SOCIAL ANARCHISM, LIFESTYLE ANARCHISM, AND THE ANARCHISM OF COLIN WARD

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INTRODUCTION

In a famous polemic, Murray Bookchin distinguishes between what he terms ‘social anarchism’ and ‘lifestyle anarchism’.1 As presented by Bookchin, social anarchism remains within the socialist tradition and accordingly seeks a transformation of society towards a more egalitarian, post-capitalist order. Lifestyle anarchism, by contrast, presents anarchy as a state of being which can and should be seized by the individual here and now. Bookchin is insistent that there is, as he puts it, ‘an unbridgeable chasm’ between the two perspectives. One cannot mix the two in an integrated anarchist theory or practice. However, a number of recent works have questioned this claim, arguing that some integration of the two perspectives is possible.2 The purpose of this chapter is to explore this possibility by looking at how the two perspectives which Bookchin sees as irreconcilable are arguably blended in the thinking of the post-war British anarchist, Colin Ward.

SOCIAL ANARCHISM VERSUS LIFESTYLE ANARCHISM

Let us begin by elaborating Bookchin’s distinction between social and lifestyle anarchism.
Social anarchism stands in the socialist tradition. It aims to establish a post-capitalist, egalitarian social order. The content of this post-capitalist order is something on which different schools of social anarchist thought disagree. But there are some basic points of agreement. First, decision-making must be decentralised. In the syndicalist variant of social anarchism, the workplace or local occupational group is the primary unit of decision-making. In the anarcho-communist variant, it is the self-governing neighbourhood or ‘commune’. Local units federate to handle issues that require coordination. Second, economic distribution must be strongly egalitarian, ideally attaining the standard of ‘from each according to his/her ability, to each according to his/her need’. Bookchin’s own version of social anarchism, social ecology, is communalist in orientation. Freedom, Bookchin argues, should not be understood primarily as a matter of the ‘autonomy’ of the individual to do her own thing without regard to the community. Rather, it is primarily a matter of the local community having real democratic control over its affairs and of the individual being able to participate in this democratic control on a ‘face-to-face’ basis and on a footing of equality.

Bookchin’s social anarchism is also distinguished, of course, by the relative emphasis that he places on the ecological argument for a communalist social order as an alternative to capitalism. To satisfy tightening ecological constraints, economic organisation must be substantially decentralised to the regional and communal level. Today’s massive urban conglomerations must give way to smaller communities that are more widely dispersed. Agriculture must be decentralised so that local people produce food primarily for local consumption. Energy supply, using new technologies of solar, wind and tidal power, must similarly be decentralised. Other economic activity must go the same way. Ecology and freedom necessarily come as a package, finding their mutual realisation in communalism. In terms of the anarchist tradition, the
basic social vision has much in common with that presented by Peter Kropotkin in *Fields, Factories and Workshops*.

What, then, is lifestyle anarchism? The first thing to say is that lifestyle anarchism is not simply an anarchism that contains a concern for lifestyle. A social anarchist can be concerned to promote specific kinds of lifestyle on the grounds that these are instrumental to bringing about a new social order. Bookchin supports a concern for lifestyle change in this respect. This is related to the view that the means used to achieve fundamental social change must prefigure the end, implying that elements of the communalist future must be embodied in the lives of anarchists today. At the very least, Bookchin accepts what we can call an instrumentalist view of anarchist lifestyle: valuable because, and insofar as, it is instrumental to the creation of a new social order.

Lifestyle anarchism, as Bookchin characterises it, values anarchist lifestyle in a different way. Anarchist lifestyle derives its value and significance not from the contribution it makes to comprehensive social change which may become effective at some future date, but from the anarchy that it manifests here and now. Anarchy is a matter of creating anarchistic spaces, albeit provisional, within existing society and enjoying them while they last. A central idea is Hakim Bey’s notion of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ): ‘a guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself, to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, before the State can crush it’. Bookchin’s evaluation is wholly negative: ‘a basically apolitical and anti-organisational commitment to imagination, desire, and ecstasy, and an intensely self-oriented enchantment of everyday life’.

Bookchin points out that Bey does not simply celebrate the intrinsic worth of the TAZ here and now, but goes further in seeing action geared to wider social transformation as misguided because it is geared to a speculative future rather than the here and
now. If lifestyle anarchism is defined in this way, then, as Bookchin argues, there does indeed seem to be a contradiction with social anarchism. However, by setting up or accepting so stark a contrast, Bey and Bookchin invite an obvious rejoinder: why can’t the anarchist value lifestyle in both ways? Why force a choice? I shall now try to show how a hybrid, bridging social and lifestyle anarchisms, finds expression in the anarchism of Colin Ward.

**FREEDOM IN THE 1960s: THE PERMANENT PROTEST DEBATE**

In turning to Ward, let us begin by sketching some of the intellectual and political context in which Ward developed his own anarchist position. In particular, it is important to attend to the debate going on in the pages of the journals *Freedom* and *Anarchy* in the late 1950s and early 1960s about the idea that anarchism should be conceived as a philosophy of ‘permanent protest’. As we shall see, the terms of this debate mirror very closely those of the more recent debate around social and lifestyle anarchisms. Ward developed a distinctive, intermediate position in this debate, one that may have lessons for anarchists currently seeking to navigate their way through the confrontation between social and lifestyle anarchisms.

One of the key instigators of the debate was the Australian anarchist, George Molnar. Molnar published in *Freedom* in the late 1950s and Ward, as editor of *Anarchy*, published his work in that journal in the 1960s. In one particularly important article published in *Anarchy* in 1961, Molnar argues that the mode of social organisation favoured by anarchists is highly unlikely ever to win universal consent. Hence, an anarchist society is not possible unless anarchists use force to implement or maintain it. But that would be contrary to the basic norm of anarchism. So an
anarchist society is, for all practical purposes, an impossibility. It makes no sense, therefore, to understand anarchism as a movement to create an anarchist society. What, then, is anarchism about? Molnar’s answer is that it is about ‘permanent opposition’ to authoritarian society: ‘This conclusion implies that the conflicting strains of anarchism cannot be resolved until anarchism is altogether purged of its association with a program of secular salvation … Anarchism, consistently interpreted, is permanent opposition’.9

This call was persuasive to some British anarchists in the 1960s and some interpreted it in a way that sounds strikingly similar to later thinkers such as Hakim Bey in its emphasis on the individual’s battle to win spaces of freedom here and now against the state, simply bracketing the question of whether and what sort of future society the anarchist wishes to create. Thus one ‘J.G.’ writes in *Freedom* in 1961 that:

> The upholder of permanent protest acts against the power of the Church, the State, the authoritarian institutions and regimentation because of the affirmation of his freedom here and now, not because of the trajectory of the future society. His action therefore springs from the contradiction between the individual and society and as such it does not necessitate any teleological precepts.10

The whole focus on what a future society might look like is, according to this writer, akin to an addiction that distracts us from living freely here and now: ‘The future-pessimistic, or optimistic, utopian or non-utopian, is but a drug habit’.11 In a letter to *Freedom* some two years later, one correspondent expressed his understanding of the permanent protest perspective in more concrete terms:
Individuals now can do something positive. Contract out – alone or in small groups. I exist behind the welfare state, after the full stop on the red tape forms. In short I bum around. My life is my permanent protest at the lousy world. I don’t rejoice at exploitation and oppression … I just see that nowadays an individual can do little but this permanent protest thing. My anarchism is between my legs, in books, poetry, thoughts and a few friends, I harm no-one and no-one harms me. I’m living my anarchism NOW.12

Other contributors to Freedom reacted to these views with the same hostility that Bookchin today reacts to views such as Bey’s, seeing them as expressing a self-indulgent escapism from social responsibility. Responding to ‘J.G.’, Arthur Uloth comments:

Well, of course if one is exhilarated by life in an authoritarian society, and finds the joy of battle in resisting social pressures, one is welcome to one’s fun. Personally, I find a world of H-Bombs and concentration camps a bit of a bore. I can think of many better ways of living … Ways that are quite within the range of human possibilities.13

Within this debate, which strikingly anticipates the terms of Bookchin’s polemic with lifestyle anarchism, Ward staked out an interesting intermediate position.

In an article published in Freedom in 1961, and originally delivered that year to a summer school of the London Anarchist Group, entitled ‘Anarchism and Respectability’, Ward sets out clearly where he stands on these issues.14 Ward begins by arguing, on lines similar to Molnar, that the idea of creating an ‘anarchist society’ is not ‘an intellectually respectable idea’. Ward concedes that the permanent protest perspective represents one coherent response to this, and that it is, to this extent, intellectually respectable:
One reasonable reaction is to stress again the individual character of anarchism and declare like Robert Frost and Ammon Hennacy: ‘I believe in the one-man revolution. We ain’t going to get any other kind.’ … I think that those anarchists like George Molnar who see anarchism as permanent protest, have an attitude which is a good deal more respectable than those who in fact make it an attitude of permanent postponement.¹⁵

However, the main point of Ward’s article is to argue that permanent protest does not properly exhaust what anarchism is or should be about. Anarchism should aim to change society. For even if it cannot be wholly transformed in an anarchist direction, society can be more or less anarchic and the anarchist should strive to make them more rather than less: ‘The concept of a free society may be an abstraction, but that of a freeer society is not’. With this perspective the idea of an ‘anarchist society’ re-emerges but in a different way: ‘having thrown the idea of an anarchist society out of the front door’, Ward writes, ‘I want to let it in again by the back window. Not as an aim to be realised, but as a yardstick, a measurement or means of assessing reality’.¹⁶ Beyond the episodes of ‘permanent protest’, in which anarchy is fleetingly grabbed and enjoyed, there is a need for a social vision: a working, always provisional conception of a different kind of society towards which the anarchist should work.

In the next section, I will set out the aspirational social vision underlying Ward’s work. The section after this discusses themes in Ward’s work which are more consistent with the here and now emphasis of so-called lifestyle anarchism. The concluding section then brings the two themes together.

THE SOCIAL ANARCHIST THEME IN WARD

In a BBC radio programme broadcast in 1968, Ward comments: ‘I consider myself to be an anarchist-communist, in the Kropotkin
There is no doubting that Ward’s anarchism is centrally informed by a social vision that has some strong similarities with that of Kropotkin.

The point of convergence is the idea of the garden city developed in the work of Ebenezer Howard. Ward worked for the Town and Country Planning Association for about a decade, a voluntary organisation which emerged to propagate the ideas of Ebenezer Howard. He wrote frequently for the TCPA journal, *Town and Country Planning*. Ward’s essays repeatedly and sympathetically draw out the connections between this tradition of urban planning and the ideas of Kropotkin. In Howard’s vision, garden cities combine industrial and agricultural production mostly directed to local needs. Towns contain green spaces along with manufacturing units and housing. Each city is in a network of other, similar cities, with greenbelts preventing them merging into a single urban whole. Thus, instead of Town and Country, we have what Howard termed ‘Town-Country’. Within this structure, Ward imagines that each neighbourhood is self-governing. Neighbourhoods federate at the city level, and cities further federate to coordinate common affairs.

Many of Ward’s specific interventions and policy ideas fit readily into, and make a particular sense within, the framework of this ‘Town-Country’ social vision. For example, one can see how Ward’s advocacy of public transport and of planning to discourage use of the private motor car corresponds with this vision. Or consider the affinity between the garden city and Ward’s interest in allotments and community gardens. Ward explored how the principle of the community garden might be extended into small-scale industrial production in his work on the ‘community workshop’. Allotments and community workshops can, in turn, be linked to his advocacy of Local Exchange Trading Schemes. Following Howard, Ward argues that the local community should own its own land so that rents from its
use would belong to it and be available to fund local public services. 26

Ward’s practical applications of anarchism range across a wide variety of concerns – housing, education, transport, food, energy, water, and more – but one thing which holds much of this work together is the way each intervention on a specific subject draws on, and draws us towards, an integrated social vision of the garden city kind.

THE PLENITUDE OF ‘UNMAKE’: THE LIFESTYLE ANARCHIST THEME IN WARD

Ward’s anarchism is informed, then, by a definite vision of a possible future society. However, a good deal of Ward’s work is less concerned with mapping the possible future than with celebrating what people can and do experience here and now.

‘And now we see an immaculate vegetable patch with an old gentleman hoeing his onions’. 27 This sentence is characteristic of Ward’s work. It focuses our attention on something that is modest and which yet at the same time carries with it a dignity associated with creative self-assertion. Much of Ward’s work as a social historian or anthropologist is concerned with identifying spaces of this creatively self-assertive kind. Ward’s purpose is not merely observational. Implicitly at least, he celebrates the way in which people discover and create these spaces, and, in so doing, perhaps encourages us to seek them and carve them out of the social world in which we live.

This theme is apparent, firstly, in Ward’s work on the history of self-build movements in housing. Ward’s main work on this topic, Arcadia for All, traces the history of the ‘plotlands’ developments in the years before World War Two. 28 Starting at the end of the nineteenth century, working-class people began to
purchase land within reasonable distance of cities such as London at depressed prices. They built on these plots and, as they did so, new communities started to grow up in haphazard fashion. Many middle-class observers viewed the developments at the time with alarm and disdain, and post-war planning legislation was motivated in part by a desire to prevent them happening again. Ward, however, is deeply impressed by the episode. Where others see an unpleasant untidiness, even a ‘vast pastoral slum’, Ward sees a prime example of creative direct action by means of which working-class people crawled out of the very real urban slums in which they often lived and found for themselves a modest place in the sun. Implicitly contrasting the results with the oppressive uniformity of the UK’s post-war tower blocks and council estates, he writes of one such development, Laindon:

Let us zoom in on one particular street in the Laindon end of Basildon. It probably has a greater variety of housing types than any street in Britain. It starts on the right with two late Victorian villas … On the left is a detached house with a porch embellished with Doric wooden columns … Then there are some privately-built houses of the 1960s, and next a wooden cabin with an old lady leaning over the gate … Here is a characteristic improved shanty with imitation stone quoins … Most of the old houses have some feature in the garden … This one has a fountain, working. This one has a windmill about five feet high painted black and white like the timber and asbestos house it adjoins. The sails are turning. Here’s one with a pond full of goldfish.

In his later and more general work on the history of self-build, Cotters and Squatters, Ward sympathetically describes the history of popular squatting in Royal forests. Much squatting activity
reflected a widespread folk belief that if a person erects a functioning building between sunrise and sunset then he or she has the right to remain. Over time, some squatted communities did establish an official position. These included the ‘free miners’ of the Forest of Dean who for a period in the nineteenth century existed as ‘a community of small proprietors [with] a considerable degree of independence and freedom from authority’. Building on the oral history work of Raphael Samuel and his students, Ward also describes the settlement at Headington Quarry in Oxford. With a ready supply of valuable stone and a lack of clear ownership titles to the land, self-build housing went up, and by the nineteenth century the area had developed into a thriving community which made ends meet partly by supplying building materials, masonry work and washing services to the Oxford colleges, and partly by means of a ‘varied series of poaching, rabbit-snaring, pig-rearing and cow-keeping activities’. Unusual in being ‘a village which had arisen singularly free of landlords’, Ward quotes Samuel’s assessment that ‘[f]or centuries it … enjoyed what was virtually an extra-parochial existence, a kind of anarchy, in which the villagers were responsible to nobody but themselves’.

We find a similar celebration of what Ward terms a ‘peopled landscape’ in his writing on allotments. ‘Some allotment sites’, Ward writes,

encapsulate … something of a visual paradise. At Bladon allotments near Woodstock in Oxfordshire … Poppies stray over the edges of the cornfield that has missed treatment, to bloom amongst the french beans. A footpath skirts the length of the site, but an enterprising holder on a very well-tended plot has created a splendid scarecrow …

The allotment represents:
a working-class landscape, a productive landscape, conforming to no ‘style’ … found in conditions of need and poverty … It is an intensive and an inventive landscape, free from everyday outside controls and forced by necessity towards initiative and invention.\textsuperscript{38}

Finally, consider Ward’s discussions of the ways in which children make use of their environment. A recurring theme of Ward’s \textit{The Child in the City}, is children’s creative appropriation of city spaces. Here is Ward writing about new estates in suburbia:

The place that is \textit{becoming}, the unfinished habitat, is rich in experiences and adventures for the child, just because of the plenitude of ‘unmake’ [:] bits of no-man’s land which have ceased to be agricultural and have yet to become residential. There are secret places for solitude among the weeds and hill-locks, gregarious places in hollows like Keith Waterhouse’s basins, where the soil is worn smooth by feet and bicycle tires and where some-one has looped a stolen length of rope round the branch of a tree and an impromptu playground develops, to disappear next year or the one after that when the builders move in.\textsuperscript{39}

Ward quotes Marjorie Allen, a campaigner for ‘nursery schools, the de-institutionalisation of residential children’s homes, tree planting, play parks and adventure playgrounds’, who holds that all urban children must have access to ‘gardens where they can keep their pets and enjoy their hobbies and perhaps watch their fathers (\textit{sic}) working with real tools; secret places where they can create their own worlds; the shadow and mystery that lend enchantment to play’.\textsuperscript{40}
CONCLUSION: BRIDGING SOCIAL AND LIFESTYLE ANARCHISM

Let us recap. We saw in the second section how Ward tried to stake out an intermediate position in the ‘permanent protest’ debate within British anarchism in the early 1960s. Ward accepted, with Molnar and others, that an ‘anarchist society’ is impossible. He accepted a stance of ‘permanent protest’ as a legitimate response to this finding. However, he argued that anarchism should be about more than ‘permanent protest’. It should continue to aim at wider social change. For while an anarchist society might not be possible, a substantially more anarchistic society is possible and represents a perfectly valid goal.

In the third section, we looked briefly at the specific vision of the good society that informs Ward’s work. The fourth section then described what one might see as an implicitly lifestyle anarchist theme in Ward’s work: his celebration of the ways in which people manage, here and now, to grab a little of the free living that they might enjoy more securely or consistently in a society of the future.

It should be clear from the foregoing account that Ward is a kind of social anarchist. This is the import of his insistence that the ‘permanent protest’ perspective is inadequate as a complete view of anarchism. His social anarchism is given clear content by the social vision described above. Indeed, there would seem to be a good deal of similarity between Ward’s social vision as described above and that which Bookchin has set out in his writings on social ecology. Both emphasise the need for a radical localisation of economic life and governance. Both look forward to a new kind of self-governing community in which the boundaries between rural and urban life are overcome, and in which the social product is distributed on a substantially egalitarian basis. Both see science and technology as potentially liberating forces within the frame-
work of such communities. Ward self-consciously looks back to Kropotkin; Bookchin acknowledges that social ecology has affini-
ties with Kropotkin’s ideas so far as the form of post-capitalist society is concerned. This is why it is entirely unsurprising that as editor of *Anarchy* in the 1960s, Ward published some of Bookchin’s pioneering essays in the theory of social ecology (such as ‘Ecology and Revolutionary Thought’).

However, Ward also places an intrinsic value on the immediate, local, and perhaps temporary, victory: the successful squat; the plotland development; the child’s creative occupation of wasteground. These experiences are valuable in their own right, and should be celebrated as such, and not only as steps – if, indeed, they are steps – to a new society. There is, then, an element to Ward’s anarchism which marks an affinity with those whom Bookchin described as lifestyle anarchists. This helps explain why, when Ward reviewed Bookchin’s polemic against lifestyle anarchism, Ward found something worthwhile in the notion of the TAZ:

> once the phrase Temporary Autonomous Zones lodges in your mind you begin to see it/them everywhere: fleeting pockets of anarchy that occur in daily life. In this sense it describes a perhaps more useful concept than that of an anarchist society, since the most libertarian societies that we know of have their authoritarian elements, and vice versa.41

Ward’s work therefore embodies the two perspectives and, quite plausibly, refuses to choose between them. Imagine that there are some activities that are constitutive of an anarchist lifestyle. One might value some such activities instrumentally because of their contribution to the creation of a new and better society. This, however, does not exclude one from also valuing them intrinsi-
cally as direct manifestations of an anarchic way of being. Take
the case of someone who is deeply involved in organising and working in a community garden. From Ward’s standpoint, it makes sense to see such activity as valuable instrumentally because of the way it pushes society in the direction indicated by his overarching vision of what a substantially more anarchic society would look like. But it also makes sense to see such activity as valuable because of the way it enables the individual to create and experience a more anarchic existence here and now. Neither perspective need be to the exclusion of the other.

A critic might point out, rightly, that not all activities on an anarchist lifestyle wish-list will necessarily have this double quality. Some activities might well have much more of one quality than the other. Does this not give rise to a possible tension between activities that can be expected to build a new society and activities that grab a bit of the anarchic good life here and now? This possible tension needs to be acknowledged. However, it is surely hyperbole to see it as calling for a repudiation of one kind of activity for the other.

On the one hand, one can agree with Bookchin that someone who simply throws out the idea of action aimed at wider social change, the creation of a new and better society, in favour of anarchic episodes and autonomous zones here and now, is giving up on something important in the anarchist tradition. On the other hand, there is also something unreasonable about the idea (which Bookchin does not assert) that we should make our lives simply vehicles for the construction of a better future society: tarmac, as it were, on the highway of history. It is reasonable for an anarchist to think that we are entitled to grab a bit of the anarchic good life here and now, if we can get it, even if this is to some extent at the cost of activities that one might expect to make a bigger contribution to overall social change. Thus, to the extent that the two conflict, a reasonable anarchist would (or at least may) aim at some sort of balance between lifestyle instrumentalism and living more anarchically here and now.
That Colin Ward’s work expresses this balanced perspective, in a such a rich and multifarious way, is one reason to see it as a major and stimulating contribution to anarchist, and wider progressive, thought.

NOTES

11. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
30. Ibid., p. 28.
34. Ibid., p. 121.
35. Ibid., p. 122.
37. Crouch and Ward, *The Allotment*, p. 188.
Anarchism is primarily understood as a skeptical theory of political legitimation. The term anarchism is derived from the negation of the Greek term archê, which means first principle, foundation, or ruling power. Anarchy is thus rule by no one or non-rule. Some argue that non-ruling occurs when there is rule by allâ€”with consensus or unanimity providing an optimistic goal (see Depuis-Déri 2010). In more recent iterations, anarchism has been used to critique gender hierarchies, racial hierarchies, and the likeâ€”also including a critique of human domination over nature. Thus anarchism also includes, to name a few varieties: anarcha-feminism or feminist anarchism (see Kornegger 1975), queer anarchism or anarchist queer theory (see Daring et al.