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**SOCIAL  
ANARCHISM  
OR  
LIFESTYLE  
ANARCHISM**

**AN UNBRIDGEABLE CHASM**

**Murray  
Bookchin**



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## A NOTE TO THE READER

This short work was written to deal with the fact that anarchism stands at a turning point in its long and turbulent history.

At a time when popular distrust of the state has reached extraordinary proportions in many countries; when the division of society among a handful of opulently wealthy individuals and corporations contrasts sharply with the growing impoverishment of millions of people on a scale unprecedented since the Great Depression decade; when the intensity of exploitation has forced people in growing numbers to accept a work week of a length typical of the last century — anarchists have formed neither a coherent program nor a revolutionary organization to provide a direction for the mass discontent that contemporary society is creating.

Instead, this discontent is being absorbed by political reactionaries and channeled into hostility toward ethnic minorities, immigrants, and the poor and marginal, such as single mothers, the homeless, the elderly, and even environmentalists, who are being depicted as the principal sources of contemporary social problems.

The failure of anarchists — or, at least, of many self-styled anarchists — to reach a potentially huge body of supporters stems not only from the sense of powerlessness that permeates millions of people today. It is due in no small measure to the changes that have occurred among many anarchists over the past two decades. Like it or not, thousands of self-styled anarchists have slowly surrendered the social core of anarchist ideas to the all-pervasive Yuppie and New Age personalism that marks this decadent, bourgeoisified era. In a very real sense,

they are no longer socialists — the advocates of a communally oriented libertarian society — and they eschew any serious commitment to an organized, programmatically coherent *social* confrontation with the existing order. In growing numbers, they have followed the largely middle-class trend of the time into a decadent personalism in the name of their sovereign “autonomy,” a queasy mysticism in the name of “intuitionism,” and a prelapsarian vision of history in the name of “primitivism.” Indeed, capitalism itself has been mystified by many self-styled anarchists into an abstractly conceived “industrial society,” and the various oppressions that it inflicts upon society have been grossly imputed to the impact of “technology,” not the underlying social relationships between capital and labor, structured around an all-pervasive marketplace economy that has penetrated into every sphere of life, from culture to friendships and family. The tendency of many anarchists to root the ills of society in “civilization” rather than in capital and hierarchy, in the “megamachine” rather than in the commodification of life, and in shadowy “simulations” rather than in the very tangible tyranny of material want and exploitation is not unlike bourgeois apologias for “downsizing” in modern corporations today as the product of “technological advances” rather than of the bourgeoisie’s insatiable appetite for profit.

My emphasis in the pages that follow concerns the steady withdrawal of self-styled anarchists these days from the social domain that formed the principal arena of earlier anarchists, such as anarchosyndicalists and revolutionary libertarian communists, into episodic adventures that eschew any organizational commitment and intellectual coherence — and, more disturbingly, into a crude egotism that feeds on the larger cultural decadence of present-day bourgeois society.

Anarchists, to be sure, can justly celebrate the fact that they have long sought complete sexual freedom, the aestheticization of everyday life, and the liberation of humanity from the oppressive psychic constraints that have denied humanity its full sensual as well as intellectual freedom. For my own part, as the author of “Desire and Need” some thirty years ago, I can only applaud Emma Goldman’s demand that she does not want a revolution unless she can dance to it — and, as my Wobbly

parents once added early in this century, one in which they cannot sing.

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But at the very least, they demanded a revolution — a *social* revolution — without which these aesthetic and psychological goals could not be achieved for humanity as a whole. And they made *this* basic revolutionary endeavor central to all their hopes and ideals. Regrettably, this revolutionary endeavor, indeed the high-minded idealism and class consciousness on which it rests, is central to fewer and fewer of the self-styled anarchists I encounter today. It is precisely the revolutionary social outlook, so basic to the definition of a *social* anarchism, with all its theoretical and organization underpinnings, that I wish to recover in the critical examination of *life-style* anarchism that occupies the pages that follow. Unless I am gravely mistaken — as I hope I am — the revolutionary and social goals of anarchism are suffering far-reaching erosion to a point where the word *anarchy* will become part of the chic bourgeois vocabulary of the coming century — naughty, rebellious, insouciant, but deliciously safe.

— July 12, 1995

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## SOCIAL ANARCHISM OR LIFESTYLE ANARCHISM

FOR SOME TWO CENTURIES, anarchism — a very ecumenical body of anti-authoritarian ideas — developed in the tension between two basically contradictory tendencies: a personalistic commitment to individual *autonomy* and a collectivist commitment to social *freedom*. These tendencies have by no means been reconciled in the history of libertarian thought. Indeed, for much of the last century, they simply coexisted within anarchism as a minimalist credo of opposition to the State rather than as a maximalist credo that articulated the kind of new society that had to be created in its place.

Which is not to say that various schools of anarchism did not advocate very specific forms of social organization, albeit often markedly at variance with one another. Essentially, however, anarchism as a whole advanced what Isaiah Berlin has called “negative freedom,” that is to say, a formal “freedom *from*,” rather than a substantive “freedom *to*.” Indeed, anarchism often celebrated its commitment to negative freedom as evidence of its own pluralism, ideological tolerance, or creativity — or even, as more than one recent postmodernist celebrant has argued, its incoherence.

Anarchism’s failure to resolve this tension, to articulate the relationship of the individual to the collective, and to enunciate the historical circumstances that would make possible a stateless anarchic society produced problems in anarchist thought that remain unresolved to this day. Pierre Joseph Proudhon, more than many anarchists of his day, attempted to formulate a fairly concrete image of a libertarian society. Based on contracts, essentially between small producers, cooperatives, and communes, Proudhon’s vision was redolent of the provincial craft world into which he was born. But his attempt to meld a *patroniste*, often

patriarchal notion of liberty with contractual social arrangements was lacking in depth. The craftsman, cooperative, and commune, relating to one another on bourgeois contractual terms of equity or justice rather than on the communist terms of ability and needs, reflected the artisan's bias for personal autonomy, leaving any moral commitment to a collective undefined beyond the good intentions of its members.

Indeed, Proudhon's famous declaration that "whoever puts his hand on me to govern me is an usurper and a tyrant; I declare him my enemy" strongly tilts toward a personalistic, negative freedom that overshadows his opposition to oppressive social institutions and the vision of an anarchist society that he projected. His statement easily blends into William Godwin's distinctly individualistic declaration: "There is but one power to which I can yield a heartfelt obedience, the decision of my own understanding, the dictates of my own conscience." Godwin's appeal to the "authority" of *his* own understanding and conscience, like Proudhon's condemnation of the "hand" that threatens to restrict *his* liberty, gave anarchism an immensely individualistic thrust.

Compelling as such declarations may be — and in the United States they have won considerable admiration from the so-called libertarian (more accurately, proprietarian) right, with its avowals of "free" enterprise — they reveal an anarchism very much at odds with itself. By contrast, Michael Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin held essentially collectivist views — in Kropotkin's case, explicitly communist ones. Bakunin emphatically prioritized the social over the individual. Society, he writes,

antedates and at the same time survives every human individual, being in this respect like Nature itself. It is eternal like Nature, or rather, having been born upon our earth, it will last as long as the earth. A radical revolt against society would therefore be just as impossible for man as a revolt against Nature, human society being nothing else but the last great manifestation or creation of Nature upon this earth. And an individual who would want to rebel against society . . . would place himself beyond the pale of real existence.<sup>1</sup>



Bakunin often expressed his opposition to the individualistic trend in liberalism and anarchism with considerable polemical emphasis. Although society is "indebted to individuals," he wrote in a relatively mild statement, the formation of the individual is social:

even the most wretched individual of our present society could not exist and develop without the cumulative social efforts of countless generations. Thus the individual, his freedom and reason, are the products of society, and not vice versa: society is not the product of individuals comprising it; and the higher, the more fully the individual is developed, the greater his freedom — and the more he is the product of society, the more does he receive from society and the greater his debt to it.<sup>2</sup>

Kropotkin, for his part, retained this collectivistic emphasis with remarkable consistency. In what was probably his most widely read work, his *Encyclopaedia Britannica* essay on "Anarchism," Kropotkin distinctly located the economic conceptions of anarchism on the "left-wing" of "all socialisms," calling for the radical abolition of private property and the State in "the spirit of local and personal initiative, and of free federation from the simple to the compound, *in lieu of* the present hierarchy from the center to the periphery." Kropotkin's works on ethics, in fact, include a sustained critique of liberalistic attempts to counterpose the individual to society, indeed to subordinate society to the individual or ego. He placed himself squarely in the socialist tradition. His anarchocommunism, predicated on advances in technology and increased productivity, became a prevailing libertarian ideology in the 1890s, steadily elbowing out collectivist notions of distribution based on equity. Anarchists, "in common with most socialists," Kropotkin emphasized, recognized the need for "periods of accelerated evolution which are called revolutions," ultimately yielding a society based on federations of "every township or commune of the local groups of producers and consumers."<sup>3</sup>

With the emergence of anarchosyndicalism and anarchocommunism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century,

the need to resolve the tension between the individualist and the collectivist tendencies essentially became moot.\* Anarcho-individualism was largely marginalized by mass socialistic workers' movements, of which most anarchists considered themselves the left wing. In an era of stormy social upheaval, marked by the rise of a mass working-class movement that culminated in the 1930s and the Spanish Revolution, anarchosyndicalists and anarchocommunists, no less than Marxists, considered anarcho-individualism to be petty-bourgeois exotica. They often attacked it quite directly as a middle-class indulgence, rooted far more in liberalism than in anarchism.

The period hardly allowed individualists, in the name of their "uniqueness," to ignore the need for energetic revolutionary forms of organization with coherent and compelling programs. Far from indulging in Max Stirner's metaphysics of the ego and its "uniqueness," anarchist activists required a basic theoretical, discursive, and programmatically oriented literature, a need that was filled by, among others, Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread* (London, 1913), Diego Abad de Santillán's *El organismo económico de la revolución* (Barcelona, 1936), and G. P. Maximoff's *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin* (English publication in 1953, three years after Maximoff's death; the date of original compilation, not provided in the English translation, may have been years, even decades earlier). No Stirnerite "Union of Egoists," to my knowledge, ever rose to prominence — even assuming such a union could be established and survive the "uniqueness" of its egocentric participants:

#### INDIVIDUALIST ANARCHISM AND REACTION

TO BE SURE, ideological individualism did not fade away altogether during this period of sweeping social unrest. A sizable reservoir of individualist anarchists, especially in the Anglo-

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\* Anarchosyndicalism can be traced back, in fact, to notions of a "Grand Holiday" or general strike proposed by the English Chartists. Among Spanish anarchists, it already was an accepted practice by the 1880s, a decade or so before it was spelled out as a doctrine in France.

American world, were nourished by the ideas of John Locke and John Stuart Mill, as well as Stirner himself. Home-grown individualists with varying degrees of commitment to libertarian views littered the anarchist horizon. In practice, anarcho-individualism attracted precisely *individuals*, from Benjamin Tucker in the United States, an adherent of a quaint version of free competition, to Federica Montseny in Spain, who often honored her Stirnerite beliefs in the breach. Despite their avowals of an anarchocommunist ideology, Nietzscheans like Emma Goldman remained cheek to jowl in spirit with individualists.

Hardly any anarcho-individualists exercised an influence on the emerging working class. They expressed their opposition in uniquely personal forms, especially in fiery tracts, outrageous behavior, and aberrant lifestyles in the cultural ghettos of fin de siècle New York, Paris, and London. As a credo, individualist anarchism remained largely a bohemian lifestyle, most conspicuous in its demands for sexual freedom ("free love") and enamored of innovations in art, behavior, and clothing.

It was in times of severe social repression and deadening social quiescence that individualist anarchists came to the foreground of libertarian activity — and then primarily as terrorists. In France, Spain, and the United States, individualistic anarchists committed acts of terrorism that gave anarchism its reputation as a violently sinister conspiracy. Those who became terrorists were less often libertarian socialists or communists than desperate men and women who used weapons and explosives to protest the injustices and philistinism of their time, putatively in the name of "propaganda of the deed." Most often, however, individualist anarchism expressed itself in culturally defiant behavior. It came to prominence in anarchism precisely to the degree that anarchists lost their connection with a viable public sphere.

Today's reactionary social context greatly explains the emergence of a phenomenon in Euro-American anarchism that cannot be ignored: the spread of individualist anarchism. In a time when even respectable forms of socialism are in pell-mell retreat from principles that might in any way be construed as radical, issues of lifestyle are once again supplanting social action and revolutionary politics in anarchism. In the traditionally individualist-liberal United States and Britain, the 1990s are awash in self-styled

anarchists who — their flamboyant radical rhetoric aside — are cultivating a latter-day anarcho-individualism that I will call *lifestyle anarchism*. Its preoccupations with the ego and its uniqueness and its polymorphous concepts of resistance are steadily eroding the socialistic character of the libertarian tradition. No less than Marxism and other socialisms, anarchism can be profoundly influenced by the bourgeois environment it professes to oppose, with the result that the growing “inwardness” and narcissism of the yuppie generation have left their mark upon many avowed radicals. Ad hoc adventurism, personal bravura, an aversion to theory oddly akin to the antirational biases of postmodernism, celebrations of theoretical incoherence (pluralism), a basically apolitical and anti-organizational commitment to imagination, desire, and ecstasy, and an intensely self-oriented enchantment of everyday life, reflect the toll that social reaction has taken on Euro-American anarchism over the past two decades.\*

During the 1970s, writes Katinka Matson, the compiler of a compendium of techniques for personal psychological development, there occurred “a remarkable change in the way we perceive ourselves in the world. The 1960s,” she continues, “saw a preoccupation with political activism, Vietnam, ecology, be-ins, communes, drugs, etc. Today we are turning inward: we are looking for personal definition, personal improvement, personal achievement, and personal enlightenment.”<sup>4</sup> Matson’s noxious little bestiary, compiled for *Psychology Today* magazine, covers every technique from acupuncture to the *I Ching*, from est to zone therapy. In retrospect, she might well have included lifestyle anarchism in her compendium of inward-looking soporifics, most of which foster ideas of individual autonomy rather

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\*For all its shortcomings, the anarchic counterculture during the early part of the hectic 1960s was often intensely political and cast expressions like desire and ecstasy in eminently social terms, often deriding the personalistic tendencies of the later Woodstock generation. The transformation of the “youth culture,” as it was originally called, from the birth of the civil rights and peace movements to Woodstock and Altamont, with its emphasis on a purely self-indulgent form of “pleasure,” is reflected in Dylan’s devolution from “Blowin’ in the Wind” to “Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands.”

than social freedom. Psychotherapy in all its mutations cultivates an inwardly directed “self” that seeks autonomy in a quiescent psychological condition of emotional self-sufficiency — not the socially involved self denoted by freedom. In lifestyle anarchism as in psychotherapy, the ego is counterposed to the collective; the self, to society; the personal, to the communal.

The ego — more precisely, its incarnation in various lifestyles — has become an *idée fixe* for many post-1960s anarchists, who are losing contact with the need for an organized, collectivistic, programmatic opposition to the existing social order. Invertebrate “protests,” directionless escapades, self-assertions, and a very personal “recolonization” of everyday life parallel the psychotherapeutic, New Age, self-oriented lifestyles of bored baby boomers and members of Generation X. Today, what passes for anarchism in America and increasingly in Europe is little more than an introspective personalism that denigrates responsible social commitment; an encounter group variously renamed a “collective” or an “affinity group”; a state of mind that arrogantly derides structure, organization, and public involvement; and a playground for juvenile antics.

Consciously or not, many lifestyle anarchists articulate Michel Foucault’s approach of “personal insurrection” rather than social revolution, premised as it is on an ambiguous and cosmic critique of power as such rather than on a demand for the *institutionalized* empowerment of the oppressed in popular assemblies, councils, and/or confederations. To the extent that this trend rules out the real possibility of social revolution — either as an “impossibility” or as an “imaginary” — it vitiates socialistic or communistic anarchism in a fundamental sense. Indeed, Foucault fosters a perspective that “resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. . . . Hence there is no single [read: universal] locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary.” Caught as we all are in the ubiquitous embrace of a power so cosmic that, Foucault’s overstatements and equivocations aside, resistance becomes entirely polymorphous, we drift futilely between the “solitary” and the “rampant.”<sup>5</sup> His meandering ideas come down to the notion that resistance must necessarily be a guerrilla war that is always present — and that is inevitably defeated.

Lifestyle, like individualist, anarchism bears a disdain for theory, with mystical, and primitivistic filiations that are generally too vague, intuitional, and even antirational to analyze directly. They are more properly symptoms than causes of the general drift toward a sanctification of the self as a refuge from the existing social malaise. Nonetheless, largely personalistic anarchisms still have certain muddy theoretical premises that lend themselves to critical examination.

Their ideological pedigree is basically liberal, grounded in the myth of the fully autonomous individual whose claims to self-sovereignty are validated by axiomatic "natural rights," "intrinsic worth," or, on a more sophisticated level, an intuited Kantian transcendental ego that is generative of all knowable reality. These traditional views surface in Max Stirner's "I" or ego, which shares with existentialism a tendency to absorb all of reality into itself, as if the universe turned on the choices of the self-oriented individual.\*

More recent works on lifestyle anarchism generally sidestep Stirner's sovereign, all-encompassing "I," albeit retaining its egocentric emphasis, and tend toward existentialism, recycled Situationism, Buddhism, Taoism, antirationalism, and primitivism — or, quite ecumenically, all of them in various permutations. Their commonalities, as we shall see, are redolent of a prelapsarian return to an original, often diffuse, and even petulantly infantile ego that ostensibly precedes history, civilization, and a sophisticated technology — possibly language itself — and they have nourished more than one reactionary political ideology over the past century.

#### AUTONOMY OR FREEDOM?

WITHOUT FALLING INTO the trap of social constructionism that sees every category as a product of a given social order, we are obliged to ask for a definition of the "free individual." How does

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\*The philosophical pedigree of this ego and its fortunes can be traced through Fichte back to Kant. Stirner's view of the ego was merely a coarse mutation of the Kantian and particularly the Fichtean egos, marked by hectoring rather than insight.

individuality come into being, and under what circumstances is it free?

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When lifestyle anarchists call for autonomy rather than freedom, they thereby forfeit the rich social connotations of freedom. Indeed, today's steady anarchist drumbeat for autonomy rather than social freedom cannot be dismissed as accidental, particularly in Anglo-American varieties of libertarian thought, where the notion of autonomy more closely corresponds to personal liberty. Its roots lie in the Roman imperial tradition of *libertas*, wherein the untrammelled ego is "free" to own his personal property — and to gratify his personal lusts. Today, the individual endowed with "sovereign rights" is seen by many lifestyle anarchists as antithetical not only to the State but to society as such.

Strictly defined, the Greek word *autonomia* means "independence," connoting a self-managing ego, independent of any clientage or reliance on others for its maintenance. To my knowledge, it was not widely used by the Greek philosophers; indeed, it is not even mentioned in F. E. Peters's historical lexicon of *Greek Philosophical Terms*. *Autonomy*, like *liberty*, refers to the man (or woman) who Plato would have ironically called the "master of himself," a condition "when the better principle of the human soul controls the worse." Even for Plato, the attempt to achieve autonomy through mastery of oneself constituted a paradox, "for the master is also the servant and the servant the master, and in all these modes of speaking the same person is predicated" (*Republic*, book 4, 431). Characteristically, Paul Goodman, an essentially individualistic anarchist, maintained that "for me, the chief principle of anarchism is not freedom but autonomy, the ability to initiate a task and do it one's own way" — a view worthy of an aesthete but not of a social revolutionary.<sup>6</sup>

While *autonomy* is associated with the presumably self-sovereign individual, *freedom* dialectically interweaves the individual with the collective. The word *freedom* has its analogue in the Greek *eleutheria* and derives from the German *Freiheit*, a term that still retains a *gemeinschaftliche* or communal ancestry in Teutonic tribal life and law. When applied to the individual, *freedom* thus preserves a social or collective interpretation of that individual's origins and development as a self. In "freedom," individual

selfhood does not stand opposed to or apart from the collective but is significantly formed — and in a rational society, would be realized — by his or her own social existence. Freedom thus does not subsume the individual's liberty but denotes its actualization.\*

The confusion between autonomy and freedom is all too evident in L. Susan Brown's *The Politics of Individualism (POI)*, a recent attempt to articulate and elaborate a basically individualist anarchism, yet retain some filiations with anarcho-communism.<sup>7</sup> If lifestyle anarchism needs an academic pedigree, it will find it in her attempt to meld Bakunin and Kropotkin with John Stuart Mill. Alas, herein lies a problem that is more than academic. Brown's work exhibits the extent to which concepts of personal autonomy stand at odds with concepts of social freedom. In essence, like Goodman she interprets anarchism as a philosophy not of social freedom but of personal autonomy. She then offers a notion of "existential individualism" that she contrasts sharply both with "instrumental individualism" (or C. B. Macpherson's "possessive [bourgeois] individualism") and with "collectivism" — leavened with extensive quotations from Emma Goldman, who was by no means the ablest thinker in the libertarian pantheon.

Brown's "existential individualism" shares liberalism's "commitment to individual autonomy and self-determination," she writes (*POI*, p. 2). "While much of anarchist theory has been viewed as communist by anarchists and non-anarchists alike," she observes, "what distinguishes anarchism from other communist philosophies is anarchism's uncompromising and relentless celebration of individual self-determination and autonomy. To be an anarchist — whether communist, individualist, mutualist, syndicalist, or feminist — is to affirm a commitment to the primacy of individual freedom" (*POI*, p. 2) — and

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\* Unfortunately, in Romance languages *freedom* is generally translated with a word derived from the Latin *libertas* — French *liberté*, Italian *libertà*, or Spanish *libertad*. English, which combines both German and Latin, allows for making a distinction between freedom and liberty, which other languages do not. I can only recommend that on this subject, writers in other languages use both English words as needed to retain the distinction between them.



here she uses the word *freedom* in the sense of autonomy. Although anarchism's "critique of private property and advocacy of free communal economic relations" (*POI*, p. 2) move Brown's anarchism beyond liberalism, it nonetheless upholds individual rights over — and *against* — those of the collective.

"What distinguishes [existential individualism] from the collectivist point of view," Brown goes on, "is that individualists" — anarchists no less than liberals — "believe in the existence of an internally motivated and authentic free will, while *most* collectivists understand the human individual as shaped externally by others — the individual for them is 'constructed' by the collective" (*POI*, p. 12, emphasis added). Essentially, Brown dismisses collectivism — not just state socialism, but collectivism as such — with the liberal canard that a collectivist society entails the subordination of the individual to the group. Her extraordinary suggestion that "*most* collectivists" have regarded individual people as "simply human flotsam and jetsam swept along in the current of history" (*POI*, p. 12) is a case in point. Stalin certainly held this view, and so did many Bolsheviks, with their hypostasization of social forces over individual desires and intentions. But collectivists *as such*? Are we to ignore the generous traditions of collectivism that sought a rational, democratic, and harmonious society — the visions of William Morris, say, or Gustav Landauer? What about Robert Owen, the Fourierists, democratic and libertarian socialists, Social Democrats of an earlier era, even Karl Marx and Peter Kropotkin? I am not sure that "*most* collectivists," even those who are anarchists, would accept the crude determinism that Brown attributes to Marx's social interpretations. By creating straw "collectivists" who are hard-line mechanists, Brown rhetorically counterposes a mysteriously and autogenetically constituted individual, on the one hand, with an omnipresent, presumably oppressive, even totalitarian collective, on the other. Brown, in effect, overstates the contrast between "existential individualism" and the beliefs of "*most* collectivists" — to the point where her arguments seem misguided at best or disingenuous at worst.

It is elementary that, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ringing opening to the *Social Contract* notwithstanding, people are definitely *not*

“born free,” let alone autonomous. Indeed, quite to the contrary, they are born *very* unfree, highly dependent, and conspicuously heteronomous. What freedom, independence, and autonomy people have in a given historical period is the product of long social traditions and, yes, a *collective* development—which is not to deny that individuals play an important role in that development, indeed are ultimately obliged to do so if they wish to be free.\*

Brown’s argument leads to a surprisingly simplistic conclusion. “It is not the group that gives shape to the individual,” we are told, “but rather individuals who give form and content to the group. A group is *a collection of individuals, no more and no less*; it has no life or consciousness of its own” (*POI*, p. 12, emphasis added). Not only does this incredible formulation closely resemble Margaret Thatcher’s notorious statement that there is no such thing as a society but only individuals; it attests to a positivistic, indeed naive social myopia in which the universal is wholly separated from the concrete. Aristotle, one would have thought, resolved this problem when he chided Plato for creating a realm of ineffable “forms” that existed apart from their tangible and imperfect “copies.”

It remains true that individuals never form mere “collections” — except perhaps in cyberspace; quite to the contrary, even when they seem atomized and hermetic, they are immensely defined by the relationships they establish or are obliged to establish with each other, by virtue of their very real existence as social beings. The idea that a collective — and by extrapolation, society — is merely a “collection of individuals, no more and no less” represents an “insight” into the nature of human

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\*In a delicious mockery of the myth that people are born free, Bakunin astutely declared: “How ridiculous are the ideas of the individualists of the Jean Jacques Rousseau school and of the Proudhonian mutualists who conceive society as the result of the free contract of individuals absolutely independent of one another and entering into mutual relations only because of the convention drawn up among men. As if these men had dropped from the skies, bringing with them speech, will, original thought, and as if they were alien to anything of the earth, that is, anything having social origin.” Maximoff, *Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, p. 167.

consociation that is hardly liberal but, today particularly, potentially reactionary.

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By insistently identifying collectivism with an implacable social determinism, Brown herself *creates* an abstract “individual,” one that is not even existential in the strictly conventional sense of the word. Minimally, human existence *presupposes* the social and material conditions necessary for the maintenance of life, sanity, intelligence, and discourse; and the affective qualities Brown regards as essential for her voluntaristic form of communism: care, concern, and sharing. Lacking the rich articulation of social relationships in which people are embedded from birth through maturity to old age, a “collection of individuals” such as Brown posits would be, to put it bluntly, not a *society* at all. It would be literally a “collection” in Thatcher’s sense of free-booting, self-seeking, egoistic monads. Presumably complete unto themselves, they are, by dialectical inversion, immensely *de-individuated* for want of any aim beyond the satisfaction of their own needs and pleasures — which are often socially engineered today in any case.

Acknowledging that individuals are self-motivated and possess free will does not require us to reject collectivism, given that they are also capable of developing an awareness of the social conditions under which these eminently human potentialities are exercised. The attainment of freedom rests partly on biological facts, as anyone who has raised a child knows; partly, on social facts, as anyone who lives in a community knows; and contrary to social constructionists, partly on the interaction of environment and inborn personal proclivities, as any thinking person knows. Individuality did not spring into being *ab novo*. Like the idea of freedom, it has a long social and psychological history.

Left to his or her own self, the individual loses the indispensable social moorings that make for what an anarchist might be expected to prize in individuality: reflective powers, which derive in great part from discourse; the emotional equipment that nourishes rage against unfreedom; the sociality that motivates the desire for radical change; and the sense of responsibility that engenders social action.

Indeed, Brown’s thesis has disturbing implications for social action. If individual “autonomy” overrides any commit-

ment to a “collectivity,” there is no basis whatever for social institutionalization, decision-making, or even administrative coordination. Each individual, self-contained in his or her “autonomy,” is free to do whatever he or she wants — presumably, following the old liberal formula, if it does not impede the “autonomy” of others. Even democratic decision-making is jettisoned as authoritarian. “Democratic rule is still rule,” Brown warns. “While it allows for more individual participation in government than monarchy or totalitarian dictatorship, it still inherently involves the repression of the wills of some people. This is obviously at odds with the existential individual, who must maintain the integrity of will in order to *be* existentially free” (POI, p. 53). Indeed, so transcendently sacrosanct is the autonomous individual will, in Brown’s eyes, that she approvingly quotes Peter Marshall’s claim that, according to anarchist principles, “the majority has no more right to dictate to the minority, *even a minority of one*, than the minority to the majority” (POI, p. 140, emphasis added).

Denigrating rational, discursive, and direct-democratic procedures for collective decision-making as “dictating” and “ruling” awards a minority of one sovereign ego the right to abort the decision of a majority. But the fact remains that a free society will either be democratic, or it will not be achieved at all. In the very *existential* situation, if you please, of an anarchist society — a direct libertarian democracy — decisions would most certainly be made following open discussion. Thereafter the out-voted minority — even a minority of one — would have every opportunity to present countervailing arguments to try to change that decision. Decision-making by consensus, on the other hand, precludes ongoing *dissensus* — the all-important process of continual dialogue, disagreement, challenge, and counter-challenge, without which social as well as individual creativity would be impossible.

If anything, functioning on the basis of consensus assures that important decision-making will be either manipulated by a minority or collapse completely. And the decisions that are made will embody the lowest common denominator of views and constitute the least creative level of agreement. I speak, here, from painful, years-long experience with the use of consensus in

the Clamshell Alliance of the 1970s. Just at the moment when this quasi-anarchic antinuclear-power movement was at the peak of its struggle, with thousands of activists, it was destroyed through the manipulation of the consensus process by a minority. The "tyranny of structurelessness" that consensus decision-making produced permitted a well-organized few to control the unwieldy, deinstitutionalized, and largely disorganized many within the movement.

Nor, amidst the hue and cry for consensus, was it possible for *dissensus* to exist and creatively stimulate discussion, fostering a creative development of ideas that could yield new and ever-expanding perspectives. In any community, dissensus — and dissident individuals — prevent the community from stagnating. Pejorative words like *dictate* and *rule* properly refer to the silencing of dissenters, not to the exercise of democracy; ironically, it is the consensual "general will" that could well, in Rousseau's memorable phrase from the *Social Contract*, "force men to be free."

Far from being existential in any earthy sense of the word, Brown's "existential individualism" deals with the individual *ahistorically*. She rarefies the individual as a transcendental category, much as, in the 1970s, Robert K. Wolff paraded Kantian concepts of the individual in his dubious *Defense of Anarchism*. The social factors that interact with the individual to make him or her a truly willful and creative being are subsumed under transcendental moral abstractions that, given a purely intellectual life of their own, "exist" outside of history and praxis.

Alternating between moral transcendentalism and simplistic positivism in her approach to the individual's relationship with the collective, Brown's exposition fits together as clumsily as creationism with evolution. The rich dialectic and the ample history that shows how the individual was largely *formed by and interacted with* a social development is nearly absent from her work. Atomistic and narrowly analytic in many of her views, yet abstractly moral and even transcendental in her interpretations, Brown provides an excellent setting for a notion of autonomy that is antipodal to social freedom. With the "existential individual" on one side, and a society that consists of a "collection of individuals" and nothing more on

## ANARCHISM AS CHAOS

Whatever Brown's own preferences may be, her book both reflects and provides the premises for the shift among Euro-American anarchists away from social anarchism and toward individualist or lifestyle anarchism. Indeed, lifestyle anarchism today is finding its principal expression in spray-can graffiti, postmodernist nihilism, antirationalism, neoprimitivism, anti-technologism, neo-Situationist "cultural terrorism," mysticism, and a "practice" of staging Foucauldian "personal insurrections."

These trendy posturings, nearly all of which follow current yuppie fashions, are individualistic in the important sense that they are antithetical to the development of serious organizations, a radical politics, a committed social movement, theoretical coherence, and programmatic relevance. More oriented toward achieving one's own "self-realization" than achieving basic social change, this trend among lifestyle anarchists is

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\* Finally, Brown significantly misreads Bakunin, Kropotkin, and my own writings — a misreading that would require a detailed discussion to correct fully. For myself, I do not believe in a "natural human being," as Brown avers, any more than I share her archaic commitment to "natural law" (p. 159). "Natural law" may have been a useful concept during the era of democratic revolutions two centuries ago, but it is a philosophical myth whose moral premises have no more substance in reality than deep ecology's intuition of "intrinsic worth." Humanity's "second nature" (social evolution) has so vastly transformed "first nature" (biological evolution) that the word *natural* must be nuanced more carefully than Brown does. Her claim that I believe that "freedom is inherent to nature" grossly mistakes my distinction between a potentiality and its actualization (p. 160). To clarify my distinction between the potentiality for freedom in natural evolution and its still incomplete actualization in social evolution, the reader should consult my greatly revised *The Philosophy of Social Ecology: Essays in Dialectical Naturalism*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1995).

particularly noxious in that its "turning inward," as Katinka Matson called it, claims to be a politics — albeit one that resembles R. D. Laing's "politics of experience." The black flag, which revolutionary *social* anarchists raised in insurrectionary struggles in Ukraine and Spain, now becomes a fashionable sarong for the delectation of chic petty bourgeois.

One of the most unsavory examples of lifestyle anarchism is Hakim Bey's (aka Peter Lamborn Wilson's) *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchism, Poetic Terrorism*, a jewel in the New Autonomy Series (no accidental word choice here), published by the heavily postmodernist Semiotext(e)/Autonomedia group in Brooklyn.<sup>8</sup> Amid paeans to "Chaos," "Amour Fou," "Wild Children," "Paganism," "Art Sabotage," "Pirate Utopias," "Black Magic as Revolutionary Action," "Crime," and "Sorcery," not to speak of commendations of "Marxism-Stirnerism," the call for autonomy is taken to lengths so absurd as to seemingly parody a self-absorbed and self-absorbing ideology.

*T.A.Z.* presents itself as a state of mind, an ardently antirational and anticivilizational mood, in which disorganization is conceived as an art form and graffiti supplants programs. The Bey (his pseudonym is the Turkish word for "chief" or "prince") minces no words about his disdain for social revolution: "Why bother to confront a 'power' which has lost all meaning and become sheer Simulation? Such confrontations will only result in dangerous and ugly spasms of violence" (*TAZ*, p. 128). *Power* in quotation marks? A mere "Simulation"? If what is happening in Bosnia with firepower is a mere "simulation," we are living in a very safe and comfortable world indeed! The reader uneasy about the steadily multiplying social pathologies of modern life may be comforted by the Bey's Olympian thought that "realism demands not only that we give up *waiting* for 'the Revolution,' but also that we give up *wanting* it" (*TAZ*, p. 101). Does this passage beckon us to enjoy the serenity of Nirvana? Or a new Baudrillardian "Simulation"? Or perhaps a new Castoriadian "imaginary"?

Having eliminated the classical revolutionary aim of transforming society, the Bey patronizingly mocks those who once risked all for it: "The democrat, the socialist, the rational ideology . . . are deaf to the music & lack all sense of rhythm" (*TAZ*, p. 66).

Really? Have the Bey and his acolytes themselves mastered the verses and music of the *Marseillaise* and danced ecstatically to the rhythms of Gliere's *Russian Sailor's Dance*? There is a wearisome arrogance in the Bey's dismissal of the rich culture that was created by revolutionaries over the past centuries, indeed by ordinary working people in the pre-rock-'n'-roll, pre-Woodstock era.

Verily, let anyone who enters the dreamworld of the Bey give up all nonsense about social commitment. "A democratic dream? a socialist dream? Impossible," intones the Bey with overbearing certainty. "In dream we are never ruled except by love or sorcery" (*TAZ*, p. 64). Thus are the dreams of a new world evoked by centuries of idealists in great revolutions magisterially reduced by the Bey to the wisdom of his febrile dream world.

As to an anarchism that is "all cobwebby with Ethical Humanism, Free Thought, Muscular Atheism, & crude Fundamentalist Cartesian Logic" (*TAZ*, p. 52) — forget it! Not only does the Bey, with one fell swoop, dispose of the Enlightenment tradition in which anarchism, socialism, and the revolutionary movement were once rooted, he mixes apples like "Fundamentalist Cartesian Logic" with oranges like "Free Thought," and "Muscular Humanism" as though they were interchangeable or necessarily presuppose each other.

Although the Bey himself never hesitates to issue Olympian pronouncements and deliver petulant polemics, he has no patience with "the squabbling ideologues of anarchism & libertarianism" (*TAZ*, p. 46). Proclaiming that "Anarchy knows no dogmas" (*TAZ*, p. 52), the Bey nonetheless immerses his readers in a harsh dogma if there ever was one: "Anarchism ultimately implies anarchy — & anarchy is chaos" (*TAZ*, p. 64). So saith the Lord: "I Am That I Am" — and Moses quaked before the pronouncement!

Indeed, in a fit of manic narcissism, the Bey ordains that it is the all-possessive self, the towering "I," the Big "me" that is sovereign: "each of us [is] the ruler of our own flesh, our own creations — and as much of everything else as we can grab & hold." For the Bey, anarchists and kings — and beys — become indistinguishable, inasmuch as all are autarchs:

Our actions are justified by fiat & our relations are shaped by treaties with other autarchs. We make the law



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