

# The Anarchist Thought of Colin Ward

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## Particularity and the Anarchism of Everyday Life

Colin Ward was a libertarian communist. He named Pyotr Kropotkin as his primary economic influence, and described himself as “an anarchist-communist, in the Kropotkin tradition.”<sup>1</sup> This was not empty praise. He produced an abridged edition of Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories and Workshops*<sup>2</sup> with a large body of his own commentary and annotations attached. In his commentary, he explicitly affirmed the validity of Kropotkin's decentralist views on industrial technology; and particularly on the spuriousness of most "economies of scale" (which he said were dependent either on unsustainable inputs or artificially inflated demand) and the superior productivity of small-scale horticulture.

Ward was also very much a Kropotkinian in his fondness for all the human scale institutions people had created for themselves throughout history. He described his most famous book, *Anarchy in Action*, as simply “an extended, updating footnote to Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*.”<sup>3</sup>

It is not about strategies for revolution and it is not involved with speculation on the way an anarchist society would function. It is about the ways in which people organise themselves in any kind of human society, whether we care to categorise those societies as primitive, traditional, capitalist or communist.

Compare Ward's description of anarchism...

Anarchism (the origin of the word is the Greek phrase meaning contrary to authority) seeks a self-organising society: a network of autonomous free associations for the satisfaction of human needs. Inevitably this makes anarchists advocates of social revolution, for the means of satisfying these needs are in the hands of capitalists, bureaucratic, private or governmental monopolies.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Colin Ward and David Goodway, *Talking Anarchy* (Oakland: PM Press, 2003 2014), p. 16.

2 Pyotr Kropotkin and Colin Ward. *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow*. Center for a Stateless Society edition, edited by James Tuttle with Introduction by Kevin Carson (C4SS: 1974, 2014).

3 Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: Freedom Press, 1996), pp. 7-8

4 Colin Ward, *Housing: An Anarchist Approach* (London: Freedom Press, 1976), p. 7.

...to Kropotkin's definition in his *Britannica* article on anarchism:

the name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government—harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilised being.

Ward himself cited Kropotkin's definition as a sort of elevator speech description of his views, and then immediately followed it up by mentioning Martin Buber and Gustav Landauer as major influences:

The next stage in the argument for me, at least, was provided by the philosopher Martin Buber, who wasn't an anarchist, although he had strong anarchist connections. He was the friend and executor of a German anarchist Gustav Landauer, who made a very profound remark, which I quote from Buber's book *Paths in Utopia*.... "The state", said Landauer, "is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it contracting other relationships, by behaving differently." Buber wrote a brilliant essay called 'Society and the State' which was printed in English in the long-dead journal *World Review* in 1951, and printed in a book of his called *Pointing the Way*.

Buber begins by making a clear distinction between the social principle and the political principle, pointing out that "it is inherent in social structures that people either find themselves already linked with one another in an association based on a common need or a common interest, or that they band themselves together for such a purpose, whether in an existing or a newly-formed society."<sup>5</sup>

Like Kropotkin's, Ward's was a communism expressed in a love for a wide variety of small folk institutions, found throughout the nooks and crannies of history, of a sort most people would not think of when they hear the term "communism." Kropotkin himself resembled William Morris in his fondness for the small-scale, local, quaint and historically rooted—especially

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5 Ward, "Anarchy in Milton Keynes" (Anarchist Library, anti-copyright 2012), p. 4

medieval folknotes, open field villages, free towns, guilds, etc.—as expressions of the natural communism of humanity. But as David Goodway notes, “Ward... goes far beyond him in the types of co-operative groups he identifies in modern societies and the centrality he accords to them in anarchist transformation.”<sup>6</sup> This passage could easily have been written by Kropotkin instead of Ward:

People with less education will realise, almost intuitively, that local administration is much older than central administration, that its roots lie deep in the history of any people in the world, and that even the words we use to describe it in various languages, express a notion of the idea that decisions are made locally, however tragically wide is the gap between idea and reality. There is an echo in the very word *council* of the word *commune*, variously spelt in the Latin languages, or the word *Gemeinschaft* in German, or the ancient word *mir* or, with a heavy irony, the word *soviet* in Russian, or the phrase *town meeting* in America, which expresses the idea of a community making decisions, raising the revenue for them, and implementing them, for itself.

Central government, for the greater part of recorded history, has represented some butcher, bandit or warrior chief who has managed to intimidate local communities to surrender their sovereignty and manpower to him to gather the revenue to conduct foreign wars.<sup>7</sup>

Although a communist, Ward was as close in some ways to Proudhon's petty bourgeois socialism as to the mainstream 20th century model of libertarian communism. For example, he differed from the latter in his support for owner-occupancy in housing—surely a petty bourgeois deviation if anything was. He saw the main sources of Marxist and anarchist opposition to this as 1) a fear that the homely petty bourgeois values of domesticity would distract the working class from making revolution in the streets, and 2) a principled opposition to "private property." But Ward pointed out in response that even Proudhon, who declared that "Property is Theft," recognized individual possession of homes, tools of a trade, the land one was cultivating, etc., as sources of freedom. And even some officially

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<sup>6</sup> Ward and Goodway, p. 16. (I would note that Kropotkin himself envisioned the emergence of communism in a technological context of small self-directed industrial shops, embedded in horticultural villages, that was of little relevance to the early and mid-20th century vision of grim industrial armies with overalls and spanners taking over factories and placing them under the control of workers' councils.)

<sup>7</sup> Ward, *Talking Houses: Ten Lectures by Colin Ward* (London: Freedom Press, 1990), p. 48.

communist regimes like Poland recognized the right to possession of living space.<sup>8</sup>

Although Ward cited as the basis for his claim that “I am, by definition, a socialist or what Kropotkin would have called an anarchist communist,” Kropotkin's definition of anarchism quoted above from his article in *Britannica*, he went on to add: “But equally, I would always stress the common ground between people who have arrived at anarchist attitudes from different starting points.”<sup>9</sup> The non-dogmatic nature of his orientation is further indicated by his comments on Murray Bookchin:

I... have noticed how other anarchists who happen not to share his opinions, at any particular time in their evolution, are trodden into the ground by his denunciations, thus confirming the outside world's view of anarchists as humorless, self-important sectarians.<sup>10</sup>

Bookchin and I have opposite ways of coping with people whose ideas have some kind of connection with our own but with whom we disagree. His is to pulverise them with criticism so that they won't emerge again....

As a propagandist I usually find it more useful to claim as comrades the people whose ideas are something like mine, and to stress the common ground, rather than to wither them up in a deluge of scorn.<sup>11</sup>

His stress on the commonality of the various traditions in the anarchist spectrum reflected an awareness of their common Enlightenment origins with liberalism and non-anarchist forms of socialism. “In the evolution of political ideas, anarchism can be seen as an ultimate projection of both liberalism and socialism, and the differing strands of anarchist thought can be related to their emphasis on one or the other of these.”<sup>12</sup>

Even more suggestively, he dissociated himself from the grim mass-production workerism commonly associated with anarchist communism:

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8 Ward, "Housing is Theft -- Housing is Freedom" (Talk to Nottingham Anarchist Group in November 1983), pp. 9-10.

9 Ward and Goodway, pp. 27-28.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 107.

11 Ward, *Temporary Autonomous Zones* (Anarchist Library, anti-copyright 2012), p. 2.

12 Ward, *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 1.

Syndicalists... tended to exaggerate the extent to which manufacturing industry was dominated by vast Ford-type factories, organized with military precision, when, as Kropotkin stressed a hundred years ago, the typical workplace is a small workshop. Probably, when syndicalists succeed in abandoning historical romanticism, they will be exploiting the new communications technology to fight international capitalism on an international scale.<sup>13</sup>

(He went on in the next paragraph to praise Bookchin for winning an audience based on his treatment of issues “summed up by shorthand words like *green, ecological, environmental, or sustainable*, [which many believe] will be dominant in the politics of the 21st century...”).<sup>14</sup>

In his commentary on William Morris's *The Factory As It Might Be*, Ward quoted with approval a passage from Paul Thompson's life of Morris:

Socialism was originally the product of the age of the factory, and it bears that mark in its primary focus on work. This is a major reason why socialism has always had a more direct appeal to men than to women, and equally why, with the growth of leisure and a home-centred way of life, its significance to ordinary life has become less and less obvious. But Morris stands alone among major socialist thinkers in being as concerned with housework and the home as with work in the factory. The transformation of both factory and home was equally necessary for the future fulfillment of men and women. Morris wanted everyday life as a whole to become the basic form of creativity, of art: “For a socialist, a house, a knife, a cup, a steam engine, must be either a work of art, or a denial of art.”<sup>15</sup>

Much like David Graeber, Ward can be said to have taken an anthropological approach to anarchism. Ward's approach to anarchism, and his understanding of its basic concepts, is a direct outgrowth of his experience of everyday life as a working person, and his personal observation of others going about their normal business.

Ward himself called his approach “sociological”: “My knowledge of the sociology of autonomous groups would tell me that it is always more

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<sup>13</sup> Ward and Goodway, p. 29. (An intriguing observation, that last, given developments since 2003.)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>15</sup> Ward, *The Factory We Never Had*. Afterword to William Morris, *The Factory As It Might Be* (Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2010), p. 11.

sensible and conducive to the effectiveness of such groups to stress the large areas of agreement, rather than those of differing propaganda emphases.” And he cited as an influence the American anarchist Paul Goodman, “who related anarchism to ordinary decisions of daily life...”<sup>16</sup>

A major part of his writing on anarchism concerns housing issues (especially squatting and self-built housing). Ward's first three jobs, before he was drafted in WWII, were “a clerk for a builder erecting (entirely fraudulently) air-raid shelters,” a position in the Ilford Borough Engineer's office (“where his eyes were opened to the inequitable treatment of council house tenants”), and working as a draftsman for the architect Sidney Caulfield (who had learned his occupation through the Arts and Crafts Movement of Ruskin and Morris and worked on Truro Cathedral). After the war he wrote nine articles on the post-war squatters' movement for *Freedom*.<sup>17</sup> Later, in the 1960s, he was a teacher in various technical colleges, which brought him into direct contact with practical issues of education and pedagogy.<sup>18</sup>

Most of his work, not only on housing but all other aspects of social life, accordingly deals with the practical anarchism of ordinary people interacting with each other in search of solutions to problems and needs in their everyday life. As David Goodway describes it: “It is Ward's vision of anarchism, along with his many years of working in architecture and planning, that account for his concentration on 'anarchist applications' or 'anarchist solutions' to 'immediate issues in which people *are actually likely to get involved*....”<sup>19</sup>

Ward is primarily concerned with the forms of direct action, in the world of the here-and-now, which are “liberating the great network of human co-operation.” Back in 1973 he considered that “the very growth of the state and its bureaucracy, the giant corporation and its privileged hierarchy... are... giving rise to parallel organisations, counter organisations, alternative organisations, which exemplify the anarchist method”; and he proceeded to itemise the revived demand for workers' control, the de-schooling movement, self-help therapeutic groups, squatter movements and tenants' co-operatives, food co-operatives, claimants' unions, and community organisations of every

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16 Ward and Goodway, p. 60.

17 David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012 (2006)), pp. 310-311.

18 Ward and Goodway, pp. 73-75.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 15.



conceivable kind. During the following thirty years he additionally drew attention to self-build activities (he was been [sic] particularly impressed by achievements in the shanty towns in the poor countries of Latin America, Africa, and Asia), co-operatives of all types, the informal economy, and LETS....<sup>20</sup>

This set him apart from the rest of the writers in the Freedom Press Group; his preoccupation with everyday life and ordinary people solving practical problems didn't fit in with their conception of anarchism at all. "When he tried to interest his comrades in the late 1940s in a pamphlet on the squatters" movement... he recalled that "it wasn't thought that this is somehow relevant to anarchism."<sup>21</sup> The incomprehension was mutual; Ward had no use for an anarchism that didn't grow from the practical experience of everyday life:

One of his greatest regrets remained that so few anarchists follow his example and apply their principles to what they themselves know best. In his case that was the terrain of housing, architecture and planning; but where, he wanted to know, are the anarchist experts on, and applications to, for example, medicine, the health service, agriculture and economics?<sup>22</sup>

In keeping with his generally inclusive and empirical approach, Ward's idea of a viable anarcho-communism for the future was a communism that incorporated not only the best of other liberatory traditions that people brought with them, but the actually-existing small-scale institutions that ordinary people have already built for themselves.

I believe that an intelligent 21st century anarchism will draw on its links with the worlds of the Green movement and with the unofficial and informal economies of the poor world, as well as those of the poor in the rich world, to draw anarchist lessons on human survival.<sup>23</sup>

Above all he denounced "a socialist movement [that] got itself into the position of dismissing as petit-bourgeois individualism all those freedoms which people actually cherish; everything that belongs to the private niche

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20 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

21 Goodway, p. 320.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 325.

23 Ward, "What Will Anarchism Mean Tomorrow? A Difficult Question to Answer" in *Colin Ward Reader* (Anarchy is Order) p. 139.

that people really cherish..."<sup>24</sup>

I merely want to stress that there is room in the garden of the informal economy for both co-operators *and* individualists. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the paradoxical anarchist, would have taken this for granted. His vision of industrial organization was that of a federation of self-employed craftsmen. We certainly get echoes of the Proudhonian view in Robert Frost's observation, "Men work together, I told him from the heart / Whether they work together or apart".<sup>25</sup>

## **Radical Monopolies**

Much like Paul Goodman and Ivan Illich, Ward viewed institutional frameworks in systemic terms: that is, in the language of Quality engineers, systems designed to produce defects. Social ills and injustice, in other words, are not simply the result of "bad apples" or individual attitudes, or peripheral aspects of the system that need to be tweaked. They are the result of a system that produces such ills as an inescapable side-effect of its basic functions.

And the basic characteristic of the system was governance by large, authoritarian institutions that—whatever their official rationale or purpose—in practice organized the rest of society to suit the needs of the institutions themselves. In other words, what Ivan Illich called "radical monopoly."

Illich described radical monopoly as

when one industrial production process exercises an exclusive control over the satisfaction of a pressing need, and excludes nonindustrial activities from competition....

Radical monopoly exists where a major tool rules out natural competence. Radical monopoly imposes compulsory consumption and thereby restricts personal autonomy. It constitutes a special kind of social control because it is enforced by means of the imposed consumption of a standard product that only large institutions can provide.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ward, "Anarchism and the Informal Economy," *The Raven* No. 1 (1987), p. 35.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 52-53

*...Any industrial product that comes in per capita quanta beyond a given intensity exercises a radical monopoly over the satisfaction of a need....*

Radical monopoly is first established by a rearrangement of society for the benefit of those who have access to the larger quanta; then it is enforced by compelling all to consume the minimum quantum in which the output is currently produced....<sup>27</sup>

As examples of radical monopoly, “[a] city built around wheels becomes inappropriate for feet”;<sup>28</sup> the subsidized, state-established educational bureaucracy results in “the universal schoolhouse, hospital ward or prison.”<sup>29</sup> A radical monopoly is a system in which the output of the system is determined by the needs of the system, and the consumers of the output are subordinated to the system's needs, to the point of so ordering the society as to make that output indispensable to them.

This does not necessarily reflect conscious design. The people running the system, as much as those at its lower levels, have internalized its operating assumptions. As Paul Goodman said:

A system destroys its competitors by pre-empting the means and channels, and then proves that it is the only conceivable mode of operating.<sup>30</sup>

. . . [T]he genius of our centralized bureaucracies has been, as they interlock, to form a mutually accrediting establishment of decision-makers, with common interests and a common style that nullify the diversity of pluralism.<sup>31</sup>

Ward argued that town planners, whether or not that was their deliberate intent as individuals or they could be judged criminally culpable for it, were effectively and functionally engaged in what amounted to vandalism. Or rather, their actions were mandated by a larger system which, judged by the same criteria as the actions of an individual, would be accused of

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27 Illich, *Energy and Equity* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 46.

28 Illich, *Disabling Professions* (New York and London: Marion Boyars, 1977), p. 28.

29 Illich, *Tools For Conviviality*, xxiv.

30 Paul Goodman, *People or Personnel*, in Goodman, *People or Personnel and Like a Conquered Province* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963, 1965). p. 70.

31 Goodman, *Like a Conquered Province*, in *Ibid.* p. 357.

vandalism.<sup>32</sup>

And the comparison is not merely metaphorical. Besides urban planning like the demolition of poor neighborhoods to build freeways, that reduces the net number of dwelling places and renders urban spaces less functional, local government policy actually destroys habitations for its own sake. Ward gives the example of the council in the East London borough of Redbridge, which adopted a policy of “ripping out the insides of empty houses to prevent any more homeless moving in.”<sup>33</sup>

And the differential class effects of so-called “urban renewal” are obvious.

There can hardly be a city where the planned and systematic destruction of working class districts in a policy of “raze and rise” has not left the residents stacked in concrete megaliths, dispersed heaven knows where, or surrounded by deliberate dereliction in a “clearance area”. The latter phrase is well-chosen, with its overtones of the Highland clearances, the archetypical vandalism of the homes of the poor and helpless by the rich and powerful.<sup>34</sup>

Ward described, in language anticipating Naomi Klein's “disaster capitalism,” British planners' use of the Blitz in much the same way New Orleans urban planners and real estate developers seized on Hurricane Katrina as an opportunity to clear out the poor, destroy their homes and build new commercial centers or gentrified housing over the ruins. And even absent war or natural disaster, urban renewal amounts to disaster capitalism, with the disaster and ethnic cleansing concealed behind slick talk of “revitalization.”

Hitler, the planner used to say in the confident days of postwar reconstruction, has provided an opportunity which generations of slum-clearance could not have achieved. Comprehensive redevelopment became possible, and when we ran out of bomb sites the planners made their own. Battle-tested in the blitzkrieg strategy, pull it down and start again was the only philosophy they knew. Conservative surgery was strictly for the private patients.. Ruthless amputation for the public wards.

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32 Ward, “Planners as Vandals,” in Ward, ed., *Vandalism* (New York and Cincinnati: Van Nostrand and Reinhold Company, 1974), p. 175.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 174.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 178.

This approach to urban renewal (a phrase which has become a dirty word in the United States where it has come to mean running the blacks out of town) has still not come to an end.<sup>35</sup>

Many of the criminal effects of the system result from the sorts of information problems R.A. Wilson attributed to authority relations and hierarchies.

R.A. Wilson noted a connection between equality and mutuality—bilateral communication between equals—and accurate information—in “Thirteen Choruses for the Divine Marquis.”

Proudhon was a great communication analyst, born 100 years too soon to be understood. His system of voluntary association (anarchy) is based on the simple communication principles that an authoritarian system means one-way communication, or stupidity, and a libertarian system means two-way communication, or rationality.<sup>36</sup>

The essence of authority, as he saw, was Law — that is, fiat — that is, effective communication running one way only. The essence of a libertarian system, as he also saw, was Contract — that is, mutual agreement — that is, effective communication running both ways. (“Redundance of control” is the technical cybernetic phrase.)

Wilson (with Robert Shea) developed the same theme in *The Illuminatus! Trilogy*. “....[I]n a rigid hierarchy, nobody questions orders that seem to come from above, and those at the very top are so isolated from the actual work situation that they never see what is going on below.”<sup>37</sup>

A man with a gun is told only that which people assume will not provoke him to pull the trigger. Since all authority and government are based on force, the master class, with its burden of omniscience, faces the servile class, with its burden of nescience, precisely as a highwayman faces his victim.

Communication is possible only between equals. The master class never abstracts enough information from the servile class to know

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35 *Ibid.*, p. 180.

36 Robert Anton Wilson. “Thirteen Choruses for the Divine Marquis” from *Coincidence—A Head Test* (1988) <<http://www.deepleafproductions.com/wilsonlibrary/texts/raw-marquis.html>>.

37 Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson, *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1975), p. 388.

what is actually going on in the world where the actual productivity of society occurs.... The result can only be progressive deterioration among the rulers.<sup>38</sup>

The same SNAFU principle was displayed in the British urban planning system. As Ward suggested, the problems resulted more from the planning bureaucracy's inability to process the results of its actions than any deliberate ill will by the planners; but the results were the same.

A lot has been built with the best information available at the time. If the results were wrong, it was not a crime. The crime is the failure to have feedback and the failure from the lessons of the past....

The problem is more stupidity than crime. But stupidity does far more harm in the world than crime.

Most of the things we have been talking about are not crimes, stupidities or mistakes, but a lack of consciousness of the whole collectivity, and of the future effects of present planning and building.<sup>39</sup>

The "lack of consciousness of the whole collectivity" is a particularly apt phrase. The whole is less than the sum of its parts. Because an authoritarian institution makes the knowledge of its individual participants unusable, the institution as a whole knows less than the sum of its individual members' knowledge. Like the brain of a person with Alzheimer's disease, the loss of synaptic information renders information non-retrievable.

The power of the planning hierarchies, by the very nature of things, blocks any feedback that might inform the naked Emperor of his nakedness.

There is in fact a terrible arrogance about the concept of planning as we have seen it in the past twenty-five years; a branch of municipal enterprise which aims at nothing less than usurping history:

"In planning schools, beginner students usually argue that people's lives in time are wandering and unpredictable, that societies have a

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<sup>38</sup> Ward, *Planners as Vandals*, p. 498.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

history in the sense that they do what was not expected of them, so that this device is misleading. Planning teachers usually reply that of course the projected need would be altered by practical objections in the course of being worked out; the projective-need analysis is a pattern of ideal conditions rather than a fixed prescription.

But the facts of planning in the last few years have shown that this disclaimer on the part of planners is something they do not really mean. Professional planners of highways, of redevelopment housing, of inner-city renewal projects have treated challenges from displaced communities or community groups as a threat to the value of their plans rather than as a natural part of the effort at social reconstruction. Over and over again one can hear in planning circles a fear expressed when the human beings affected by planning changes become even slightly interested in the remedies proposed for their lives. “Interference,” “blocking”, and “interruption of work”—these are the terms by which social challenges or divergencies from the planners' projections are interpreted. What has really happened is that the planners have wanted to take the plan, the projection in advance, as more “true” than the historical turns, the unforeseen movements in the real time of human lives.<sup>40</sup>

## **The Stupidity of Hierarchy**

Ward's critique of hierarchy has a lot in common with R. A. Wilson's and David Graeber's.

...[W]e have to build networks instead' of pyramids. All authoritarian institutions are organised as pyramids: the state, the private or public corporation , the army, the police, the church , the university, the hospital: they are all pyramidal structures with a small group of decision-makers at the top and a broad base of people whose decisions are made for them at the bottom. Anarchism does not demand the changing of the labels on the layers , it doesn't want different people on top, it wants us to climber out from underneath. It advocates an extended network of individuals and groups, miking their own decisions, controlling their own destiny.<sup>41</sup>

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40 Ward, “Planners as Vandals,” p. 182. Punctuation in original.

41 Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, p. 26.

The fantastic inefficiency of any hierarchial organisation -- any factory, office, university, warehouse or hospital -- is the outcome of two almost invariable characteristics. One is that the knowledge and wisdom of the people at the bottom of the pyramid finds no place in the decision-making leadership hierarchy of the institution. Frequently it is devoted to making the institution work in spite of the formal leadership structure, or alternatively to sabotaging the ostensible function of the institution, because it is none of their choosing. The other is that they would rather not be there anyway: they are there through economic necessity rather than through identification with a common task which throws up its own shifting and functional leadership.<sup>42</sup>

...[I]t is not anarchy but government which is a crude simplification of social organisation, and... the very complexity of... tribal societies is the condition of their successful functioning.<sup>43</sup>

Harmony results not from unity but from complexity.<sup>44</sup>

Anarchy is a function, not of a society's simplicity and lack of social organisation, but of its complexity and multiplicity of social organisations. Cybernetics, the science of control and communication systems, throws valuable light on the anarchist conception of complex self-organising systems.<sup>45</sup>

Ward quotes with approval cyberneticist John McEwan's description of the "cybernetics of evolving self-organising systems."

Here we have a system of large variety, sufficient to cope with a complex, unpredictable environment. Its characteristics are changing structure, modifying itself under continual feedback from the environment, exhibiting "redundancy of potential command", and involving complex interlocking control structures. Learning and decision-making are distributed throughout the system, denser perhaps in some areas than in others.<sup>46</sup>

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42 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 51.



Thus both anthropology and cybernetic theory support Kropotkin's contention that in a society without government, harmony would result from 'an ever-changing adjustment and readjustment of equilibrium between the multitudes of forces and influences' expressed in 'an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international—temporary or more or less permanent—for all possible purposes: production, consumption and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection, defence of the territory, and so on; and on the other side, for the satisfaction of an ever-increasing number of scientific, artistic, literary and sociable needs.'

How crude the governmental model seems by comparison, whether in social administration, industry, education or economic planning. No wonder it is so unresponsive to actual needs. No wonder, as it attempts to solve its problems by fusion, amalgamation, rationalisation and coordination, they only become worse because of the clogging of the lines of communication.<sup>47</sup>

Even when state policies are made by well-meaning people to address real problems, and carried out by well-meaning functionaries, the asymmetrical power relationship leads to all the pathologies of one-way information flow that result from authority.

Housing by public authorities was not instituted by an all-embracing state seeking ever greater control over its subjects, but through the efforts of nobly-intentioned people who were appalled by the squalor, disease and high mortality in overcrowded insanitary hovels. But as in institution it leads continually to [a] view of the occupants as numbers, as abstractions, as "housing units"....<sup>48</sup>

I used to keep a note of newspaper reports of the well-meant but insufferably inquisitive and inquisitorial attitude of local councils to their tenants. Here are some, relating not to flats but to housing estates. No washing on the line after 12 noon (Essex), compulsory to burn coke (Notts.), no dogs (Middlesex), evicted for painting his house cream—all the rest were red (Warrington), forbidden to paint doorstep

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<sup>47</sup> Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, p. 52.

<sup>48</sup> Ward, "Housing and Human Needs," in *Housing: An Anarchist Approach*, pp. 39-40

(Bardwell), evicted for keeping pigeons if tenant is not a member of National Homing Union (Staffs.), tenants graded according to cleanliness—lowest grade must go (Ely), no trees to be planted in garden without permission (Lanes.). Finally, Hastings Corporation issues its tenants with a handbook containing the following instructions: "Keep your home clean and tidy. Endeavour to have some method of cleaning as you go along; do not try to clean the whole house in one day. Regular bed times for children and adults, except on special occasions. Sit down properly at the table. Hang up your pots and pans or put them on a shelf. . . ." How right Auden was when he wrote, Private faces in public places/ Are wiser and nicer/ Than public faces in private places.<sup>49</sup>

## **Anarchy in Action**

Ward's view of anarchy as something that exists "in the interstices of dominant power structures" (*Anarchy in Action*) was also quite similar to Graeber's. Like Graeber, he saw everyday anarchy as something indispensable to the actual functioning of the authoritarian institutions that are normally viewed as directing society. As David Goodway put it, "current societies and institutions, no matter how capitalist and individualist, would completely fall apart without the integrating powers, even if unvalued, of mutual aid and federation."<sup>50</sup>

The argument of this book is that an anarchist society, a society which organises itself without authority, is always in existence, like a seed beneath the snow, buried under the weight of the state and its bureaucracy, capitalism and its waste, privilege and its injustices, nationalism and its suicidal loyalties, religious differences and their superstitious separatism.

Of the many possible interpretations of anarchism the one presented here suggests that, far from being a speculative vision of a future society, it is a description of a mode of human organisation, rooted in the experience of every day life, which operates side by side with, and in spite of, the dominant authoritarian trends of our society. This is not a new version of anarchism. Gustav Landauer saw it, not as the founding of something new, "but as the actualisation and

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>50</sup> Goodway, p. 314.

reconstitution of something that has always been present, which exists alongside the state, albeit buried and laid waste". And a modern anarchist, Paul Goodman, declared that: "A free society cannot be the substitution of a 'new order' for the old order; it is the extension of spheres of free action until they make up most of social life."<sup>51</sup>

George Woodcock's description of Paul Goodman could just as easily apply to Ward:

the anarchist does not seek to destroy the present political order so that it may be replaced by a better system of organization... rather he proposes to clear the existing structure of coercive institutions away so that the natural society which has survived in a largely subterranean way from earlier, freer and more egalitarian periods can be liberated to flower again in a different future.

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The anarchists have never been nihilists, wishing to destroy present society entirely and replace it with something new... The anarchists have always valued the endurance of natural social impulses and the voluntary institutions they create, and it is to liberating the great network of human co-operation that even now spreads through all levels of our lives rather than to creating or even imagining brave new worlds that they have bent their efforts. That is why there are so few utopian writings among the anarchists; they have always believed that human social instincts, once set free, could be trusted to adapt society in desirable and practical ways without plans -- which are always constrictive -- being made beforehand.<sup>52</sup>

A favorite quotation of Ward's was the famous one of Landauer's: "The state is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behavior; we destroying it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently."<sup>53</sup>

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51 Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, p. 18.

52 George Woodcock, "The Artist as Conservative" (1986), in Goodway, p. 317.

53 Goodway, p. 319.

Ward's perceptual filters, in evaluating George Orwell's views on socialism, say a lot about his own perception of anarchism. In "Orwell and Anarchism" he quotes Orwell's impressions of Barcelona and the POUM militia as foreshadowing what "the opening stages of Socialism" might be like in the future:

One had been in a community where hope was more normal than apathy or cynicism, where the word "comrade" stood for comradeship and not, as in most countries, for humbug. One had breathed the air of equality.... The thing that attracts ordinary men to Socialism and makes them willing to risk their skins for it... is the idea of equality; to the vast majority of people Socialism means a classless society, or it means nothing at all. And it was here that those few months in the militia were valuable to me. For the Spanish militias, while they lasted, were a sort of microcosm of a classless society. In that community where no one was on the make, where there was a shortage of everything but no privilege and no boot-licking, one got, perhaps a crude forecast of what the opening stages of Socialism might be like. And, after all, instead of disillusioning me it deeply attracted me. The effect was to make my desire to see Socialism established much more actual than it had been before.

Ward quotes Orwell elsewhere in the same work (*Homage to Catalonia*) as saying that—despite the betrayal of the Stalinists in Madrid, the liquidation of anarchist and libertarian socialist self-rule and the collapse of the Republican war effort—"the whole experience has left me with not less but more belief in the decency of human beings."<sup>54</sup>

Ward reads similar significance into Winston Smith's view of the proles as a source of hope—not because they would one day rise up and overthrow the Party, but because they had "stayed human." To the proles what mattered were "individual relationships," such that "a completely helpless gesture, an embrace, a tear, a word spoken to a dying man, could have value in itself." Ward elaborates, perhaps describing himself as much as Orwell:

Stay human: love one another. This is Orwell's ultimate message. It is not revolutionary, it is not political, it is not even original. But it is the most important message of all.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ward, "Orwell and Anarchism" Five articles in *Freedom*, 1955. Reproduced in *George Orwell at Home (and among the Anarchists): Essays and Photographs* (London: Freedom Press, 1998), p. 27.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Like David Graeber, Ward saw anarchy as something we do right now.

Many years of attempting to be an anarchist propagandist have convinced me that we win over our fellow citizens to anarchist ideas, precisely through drawing upon the common experience of the informal, transient, self-organising networks of relationships that in fact make the human community possible, rather than through the rejection of existing society as a whole in favour of some future society where some different kind of humanity will live in perfect harmony.<sup>56</sup>

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Why do people consent to be ruled?... It is because they subscribe to the same values as their governors. Rulers and ruled alike believe in the principle of authority, of hierarchy, of power.... And yet, in their ordinary lives they keep society going by voluntary association and mutual aid. Anarchists are people who make a social and political philosophy out of the natural and spontaneous tendency of humans to associate together for their mutual benefit.<sup>57</sup>

Like Graeber, he also saw an “anarchist society” as the outgrowth of whatever arrangements ordinary people work out for themselves in their face-to-face dealings. In his concluding commentary in *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow*, he quoted Kropotkin's 1919 assessment of the Russian revolution:

But it is impossible to achieve such a revolution by means of dictatorship and state power. Without a widespread reconstruction coming from below -- put into practice by the workers and peasants themselves -- the social revolution is condemned to bankruptcy. The Russian Revolution has confirmed this again, and we must hope that this lesson will be understood; that everywhere in Europe and America serious efforts will be made to create within the working class -- peasants, workers and intellectuals -- personnel of a future revolution which will not obey orders from above but will be capable of elaborating for itself the free forms of the whole new economic life.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>58</sup> Pyotr Kropotkin and Colin Ward. *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow*. Center for a Stateless Society edition, edited by James Tuttle with Introduction by Kevin Carson (C4SS: 1974, 2014), p. 159.

## **Mutuals and Self-Management as a “Third Way”**

As an anarchist, Ward was critical of the state not only under capitalism but under the whole gamut of state socialist regimes—especially, given his direct experience of its effects on the human-scale institutions he loved, the Labour government after WWII.

Briefly covering the same ground as Murray Bookchin's *Third Revolution*, Ward pointed to the role of working class direct action and self-organized democratic institutions in the major revolutions of the past:

anarchist aspirations can be traced through the slave revolts of the ancient world, the peasant risings of medieval Europe, in the aims of the Diggers in the English Revolution of the 1640s, in the revolutions in France in 1789 and 1848, and the Paris Commune of 1871. In the 20th century, anarchism had a role in the Mexican Revolution of 1911, the Russian Revolution of 1917, and most notably in the revolution in Spain that followed the military uprising that precipitated the civil war in 1936.<sup>59</sup>

He criticized the revolutionary socialist regimes of the 20th century for liquidating self-organized, decentralized working class institutions in language reminiscent of Hannah Arendt and Murray Bookchin.

Historically, anarchism arose not only as an explanation of the gulf between the rich and the poor in any community, and of the reason why the poor have been obliged to fight for their share of a common inheritance, but as a radical answer to the question “What went wrong?” that followed the ultimate outcome of the French Revolution. It had ended not only with a reign of terror and the emergence of a newly rich ruling caste, but with a new adored emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, strutting through his conquered territories.

The anarchists and their precursors were unique on the political Left in affirming that workers and peasants, grasping the chance that arose to bring an end to centuries of exploitation and tyranny, were inevitably betrayed by the new class of politicians, whose first priority was to re-establish a centralized state power. After every revolutionary uprising, usually won at a heavy cost for ordinary populations, the new

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<sup>59</sup> Ward, *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 8.

rulers had no hesitation in applying violence and terror, a secret police, and a professional army to maintain their control.

For anarchists the state itself is the enemy, and they have applied the same interpretation to the outcome of every revolution of the 19th and 20th centuries. This is not merely because every state keeps a watchful and sometimes punitive eye on its dissidents, but because every state protects the privileges of the powerful.<sup>60</sup>

He viewed the tendency of the “progressive” state in parliamentary democracies like Britain as just a milder version of the same thing. The social activist state of the 20th century, and especially the postwar Labour regime, destroyed an entire working class institutional infrastructure.

When we compare the Victorian antecedents of our public institutions with the organs of working-class mutual aid in the same period the very names speak volumes. On the one side the Workhouse, the Poor Law Infirmary, the National Society for the Education of the Poor in Accordance with the Principles of the Established Church; and, on the other, the *Friendly Society*, the *Sick Club*, the *Cooperative Society*, the *Trade Union*. One represents the tradition of fraternal and autonomous association springing up from below, the other that of authoritarian institutions directed from above...

In the 19th century the British working class built up from nothing a vast network of social and economic initiatives based upon self-help and mutual aid. The list is endless: friendly societies, building societies, sick clubs, coffin clubs, clothing clubs, up to enormous enterprises like the trade union movement and the Co-operative movement. How have we allowed that tradition to ossify?

I... would claim that the political left in this country invested all of its fund of social inventiveness in the idea of the state so its own ideas of self-help and mutual aid were stifled.... Politically it was because of the sinister alliance of the Fabians and Marxists, both of whom believed implicitly in the state and assumed that they would be the particular elite in control of it. Administratively, it was because of the equally sinister alliance of bureaucrats and professionals: the British civil service and the British professional classes, with their undisguised

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60 *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

contempt for the way ordinary people organised anything...

The great tradition of working-class self-help and mutual aid was written off, not just as irrelevant, but as an actual impediment, by the political and professional architects of the welfare state, aspiring for a universal public provision of everything for everybody.

History itself was re-written to suit the managerial, political and bureaucratic vision.... And whether in school or in higher education, whatever is taught about the origins of the welfare state implies that twentieth-century state universalism replaced the pathetic unofficial, voluntary or philanthropic pioneering ventures of the nineteenth century....

How sad that in Britain—birthplace of friendly societies, trade unionism and the cooperative movement—socialists should have been so intoxicated with power and bureaucracy and the mystique of the state, that they should dismiss their own inheritance as a path not worth taking.<sup>61</sup>

His analysis of just about every aspect of social life and policy follows the basic pattern outlined in “The Path Not Taken.”

Ward had no love lost on either corporate or state bureaucracies, and still less for the kind of ideological polarization that treated Thatcherite corporate ownership and the Labour Party bureaucratic state as mutually exhaustive alternatives. State bureaucracies, like corporate, are self-serving managerial hierarchies.

Welfare is administered by a top-heavy governmental machine which ensures that when economies in public expenditure are imposed by its political masters, they are made by reducing the service to the public, not by reducing the cost of administration.<sup>62</sup>

As a result he found himself equally at war with the Labourite bureaucratic state and the Thatcherite corporate-state nexus.

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61 Ward, "The Path Not Taken" *The Raven* No. 3 (1987), pp. 195-197, 199.

62 Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, p. 14.



Social spontaneity is highly valued by anarchists but is not on the agenda of the politicians involved in dismantling the British post-war welfare state, and recommending the virtues of profit-making private enterprise. Anarchists are frequently told that their antipathy to the state is historically outmoded, since a main function of the modern state is the provision of social welfare. They respond by stressing that social welfare in Britain did not originate from government, nor from the post-war National Insurance laws, nor with the initiation of the National Health Service in 1948. It evolved from the vast network of friendly societies and mutual aid organizations that had sprung up through working-class self-help in the 19th century....

Alternative patterns of social control of local facilities could have emerged, but for the fact that centralized government imposed national uniformity, while popular disillusionment with the bureaucratic welfare state coincided with the rise of the all-party gospel of managerial capitalism. Anarchists claim that after the inevitable disappointment, an alternative concept of socialism will be rediscovered. They argue that the identification of social welfare with bureaucratic managerialism is one of the factors that has delayed the exploration of other approaches for half a century. The private sector, as it is called, is happy to take over the health needs of those citizens who can pay its bills. Other citizens would either have to suffer the minimal services that remain for them, or to re-create the institutions that they built up in the 19th century. The anarchists see their methods as more relevant than ever, waiting to be reinvented, precisely because modern society has learned the limitations of both socialist and capitalist alternatives.<sup>63</sup>

In short: "As an anarchist and a believer in freedom and autonomy, I don't see why I should be pushed into the position of defending the corporate state of the left against the corporate state of the right."<sup>64</sup>

Ward had a special distaste for managerial culture, whether in the bureaucratic state or the bureaucratic corporation.

A once-famous book, James Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution*, traced a shift in power in companies from shareholders to managers.

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<sup>63</sup> Ward, *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 27, 29-30.

<sup>64</sup> Ward, "Housing is Theft," p. 8.

But another more recent change in the power structure of public services of every kind has been felt, for example, all through the education system. It is the rise to dominance of professional managers who are the new unassailable masters of every kind of institution. Middle-class professionals in, say, public health, environmental planning, schools and universities, and the social services have found themselves subjected to the same kind of managerial Newspeak that used to outrage working-class trade unionists. Mastery of its grotesque jargon has become the prerequisite for appointment and promotion throughout the job market, except in the submerged economy of hard repetitive work, where the old assumptions of insecurity, long hours, and low pay remain true....

It seems inevitable that anarchist concepts will be reinvented or rediscovered continually, in fields never envisaged by the propagandists of the past, as people in so many areas of human activity search for alternatives to the crudities and injustices of both free-market capitalism and bureaucratic managerial socialism.<sup>65</sup>

Ward's fondness for small-scale possession (e.g. the "privatization" of council housing to tenants) gave him a rather petty bourgeois air, for a self-described communist who opposed the evils of property. In response to an objection to buyout of council houses/flats by a tenant cooperative, he wrote:

*11. That the tenant take-over presupposes and exalts the virtues of ownership, while in a desirable social order private ownership of real property would not exist.*

I agree. I agree too that householders, whether owners paying back mortgage loans or tenants, the greater part of whose rent goes in interest payments, are both victims of our economic system. I believe in social ownership of social assets, but I think it a mistake to confuse society with the state. Co-operative ownership seems to me to be a better concept of social ownership than ownership by the state or by the municipality. But in pragmatic terms since we have reached a point where the majority of dwellings are owner-occupied, I want to extend the benefits that accrue to the owner-occupier to the tenant.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ward, *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>66</sup> Ward, "Participation or Control," *Housing: An Anarchist Response*, p. 156

And just as many anarchists see the landlord as the state writ small, Ward noted the reverse was also true of housing owned by local governments and rented out to the poor: “the local authorities have simply taken over, though less flexibly, the role of the landlord, together with the syndrome of dependency and resentment that it engenders.”<sup>67</sup>

In industry, postwar nationalization under Labour created an institutional culture in many ways even more hostile than capitalism to worker self-management. There was far less chance of worker self-management in state industries actually nationalized by an actual Labour government, after WWII, than even there had been in the 1920s when the Sankey Report (speaking for the majority of a Royal Commission) recommended nationalization of the mines with a “joint control” system that included workers.<sup>68</sup>

In the realm of public services, the postwar Labour government centralized, under national control, functions that had previously been genuinely social—local, autonomous and self-managed. This empowered the neoliberal Thatcher decades later to take centralization still further against local autonomy, giving the national government a deadlock on “privatization” policies (i.e., selling the same functions off to giant corporations rather than devolving them back to local communities and civil society).

In education, working class educational institutions of the kind described by Kropotkin and E.P. Thompson, and Phillip Gardener's *The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England*, were killed by a one-two punch, first by “progressive” and Labour governments, and then by Thatcher's corporatist counterfeit of “free market reform.”

In the late 19th century, Ward recounts, the working class preferred so-called “private” schools (affordable, often working class-run schools that we would call “alternative schools” today) to the centrally regulated state schools.<sup>69</sup> The state schools' own ideologists, he said, openly admitted that “the function of the public education system is to slot working-class children into working-class jobs.”<sup>70</sup>

And the centrally controlled, state-funded schools that “progressives”

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67 Ward, “Housing is Theft,” p. 7.

68 Ward, “Workers' control and the collective contract,” *Anarchy* 40 (Vol. 4, No. 6 -- June 1964), p. 180.

69 Ward, *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 54-55.

70 Ward, “The Path Not Taken,” p. 198.

considered such a victory, were in turn rendered utterly subservient to capitalist employers under Thatcher. Thatcher greatly reduced the autonomy of local schools, imposing a national curriculum on them<sup>71</sup>—much like the simultaneous promotion of charter schools and Core Curriculum in the United States.

...an incoming government was blaming the collapse of the British manufacturing industry on, of all unlikely scapegoats, the schools. There followed a new regime of unprecedented intervention by central government in the management and curriculum of primary and secondary schools, which in Britain are provided by local authorities. These included the imposition, for the first time, of a National Curriculum by the central government, a continuous programme of testing children at particular ages, and an avalanche of form-filling for teachers. (This endless assessment proved beyond doubt that schools in affluent districts achieve higher marks than schools in poor areas with a majority of children whose native language is not English. These are social facts that most people already knew.)

By 1995, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools was declaring that the real impediment to the development of a better educational system in Britain was "a commitment to particular beliefs about the purposes and conduct of education", and that what was needed was "less learning by doing and more teaching by telling".<sup>72</sup>

Ward saw localism and cooperative self-management of services of all kinds as a sort of "Third Way" alternative to both 1940s-style nationalization and "privatization" to capitalist corporations. In every case, public services were to be managed cooperatively, either by those providing them or their recipients.

For example, transport—like the railways—should be "managed by the community and the transport workers."<sup>73</sup>

The National Health Service was created in utter disregard for "the network of friendly societies that began as organs of working-class self-help in the previous century," which provided healthcare to "most employed workers (but not their families)." Medicine might have been socialized by working

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71 Ward and Goodway, p. 85.

72 Ward: *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 57-58.

73 Ward and Goodway, p. 86.

through and expanding the friendly society network, he argued, much like the educational system (which provided taxpayer funding to the wide variety of schools in the preexisting patchwork of local government, private and religious schools). He pointed to the example of Denmark, which “has hundreds of small schools set up by groups of parents and teachers, which receive 75 percent of their funds from the national education budget.”<sup>74</sup>

Ward's treatment of natural resource management, in the context of water policy, sounds a lot like Elinor Ostrom: “...local popular control is the best way of avoiding [Hardin's “tragedy of the commons”], and... all through history local communities have devised ways of ensuring fair share of a vital and limited resource.”<sup>75</sup>

But actual water policy followed the same path as all other public services. Thousands of community water systems in England and Wales were centralized under ten regional boards in 1974, and then in 1989 the water industry was sold off to private corporations.<sup>76</sup>

## **Agency and Self-Organization**

This passage from *Anarchy in Action* is paradigmatic of Ward's view of human agency:

The novelist Nigel Balchin, was once invited to address a conference on “incentives” in industry. He remarked that “Industrial psychologists must stop about with tricky and ingenious bonus schemes and find out why a man, after a hard day's work, went home and enjoyed digging in his garden”

But don't we already know why? He enjoys going home and digging in his garden because there he is free from foremen, managers and bosses. He is free from the monotony and slavery of doing the same thing day in day out, and is in control of the whole job from start to finish. He is free to decide for himself how and when to set about it. He is responsible to himself and not to somebody else. He is working because he WANTS to and not because he HAS to. He is doing his own

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>75</sup> Ward and Goodway, p. 91.

<sup>76</sup> Ward, “Water and the Gift Relationship,” in Ward, *Social Policy: An Anarchist Response* (London: Freedom Press, 1996), p. 63.

thing. He is his own man.<sup>77</sup>

So the single biggest differentiating factor is whether an activity is undertaken for one's ends, under one's own autonomous direction, or simply involves alienating one's time to serve as a living tool in another's hand. Simply taking over direction of another person's activities "for their own good" can turn those activities from a joy to a chore. Ward quotes a newspaper comparison of "official" and "unofficial" squatters in a Lancashire camp:

There are two camps within the camp -- the official squatters (that is the people placed in the huts after the first invasion) and the unofficial squatters (the veterans, who have been allowed to remain on sufferance). Both pay the same rent of 10s a week but there the similarity ends. Although one would have imagined that the acceptance of rent from both should accord them identical privileges, in fact, it does not. Workmen have put up partitions in the huts of the official squatters and have put in sinks and other numerous conveniences. These are the sheep; the goats have perforce to fend for themselves.

A commentary on the situation was made by one of the young welfare officers attached to the housing department. On her visit of inspection she found that the goats had set to work with a will, improvising partitions, running up curtains, distempering, painting and using initiative. The official squatters, on the other hand, sat about glumly without using initiative or a hand to help themselves and bemoaning their fate, even though might have been removed from the most appalling slum property. Until the overworked corporation workmen got around to them they would not attempt to improve affairs themselves.<sup>78</sup>

Ward comments:

This story reveals a great deal about the state of mind that is induced by free and independent action, and that which is induced by dependence and inertia: the difference between people who initiate things and act for themselves and people to whom things just

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<sup>77</sup> Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, p. 92.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

happen....

People care about what is theirs, what they can modify, alter, adapt to changing needs and improve for themselves. They must be able to attack their environment to make it truly their own. They must have a direct responsibility for it.<sup>79</sup>

The same principle applies to learning—the only really effective learning is that which is driven by interest or engagement, in response to some perceived interest, need or problem of the learner. Ward describes a typical exercise in "participation" as inculcated in schools as "a manipulative propagandist exercise to fob off opposition to decisions which have already been made elsewhere." Genuine education for participation "means starting from an awareness of his own interests and how to fight for them..." Children's interest is

rarely kindled by an abstract interest in the broader issues, but rapidly involved in the local and immediate controversy, and gaining in insight and effectiveness as this involvement deepens. The only way a child learns to ride a bike is by riding one, and the only way that anyone, child or adult, learns to participate in environmental decision-making is by doing so.

In the adult world the most important work in education for participation is done, not in the formal education system, but informally through the activities of voluntary organisations and pressure groups.<sup>80</sup>

One hopeful development in recent decades, in response to increasing restrictions on extreme disciplinary measures like corporal punishment and a corresponding increase in schools' tendency to expel "unteachable" students, has been the resurgence of alternative schools. And as it turns out, the anarchist-flavored curriculum of self-directed learning in such schools is especially effective for the students who did the worst in conventional schools.

Many observers claim that the school system has failed to prepare for the dilemmas that came in the wake of the abandonment of physical

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>80</sup> Ward, "Education for Participation," *Housing: An Anarchist Response*, p. 124.

punishment. The teacher is deprived of the weapon that was seen as the ultimate sanction of the school. This has resulted in increased numbers of children being excluded from school because teachers have declined to have them in the class. Anyone who has observed how one disruptive member of the class can make learning impossible for the whole group has no criticism to make of those teachers (especially since their employers put pressure on them not to upset statistics).

In the 1960s and 1970s an intriguing situation arose in several British cities: London, Liverpool, Leeds, and Glasgow. Groups of enthusiasts found empty buildings and set up 'free schools' to provide an informal education for children who were either excluded from school or had excluded themselves through truancy. (One of them, White Lion Free School in London, lasted from 1972 to 1990.) The regime of these schools was consciously modelled on the experience of the progressive school movement. I asked a veteran of those experiments why the idea had not been revived among the new generation of excluded children at the start of the new century. She gave me two reasons: first, the legal requirement in Britain for all schools to teach the National Curriculum introduced during the Thatcher regime and retained by its successors; and second, the difficulty of finding premises that would meet the safety and sanitary regulations prescribed for schools.<sup>81</sup>

In *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Pirsig's fictional mouthpiece Phaedrus describes the emergence of a course of self-directed learning for a previously unmotivated student, spurred entirely by his grappling with his own immediate life needs:

Phædrus' argument for the abolition of the degree-and-grading system produced a nonplussed or negative reaction in all but a few students at first, since it seemed, on first judgment, to destroy the whole University system. One student laid it wide open when she said with complete candor, "Of course you can't eliminate the degree and grading system. After all, that's what we're here for."

She spoke the complete truth. The idea that the majority of students attend a university for an education independent of the degree and

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81 Ward, *Anarchism: A Very Brief Introduction*, pp. 73-74.



grades is a little hypocrisy everyone is happier not to expose. Occasionally some students do arrive for an education but rote and the mechanical nature of the institution soon converts them to a less idealistic attitude.

The demonstrator was an argument that elimination of grades and degrees would destroy this hypocrisy. Rather than deal with generalities it dealt with the specific career of an imaginary student who more or less typified what was found in the classroom, a student completely conditioned to work for a grade rather than for the knowledge the grade was supposed to represent.

Such a student, the demonstrator hypothesized, would go to his first class, get his first assignment and probably do it out of habit. He might go to his second and third as well. But eventually the novelty of the course would wear off and, because his academic life was not his only life, the pressure of other obligations or desires would create circumstances where he just would not be able to get an assignment in.

Since there was no degree or grading system he would incur no penalty for this. Subsequent lectures which presumed he'd completed the assignment might be a little more difficult to understand, however, and this difficulty, in turn, might weaken his interest to a point where the next assignment, which he would find quite hard, would also be dropped. Again no penalty.

In time his weaker and weaker understanding of what the lectures were about would make it more and more difficult for him to pay attention in class. Eventually he would see he wasn't learning much; and facing the continual pressure of outside obligations, he would stop studying, feel guilty about this and stop attending class. Again, no penalty would be attached.

But what had happened? The student, with no hard feelings on anybody's part, would have flunked himself out. Good! This is what should have happened. He wasn't there for a real education in the first place and had no real business there at all. A large amount of money and effort had been saved and there would be no stigma of failure and ruin to haunt him the rest of his life. No bridges had been burned.

The student's biggest problem was a slave mentality which had been built into him by years of carrot-and-whip grading, a mule mentality which said, "If you don't whip me, I won't work." He didn't get whipped. He didn't work. And the cart of civilization, which he supposedly was being trained to pull, was just going to have to creak along a little slower without him.

This is a tragedy, however, only if you presume that the cart of civilization, "the system," is pulled by mules. This is a common, vocational, "location" point of view, but it's not the Church attitude.

The Church attitude is that civilization, or "the system" or "society" or whatever you want to call it, is best served not by mules but by free men. The purpose of abolishing grades and degrees is not to punish mules or to get rid of them but to provide an environment in which that mule can turn into a free man.

The hypothetical student, still a mule, would drift around for a while. He would get another kind of education quite as valuable as the one he'd abandoned, in what used to be called the "school of hard knocks." Instead of wasting money and time as a high-status mule, he would now have to get a job as a low-status mule, maybe as a mechanic. Actually his real status would go up. He would be making a contribution for a change. Maybe that's what he would do for the rest of his life. Maybe he'd found his level. But don't count on it.

In time...six months; five years, perhaps...a change could easily begin to take place. He would become less and less satisfied with a kind of dumb, day-to-day shopwork. His creative intelligence, stifled by too much theory and too many grades in college, would now become reawakened by the boredom of the shop. Thousands of hours of frustrating mechanical problems would have made him more interested in machine design. He would like to design machinery himself. He'd think he could do a better job. He would try modifying a few engines, meet with success, look for more success, but feel blocked because he didn't have the theoretical information. He would discover that when before he felt stupid because of his lack of interest in theoretical information, he'd now find a brand of theoretical information which he'd have a lot of respect for, namely, mechanical

engineering.

So he would come back to our degreeless and gradeless school, but with a difference. He'd no longer be a grade-motivated person. He'd be a knowledge-motivated person. He would need no external pushing to learn. His push would come from inside. He'd be a free man. He wouldn't need a lot of discipline to shape him up. In fact, if the instructors assigned him were slacking on the job he would be likely to shape them up by asking rude questions. He'd be there to learn something, would be paying to learn something and they'd better come up with it.

Motivation of this sort, once it catches hold, is a ferocious force, and in the gradeless, degreeless institution where our student would find himself, he wouldn't stop with rote engineering information. Physics and mathematics were going to come within his sphere of interest because he'd see he needed them. Metallurgy and electrical engineering would come up for attention. And, in the process of intellectual maturing that these abstract studies gave him, he would he likely to branch out into other theoretical areas that weren't directly related to machines but had become a part of a newer larger goal. This larger goal wouldn't be the imitation of education in Universities today, glossed over and concealed by grades and degrees that give the appearance of something happening when, in fact, almost nothing is going on. It would be the real thing.<sup>82</sup>

As recounted by Illich in *Deschooling Society*, the Brazilian teacher Paolo Freire observed the same thing in real life:

He discovered that any adult can begin to read in a matter of forty hours if the first words he deciphers are charged with political meaning. Freire trains his teachers to move into a village and to discover the words which designate current important issues, such as the access to a well or the compound interest on the debts owed to the *patron*. In the evening the villagers meet for the discussion of these key words. They begin to realize that each word stays on the blackboard even after its sound has faded. The letters continue to unlock reality and to make it manageable as a problem. I have

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82 Robert Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry Into Values* (New York: William Morrow Publishing Company, 1979). Online version courtesy of Quality page, Virtual School Distributed Learning Community <<http://www.virtualschool.edu/mon/Quality/PirsigZen/index.html>>.

frequently witnessed how discussants grow in social awareness and how they are impelled to take political action as fast as they learn to read. They seem to take reality into their hands as they write it down.<sup>83</sup>

## Federalism and Other Principles of Organization

According to Ward's principles of anarchist organization organizations "should be (1) voluntary, (2) functional, (3) temporary, and (4) small."<sup>84</sup>

Another principle, federalism, follows from the fourth—smallness. If the coordination of necessary social functions is beyond the scope of a local face-to-face group, but the effects of large scale and indirect representation are pernicious, it follows that we must "find ways in which the large-scale functions can be broken down into functions capable of being organised by small functional groups and then link these groups in a federal manner."<sup>85</sup> For Ward, Proudhon's federalism was an answer to the authoritarian state socialist snobs (the kind who toss around the words "economies of scale" like creationists toss around the Second Law of Thermodynamics) who saw decentralism and direct democracy as squalid relics of the past and unadaptable to "modern" needs. "Proudhon was criticized for being a mere survivor of the world of peasant farmers and small artisans in local communities, but he had a ready response in setting out the principles of successful federation."<sup>86</sup>

Another theory of anarchist organization, spontaneous order, sounds a lot like David Graeber and Elinor Ostrom: "given a common need, a collection of people will, by trial and error, by improvisation and experiment, evolve order out of chaos — this order being more durable and more closely related to their needs than any kind of externally imposed order."<sup>87</sup>

An important component of the anarchist approach to organisation is what we might call the theory of spontaneous order: the theory that, given a common need, a collection of people will, by trial and error, by improvisation and experiment, evolve order out of the situation—this

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83 Illich, *Deschooling Society* [ch. 2]

84 Ward, "Anarchism as a Theory of Organization" (1966). Reproduced by Anarchist Library <<http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/colin-ward-anarchism-as-a-theory-of-organization.pdf>>, p. 2.

85 Ward, "Anarchism as a Theory of Organization," p. 3.

86 Ward, *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 5.

87 Ward, "Anarchism As a Theory of Organization," p. 4.

order being more durable and more closely related to their needs than any kind of externally imposed authority could provide.<sup>88</sup>

One of Graeber's common themes—as with Ostrom—is an optimism about the ability of ordinary people to sit down face-to-face, in situations where they have an ongoing relationship rather than a one-off dealing and nobody is in the position of having armed gunmen to subordinate the others to their will.

## **Industrial Technology**

Ward, in the Introduction to his edition of Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, approvingly quotes Lewis Mumford:

Almost half a century in advance of contemporary economic and technical opinion, he had grasped the fact that the flexibility and adaptability of electric communication and electric power, along with the possibilities of intensive biodynamic farming, had laid the foundations for a more decentralised urban development in small units, responsive to direct human contact, and enjoying both urban and rural advantages. ...

Kropotkin realised that the new means of rapid transit and communication, coupled with the transmission of electric power in a network, rather than a one-dimensional line, made the small community on a par in essential technical facilities with the over-congested city. By the same token, rural occupations once isolated and below the economic and cultural level of the city could have the advantage of scientific intelligence, group organisation, and animated activities, originally a big city monopoly; and with this the hard and fast division between urban and rural, between industrial worker and farm worker, would break down too.... With the small unit as a base, he saw the opportunity for a more responsible and responsive local life, with greater scope for the human agents who were neglected and frustrated by mass organisations.<sup>89</sup>

The very technological developments which, in the hands of people with statist, centralising, authoritarian habits of mind, as well as in the

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<sup>88</sup> Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, p. 31.

<sup>89</sup> Kropotkin and Ward, *Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow*, p. 14.

hands of mere exploiters, demand greater concentration of industry, are also those which could make possible a local, intimate, decentralised society. When tractors were first made, they were giants, suitable only for prairie-farming. Now you can get them scaled down to a Rotivator for a small-holding. Power tools, which were going to make all industry one big Dagenham, are commonplace for every do-it-yourself enthusiast.<sup>90</sup>

The rise of cheap, tabletop CNC machinery—especially the cheapest open-source designs—suited to small-scale production in garages is an even better example. David Noble, in [cite] describes the creation of large-scale, expensive CNC machinery for factory production after World War II as a conscious strategy for deskilling workers and shifting the control of production upward from the shop floor to engineers and managers.<sup>91</sup> The development of smaller, cheaper CNC machinery in the '70s led to the proliferation of distributed, flexible manufacturing in small shops on the Emilia-Romagna model. And the availability of even smaller, cheaper—especially open source—machinery since the turn of the 20th century has given rise to the maker movement, which promises to return manufacturing to the craft model with production in cooperative shops controlled by self-employed small producers who own their own tools.

If anything, Ward's commentary on Kropotkin in his critical edition of *Fields, Factories and Workshops* comes across as pessimistic. At the time he wrote, over forty years ago, he could only say that Kropotkin himself, and even more so the technological developments after his time, had shown that an economy of decentralized manufacturing in small shops was entirely feasible from a technical standpoint; but its actual adoption had been quite spotty at the time of Ward's commentary. Fast forward to 1987, and Ward was arguing that a shift to the informal economy was occurring as a matter of necessity in the face of permanent unemployment and underemployment: self-employment was "the only discernible pattern of the future economy." He repeated Victor Keegan's observation to that "what we are experiencing now is nothing less than a movement back towards an informal economy after a brief flirtation of 200 years or so with a formal one," adding: "We are talking about the movement of work back into the domestic economy."<sup>92</sup> By the early 21st century, he was declaring mass production obsolescent. "...[Kropotkin] anticipated the changes in sources

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>91</sup> David Noble

<sup>92</sup> Ward, "Anarchism and the Informal Economy," p. 31.

of motive power that in the 20th and 21st centuries would make the large factory obsolete. We see this in the obsolescence all around us today.”<sup>93</sup>

## **Agriculture**

Ward was every bit as much a disciple of Kropotkin in food production as in industrial production.

Any discussion of environmental issues has to start with the fact of malnutrition in a world of plenty, and then proceed to examine the high cost of the rich world’s “cheap” food. Kropotkin’s arguments included the claim that a densely populated small country like Britain could feed itself from its own land, an idea regarded as absurd even though it was based on European experience. A century later I had the pleasure of meeting Jac Smit, president of the Urban Agriculture Network and co-author of the United Nations report on Urban Agriculture: Food, Jobs and Sustainable Cities, who explained how in Chinese cities 90% of vegetables are locally grown...<sup>94</sup>

He noted, contrary to the popular belief that housing developments destroyed valuable farmland, that the value of food produced in household gardens in such new developments actually exceeded the value of previous commercial agricultural output on the same land. The reason is that small-scale intensive horticulture is far more efficient than mechanized row-cropping in output per acre.<sup>95</sup>

This is borne out by a wide variety of experience. One of the most interesting examples is John Jeavons's biointensive farming a particularly highly developed form of raised bed horticulture. Jeavons has managed—relying entirely on closed-loop nitrogen recycling through composting with no outside fertilizer inputs, and minimal irrigation aside from the use of conserved rainwater—to produce sufficient food to feed one person on a tenth of an acre. It's a very Spartan diet, to be sure—80% legumes, roots and cereal grains—but the tenth of an acre requirement simply establishes an absolute minimum that can be supplemented with edible landscaping, fowl and rabbits, etc.<sup>96</sup>

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93 Ward, *The Factory We Never Had*, p. 14.

94 Ward, *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 91.

95 Ward, *Talking Houses: Ten Lectures by Colin Ward* (London: Freedom Press, 1990), p. 33.

96 John Jeavons, *How to Grow More Vegetables*. Eighth edition (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2012).

## Housing

Housing, given Ward's own occupational background in architecture and public housing, and his primary interest as an anarchist writer, is the premier illustration of his views on the contrast in efficiency between people making decisions for themselves, and having decisions made for them by “experts” and elites. The articles in his collection *Housing: An Anarchist Response* are almost entirely admiring accounts of self-built housing, squatting and rent strikes. And housing is a perfect example of the superiority of decisions made by those who have both the informational advantages of being directly in the situation on the ground, and the incentive advantages of having skin in the game:

Ours is a society in which, in every field, one group of people makes decisions, exercises control, limits choices, while the great majority have to accept these decisions, submit to this control and act within the limits of these externally imposed choices. Nowhere is this more evident than in the field of housing: one of those basic human needs which throughout history and all over the world people have satisfied as well as they could for themselves, using the materials that were at hand and their own, and their neighbours' labour. The marvellously resourced anonymous vernacular architecture of every part of the globe is a testimony to their skill, using timber, straw, grass, leaves, hides, stone, clay, bone, earth, mud and even snow....

Even today “a third of the world's people house themselves with their own hands, sometimes in the absence of government and professional intervention, sometimes in spite of it.” In the rich nations the more advances that are made in building technology and the more complex the financial provision that is made for housing, the more intractable the “problem” becomes.<sup>97</sup>

People who would be viewed as “unlettered” by most professional architects, historically, have shown remarkable design sense when planning their own houses—as evidenced by a historian Ward quotes on 19th century Irish peasants planning a house, who “would discuss for hours the proportions of a new building—how high a house should be if it was a certain length, with so many rafters in order that it might look well . . .”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>98</sup> Ward, “Housing and Human Needs,” *Housing: An Anarchist Response*, pp. 42-43.



Ward was also an extraordinary historian of self-built housing in 20th century Britain. From the inter-war period on, Britons carried on in very much the tradition of their pre-Enclosure ancestors with cottages on the edge of the wood or fen and common pasturage rights for a few pigs or geese.

- Up to 1945 “plotlanders” were able to make use of small patches of land not needed for agriculture, gradually building up weekend shacks into permanent residences, by using their own time and labour rather than large sums of money.
- Immediately after the Second World War, homeless people in their thousands squatted in recently-vacated military camps, organizing their own communal services. Then, in the 1960s and 1970s, a similar movement erupted across vacant local-authority properties, evolving into long-term housing co-operatives.
- Today various kinds of travellers are attempting to settle on their own land, living outside the formal economy and experimenting with a wide range of unconventional dwelling types.
- This sort of self-help housing provision is flexible, cheap and creative. It tends to use human capital rather than financial capital, and to evolve slowly from the most basic provision by devising ingenious new solutions.<sup>99</sup>

He describes the large-scale self-built housing movement in Pittsea and Laindon between the wars, where—just as in Latin American *barriados* and *favelas*—residents started out in many cases with hastily built, substandard, jerry-built housing, but it was steadily upgraded over time until the older sections were filled with attractive self-built cottages with gardens. “What in fact those Pitsea-Laindon dwellers had was the ability to turn their labour into capital over time, just like the Latin American squatters.”<sup>100</sup>

Although the state has since regulated the possibility of such developments out of existence (“the cheap, substandard unfinished kind of development that gives the underprivileged a place of their own has ceased to be

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<sup>99</sup> Ward, *Cotters and Squatters: The Hidden History of Housing* (2004), p. 3.

<sup>100</sup> Ward, *Talking Houses*, p. 31.

available"<sup>101</sup>), Ward imagines it as the basis of housing development in poorer countries if governments would cease to interfere:

But imagine we were a poor country, and like those poor countries which had made a realistic assessment of resources, and had moved from persecuting the homeless to adopting the policy of site-and-services, which can be seen in some South American and African countries—the provision of minimum services for self-build housing. And suppose we applied this, not to green field sites, but to the acres of dereliction in urban districts, where the municipal zeal to erase the slums has outstripped the capacity to rebuild. Imagine that the corporation provided a road, a plot, party walls and a service core of plumbing bath, basin, wc, sink, and ring-main terminal, as our equivalent of the site-and-services nucleus, and then encouraged people to do their own thing. Self-build housing societies would spring up, voluntary effort would aid those unable to help themselves, the homeless and unemployed could make homes and make jobs, and in a decade we would see a self-made community, freed from the awful dependency we inflict on the municipal tenant (one-third of the families at Thamesmead are behind with the rent) and from the pauperisation we inflict on the beneficiaries of welfare.<sup>102</sup>

And in fact a major share of the hundreds of millions involved in the Third World urban explosion of recent decades live in self-built housing in self-built housing in the slums of major cities.

If you want examples of anarchist cities in the real world today, in the sense of large-scale human settlements resulting from popular direct action and not on governmental action, it is to the Third World you would have to turn. In Latin America, Asia and Africa, the enormous movement of population into the big cities during the last two decades has resulted in the growth of huge peripheral squatter settlements around the existing cities, inhabited by the "invisible" people who have no official urban existence.<sup>103</sup>

And as Ward noted with the self-built housing in Britain between the wars, the quality of such squatter housing was heavily upgraded over time, with lovingly-built cottages and gardens in areas developed a generation earlier.

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101 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

102 Ward, "The Pittsea-Laindon Story: Some Lessons From Shanty-Town," *Housing: An Anarchist Response*, p. 86

103 Ward, "Notes on Anarchist Cities," *Housing: An Anarchist Response*, p. 88

He quotes Barbara Ward's refutation of the mainstream or official view of *barriadas* as "breeding-grounds for every kind of disease, social and family disorganisation" (based on the *barriadas* of Peru):

Instead of chaos and disorganisation, the evidence instead points to highly organised invasions of public land in the face of violent police opposition, internal political organisation with yearly local elections, thousands of people living together in an orderly fashion with no police protection or public services, The original straw houses constructed during the invasions are converted as rapidly as possible into brick and cement structures with an investment totalling millions of dollars in labour and materials. Employment rates, wages, literacy, and educational levels are all higher than in central city slums (from which most *barriada* residents have escaped) and higher than the national average. Crime, juvenile delinquency, prostitution and gambling are rare, except for petty thievery, or the incidence of which is seemingly smaller than in other parts of the city.<sup>104</sup>

The poor of the Third World shanty-towns, acting anarchically, because no authority is powerful enough to prevent them from doing so, have three freedoms which the poor of the rich world have lost.... [T]hey have the freedom of community self-selection, the freedom to budget one's own resources and the freedom to shape one's own environment.<sup>105</sup>

Ward, accordingly, was quite sympathetic to the idea of housing as a work in progress, as an ongoing part of its inhabitants' lives, rather than a finished commodity bought once and for all from experts. And he challenged English urban planners with the fact that self-built housing in squatter neighborhoods tended to improve from one generation to the next, whereas "professionally" built public housing provided by planners immediately began to deteriorate from the residents' sense of alienation and lack of identity or pride in the housing given to them by "the authorities."

1. The idea that a house is a fully-finished, fully-serviced object right from the start belongs to a very small part of the world and a very small stretch of our own history. All through history homes have

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104 Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, p. 69.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

started humbly and have been enlarged, improved and adapted over time. Today in the exploding cities of Latin America, what begins as a straw shack becomes in about fifteen years a fully serviced suburban house, through the efforts of its occupier, who, starting with nothing, invests his own energy, income and ingenuity in his home. I could take you to houses in the Essex "plotlands" started before such efforts were ruled out of court by our building regulations, public health and planning legislation, where exactly the same phenomenon could be seen. But for us, seeing housing as a commodity rather than an activity, a house is either complete from the moment of occupation or it is illegal....

4. Squatters in North London boroughs like Camden and Islington have also set about restoring and improving houses, using voluntary labour and unorthodox materials, at an infinitely lower cost and much more rapidly than the councils could....

7. If housing standards were the vital consideration, how is it that on one side of town, sub-standard private housing is cherished and continually improved by its occupants, while on the other Parker Morris expensively built council housing begins its cycle of deterioration the moment it is occupied?<sup>106</sup>

He also pointed out that local housing authorities and planners came off poorly in comparison to squatters, in terms of sheer cost-effectiveness and value creation. Squatters, by treating the irrational effects of planning decisions as damage and routing around them, managed to mitigate their ill effects.

...[P]olicies of accumulating huge sites for eventual comprehensive redevelopment left a vast number of houses either slowly rotting awaiting demolition, or similarly awaiting eventual renovation. Policy itself, as Graham Lomas stressed, "left great areas unoccupied and ripe targets for vandalism and squatting"....

Fortunately the squatters sometimes got there before the unofficial vandals. The response of the authorities was interesting. Central government changed the law on squatting for the first time since the fourteenth century--although squatting is neither criminal nor illegal, it

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106 Ward, "Dear Mr. Crosland," *Housing: An Anarchist Response*, pp. 94-97.

is simply unlawful.... Local government in many places distinguished itself by destroying its own property to keep squatters out--ripping out services, smashing sanitary fittings, and pouring wet concrete down drains. In others it employed so-called "private investigators" as agents of the council to terrorise and intimidate squatting families.... On several occasions councils actually blamed the squatters for damage to property done on their instructions by their own employees.

Just in case you... believed the stories told about squatters, surveys showed that in Haringey 51 percent were actually people with children, in Lambeth over 60 per cent, and in Cardiff 77 per cent.

And what property did they squat? [Less than 3% of squatted units in Haringey were in the permanent stock of council housing to let, and had been empty on average for over six months] "...The reality is not that squatters jump the housing waiting list or deprive others of a home but rather that they opt out of the queue altogether and make use of houses that would otherwise be empty."<sup>107</sup>

71% of squatters claimed to have made improvements or repairs to the property they occupied. One, Andy Ingham, wrote a "Self Help House Repairs Manual" for squatters.<sup>108</sup>

Ward noted that all of us are descended from squatters at some place and time. His description of the stages of the postwar squatting campaign in Britain almost exactly parallels Kropotkin's account of the growth of early medieval towns from squatter settlements, and the process by which they won independence from the "property" claims of neighboring lords, and finally got official recognition through a royal charter:

Firstly, initiative, the individual action or decision that begins the campaign, the spark that starts the blaze. Secondly, consolidation, when the movement spreads sufficiently to constitute a threat to property rights and becomes big enough to avoid being snuffed out by the authorities. Thirdly, success, when the authorities have to concede to the movement what it has won. Finally, official action, usually undertaken unwillingly to placate the popular demand, or to

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<sup>107</sup> Ward, "Self-Help in Urban Renewal" *The Raven* No. 2 (1987), p. 118.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* p. 119.

incorporate it in the status quo.<sup>109</sup>

In fact at one point he makes an explicit comparison to the medieval towns:

What an extraordinary tribute to the capacity for mutual aid of poor people defying authority. The reader who is familiar with Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* is bound to be reminded of his chapter in praise of the mediaeval city, where he observes that "Wherever men had found, or expected to find, some protection behind their town walls, they instituted their co-jurations, their fraternities, their friendships, united in one common idea, and boldly marching towards a new life of mutual support and liberty. And they succeeded so well that in three or four hundred years they had changed the very face of Europe." Kropotkin is not a romantic adulator of the free cities of the middle ages, he knows what went wrong with them, and of their failure to avoid an exploitive relationship with the peasantry. But modern scholarship supports his interpretation of their evolution. Walter Ullman for example remarks that they "represent a rather clear demonstration of entities governing themselves" and that "In order to transact business, the community assembled in its entirety . . . the assembly was not 'representative' of the whole, but was the whole."<sup>110</sup>

Ward also resembles Jane Jacobs in many particulars. Witness his description of the reconstruction of inner cities, and of the self-organized urban life it replaces:

The reconstruction of the inner city has another effect—the shift from a fine-grained to a coarse-grained environment. This is very obvious in the surface texture—the change from small-scale buildings with a lot of visual interest to large-scale buildings with much less to beguile the eye. The coarse, crude, slab-like character of post-war buildings slaps you in the face in every British city, from pavement to skyline.

But it is also apparent in the economic and social pattern of the city. All those small-scale business enterprises which provided the enormous variety of service trades and occupations which are one of the reasons why people congregate in cities in the first place, disappear because the high rents of new buildings cannot be

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109 Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, pp. 70-71.

110 Ward, "Notes on Anarchist Cities," *Housing: An Anarchist Response*, p. 89

sustained by the turnover of small businesses depending on low overheads. No umbrella-repairers, picture-frame makers, pastrycooks or ballet-shoe makers. No voluntary organisations, small publishers or chiropodists. Only large-scale, highly capitalised, high-turnover and big-profit entrepreneurs need apply.

It affects homelessness, too. The gradual disappearance of cheap rented accommodation, boarding-houses, common lodging houses, means that there is nowhere for the poor and homeless to lay their heads. Hence the growing "problem" of homeless single people in the cities. There are more people sleeping rough in London today than in, for instance, New York, where there are still cheap, run-down properties, and consequently somewhere for people to sleep at all levels of wealth and poverty.

Similarly it implies the death of cheap eating-houses and places of entertainment: no room for them in the new office blocks and shopping centres of the rebuilt city. The effect of this coarsening of the texture of urban life can be seen in every city in the country.<sup>111</sup>

## Schooling

Ward writes very much in the tradition of libertarian or alternative schooling, going back not only to the turn of the 20th century but all the way to William Godwin.

This entirely different conception of the school had already been envisaged by Godwin in 1797 as a plan "calculated entirely to change the face of education. The whole formidable apparatus, which has hitherto attended it, is swept away. Strictly speaking, no such characters are left upon the scene as either preceptor or pupil. The boy, like the man, studies because he desires it. He proceeds upon a plan of his own invention, or which, by adopting, he has made his own." Perhaps the nearest thing to a school of this kind within the official system was Prestolee School (an elementary school in Lancashire revolutionised after the First World War by its headmaster Edward O' Neil), where "time-tables and programmes play an insignificant part, for the older children come back when school hours

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111 Ward, "Planning and Human Needs," *Housing: An Anarchist Approach*, p. 134

are over, and with them, their parents and elder brothers and sisters".<sup>112</sup>

The most devastating criticism we can make of the organised system is that its effects are profoundly anti-educational. In Britain, at five years old, most children cannot wait to get into school. At fifteen most cannot wait to get out.<sup>113</sup>

Ward quotes an account of a playground called The Yard, which was opened in Minneapolis in the late 40s to provide children with "their own spot of earth and plenty of tools and materials for digging, building and creating as they see fit." At the outset

it was every child for himself The initial stockpile of secondhand lumber disappeared like ice off a hot stove. Children helped themselves to all they could carry, sawed off long boards when short pieces would have done. Some hoarded tools and supplies in secret caches. Everybody wanted to build the biggest shack in the shortest time. The workmanship was shoddy.

Then came the bust. There wasn't a stick of lumber left. Hijacking raids were staged on half-finished shacks. Grumbling and bickering broke out. A few children packed up and left.

But on the second day of the great depression most of the youngsters banded together spontaneously for a salvage drive. Tools and nails came out of hiding. For over a week the youngsters made do with what they had. Rugged individualists who had insisted on building alone invited others to join in -- and bring their supplies along. New ideas popped up for joint projects. By the time a fresh supply of lumber arrived a community had been born.<sup>114</sup>

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112 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

113 *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

114 *Ibid.*, p. 89.



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