pseudonym Lewis Herber) predated Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and went much further than that book in portraying the pervasive nature of the burgeoning ecological crisis. Thanks in large part to the stunning success of Carson's book, that sense of crisis began to seep into popular culture in the mid-1960s, feeding off of concerns about the consequences of environmental destruction for human well-being (a theme Bookchin took up again in 1965's *The Crisis in Our Cities*). By the end of the decade, it was clear that environmentalism was an idea whose time had come: the first Earth Day in 1970 saw the mobilization of upwards of 20 million people, in what was probably the largest

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[21] Ibid., 185.

demonstration of the era.[22] On one hand, environmental concerns were easily translated into traditional political action, giving rise to a succession of new policies and a host of Washington-based lobbying organizations in the 1970s. But Bookchin hoped that they might also offer a promising new avenue to more radical reformers. That hope was the premise of his pioneering article "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought," published in 1964, which was "the first manifesto of radical ecology."[23] Noting the historical tendency of radical theorists to ground their perspectives in the contemporary insights of the sciences, Bookchin urged radicals to develop a new set of theoretical understandings that built off of ecology's revelations about the character of the natural world. Ecology was both "intrinsically a critical science," raising far more fundamental questions about human life on Earth than political economy, and "an integrative and reconstructive" one, seeking a harmonization of human beings and nature only realizable (so Bookchin claimed) if society was reorganized along anarchist lines.[24] On a more practical level, by addressing threats which imperiled the human race as a whole, ecology had the potential to unite the left around what could be portrayed as the central contradiction of capitalism—the incessant productive drive that spurred it to destroy the very material basis of its operation, and, in the process, the foundations of human life itself.

As little more than "state capitalism," actually-existing Marxist states had, as suggested above, inherited this contradiction from the very economic system they sought to supplant. And as Horkheimer and Adorno's argument predicted, the efforts of those states to outcompete capitalism through the rationalization of production had

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[22] Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Green Revolution* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), 24.
[23] Janet Biehl, "Introduction," in *The Murray Bookchin Reader* (Oakland, CA: Black Rose Books, 1999).
[24] Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, 58.

compromised Marxism's own ideals. The drive to dominate nature in the name of productivity and economic growth had resulted in other kinds of domination incompatible with the utopian spirit of human liberation that had informed Marx's early manuscripts. Spontaneity, subjectivity, democracy, equality—all were sacrificed on the altar of "Five Year Plans" and the like, designed to wrench backwards societies into the modern world at any cost.

Marxist theory, Bookchin believed, had paved the way for this outcome by failing to bring the problem of domination into clear view. Marxists, much less Marx himself, were not completely inattentive to the problem of domination.[25] But the famous watchword from Marx's economic writings was, of course, not domination but *exploitation*, which focused on the way in which the owners of the means of production stripped wage laborers of some of the value generated by their labor. Marx's call to expropriate the expropriators was aimed at putting an end to the exploitative relationship between classes by placing productive property under public control and eliminating wage labor. This general prioritization of exploitation helped to foster the assumption that domination (of men over women, for example) would dissolve along with class rule under socialism—or, at the very least, that confronting domination as such would divert precious radical energies away from the class struggle. Such assumptions were problematic for two reasons. The first reason was that some forms of domination were precapitalist in origin—as the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch put it, they were "nonsynchronous" contradictions held over from prior eras of human history—and could

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[25] Marx had highlighted manifestations of domination that were not purely economic in character, and Marxists like Engels (*The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*), and Bebel (*Woman under Socialism*) drew from the burgeoning discipline of anthropology in examining pre-capitalist forms of domination.

for no logical reason be expected to dissolve with the transfer of ownership, or even control, of the means of production. [26] The second reason was the one identified by Horkheimer and Adorno—the fact that orthodox Marxism's own logic, traceable in large part back to Enlightenment presuppositions, forced it to implement new forms of domination in the pursuit of its ostensible goals. Rather than rescuing the Enlightenment project from its contradictions, then, Marxism had kept them in place, and left others unresolved besides.

Class identity and class struggle were no longer sources of liberation, Bookchin argued, but shackles, not only because they wedded revolution to the nonexistent agency of the proletariat, but because they encouraged revolutionaries to downplay the need to confront domination directly, in all its forms. He claimed that the fundamental dynamic that drove human development stemmed not from class and the exploitation of labor, but from domination and the hierarchies that allowed it to operate by structuring society unequally. These hierarchies were "much subtler and more elusive phenomena" than class, "based not only on biological facts like age, gender, and kinship differences…but also on social facts like ethnocentricity, bureaucratic control, and national origin."[27] They were effectively invisible to traditional Marxism because of its economistic bias: "The dialectical unfolding of hierarchy has left in its wake an ages-long detritus of systems of domination involving ethnic, gendered, age, vocational, urban-rural, and many other forms of dominating people, indeed, an elaborate system of rule that economistic 'class analyses' and strictly anti-statist approaches do not clearly reveal."[28] These hierarchies, as well as the "hierarchical sensibility of command and obedience" which comprised the

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[26] See Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2009).
[27] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 28.
[28] Ibid., 27.

subjective side of domination, "emerged long before capitalism" and would presumably continue to persist unless consciously extirpated from social life.[29]

Anarchism, Bookchin believed, offered a "deeper, richer, and most significantly, *broader* insight into and grasp of the dialectic of domination and freedom" than Marxism and other socialist ideologies. Even classical anarchists had resisted the tendency to trace all manifestations of oppression back to economic relationships. As they saw it, putting an end to class rule was a critical task of the revolution, but it was not a panacea that would destroy other forms of domination as well. Most importantly, classical anarchists held that the state represented a distinct locus of domination at least as important as capital. For this reason, it would have been no surprise to them to hear that Marxism carried the seeds of domination within itself. In its reliance upon the state as the midwife of a socialist society, Marxism in the name of revolutionary realism threatened to perpetuate indefinitely an institution that Marx himself recognized to be a symptom of alienation and inequality. Putting the abuses of the state and the abuses of capital on a relatively equal footing encouraged anarchists to ask what each had in common, and to frame their social ideal against a more general category of oppression than class rule. Indeed, though classical anarchists did not use the terminology, theirs was arguably a political philosophy of "non-domination."[30] Although this concern with domination was only gradually broadened to encompass all of the institutions and relationships that would

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[29] Murray Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1996), 29.

[30] Anarchists were more radical in their vision of non-domination than the "republicans" credited by Philip Pettit with introducing this idea into the Western tradition. The republican understanding of non-domination is premised on the need for protective institutions which, by exerting responsible and constrained coercion in targeted ways, prevent groups or individuals from forcing their will upon others. Anarchists were, by contrast, hopeful that social reorganization, education, and cultural transformation would be sufficient to accomplish this end, without the need for coercive institutions. The fundamental characteristic that separated them from the rest of the socialist movement during the late 19th and early 20th centuries was, in fact, their rejection of the idea that a republican state could be trusted to oversee a gradual transition into socialism.

come to be scrutinized in the second half of the 20th century, the state-and-capital

approach of classical anarchism at least contained the potential to be developed into a

deeper and broader critique of domination.[31]

Furthermore, anarchism had, historically, lacked the internal, self-generating

tendency towards domination that plagued both capitalism and socialism. Capitalists and

socialists premised their shared compulsion to dominate nature through instrumental

rationality on their particular variations on the same modernist fantasy. They were

perpetually trying to justify the suffering and destruction engendered by industrialization,

the alienating effects of science and technology, and the need to enact rigorous individual

and social discipline in the name of rationalizing social existence, conquering scarcity,

and securing material well-being. Their sense of the enormity of their enterprise was

informed by the feeling that it was necessary—whether through the unconscious

dynamics of capitalism or the conscious ambitions of socialism—to tear to shreds the

totality of social life that had been inherited and usher in a new order organized along

radically different lines. Anarchists, by contrast, lacked faith in both the "invisible hand"

of the capitalist and the "historical necessity" of the Marxist, both of which conjured

rational and humane ends out of irrational and inhumane means. They were acutely

sensitive to the paradoxes of progress, and more willing than other radicals to question

the utility of the cultural losses, the social injustices, and even the environmental

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[31] The anarchist concern with domination did not automatically translate, of course, into an enlightened perspective on all kinds of domination. The record of classical anarchists, viewed from a modern perspective, was notoriously checkered. Classical anarchism was tainted by support for the patriarchal family (Proudhon), anti-Semitism (Bakunin), discomfort with free sexuality (Kropotkin), and a general anthropocentrism. Issues of widespread concern in today's world like gay and disability rights were, of course, as yet invisible.

destruction that accompanied modernization.[32] The almost rapturous tone struck by Marx in the *Communist Manifesto* in response to what Joseph Schumpeter called the "creative destruction" of capitalism was foreign to them, and they hoped that the best of the precapitalist world might be preserved alongside the advances of modern production.[33] "Progress," according to their understanding, did not entail a breathless leap into modernity, but the careful salvaging of certain traditions and values, which would be supplemented rather than overtaken by modern advances. That attitude, arguably, made them less willing to justify domination by placing it in the service of human advancement, and it prefigured the even deeper ambivalence about the mixed blessings of the modern world that colored the intellectual atmosphere into which Bookchin's writings appeared.

Contesting domination politically and culturally

Bookchin's hopes of crafting a politically-potent theory of domination were bolstered by the fact that resistance to domination had taken on a concretely political aspect in the postwar era. In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, activists began to build organizations and movements around specific dimensions of domination, targeting subjects like race, gender, and sexuality in a manner foreign to the *modus operandi* of the Old Left. As a variety of social theorists have noted, the rise of these so-called "new

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[32] Some have argued that figures like Kropotkin and Élisée Reclus anticipated the ecological sensibility that informs social ecology. See for example, George Woodcock's introduction to Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom: The Odyssey of Élisée Reclus* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1996).

[33] Indeed, even more than other 19th-century radical perspectives, classical anarchism fed off of the clash between premodern values and sensibilities and the ethos of the new industrial order, and it found much to appreciate in the relationships and worldviews that had sustained common people for millennia. Although it made some limited inroads into the rising class of proletarians, its real heroes were the craftsman, the peasant, and the *petite-bourgeois*, and more than a little nostalgia informed its romanticization of medieval institutions and folkways.

social movements" represented a break with the assumptions of traditional radicalism.[34]

These movements reflected the feeling that the working class could no longer be the

primary "agent" of social change, both because it had proven itself impotent and co-

optable, and because its own liberation did not, in fact, encompass the liberation of all of

"humanity," as Marx had prophesied. The new movements assumed that domination

could not be equated solely with economic power, and they sought to eliminate

domination in means as well as ends by encouraging grassroots participation and

charging ordinary people themselves with the task of their own liberation.

Bookchin believed that the most important of these movements were the ecology

movement, the feminist movement, and the community control movement. These were

linked, he argued, by their shared concern with domination:

> Ecology raises the issue that the very notion of man's domination of nature stems
> from man's domination of man. Feminism reaches even further and reveals that
> the domination of man by man actually originates in the domination of woman by
> man. Community movements implicitly assert that in order to replace social
> domination by self-management, a new type of civic self—the free, self-
> governing citizen—must be restored and gathered into new institutional forms
> such as popular assemblies to challenge the all-pervasive state apparatus.
> Followed through to their logical conclusion, all of these movements challenge
> not only class formations but hierarchies, not only material exploitation but
> domination in every form.[35]

Bookchin recognized the danger that the new movements would degenerate into

compartmentalized struggles, hostile to one another and fixated on narrow sets of

interests and objectives. But he was hopeful that they could be united on the basis of a

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[34] See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, "The New Social Movements" in *Telos* 1981, no. 49 (September 1981): 33-37.

[35] Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society*, 15. It should be noted that Bookchin seems to have contradicted himself on the question of whether the domination of woman by man precedes the domination of man by man. In the *Ecology of Freedom*, his narrative of the development of hierarchy begins with the rise of gerontocracies in which the aged are invested with special status. But there is no doubt that, at the very least, he saw the domination of men over women as contributing to the domination of men over men as well.

shared conception of a society free from hierarchy and domination. The principal

contribution Bookchin sought to make to these struggles was to help them "discover the

sweeping implications of the issues they raise: the achievement of a totally new, non-

hierarchical society in which the domination of nature by man, of woman by man, and of

society by the state is completely abolished—technologically, institutionally, culturally,

and in the very rationality and sensibilities of the individual."[36]

This quote hints at Bookchin's belief that the political demands of the new social

movements, taken by themselves, were not adequate solutions to the problem of

domination. To root out domination entirely, he realized, was an inherently utopian

enterprise. It called not only for a transformation of political and economic institutions,

but for a transformation of *sensibility*, a revolution of everyday life. In the 1960s, those

utopian hopes were embodied in the so-called "counterculture." By deconstructing

bourgeois values and throwing out the technocratic mentality of the prior generation, the

counterculture had helped to delegitimize prevailing patterns of life, and had put a

thoroughgoing "spiritual" transformation on the radical agenda. That countercultural

attitudes could devolve into superficial escapism was a possibility to which Bookchin

was only too painfully attuned in later years.[37] But Bookchin's affection for cultural

rebellion was never synonymous with a wholehearted embrace of the counterculture

itself. What he called for was "a richer, more perceptive, and more *conscious*

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[36] Ibid., 14.

[37] With Theodore Roszak, Bookchin saw plenty of overlap between the concerns of the counterculture and of the student movement. And like Roszak, he thought one of the great failings of the 1960s was that they were never happily married to one another and ultimately went their separate ways, with the counterculture degenerating into apolitical "narcissism" (to borrow Christopher Lasch's term) and the student movement gravitating towards crude neo-Leninism. Arguably, Bookchin's attack on "lifestyle" anarchism can be seen as an attempt to exorcise some of the consequences of the very cultural radicalism he had once embraced. See *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism?: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2001).

development" of the agenda the counterculture had helped to set. The counterculture had injected a utopian quality into social radicalism that raised the possibility of rooting out domination from the ground up, fostering a new way of *being-in-the-world* by "translat[ing] freedom and love into existential realities of everyday life."[38] But its lack of a developed consciousness had made it vulnerable to commercialization and "pseudo-radicalism."[39] Cultural radicals, like the political radicals of the new social movements, had to be made aware of the full implications of their own ideas.

Bookchin was hopeful that the contributions of the new social movements could be fused with the contributions of the counterculture into a radical strategy capable of eradicating domination in both its objective and subjective manifestations. It was a propitious moment, he believed, to put forward a theory of domination that could breathe a sense of purpose into the politically and culturally disaffected and render them fully conscious of their historic mission.

The origins of hierarchy and domination

The first task of such a theory, Bookchin argued, was to uncover the origins of hierarchy and domination in the human past. In his *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno had suggested that these origins were for all intents and purposes lost in "the mists of prehistory," and that to argue over them was a fruitless exercise.[40] But Bookchin believed that a wealth of anthropological data had made it possible to trace domination back to the emergence of hierarchies in early human societies, and to chart the evolution of these

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[38] Bookchin, *Towards an Ecological Society*, 161.
[39] Ibid., 166.
[40] See *Negative Dialectics* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), 313.

hierarchies over time.[41] Bookchin's starting point for his narrative of that evolution was premised on the existence in early human history of "organic societies," whose social structure and culture worked against hierarchy and domination in a number of ways. Firstly, these societies were thoroughly egalitarian, differentiating social groups and roles without placing them into hierarchies that privileged some over others. Rather than connoting superiority or inferiority, the qualitative differences recognized by these societies merely formed the basis of patterns of relationships that structured social interaction on an equal plane. Thus, in organic societies there was "complete parity or equality between individuals, age-groups and sexes."[42] Distinctions between "leaders" and "led" have been retroactively read into these societies, but in fact "[w]hat we flippantly call 'leadership' in organic societies often turns out to be guidance, lacking the usual accoutrements of command. Its 'power' is functional rather than political."[43] In fact, internal affairs were generally handled with a minimum of coercion. Secondly, with respect to the sharing of resources, there was an even deeper unity than that connoted by notions of "common property." Rather, *usufruct* was often the norm. Unlike exchange, or even more solidaristic notions like reciprocity or mutual aid, usufruct was not a *quid pro quo*. It established the right to use an object simply because one needed it, assuming the object was not already in use by another. Finally, these societies recognized an obligation to care for all of their members, providing an "irreducible minimum," an "inalienable right" of every member of the community to food, shelter, and clothing "irrespective of the amount of work contributed by the individual to the acquisition of the means of

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[41] Bookchin relied largely on the work of Max Weber, Paul Radin, and Dorothy Lee.
[42] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 123.
[43] Ibid., 122.

life."[44] This is what established an "equality of unequals" which was sensitive to differences of need and ability and intent upon putting people on the same footing.

Organic societies not only had an egalitarian structure, but also what Bookchin sometimes referred to as an egalitarian "outlook."[45] This outlook "visualized people, things, and relations in terms of their uniqueness rather than their 'superiority' or 'inferiority'…The world was perceived as a composite of many different parts, each indispensable to its unity and harmony. Individuality…was seen more in terms of interdependence than independence. Variety was prized within the larger tapestry of the community—as a priceless ingredient of communal unity." Thus, the absence of social hierarchy was complemented by the absence of a hierarchical mentality. The ideas of "equality" and "freedom" were "implicit in the very outlook itself."[46] The value of mutual respect and the sense of unity between the individual and the group were reflected in the very language these societies used to communicate: one spoke of doing things "with" other people rather than "to" them.

One of the principal reasons for this nonhierarchical outlook, Bookchin argued, was the respect accorded in early societies to women and the roles and values traditionally associated with women. Matricentric horticultural societies (as opposed to *matriarchal* societies, which were structured around female rule) were informed by "feminine" values of sharing, nurturing, respect for place, and love. The unconditional love associated with the mother, in particular, yielded "the total deobjectification of

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[44] Ibid., 123. Bookchin takes the terminology from Paul Radin.
[45] The term is somewhat misleading because it would seem to imply self-consciousness—which, if we are to adopt some of his other claims, could only have existed in the most primitive form in these societies. The term "sensibility" probably better captures Bookchin's meaning.
[46] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 110.

person that makes humanness its own end rather than a tool of hierarchy and classes."[47]

One of the major contributions of the modern feminist movement, according to

Bookchin, was to have restored these values to a position of respect. If "feminine" values

could be freed of their association with a particular biological category of human being

and made to inform human relationships as a whole, he believed, they could once again

help to form the foundation of a non-hierarchical sensibility.

Bookchin argued that the egalitarian social structure and outlook typical of

organic societies shaped their attitudes towards nature: "organic society's harmonized

view of nature follows directly from the harmonized relations within the early human

community."[48] Nature was perceived as non-hierarchical, an organic whole in which

qualitatively different parts were united in cooperative interrelationship. Furthermore,

these societies assumed a symbiotic relationship between human communities and their

natural surroundings. In fact, nature was thought to be an active part of the community,

rather than simply an environment to move around in, exploit, or placate. And, vice

versa, the community was "conceived to be part of the balance of nature—a forest

community or a soil community—in short, a truly ecological community or *eco-*

community peculiar to its ecosystem, with an active sense of participation in the overall

environment and the cycles of nature."[49] Given these integral interconnections, there was,

as Bookchin puts it, an "ontological" continuity between nature and humanity. Rather

than positing a gap between the human subject and the natural object that had to be

bridged through "labor," in organic societies human beings worked *with* rather than *upon*

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[47] Ibid., 128. I have found no evidence that Bookchin ever engaged with the work of Martha
Nussbaum or others who have tried to build off of traditionally "feminine" values in an effort to revise our
understanding of justice.

[48] Ibid., 115.

[49] Bookchin, *Towards an Ecological Society*, 61.

nature, helping to realize natural potential rather than appropriating or dominating nature through technical mastery.[50]

While Bookchin endorsed many of the characteristics he associated with organic societies, he believed that to resurrect them in the modern world was both impossible and undesirable. Several features made these kinds of societies both unattractive on their own terms and vulnerable to internal developments in the direction of hierarchy and domination. One problem was that the values embodied in their relationships and practices were generally unconscious and habitual rather than rationally justified. As such, their way of life was not always properly distinguished from and defended against alternative ways of life which threatened to exert a corrosive influence. The same lack of reflexivity also helped to account for the rigidity that characterized organic societies. These societies did not recognize the desirability, or even possibility, of social advances, and their social structures and practices tended to be strongly resistant to change. Furthermore, these societies were tainted by an insularity that prevented them from engaging in constructive intercourse with the outside world and developing a universalistic conception of humanity. Rather, they fostered "an inward retreat into a guardedness and suspicion toward all that is exogenous to the community—a fear of the social horizon."[51] Finally, though these societies generally lived in peaceful coexistence with nature, their occasional opportunistic destruction of flora and fauna demonstrates that they lacked a consistent ecological ethic, as well as the knowledge and techniques necessary to foster benign interaction with ecological processes.

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[50] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 318. In Bookchin's words, work implied "a synchronicity of subject and object."
[51] Ibid., 121.

Nevertheless, it was an important part of Bookchin's project to establish the historical reality (if not the contemporary desirability) of organic societies, for it was a means of shattering the notion that hierarchy, domination, and the destruction of nature are inevitable corollaries of human existence. It was also a means of bringing to light tantalizing possibilities and potential that might have given a different direction to social evolution and which might continue to inform a vision of humanity's future.[52] As Bookchin writes, "[r]arely is history notable for its capacity to select and preserve the most virtuous traits of humanity. But there is still no reason why hope, reinforced by consciousness and redolent with ancestral memories, may not linger within us as an awareness of what humanity has been in the past and what it can become in the future."[53]

As a resolutely dialectical thinker steeped in the Hegelian tradition, Bookchin did not claim that hierarchy had been imposed upon this organic order from the outside, like a satanic snake finding its way into God's garden. Rather, "[h]ierarchy emerged primarily as an *immanent* development within society that slowly phased humanity from fairly egalitarian relationships into a society institutionalized around command and obedience."[54] This development began, according to Bookchin's reading of the anthropological literature, with the gradual separation of elders into not only a distinct but a "superior" social stratum (or "gerontocracy"). This kind of hierarchy was still relatively inclusive, however, since age and experience were distinctions that eventually came to all. Hierarchy became more insidious with the rise of shamans, who helped to further

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[52] Other anthropologically-oriented anarchists have looked to early societies for similar reasons. See, for example, David Graeber's aptly-named *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2007).

[53] Ibid., 118.

[54] Ibid., 26.

limit power and authority to a select few by cultivating quasi-religious respect for, and fear of, those individuals granted special status within the community. The groups they formed were, Bookchin suggests, "incipient political institutions."[55] Indeed, "the shaman is the incipient State personified,"[56] combining power with ideology, creating "the ideological mythos that crystallizes incipient power into actual power."[57]

Bookchin traced the emergence of these early forms of hierarchy in part because he was eager to show that hierarchy and domination precede the crystallization of specifically *economic* classes. In fact, on an economic level these early hierarchical societies remained relatively egalitarian; what limited inequality arose was kept in check by leveling mechanisms like the potlatch. Furthermore, the influence of cultural norms was still strong enough to foster skepticism of independent wealth, solidarity along kinship lines, and the continuation of usufruct and the irreducible minimum.

The qualitative character of the shift towards hierarchy became more apparent with the beginning of the subjugation of women, for this led to a transformation of values as well as social structure. Biological distinctions between men and women were transmuted from qualitative but complementary differences into the notion that men were "naturally" entitled to exercise greater authority. The civil sphere, as opposed to the increasingly deemphasized realm of domesticity, was greatly expanded, carved out by men as their exclusive domain and invested with special status. Matricentric values were driven underground, and sororal relationships rendered invisible. Women were taught to view their "posture of renunciation, modesty, and obedience as the intrinsic attributes of

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[55] Ibid., 154.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 153.

[their] subjectivity."[58] This new set of attitudes towards women and the "feminine"

values associated with them facilitated the domination of men over men as well. It

"generate[d] a hostile ambience in society—a meanness of spirit, a craving for

recognition, an aggressive appetite, and a terrifying exaggeration of cruelty." Otherness

came to be seen not as complementary but as antagonistic. Rather than initiating a

Hegelian journey to mutual recognition and self-identity, this antagonistic outlook

became "an epistemology that devaluates humanity into an aggregate of mere objects."[59]

The general hostility towards otherness promoted by patriarchal hierarchies was typified

by a "masculine," warrior mentality. Not only did this mentality help hierarchy to

colonize societies internally, but it also led to the projection of aggression outward

towards surrounding societies, effectively compelling the latter to develop hierarchies of

their own in their efforts to defend themselves.

Once the hierarchies developed by elders, shamans, and patriarchs were encrusted

at a higher level of institutionalization, the modern state began to take shape. By

centralizing power it enabled social and economic elites to establish and wield

systematically not only cultural and social supremacy, but political supremacy. Its rise, as

both Hegel and Marx realized, was a consequence of social fragmentation. The state was

now distinguished from "civil society," which was associated with inequality,

competition, and strife. In its efforts to establish artificially the equality, common

identity, and stability that had once emerged fluidly out of egalitarian social relationships,

the state symbolized the definitive loss of the unity that had characterized organic

societies.

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[58] Ibid., 194.
[59] Ibid., 195.

As hinted at above, this unity was shattered on a subjective level as well, with the rise of a hierarchical sensibility, nurtured initially by shamans and priests. What Bookchin calls "epistemologies of rule" fostered "the development of patriarchy and an egoistic morality in the rulers" and "a psychic apparatus rooted in guilt and renunciation" in the ruled, organizing "psychic structures for command and obedience."[60] Organic societies had a "conciliatory sensibility" that manifested itself in animism: "Preliterate epistemology tends to unify rather than divide: it personifies animals, plants, even natural forces and perfectly inanimate things as well as human beings."[61] Even primitive magic, Bookchin contended, sought the cooperation of nature, not its domination. The shaman and the priest, by contrast, pioneered the dividing up of the world in order to manipulate it. With the emergence of the "*transcendental conception of order*" associated with the Hebrews, object was subordinated to subject, and reality to spirit, by the dictates of a supernatural and sovereign power.[62] "This religious separation of the world's order in terms of sovereignty rather than complementarity," Bookchin writes, "provided an ideology of unreasoned obedience, of rule by fiat and the powers of supernatural retribution."[63]

While "Jerusalem" emphasized faith and obedience, "Athens" emphasized reason and investigation, but its worldview was no less premised on the existence of hierarchies. For all of its stress upon "balance," the dualisms that Hellenic thought introduced— between mind and body, rationality and sensuality, society and nature, mental work and physical work, and so forth—were organized by reason so that one was given "both

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[60] Ibid., 159.
[61] Ibid., 169.
[62] Ibid., 175.
[63] Ibid., 177.

epistemological and social priority" over the other.[64] Thus what began as dualistic distinctions evolved into hierarchies. In other words, in the realm of thought no less than in society, qualitative differences were not allowed to coexist on the same plane of equality, but were inevitably ranked relative to one another. Bookchin concluded that "from the two mainstreams of western civilization, Hellenism and Judaism, the Promethean powers of the male are collected into an ideology of repressive rationality and hierarchical morality."[65]

One consequence of this legacy of hierarchical thinking was that the state, as it solidified its hegemony, was "internalized," building upon ingrained hierarchical assumptions so as to ensure inward as well as outward obedience. Dependent upon the cooperation of their subjects, states began to employ ideology to discipline minds as well as bodies: "Hierarchy, class, and ultimately the State penetrate the very integument of the human psyche and establish within it unreflective internal powers of coercion and constraint…By using guilt and self-blame, the inner State can control behavior long before fear of the coercive powers of the State have to be invoked."[66] In the modern era, the need for this kind of self-policing was reified by thinkers like Sigmund Freud into a corollary of "civilization" itself, and treated as an inescapable condition of social stability and progress. In order for civilization to operate, it was assumed, individuals had to exercise perpetual self-control and sublimate any potentially disruptive impulses. What Freud called the "reality principle" ensured that these impulses were kept in check, encouraging an attitude of self-discipline, guilt, and obedience to authority. Thus, by the 20th century, hierarchy and domination had not only worked their way into social

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[64] Ibid., 180.
[65] Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society*, 64.
[66] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 189.

institutions, but into the human mind—at such a depth that they had acquired an aura of inevitability, being justified as "natural" outgrowths of human interaction, rooted in the most basic social needs of the species.

Towards a new philosophy of nature and "objective" ethics

The development of social hierarchies and their validating ideologies transformed the ways in which human beings related to the natural world. An antagonistic attitude towards nature was initially fostered by the aged members of the community who presided over gerontocracies. The aged, Bookchin argued, had special reason to privilege society over nature, for social hierarchy allowed them to overcome the decline in their natural faculties. Their hostility towards nature ultimately developed into the "repressive reason" that became the main means of establishing human domination over nature. The domination of nature, Bookchin claimed, was also linked in very symbolic ways to the emergence of male domination over women. This idea was hardly unique to Bookchin, of course,[67] but he went so far as to propose that "[t]he subjugation of [woman's] nature and its absorption into the nexus of patriarchal morality forms the archetypal act of domination that ultimately gives rise to man's imagery of a subjugated nature." The "violation of woman as nature" reinforced the violation of "nature as woman," and vice versa.[68]

With the rise of the reality principle, human beings found themselves divided from nature not only externally, but internally. Self-rule demanded personal discipline and the repression of natural impulses (or what Freud called the "pleasure principle").

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[67] See, for example, Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983).

[68] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 193.

This internal mastery was seen as a precondition of external mastery: Marx no less than Freud assumed that self-repression and self-discipline were "the historic knout for achieving mastery over nature." Consequently, he "made domination an indispensable phase or moment in the dialectic of civilization."[69] Marx failed to appreciate the historical contingency of his own notion of a stingy "realm of necessity" that had to be controlled through technics if human beings were to advance into the "realm of freedom." For Bookchin, this was no more than an unexamined Victorian bias, premised on an arrogant dismissal of the precapitalist world and a faith in the historical necessity of capitalism.

Marx saw hierarchy and domination as consequences of human beings' struggle to wrest an economic surplus from nature.[70] They were inevitabilities, at least until the final triumph of communism, when production would take place without oppression and destruction, and the rule of men would be replaced by the administration of things. But as Bookchin pointed out, despite their prevalence within the Western tradition, institutionalized hierarchies of any kind (much less class hierarchies) emerged in a strikingly small number of human societies historically (indeed, many of the "stagnant" societies now regarded with merely anthropological interest preserved egalitarian ways of life well into the modern era). Although hierarchy was immanent to the earliest human societies, in the sense that it evolved dialectically, its ascendance was still dependent upon choice and contingency. In other words, organic societies had not developed hierarchies because they were shackled to teleological necessity; rather, there had been historical "turning points" at which social development might have been steered in

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[69] Ibid., 185.

[70] For Marx and the Frankfurt School, "Nature was seen as a "domineering" force over humanity that human guile—and the class rule—had to exorcise before a classless society was possible." Bookchin, *Philosophy of Social Ecology*, 188, f.1.

another direction.[71] The idea of an innate conflict between human beings and nature that led inexorably to hierarchy and domination was a product of human invention rather than objective reality.

Aside from having set themselves against nature, Bookchin liked to point out that human beings had progressively attributed the hierarchy they established in their own societies to nature itself, coming to see nature as a great chain of being, populated by "kings," "queens," "workers" and the like. This imputation of these characteristics of human organization to the structure of the natural order was, according to Bookchin, anthropomorphism in the service of ideology. Artificially ascribing hierarchies to nature was used to help justify social inequalities by painting hierarchy as a principle of cosmological order. Human hierarchies, too, could then be conceived as "natural," as arising organically out of the life of the species, just as an anthill captured the organic structure of formic life.

In fact, Bookchin insisted, hierarchy was a phenomenon that was not to be found in "first nature," but was "exclusively characteristic of second nature."[72] In other words, hierarchy was a strictly *social*, not a *natural* phenomenon. While it was possible to find examples of *coercion* in the animal world, there was no such thing as organized domination or intentional cruelty in nature:

> What we normally call domination in nature is a human projection of highly organized systems of *social* command and obedience onto highly idiosyncratic, individual, and asymmetrical forms of often mildly coercive behaviour in animal communities. Put simply, animals do not "dominate" each other in the same way that a human elite dominates, and often exploits, an oppressed social group. Nor

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[71] Bookchin cites three major turning points—the rise of the warriors, the emergence of the city, and the rise of the nation-state/capitalism.

[72] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 24. Bookchin used the term "first nature" to apply to aspects of the natural world which had not been modified by human beings. "Second nature" refers to that part of nature which has been shaped by human hands, including society, culture, and politics.

do they "rule" through institutional forms of systematic violence as social elites do.[73]

Ecology, Bookchin believed, could provide clues to non-hierarchical thinking, because "ecosystems cannot be meaningfully described in hierarchical terms."[74] Rather, every ecosystem was "a circular, interlacing nexus of plant-animal relationships." Every species, from the simplest to the most complex, was "knitted together in a network of interdependence." Such networks were unthinkable without the substantial role played by symbiosis in fostering complementary rather than antagonistic relationships between organisms.[75]

Part of Bookchin's project in working towards a new philosophy of nature, then, was to contest the notion that nature was a "cruel" realm of "suffering" and "scarcity."[76] Such ideas were linked, however, to a more fundamental conception of nature as consisting of the meaningless interaction of matter according to neutral natural "laws." Arising out of the development of early modern science and physics, this understanding of nature had proven to be both liberatory and destructive. In striving to expunge all remnants of Aristotelianism from modern science, the disciples of Bacon, Descartes, and Newton had undoubtedly helped to tear down the "natural" hierarchies that had plagued the middle ages and the Renaissance. But they had also made a mockery of the idea of natural virtue, converting the realm of nature into an amoral interplay of competing forces. The implications of this understanding of nature were taken to their giddiest extreme by the Marquis de Sade, whose characters scoffed at the artificiality of virtue and

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[73] Murray Bookchin, *Remaking Society: Pathways to a Green Future* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 33.

[74] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 90.

[75] Ibid., 91.

[76] Ibid., 368.

reveled in the "natural," sadistic ethic of might makes right. As Sade's novels illustrated in gory detail, if nature could not offer meaning or moral guidance, and if God was out of the picture, human existence risked degenerating into a free-for-all in which the basest depravity held sway.

Bookchin's unfashionable, and in some ways deeply conservative, response to that possibility was to attempt to resurrect the idea of natural *purpose* without attributing the origins and direction of nature to the preordained plan of an external deity. For Bookchin, an uncreated world was not the same thing as a meaningless, random, or irrational world. He believed that natural history evidenced a general trajectory of evolution towards complexity, diversity, and subjectivity. These tendencies could be explained according to nature's own internal logic, without having to posit an external overseer, whether that overseer was conceived as a divine being or (in a Bergsonian vein) as an impersonal "force." God is not needed to breathe life into nature—rather, nature pulses with life of its own accord, and carries the potential within itself to evolve into all of its many wonders. Along with influences like Ernst Bloch and Hans Jonas, Bookchin believed that nature was dynamic and creative rather than static and mechanistic. For him, the death of God was an invitation to attribute God-like properties to matter itself.

Thus, Bookchin's secularism was thoroughly infused with respect for the "spiritual" attitude towards nature adopted by the earliest natural philosophers. The true legatees of this pre-Socratic perspective were those thinkers associated with the anti-positivist Hegelian tradition who envisioned matter in a state of flux and development, full of life and potential. Nature for these thinkers was not a static thing; rather, it was

"the very history of its evolutionary differentiation."[77] In other words, the term "nature" designated a process of development rather than a "thing" or a system of things. For social ecology, Bookchin writes, "nature is conceived not merely as a constellation of ecosystems but also as a meaningful natural *history*, a developing, creative, and fecund nature that yields an increasing complexity of forms."[78] Even the "clear sighted naturalism" he endorsed could see purpose and potential within nature and treat it with a respectful awe that verged on the "spiritual."

Bookchin resisted the tendency within modern epistemology following Kant to chalk notions like "purpose" and "meaning" up to the artificial perceptions of the observing subject. The subjective ordering of reality was said to have imparted patterns to nature that in fact stemmed from the subject's own consciousness. From this perspective, neither "God" nor "nature" brought order and direction to human existence—rather, humans themselves created order and direction through acts of perception and will. Although Kant's "Copernican revolution" arguably elevated rather than demoted the human subject, it did not, for Bookchin, give human beings enough of a toehold in the world, for it still implied the fragmentation of reality, a separation of subject and object. Prevented from gaining direct knowledge of what Kant called *das Ding an sich*, human beings could only feel secure in their claims about objective reality through a "leap of faith." However much his belief in an ordered and purposeful nature may have seemed like a leap of precisely this kind to some of his interlocutors,[79] Bookchin held fast to his

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[77] Bookchin, *Remaking Society*, 41-42.
[78] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 364.
[79] See Robin Eckersley, "Divining Evolution and Respecting Evolution" in *Social Ecology after Bookchin*, ed. Andrew Light (New York: Guilford, 1998).

insistence that natural order, natural development, and natural potential were objective

realities that could be understood *rationally*.

This was different from claiming that these things could be known *scientifically*,

at least without revising some of the assumptions that had infected modern science.

Science had essentially taken on the epistemological skepticism described above,

envisioning order and meaning as characteristics of the subject rather than the object:

although nature appeared rational and orderly on the surface, it was not, as the ancients

believed, self-expressive and self-directive. Assumptions like these had led the scientific

enterprise into fundamental contradictions. "Science, in effect," writes Bookchin,

> has been permitted to live a lie. It has presupposed, with astonishing success, that
> nature is orderly, and that this order lends itself to rational interpretation by the
> human mind, but that reason is *exclusively* the subjective attribute of the human
> observer, not of the phenomena observed. Ultimately, science has lived this lie
> primarily to avoid the most unavoidable "pitfalls" of metaphysics—that an
> orderly world that is also rational may be regarded as a meaningful world.[80]

The *pièce de résistance* of natural evolution, the development that best illustrated

the confluence of order, reason, and *meaning* in nature's organic unfolding, was for

Bookchin the gradual emergence of subjectivity. Although subjectivity had been

banished to its own domain by modern philosophy, its development was deeply

embedded in natural history. Subjectivity was traceable "to its most rudimentary forms as

mere sensitivity in all animate beings and…in the very reactivity (*sensibilité*) of the

inorganic world itself." As Bookchin defined it, subjectivity meant "the fact that

substance—at each level of its organization and in all its concrete forms—*actively*

functions to maintain its identity, equilibrium, fecundity, and place in a given

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[80] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 319.

constellation of phenomena."[81] As such, it had "always been present, in varying degrees,

throughout natural history, but as increasingly close approximations of the human mind

as we know it today."[82] Thus, rather than conceiving of the human mind as cut off from

natural processes and only able to observe them indirectly from the outside, Bookchin

understood it as the fullest development thus far of the subjective potential within nature.

As was true of the term "nature" itself, the term "subjectivity" referred not to a *thing*, but

to the process of subjective development over eons of natural evolution. Consequently,

"the graded emergence of mind in the natural history of life is part of the larger landscape

of subjectivity itself."[83] Even human reason did not stand above nature, but developed out

of it. Far from being inherently at odds with the natural world, it was bound up with the

rest of the human body and with other living forms in a "veritable 'music of the

spheres.'"[84] "The flaw in Horkheimer and Adorno's works on reason," Bookchin

concludes, "stems from their failure to integrate rationality with subjectivity in order to

bring nature within the compass of *sensibilité*."[85]

If it was important to appreciate the distribution of subjectivity throughout the

natural world as a means of breaking down the conceptual barriers between mind and

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[81] Ibid., 364.

[82] Ibid., 320. Bookchin believed that instrumental and positivistic ways of thinking had blinded human beings to the diffusion of subjectivity throughout nature. In terms reminiscent of Herbert Read, Bookchin claimed that we get glimpses of this "wealth of subjectivity" "through art, fantasy, play, intuition, creativity, sexuality and, early in our lives, in those sensibilities of childhood and youth from which adulthood and the norms of "maturity" wean us in the years that follow." Subjectivity is even to be found "in the evolution of form *as such*": "Conceived as an *active process of ever-growing, interrelated complexity*, the "balance of nature" can be viewed as more than just a formal ensemble that life presupposes for its own stability and survival. It can also be viewed as a formal ensemble whose very organization into integrated wholes exhibits varying levels of "mentalism," a subjectivity to which we will respond only if we free our sensorium from its instrumentalist inhibitions and conventions." Ibid., 370. Read would have much appreciated Bookchin's nod to abstract art, which helped to reveal "*the primal affinity of mind with form itself.*" Ibid., 365.

[83] Ibid., 365.

[84] Ibid., 321.

[85] Ibid., 366.

nature, it was also important to appreciate the unique character of *human* subjectivity.

Although it was possible to chart the development of subjectivity from plants on up

through complex forms of animal life, the appearance of human subjectivity marked the

moment at which quantitative advances generated a qualitative shift. In human beings,

nature produced for the first time a creature with the potential for *self*-consciousness. For

Bookchin, it was incorrect to say, with Schelling, that human beings *were* nature rendered

self-conscious, for they continued to demonstrate in innumerable ways their failure to

live up to that potential. But that *capability*, at least, distinguished them from all other

animals, and it formed the basis for Bookchin's humanism. The quality of self-

consciousness made the rational self-direction of human life possible. It also, Bookchin

claimed more controversially, qualified human beings to act as the stewards of natural

evolution, gently steering rather than dominating it. Through their enlightened

interactions with nature, human beings could infuse evolution with more advanced

subjectivity and purpose: "Here, humanity would neither give nor take; it would actually

participate with nature in creating the new levels of diversity and form that are part of a

more heightened sense of humanness and naturalness."[86]

The ethic needed to guide humanity in this calling could be grounded, Bookchin

claimed, in nature itself. Although nature did not itself constitute an ethics, it was "the

matrix for an ethics, the source of ethical meaning that can be rooted in objective

reality."[87] Because the course of natural evolution evidenced meaning and coherence, it

provided the "objective matrix" which established ethical boundaries around the

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[86] Ibid., 367. Some of Bookchin's examples of what this might entail did little to assuage his critics' accusations of humanist arrogance—for example, intervening in "barren" ecosystems to imbue them with complexity and diversity.
[87] Ibid., 368.

operation of reason.[88] Organic societies understood this: they believed that there was a

"Way" about nature they had to "try to understand and to whose claims they must

respond with insight and awareness."[89] In the modern context of untrammeled

instrumentalism, reason had to regain its footing in natural reality if it was to be

reconciled with the ethical aspirations of humanity.

The most important point of reference for a natural ethic was the movement of

natural evolution towards an ever more complex "unity in diversity." Bookchin shared

with other ecological thinkers the ideas that diversity was a sign of health, and that

qualitative differentiation could foster sophisticated forms of cooperation rather than

conflict. His understanding of the way in which this dynamic played itself out in natural

history was thoroughly Hegelian. Over the course of billions of years of natural

development, natural variegation had gradually converged into an all-encompassing

"unity" which established a fundamental harmony between the different parts of the

natural world even as it preserved those parts in all of their distinctness. But Bookchin's

teleological inclinations were milder than Hegel's, whose philosophy by the end of his

life had hardened into a closed system. For Bookchin, natural development was not

destined to terminate in a static state—the symbiotic interrelationships he envisioned

were dynamic rather than static, fostering perpetual, open-ended development: "In nature,

balance and harmony are achieved by ever-changing differentiation, by ever-expanding

diversity."[90] The libertarian implication of this view was that the constructive interaction

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[88] Ibid., 367.
[89] Ibid., 322.
[90] Ibid., 88.

of this diversity was premised on a "high degree of spontaneity," and was impossible to realize through totalitarian direction from above.[91]

Bookchin's thesis about the origins of humanity's hostile relationship with the natural world led him to the conclusion that this relationship could never be set aright without a revolution in social relations. But he did believe that a reformed natural philosophy could help provide guidance to this libertarian project. The natural ethic he proposed offered principles integral to the success of a libertarian society. Just as human subjectivity was linked to the development of subjectivity throughout nature as a whole, human society was an extension of natural tendencies: "society itself in its most primal form stems very much *from* nature. Every social evolution, in fact, is virtually an extension of natural evolution into a distinctly human realm."[92] Society, like subjectivity, had not simply been imposed upon nature from the outside—rather, nature had "phased" into society, with complex forms of animal organization prefiguring what would become institutional configurations within the human world. Society and nature were united in a "graded evolutionary continuum" distinguished by "the remarkable extent to which human beings, living in a rational, ecologically oriented society, could *embody* the *creativity* of nature—this, as distinguished from a purely *adaptive* criterion of evolutionary success."[93] The achievements of human civilization, rather than being cause for human superciliousness, were a testament not only to human ingenuity but to natural evolution itself. They were the expressions of a naturally-endowed capacity for creativity. Ultimately, Bookchin speculated, humans could give rise to a dialectical *Aufhebung* of first and second nature, resulting in a "free nature" that sublated them both into a higher

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[91] Ibid., 89.
[92] Bookchin, *Remaking Society*, 25.
[93] Ibid., 35.

unity. This "free nature" would be "a nature that slowly finds a voice and the means to relieve the needless tribulations of life for all species in a highly conscious humanity and an ecological society."[94]

To say that human society was linked genealogically to modes of organization within "first nature" was not to say that social forms and practices could not develop in ways hostile to natural well-being. But it did contest the notion that there was an irreparable conflict between "nature" and "society." In fact, the tensions which existed between society and nature were traceable to dynamics "*within* social development itself—not *between* society and nature."[95] The proper revolutionary objective was not to abandon society and civilization altogether (as some anarcho-primitivists have prescribed), but to figure out how to reorient society and civilization so as to build upon their natural foundations and harmonize them with the natural world. Only by "recreating our existing sensibilities, technics, and communities along ecological lines" will an ecological society ally "itself with its natural environment in a *creatively reproductive form*—a form that spawns a human symbiotic sensibility, a human technics that *enriches* nature's complexity, and a human rationality that enlarges nature's subjectivity."[96]

Bookchin and his critics

Bookchin's body of work, to his own mind, represented a highly original contribution to what Jürgen Habermas has called the "project of modernity," suggesting a route around the stumbling block of domination that had proven too stubborn for Horkheimer and Adorno. That route led through an innovative natural philosophy that

[94] Ibid., 37.
[95] Ibid., 32.
[96] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 367.

stressed nature's symbiotic and egalitarian aspects. Exploding the idea that hierarchy and domination were "natural" phenomena was meant to stimulate the realization that their presence in human society was artificial, arbitrary, and counterproductive. That realization, in turn, would help open up a new sense of social possibility, a vision of a libertarian society purged of all remnants of hierarchy and domination and held together by unity-in-diversity—a vision, Bookchin hoped, that could be jointly embraced by the burgeoning social movements that would be responsible for bringing it into being. Remaking society along libertarian lines would eliminate the drive to dominate nature, for when people began to work cooperatively and harmoniously with each other, they would come to appreciate the value of establishing the same kind of relationship to the natural world. Decentralized human communities and ecologically-friendly technologies could then be tailored to fit the characteristics of specific natural settings, greatly diminishing the impact of human activities on the natural world and allowing human beings themselves to derive both the material and spiritual satisfactions of intimate collaboration and communion with nature.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Bookchin's thought was widely recognized as a valuable contribution to the radical "green" movement beginning to congeal in reaction to the bourgeois environmentalism that had overshadowed the first wave of environmental activism, and it directly inspired the philosophy of the pioneering German Green Party (founded in 1980). Many within the movement subsumed Bookchin's "social ecology" under the broader heading of "deep ecology," a term coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1973 in contradistinction to the "shallow ecology" whose primary concerns were pollution, resource depletion, and the health and affluence of

people in developed countries. Deep ecology was aimed not simply at reducing

humanity's ecological footprint, but at transforming the way in which humanity related to

nature as a whole. Human beings, Naess argued, were not analytically separable from

nature, but connected with nature through an "intrinsic relation" outside of which neither

humanity nor nature would be the same. The deep ecologist was to be guided by a

principle of "biospherical egalitarianism" which recognized that all living things had an

"*equal right to live and blossom.*"[97] Bill Devall and George Sessions, who popularized

deep ecology in the United States, described its task as "cultivating ecological

consciousness,"[98] and working towards "a comprehensive religious and philosophical

worldview."[99] They argued for the need to link the transformation of subjectivity on the

individual level to cultural and political change, culminating in a "self-regulating

community" explicitly modeled on the anarchist tradition.[100] Devall and Sessions cited

Bookchin prominently in support of their ideas.[101]

It came as a surprise to many, then, when Bookchin launched a furious attack on

deep ecology at the first meeting of the U.S. Greens in 1987. Deep ecology, he charged,

had degenerated into an eclectic hodgepodge of "spiritual" pabulum, tinged with

alarmingly fascistic tendencies. It was not merely "biocentric," but actively anti-human,

viewing the human race itself as a parasitic excrescence upon nature and celebrating

reductions of the human population caused by disease and strife. Because it condemned

humanity as a species, it was oblivious to the specific configurations of social life that

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[97] Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 28.
[98] Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology* (Layton, UT: Gibbs M. Smith, 1985), 8.
[99] Ibid., 65.
[100] Ibid., 19.
[101] Ibid., 3.

facilitated natural destruction, and it lumped the victims of hierarchy and domination in with the main perpetrators of that destruction. By taking untamed wilderness as its ideal, it implied that the most "natural" landscape was one from which human beings were excluded entirely. Against this Malthusian, misanthropic, and apolitical perspective, he offered social ecology: politically savvy, unafraid to affirm human uniqueness, and unwilling to reduce the human race to mere "dwellers in the land," passively obedient to natural rhythms and contingencies. The time had come, Bookchin argued, for the green movement to decide which offered a more promising guide to practice.

What puzzled many in the movement was that Bookchin's critique was phrased as if he was looking for a fight, at precisely the moment when there was hope of building unity. What emerged was a fractious "cold war," in which Bookchin and his supporters (but mainly Bookchin) ranged themselves against a series of challengers who took exception to his uncharitable reading of deep ecology and the imperious tone in which he asserted the superiority of social ecology.[102] Over the next decade, Bookchin grew increasingly estranged from the movement and hostile towards those who disagreed with him. What this accomplished, in effect, was to encourage a broad swath of American greens to declare open season on his entire body of work. Perhaps the most frequently recurring charge was the one that had been directed at Bookchin by David Ehrenfeld as early as 1981: namely, that his thought exemplified the "arrogance of humanism."[103] That arrogance was manifested most glaringly in the assumption that it was possible for human beings (beginning, of course, with Bookchin himself) to arrive at foolproof

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[102] David Watson, *Beyond Bookchin: Preface for a Future Social Ecology* (New York: Autonomedia, 1996), 19.

[103] Bookchin, Ehrenfeld writes, embraced "the unwarranted optimism of a humanistic cult whose efforts to redesign the world in our own image have given us a lengthy string of ever-worsening failures." *The Arrogance of Humanism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1981), 127.

conclusions about the essential workings of the natural world—not only in its actuality, but in its *potentiality*, which seemed to call for a kind of prophetic insight into an unobservable dimension of reality. Of course, Bookchin himself thought he had marshaled compelling evidence for his claims about the directionality of natural evolution towards diversity and complexity, but in fact his "evidence" was highly selective, and he acted as though the fields of anthropology and the natural sciences—full of internal debates and disagreements—were governed by happy consensuses from which one could pluck indisputable truths at will. Bookchin had rejected the humble skepticism counseled by modern epistemology, argued Bob Black, out of "a childish craving for an unattainable certitude."[104]

The quasi-teleology Bookchin thought he could discern in nature was highly problematic, his critics claimed, even when taken on its own terms. Bookchin was quick to draw faulty parallels between the development of insensate objects like acorns and the inconceivably complex development of human societies.[105] While it might indeed be possible to make a meaningful claim about the likelihood of an acorn's growth in a particular direction, it was folly to do so on the level of collective human development. Yet Bookchin seemed to believe that human beings, through a combination of observation and intuition, could determine the proper destinies of all creatures. Bookchin went further, however, for he derived from the mere existence of certain tendencies the conclusion that they were normatively desirable. As a number of critics pointed out, this entailed committing the philosophical blunder of deriving an *ought* from an *is*. As Robin

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[104] Bob Black, *Anarchy after Leftism* (Columbia, MO: C.A.L. Press, 1997), 90.
[105] As David Watson writes, "It's inane to compare an egg becoming a chicken, something that it has indeed been constituted to become, and speculation about several billion years of evolution, including hundreds of millennia of human natural and social evolution." *Beyond Bookchin*, 89.

Eckersley writes, "[e]ven if Bookchin is right in his argument that there is a telos in nature, this discovery does not in itself tell us why we ought to further it," much less why it ought to be used as a foundation for the ethical guidelines applicable to human societies.[106]

Beyond his confident claims about the direction of natural development, and beyond his assertion this development was objectively good, Bookchin made the even more controversial proposition that human beings should actively encourage it, intervening in nature to promote diversity and complexity where it did not arise spontaneously. It was, he suggested, human beings' unique faculty of self-consciousness that qualified them for the job. By entrusting human beings with stewardship over nature (however sensitively exercised), Bookchin's philosophy revealed itself to be "only a variant of the ideology of bourgeois progress and human mastery."[107] Under the cover of his faith in the underlying compatibility of human and natural ends, Bookchin portrayed as benign the use of human reason to modify and direct nature, without qualifying "how and to what extent our responsibility is to be discharged."[108]

Even on the level of social ecology's purportedly incisive social analysis, Bookchin was open to criticisms. His conception of "hierarchy" was strikingly one-dimensional, failing to distinguish the consequences of different kinds of hierarchies, leaving his readers with "no means of deciding which is the worst, or where to begin our

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[106] Robin Eckersley, "Divining Evolution and Respecting Evolution" in *Social Ecology after Bookchin*, ed. Andrew Light (New York: Guilford, 1998), 67. Furthermore, in order to justify the leap from "is" to "ought," Bookchin had to paint an implausibly harmonious picture of natural "mutualism" (a concept, incidentally, full of unacknowledged anthropomorphism), whitewashing the existence of conflict between and within species.

[107] Watson, *Beyond Bookchin*, 27.

[108] Eckersley, "Divining Evolution and Respecting Evolution," 69.

struggle against them."[109] Furthermore, even if hierarchy was a necessary precondition for domination, it was by no means clear that it was a sufficient one, and it was less clear still that removing it would automatically eliminate all human desire to dominate nature. Finally, by suggesting that hierarchy and domination were impositions upon originally mutualistic human relationships, which were then muffled and constrained, Bookchin failed to see how "coordination and command, organization and hierarchy, and agreement and domination are creatively embedded *in* one another."[110] This was one way of stating the Foucauldian point that power should not be conceptualized as a *constraint* upon some free, primordial substratum that is, lamentably, curtailed in its "natural" operation. Rather, power is *creative*, mobilizing and channeling agency and desire, and helping to construct the very idea of "nature" in the first place.[111]

All of these criticisms were evidence, some believed, of one root problem: Bookchin's philosophy stood or fell with a host of Enlightenment-based assumptions that had fallen into disrepute. Bookchin stubbornly clung, argues Saul Newman, to "the idea that at the base of social relations there is a certain immanent and historically determined unfolding of rational and ethical capacities," and "a certain narrative of freedom and progress driven by an unfolding of a social totality – an essence or capacity that is immanent within society, and whose emergence will bring about a rational harmonisation

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[109] Mary Mellor, *Breaking the Boundaries: For a Feminist Green Socialism* (London: Virago, 1992), 109.

[110] Alan P. Rudy, "Ecology and Anthropology in the Work of Murray Bookchin: Problems of Theory and Evidence," in *Social Ecology after Bookchin*, 284.

[111] John P. Clark points to this shortcoming of Bookchin's work in "Anarchy and the Dialectic of Utopia," in *Anarchism and Utopianism*, eds. Laurence Davis and Ruth Kinna (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2010). The idea that something called "nature" exists outside of human constructs has come under fierce scrutiny. See, for example, William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995).

of social forces and the full humanisation of Man."[112] This accounted for Bookchin's

anthropocentrism, his belief in reason, his readiness to read something like "progress"

into natural evolution, his denial of intractable conflict and tension in nature, and his

outdated conception of power. Bookchin had failed in his effort to craft a visionary

reinvention of anarchism, hamstrung as he was by "hopeless nostalgia" for the credulous

Enlightenment axioms that classical anarchists had taken for granted.[113]

Far from denying these kind of accusations outright, Bookchin gradually

embraced the idea that his calling, during the last decade of his life, was to defend the

Enlightenment heritage, not only by affirming its influence on his work (which he did

vigorously), but by fending off its attackers. By that time, the attackers were many:

sociobiology, the Gaia hypothesis, neo-Malthusianism, deep ecology, primitivism,

technophobia, postmodernism, and "lifestyle" anarchism, all of which voiced

fundamental objections to ideals spawned by Enlightenment thought: science,

civilization, progress, reason. For polemical purposes, Bookchin somewhat conveniently

reduced these schools of thought to shades of "antihumanism." What they had in

common, he argued, was their "animalization of humanity,"[114] stemming from "a deep-

seated cultural malaise that reflects a waning belief in our species' creative abilities."[115]

Through their combined efforts, they had managed to "reenchant" nature and

"disenchant" humanity.[116] Bookchin himself, of course, had written of the need to restore

a "spiritual" view of nature, but he had imagined that this sense of awe and respect would

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[112] Saul Newman, *The Politics of Postanarchism* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 147.

[113] Ibid., 143.

[114] Murray Bookchin, *Re-enchanting Humanity: A Defense of the Human Spirit against Anti-Humanism, Misanthropy, Mysticism, and Primitivism* (London: Cassell, 1995), x.

[115] Ibid., 1.

[116] Ibid., 5.

carry over to the human species as one of nature's most extraordinary creations, an outgrowth of natural evolution and yet qualitatively distinct in its unique capacities. It now seemed, however, that to revere and protect nature meant that one had to denigrate humanity.

When in later books like *Re-enchanting Humanity* Bookchin's humanism grew more insistent, and his praise for non-human nature and premodern societies more measured, he was not so much contradicting his earlier work as he was waging a conscious campaign to redistribute awe and respect towards humanity's greatest achievements and highest potential. This explains his repeated stress on the qualities that distinguish human beings as a species: "To be a human animal, in effect, is to be a reasoning animal that can consciously act upon its environment, alter it, and advance beyond the passive realm of unthinking adaptation into the active realm of conscious innovation."[117] Humans were unmatched in their "extraordinary intelligence, anatomical flexibility, unprecedented communicative abilities, distinctly mutable and highly malleable institutions (that we properly call society) and extraordinary capacity for innovation."[118] They were *obliged* "to intervene in the evolutionary process of first and second nature and to render them a rational and ethical development," creating a "free," "thinking" nature relieved of "needless pain, destruction, catastrophes, and regressions."[119] Where the antihumanists would deny human beings the use of their most highly evolved capacities, he pictured an "enlightened humanism" bringing greater

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[117] Ibid., 22.
[118] Ibid., 16.
[119] Ibid., 32.

rationality, meaning, and purpose to both human society and natural evolution.[120] For

Bookchin, humankind's most distinctive traits—the ability to reason and act self-

consciously—may have in some sense been responsible for the domination and

destruction of nature, but they also provided the principal means by which that

domination and destruction could be overcome.

Conclusion

The Enlightenment was not Bookchin's only source of inspiration,[121] but in his

efforts to transcend the impasse at which critical theory had arrived in the work of

Horkheimer and Adorno, and to counteract what he saw as a new counter-Enlightenment

arising in the late-20th century, it formed his main point of reference during the most

theoretically productive phase of his career. Indeed, in the final analysis, he envisioned

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[120] Bookchin saw this "enlightened humanism" as a fusion of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment: With the Enlightenment *philosophes*, Bookchin believed that reason could still help to "illuminate the path to liberty…by destroying the fetters of superstition and domination." Reason's speculative capacities continued to make it "the arbiter *par excellence* for critically evaluating human social progress and moral development." Reason "had the all-important power to critically search *beyond* the past and present, to transcend the given state of affairs, and to stake out the contours of a progressive future literally defined as a rational society." *Re-enchanting Humanity: A Defense of the Human Spirit against Anti- Humanism, Misanthropy, Mysticism, and Primitivism* (London: Cassell, 1995), 9. This Enlightenment project was transformed in the 19th century into a fusion of "Renaissance aestheticism with Enlightenment rationalism," and it was this outlook—simultaneously rational and imaginative, instrumental and idealistic, ordered and playful—that was absorbed by most of the socialist movement. It was an "enlightened humanism," then, which "acquired a mass outreach in Marxian socialism and, to a considerable degree, in classical anarchism." Ibid., 12. This enlightened humanism offered "the hopeful message that society can be rendered not only rational but wise and not only ethical but passionately visionary." Ibid., 32.

[121] It would be irresponsible to yoke Bookchin's thought too firmly to the fortunes of the Enlightenment, for it sampled from too many tributaries to be reducible to that one influence. Arguably, Bookchin's conceptualization of nature owed more to pre-Enlightenment Aristotelianism than it did to the scientific worldview of Descartes and Bacon, and it represented an emphatic repudiation of the sober-minded positivism that was one of the principal legacies of Enlightenment thought. Tellingly, Hans Jonas—whose *The Phenomenon of Nature* was one of Bookchin's principal inspirations—was grouped by Habermas with what the latter called "Old Conservatives," who clung to the idea of "substantive reason," rejected the "modern understanding of the world," and "recommend[ed]…a return to positions *prior* to modernity." These conservatives, Habermas suggested, were neo-Aristotelians, "encouraged by the ecological question to renew the idea of a cosmological ethic." Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, eds. Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 53.

his work as an extension of the "still-unfinished" Enlightenment project, an effort to infuse that project with an ecological sensibility and a higher degree of self-consciousness.[122] The theoretical framework he developed was meant to show how that project might be conceived as an extension of natural evolution rather than a deviation from it. If the Enlightenment could work with nature instead of against it, it would not be contradictory to call oneself an "ecologist" and an "enlightened humanist" in the same breath. Discarding harmful dichotomies between humanity and nature, Bookchin believed, did not have to mean reducing human beings to an animalistic common denominator shared with other species. Rather, the way to reconcile humans and nature was to show how the former could use their most distinguished abilities not to dominate but to enrich natural tendencies by making them more rational and purposive.

Unfortunately, the combative posture Bookchin assumed beginning in the late 1980s ended up becoming a major distraction from his ideas and greatly limited the appeal and spread of social ecology. Bookchin the thinker was often obscured by Bookchin the polemicist, and the dust that was stirred up by his scuffles with detractors sometimes concealed the nuances of his thought in exaggerations and oversimplifications. His attitude only encouraged his critics to look for connections between the humanism he espoused as an ideal and his arrogant and intolerant behavior in practice. Indeed, it seemed to be a case study in how the universalistic rhetoric of humanism could be used to camouflage a highly idiosyncratic and narrow-minded perspective.

Undoubtedly, Bookchin's effort to "rescue reason" by rooting it in nature was in some sense eccentric, for it represented a kind of foundationalism that was brazen in its

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[122] Bookchin, *Re-enchanting Humanity*, 32.

rejection of philosophical fashion.[123] More than any anarchist before or since, he was prepared to embrace the full consequences of grounding his political theory in the idea of "natural order," an idea whose validity was presumed by classical anarchists and often assumed by New Anarchists as well. Perhaps the most important corollary of that idea, from Bookchin's perspective, was the conclusion that humans themselves had a "nature," understood to encompass both their present characteristics and their future potential.[124] Any conception of an ideal political order, Bookchin assumed, had to be premised on an understanding of what was suited to that nature.

Bookchin was not alone amongst New Anarchists in holding that belief. But by asserting the knowability of human nature in such an unqualified and self-assured manner, he opened himself up to criticisms whose force might have been dampened if they had met with a subtler argument. Noam Chomsky and Paul Goodman also defended the Enlightenment against its critics and made recourse to the idea of human nature. But they did so in far more pragmatic ways. Chomsky, for example, has insisted that denying human nature outright is tantamount to declaring human beings to be "indefinitely malleable," without "innate structures of mind" or "intrinsic needs." If this is so, then they are "fit subject[s] for the 'shaping of behavior' by the state authority, the corporate manager, the technocrat, or the central committee." If we are to preserve any confidence in the human species whatsoever, at the very least we will "will hope this is not so and will try to determine the intrinsic human characteristics that provide the framework for intellectual development, the growth of moral consciousness, cultural achievement, and

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[123] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 160.

[124] As Bookchin writes, "we are still unfinished as human beings because we have not as yet fulfilled our potentiality for cooperation, understanding, and rational behavior." *Re-enchanting Humanity*, 235.

participation in a free community."[125] Like Bookchin, Chomsky realizes that the

possibility of identifying those characteristics hinges on the assumption that human

nature is embedded in a broader natural order susceptible of investigation: if human

nature is indeed "part of the natural world…we should be able to learn about it by

rational inquiry."[126] Chomsky posits that we might

> develop a social science based on empirically well-founded propositions
> concerning human nature. Just as we study the range of humanly attainable
> languages, with some success, we might also try to study the forms of artistic
> expression or, for that matter, scientific knowledge that humans can conceive, and
> perhaps even the range of ethical systems and social structures in which humans
> can live and function, given their intrinsic capacities and needs. Perhaps one
> might go on and project a concept of social organization that would—under given
> conditions of material and spiritual culture—best encourage and accommodate the
> fundamental human need—if such it is—for spontaneous initiative, creative work,
> solidarity, pursuit of social justice.[127]

Chomsky's language is self-consciously tentative because at present, any hope of a

"science" of human nature can only be highly speculative, given that only the most

rudimentary hints of it exist. But it is always the case that social theories are devised, and

social actions taken, under conditions of uncertainty. We cannot fail to think and act

about what is best for human beings simply because we do not yet have definite answers

about the nature of those beings. We "are compelled to take an intuitive leap, to make a

posit as to what is essential to human nature, and on this basis to derive, however

inadequately, a conception of a legitimate social order."[128] Given our insufficient

knowledge, at present the idea of "human nature" must be treated not as a scientific fact,

but as "common sense," a "regulative principle." If we accept the hypothesis that human

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[125] Noam Chomsky, *Chomsky on Anarchism*, ed. Barry Pateman (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005), 114.
[126] Ibid., 173.
[127] Ibid., 115.
[128] Ibid., 173.

beings are by nature constituted so as to flourish under conditions of freedom, we are led more-or-less straightforwardly, Chomsky believes, to the auxiliary hypothesis that we ought to strive for a society which approximates the anarchist ideal.[129]

Goodman, too, feared that human beings were coming to be seen as featureless lumps of dough to be fed into the Organized System and molded in whatever way it saw fit. Like Chomsky, he believed that the only reliable safeguard against this arrant behaviorism was the idea that human beings had intrinsic needs which could not simply be "socialized" away. In *Growing Up Absurd*, however, he adopted an even more cautious tone than Chomsky: "we do not need to be able to say what "human nature" *is*," he writes, "in order to be able to say that some training is 'against human nature' and you persist in it at peril."[130] In effect, Goodman suggests that even if we cannot make infallible claims about what human nature is, we can be reasonably sure of what it is *not*—that is, we can arrive at some common-sense conclusions about what kinds of social practices are harmful to human well-being. Adopting this attitude means approaching human nature (and, if we may be permitted some extrapolation, "nature" in general) in much the same way that a negative theologian approaches God, gradually ruling out possibilities and aligning beliefs and conduct ever more closely with what we suspect to be true of the subject of analysis.

These examples offer at least some inkling of how an ambitious enterprise like Bookchin's, which seeks nothing less than to establish an objective, natural grounding for human ethics and social organization, might be preserved from lapsing into unfounded dogmatism. Chomsky and Goodman lacked Bookchin's sweeping theoretical vision, but

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[129] Ibid., 155.
[130] Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd*, 6.

for that very reason their approaches to human nature were more conjectural and pragmatic, capable of withstanding some of the criticisms directed against him and offering more plausible ways in which human nature might still serve as a useful concept, even within a highly hostile philosophical climate.

Nevertheless, if Bookchin's body of work evidences some of the pitfalls of grand theorizing, it also evidences many of its strengths. Bookchin pushed anarchist theory into areas where it logically belonged but into which it had never really ventured. By spotlighting hierarchy and domination rather than state and capital, he brought considerable clarity to anarchism's negative project, and breathed new relevance into the tradition. By tackling the question of nature head-on, he forced anarchists to own up to some of their most controversial assumptions and to formulate more thorough justifications for them. And by illustrating the elective affinity between anarchism and ecology, he did more than anyone else to infuse an ecological sensibility into the heart of the anarchist ideal.

Chapter 6

Utopia, Limited:
Planning for Freedom in the New Anarchism

> The order that is anarchy is not something to be invented, a new heaven and a
> new earth. It is the same earth and the same humanity as we have always known,
> waiting to be awakened into freedom. The future is concealed within the present.
>
> George Woodcock
>
> [D]ecentralization is a long word which means nothing unless you have a plan.
>
> Herbert Read

"Our age is an age of compromises, of half-measures, of the lesser evil." So

begins Marie Louise Berneri's *Journey through Utopia*, her annotated tour through the

high points, and the forgotten corners, of the utopian tradition, published posthumously in

1950. Writing in the late 1940s, she expressed her hope that reading of "ideal states and

cities" would "humble" her audience, serving as a reminder of "the modesty of our

claims, and the poverty of our vision."[131]

Berneri's perspective on the utopian tradition was a curious inversion of the

dominant mood of the time. For Judith Shklar, as for the bulk of the postwar

intelligentsia, it was precisely the utopians whose outlook had been discredited. The

"rational political optimism" of the Enlightenment, she argued, had been knocked off its

pedestal once and for all by the twin shocks of totalitarianism and world war, and even

the viability of Western civilization itself was open to question.[132] Humility was indeed

called for, but as a check on the ambitions of anyone who would "construct grand designs

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[131] Marie Louise Berneri, *Journey through Utopia* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950), 1.
[132] Judith Shklar, *After Utopia: The Decline of Political Faith* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), ix.

for the political future of mankind."[133] The way out of the postwar abyss would have to be charted by sensible, prudent people not easily tempted into overestimations of human capabilities.

This disqualified anyone with lingering faith in "the anarchism of the Enlightenment," the ideal condition implicit in the work of most Enlightenment philosophers and advocated most openly by William Godwin, in which human behavior was self-regulated by the laws of reason (or, in Adam Smith's version, the laws of self-interest), and the coercion of the state was replaced by the voluntary relationships of "society." That ideal, Shklar believed, had been irreversibly deflated by repeated, devastating failures to operationalize rational objectives politically. It was now "next to impossible to believe strongly that the power of human reason expressing itself in political action is capable of achieving its ends."[134] More in tune with the spirit of the times, Shklar argued, were "romantic" anarchists like Herbert Read and Alex Comfort, who at least acknowledged the hollowness of Enlightenment platitudes and the need for new sources of value. These figures were just as hopeless politically as the apostles of reason who had preceded them, however: they espoused a "politics of the unpolitical," the main concern of which was "to defend non-political man against the encroachments of public life."[135] This hyper-individualistic perspective, concerned above all with disengaging the individual from potentially compromising political involvement, was, for Shklar, no politics at all: it took flight from harsh political realities rather than facing up to them, amounting to a rejection of "all historically possible forms of political life."[136]

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[133] Ibid., vii.
[134] Ibid., ix.
[135] Ibid., 96.
[136] Ibid., 151.

The equally unsatisfactory political poles Shklar claimed to have identified—one believing that underneath the coercion of the state was a self-regulating rational utopia waiting to be loosed, and the other holding that if utopia was not possible, the only option was for the individual to save himself by retreating from social life—bear some slight resemblance to what we have encountered in preceding chapters. It is true that Read and Comfort both emphasized their "romanticism" in the context of World War II, and that Comfort occasionally went so far as to argue that individuals should declare themselves free of all "corporate allegiances."[137] We might, furthermore, see Murray Bookchin as a modern version of the "Enlightenment anarchist," having made a quixotic effort to reaffirm the hoary Enlightenment principles that Shklar deems outdated. But Read, as we have seen (Chapter 1), was no stereotypical romantic, harboring a robust rationalist and communitarian streak, and to dismiss Comfort's position as "apolitical" is to do a serious disservice to his activism and to the idea that a certain type of individual resistance might help to inspire collective struggle and open up previously unavailable political possibilities (Chapter 2). As for Bookchin, even after he appointed himself the latter-day white knight of the Enlightenment, he never advocated a simplistic regurgitation of Enlightenment ideas. When he argued for an "enlightened humanism" that would supplement reason with Renaissance aestheticism, and when he developed a quasi-spiritual, quasi-teleological natural philosophy that drew inspiration from pre-modern conceptions of nature, he evidenced an understanding, at least implicitly, of the limitations of Enlightenment thought (Chapter 5).

All this is to say that it would be inaccurate and unfair to characterize the responses of the New Anarchists to the political and spiritual conundrums of the postwar

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[137] Alex Comfort, *Writings against Power & Death* (London: Freedom Press, 1994), 35.

world either as individualistic refusals of responsibility or as doomed efforts to resuscitate Enlightenment clichés. With respect to the influence of Enlightenment assumptions on their thought, the New Anarchists did believe that the greater part of the impetus towards social organization could be provided by "natural" tendencies of rationality and mutual aid, but they retained, as this chapter will demonstrate, a central role for the collective planning of social life. To call the society they envisioned "self-regulating" would be highly misleading, for they pictured extensive, structured forms of cooperation providing mechanisms by which conscious control over social forces could be exerted. But if they were sensitive to the inadequacy of pure spontaneity, they were also sensitive to the risk that planning might be monopolized by experts, and/or develop into a totalitarian crusade to place every aspect of social life under control. For this reason, they stressed the need to develop methods of planning democratically that struck a balance between control and spontaneity, general objectives and local diversity, social well-being and individual freedom. Cognizant of the tendency of social planners to overreach, the New Anarchists proposed curbing potential excesses by sizing projects to "human scale" and keeping them strictly within ecological limits.

With respect to their "romantic" individualism and their supposed disdain for complex political realities, it is simply a fallacy to suggest that New Anarchists were determined to hold out for utopia rather than dirtying themselves with compromise: as we have seen, they were open—far more than their anarchist predecessors, anyway—to working within the system. Where they differed most radically from self-proclaimed "dystopians" like Shklar was in explicitly rejecting the idea that in order to act pragmatically one had to cease being a utopian. Their response to the social and political

possibilities of the postwar world, in other words, was neither to withdraw from the horrors of mass irrationality into the womb of Enlightenment credulity, nor to abandon all hopes of rational social organization and flee from social life into the sanctuary of individualistic quietism. Rather, they sought to chart the way forward by developing what might be described as a *pragmatic utopianism*.

This is what made them receptive to efforts like Berneri's to keep the utopian tradition alive. The anti-utopians—Shklar, Karl Popper, Friedrich Hayek, amongst others—tended to tar the entire utopian tradition with the same brush, linking it to hubristic social engineering, totalitarianism, and domination by paternalistic elites who presumed to have special insight into what was best for humanity. The New Anarchists, by contrast, emphasized the libertarian aspects of both the theory and the practice of utopia. They distinguished the "authoritarian" visions of many utopian authors from the "anti-authoritarian" strain of utopian thought whose preeminent modern representative was William Morris.[138] Morris and the other exemplars of that strain "retain[ed] a sense of organic freedom" that inclined them towards a decentralist and democratic ideal, premised on individual freedom, mutual aid, and creativity.[139] The New Anarchists also understood that, on the level of practice, the pursuit of utopia had most commonly manifested itself not in the form of state-driven messianism, but in small-scale, voluntaristic social experimentation, exemplified by the longstanding communitarian tradition in Britain and, especially, North America.

It is hardly surprising that the New Anarchists mined these currents of the utopian tradition thoroughly for inspiration. But less expectedly, they also found value in the

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[138] Berneri cites Foigny, Diderot, and Morris as the main figures in this tradition, though others might be added to the list. Read, for example, includes Rabelais.

[139] Herbert Read, *Anarchy and Order: Essays in Politics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954), 22.

utopian strain most roundly excoriated by the anti-utopians: "blueprint," or "ideal city"

utopianism, whose long lineage extends from Plato to moderns like Charles Fourier and

Ebenezer Howard.[140] The New Anarchists found in this line of thought not inflexible

plans to be taken up wholesale, but useful examinations of the implications of political

ideals for the organization of physical space and social institutions. Where anti-utopians

saw megalomaniacal proposals to implant social perfection into the world—fueled by

dangerous illusions about the perfectibility of humankind, the boundless potential of

reason and technology, and the possibility of refashioning society from above—the New

Anarchists saw admirable principles of balance, temperance, and harmony. From the

beginning, they recognized, utopians had been inspired by the concept of *limit*,

understanding that social ideals could not be realized if destructive economic forces were

left unchecked, if amorality and rapaciousness overwhelmed ethical restraint, and if

social space and institutions were allowed to grow to a size beyond rational control. In

the 20th century, these were the clear and present dangers of the limit*less* world that had

been introduced by capitalism, industrialization, and the ever-expanding modern state. In

the utopian tradition, the New Anarchists found not unhinged radicalism, but admirable

principles that could be used to rein in the worst consequences of modernization. Their

goal was not to try and literalize any one vision of the good life (tellingly, they did not,

with the minor exception of Paul Goodman, offer ideal cities of their own), but to inject

the heartbeat of the utopian tradition into even their most practical recommendations.

It was not only the grandiosity of utopian ambitions to which the anti-utopians

objected, however, but to the rapidity with which modern radicals sought to realize those

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[140] For a helpful typology of utopia, see Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism* (Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press, 1991).

ambitions. If the "blueprint" utopians had given fullest expression to utopian hopes, the phenomenon of millenarianism had injected an attitude of impatience and expectancy into the utopian tradition. Millenarianism had its roots in medieval religious radicalism, but it had been secularized—so ran a popular argument—by radicals who envisioned a rational society blossoming spontaneously out of a cathartic revolutionary event. Anarchists, who rejected the idea of a gradually-unfolding historical teleology, celebrated spontaneity, and opted for direct action over patient parliamentarianism, were thought to represent this attitude *par excellence*. But whatever the justification for attributing the millenarian orientation to 19th- and early 20th-century anarchism, the label fails to capture the spirit of the New Anarchism. Although New Anarchists retained an important place for spontaneity in their political thought, they realized that it could be all-too-easily confused with a lack of foresight, rationality, and consciousness, and that it could be used to justify the blind operation of the free market just as easily as revolutionary effervescence. If anarchism was to be a social ideal in which rational citizens made social decision-making the object of informed consciousness, it could not dispense with the need for *planning*—the planning of social space no less than the economic planning which came to be associated with the socialist tradition more broadly. Although by mid-century planning had come to be thoroughly identified with shortsighted bureaucratic paternalism, the New Anarchists found an alternative in the decentralist planning tradition that stretched back into the late 19th century. This tradition combined tentative and balanced "blueprinting" with an emphasis on democratic participation and cautious "conservative surgery." Injecting this tradition with an aesthetic sensibility, the New Anarchists conceived of planning not as a staid and abstract enterprise, but as a full-

bodied, sensual, and imaginative enterprise, invigorated by a playful and artistic spirit. Like earlier utopians, they believed that planning should not be about plodding instrumental rationality, but about grand ideas. They also insisted, however, on making the planning process as open to input and responsive to real needs as possible. This, too, constituted a limit or check on the utopian enterprise, for they were unwilling to subordinate democracy to expertise, "necessity," or celerity, and were prepared, as a consequence, to accept that social change would be a long, gradual process.

Well before the resurgence of political radicalism in the 1960s, in the thick of the postwar "consensus," New Anarchists like Read and Goodman fought to keep the spirit of radical social criticism alive, and like Berneri they attempted to fan the dying embers of the utopian tradition as a logical extension of that spirit. No one, however, proclaimed the need for utopian thinking in the postwar world more forcefully than Murray Bookchin. In his body of work, he fused the various aspects of New Anarchist utopianism—its admiration for the ancient *polis* and the medieval commune, its identification with the decentralist planning tradition, and its vision of confederated, humanly-scaled communities which were both intimate and technologically modern— with a sophisticated ecological and countercultural sensibility. To the end of his life, Bookchin burned with a sense of revolutionary urgency that set him apart from other New Anarchists. But he, too, realized that big plans had to be combined with small ones, that ambitious, long-term goals had to be combined with winnable, short-term goals. In his political program for "municipal libertarianism," Bookchin showed concretely how the utopian social ideal he espoused could be translated into an immediate plan of action. He envisioned the diligent building of a mass movement that would reclaim public space

and institutions in the name of popular sovereignty piece by piece. No more than other New Anarchist perspectives was his an attitude of all or nothing.

In contrast to most of their contemporaries, the New Anarchists believed that ambitious social idealism could be united with rational, democratic, pragmatic social development. They believed that planning, when undertaken in a limited, libertarian manner, would be enlivened rather than undermined by spontaneity, creativity, and individual freedom. And they believed that forward-looking efforts to alter the structure of society fundamentally could be reconciled with the preservation of the fine texture of mutual aid and everyday *metis* that had already woven patterns into the fabric of social life. While others sought to discredit the utopian impulse once and for all, they sought to reclaim and rework the utopian tradition for the postwar world. Against the realism of thinkers like Shklar and Popper, who countered social radicalism with a sober and restrained liberalism, the New Anarchists showed that the ideal could inform one's orientation to the real by enriching rather than hindering pragmatic decision-making. They did not seek validation for their perspective in teleological certainties, and they did not recommend a posture of breathless millennial expectancy. Rather, "[t]he task of the anarchist philosopher," in Read's words, "is not to prove the imminence of a Golden Age, but to justify the value of believing in its possibility."[141]

Anarchism and the reaction against utopianism

Shklar's unfavorable assessment of the prospects of utopianism was embedded in more general observations about the decline of "political faith" from its Enlightenment apex to its postwar nadir. Not just the utopian tradition specifically, but political

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[141] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 14.

radicalism of all kinds, she claimed, had been supplanted by skepticism of all grand political designs. Even political philosophy itself was succumbing to the pessimistic conclusion that careful reasoning about political affairs was an exercise in futility, inapplicable to a world in which power, interest, and irrationality consistently triumphed over noble intentions. The idea of utopia occupied a special place in these and similar musings from the same era, however, for it epitomized the idea that political ideals could be translated into political realities. Utopianism presumed not only that politics could be an instrument of good, but that it could be brought into accordance with a definitive notion of the Highest Good. That was the assumption, argued Karl Popper in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, that had paved the way to totalitarianism, for its political manifestation was a "closed" society, carefully isolated and controlled to ensure static conformity to an unchanging ideal. This understanding of social perfection had its earliest progenitor in Plato, who illustrated in the *Republic* and elsewhere what Popper called "utopian engineering," an endeavor to construct social institutions around a positive good. The utopian engineer was a kind of master craftsman, whose default view of social reality was as a blank slate upon which to inscribe his vision. Popper contrasted utopian engineering with what he called "piecemeal engineering," which, instead of striving for a Highest Good, focused on fighting social evils one at a time, without any *a priori* sense of direction. Popper's book appeared in 1945, and the parallel he drew between utopianism and totalitarianism would go on to influence a generation of anti-utopians. Shklar, a fellow Eastern European exile, argued similarly that politics should adopt a neutral posture with respect to the good life and focus on preventing the *summum malum* of cruelty, a negative project of this kind being more conducive to political temperance

than impractical attempts to formulate a positive good that encompassed everyone.[142] The work of Popper and Shklar was representative of attempts by postwar liberals to salvage what remained of the Enlightenment inheritance by purging it of its optimism. They envisioned a liberalism that would be perpetually mindful of "the darker aspects of the human condition."[143]

The understanding of utopia that informed such attitudes owed a great debt to the work of Karl Mannheim. Utopia, as Mannheim defined the term in his *Ideology and Utopia*, was no harmless thought experiment, no mere "city in speech." Utopia was inherently oriented towards *action*, because ideas which transcend reality do not become "utopian" until human beings actively seek to implement them. While visions of the ideal society have haunted human culture for millennia, it was not always the case that such visions were thought by their originators to be actualizable. Perhaps the most pervasive of these utopian conceptions in the Western tradition—the Christian Kingdom of God—was for the bulk of the Christian era explicitly placed outside space and time. To conceive of the Kingdom in this way, as did the vast majority of Christians well into the Middle Ages, was to blunt its potentially revolutionary implications. Mannheim points out that "[a]s long as the clerically and feudally organized medieval order was able to locate its paradise outside of society, in some otherworldly sphere which transcended history and dulled its revolutionary edge, the idea of paradise was still an integral part of medieval society." The idea of paradise, in other words, played an "ideological" role, contributing to the stability of the established social order by projecting hopes for a better life into the

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[142] See "Putting Cruelty First," in Judith Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

[143] Ira Katznelson, *Desolation and Enlightenment: Political Knowledge after Total War, Totalitarianism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 4.

next world. The crucial shift came when this domesticated conception of paradise, so palatable to religious and political elites, was challenged by radicals who sought to make the traditional Christian Kingdom materially immanent. Following the logic of the terminological conventions he adopts, Mannheim writes that "[n]ot until certain social groups embodied these wish-images into their actual conduct, and tried to realize them, did these ideologies become utopian."[144]

The emergence of "utopianism" proper, according to Mannheim's definition, can therefore be linked to a specific era of human history during which human agency began to burst through the straitjacket of medieval quietism and upset the social order. Norman Cohn, in his influential book *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, would pick up and elaborate Mannheim's thesis that the utopian impulse found its earliest manifestation in the religious radicalism of the early modern era. He described the late medieval and post-Reformation millenarian movements as manifestations of a kind of "mystical anarchism," which sought to transform the material world fundamentally rather than escape from it.[145] The participants in these movements believed, implicitly, that human agency— particularly the agency of those at the bottom of the social hierarchy—could be mobilized in the service of social revolution, ushering in an era of equality and Christian brotherhood. They attacked not just the ignominies of "popery," but the very foundations of the social order, including private property and the authority of the state.

The difference between early modern religious radicals and later, secular, revolutionaries was that the former continued to believe that their agency was not literally

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[144] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1936), 193.

[145] Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1970), 176.

capable of establishing God's perfect Kingdom. They could prepare the way for it by clearing the ground of devilish institutions and approximating to the best of their ability the equality and brotherhood they associated with the message of the gospels. But final perfection could only be established by divine intervention. For all of the disruption caused by millenarian movements, then, inherent limits were—at least theoretically—built into their assumptions. A secularized utopianism was more dangerous, for it placed the creation of the new social order entirely within the scope of autonomous human action. Enlightenment rationalism informed the modern version of the belief that utopia might be conceived as a masterpiece of the human mind, and implanted into reality through the power of the state, guided by clear-sighted engineers who traded in straight lines and symmetrical regularity. This rationalist version of social perfection was, some argued, the heavenly ideal in a new guise,[146] and it went on to inform, explicitly or implicitly, various 19th-century revolutionary movements. Thus, the rational shell of modern political radicalism encased an irrational core, built on delusions of mundane perfection and the transference of divine agency to human beings. This was true even of approaches that absorbed the rationalist ideal into the "dialectical" unfolding of history. Although Marx would challenge voluntarist models of social transformation with an analysis of inexorable historical processes which operated behind the backs of human beings, his approach, too, carved out an integral role for human agency, which was supposed to work in concert with historical necessity to bring about a rational social order.

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[146] Consider the famous argument made by Carl Becker in *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

Whether one was a Jacobin or a Marxist, human agency, emboldened by notions of revolutionary and/or historical "necessity," was to play an integral part in freeing the world of conflict, want, and irrationality. This was a far deadlier delusion than could be attributed to the medieval millenarians, for it exploded all limits on the utopian enterprise, whether those limits stemmed from what Kant called the "crooked timber of humanity" or from reliance upon external, divine assistance. As a suprarational religious fantasy erroneously applied to the material world, utopianism was menacing enough, but when it masqueraded as a rational, realizable project for humankind it spelt wholesale disaster, for it guaranteed that the element of providential expectancy characteristic of religious radicalism would be replaced by determined, ruthless, and increasingly desperate efforts to cleanse the human condition of contradiction. As the degeneration of the Bolshevik revolution into totalitarianism illustrated, all manner of coercive, controlling, and unethical behavior was likely to follow.

Dystopia, the anti-utopians believed, was the unshakeable doppelgänger of utopia, for the very logic of utopia, its hubristic presumption that human beings were capable of reforming the world so fundamentally and so precipitously, was an invitation to violence borne of Procrustean despair. The great dystopian novels of the early 20th century—Zamyatin's *We*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, Rand's *Anthem*, Orwell's *1984*—embodied this violence and despair in the nihilism of soulless, casually utilitarian bureaucratic states, behaviorist monstrosities that exerted total control over their subjects. The social theorists of the era were, however, just as likely to see the modern utopian attitude exemplified in the powerless and futile flailing of the anarchist. Mannheim called

anarchism the "relatively purest form of modern Chiliastic mentality."[147] The modern
anarchist was Cohn's medieval, mystical anarchist who had lost all transcendent outlets
for his radical energies. His revolutionary ambitions hopelessly at odds with reality, there
was little for this pathetic creature to do but explode (often literally). Not, however,
before seeking to counteract the obvious senselessness of his actions by making a virtue
of destruction itself, praising its "purifying and regenerating" effects.[148] As the
anarchist's utopian ambition met with intractable reality, it degenerated into bitter
fantasies about the obliteration of the imperfect world in existence. For Daniel Bell, this
impotent nihilism was personified by Bakunin.[149] Indeed, Bakunin has been used more
than once to illustrate the dangers of "utopian psychology": unwilling to brook any
compromise between the ideal and the real, the self-described "fanatic lover of liberty"
had, in a classic utopian irony, fallen back on conspiracy and dictatorship as the only
plausible means of advancing his cause.

Whether this is a charitable characterization of Bakunin or other, like-minded,
anarchists cannot be taken up here. Undoubtedly, hyperbole and selective reading
compromised many of the anti-utopian arguments made in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.
Nevertheless, it was impossible for mid-century social thinkers, operating with the
benefit of hindsight, to ignore the ironies that had overtaken the social idealism of the
19th and early 20th century. Indeed, for many these ironies had taken on the aura of
inevitability that once belonged to the revolution.

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[147] Quoted in *Anarchism and Utopianism*, eds. Laurence Davis and Ruth Kinna (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2010), 25.

[148] Aileen Kelly, *Mikhail Bakunin: A Study in the Psychology and Politics of Utopianism* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1982), 4.

[149] Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 281.

The influence of Kropotkin on New Anarchist utopianism

Although far from anti-utopians themselves, the New Anarchists, too, were influenced by the notion that the classical model of revolutionary change had been roundly discredited. They accepted, as George Woodcock puts it, that "it was futile to imagine that a new society would emerge in its fullness at the time of revolution like Minerva stepping fully armed from the head of Jupiter."[150] Tellingly, their muse was not Bakunin, but Kropotkin, whom Woodcock credited with initiating "a major shift in anarchist thinking which makes him, for his successors, the most important of the movement's major thinkers."[151]

Kropotkin's influence manifested itself in a variety of ways in the New Anarchism. His *Mutual Aid* was especially important as a key source of the naturalistic ethic that informed New Anarchists all the way through Bookchin. His illustrations of mutual aid in practice, as discussed below, helped shift the anarchist conception of revolution from a radical break with the status quo to an expansion of tendencies already in existence. His activities while living in exile in England anticipated the phenomenon, examined in the next chapter, of the anarchist as public intellectual. But most significant, perhaps, was the direction he helped to give to the New Anarchist social ideal, principally through the influence of his quasi-utopian *Fields, Factories, and Workshops*, first published in 1898.[152] The book was edited, annotated, and reprinted twice by New

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[150] Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, ed. George Woodcock (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1983), 198.

[151] Ibid., 197. Herbert Read edited a volume of his selected writing in English as early as 1941.

[152] This book should be contrasted with Kropotkin's other quasi-utopian work, *The Conquest of Bread* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2007), which was still framed in terms of a revolutionary situation. The "philosophic optimism" of *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, Woodcock writes, "represents a change in emphasis, even in allegiance." Kropotkin was increasingly "seeking links with writers and thinkers who

Anarchists: first by Colin Ward in 1974 and later by George Woodcock in 1994. Paul

Goodman considered the book to be a touchstone of sorts for his own work—he

envisioned his 1947 *Communitas* as an updated version of Kropotkin's arguments.

Although the New Anarchists sought to reapply rather than merely reprint or reiterate

Kropotkin's ideas (which in their original form were drenched in outdated 19th-century

statistics), they were united in their belief that those ideas were, in the middle of the 20th

century, timelier than ever. Re-titling his edition of the book *Fields, Factories, and*

Workshops of Tomorrow, Ward called it "one of those great prophetic works of the

nineteenth century whose hour is yet to come."[153]

    Fields, Factories, and Workshops is not a utopia proper, but rather Kropotkin's

attempt to extrapolate utopian possibilities out of the potential generated by modern

technology and production, and to envision a reconfiguration of political geography and

social institutions that would allow humankind to exploit that potential without fostering

hierarchy or alienation. Although its suggestions for industry, agriculture, and education

were undoubtedly influenced by pre-capitalist practices, Kropotkin's book was not a

reactionary or romantic paean to a more primitive condition, but an effort to envision an

approach to modernization that would capitalize on its promise while avoiding its pitfalls.

He sought to show that anarchism was not a regressive but an eminently modern ideal,

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might not necessarily accept his politics, but stood close to him in the issues of an organic melding of rural and industrial life and of a fruitful integration of the manual and intellectual in education." *Fields Factories and Workshops*, 157.

    [153] Peter Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops of Tomorrow*, ed. Colin Ward (London: Freedom Press, 1985), iv. Woodcock's more sober assessment is that Kropotkin "lived mainly within his age, and was in no true sense a prophet, but rather a speculator about the future who was equipped with perception but no great inventiveness. The flashes of imaginative insight that contemporaries like H. G. Wells projected into the future were not Kropotkin's forte, nor, for that matter, was the precise and usually erroneous forecasting of the Utopians. Yet he was right in presenting the viability of small and scattered industrial enterprises as compared with large-scale factories, and the importance of industrial decentralization in establishing a rural society based on humane working relationships rather than profit." *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, 163.

which could in fact be rendered more plausible than ever before by advances in science and technology. Kropotkin saw in the development of certain technologies (particularly in the realms of energy, transit, and communication) the possibility of decentralizing social organization without encouraging provincialism or lessening quality of life. Increasingly, he realized, it was no longer necessary to live in the middle of an overcrowded city to have access to the most advanced technology, scientific knowledge, and modern conveniences.

Indeed, Kropotkin had no doubt, unlike some of the social theorists of the 1960s and beyond, that there could be such a thing as a "liberatory technology." He saw machines as potential aids to workers, reducing labor time and intensity, rather than as their competition. Furthermore, he hoped to dispel the idea that centralization was an inevitable outgrowth of technological advances; as Ward wrote in his gloss on the book: "The very technological developments which, in the hands of people with statist, centralising, authoritarian habits of mind, as well as in the hands of mere exploiters, demand greater concentration of industry, are also those which could make possible a local, intimate, decentralised society."[154] Kropotkin believed that centralization, more often than not, was employed as a way to maintain control rather than to cope with complexity or increase efficiency. Consequently, to think that revolution could be effected simply by putting a different set of masters in charge of a centralized industrial system was to overlook the power dynamics bound up in the organization of industry itself. Only by reducing industry to a more human scale—breaking it up into smaller enterprises and democratizing control over its operations—could the capabilities of

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[154] Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops of Tomorrow*, 164.

modern technology be exploited without introducing the authoritarian tendencies of industrial capitalism.

Kropotkin's proposals for agriculture were meant to complement his proposals for the decentralization of industry. Living and writing in Britain, Kropotkin like many of his contemporaries lamented the sorry state of British agriculture towards the end of the 19th century and envisioned its rebirth. He was confident that improved agricultural practices would allow Britons to feed themselves without reliance upon imports. The feasibility of his analysis aside, it spoke to the larger principle of self-sufficiency in production and consumption. Kropotkin maintained that the capitalist tendency towards specialization (or, on a regional and national level, "comparative advantage") undermined local autonomy by putting communities at the mercy of fluctuating international trade. Instead, he envisioned each nation as its "own agriculturist and manufacturer," providing domestically for the vast majority of its everyday needs.[155] Despite the fact that Kropotkin endorsed self-sufficiency, however, his was by no means an isolationist attitude. Although international trade would be limited to what was absolutely necessary, he envisioned a rich exchange of knowledge and ideas that would allow every locality to reap the benefits of the most advanced scientific techniques and follow the latest developments in arts and culture.

Kropotkin believed that decentralization would also make possible a new balance between rural and urban life, in contrast to the typical parasitism of cities on the surrounding countryside. Although he hoped to put an end to the city's dominance, however, he did not advocate for a romanticized rural existence over an urban one—rather, he rejected the notion that the two were irreconcilable in the modern world

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[155] Ibid., 27.

altogether. Because the fruits of modern technology no longer had to be concentrated in the cities, it was possible to live a rural life without becoming disconnected from the wider world. Small-scale manufacturing would combine rural and urban advantages, bringing "the factory amidst the fields."[156] People could be productive without sacrificing their quality of life to the degrading living and working conditions of urban centers. It was a "necessity," Kropotkin believed, "for each healthy man and women [sic] to spend a part of their lives in manual work in the free air."[157]

Mirroring this balance of manufacture and agriculture, city and country, was Kropotkin's proposal for an "integral" approach to education that combined mental and manual training and prepared individuals to move comfortably amongst multiple realms of life. Aside from the practical benefits to be gained by this, it represented a restoration of the rounded humanity that had been shattered by the division of labor. Before going on to specialized pursuits, Kropotkin proposed that all young people receive a general education that instilled both scientific knowledge and skill in handicraft. An emphasis on acquiring applied knowledge, he hoped, would work in conjunction with learning-by-doing, fostering a close relationship between theory and practice.

Whether he was making a case for the potential fecundity of British soil or the possibility of decentralizing the benefits of modern technology, Kropotkin was keen to demonstrate that a large segment of humanity need not be condemned to starvation or pauperization on the basis of immutable laws of population or productive development.

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[156] Ibid., 157.

[157] Ibid., 158. Paul Goodman also believed that rural reconstruction, aside from helping to solve some of the problems of the city, could resurrect "an alternative way of life." *People or Personnel and Like a Conquered Province* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 335. The values he attributed to this way of life included "relative self-sufficiency, escape from the cash nexus, direct control of necessities, practical attachment to family, home, site, and natural conditions." Paul Goodman and Percival Goodman, *Communitas: Ways of Livelihood and Means of Life* (New York: Random House, 1960), 88.

Scarcity did not have to be conquered through giant leaps in productivity that demanded

vast outpourings of blood and sweat and the sacrifice of freedom in the name of

discipline and efficiency. His vision of modernization began with the claim that the

reorganization of presently-available resources was the most important step in providing

for the well-being of all. The primary task was neither to dismantle nor greatly expand

industry, but rather to rearrange it. For New Anarchists skeptical of the growth-oriented

economics of the postwar era, Kropotkin's argument embodied the important idea that a

different kind of social organization (e.g. putting land to common use, privileging small

industries) could unlock productive potential that was already at hand, directing

capabilities towards the common good rather than relying on the extraordinary productive

leaps required to introduce a tolerable standard of living to all under conditions of vast

inequality.

Kropotkin's sense of social possibility stemmed not from detached dreaming but

from empirical observation and scientific analysis—his book was laden with statistics

and appendixes, and though he believed its general principles to be widely applicable, he

directed its main arguments to the concrete historical context of turn-of-the-century

Britain. As George Woodcock put it in his version of the book, the vision that Kropotkin

lays out in *Fields, Factories, and Workshops* "is the old anarchist dream of freedom and

abundance considered in terms of scientific and technological possibility."[158] Kropotkin

sought to show, in the most convincing terms that contemporary evidence allowed, that—

in the words of Noam Chomsky—anarchism offered "exactly the appropriate ideas for an

advanced industrial society."[159] This meant, however, that industry could not be

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[158] Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, 159.
[159] Noam Chomsky, *Language and Politics*, ed. C. P. Otero (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2004), 144.

permitted to run amok, but had to be broken into pieces compatible with values of balance, human scale, and democratic control.

Ebenezer Howard and the birth of modern city planning

In many ways, Kropotkin's work captured the spirit of the "pragmatic utopianism" characteristic of the New Anarchists: his empirically-grounded assessment of social potential avoided spinning proposals out of thin air, his recommendations—while not exactly "realistic"—were directed at a specific social context, and he offered generalizations about priorities and ideal social configurations without prescribing a recipe for utopia that purported to be universally applicable. And though Kropotkin's ideas were decidedly out of step with the mainstream of the socialist movement, they overlapped considerably with, and indeed influenced, another tradition which was just beginning to take shape around the turn of the century: the modern town planning movement.[160] Not coincidentally, the ur-text of that movement, Ebenezer Howard's *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Social Reform* (reissued as *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*), first appeared, as did Kropotkin's book, in 1898.[161] This tradition, whose leading lights were Howard, Patrick Geddes, and Lewis Mumford, provided what was probably the most important source of inspiration for New Anarchist ideas (particularly those of Ward, Goodman, and Bookchin) outside of the anarchist tradition itself.

Howard's *Tomorrow*, as well as the movement it helped to inspire, grew out of the Victorian reaction to the congested, ugly, and unhealthy urban conditions that had been generated by industrialization. Although in the early modern era capital had spurned

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[160] In fact, as Peter Hall writes: "many…of the early visions of the planning movement stemmed from the anarchist movement." *Cities of Tomorrow* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 3.

[161] Howard, incidentally, was both an acquaintance of Kropotkin and an admirer of his work.

the cities for their guild-based economic restrictions, the unraveling of feudal regulations and the displacement of a large pool of labor from the countryside due to enclosures eventually made the cities logical places to centralize production. As factories moved to the cities, so did workers, who for reasons of limited mobility were forced to crowd together into dwellings within walking distance of their places of employment. The extraordinarily degraded lifestyle that resulted—characterized by extremely cramped living quarters, lack of sanitation, casual immorality, and crime—was largely hidden from the view of polite Victorian society at first, but by the end of the 19th century a number of literary and journalistic exposés had made the problems of the inner city impossible to ignore. While social Darwinists blamed the condition of the impoverished on their own failings, more enlightened reformers attributed the degeneration of urban space and the people within it to the operation of the unrestrained market, which on the micro level accorded free license to greed and rapacity, and which on the macro level opted for blind market mechanisms over the conscious and rational control of social development.

The enlightened attitude toward the so-called "social question" prompted two related reactions. First was a predictable effort to restructure urban space, particularly the ghastly, overcrowded slums, through the design of healthier and less congested buildings and roads. The second reaction was a brief resurgence of the communitarian movement, which had more or less fizzled out in the middle of the 19th century. Communitarianism by this time had fallen out of favor with the socialist movement, becoming an object of ridicule for everyone from Marxists versed in Engels' famous critique of "utopian socialism" to reform-minded Fabians intent upon introducing socialism gradually into the

existing social order.[162] The communitarian mentality, it was believed, reflected a desire to flee rather than reform the ills of urban life by escaping with likeminded colonists to locales isolated enough to be immune from the social forces that had corrupted existing cities. Howard, though originally taking an interest in far-flung communitarian schemes like Albert Kinsey Owen's Topolobampo, ultimately settled on an innovative approach that represented a middle ground between the impulse to reform and the impulse to start afresh. Although Howard did indeed propose to establish new towns, his "Garden Cities" were not meant to be isolated enclaves but rather parts of the solution to the bloated and insalubrious city. Established in the vicinity of large urban areas like London, they would help to drain off the urban population not through endless suburban agglomeration, but through the formation of entirely new settlements, separated from one another by what came to be called "green belts" subject to strict building proscriptions. Howard's was a vision of the planned dispersal of population through what were called at the time "home colonies," which unlike traditional settlements would offer their residents from the beginning all of the basic amenities of modern living.

Insofar as Howard's designs for his model Garden City can be called "utopian," they clearly belong to the "blueprint" strain of that tradition: they are full of meticulous prescriptions for the city's layout, proportions, and institutions (though these prescriptions were accompanied in later editions with warnings about applying the designs too literally to any specific site). Howard envisioned small towns designed to support an upper limit of 32,000 people, surrounded by open countryside. Each town

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[162] As Peter Hall and Colin Ward point out, Howard's "book flatly contradicted [the Fabians'] basic strategy, developed by Sidney Webb, of achieving socialism through municipal ownership within the existing cities, or Gas and Water Socialism." *Sociable Cities: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 30.

would, ideally, be organized as a series of concentric rings separated by green spaces and traversed by six wide radial boulevards, dividing it into six sections or wards. Ringing a five-acre public garden in the center of town would be the principal public buildings (the town hall, concert halls, lecture halls, museum, picture galleries, libraries, theaters, and so forth). Moving outward, Howard's proposal included a wide glass arcade that would serve as a marketplace, followed by residences arrayed along boulevards and intermediate radials. Further out would lie a thin industrial belt far enough away so as not to be a nuisance, served by a circular railway. The outer extremity of each town would consist of a vast green belt of 5000 acres, containing farms and quasi-urban institutions like reformatories and convalescent homes. The circular layout (with radii of ¾ of a mile) would allow residents to get from one part of town quickly and efficiently on foot or by bicycle. Consequently, the industrial, economic, and political sections of town would all be easily accessible without the need to intermingle them.

All considered, Howard's Garden City design was a geometrically-balanced synthesis of town and country, built to human scale, which was meant to offer an attractive alternative to the bloated, alienating, and unsustainable urban conglomerations that had resulted from the unchecked industrialization of the 19th century. "The astonishing fact about Howard's plan," write Peter Hall and Colin Ward in their co-authored book on Howard, "is how faithfully it follows the precepts of good planning a century later: this is a walking-scale settlement, within which no one needs a car to go anywhere; the densities are high by modern standards, thus economising on land; and yet the entire settlement is suffused by open space both within and outside, thus sustaining a

natural habitat."[163] Ultimately, Howard hoped that the successful establishment of model Garden Cities would have a chain effect, leading to imitations that would spread across England, gradually socializing land and, indirectly, breaking up industrial "conurbations" without the need to involve the state. New towns occupying the same region could eventually federate with one another, gradually building up a polycentric "Social City."

As a true modern utopian, Howard was not merely indulging in thought experiments—he had every intention of seeing his plan put into practice. Much of *Tomorrow* consists of a series of dry recommendations as to how efforts to establish Garden Cities might be funded and organized. Shortly after publishing his book, Howard founded the Garden City Association, which eventually became the Town and Country Planning Association (the organization, under the latter moniker, employed Colin Ward for a number of years as its education officer). Believing that "working models were more convincing than theoretical arguments," Howard and his followers oversaw the translation of the Garden City vision into reality with the founding of Letchworth in 1903 and Welwyn in 1920.[164] These experiments did not set off the chain reaction Howard had idealistically envisioned at the turn of the century, and compromises made to secure financing steered them away from Howard's original vision. But the Garden City idea proved extraordinarily influential nonetheless. It was the main point of reference when the British government sought to use post-World War II reconstruction as an opportunity to restructure the country's great urban districts. The idea was not merely to rebuild the areas that had been destroyed by the Luftwaffe, but to siphon a significant percentage of the urban population off from overcrowded inner cities into freshly founded "New

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[163] Ibid., 23.
[164] Colin Ward, *Welcome, Thinner City: Urban Survival in the 1990s* (London: Bedford Square Press, 1989), 18.

Towns" separated by green space and limited in size. The "New Towns" program

announced by the Labour government in 1946 was, as one student of the program has

noted, "perhaps the most ambitious of all attempts at national planning."[165] The irony,

Peter Hall points out, was that when the ideals of Howard and other quasi-anarchist

planners were finally "translated into bricks and mortar" on a large scale, "more often

than not…this happened through the agency of state bureaucracies."[166] As the state

appropriated aspects of the Garden City model, Howard's early ideals were, as Howard

(who died in 1928) surely would have predicted, only further warped.

Howard and others who provided the early impetus for town planning had, in fact,

found themselves marginalized almost immediately once their ideas began to be

translated into action, crowded out by the more practical-minded men responsible for

turning planning into a proper profession. This has been described as a shift from

"visionaries" to mere "planners."[167] But in important ways, even Howard's original

vision had been severely limited by Victorian timidity. That Howard had socialist

sympathies and envisioned a substantial amount of "anarchist co-operation" taking place

within the towns he proposed, as Ward and Hall claim, is undoubtedly true, but the

approach he endorsed was intentionally reserved or neutral with respect to crucial matters

of economic and political arrangement.[168] As Murray Bookchin points out, "as a

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[165] Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 23.

[166] Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, 3. As Hall and Ward point out, "Howard, who so distrusted government as an agent to build new towns, would today find himself totally dependent on its active co-operation." *Sociable Cities*, 110.

[167] See Stanley Buder, *Visionaries and Planners: The Garden City Movement and the Modern Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[168] The full quote reads as follows: "each Garden City would be an exercise in local management and self-government. Services would be provided by the municipality, or by private contractors, as proved more efficient. Others would come from citizens, in a series of what Howard called pro-municipal experiments—or self-help. In particular, people would build their own homes with capital provided through

pragmatic man, Howard essentially divested his scheme for the 'marriage' of town and country of its socialist and anarchist elements." In Howard's work "design is assigned the task of achieving sweeping goals that actually involve revolutionary changes in the entire economic, social, and cultural fabric of bourgeois society."[169] Howard's suggestions for the political arrangements of his Garden City, Bookchin notes with dismay, called for administrative centralization and elective politics with no means of recall. Furthermore, Howard made no provisions for rotation of agricultural and industrial work or industrial self-management. The social interactions and "community" he envisioned were, Bookchin suggests, superficial.[170] Most importantly, Howard "leaves undefined the nature of work, the control of the means of production, the problem of distributing goods and services equitably, and the conflicting social interests that collect around these issues."[171] Bookchin accuses Howard of failing to appreciate that design must flow out of a particular way of life; it is not capable, by itself, of giving rise to a way of life. With its overestimation of the advantages to be wrought from the redesigning of social space, Howard's was a vision of social reconstruction without revolution; it made utopia palatable by divesting it of most of its content.

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building societies, friendly societies, co-operative societies, or trade unions." "It was a vision of anarchist co-operation, to be achieved without large-scale central state intervention. Not for nothing did Howard admire Kropotkin. Garden City would be realised through individual enterprise, wherein individualism and co-operation would be happily married." Hall and Ward, *Sociable Cities*, 28.

[169] Murray Bookchin, *The Limits of the City* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 118.

[170] "In Howard's garden city and the "new towns," Bookchin writes, "[n]eighborliness is mistaken for organic social intercourse and mutual aid; well-manicured parks for the harmonization of humanity with nature; the proximity of work places for the development of a new meaning for work and its integration with play; an eclectic mix of ranch-houses, slab-like apartment buildings, and bachelor-type flats for spontaneous architectural variety; shopping-mart plazas and a vast expanse of lawn for the *agora*; lecture halls for cultural centers; hobby classes for vocational variety; benevolent trusts or municipal councils for self-administration." Ibid., 120-21. Economic competition, class antagonisms, social hierarchy, and domination and exploitation, Bookchin points out, would still be allowed to continue in many ways and would be placed outside of the control of the community.

[171] Ibid., 119.

Nevertheless, Howard and his followers had helped to point radical social thinkers to considerations that were virtually invisible within the socialist movement at the turn of the century: the need to link social ideals to the structure of social space, the need to push back against the centralizing tendencies of industrialization and urbanization, and the need to preserve the natural environment. Furthermore, their approach did not require one to defect from modern society or give up on confronting the problems of the inner city, as did many of the communitarian schemes that preceded it. As Frederic Osborn, the most influential proponent of the Garden City idea after Howard, put it: "building new towns is not an evasion of the problem of making the best of existing towns, but is indispensable to the solution of that problem."[172] But the main importance of Howard's original idea was to have offered a tantalizing vision of what modernization might have looked like if it had been carefully limited, balanced, and rationally managed, and what it could look like in the future if those principles were brought to subsequent social development. In short, the New Anarchists—Bookchin included—believed that if fused with anarchist political and economic arrangements, there was much in Howard's book and the decentralist planning movement as a whole that could help point towards an alternative version of modern life.

Planning under fire

In the tradition of communitarianism, Howard had envisioned Garden Cities spreading through persuasion and voluntary participation, and had been highly skeptical of state involvement in such enterprises. Once social planning became part of the agenda of the modern state, it came to be associated with much cruder methods. Unable to

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[172] Frederic J. Osborn, *Green-Belt Cities* (London: Evelyn, Adams & Mackay, 1969), 16.

construct new cities on virgin soil, state planners confiscated private property and sought

to expand preexisting towns against the wishes of local residents. Standard-bearers of the

Garden City movement like Lewis Silkin and Frederick Osborn were denounced by angry

citizens as "dictators." Part of the problem was that rather than reconciling town and

country as Howard had envisioned, the Labour government's New Towns seemed to

those on the receiving end to be rearranging rural life for the benefit of city dwellers.[173]

But the deeper objections had to do with the paternalism, the arrogance, the hostility to

democracy and diversity that seemed to be bound up with the planning enterprise.

Wedded to the state's ability to execute its designs through threats and compulsion,

planning represented to some an insidious threat to freedom, an excuse to expand state

power and take decisions out of the hands of ordinary citizens.

The eventual association of the Garden City ideal with the coercion and

bureaucracy of the state forever tarnished its reputation. Undoubtedly, it contributed to

the seemingly odd decision by Jane Jacobs in her influential book *The Death and Life of*

Great American Cities to lump the decentralist approach to planning represented by

Howard and (most of) his followers in with the highly centralist approach of the founder

of Modernist city planning, Le Corbusier.[174] To be sure, Howard and Le Corbusier shared

some similar shortcomings: as Bookchin points out, Howard's failure to confront the

contradictions of capitalism led him to the idea that social problems could be solved

through technical innovation alone, and, "however unintentionally," this fostered "the

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[173] Anthony Alexander, *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities* (London: Routledge, 2009), 25. As Alexander notes, Osborn explicitly argued that "the needs of the urban many should outweigh the desires of the rural few."

[174] Jacobs recognized that early decentralist planners would have drawn a sharp distinction, but argued that "ironically, the Radiant City comes directly out of the Garden City" and that most of the early decentralists' disciples eventually made peace with Le Corbusier, operating with a merged version of the two visions—a "Radiant Garden City." *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1961), 22-24.

myth that structural design is equatable with social rationality."[175] Le Corbusier, too, had made the mistake of thinking he could rationalize social life simply by structuring it diagrammatically. His "Radiant City," which provided for ample green space by concentrating density upwards in imposing high-rises, owed an obvious (and in fact acknowledged) debt to Howard's Garden City design. But despite Bookchin's criticisms of Howard, the New Anarchists were, on the whole, keen to demonstrate that the decentralist and Modernist approaches were different both in spirit and outcome.

To begin with, the decentralists wanted to disperse urban density rather than find more efficient ways of concentrating it. Their vision of harmonizing urban and rural was informed by a sense of respect for rural values and modes of life, whereas Le Corbusier's vision was utterly enamored of industrialization. His work was brimming with admiration for the behemoths of modern engineering—steamships, airplanes, cars, factories—whose development was driven forward by large-scale industry and war. Even the design of living spaces, Le Corbusier argued, should reflect the "cold reason" and austere plans that informed these industrial outputs—the house is, he famously wrote, "a machine for living in."[176] His plans were mercilessly abstract, envisioning custom as a mere impediment, which had to be discarded by planners of social space just as casually as it was by the industrialist. He believed that mathematical abstraction rather than cautious organic calibration was the proper route to "harmony." He embraced standardization enthusiastically, and envisioned as a reference point for his plans standardized human beings with the same set of needs. Standardization could not, Le Corbusier believed, be

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[175] Murray Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1996), 152.
[176] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (New York: Dover, 1986), 4.

fully realized without brushing away "the stifling accumulation of age-long detritus."[177] Thus, rather than bringing the more organic relationships and organization of the family and civil society into the factory, he sought to bring the organization and rationalization demanded by the exigencies of modern industry and war into living and social space. As Paul Goodman and his brother Percival pointed out in their co-authored *Communitas*, Le Corbusier conceived of "society as an Organization."[178] His technocratic vision sought to replace traditional humanist values with the values of the engineer.[179] And for all of his "modernist" ambitions, rather than offering a future-oriented vision he suggested "nothing but the rationalization of existing means."[180]

While the example of the postwar New Towns had shown that even certain aspects of a decentralist ideal could be taken up by state technocrats, Le Corbusier's approach was far more objectionable to the New Anarchists. To implement a decentralized vision through a central authority (as with the New Towns) was, at the very least, to adopt an approach riven by contradiction, capable in certain instances of being exploited for democratic and humanistic purposes. But Le Corbusier's approach could be smoothly adopted by captains of industry and government who were used to treating people as statistics and taking their own authority for granted. The principles which informed his understanding of planning offered few resources to those who hoped to foster democratic interactions and build off of already extant tendencies of mutual aid. Furthermore, while Le Corbusier embraced even the most dehumanizing aspects of

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[177] Ibid., 288.

[178] Goodman and Goodman, *Communitas*, 48.

[179] The contrast comes through when the Goodmans write, that "[a] city is made by the social congregation of people, for business and pleasure and ceremony, different from shop or office or private affairs at home. A person is a citizen in the street. A city street is not, as Le Corbusier thinks, a machine for traffic to pass through but a square for people to remain within. Without such squares—markets, cathedral places, political forums—planned more or less as inclosures [sic], there is no city." Ibid., 49.

[180] Ibid., 48.

technocracy and modernity wholeheartedly, the balanced ideal put forward by Howard

and Kropotkin took a much more nuanced view of the modern ethos.

By effectively conflating the decentralist and Modernist planning traditions,

Jacobs seemed to suggest that *any* approach to planning which proclaimed grand

ambitions and imagined a fundamental reconfiguration of urban space was inherently

undemocratic, prone to abstraction, and oblivious to the way cities actually worked.

Jacobs' vision of the city, as is well known, included some strikingly anarchistic

elements—she called, most importantly, for neighborhood-based self-government as an

antidote to the top-down paternalism of city planners.[181] But she was so certain that this

kind of self-government was irreconcilable with planning as traditionally conceived that

she virtually rejected the idea of planning out of hand, treating everyone within the

tradition with equal contempt and accusing them of a deep-seated "anti-urban" bias.

While her denunciation of the planning norms of her time and her characterization of the

fine grain of city life are justly celebrated, her own proposals for urban reform were,

tellingly, uninspired—focused, as Lewis Mumford noted in a sharply critical review of

her book, on fostering inner-city safety rather than pursuing ambitious social goals.[182]

Unlike the decentralists, Jacobs celebrated the very *bigness* of the modern city, taking its

layout and logic more or less for granted.

The New Anarchists, like Jacobs, objected to planners who tried "to make the

crooked places straight, to iron out the kinks, to eliminate non-conforming users, and, in

short, to impose geometry upon urban geography."[183] They agreed that the designs of

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[181] See Jacobs, *Death and Life*, 405-27.

[182] See *The Urban Prospect* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 182-207.

[183] Colin Ward, *Housing: An Anarchist Approach* (London: Freedom Press, 1976), 133.

most modern city planners were "crassly institutional and utilitarian."[184] They also agreed

that with respect to immediate practical reforms, it was sometimes necessary to think

small rather than to think big, to be sensitive to the complex texture of everyday life and

to remain flexible and adaptable enough to confront unforeseen developments.[185] But

unlike Jacobs, they believed that urbanization and the destructive social forces

underpinning it had almost completely destroyed the character of city life. The 20th-

century city, they argued, fostered a herd-like mentality, alienation, anonymity,

privatization, atomization, commoditization, and manipulation. The city had become a

place to work rather than a place to live, its grid-like monotony reflective of a factory

mentality. It had grown so far beyond human scale so as to be incomprehensible to the

average citizen. Its architectural gigantism created an ambience of hierarchical power.[186]

Rather than a rational expression of social life, it was a cancer, rotting on the inside,

whose extremities were progressively devouring the countryside and subjecting it to the

same social and organizational logic.[187] In fact, most of the urban entities described as

"cities" were unworthy of the appellation altogether—they had evolved into the negation

of the city, the "megalopolis," whose "vast stretches of mortar, brick, wood, and

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[184] Bookchin, *The Limits of the City*, ix.

[185] As Ward pointed out, total renewal often means total obsolescence once conditions change. *Housing*, 134. "The worst piece of advice that planners have ever accepted," he writes, "was Daniel Burnham's injunction to 'Make no little plans'"; "we have insisted on thinking big, drawing up plans which were totally unrealisable or which depended on the projection into the future of economic and demographic trends which have proved to be transient." Ibid., 135.

[186] As Bookchin puts it, the "soaring geometric structures" of the modern city "exude social power in its most reified form: power for the sake of power, domination for the sake of domination." *Toward an Ecological Society*, 146.

[187] Bookchin characterizes the "cancer" as follows: "City space with its human propinquity, distinctive neighborhoods, and humanly scaled politics—like rural space, with its closeness to nature, its high sense of mutual aid, and its strong family relationships—is being absorbed by urbanization, with its smothering traits of anonymity, homogenization, and institutional gigantism." *From Urbanization to Cities: Towards a New Politics of Citizenship* (London: Cassall, 1995), 16-17.

glass…often extend beyond the physical horizon of the individual and, in a very real sense, beyond his or her psychic horizon."[188]

This was the context that made it especially imperative to unite local self-government with conscious social control over urban and rural development and an ambitious—indeed, revolutionary—vision of social and spatial reform. Urbanization had been limited in the past only by its tendency to destroy the conditions of its own perpetuation.[189] Urban growth was seen at worst as one of the ugly "necessities" of modernization, and placing humanmade limitations upon it was assumed to be a futile endeavor. The New Anarchists insisted that there was nothing "necessary" about urbanization—it was not the outgrowth of dynamics innate to technological development or population expansion, but was a product of political and economic factors that, to the extent that they operated unconsciously, could be subjected to rational control.[190]

The style of New Anarchist planning

The promise of the rational control of social life was the principal desideratum that the New Anarchists associated with social planning. While Jacobs virtually rejected planning and design outright in her eagerness to counteract the follies of state planners, the New Anarchists understood that the profound challenges of modern urban life could not be confronted without a dash of utopian vision, and they found plenty of libertarian potential in the decentralist planning tradition that had incurred Jacobs' derision. Jacobs had been correct to suggest that the decentralist and Modernist approaches had merged in

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[188] Ibid., 4. For the classic discussion of the "megalopolis," see Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1938).

[189] As Bookchin points out, "limitless expansion is itself a limit, a self-devouring process." *The Limits of the City*, 89.

[190] See Goodman, *People or Personnel and Like a Conquered Province*, 317-18. "The remarkable increase in technical efficiency," Goodman writes, "could just as well produce rural affluence or a cooperative society of farmers and consumers." Ibid., 319.

the model of planning that had been taken up by the American and British states, but she was wrong to use this fact to discredit the decentralist tradition as a whole. The New Anarchists aimed to develop the libertarian potential of that tradition—not only by taking up some of its main insights, but also by bringing to it a style that emphasized play, artistry, and open-endedness, and by balancing the need for plans with respect for already-established social networks and democratic decision-making.

The "style" of New Anarchist planning is most evident, perhaps, in Paul and Percival Goodman's *Communitas*. Although the book stands out for being the closest any of the New Anarchists ever came to making an original contribution to "ideal city" utopianism, it is far from a standard exercise in urban blueprinting. Part compendium of modern approaches to social planning, part critique of troublesome tendencies within the Modernist movement, and part inventive speculation about alternative forms of social organization, the book managed to make a serious contribution to the planning literature while "giving free rein to playful imagination," in the words of one contemporary reviewer.[191] Its style contrasts in illuminating ways with Howard's *Tomorrow*. Howard's book was written with the sobriety and naïve optimism of 19th-century social reformism, reflecting his certainty that he had found *the* solution to the problems of modern urban life, to which he needed only to convert others. Contrastingly, the style of *Communitas* is playful, mingling considered proposals with ideas that seem off the top of the head and receive little elaboration. The text is interspersed with illustrations, some of them disciplined in execution, others gleefully crude and cartoonish. The overall effect on the reader is that it is hard to know what to take seriously. But this stylistic approach is in the

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[191] Svend Riemer, "*Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life*, by Percival Goodman; Paul Goodman," *American Journal of Sociology* 53, no. 3 (Nov., 1947), 232.

service of a deeper point, which is that planning does *not* have to be "serious" business, reserved for humorless, "Cartesian" experts who hand down their paternalistic prescriptions from on high. In the Goodmans' book, the reader is treated to a mélange of ideas and approaches that undercuts the notion that there is any *one* "right" way, and encourages an attitude of experimentation and imaginative pragmatism.

Goodman would never have claimed to have discovered a panacea for problems of modern social organization, much less a panacea that could be captured in a generalizable set of blueprints. He did not consider it part of his agenda to set forth a comprehensive outline of an anarchist society. Nevertheless, in the second of the "three community paradigms" that the Goodmans sketched, they attempted to organize a small city on anarchist principles, put forward not as a "plan" but as a kind of offering, to be considered alongside others. The influence of Kropotkin is plainly evident. Like Kropotkin, the Goodmans pictured a city of modest size with a tightly-knit local economy, self-subsistent with little need for export and import. They, too, insisted that regionalism did not equal provincialism, and believed that small, autonomous cities could be connected in myriad ways on a national and international level. They envisioned a reformation of education that would equip individuals for rural as well as urban life. They also envisioned a transformation of work. The assignation of work, according to their scheme, would weigh psychological and moral considerations against considerations of efficiency and would rotate responsibilities so that individual development was not stunted by overspecialization. Work would become an end as well as a means, and workers would, of course, be involved in decisions about production. Consumption would be rationalized, dispensing with inefficiencies like advertising and packaging, and

money would fade into insignificance (though the Goodmans offered few details about what would replace it). With respect to the structure and design of the city, civic spaces and public buildings would be attractive and inviting enough that people would be willingly drawn out of their private residences to participate in public life. Public squares would provide ample opportunities to interact casually with others, fostering face-to-face interaction not only in the context of economic and political decision-making but in the minutiae of everyday life. For (Paul) Goodman, carving out designated public space as a medium for incidental contact no less than an arena for citizenship was a means of creating the structural preconditions for a democratic public.

The Goodmans' approach may have been more suggestive than prescriptive, but they were insistent upon the general importance of social planning. While they recognized the dangers inherent in large-scale planning, the real problem, they believed, was that planners did not think big *enough*, were not "philosophical," did not "raise the question of the end in view." It was in fact the *lack* of long-term vision that resulted in planning becoming rigid and obsessed with details, losing sight of the purpose of the enterprise. The problem with contemporary planning, the Goodmans argued, was that it was "carried on with eyes shut to the whole pattern," breaking social life down into disconnected enterprises.[192] Work, residence, and transit, they maintained, could be planned as one problem. Yet by no means did the Goodmans endorse the imposition of abstract plans onto concrete, complex social realities. They did not go nearly as far as Howard in mapping out an ideal configuration of social space and social institutions, and in the final analysis their proposals (in *Communitas* and elsewhere) were spotty and incomplete. But this was true to the spirit of their utopianism: "Mostly," they write, "the

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[192] Goodman and Goodman, *Communitas*, 223.

thousand places that one plans for have mixed conditions and mixed values. The site and history of a place are always particular, and these make the beauty of a plan. Different people in a place want different things. Some of these conditions and aims are compatible and some are incompatible—the musician, says Plato, knows which tones will combine and which will not combine. It's a difficult art that we have to learn."[193]

Indeed, the New Anarchists were apt to counter the image of the planner as technocrat with the image of the planner as artist. In *Like a Conquered Province*, Goodman lamented that "[t]here is no longer an art of city planning but a science of urbanism, which analyzes and relates the various urban functions, taking into account priorities and allocating available finances."[194] The organization of social space and the structures within it, he felt, was not a matter simply of instrumentality, nor should it be left to the unconscious, amoral workings of the market. Rather, it is supposed to embody the values and ideals that the society has deemed to be important, proceeding with consciousness, intent, and appreciation for harmony and balance. Similarly, when Bookchin called for a view of the city as "a social work of art," he meant "a community fashioned by human creativity, reason, and ecological insight."[195]

Of course, misplaced aestheticism was just as ripe for anti-utopian critique as passionless and assured technocracy. After all, although Karl Popper had applied the language of "engineering" to Plato's utopia, he had argued that the Platonic fallacy stemmed from a misguided aesthetic impulse, similar in spirit to Le Corbusier's method because it demanded a blank canvas upon which to impress an idiosyncratic vision of perfection. It was Plato the frustrated artist who had sought to extirpate the discordant

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[193] Ibid., 221.
[194] Goodman, *People or Personnel and Like a Conquered Province*, 322.
[195] Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society*, 169.

notes from his vision of social harmony, banishing poets, reprogramming the minds of children, and the like. The problem with Popper's argument is that it reflects a singularly deranged understanding of artistry. The artist, the New Anarchists realized, is not someone who seeks to banish all contingency from the world and start anew, but one who works skillfully with materials that are already given, who respects the inherent qualities of those materials and focuses on further unlocking their potential and integrating them into a larger unity. On the level of city planning, this meant, in Bookchin's language, that communities (which he called "ecocommunities") had to be "artistically molded to the ecosystems in which they are located."[196] This, for Bookchin was the essence of "bioregionalism," which combined conscious human planning with cautious sensitivity to the unique characteristics of the specific geographical areas in which cities were constructed.[197]

Planning as "conservative surgery"

That sensitivity to what was already in existence applied not just to "first nature" but also, when reforming social spaces rather than establishing new ones, to "second nature." It meant looking for the ways in which organic, spontaneous order was already patterning human interactions, even under the least propitious of circumstances. It meant recognizing that even the most alienating tangle of urban existence was shot through with veins of mutual aid and self-help, which imbued even the disjointed lives of city dwellers with some meaning and stability, and reflected at least a meager ability to personalize the environment. The anarchist architect John Turner, as Colin Ward liked to point out, had

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[196] Ibid., 68.

[197] See Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman, *Defending the Earth* (Boston: South End Press, 1991), 79-81.

found these qualities even in the squatter settlements of Latin America, which had been arrogantly assumed to be purely haphazard bricolages ruled by the laws of the jungle. The New Anarchists realized that no planner without a healthy dose of humility and a sharp eye for empirical observation would be able to appreciate the multifarious ways in which people evolve order of their own accord. This order had to be respected and nurtured rather than casually sacrificed to the realignments of social life mandated by the schemes of a master planner.

As Jane Jacobs had argued in *Death and Life*, with respect to reforming the structure of cities already in existence, it was crucial to know what kind of "materials" one was working with, to know what kind of "problem" a city was, as she put it. Inspired by the ecological perspective of the life sciences, Jacobs had argued that the city was an "organized complexity," whose different parts were interrelated in a variety of subtle ways. These interrelationships, she claimed, were not irrational and accidental, but part of the city's natural variegation. The main failing of planners was that they were quick to dismiss this complexity in an effort to reduce urban problems to manageable, bivariate relationships. It was a short step from such convenient abstractions to the kind of violence done by a planner like Robert Moses to the richness of New York City neighborhoods.

The glaring omission in Jacobs' account of the city was the fact that the dynamics of capitalism, no less than the simplifications of planners, were shaping the layout and character of the city behind the backs of its denizens—actively undermining, in fact, much of the complexity, diversity, and rational order that they had brought to their everyday lives. The *dis*organizing consequences of market operations had imbued city

spaces with randomness and arbitrariness that was destructive of human relationships and that might have been avoided if communities had had the ability to decide and plan. Like Howard, Jacobs had failed to appreciate the social forces that would ultimately overwhelm plans and non-plans alike. The New Anarchist understanding of the city, taking these forces into full account, therefore fell somewhere in between Jacobs' "organized complexity" and "disorganized complexity."[198]

Nevertheless, the New Anarchists realized, with Jacobs, that even a modern mecca of urbanization like New York was suffused with organic interrelationships that needed to be recognized and respected. In the words of Murray Bookchin, "[b]ehind the physical structure of the city lies the social community—its workaday life, values, culture, familial ties, class relations, and personal bonds. To fail to consider how this hidden dimension of urbanity forms the structure of the city is as valueless, indeed misleading, as to ignore the role of the structure in reinforcing or undermining the social community."[199] The New Anarchist approach to planning was visionary, but not hubristic. It was tempered, always, by the knowledge that social order can never be created *in toto* on a drawing board. Just as any effort to bring a new city into existence must take into account the ability of human beings to organize their own lives and shape social reality to suit their needs, any effort to reform an already-existing city must begin with the realization that every city is sustained chiefly by the order that arises organically within what Bookchin referred to as the "social community." Kropotkin had been the one, argued George Woodcock, to push that realization to the forefront of anarchist thought, showing that it is not coercion but natural impulses to mutual aid and voluntary

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[198] Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 430-32.
[199] Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society*, 137.

groupings that hold society together. The implication for anarchist strategy, Woodcock suggests, is that "it is by sustaining this network and defending it against the authoritarians that we can draw nearer the society at which we aim than by the use of outdated insurrectionary methods."[200]

Just as the idea of a ground-clearing, violent revolution was an outdated 19th-century fantasy, it was fallacious to think that the best way to further anarchist ideals in an urban setting was to sweep away the social structures already in existence. Any social reformer in the real world necessarily worked within a context not of his or her making which constituted an innate limit on what was possible through conscious planning. But any social context offered much that could serve as a boon rather than a burden to the decentralist planner. While Le Corbusier seemed to revel in the destruction that would dispense with custom and tradition and provide the planner with a blank slate for his designs, the New Anarchist approach to the social context already in place was far more akin to what the Scottish biologist and decentralist planner Patrick Geddes—a supporter of Howard and close friend of Kropotkin—called "conservative surgery." Rather than seeking to implant plans drawn up in a vacuum, this approach required planners to think carefully about "what to save, how to save it, what to renew, and how to renew it, when and where to remove or modify existing structures."[201] Far too many sacrifices, Geddes argued, had been made to straight lines. "True town-planning" began with "simply amending the surroundings of the people."[202] Geddes wrote that

> the lesson town planners everywhere most need, that town planning is not
> something which can be done from above, on general principles easily laid down,

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[200] Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, 198.

[201] Marshall Stalley, "Introduction" to *Patrick Geddes: Spokesman for Man and the Environment*, ed. Marshall Stalley (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1972), xiv.

[202] Geddes, *Patrick Geddes*, 90.

which can be learned in one place and imitated in another…. It is the development of a local life, a regional character, a civic spirit, a unique individuality, capable of course of growth and expansion, of improvement and development in many ways, of profiting too by the example and criticism of others, yet always in its own way and upon its own foundations.[203]

True planning required making an effort to discover how people in a particular locality were already living their lives, as well as what they wanted and needed to change.[204] It meant, as Ward puts it, "combining the conservation of the whole with the renewal of the parts, cherishing rather than eliminating the *genius loci*."[205] The real need was to transform the existing city through improvement rather than eliminating it through destruction.

This did not mean, however, that there was no role for higher-order thinking in the process of planning. While Geddes encouraged sensitivity to the specific past, present, and future of specific cities, he also found value in thinking about the city as a "genus." The planner, he argued, "must not shrink from formulating the ideal of the city." It was essential to bring to planning a sense of "social and educational hope and purpose," and a "conception of civic progress"—these help to ensure that "our selection amid the many possibilities of life" is done "consciously and for higher ends."[206] In his efforts to link the ideal and the real, Geddes beautifully captured the character of New Anarchist utopianism: "Idealism and matter of fact are thus not sundered, but inseparable,

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[203] Ibid., 108.

[204] As Geddes wrote of his work in India: "I differ from the engineers in not wanting to plan these people into my ways, or in the style I bring from Europe. On the contrary, I try to discover how these people need, and really want to be planned. *This is the difference between false and true planning*." Each town should be "a human garden of the world, where each form of life may grow and develop according to its nature." Ibid., 74. "Just as a flower may be fully comprehended only when its natural soil and climate are investigated," Geddes writes, "so a city can be understood only with reference to the region in which it is located, the history of its people, and the social and physical forces affecting and being affected by it." Ibid., 107.

[205] Ward, *Welcome, Thinner City*, 23.

[206] Geddes, *Patrick Geddes*, 51.

as our daily steps are guided by ideals of direction, themselves unreachably beyond the stars, yet indispensable to getting anywhere, save indeed downwards." "Eutopia," he maintained, "lies in the city around us; and it must be planned and realised, here or nowhere, by us as its citizens—each a citizen of both the actual and the ideal city seen increasingly as one."[207]

In *Anarchy in Action*, Ward described the anarchist society he championed as a "seed beneath the snow." The metaphor was meant to capture the notion that the preconditions for anarchism were already present in everyday life. It was improper to think of these preconditions as cohering into a platform for an epoch-making revolution. Rather, they were better described as tendencies which were manifested in a variety of ways, scattered here and there, sometimes in evidence, sometimes stifled and slumbering, but always ready to be reawakened.[208] The insightful planner was one who could discern those tendencies in social existence as given and avoid stifling them. But the planner also had to be prepared to *cultivate* those seeds by providing them with conscious encouragement and direction. This meant that anarchism could not rely upon simple spontaneity, but had to feed off of the social imaginings of the utopian tradition. Coming to concrete reforms with a broad social perspective was distinct from seeking to impose grand plans on a recalcitrant reality. Anarchism, rightly understood, called not for a sharp and radical break with social reality, but for the actualization of potential already in existence. For normative no less than practical reasons, it had to conceive of itself as

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[207] Ibid., 112.

[208] Ward writes that "an anarchist society, a society which organizes itself without authority, is always in existence, like a seed beneath the snow, buried under the weight of the state and its bureaucracy, capitalism and its waste." *Anarchy in Action* (London: Freedom Press, 1996), 18.

bringing the real closer to the ideal by working step-by-step within a given set of possibilities and opportunities.

Planning for (and with) democracy

The need to work within existing reality was linked, for the New Anarchists, to the need to work with existing people rather than treating them as clients or statistics. This meant, firstly, recognizing the ways in which people were already actively circumventing the shortcomings and blind spots of the existing planning machinery by making their own plans. Colin Ward cited numerous examples of people following their own initiative in modifying the environment, ranging from greening the inner city through community gardens, to do-it-yourself housing and the *ad hoc* rehabilitation of dilapidated buildings. Postwar state planning, seeking to subordinate all planning decisions to official approval and oversight, had cracked down on this kind of activity, but Ward celebrated it as a form of direct action. Secondly, people-friendly planning meant structuring the environment in such a way as to allow for democratic control. As discussed in Chapter 3, Ward believed that housing, especially, had to be constructed so as maximize dwellers' ability to modify it.[209] On the level of this most individualized and private space, people had to be enabled "to make their own plans."[210] The same principle

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[209] "What is needed," Ward writes, "is to plan with sufficient flexibility and ingenuity to satisfy the needs of every kind of tenant and to extend rather than limit the variety of ways in which he can choose to live." Ward, *Housing*, 39. The architect "has to find ways of planning that will give the tenants scope for the maximum of human vagaries with the least annoyance to his neighbour, rather than the minimum of accommodation that will comply with sanitary bylaws, and rather than an impressive monument to the genius of the architect." "He has to find, as Gropius says, 'a common language of architecture and its individual variations, a humanised standard, fitting the whole of our community, but simultaneously satisfying also, by its modifications, the different desires of individuals.'" The architect "has to use his skill to transform the environment *in order that* people may attack it to make it theirs." Ibid., 40.

[210] Colin Ward, *When We Build Again: Let's Have Housing that Works!* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), 120.

could be applied, insofar as possible, to the social space meant to serve general community needs.

Most importantly, however, it was necessary to make average citizens part of the planning process. The 1960s saw the initiation of a number of efforts to democratize planning—including "advocacy" planning, "community" planning, and "citizen" planning—all of which were "groping for ways of cutting planning down to size and making it responsive to human needs and aspirations."[211] These included things like "community workshops," which sought to involve the public in planning in hands-on ways. For all of his distrust of the government, Ward believed that empowering citizens through public policy in this manner was better than leaving development up to the free market.[212] Planning, Ward realized, could be enriched by the knowledge and ability that ordinary people already have: "the awareness and environmental sophistication of the ordinary citizen is much more important than the educational experience of the professionals." The planner, Ward writes, is not a special kind of man—rather, "every man is a special kind of planner."[213] The planning profession, he believed, needed to be demystified, stripped of some of its aura of "expertise."

This is not to suggest that Ward believed all aspects of the planning enterprise to be perfectly accessible to the engaged amateur. But there were steps that could be taken to maximize people's ability to understand and contribute to the process. Planning had to be rendered transparent, which meant avoiding unnecessary complexity in the first place: complicated plans violate the principle of "*transparency of operation*, which demands

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[211] Ward, *Housing*, 136.
[212] Citizens "should be enabled to create their own solutions, but…inevitably, this enabling has to be a matter of public policy. I do not trust government, but neither do I trust market forces." Ward, *Welcome, Thinner City*, 4.
[213] Ward, *Housing*, 117.

that what is done in the name of the public should be comprehensible to the public."[214]

Those who do, in fact, possess expertise relevant to the planning enterprise must do their

utmost to share their knowledge with the public rather than maintaining a "professional"

distance. Disseminating knowledge to citizens rather than bottling it up through

specialization was an important aspect of what Ward called "education for participation."

The goal of education for participation was "*enhancing* people's ability to decide for

themselves."[215] "Education for participation," Ward writes, "aims at de-professionalising

decision-making. It seeks nothing less than changing the meaning of the word 'planning'

from a specialist activity of paternalistic government to one of the normal attributes of

citizenship." The principal way to do this was to involve people, young and old, in "real

issues and controversies" and to convince them "that they can make effective choices and

can organise themselves to put those choices into effect."[216] Thus, education for

participation, though it might include reforms of the "formal educational machinery,"

was principally about the need to

> bring education for participation into the street: contact-making activities like
> street theatre, didactic drama for performance anywhere that people congregate, a
> shopfront planning clinic run in association with a housing aid centre, and above
> all, the use of local papers or the launching of community papers…where a
> conscious effort is made to give citizens access to the know-how of urban
> decision-making.[217]

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[214] Ibid., 137. Bookchin expresses a similar sentiment: "if power is to be regained by the people from the state, the management of society must be deprofessionalized as much as possible. That is to say, it must be simplified and rendered transparent, indeed, clear, accessible, and manageable such that most of its affairs can be run by ordinary citizens." *From Urbanization to Cities*, 243.

[215] Ward, *Housing*, 118.

[216] Ibid., 128. We acquire our knowledge of how our environment is shaped "through *involvement* in particular issues, furious local conflicts, rows over deficiencies, arguments about missing facilities." Ward notes that "our children are no different: rarely kindled by an abstract interest in the broader issues, but rapidly involved in the local and immediate controversy, and gaining in insight and effectiveness as this involvement deepens. The only way a child learns to ride a bike is by riding one, and the only way that anyone, child or adult, learns to participate in environmental decision-making is by doing so." Ibid., 124.

[217] Ibid., 127.

Although participatory planning would necessarily begin with local issues, as citizens learned the ins and outs of the process and built up democratic capital, it would be possible to create a "framework for popular large-scale planning" which would help bring a more ambitious sense of direction to short-term, small-scale decisions.[218] But in its immediate aims, Ward's education for participation shared much with the kind of community-empowerment model associated with Saul Alinsky, who Ward invoked explicitly.[219] Recalling Alinsky's Machiavellianism, Ward writes that education for participation is "education about power,"[220] about making resources available to the citizen who "wants to find out how the system works, and how *he* can work it."[221] Its first, if not its ultimate, aim is to help people develop "an awareness of [their] own interests and how to fight for them." [222]

Alinsky's strategy for transferring power to the people did not, however, leave much room for utopian flights of fancy. Although inspired by admiration for Jeffersonian democracy (not, as some contemporary right-wing pundits have absurdly suggested, by socialism or Marxism), it was eminently instrumental, focused on outlining a tactical toolbox for community self-organization around whatever issues happened to be important to the citizens of a particular locale. While Alinsky's model, like the work of the New Anarchists, helped to shift the left's attention from the places where people worked to the places where people lived, it offered little in the way of vision. The New Anarchists, as we have seen, were not content to rely upon mere popular empowerment, much less amorphous "spontaneity." From Read on down, there was a clear recognition

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[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid., 125.
[220] Ibid., 119.
[221] Ibid., 127.
[222] Ibid., 124.

within the New Anarchism of the need for big, utopian thinking as a supplement to unavoidable considerations of power and strategy. This New Anarchist utopianism reached its unmistakable zenith in the work of Murray Bookchin.

Bookchin: the city as ideal

The ideal-city strain of the utopian tradition has always been limited by its tendency to overemphasize the city's spatial configuration. When it comes time to visualize the kind of life that might be lived in its proposed cities, the utopian imagination has, disappointingly often, been "impoverished," as Lewis Mumford has noted, compromised by "compulsion and regimentation."[223] Murray Bookchin brought together the spatial and organizational concerns of the utopian and decentralist planning traditions with a full-bodied philosophical, political, and cultural ideal of the city and environs. Furthermore, he showed concretely how that ideal could be linked to a far-reaching plan for recapturing the essence of the city through local political action.

As suggested above, whatever value they found in rural life (and all sought a renewed balance between rural and urban), the New Anarchists were far from pastoral reactionaries. Their views were not—"objectively" speaking, to employ Marxist jargon— the views of a peasant class nostalgic for a preurban and preindustrial era, as has sometimes been claimed of classical anarchists. Both their biographies and their social ideals were bound up with cities, and all found much to appreciate in city life. Bookchin, however, went the furthest in articulating the importance of the city to modern anarchism. He sought to provide his readers with "an idea of what the city was once like at its best" in order to "recover high standards of urbanism" that had been lost in the modern world.

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[223] Lewis Mumford in *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, ed. Frank E. Manuel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), 10.

[224] He called for a modern conception of the city that elevated it to the preeminence it enjoyed during the height of the Greek *polis* and the medieval *commune*, when the city was the "*summum bonum* of social life."[225]

Cities, Bookchin claimed, are the "destiny" rather than merely the "environment" of the human species, for only through a developed urban life can humanity realize its full potential.[226] Historically, the city played a crucial role in replacing biological relationships with social relationships, breaking the grip that kinship ties had on early societies and allowing humankind to transcend its animality. The city changed "an ethnic folk into a body of secular citizens," and helped to ensure that "the notion of a shared *humanitas* replaced the exclusivity of the clan and tribe."[227] But even more importantly, cities had provided a means through which human beings could shape their social environment and exert rational control over social life. The structure and development of cities were not left up to "blind and demoniacal social forces"[228] in the classical and medieval eras, but were consciously shaped and steered: the Athenian polis, for example, was not "the spontaneous product of custom and tradition," as Hegel and the Romantics believed, but "a consciously crafted structure, the product of purposeful, insightful, and thoughtful efforts to achieve clearly perceived goals."[229] The earliest cities had been limited primarily by their dependence upon hard-won agricultural surpluses, and their organization reflected the organization of agricultural life. With the increased autonomy of the Greek cities of the 6th and 5th centuries BCE, limit and moderation became self-

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[224] Bookchin, *The Limits of the City*, vii.
[225] Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society*, 135.
[226] Bookchin, *The Limits of the City*, 2.
[227] Bookchin, *From Urbanization to Cities*, 7.
[228] Bookchin, *The Limits of the City*, 30.
[229] Bookchin, *From Urbanization to Cities*, 83.

imposed principles rather than externally-imposed necessities; the goals of the

precapitalist "planner," Bookchin points out, "were defined not merely by functional

considerations, but by canons of balance, harmony, and beauty derived from

cosmological or philosophical speculations."[230]

The Athenian polis was conceived as a harmonized totality, weaving unique

particulars into the same tapestry, and embodying the harmony that characterized

Athenian life as a whole.[231] Its structure also expressed the political principle of

democracy. As Aristotle recognized, restricting the city to a modest size "allows for

individual control over the affairs of the community and the exercise of individual human

powers in the social realm…Hence the *polis* must be large enough to meet its material

needs and achieve self-sufficiency, but small enough to be taken in at one view. Only in

such a *polis* would human beings be able to realize their humanity, that is to say, to

actualize their potentialities for rational judgement."[232] "Human scale," in this context,

meant not just the imperative to keep the city accessible to "amateurs" through

"economic, cultural, and institutional comprehensibility," but providing ample structural

opportunities for direct human contact.[233] Bookchin presumed, like Aristotle, that human

potential could not be actualized in isolation. The city, as the individual's "most intimate

social environment," represented "the most direct arena in which the individual can act as

a truly social being and from which he or she can attain the most immediate social

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[230] Bookchin, *The Limits of the City*, 105.

[231] The social equilibrium of Greek society "was summed up by the term *autarkeia*: a concept of wholeness, material self-sufficiency, and balance that is the core of the Hellenic outlook." Ibid., 31.

[232] Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society*, 103.

[233] Ibid., 188. Amateurism ought to inform the layout of the city as well as the structure of its mechanisms of decision-making: "the accessibility of virtually all organs of power to the citizen, the conscious despecialization of municipal agencies, the formulation of policy in face-to-face assemblies, and the use of the lot in the selection of public officials." Ibid., 141.

solutions to the broader problems that beleaguer the privatized self."[234] The essence of

the city, then, was to provide a "public arena" for democratic citizenship and socially-

mediated self-realization.[235] The medieval *commune* had carried aspects of this urban

tradition through the Middle Ages,[236] and anarchist theorists like Kropotkin brought

"modernity" to the classical conception of the city by fusing it with modern "concepts of

face-to-face democracy and popular self-administration."[237]

The city occupied such an important place in classical life because it represented

more than simply geographical congruence—it was conceived as "an *ethical* union of

citizens."[238] Such cities were "moral associations that were nourished by a shared sense

of ideological commitment and public concern. Civic ideology and concern centered

around a strong belief in the good life for which the city provided the arena and catalytic

agent." The "good life" was understood not in a materialistic sense but as "a life of

good*ness*, of virtue and probity."[239] Thus the relationship of the individual to the city was

not instrumental (like that of modern "taxpayers" who demand their fair share of

municipal services), but *ethical*, for the city was not a mere tool (as it was for Le

Corbusier), but a way of life. This way of life was communicated through the operation

of an expansive educational ideal, *paideia*, which envisioned the polis as a kind of

"school" in which character was shaped and individual development was linked to civic

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[234] Bookchin, *From Urbanization to Cities*, 23.
[235] Ibid., 4.
[236] In the medieval *commune*, which reached its fullest development in the Italian city-states, craftsmen made commodities to satisfy their needs rather than to accumulate capital. Economic activity was carefully regulated by guilds, and an apprentice could count on becoming a master with the development of certain skills. Trade and the development of technology are vitiated—tools, for example, are tailored to the craftsman, not vice versa. The market was a part of civic life. The commune was policed by its own citizens and its officers were elected by the guilds or public assemblies. People called each other "brother." The commune provided security and was pervaded by a sense of community. "The commune was home," Bookchin writes, "not merely an environment that surrounded the home." *The Limits of the City*, 49.
[237] Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society*, 100.
[238] Bookchin, *From Urbanization to Cities*, 8.
[239] Ibid., 19.

excellence. Politics was understood as "an inexhaustible, everyday 'curriculum' for intellectual, ethical, and personal growth—*paideia* that fostered the ability of citizens to creatively participate in public affairs, to bring their best abilities to the service of the *polis* and its needs, to intelligently manage their private affairs in accordance with the highest ethical standards of the community."[240]

By recovering the ancient and medieval ideal of the city, Bookchin was not proposing the straightforward imitation of that social form, however. Ultimately it is necessary "to go beyond the city as such and produce a new type of community, one that combines the best features of urban and rural life in a harmonized future society."[241] Bookchin's "ecocommunity" was meant to be a dialectical sublation of the urban and the rural, in which the community was integrated into its local ecosystem to an unprecedented degree, and sustained by scaled-down, eco-friendly technology.[242] Such a community would unite "industry with agriculture, mental work with physical, individuality with community." Nature would "become an integral part of all aspects of human experience, from work to play."[243] The ecocommunity would be "more than a city." It would have "no limits other than those consciously fashioned by human creativity, reason, and ecological considerations."[244]

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[240] Ibid., 64.

[241] Bookchin, *The Limits of the City*, xi.

[242] Unlike contemporary technophobes like Jacques Ellul, Bookchin shared Kropotkin's turn-of-the-century optimism about the potential of technology. 20th-century technological advances, he argued, had made possible "a materially abundant, almost workless era in which most of the means of life can be provided by machines." *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, 93. That quantitative development had created the preconditions for a qualitative advance in human relationships, for it enabled everyone, theoretically, to participate in the management of social affairs, undermining one of the main justifications of social hierarchy. Furthermore, in many industries, technology was starting to shrink to more manageable size which was more conducive to the layman's learning to operate it and thereby gain "a new sense of self-assurance and autonomy over the material aspects of life." Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society*, 27.

[243] Bookchin, *The Limits of the City*, 137.

[244] Ibid., 138.

Although Bookchin often celebrated the rational control that made social development the product of conscious choice in the ancient and medieval world, he could also be found making the seemingly contradictory suggestion that in these eras of human history, harmonious social relations were "trusted to spontaneously evolve the city as a vital civic entity and a work of art."[245] The historical accuracy of either claim aside, the contradiction is an expression of Bookchin's difficulty in grappling with the complex significance of the traditional ideal of social life for the modern world. Effectively, Bookchin believed that when social relations are harmonious—i.e., non-contradictory, non-exploitative, and non-dominating—the social life that spontaneously emerges out of them will be, for all intents and purposes, commensurable with the outcomes of conscious rational control. In other words, there was no contradiction between spontaneity, limit, and rational control in the Greek *polis* and the medieval *commune*. In the modern world, by contrast, where social relations *are* contradictory, exploitative, and dominating, the social life that emerges spontaneously is irrational, fragmented, and reified. Spontaneity cannot be fully trusted under modern conditions, even if it is, in part, a means of giving expression to repressed natural tendencies. Complete spontaneous freedom, Bookchin argued, is an impossibility in an unfree world. Consequently, there is a pressing need to privilege conscious, rational control as a way of pushing back against the caprice of the market—this was the fundamental insight of modern city planning, even if it had gone too far in the direction of rationalism and opted for paternalism over democracy.[246]

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[245] Ibid., 100.

[246] "City planning," Bookchin writes, "is an expression of mistrust in the spontaneity of contemporary social relations, and for good reason." Ibid., 100.

Reclaiming the city: libertarian municipalism

Bookchin thought that the rise of countercultural sensibilities could help to bridge the gap between spontaneity and rational consciousness, fostering "a unity of intuition with reason, of hopeful enthusiasm with patient wisdom, of emotional sensibility with a coherent consciousness."[247] He found empirical support for this hope in countercultural experiments with planning, which attempted "to replace hierarchical space by liberated space," focusing less on design and more on relationships and lifestyles.[248] But this was Bookchin at his most unabashedly utopian; it reflected his vision of a transformed social totality that reconciled the sharpest contradictions of modern world—mind and body, individual and community, culture and nature. Bookchin never abjured that vision, but throughout the 1980s and 1990s, he increasingly directed his energies towards an elaboration of a political strategy that could inform the immediate activities of radicals within their communities of residence.

In *Like a Conquered Province*, Paul Goodman expressed the need to "experiment with new forms of democracy, so that the urban areas can become cities again and the people citizens."[249] The strategy proposed by Bookchin to accomplish this end was what he called "libertarian municipalism." Determined to inject the left with a renewed sense of political purpose, he spent the last decades of his life developing a plan for taking back the city bit by bit. His was the most developed proposal for a new form of democracy, and a new form of political action, to emerge from the New Anarchism. It combined an idealistic model of direct democracy with an approach to local politics which, by

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[247] Ibid., 135.
[248] Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society*, 161. See *The Limits of the City* for a detailed description of one of these experiments.
[249] Goodman, *People or Personnel and Like a Conquered Province*, 326-27.

anarchist standards, was eminently practical. Indeed, Bookchin presumed that reclaiming

municipalities for the people would be a painstakingly slow process, advancing unevenly

and incrementally through small triumphs, half-victories and resets.

Bookchin called for radicals to direct their efforts primarily towards

democratizing municipal institutions and reinvigorating the public sphere on a local level.

Sometimes this called for fostering direct interaction amongst citizens within civil

society, or even extralegal actions of various kinds. But when possible, he advocated

working within established channels of power by running candidates for local office—

candidates whose platforms would center on the expansion of popular involvement in

decision-making through face-to-face assemblies. At first, "electoral activity will

primarily be a form of educational activity." Even assemblies formed without official

sanction could exercise "enormous moral power,"[250] creating "in embryonic form the

institutions that can give power to a people generally."[251] Assuming it eventually became

possible to win electoral victories, "the goal of such a practice would be to alter city and

town charters where possible to enlarge civic democracy and to establish grass-roots

structures."[252] Even republican systems of government, Bookchin argued, contained

democratic institutions that could be opened up "to the widest public participation

possible."[253] These democratic institutions could be restructured so as to be guided by the

most inclusive possible input from the community and administered by recallable,

rotatable delegates with strict mandates.

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[250] Bookchin, *From Urbanization to Cities*, 230.
[251] Ibid., 231. "It is this kind of education," Bookchin writes, "that makes for trust, personal interaction, and face-to-face discussion, and that fosters the development of a face-to-face democracy. Its authentic starting point is the small study group, the local lecture hall, the neighborhood press, and personal discourse." Ibid., 12.
[252] Ibid., 9.
[253] Ibid., 12.

The approach to administration Bookchin envisioned necessarily retained an important place for expertise, especially in larger cities with complex webs of social services. But policy-making, he insisted, would be strictly the business of popular assemblies. Guided by the collective will of these assemblies, municipalities would bring the most significant aspects of social life under conscious, democratic control. This included economic production and distribution. Bookchin did not believe, like anarcho-syndicalists, that economic decision-making was solely the prerogative of workers. He advocated "*politiciz*[*ing*] the economy" and "dissolving economic decision making into the civic domain," so that the community as a whole could take responsibility for its economic affairs.[254] Because the growth of public control in municipalities was likely to result in capital flight, he suggested establishing "municipally-owned enterprises and farms" that would provide higher-quality goods than were produced by private corporations.[255] For internal and external security, Bookchin proposed that libertarian municipalities establish a civic guard with rotating patrols and grassroots militias, to protect against criminals, invaders, and the encroachment of the state.[256]

The democratization of municipalities, Bookchin argued, would restore the practice of "politics" in the ancient sense of the term—politics not as statecraft but as the self-management of social life by a body of citizens. "Political power" would mean, as it once did, the power of the *people*, rather than the power of bureaucrats and representatives *over* the people. The municipality was the starting point for this notion of politics for it was the "authentic unit of political life,"[257] the "basis for political freedom,"

[254] Ibid., 235.
[255] Ibid., 267.
[256] Ibid., 243.
[257] Ibid., 222.

and, by extension, "individual freedom."[258] Bookchin realized that municipalities were, in

the real world, still deeply divided in many respects, including class. But there was a

growing possibility that the "entirely new *transclass* issues" that emerged out of the

1960s could provide a new basis for unity—issues concerning "environment, growth,

transportation, cultural degradation, and the quality of urban life in general." Regardless

of class background, every citizen had reason to be concerned with "the massive dangers

of thermonuclear war, growing state authoritarianism, and ultimately global ecological

breakdown." We can see, claimed Bookchin hopefully, "an emerging *general social*

interest over old particularistic interests."[259] That social interest, he believed, made it

feasible to pursue organization on concentric geographical lines, rather than restricting it

to class, gender, or racial lines.

By expanding popular control over local systems of government, a "dual power"

would be built up that was rooted in direct democratic association, distinct from state and

federal government. Bookchin claimed that running libertarian candidates for local office

meant "also running them *against* state, provincial, and national offices and

institutions."[260] He did not completely write off participation in higher levels of political

activity (he accepted that sometimes reforms at the state and federal level had to be

supported), but held that "for a municipalist movement to run candidates for state,

provincial, or national office would be absurd…if only because *any* office beyond the

municipal level is, almost by definition, a form of representation rather than

participation."[261] His goal was not simply to strengthen "civil society," like many

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[258] Ibid., 203.
[259] Ibid., 233.
[260] Ibid., 10-11.
[261] Ibid., 10.

contemporary communitarians, but to extend "local citizen-oriented power at the expense and ultimately the removal of the nation-state by village, town, and city confederations."[262]

In large cities, putting power back into the hands of the people would have to begin on a small scale, with blocks, neighborhoods, groups of neighborhoods, and eventually local government as a whole. Bookchin compared this creeping "municipalization" to the tactics of early Fabian socialism, before it threw in its lot with the national state. Eventually, he hoped, systems of local government would be taken over one by one. These municipalities would then confederate with each other, both for the purpose of cooperation and interchange (which, as Howard and Kropotkin had hoped 100 years earlier, would mitigate the threat of parochialism), and in order to form a bulwark of resistance to higher levels of governmental power that might try to put an end to the experiment. These confederations would be managed by confederal councils, "a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies, in the various villages, towns, and even neighborhoods of large cities."[263] The power exercised by confederal councils "flows from the bottom up" and "diminishes with the scope of the federal council ranging territorially from localities to regions and from regions to ever-broader territorial areas."[264] These councils would help to create "a new political culture" that stressed interrelationship and discouraged one community from pursuing policies that harmed

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[262] Ibid., 1.
[263] Ibid., 252-53.
[264] Ibid., 253.

another.[265] They would be the main vehicles of a "dialectical development of independence and dependence into a more richly articulated form of interdependence."[266]

Bookchin's proposed network of "increasingly independent and confederated municipalities" would "emerge in flat opposition to the centralized nation-state."[267] This was a vision of revolution through the accretion of power rather than the seizure of power. Bookchin continued to maintain that at some point in the future, the tensions between these two loci of power would probably erupt into outright struggle. But long gone was the mindset of imminent millennial expectation—any large-scale showdown of this kind between free municipalities and the state would come only at the end of a long, sustained process, whose success would be determined primarily by the arduous and persistent work of organizers and activists. Generations could pass before a network of democratic municipalities was strong enough to make a serious bid for autonomy. And although a military confrontation with the state was a possibility, ideally the state would be hollowed out so thoroughly of legitimacy and coercive ability that it would collapse on its own. What would be left was an aggregation of decentralized polities analogous to the old socialist vision of a "Commune of communes."

Conclusion

Bookchin, bothered by what he perceived as a growing trend of political timorousness, described libertarian municipalism as "a completely uncompromising politics."[268] Indeed, it was harder for Bookchin than for the other New Anarchists to part with the revolutionary rhetoric that had served as a badge of one's radicalism on the left

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[265] Ibid., 250.
[266] Ibid., 255.
[267] Ibid., 10.
[268] Ibid., 10.

Rather, it was a way of orienting thinking and acting towards social possibility, of ensuring that even the most mundane issues were approached with the broadest possible perspective. The New Anarchists were willing to accept that a variety of utopian approaches could help to foster this mindset, including concrete imaginings of how social ideals might be translated into social reality—for sometimes, they realized, people need images as well as indefinite hopes to fire the mind. The imaginings that attracted them were informed not by the modernist extremism of a Le Corbusier, but by a distinctly balanced effort to bring together urban and rural, to limit social space and institutions to human and ecological scale, and to revive the humanist and democratic ideals that had once shaped the character of city life.

Furthermore, the New Anarchists envisaged the pursuit of their social ideals not as a sudden break with the status quo, but—as Bookchin suggested—as a *process* advancing through piecemeal change, experimentation, diligent organization, and even, in Bookchin's case, electoral activity. This process was necessarily slow not only because it had to wade through the viscous medium of the managerial society, but because it was stubbornly and proudly democratic. The New Anarchists realized that a participatory bearing in a body of citizens had to be cultivated through education and experience. While they championed the everyday knowledge that could be immediately introduced into the planning process and celebrated forms of direct action that made immediate provisions for needs unmet by the existing order, they understood that establishing democracy and transforming social space was not simply a matter of "empowerment," but also a matter of reorienting sensibilities and instilling the requisites of engaged citizenship.

If the revolutionary changes imagined by the New Anarchists were not to be realized in a *sudden* break with the status quo, neither were they to be realized through a *radical* break, at least if that term was taken to mean an uprooting of extant institutions and a complete reordering of social life. Building off of the insights of figures like Kropotkin and Geddes, the New Anarchists believed that the most practical means of change available—nurturing tendencies of mutual aid, spontaneous organization, and self-help already in existence—was also the most normatively desirable. They had too much faith in the resilience of natural order to believe that it could be entirely smothered by artificiality and coercion, even within the dystopian landscape of the "megalopolis." To plan with respect for that order meant taking ordinary people's propensities for self-organization seriously, and carefully integrating the best of the past and present into the future.

Finally, far from simply seeking to take the lid off of "spontaneous" human tendencies, the New Anarchists wanted to bring social development within the scope of reason and consciousness. They were deeply concerned that modern societies rise to the level of what Ulrich Beck and others have called "reflexive modernization," cultivating the highest potential of modern production and technology while preserving a sense of the perils of progress and ensuring that the dynamics of modern life do not break free of their bonds and foment their own undoing.[271] In a world where nuclear doomsday beckoned, where environmental catastrophe was a real possibility, and where voracious urbanization was tearing apart the fabric of social life, there was urgent need for a renewed sense of *limit*. That need was best served, according to the New Anarchists, not by abandoning the utopian tradition, but by reenergizing its most libertarian

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[271] See Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1992).

manifestations. In the postwar era, not only was the inexorable march of human progress called into question, but grave doubts emerged about the continuance of *homo sapiens* as a species. For the New Anarchists, the realization of the libertarian society they advocated had become, in effect, not only a matter of human freedom, but a matter of human survival.

Conclusion

The Anarchist as Public Intellectual

What I would like is for anarchism to have intellectual respectability.

Colin Ward

From the late 19th century into the early 20th century, the anarchist movement was dominated by the figure of the "professional revolutionary." To be an anarchist was to cast off the trappings of bourgeois society, to commit oneself to a lifestyle of ascetic militancy, and, very frequently, to be harried from country to country by reactionary regimes. Marxists had their archetype in Lenin; the anarchists had theirs in Bakunin, the firebrand whose every movement exuded single-minded devotion to the cause, flitting about Europe in search of revolution and sacrificing his personal happiness for a life of constant agitation. Surely it is figures like Bakunin that the historian James Joll had in mind when he wrote in his popular account of the anarchist tradition that "[a]narchism is necessarily a creed of all or nothing."[1] Anarchists, according to this interpretation, turned intransigence into a virtue, adopting an attitude of almost fanatical commitment to the revolutionary struggle, an implausibly reductionist understanding of social institutions, and a Samson-like readiness to dissolve organizations and alliances (like the First International) before compromising principles on practical grounds.

The political "faith" that sustained the professional revolutionary, and gave his obduracy whatever credibility it had, was the idea that the revolution, whether a product of will, History, or some mixture of the two, was a certainty whose arrival would only be

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[1] James Joll, *The Anarchists* (New York: Grosset & Dunlop, 1964), 275.

unnecessarily delayed by half-measures. Revolutionaries like Bakunin, George

Woodcock writes,

> acted in an environment of confidence. Progress was inevitable. The social
> revolution would come, if not this year or next, at least in a measurable period of
> time. Capitalist accumulation, war, all the social calamities, merely speeded the
> day when exploitation and tyranny would vanish and freedom would be
> established permanently in the lives of men. Having few doubts, the
> revolutionaries worked for that day with a consistency, a self-abnegation, a
> Gargantuan energy at which we can only wonder.[2]

Indeed, in the postwar years it was hard to identify with the optimism that had fueled the

diligent, assured activity of the 19th-century revolutionaries. Tellingly, when the New

Anarchists had occasion to look back over the revolutionary tradition on the centenary of

the revolutions of 1848, it was not Bakunin, unfazed by defeat and forever charging

headlong into the revolutionary future, who spoke to them, but Alexander Herzen.

Herzen's thought, Woodcock wrote in 1948, showed that "even in the great era of the

revolutionary upsurge, the disorders of doubt and disillusionment were already present."[3]

Herzen, like Bakunin, was mixed up in the events of 1848—or as mixed up as he could

be, having arrived in France after reaction had already set in—but mingling with the

Parisian revolutionaries who were working to rekindle the spirit that had launched the

February Revolution, he was steadily disabused of his hopes for a sudden, dramatic

transformation of society. Dwight Macdonald spelled out the relevance of Herzen's

retrospective reflections on these events to the postwar predicament:

> We are…in much the same state of mind as Herzen after the failure of the 1848
> revolution: despair and doubt ravage us, the Marxian dream has turned into the
> Russian nightmare (or the British doze), and so now we should be able to
> appreciate Herzen's unsystematic, skeptical, and free-thinking (also free-feeling
> approach). His disenchantment, shot through with irony and rooted in his lifelong
> habit of judging abstract ideas by their concrete results—these qualities now seem

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[2] George Woodcock, *The Writer and Politics* (London: The Porcupine Press, 1948), 56.
[3] Ibid., 57.

to us…more attractive, and more useful, than Marx's optimistic, humorless, and somewhat inhuman doctrine of inevitable (a word Herzen would never have used) progress via historical/materialistical/dialectical necessity (another un-Herzenian word).[4]

Drawing similar parallels, Woodcock held that Herzen approximated more than any of his fellow revolutionaries "the disillusioned revolutionary intellectual of our own day."[5] It was precisely his intellectuality that made him an attractive figure, for while Bakunin seemed to believe that rash action was better than no action at all, Herzen maintained a thoughtful, critical distance not only from established social institutions, but from ill-advised revolutionary escapades. The concrete, visceral present could not, he insisted, be sacrificed to an abstract, colorless future. Social change had to be made in the real world, not an imaginary world in which intentions corresponded neatly to outcomes, and unfathomable complexity was made to fit into tidy, rationalistic schemata. Acting on the basis of revolutionary prophecy was an invitation to shrug off moral responsibility for one's actions; as Isaiah Berlin put it, Herzen believed that

> one of the greatest of sins that any human being can perpetrate is to seek to transfer moral responsibility from his own shoulders to those of an unpredictable future order, and, in the name of something which may never happen, perpetrate crimes today which no one would deny to be monstrous if they were performed for some egoistic purpose, and do not seem so only because they are sanctified by faith in some remote and intangible Utopia.[6]

During periods of mass complacency, like the political doldrums that followed the rout of the 1848 revolutionaries and the years of consensus after World War II, it becomes especially clear that political positions are adopted, and political actions undertaken, not on account of historical necessity, but on account of moral and intellectual choices. This

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[4] Dwight Macdonald, "Preface" to Alexander Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), xii.

[5] Ibid., 57.

[6] Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 197-98.

is how the New Anarchism began: it did not arise out of a movement in motion, but out of the judgments made by intellectuals that anarchist principles were rationally and intuitively appealing. When the New Anarchists declared their affinity with these principles, they did so with no faith in the "destiny" of anarchism—if anything, they saw themselves as guppies swimming against a powerful historical tide that had brought the anarchist movement to the lowest point in its history. Their question, like Herzen's, was how to put their principles into operation, on however limited a scale, in a world that was overwhelmingly indifferent or hostile to them. Seen in this light, it is understandable why Herzen's example was meaningful to Macdonald and Woodcock, and why Colin Ward would have cited him as his "major political influence."[7]

The Herzen analogy only goes so far, however. Herzen spent the bulk of his life in exile, lobbing criticism at his native country from afar while generally remaining detached from the domestic politics of the countries in which he found refuge. The New Anarchists, by contrast, were firmly established in the very countries whose relative freedoms had attracted not only Herzen (who lived in Britain for twelve years) but a century's worth of dispossessed radicals. Although highly critical of the societies in which they lived, they were hardly outcasts from them. They had opportunities to engage their domestic contexts in speech and action that were unavailable to Herzen and the cosmopolitan (by choice or necessity) revolutionaries of his generation. They did not live in poverty, like many of those revolutionaries (Herzen, in this case, excepted), but were able to carve out comfortable livings for themselves within the hearts, or at least on the margins, of mainstream institutions. Indeed, with only a little irony, it would be more accurate to call them "revolutionary professionals" than "professional revolutionaries."

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[7] Colin Ward, *Influences: Voices of Creative Dissent* (Hartland, UK: Green Books, 1991), 49.

This does not necessarily mean that they were hopelessly coopted by the very System they claimed to oppose, however. Their political philosophy arguably helped them to resist some of the allure of a bourgeois, professional, existence. Singling out Goodman, Bookchin, and Chomsky as representative of a distinct strain of anarchist "public intellectual," Russell Jacoby has argued that such figures have proven "less vulnerable to the corruptions of title and salary" than most, thanks to their "moral, almost instinctual" resistance, and their distrust of large institutions.[8] Furthermore, the New Anarchists did not, like many Marxist thinkers of the same era, adopt a jargon-laden style of writing tailored to an academic elite; they were thoroughly immune to the appeal of affected intellectual superiority. Admittedly, they were responsible for an intellectualization of anarchism that was at least comparable to the intellectualization of Marxist theory that happened around the same time. But even their theoretical work, though intellectually grounded, was written with accessibility in mind.

The New Anarchists courted a wide audience because they did not believe in any one "agent" of revolution. They spoke not to the intelligentsia, nor the working class, but to the "people." This traditionally vague category, argued Bookchin, had taken on substance with the emergence of "transclass," "social" issues that had the potential to unite different interest groups. Social democrats, too, began to speak of the "people" rather than the working class during this era. But in their case that language was a sign of capitulation to broad-based party politics. When the New Anarchists used this kind of populist rhetoric, it was to draw a contrast between the elite and the grassroots, to distinguish the special interests of the brokers of economic and political power from the

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[8] Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 97.

struggles of everyday people—women, students, workers, people of color—to win more control over their lives and to preserve and expand their standard of living. As Bookchin writes, "the only politics that remains for the Left is one based on the premise that there *is* a 'general interest' in democratizing society and preserving the planet."[9] Effecting political change in the postwar world would be impossible, he realized, without forming coalitions and building solidarity across gender, class, and racial lines.

Communicating with the general public called not for incendiary revolutionary bloviating, or for pompously bestowing truths upon the ignorant masses, but for offering observations and suggestions in a spirit of debate and experiment, framed in language that people could understand. The New Anarchists accomplished this, in part, by adopting a relatable national idiom that appealed to home-grown sources of radical democracy: thus, Goodman described himself frequently as a "Jeffersonian," Bookchin tried to revive the New England tradition of the town meeting, Ward drew examples of mutual aid from the history of English shanty towns, allotments, holiday camps, and friendly societies. More importantly, they aimed to win people over, not through pandering or charisma, but by offering plausible anarchist solutions to the problems of everyday life. The objective behind his journal *Anarchy*, Ward writes, was "to take the problems which face people in our society, the society we're living in, and to see if there are anarchist solutions."[10] The task of the anarchist

> is to propagate solutions to contemporary issues which, however dependent they are on the existing social and economic structure, are *anarchist* solutions: the kind of approaches that would be made if we were living in the kind of society we envisage. We are much more likely to win support for our point of view, in other words, if we put forward anarchist answers which can be tried out here and now,

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[9] Murray Bookchin, *From Urbanization to Cities: Towards a New Politics of Citizenship* (London: Cassall, 1995), 269.
[10] Colin Ward, ed., *A Decade of Anarchy, 1961-70* (London: Freedom Press, 1987), 13.

than if we declare that there are no answers until the ultimate answer: a social revolution which continually disappears over the horizon.[11]

The main thing was to put anarchism on display as much as possible, to point to the ways in which mutual aid was already in operation, and to show how it could be extended into new realms of social life. For as much stress as they placed upon reasoned discourse, the New Anarchists had keen appreciation for the force of example: "One practical demonstration," Ward believed, "is worth volumes of theoretical justification."[12]

If the professional revolutionary took a certain pride in extremism, New Anarchists like Ward openly courted respectability. Ward wanted anarchism to stake out a claim for itself within the public sphere of a pluralistic society, to become part of an ongoing public conversation. Getting anarchism "back into the intellectual bloodstream" could help to reframe issues around which discourse had calcified into phony dichotomies: state action *versus* privatization, individual freedom *versus* communal responsibility, authority *versus* autonomy.[13] The New Anarchists did not invite their audience to "become" anarchists in the sense of joining an anarchist movement. Rather, they encouraged their readers to experiment with evaluating social problems through an anarchist lens, to bring anarchism's particular bundle of values and hopes to bear on concrete questions in order to see whether they could help to reveal possibilities that were previously hidden from view. When the New Anarchists identified as "anarchists," it was not because they were proclaiming their faith in a political ideology, but because they found both normative and practical value in adopting anarchism as a *sensibility* that

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[11] Colin Ward, *Housing: An Anarchist Approach* (London: Freedom Press, 1976), 10.
[12] Colin Ward, *Tenants Take Over* (London: The Architectural Press, Ltd, 1974), 81.
[13] Colin Ward quoted in David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 326.

informed their social criticism and their social ideals. Anarchism was not a textbook full of pat solutions for social ills—these had to be worked out one at a time, through trial and error. But even concrete problems could not be tackled without bringing some kind of background assumptions into the picture. Before launching oneself into social reform, the New Anarchists believed, there was much to be gained from marinating in the insights of the anarchist tradition. This did not mean that one had to arrive at conclusions that were recognizably "anarchist" in each and every instance—sometimes it was necessary to stand up for institutions which, ideally, one would rather live without. But bringing an anarchist perspective to complex problems of social life would ensure, at the very least, that one was always on the lookout for ways to foster popular control, mutual aid, and individual freedom. Anarchism (or "anarchy"), Ward proposed, was better understood as an "approach" than as a "hypothetical destination."[14]

The upside of this conceptualization of anarchism was, as has already been suggested, that it allowed one to participate substantively in one's immediate social environment, without continuously holding one's breath in anticipation of cataclysmic change. It would be possible to see this as a purely pragmatic attitude, an approach to be adopted in the absence of a revolutionary alternative. It is of critical importance to recognize, however, that when the New Anarchists proposed working within the status quo, it was not out of mere deference to political realism. They understood that social institutions and relationships already in existence were not merely constructs of power, but were always to some extent fed and influenced from below by popular initiative. If the New Anarchists were "conservative," it was in their feeling that it was vital to preserve what was valuable in extant patterns of life rather than seeking to blow up the

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[14] Colin Ward, "House and Home" *Anarchy* 35 (Jan. 1964), 1.

bourgeois order and start afresh. Their conservatism was informed by the idea that innate

tendencies of mutual aid were always pushing back against coercion and

authoritarianism, finding their way into the cracks and seams of the System. Even if that

System was predominantly corrupt, it was marbled with mutual aid, and could not simply

be haphazardly pulled apart.

As much as New Anarchists like Ward—or, better, Noam Chomsky—sometimes

wanted to believe that anarchism could be boiled down to a "sensibility"—which, in

Chomsky's case, is virtually indistinguishable from "common sense"—their writings

contradict that ironically anti-intellectual impulse in at least two respects. Firstly, as we

have seen, almost all of the major figures of the New Anarchism (Chomsky being an

exception) felt it proper at one time or another to engage in what they explicitly

described, or was plausibly described by others, as anarchist "theory." Their populist

impulses were in tension with the at-least tacit recognition that an anarchist "sensibility"

was not something that simply emerged spontaneously or "naturally" (although it may

very well be more in keeping with "natural" tendencies than other political sensibilities).

Indeed, it would hardly have been necessary to place so much emphasis on education—

not just tearing down the present system, but carefully thinking through the anarchist

paideia that would replace it—if it were thought sufficient to liberate people's innate

instincts. Even if the psychic preconditions for an anarchist sensibility were "naturally"

present in the human mind, it was necessary, as Bookchin would have put it, to unlock

that potential by raising people to self-consciousness of their own nature, their own

capabilities, and their own ideals. Bookchin was, by far, the most outspoken of the New

Anarchists in arguing for the centrality of theory in fostering that self-consciousness, and,

in so doing, bringing more coherency and vision to whatever commonsensical ideas were present in the first place. But it is not taking too great a liberty to read similar intentions into other examples of New Anarchist theorizing, however modest they may appear next to Bookchin's rather grandiose ambitions.

Secondly, the New Anarchists understood that orienting oneself to the present meant orienting oneself to the past. The main figures we have examined can be distinguished from their contemporaries by the fact that they were not just "anarchistic," like many of the radicals of their generation, but *anarchists*, in the sense that they found meaning and utility in taking the anarchist tradition as their main (though far from their only) point of reference in articulating their own perspectives. Goodman was dismayed when, in the 1960s, the belief took hold of young people that the only authentic radicalism was *de novo*, borne of one's immediately-experienced feelings of alienation. That belief was, he realized, the Trojan horse by which the most tired assumptions of the status quo were smuggled, unnoticed, into the professedly "radical" postures of its opponents. What the new generation of discontents desperately needed was a larger human story with which to identify. They needed to draw lessons and inspiration from the struggles of those who had come before and to take up the unfinished business that those predecessors had left behind. Otherwise, they would be mere reeds in the wind, blown every which way by the latest fashions and by their own caprices.

To call the New Anarchism a "sensibility" is fair enough, but only if it is conceded that sensibilities do not spring into being fully formed, but are instead chiseled by education, environment, and experience. If we are to adopt the naturalistic premises of the New Anarchists, the innate ways that human beings have of perceiving and modifying

the world they live in may indeed, if kept free of warping influences, provide the main ballast for anarchists-in-the-making. But without disciplined theorizing and a sense of political tradition to provide coherency and vision, anarchism reduced to this uncarved block of libertarian instincts risks becoming little more than generic anti-authoritarianism—which, as the rise of the "libertarian" right has shown, is just as susceptible of being appropriated for reactionary purposes as for progressive ones.

Although they read each other's work and occasionally acknowledged their debts to one another, the New Anarchists never forged a collective identity. This is one of the reasons their contribution to anarchist thought has been woefully underappreciated, when not dismissed or overlooked entirely. And it may help to explain why Bookchin, perhaps the most impressive and certainly the most visionary thinker of them all, ultimately defected from the tradition entirely. This defection did not signal a qualitative shift in his views so much as the fact that he had ceased finding it meaningful and useful to use the label "anarchist" to situate himself politically. Bookchin had once been invested in differentiating "social" anarchism from "lifestyle" anarchism, separating out anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin whose emphases were collectivistic, from the wide array of individualists whose approach to anarchism was fundamentally aesthetic and apolitical. The seeds of his apostasy can be seen even in this struggle over terminology, however, because he found it difficult to admit all but a select few into the "social" category—even Paul Goodman, once claimed by Bookchin as a major source of inspiration, was dismissed on account of his supposed individualism. Having winnowed social anarchism down to a drop in the bucket of the anarchist tradition, Bookchin finally concluded, logically enough, that figures like Kropotkin were the exceptions rather than the rule.

Anarchism, he now averred, "represents in its *authentic* form a highly individualistic outlook that fosters a radically unfettered lifestyle, often as a substitute for mass action."[15] It was not a social theory at all, but an expression of a "very simplistic individualistic and antirationalist psychology."[16] The alternative he now favored, "communalism," was distinct from anarchism not only in its insistence upon rationality and the priority of the community, but in its open embrace of "government" and "politics" (both of which were distinct from the state, Bookchin argued) on the level of the municipality, and its acceptance of practical methods of decision-making like majority rule. Bookchin described communalism as "a distinct ideology" built on top of a synthesis of the anarchist and Marxist traditions.[17]

The reality, of course, is that political traditions do not, properly speaking, have "authentic" forms. The individualists to whom Bookchin objected were not revealing the "essence" of anarchism, but constructing their own interpretation of that tradition. It is sensible enough that he preferred to restate his political principles in their own terms than spill any more ink battling over labels. But by giving up on the anarchist tradition, Bookchin helped cede it to the primitivists and postmodernists who dominate it today. When the latest generation of anarchist thinkers looks back over the anarchist past, more often than not it sees a tradition which was founded upon naïve Enlightenment principles, principles which sputtered and died in the middle of the 20th century, giving rise to a new wave of anarchist theory which had the good sense to cleave anarchism off from outdated assumptions about reason, nature, and progress. The figures we have called the "New Anarchists," therefore, are only significant insofar as they prefigured that development—

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[15] Murray Bookchin, *Social Ecology and Communalism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2007), 90.
[16] Ibid., 108.
[17] Ibid., 97.

which is to say, not very significant at all, or at least not nearly as significant as groups like the Situationists, who are supposed to have hinted at the "epistemological break" that later took place.[18]

It is regrettable that the New Anarchism has rarely been recognized as a distinct phenomenon, and that the figures who made the most important contributions to it did not have a stronger sense of being part of a shared enterprise. The New Anarchism was not merely the death rattle of classical anarchism, but neither was it a qualitative break with classical anarchism's core humanist assumptions. The New Anarchists offered a wealth of ideas about how to adapt anarchism to non-revolutionary conditions—how to solve its mean-ends problem by drawing from pacifism and nonviolence, how to develop a more constructive attitude of engagement with the state, how to provide the educative influences needed to prepare people for freedom and self-determination, how to make anarchism relevant to emerging struggles centered on domination, and how to inject farsighted social idealism into the pragmatic political atmosphere that prevailed after the war. The "New Anarchism" is the convenient fiction we have adopted in order to assess this body of ideas as representative of a coherent perspective. Hopefully by investing these ideas with an *ex post facto* identity of this kind, we have entitled them to a fairer hearing than they have heretofore received.

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[18] Saul Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 56.

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