Individual and Community

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Abstract

Scholars of political ideology commonly allege that anarchism is not a coherent ideology because of the coexistence within it of irreconcilably opposed individualist and communalist strands. This chapter argues, to the contrary, that the coexistence within anarchism of well-developed and very different individualist and communalist strands is a primary source of its ideological coherence, distinction, and political strength. It argues, moreover, that the sometimes competing demands of individuality and community can never be perfectly reconciled, even in an 'ideal anarchy', and that this seeming limitation of anarchism is actually one of its greatest strengths. These points are illustrated with reference to anarchist debates about and expressions of so-called 'lifestyle' politics, radical democracy, and literary utopianism.

Scholars of political ideology commonly allege that anarchism is not a coherent ideology because of the coexistence within it of irreconcilably opposed individualist and communalist strands. The political theorist David Miller, for example, argues from a market socialist perspective that there is no coherent core or consistent set of ideas shared by anarchists. Focusing specifically on the many ideological differences and disagreements between individualist and communalist anarchists, Miller concludes that 'we must face the possibility that anarchism is not really *an* ideology, but rather the point of intersection of several ideologies'.[1]

Terence Ball and Richard Dagger echo Miller's claim in their influential text *Political Ideologies and the Democratic Ideal*. According to Ball and Dagger, all anarchists agree that the state is an evil to be abolished in favour of a system of voluntary cooperation. But the agreement ends there. Again emphasising the relationship between individual and community in anarchist thought (as well as conflicting ideas about the role of violence), Ball and Dagger observe that whereas some anarchists are 'radical individualists who advocate a competitive, capitalist—but stateless society', others are 'communalists who detest capitalism and believe that anarchism requires the common ownership and control of property'. They conclude from their brief analysis that the disagreements and differences among anarchists 'overwhelm the single point on which they agree'.[2]

Andrew Heywood makes a similar point in his best-selling textbook *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*. In a chapter replete with inaccuracies and misleading and reductive popular stereotypes about anarchism, Heywood maintains that anarchism is less a unified and coherent ideology in its own right and more a 'point of overlap between two rival ideologies—liberalism and socialism—the point at which both ideologies reach anti-statist conclusions'.[3] While he concedes that anarchism nevertheless ought to be treated as a separate ideology because its diverse supporters are united by a series of broader principles and positions, he emphasises anarchism's 'dual' and derivative character: 'it can be interpreted as either a form of "ultra-liberalism", which resembles extreme liberal individualism, or as a form of "ultra-socialism", which resembles extreme socialist collectivism'.[4]

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[1] David Miller, *Anarchism* (London and Melbourne: J.M. Dent, 1984), 3.

[2] Terence Ball and Richard Dagger, *Political Ideologies and the Democratic Ideal*, 4th ed. (New York and San Francisco: Longman, 2002), 14.

[3] Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 142.

[4] Ibid.

In contrast to this line of argument, which is a commonplace in the scholarly literature on political ideologies, I will argue in this chapter that anarchism is indeed a coherent and distinctive political ideology and that the coexistence within it of well-developed and very different individualist and communalist strands is a primary source of its ideological distinction and political strength. Far from being a weakness or a sign of incoherence, efforts by anarchists to maximise individuality *and* community highlight anarchism's pluralistic and contested character, and its ideologically unique balancing of individuality and community in a dynamic and creative tension.

The plan for the chapter is as follows. First, I will critically analyse one of the leading theoretical works on the relationship between individuality and community in anarchist thought. I will then consider in turn arguments, assumptions, and imaginative explorations of the proper relationship between individual and community in debates between so-called 'lifestyle' anarchists and 'social' anarchists, anarchist conceptions of democracy, and the anarchist literary utopian tradition. I conclude by reflecting on the ideological importance of anarchism's enduring ability to embrace seemingly contradictory extremes.

The Anarchist Ideal of Communal Individuality

In his book *Anarchism: A Theoretical Analysis*, Alan Ritter analyses the relationship between individual and community in anarchist thought, as well as in wider comparative ideological perspective. His argument is essentially twofold. First, anarchists regard individual and community as mutually dependent values, an amalgam Ritter refers to as 'communal individuality' and which he claims they regard as their chief political objective. Second, while anarchists are not alone in advocating such an ideal, they have more to teach us about it than other ideological traditions.

As evidence for the first of these claims, Ritter assesses the meaning and significance of individuality and community in the work of classical anarchists such as Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin. He finds that notwithstanding their many differences, all of them share a common understanding of individuality as self-development, and of community as reciprocal awareness. Moreover, and very importantly, all of them seek to combine the greatest individual development with the greatest communal unity. Contrary to popular misconception, in other words, the chief goal of the anarchists is not freedom above all else, but a society of strongly separate persons who are strongly bound together in a group.

Ritter's second key argument, that anarchism has more to teach us about communal individuality than other ideological traditions, broadens the scope of the analysis beyond the classical anarchists to encompass their liberal and socialist contemporaries. Having acknowledged that anarchists are not the only theorists who regard individuality and community, understood as mutually dependent values, as their chief political objective, Ritter maintains that their conception of communal individuality is distinctively appealing. This is so because they work out in detail, and with no resort to legal government, how to create, organise and maintain a regime in which communal individuality flourishes.

In contrast to their liberal counterparts, who tend to assign community a lower normative status either because it is normatively irrelevant or an interference with the satisfaction, freedom, or individuality they most prize or at best an instrumental value, anarchists strive to maximise

individuality and community seen as equal, interdependent values.[5] While Ritter concedes that there are signs of devotion to community among some liberals, he contrasts this tepid or ambivalent commitment with the strong anarchist emphasis on communal individuality, yielding the conclusion that this disagreement between the two groups in normative starting point is decisive evidence that 'anarchists, far from being an especially hardy breed of liberals, are an entirely difference race'.[6]

If anarchists and liberals part company on the value of community, anarchists and socialists disagree most vehemently about the nature of the state. Marx and Engels, for example, who like the anarchists regard community and individuality as potentially mutually reinforcing values (even if they were reluctant to sketch out in any detail how a socialist society might be organised so as to maximise these values) and are critical of the liberal bourgeois state, believe that the state debases and estranges its subjects primarily because of its transient class character. This sets them apart from their anarchist contemporaries, who while they appreciated that particular effects of each state are shaped by its changeable attributes, also emphasised the inherent legality and coerciveness of every state as a constant source of its more serious effects. Ritter puts the point as follows, 'For the anarchist … its makes no difference, so far as concerns its more important effects, who runs the state, how it is organized, or what it does. It debases and estranges its subjects regardless of these contingencies, just because it is a state'.[7]

Ritter's argument is not without its difficulties and limitations, three of which are particularly noteworthy. First, he pays very little attention to the work of the individualist anarchists. While clearly a limitation, this is not one that is fatal to Ritter's argument, which is in fact confirmed by a wider focus on the individualist anarchist tradition. Contrary to Ball and Dagger's misleading assertion cited above, the individualist anarchist tradition is historically not anti-socialist but anti-capitalist. From Benjamin Tucker in the United States to Henry Seymour in Britain, individualist anarchists explicitly referred to themselves as socialists[8] and opposed the exploitation of labour, all forms of non-labour income, and capitalist property rights. Like their social anarchist counterparts, they opposed profits, rent and interest as forms of exploitation, and property as a form of theft. They rejected representative democracy, called for the complete abolition of the state, argued for a revolution that would eliminate capitalism, and sought to return the full product of labour to labour in the context of an egalitarian society. As to their understanding of the relationship between individual and community, Tucker's remarks are exemplary, '*Liberty* has always insisted that Individualism and Socialism are not antithetical terms; that, on the contrary, the most perfect Socialism is possible only on condition of the most perfect Individualism; and that Socialism includes, not only Collectivism and Communism, but also that school of Individu-

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[5] Alan Ritter, *Anarchism: A Theoretical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 117.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 127.

[8] Individualist anarchism may plausibly be regarded as a form of both socialism and anarchism. Whether the individualist anarchists were *consistent* anarchists (and socialists) is another question entirely. See, on this point, Iain McKay, *An Anarchist FAQ*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh and Oakland: AK Press, 2012), 623–639. McKay comments as follows: 'any individualist anarchism which supports wage labour is *inconsistent* anarchism. It *can* easily be made *consistent* anarchism by applying its own principles consistently. In contrast, "anarcho"-capitalism rejects so many of the basic, underlying, principles of anarchism … that it cannot be made consistent with the ideals of anarchism' (Ibid., 638).

alist Anarchism which conceives liberty as a means of destroying usury and the exploitation of labour'.[9]

Second, Ritter's legitimate focus on anarchism as a normative political philosophy, or a set of moral arguments about the justification of political action and institutions, yields a somewhat bookish form of analysis divorced from historical context and engagement with anarchism as a social movement and practice. Again, however, this limitation does not undermine his basic argument, for as John Clark has pointed out with specific reference to Ritter's work:

> Ritter, a careful student of classical anarchist thought, explains that in espousing communal individuality, the anarchist tradition asserts that personal autonomy and social solidarity, rather than opposing one another, are inseparable and mutually reinforcing. He sees the theoretical defense of this synthesis to be "the strength of the anarchists' thought." One might add that one of the great achievements of anarchist *practice* has been the actualization of this theoretical synthesis in various social forms, including personal relationships, affinity groups, intentional communities, cooperative projects, and movements for revolutionary social transformation.[10]

Third and much more damaging is Ritter's tendency at times to overstate his case in a way that obscures the dialectical richness of the anarchist theoretical tradition. The following remark is indicative:

> By committing themselves equally to individuality and community, anarchists raise doubts whether their chief aims are consistent. For lacking a principle to adjudicate between individuality and community, how can they judge situations where the courses these norms prescribe conflict? To meet this objection anarchists deny the possibility of conflict; they view each of their aims as dependent on the other for its full achievement.[11]

While the claim that anarchists view each of their aims (individuality and community) as dependent on the other for its full achievement is valid, the further claim that they deny the possibility of conflict between them is not. And the evidence Ritter presents does not support this further claim. Bakunin did, indeed, believe that 'the infinite diversity of individuals is the very cause, the principal basis, of their solidarity' and that solidarity serves in turn as 'the mother of individuality'.[12] Likewise, there is ample evidence to support the argument that other anarchists more or less explicitly agreed, believing that communal awareness springs from developed individuality and that developed individuality in turn depends on a close-knit common life. However, it does not follow that they denied the possibility of conflict between individuality and community.

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[9] Quoted in McKay, Ibid., 581–582; see also Peter Ryley, *Making Another World Possible: Anarchism, Anti-Capitalism and Ecology in Late 19th and Early 20th Century Britain* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013), ch. 4.

[10] John Clark, *The Impossible Community: Realizing Communitarian Anarchism* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 170.

[11] Ritter, *Anarchism*, 28–29.

[12] Quoted in Ibid.

Ritter appears to half recognise this point some 100 pages later when he notes that 'Anarchist individuality and community are patently discordant [...] Just as individuality fragments community, so community makes it hard for individuality to grow'.[13] This recognition, in turn, prompts him to articulate a somewhat more nuanced position than his earlier claim that anarchists deny the possibility of conflict between individuality and community, 'neither a shattering individualism nor a stifling communitarianism contaminates an ideal anarchy, because its individualizing and communalizing tendencies fructify each other so as to prevent destructive excess'.[14] As we shall see, however, even this formulation overemphasises the role of ideal harmony in anarchist thought. In contrast to Ritter, I will argue in what follows that the sometimes competing demands of the individual and society can never be fully and perfectly reconciled, even in an 'ideal anarchy'. I also contend that this seeming limitation of anarchist theory is actually one of its greatest strengths. More generally, I argue that anarchist theory and practice are truest to the ideology's core value of communal individuality when they steer a careful course between the Scylla of presuming an unbridgeable chasm between individual and community and the Charybdis of striving for a perfect and complete reconciliation between the two.

Social Anarchism and Lifestyle Anarchism

Perhaps nowhere are the difficulties involved in balancing individualism and communalism more evident than in fraught movement debates about so-called lifestyle anarchism, the attempt by individuals to enact the principles of anarchism in their daily life. As one commentator has accurately observed, the question of lifestylism within anarchist movements highlights this tension precisely because it is a tactic that has both individualist and collectivist aspects.[15]

In contrast to their ideological cousins and sometime political rivals, liberalism and 'scientific' socialism, most anarchists—like so many feminists, pacifists, ecologists, anti-imperialists, and libertarian and utopian socialists—regard the liberation of everyday life as a defining feature of both their social ideals and the means of achieving them.[16] The political thinker Murray Bookchin articulated this point with memorable clarity in the aftermath of the rebellions of the 1960s: 'It is plain that the goal of revolution today must be the liberation of daily life. Any revolution that fails to achieve this goal is counter-revolution. Above all, it is *we* who have to be liberated, *our* daily lives, with all their moments, hours and days, and not universals like "History" and "Society"'.[17]

Contemporary anarchists generally tend to use the term 'lifestyle anarchism' to refer to this feature of the anarchist movement. For example, James Purkis and Jonathan Bowen employ it to describe the 'living [of] one's life in accordance to particular [anarchist] principles'.[18] However, the term is now also frequently deployed with a pejorative intent, to 'deride someone who is perceived to be more interested in cultivating their own personal liberation than in achieving

[13] Ibid., 137.

[14] Ibid., 140.

[15] Laura Portwood-Stacer, *Lifestyle Politics and Radical Activism* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 142.

[16] Laurence Davis, 'Love and Revolution in Ursula Le Guin's *Four Ways to Forgiveness*', in Jamie Heckert and Richard Cleminson (Eds), *Anarchism and Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2011), 104.

[17] Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (Edinburgh and Oakland: AK Press, 2004 [1971]), 10.

[18] Jonathan Purkis and James Bowen (Eds), *Changing Anarchism: Anarchist Theory and Practice in a Global Age* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 8; quoted in Portwood-Stacer *Lifestyle Politics*, 134.

social transformation'.[19] Ironically, perhaps the most widely known use of the term in this pejorative sense is Murray Bookchin's 1995 polemic *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm*. In this brief but hugely controversial work, Bookchin lambastes contemporary anarchists for abandoning their social revolutionary and utopian aspirations in favour of an introspective personalism, escapist aestheticism, and chic boutique lifestyle culture that poses no serious threat to the existing powers. He also contrasts lifestyle anarchism unfavourably with the social anarchist tradition, concluding that between them there exists 'a divide that cannot be bridged'.[20]

The differences between Bookchin's earlier and later assessments of anarchist lifestyle politics are worth examining in some detail in part for what they reveal about the ideological pitfalls faced by those attempting to reconcile anarchism's strong commitments to both individuality and community.[21] In his earlier work, Bookchin repeatedly praised the counterculture of the 1960s for encouraging a libertarian lifestyle that provided the revolutionary with the psychic resources necessary to resist the subversion of the revolutionary project by authoritarian or elitist propensities assimilated in hierarchical society. As he observed in a piece originally composed in Paris in July 1968, the habits of authority and hierarchy are instilled in the individual at the very outset of life.[22] The revolutionary movement must therefore be 'profoundly concerned with lifestyle' if it is to avoid becoming a source of counterrevolution.[23] And the revolutionary must try to reflect in his or her own person the conditions of the society (s)he is trying to achieve—at least to the degree this is possible in the constraining circumstances of the here and now. Anarchist organisations, Bookchin observed elsewhere (in response to changes by Marcuse and Huey Newton that anarchists rejected revolutionary organisation in favour of individual expression), differed from socialist political parties precisely by virtue of being social movements combining 'a creative revolutionary life-style with a creative revolutionary theory'.[24] Both were essential, insofar as 'life-style is related as intimately to revolution as revolution is to life-style'.[25]

In contrast to those socialists who dismissed as a form of 'bourgeois individualism' the 'intensely personal'[26] nature of the countercultural revolution spreading through society in the 1960s, the Murray Bookchin of the early 1970s drew a distinction between the atomised egotism produced by capitalism and the libertarian communist struggle for a free and joyous society in which each individual might acquire control over her or his everyday life. Viewed as an element of the latter project, he suggested, the process of anti-authoritarian *individuation* initiated by the counterculture was *itself* revolutionary insofar as revolution may be understood as self-activity in its most advanced form: the individuation of the 'masses' into conscious beings who can take

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[19] Portwood-Stacer, Ibid.

[20] Murray Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (Edinburgh and San Francisco: AK Press, 1995).

[21] I explore these contrasts in greater depth, and with much more attention to historical context, in a journal article that has significantly informed the current discussion. See Laurence Davis, 'Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unhelpful Dichotomy', *Anarchist Studies*, 18:1 (2010), 62–82.

[22] Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, 168.

[23] Ibid., 11.

[24] Bookchin, 'Anarchy and Organisation: A Letter to the Left', reprinted from *New Left Notes*, January 15, 1969: http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/bookchin/leftletterprint.html. Last accessed on 24 September 2017.

[25] Bookchin, 'Toward a post-scarcity society: The American perspective and the SDS', May 1969: http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/bookchin/sds.html. Last accessed on 24 September 2017.

[26] Bookchin, 'On Spontaneity and Organisation' (London: Solidarity Pamphlet, 1975 [1972]).

direct, unmediated control of society and of their own lives. As such, the revolutionary process was necessarily an organic rather than a mechanical one, and would affirm 'not only the rational but the joyous, the sensuous and the aesthetic side of revolution'.[27] More specifically, it would affirm and extend the counterculture's practical and wide-ranging challenges to both the unconscious and conscious legacies of domination: for example, its commitment to the autonomy of the self and the right to self-realisation; the evocation of love, sensuality, and the unfettered expression of the body; the spontaneous expression of feeling; the de-alienation of relations between people; the formation of communities and communes; the free access of all to the means of life; the rejection of the plastic commodity world and its careers; the practice of mutual aid; the acquisition of skills and counter-technologies; a new reverence for life and for the balance of nature; and the replacement of the work ethic by meaningful work and claims of pleasure.

A leading theorist of the anarchist and revolutionary personalist dimensions of the counterculture of the 1960s, some 25 years later Bookchin adopts a much more strident and combative tone towards countercultural, lifestyle-oriented anarchism in his 1995 polemic, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism*. Whereas in the late 1960s and early 1970s he welcomed the individualism, spontaneity, cultural and sexual freedom, and undisciplined libertarian lifestyle that he associated with the counterculture, in the 1990s he lambastes contemporary anarchists for exhibiting precisely these same qualities. Moreover, he places the blame for this alleged degeneration of Euro-American anarchism on those same participants in the counterculture of the late 1960s whom he earlier praised for their utopian and revolutionary cultural experimentation. According to the elder Bookchin, individualist and communalist forms of anarchism cannot coexist, because the 'chasm' that now separates them is not simply a transient contemporary phenomenon but an 'unbridgeable' divide deeply rooted in the history and theory of anarchism. One or the other must triumph, and he leaves no doubt about which side of the struggle he is on.

There are numerous problems with this later account of anarchism. First, it conceives the relationship between individual and community in a reductively non-dialectical fashion. Whereas Bookchin criticises 'anarchism's failure to resolve [the] tension'[28] between individual autonomy and social freedom, a more dialectical[29] and less perfectionist understanding of the relationship between the two would allow for the possibility of a creative tension between the individualist and communalist dimensions of anarchism. Second, Bookchin presents a distorted picture of the relationship between individual and community in the history of anarchist theory and practice. From Godwin, Bakunin, and Kropotkin to Reclus, Malatesta, and Goldman, most anarchists have consistently affirmed the importance of both individual autonomy and social justice, and recognised their inseparable interrelationship, even as they disagreed about how these goals should be held in balance and what the best strategies are for achieving them.[30] Third, Bookchin's account of even individualist anarchism is historically inaccurate and reductive, most notably in its conspicuous failure to acknowledge the socialist and egalitarian dimensions of the current. Fourth, while there is a kernel of truth in some of his criticisms of the contemporary anarchist movement, his polemical intent drives him to make sweeping generalisations unsubstantiated by the available empirical evidence. To be sure, the conditions of neoliberalism have made it particularly

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[27] Ibid., 8.

[28] Bookchin, *Social Anarchism*, 4.

[29] Clark, *The Impossible Community*, 172.

[30] Cindy Milstein, *Anarchism and Its Aspirations* (Oakland and Edinburgh: AK Press, 2010); Clark, Ibid.; Ritter, *Anarchism*; Portwood-Stacer, *Lifestyle Politics.*

difficult for practitioners of lifestyle activism to 'connect microscopic interventions to macroscopic struggles in a non-superficial way',[31] and one may legitimately criticise the tendency of groups like CrimethInc. to prioritise personal liberation for a privileged few over the construction of collective revolutionary movements working for the betterment of all. However, Bookchin's either/or theoretical premises, and the markedly strident and uncompromising tone of his argument, serve only to belittle and demean the Herculean efforts of those many contemporary anarchists attempting to build bridges between the personal and political aspects of libertarian revolutionary social change in very difficult social circumstances. Contrary to what the Bookchin of *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism* would have us believe, both the communalist and the individualist tendencies of anarchism are now very much alive and thriving. The revolutionary personalist spirit of the American anarchist counterculture that he once praised lives on in the decentralised networks of the global Occupy and European *Indignado* movements; world-wide anti-austerity and anti-capitalist mobilisations; interconnected alter-globalisation struggles from Latin America to Asia and Africa and the Middle East; deep green ecological and climate justice campaigns led by small farmers and indigenous peoples in the global South; student struggles from Chile to Quebec and the United Kingdom; and countless experiments in cooperative production and distribution, alternative media and art, and collective living.

Perhaps even more damagingly, Bookchin's polemic foreclosed precisely the sort of reasoned dialogue that his earlier work had initiated. If in the 1960s he 'made the need for a convergence between the counterculture and the New Left the focus of most of [his] activities',[32] and consequently muted or expressed constructively any reservations he had about lifestyle-oriented cultural politics, in the changed circumstances of the 1990s he put his earlier bridge-building efforts behind him and turned instead to what he perceived as the then far more urgent political task of extinguishing once and for all the mortal threat to the revolutionary anarchist tradition posed by individualistic, liberal, or lifestyle anarchism. This shift proved to be both counterproductive and ultimately futile.

It was counterproductive because Bookchin's growing ideological rigidity blinded him to empirical evidence pointing to political conclusions very different from those which he came to regard as axiomatic.[33] It was ultimately futile because the chasm of Bookchin's ideological imagination separated not lifestyle anarchism from social anarchism, but his own idealist and context insensitive interpretation of lifestylism from empirical reality. Whereas Bookchin sought to pass a final moral judgement on lifestyle politics, a grounded and hence more constructive ethical critique would as Laura Portwood-Stacer has suggested balance recognition of the positive potential of lifestyle politics under certain conditions, with sensitivity to the specific conditions that may make them less practicable and productive on other occasions. It would strategically ascertain 'in what situations and for what goals is lifestyle activism an effective course of action', and hence commit to 'nuanced, situational critique that accepts the presence of lifestyle as a site of engagement while aiming to maximize its most promising potentials'.[34]

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[31] Portwood-Stacer, Ibid., 142.

[32] Bookchin, 'Whither Anarchism? A Reply to Recent Anarchist Critics', 1998: http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/bookchin/whither.html. Last accessed on 25 September 2017.

[33] See, on this point, my discussion of the autonomous social movements of the 1980s in Davis, 'Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism', 75–76.

[34] Portwood-Stacer, *Lifestyle Politics*, 140, 151–152.

In short, what is now urgently needed in anarchist movement discussions of lifestyle politics is not further polarising discourse about 'unbridgeable chasms', but bridge building in the form of intelligent, appropriately self-critical and context-sensitive dialogue that recognises common ground. Bookchin's work in the aftermath of the rebellions of the 1960s was a model of such bridge building, whereas his later writing served only to exacerbate existing splits in the movement. Sadly, his 1995 polemic was also a prelude to his ultimate break with anarchism, which in the years before his death he consistently mischaracterised as an inherently anti-social and anti-political ideology that 'above all seeks the emancipation of individual personality from all ethical, political, and social constraints'.[35] Hence the need he perceived for an international Left to advance beyond anarchism altogether—and indeed beyond Marxism, syndicalism, and 'vague socialist framework[s]'[36]—towards Bookchin's own longstanding libertarian municipalist, non-anarchist democratic project, now dubbed simply Communalism.

Stepping away from Bookchin's work, I turn now to historical and contemporary debates about the relationship between anarchism and democracy. Like debates about lifestyle politics, I contend, they reveal hidden assumptions that illuminate the ideological pitfalls involved in attempting to balance individual and community in anarchist theory and practice. I argue, more specifically, that whereas positions on the issue tend to polarise into competing camps—either anarchism and democracy are fundamentally incompatible, or they are seamlessly compatible—a more nuanced account guided by the anarchist value of communal individuality would allow for the possibility that anarchism is the most radical form of democracy but also something qualitatively different from and beyond it. Anarchist democracy, in turn, might be conceived as what I have elsewhere termed a 'grounded utopian'[37] ideal that can renew the democratic promise by recalling its radical heritage and continually pushing it towards a horizon both revolutionary and eminently realisable.

Anarchist Democracy

Like such terms as 'freedom', 'equality', 'individuality', and 'community', the concept of democracy is an inherently debatable and changeable idea.[38] In other words, there is no single agreed meaning of the term valid for all peoples at all times. Rather, its meanings at any given moment in history reflect struggles among different groups who understand and practice democracy very differently.[39] It follows that attempts to formulate a comprehensive, fixed, and static definition of the term are not only doomed to fail but are also anti-democratic, insofar as

[35] Murray Bookchin, *The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), 139.

[36] Bookchin, 'The Communalist Project', *Harbinger, A Journal of Social Ecology*, 3:1 (September 1, 2002): http://social-ecology.org/wp/2002/09/harbinger-vol-3-no-1-the-communalist-project/#8230. Last accessed on 1 October 2017.

[37] Laurence Davis, 'History, Politics, and Utopia: Toward a Synthesis of Social Theory and Practice', in Patricia Vieira and Michael Marder (Eds), *Existential Utopia: New Perspectives on Utopian Thought* (New York and London: Continuum, 2012), 127–140.

[38] Anthony Arblaster, *Democracy* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987), 5.

[39] James Cairns and Alan Sears, *The Democratic Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 161.

they strive to control and contain something that by its very nature must reflect the varying and complex needs and belief systems of people over time.[40]

Political ideologies may be understood as evolving frameworks for interpreting essentially contested concepts, reflecting different fundamental political commitments on the part of those who hold them.[41] Regardless of their perspectives on the democratic ideal, all the major political ideologies have engaged with it by providing more definite interpretations of its meaning. They have also considered whether it is desirable and possible, and if so, what form it should take.[42] Anarchism is no exception, although as we shall see debates about the relationship between anarchism and democracy are particularly fraught, in part because of widely varying—if frequently unstated and unexamined—beliefs about the proper relationship between the individual and the community.

Critics of anarchism commonly allege that it is lacking in democratic credentials. Liberal and Marxist critics, in particular, regularly use the term 'democracy' as something of an ideological bludgeon in their analyses of anarchism. The Leninist Hal Draper, for example, selectively quotes from the work of Proudhon to support his contention that anarchism and democracy are fundamentally opposed, 'Anarchism is not concerned with the creation of democratic control from below, but only with the destruction of "authority" over the individual, including the authority of the most extreme democratic regulation of society that it is possible to imagine'.[43] More recently, the Leninist Paul Blackledge again selectively quotes from the work of a range of anarchist scholars and revolutionaries to support his claim that anarchism's 'transhistorical conception of human egoism' acts as a barrier to its conceptualisation of a new (i.e., Marxist-Leninist) form of democracy that could overcome the capitalist separation of economics and politics.[44]

Notwithstanding the many historical inaccuracies and conceptual deficiencies of such arguments,[45] they highlight real disagreements within the anarchist tradition itself. Consistent with the pluralistic and contested nature of all political ideologies,[46] anarchism does not consist of a single set of consistent beliefs and doctrines. Rather, it contains diverse and sometimes incompatible elements which give rise to disagreements within the ideological tradition about its content and character. One particularly vigorous field of intra-ideological contention concerns the relationship between anarchism and democracy.

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[40] Benjamin Isakhan and Stephen Stockwell (Eds), *The Secret History of Democracy* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2.

[41] Matthew Festenstein and Michael Kenny (Eds), *Political Ideologies: A Reader and Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.

[42] Terence Ball and Richard Dagger, *Political Ideologies and the Democratic Ideal*, 8th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2011), 39.

[43] Hal Draper, 'The Two Souls of Socialism', *New Politics*, 5:1 (Winter 1966), 57–84: https://www.marxists.org/archive/draper/1966/twosouls/4-anarch.htm. Last accessed on 2 October 2017.

[44] Paul Blackledge, 'Freedom and Democracy: Marxism, Anarchism and the Problem of Human Nature', in Alex Prichard et al. (Eds), *Libertarian Socialism: Politics in Black and Red* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 19–22.

[45] See, for example, Iain McKay's thorough online critiques of Draper and Blackledge in 'Hal Draper, Numpty!, parts 1–2' (April 2008 and October 2009): http://anarchism.pageabode.com/anarcho/hal-draper-numpty and http://anarchism.pageabode.com/anarcho/hal-draper-numpty-part-deux: Last accessed on 15 September 2017; and 'Yet another SWP numpty on anarchism, parts 1–5' (March 2013–September 2014): collected at http://anarchism.pageabode.com/anarcho/yet-another-swp-numpty-anarchism-part-5: Last accessed on 15 September 2017.

[46] Festenstein and Kenny, *Political Ideologies*, 4–5.

Many anarchists and anarchist groups, historical and contemporary, have maintained that anarchism and democracy are fundamentally incompatible. Malatesta, for example, famously associated democracy with majority rule, and proclaimed that 'we are neither for a majority nor for a minority government; neither for democracy nor for dictatorship... We are for anarchy'.[47] More recently, Uri Gordon objects to the association between anarchism and democracy in part because of the element of coercive enforceability which he associates with the term 'democracy'. According to Gordon, democratic discourse assumes 'without exception' that the political process results, at some point, in collectively binding decisions that are coercively enforceable. By contrast, the outcomes of anarchist process are impossible to enforce. It follows that anarchism represents 'not the most radical form of democracy, but an altogether different paradigm of collective action'.[48] Elsewhere, he also criticises efforts to recuperate democracy for anarchism because he believes that such efforts entangle anarchism with 'the *patriotic* nature of the pride in democracy which it seeks to subvert'.[49] In a similar vein, CrimethInc. too emphasises the coercive and exclusionary aspects of the theory and practice of democracy, from ancient Athens to modern representative democracy. Moreover, they contend that even direct democracy without the state will inevitably reproduce exclusion, and either coercion or confusion. They conclude that when we engage in collective activities, it is important that we understand what we are doing as a *collective practice of freedom* rather than as a form of participatory democracy.[50]

Whereas partisans of what might be termed the 'unbridgeable chasm' thesis about the relationship between anarchism and democracy emphasise the worst (coercive and exclusionary) features of the democratic tradition, champions of the 'seamless unity' position uncritically focus on the best (libertarian, egalitarian, and radically participatory) aspects of the tradition. Wayne Price, for example, declares simply that 'anarchism is democracy without the state'.[51] According to Price, 'democracy' has two contradictory meanings today: on the one hand, the justification of the existing state, and on the other hand a tradition of revolutionary popular liberation that serves as a standard for judging and condemning the state. Anarchism is ideologically aligned with the latter. To be sure, many anarchists have opposed democracy, and 'the individualist tendencies [within anarchism] are the worst in that regard', but these 'weaknesses of anarchism' can be corrected by a clear and unambiguous recognition that 'the program of anarchism' is to replace the bureaucratic-military state machine with a federation of decentralised popular assemblies and associations based on the principle of majority rule, in short democracy without the state.[52] As for those anarchists such as Malatesta who have expressed principled concerns about majoritarianism from a social anarchist perspective, they are simply confused. Again according

[47] Errico Malatesta, 'Neither Democrats, nor Dictators: Anarchists', *Pensiero e Volontà*, May 1926; Translated by Gillian Fleming and published in Vernon Richards (Ed), *The Anarchist Revolution* (London: Freedom Press, 1995): https://archive.org/stream/al_Errico_Malatesta_Neither_Democrats_nor_Dictators_Anarchists_a4/Errico_Malatesta__Neither_Democrats__nor_Dictators__Anarchists_a4#page/n1/mode/2up. Last accessed on 4 October 2017.

[48] Uri Gordon, *Anarchy Alive!: Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2008), 67–70.

[49] Uri Gordon, 'Democracy: The Patriotic Temptation': https://crimethinc.com/2016/05/26/democracy-the-patriotic-temptation. Last accessed on 29 September 2017.

[50] CrimethInc., 'From Democracy to Freedom': https://crimethinc.com/2016/04/29/feature-from-democracy-to-freedom. Last accessed on 29 September 2017.

[51] Wayne Price, 'Anarchism as Extreme Democracy', *The Utopian*, vol. 1 (2000), 7: https://www.utopianmag.com/files/in/1000000006/anarchism_extreme.pdf. Last accessed on 4 October 2017.

[52] Ibid., 10.

to Price, Malatesta 'mixes up' opposition to democratic ideology as a rationalisation for capitalism and the state with denunciation of the very concept of majority rule.[53] Whereas the former is justified from an anarchist perspective, the latter is not, because collective decisions agreed by a majority must be binding on dissenting minorities as well. People with minority views have the right to participate in all decision-making. They have the right to try to win a majority to their views. However, once a majority decision is made, they do not have the right to impede the execution of the majority's will, which if necessary will be enforced by 'coercion—reduced to the minimum possible at the time'.[54] Such coercion is consistent with anarchist principles because the goal of anarchism is to 'abolish the state', not organised coercion per se.[55] In sum, Price concludes without leaving any room for ambiguity or doubt, 'when everyone is involved in governing then there is no government'.[56]

While many of Price's criticisms of anarchist anti-democratic arguments are valid, ultimately and somewhat ironically, his own absolutist position is the mirror image of theirs and only bolsters their case. Consider Malatesta's position, for example. Far from being the confused thinker Price makes him out to be, Malatesta consistently opposed government of any kind, whether by a majority or a minority, because as an anarchist he objected in principle to any form of power or institution with a formalised and standing mechanism for forcing compliance to a set of decisions. He also raised legitimate concerns about a possible 'tyranny of the majority' in even the most participatory democratic society based on majority rule, not because he sought to defend a tyranny of the minority (which he regarded as the worst form of government), but because he valued freedom for all and recognised that majorities can and frequently do trample down the rights of minorities. By way of a nuanced alternative to majority rule, he offered the following helpful observation:

> Certainly anarchists recognise that where life is lived in common it is often necessary for the minority to come to accept the opinion of the majority. When there is an obvious need or usefulness in doing something and, to do it requires the agreement of all, the few should feel the need to adapt to the wishes of the many [...] But such adaptation on the one hand by one group must on the other be reciprocal, voluntary and must stem from an awareness of need and of goodwill to prevent the running of social affairs from being paralysed by obstinacy. It cannot be imposed as a principle and statutory norm. This is an ideal which, perhaps, in daily life in general, is difficult to attain in entirety, but it is a fact that in every human grouping anarchy is that much

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[53] Ibid., 6.

[54] Wayne Price, 'Are Anarchism and Democracy Opposed? A Response to Crimethinc', *AnarchistNews.org* (July 2016): https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/wayne-price-are-anarchism-and-democracy-opposed. Last accessed on 1 October 2017. Not surprisingly, Blackledge finds affinities between his own conception of democracy and Price's. See Blackledge, 'Freedom and Democracy', 22–23.

[55] Rather unhelpfully, Price conflates a range of different varieties of coercion with his catch-all use of the term. For more sophisticated philosophical accounts, see Michael Taylor, *Community, Anarchy and Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Magda Egoumenides, *Philosophical Anarchism and Political Obligation* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2014); and Richard Sylvan, 'Anarchism', in Robert E. Goodin et al. (Eds), *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

[56] Price, 'Are Anarchism and Democracy Opposed?', 54.

nearer where agreement between majority and minority is free and spontaneous and exempt from any imposition that does not derive from the natural order of things.[57]

In other words, in place of both majority and minority rule, he proposed a model of decision-making that eschewed coercive enforcement in favour of an ideal of free and spontaneous agreement consistent with the anarchist principle of communal individuality. Importantly, he also acknowledged the practical difficulties likely to be faced by those committed to enacting such an ideal.

More critically, we might perhaps inquire whether Malatesta, Price, Gordon, and CrimethInc. are correct in assuming that the idea of democracy is necessarily tied to the concept of majority rule. Carole Pateman, a leading participatory democratic theorist influenced by the anarchist tradition,[58] argues that it is not. Promisingly, she develops a theory of participatory democracy grounded in an anarchistic conception of self-assumed obligation incompatible with majority rule. According to Pateman, direct democratic voting in a genuinely participatory democratic society may be regarded as the political counterpart of promising, or free agreement. By directly voting in favour of a particular proposal, a citizen assumes an obligation to abide by it. However, the obligation in question is owed not to any external authority such as the state but to one's fellow citizens. Moreover, someone who finds herself in a minority on a particular vote, or who abstains from voting, cannot be compelled to abide by the decision reached because any such imposition on individual autonomy would be contrary to the principle of self-assumed obligation.[59]

Within the anarchist tradition, too, a wide range of anarchist thinkers have drawn on democratic theory, anarchist theory, and the long histories of democratic and anarchist revolutionary popular struggle to argue that anarchism is the most radical form of democracy, one moreover opposed to the principles of both state sovereignty and majority rule. Paul Goodman, for example, whose anarchism exercised a profound influence on the counterculture of the 1960s, maintained that 'participatory democracy … is, of course, the essence of Anarchist social order, the voluntary federation of self-managed enterprises'[60] and rejected the 'rule of the majority' as an 'obvious coercion that soon, moreover, becomes unconscious under the cover of an illusion of justice, fair play, etc.'.[61] The *Anarchist FAQ* notes that 'instead of capitalist or statist hierarchy, self-management (i.e. direct democracy) would be the guiding principle of the freely joined associations that make up a free society', but then takes pains to emphasise the point that 'the coercive imposition of the majority will is contrary to the ideal of self-assumed obligation, and so it is contrary to direct democracy and free association'.[62] Saul Newman argues that democracy

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[57] Errico Malatesta, 'A Project of Anarchist Organisation', 1927: http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/errico-malatesta-and-nestor-makhno-about-the-platform. Last accessed on 4 October 2017.

[58] David Goodway reports that Pateman was an anarchist throughout the 1960s and that she once wrote to him that 'the critique of subordination which runs throughout my work has its genesis in anarchist political theory'. See David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 265.

[59] Carole Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1985), 159–162; see also Robert Graham, 'The Role of Contract in Anarchist Ideology', in David Goodway (Ed), *For Anarchism: History, Theory, and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 170–173.

[60] Paul Goodman, 'The Black Flag of Anarchism', first published in *The New York Times Magazine* (July 14, 1968); reprinted in Taylor Stoehr (Ed), *Drawing the Line: The Political Essays of Paul Goodman* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979), 209.

[61] Goodman, 'Unanimity', first published in *Art and Social Nature*, 1946; reprinted in Stoehr (Ed), Ibid., 40.

[62] Iain McKay, *An Anarchist FAQ*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh and Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2008), 41.

'always exceeds the limitations of the state and opposes the very principle of state sovereignty'. However, for anarchists, it has to be more than simply majority rule, because this can threaten individual liberty. Rather, it ought to be conceived as a historical project involving the questioning of all forms of political power and social hierarchies and the assertion of collective autonomy or equal liberty. In short, it has to be re-imagined as a 'democracy of singularities', and democracy, 'radically conceived' in this fashion, '*is* anarchy'.[63] David Graeber observes that the anarchist identification with democracy goes back a long way. He conceives anarchism as a political movement that aims to bring about a genuinely free society in which people 'only enter those kinds of relations with one another that would not have to be enforced by the constant threat of violence'. Democracy, in turn, is 'not necessarily defined by majority voting'. Rather, it is a 'process of collective deliberation on the principle of full and equal participation'. Considered together, anarchism is not the negation of those aspects of democracy ordinary people have historically liked; rather, it is 'a matter of taking those core democratic principles to their logical conclusions'.[64]

While Gordon is correct to point out that such understandings of democracy conflict with currently dominant popular usage, this is hardly a persuasive argument to abandon the long historical struggle to reclaim the term from those who have misused it to legitimate existing configurations of power. Moreover, it is an odd argument for an anarchist to make, as anarchists have long battled with popular opinion over the normative connotations of the term 'anarchism'.

This suggests the need for a more historically informed and politically engaged interpretation of the relationship between anarchism and democracy. As Raymond Williams has accurately observed, the term 'anarchy' came into English in the mid-sixteenth century, and its earliest uses are not too far from the early hostile uses of the term 'democracy'. Thereafter, however, the historical trajectory of the two terms diverged. Whereas the latter began to acquire a more positive connotation in the public mind following its co-optation by post-revolutionary elites in the United States, and gradual re-definition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a system of government or (even more narrowly) as a means of electing a government, the stubbornly un-co-optable anarchism retained its negative connotations.[65]

Radical democrats and anarchists never gave up the battle for democracy, however. For them, democracy could never be simply a form of government or public administration. Rather, it signified a continuing historical project in which ordinary people challenged mastership and rulership in all their various guises in the name of an ideal of *self-government.* And this point, in turn, suggests a continuing role for anarchism as a grounded utopian ideal that can renew the democratic promise by recalling its radical heritage and pushing it towards a horizon both revolutionary and eminently realisable. Revolutionary in practical terms, because anarchism is not simply a collection of abstract ideas but a living revolutionary movement representing the hopes and dreams of the dispossessed and those consigned to the social margins. Revolutionary in theoretical terms, because even direct democracy is not anarchism, inasmuch as the power of all is not equivalent to the power of none. Anarchism thus remains a radically open-ended horizon for democracy,

[63] Saul Newman, *The Politics of Postanarchism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011 [2010]), 2, 33–34.

[64] David Graeber, *The Democracy Project* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 154, 186–188.

[65] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society* (Hammersmith, London: Fontana Press, 1988 [1976]), 37; see also Graeber, Ibid., ch. 3.

one in which political 'sovereignty' lies not in society or in the individual but in a continual unresolved tension between the two.[66]

We will now consider the dramatic enactment of this tension in the anarchist utopian literary imagination, focusing specifically on Ursula K. Le Guin's novel *The Dispossessed* (1974). My argument is that *The Dispossessed* can facilitate a creative and constructive dialogue between hitherto competing anarchist perspectives on the relationship between the individual and the community. I contend, more specifically, that it can do so by means of its imaginative exploration of the ways in which the conflict between individual and community might be significantly reduced but not eliminated entirely in an anarcho-communist society.

The Anarchist Utopian Literary Imagination

Literary utopias explore both 'what is' and 'what might be', as well as the relationship between the two. They do so by means of a 'speaking picture' that surveys contemporary society's norms, practices, and possibilities for change; portrays in some detail the principles and practices of one or more alternative imaginary societies; and enquires about the relationship between 'what is' and 'what might be' by considering the possibilities, effects, and desirability of various changes.[67] In contrast to conventional normative political theory, which attempts to organise our beliefs about right and wrong into systematic moral principles and abstract political theories, literary utopias cause us to 'see' an ideal philosophical city by means of a feigned concrete description, quite a different achievement from a mere explanation of the principles on which it should rest.[68] The differences between the two suggest the possibility that while 'a careless theorist might be misled by the particularity or lack of rigour characteristic of political stories', utopian literature might also help 'thoughtful theorists see what they may have missed, or illuminate what they may have seen only dimly'.[69]

The Dispossessed, a work of science fiction which depicts and critically interrogates an experiment in anarchist communism in an imaginary future, tells the story of Shevek and his experiences on two contrasting worlds, 'Anarres' (based on an experiment in non-authoritarian communism that has survived for 170 years) and 'Urras' (where Shevek encounters a hierarchical capitalist society analogous in many respects to contemporary non-fictional capitalist states). From the outset, the novel explores the evolving and frequently fraught relationship between an individual (Shevek) and the ambiguously utopian anarchist community in which his individuality is both nourished and stymied. Among its many notable artistic achievements, *The Dispossessed* provides not only an exceptionally well-informed, highly imaginative, and persuasive description of what everyday life might be like in an anarchist communist society but also a sensitive literary exploration of the tensions between individual and community in anarchist thought and (imaginary) practice. To the thoughtful political theorist, it offers not an ideological blueprint but

[66] Amedeo Bertolo, 'Democracy and Beyond', *Democracy and Nature*, 5:2 (July 1999), 311–324: www.democracynature.org/vol5/bertolo_democracy.htm. Last accessed on 4 October 2017.

[67] Peter Stillman, '"Nothing is, but what is not": Utopias as Practical Political Philosophy', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 3:2&3 (Summer/Autumn 2000), 11.

[68] Bertrand de Jouvenal, 'Utopias for practical purposes', in Frank Manuel (Ed), *Utopias and Utopian Thought* (London: Souvenir Press, 1973), 219–220.

[69] Dan Sabia, 'Individual and Community in Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*', in Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman (Eds), *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. Le Guin's* The Dispossessed (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 111.

an unusually suggestive account of how the anarchist ideal of communal individuality might be approximated but never fully achieved in practice.

Drawing on the work of Kropotkin, whom Le Guin regarded as 'the greatest philosopher of anarchism',[70] Le Guin has her omniscient narrator observe of Shevek that he was 'brought up in a culture that relied deliberately and constantly on human solidarity, mutual aid'.[71] Later, Shevek himself describes Anarresti society as follows: 'We have no law but the single principle of mutual aid between individuals. We have no government but the single principle of free association'.[72]

This deeply ingrained ethic alone is insufficient to sustain a humane community on Anarres, in part because as one of the other central characters remarks in a heated debate with Shevek, 'the will to dominance is as central in human beings as the impulse to mutual aid is'.[73] In addition to the ethics of mutual aid, and the system of education that supports it, a wide range of social institutions, conventions, and practices are needed to 'embody, encourage, and reinforce the ethic … and thereby ensure the responsible exercise of freedom by individuals'.[74] These include forms of post-capitalist economic and post-statist political organisation that prevent the concentration of economic and political power, the decentralised and democratic self-government of economic and social life, rotation of positions of leadership within organisations, practices of communal living, and the like.[75]

Yet for all their accomplishments, the Anarresti have not succeeded in eliminating entirely the conflict between individual and society. Moreover, Le Guin suggests paradoxically, this apparent failing is also a virtue, insofar as the realisation of the perfectionist ideal of complete harmony between the two would entail the death of individual liberty and the diversity, novelty, creativity, and vibrant life it makes possible. Like Oscar Wilde and Emma Goldman in this respect, and unlike her utopian predecessor William Morris, Le Guin acknowledges a prominent and enduring place in her utopian imagination for a socially disruptive form of individual assertiveness. In fact, it is fair to say that her representation of this disruptive assertiveness in the narrative of Shevek's progressive rebellion against the creeping conformity and stagnation of Anarresti society constitutes the main dramatic action of the novel.

Ultimately, Shevek comes to adopt a critical perspective on his home world. He criticises, in particular, the ways in which the *institutionalisation* of mutual aid has transformed the legitimate interest in and demand for cooperation and community into an interest in and demand for conformity and obedience. In conversation with his partner Takver, for example, he exclaims indignantly that 'the social conscience completely dominates the individual conscience, instead of striking a balance with it. We don't cooperate—we *obey* […] We fear our neighbor's opinion more than we respect our own freedom of choice'.[76] Later, in a more public setting, he declares passionately, 'We've been saying, more and more often, you must work with the others, you must accept the rule of the majority. But any rule is tyranny. The duty of the individual is to accept *no*

[70] Ursula K. Le Guin, quoted in Charles Bigelow and J. McMahon, 'Science Fiction and the Future of Anarchy: Conversations with Ursula K. Le Guin', *Oregon Times* (December 1964), 29.

[71] Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (New York: Harper Collins, 1974), 204.

[72] Ibid., 300.

[73] Ibid., 167–168.

[74] Dan Sabia, 'Individual and Community', 116.

[75] Ibid., 116–119.

[76] Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 330.

rule, to be the initiator of his own acts, to be responsible. Only if he does so will the society live, and change, and adapt, and survive'.[77]

But he does not condemn Anarres absolutely. Rather, he comes to the conclusion that for all its manifest failures to live up to its high ideals, his society still holds out a promise of something very good and noble that might yet be redeemed by constructive revolutionary action. Pursuing this line of thought at a pivotal point in the novel, Shevek articulates a balanced position on the proper relationship between individual and community that recognises the vital importance of both. On the one hand, he emphasises the value of mutuality and community in facing necessity. More specifically, he embraces the Anarresti ideal of an organic community in which all share equally the inescapable burdens of life. On the other hand, he is alert to the dangers of a tyranny of the majority, and hence also to the value of protecting individual autonomy even and perhaps especially when it conflicts with prevailing social norms. These reflections eventually yield the following important insight, 'With the myth of the State out of the way, the real mutuality and reciprocity of society and individual became clear. Sacrifice might be demanded of the individual, but never compromise[78]: for though only the society could give security and stability, only the individual, the person, had the power of moral choice—the power of change, the essential function of life'.[79]

Taking this philosophy to heart, Shevek makes a brave decision. He resolves to fulfil his proper function in the social organism by becoming an anarchist revolutionary in an anarchist society conceived as a permanent revolution. In so doing, he reminds us of a truth frequently forgotten or overlooked by those theorists of revolution who conceive of it as a singular and absolute break with past structures of oppression. Specifically, he reminds us that because individual and community can never be perfectly reconciled, even in an anarchist communist society, but only balanced in a dynamic and creative tension, the revolutionary process is necessarily a never-ending one. This is not an argument for 'reformism'. To the contrary, it is an argument for a deeper conception of revolution, based on the recognition that patterns of institutionalisation in a post-revolutionary anarchist communist society will inevitably create new and unpredictable dangers and potential sources of oppression. Conceived in this broad historical perspective, anarchy in turn implies a sceptical questioning of all institutions, however democratic they might be. Like radical democracy,[80] anarchy may be understood as a performance art, which like all performance art exists only while it is being performed (think, for example, of a singer's song, which ceases—though it may linger on in the mind and imagination—once the melody has resounded). In other words, anarchy is generated by people in an anarchist state of mind, and by the actions they take in accordance with that state of mind. When this action ceases, when individual and popular vigilance relax, then the door is opened to a tyranny of either the minority or majority. In this sense, eternal vigilance is truly the price of liberty, individuality, and community.

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[77] Ibid., 359.

[78] Shevek is presumably referring to 'compromise' of an individual's personal integrity or fundamental humanity.

[79] Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, 333.

[80] See, for example, C. Douglas Lummis, *Radical Democracy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 159–163.

Conclusion

> 'The Revolution is in the individual spirit, or it is nowhere. It is for all, or it is nothing. If it is seen as having any end, it will never truly begin'.
>
> —Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*

Against those who argue that anarchism is not a coherent political ideology because of the coexistence within it of irreconcilably opposed individualist and communalist strands, I have argued in this chapter that it is indeed a coherent and distinctive ideology and that the coexistence within it of well-developed and very different individualist and communalist strands is a primary source of its ideological distinction and political strength. Far from being a weakness or sign of incoherence, efforts by anarchists to maximise individuality *and* community highlight anarchism's pluralistic and contested character, and its ideologically unique balancing of individuality and community in a dynamic and creative tension. In contrast to other political ideologies and ideologically informed social movements, anarchists alone have explored in both theory and practice how to create, organise, and maintain a stateless society in which communal individuality flourishes.

Importantly, however, I have also argued that the sometimes competing demands of individuality and society can never be fully and perfectly reconciled, even in an 'ideal anarchy', and that this seeming limitation of anarchism is actually one of its greatest strengths. Anarchist theory and practice, I have maintained, are truest to the ideology's core value of communal individuality when they steer a careful course between the Scylla of presuming an unbridgeable chasm between individual and community and the Charybdis of striving for a perfect and complete reconciliation between the two.

Moreover, there is room for legitimate disagreement among anarchists about how the goals of individual autonomy and social justice should be held in balance and what the best strategies are for achieving them. The responses to such questions are in part necessarily context-sensitive, which in turn suggests the need for situational critique and intelligent, appropriately self-critical and context-sensitive movement dialogue that recognises common ground.

I illustrated these points by means of a close examination of anarchist debates about the relationships between, respectively, social anarchism and lifestyle anarchism, and anarchism and democracy. In both cases, we found that unstated assumptions about the proper relationship between individual and community impeded the sort of creative dialogue and constructive bridge building necessary to advance such debates beyond unproductive ideological binaries. Finally, we saw how the anarchist utopian literary imagination can facilitate such a dialogue by dramatically enacting a thought experiment of a revolutionary society in which the anarchist ideal of communal individuality is approximated but never fully realised.

One legitimate objection that might be raised against the argument of this chapter is its failure to engage with the so-called 'anarcho-capitalist' tradition. As Benjamin Franks rightly points out, individualisms that defend or reinforce hierarchical forms such as the economic-power relations of anarcho-capitalism are incompatible with practices of social anarchism based on developing immanent goods which contest such inequalities.[81] However, even here, a degree of caution is

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[81] Benjamin Franks, 'Anarchism', in Michael Freeden et al. (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 393–394.

required. First, is anarcho-capitalism really a form of anarchism or instead a wholly different ideological paradigm whose adherents have attempted to expropriate the language of anarchism for their own anti-anarchist ends? Iain McKay, whom Franks cites as an authority to support his contention that 'academic analysis has followed activist currents in rejecting the view that anarcho-capitalism has anything to do with social anarchism',[82] also argues quite emphatically on the very pages cited by Franks that anarcho-capitalism is by no means a type of anarchism. He writes, 'It is important to stress that anarchist opposition to the so-called capitalist "anarchists" does *not* reflect some kind of debate within anarchism, as many of these types like to pretend, but a debate between anarchism and its old enemy, capitalism... Equally, given that anarchists and "anarcho"-capitalists have fundamentally *different* analyses and goals it is hardly "sectarian" to point this out'.[83] Second, Franks asserts without supporting evidence that most major forms of individualist anarchism have been largely anarcho-capitalist in content, and concludes from this premise that most forms of individualism are incompatible with anarchism. However, the conclusion is unsustainable because the premise is false, depending as it does for any validity it might have on the further assumption that anarcho-capitalism is indeed a form of anarchism. If we reject this view, then we must also reject the individual anarchist versus communal anarchist 'chasm'-style of argument that follows from it.[84]
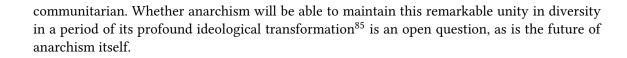
In contrast to this perspective, I maintain that the ideological core of anarchism is the belief that society can and should be organised without hierarchy and domination. Historically, anarchists have struggled against a wide range of regimes of domination, from capitalism, the state system, patriarchy, heterosexism, and the domination of nature to colonialism, the war system, slavery, fascism, white supremacy, and certain forms of organised religion. They have also conceptualised, and enacted in prefigurative practice, a rich variety of visions of social life structured according to principles other than hierarchy and domination. While these visions range from the predominantly individualistic to the predominantly communitarian, features common to virtually all include an emphasis on self-management and self-regulatory methods of organisation, voluntary association, decentralised federation, and direct democracy. In short, anarchists desire a decentralised society, based on the principle of free association, in which people will manage and govern themselves.

As is the case in all vibrant political ideologies, anarchists will continue to disagree robustly about many fundamental matters of value, including the proper relationship between individual and community. If its intra-ideological debates on this subject have been particularly sharp, it is perhaps worth recalling that one of the hallmarks of anarchist ideology has always been its enduring ability to embrace seemingly contradictory extremes. A protean and practice-grounded political ideology, anarchism is both traditional and innovative, scholarly and popular, reflective and action-oriented, libertarian and egalitarian, critical and constructive, confrontational and compassionate, destructive and creative, organised and spontaneous, rational and romantic, sensual and spiritual, natural and social, feminine and masculine, rooted and cosmopolitan, evolutionary and revolutionary, pragmatic and utopian, personal and political, individualistic and

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[82] Ibid., 393.

[83] McKay, vol. 1, 478.

[84] Interestingly, and revealingly, Franks misquotes the title of an earlier journal article of mine in his thoughtful discussion of it. The citation listed in his bibliography is 'Davis, L. 2010. "Social anarchism or lifestyle anarchism: An unhelpful distinction", *Anarchist Studies*, 18 (1): 62–82', whereas the actual title of the article is 'Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unhelpful Dichotomy'.

communitarian. Whether anarchism will be able to maintain this remarkable unity in diversity in a period of its profound ideological transformation[85] is an open question, as is the future of anarchism itself.

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[85] See, on this subject, Laurence Davis, 'Anarchism', in Vincent Geoghegan and Rick Wilford (Eds), *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 213–238.

Laurence Davis
Individual and Community
2019