

Babies, Bathwater and Big Ideas

By Neala Schleuning

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Anarchist theory is the living dream of the Enlightenment. It is the political philosophy of the Enlightenment, bringing light to a dark world. In the *Revolution of Everyday Life*, Raoul Vaneigem shared a delightful contemporary vision of enlightenment. Here’s a slightly abridged version of his parable:

“Millions of **people** lived in a huge building with no doors or windows. The feeble light of countless oil lamps competed with the unchanging darkness. . . . The upkeep of the lamps was the duty of the poor, so that the lighting waxed and waned with the alternation of revolt and pacification. One day a general insurrection broke out. . . . Its leaders demanded a fair allotment of the costs of lighting; **that light should be . . .** considered a public utility **and** should be free. . . . During a particularly lively clash with the forces of order, a stray bullet pierced the outer wall, leaving a crack through which daylight streamed in, **and** this flood of light was greeted with cries of victory. The solution had been found: all they had to do was to make some more holes. The lamps were thrown away or put in museums, and power fell to the window-makers. . . . Then, a century or two later, . . . the people, that eternal malcontent, had grown accustomed to plate-glass windows, and took to asking extravagant questions. “To drag out your days in a greenhouse, is that living?” they began to ask.” 57-58

Vaneigem

The Enlightenment was characterized by secularism, an urbane, anti-nationalist cosmopolitanism, a wonderful passion for freedoms of all sorts, tension with religions, and an unabashed pursuit of modernity, most often articulated as embracing science. The centerpiece of the Enlightenment was the human being: not a god, not the State, but the people. The Enlightenment celebrates the optimistic vision that human beings are inherently good, are rational beings and “know” right from wrong, and therefore need no external power to shape human destiny. It is a vision of human empowerment, a vision of supreme optimism. The central vision of the 17th and 18th century Enlightenment culminated in the flowering of 19th century anarchist theory.

It is important to understand appreciate the cultural context of life in the 19th century. What did the world look like then? There was little mobility, and few freedoms for individuals. People were constrained by a rural, agricultural village life and culture. Many were enslaved. Village economic life was simple. It focused on directing skills to meeting basic needs and crafting goods to share or barter with neighbors. It was the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, and in a relatively short time span, the rapid enclosure of commonly-held lands and the emerging factory system destabilized life across Europe. Resistance to these changes grew, and anarchist theory emerged to challenge the new rapacious social and economic structures of early capitalism.

Building on the ideas of the Enlightenment, there were several key concepts at the core of anarchist theory. For most part, these principles have persisted into our own era, although they continue to be rigorously debated.

1. The critique of capitalism and private property
2. Resistance to all authority (religious, the State, custom) and its corollary, a belief in individual freedom and liberty
3. A deep suspicion of progress and technology
4. A celebration of the individual and a tendency to foreground individual over society
5. A commitment to a politics of action, and not just thought, and
6. A commitment to the value of cooperation and the need for mutual support for survival.

I'd like to take some time now to look at these ideas a little more closely.

Capitalism and Private Property. The good news is that we haven't changed our thinking about capitalism. We have Karl Marx to thank for many of our insights into the relationship of ownership to political power so Marx is a baby to keep!

Private property is not your personal belongings, your earrings, your furniture, or your car. It's not even owning your own home. Private property is not about taking something, using it, and enjoying it; it is about control and power, about exploitation, about having more than enough, more than you need. Private property is also the right of the owner to limit the freedom of others, to keep everyone else out—enclosing the common resources of the planet for personal, individual use. The forces of nation states and armies are used to defend it, and computers and bureaucracies sort it and document it and trace it.

Being an owner shapes one's humanity. Owning demands that I always begin my thinking with myself, with me. As an owner, I think about how I can have more than you do, how can I take what you have, how can I keep you from what I want. This preoccupation with self is focused on depriving other selves of their goods or their opportunities to meet their needs and exercise their freedoms.

Modern conceptions of private property began in Europe in the late 18th century. The early theory was worked out by John Locke, and was based on defending the right of individuals to enclose portions of the Commons. Enclosure continues today across the planet. Access to land was survival. Enclosure destroyed the collective ownership of pre-modern societies, and the underlying ethic respecting the right of all to live. As ownership was consolidated and the forests and fields were enclosed, people were denied access to hunting, fishing, gathering, and farming and were forced into cities, factories and jobs. Enclosure of land was sometimes accomplished through so-called legal action. A famous Woody Guthrie line in "Pretty Boy Floyd" goes: "Some will rob you with a six gun, and some with a fountain pen." Other enclosures were the result of military struggle and repression and enslavement of local populations through taxation and enserfment.

Today, transnational corporations (TNCs) and private companies own outright, or control, the bulk of the world's natural resources and have enclosed most elements of the economy necessary for human survival.

Even food production. Fast food is not about convenience, it is about enclosure. As we speak, there is an epic battle underway for control of the world's fresh water resources. I'm watching the political debates going on over control of the waters of the Great Lakes.

The second enclosure was the enclosure of work, first through enserfment or slavery, and then through private ownership of the industrial means of production and the subsequent enclosure of creativity through a division of labor designed as part of the factory system.

The third and most recent enclosure is consumer property, which has emerged as the ultimate logic of the marriage of private ownership and centrally controlled industrialization. The purpose of economic production activity in a consumer economy is not to meet people's needs, but to concentrate wealth more centrally through hyper-production of non-essential goods and the enclosure of human services. Everything is owned in a consumer society—the natural resources, the work, the consumer, the consumer's intimate desires, and the act of consuming.

The consumer society's only agenda, according to French Situationist Guy Debord, is self-perpetuation: "When economic necessity is replaced by the necessity for boundless economic development, the satisfaction of primary human needs is replaced by an uninterrupted fabrication of pseudo-needs which are reduced to the single pseudo-need of maintaining the reign of the autonomous economy" (Debord Para 51).

Debord called this the society of the spectacle—a society based on escalating unmet needs and desires. It is finely tuned to continuously shape and re-shape consumer desire for new product trends and new consumption patterns. "The spectacle," he writes, "is the permanent opium war which aims to make people identify goods with commodities and satisfaction with survival that increases according to its own laws" (Debord, 44).

True culture, he wrote, is the "representation of the lived, a common knowledge," a common community. In a consumer society community is warped and human interaction perverted; community becomes identified with the product, the purchase, the things we buy. Participation in the consumer economy replaces real engagement, real relationship. We meet in the global shopping mall and share the tenuous ties of the shared purchase. This is not community. The spectacle, Debord notes, is the "illusory representation of the non-lived, a restructuring without community" (Debord, 185, 192).

Authority and Freedom. Historically, the anarchist argument against authority is an uncompromising critique of what Emma Goldman called "power over." Anarchist theory recognizes that power exists, and seeks to mitigate and contain its dangers. As a result, the anarchist vision has always articulated a decentralized, shared-governance political philosophy. The anarchist critique argued that the only purpose of the nation state was to protect property, to centralize political and economic power and control, and to perpetuate collective violence.

Today the state is far more powerful and far more centralized than the nation states of the 19th century. What we began to call The System in the 60's controls every facet of our lives. The System includes the government, but far more sinister is the faceless bureaucracy and anonymous structures of technological and sociological control. The trans-national corporations are the new governmental authorities that rule every aspect of contemporary life. Their agenda is the centralization of political and economic power and control, and they conduct the business of the world behind closed doors in close cooperation with governments. According to Noam Chomsky, the first agenda of corporation politics is the destruction of democracy. The destruction of democracy is the ultimate enclosure, the enclosure of our freedom. Democracy is inclusive; ownership is exclusive. Democracy is community; ownership is individual. Democracy decentralizes power; ownership centralizes.

At the heart of anarchist theory is a belief in the power of people to organize their political lives on the principles of democracy in its purest sense. Most social anarchist theories tend to support grass-roots, local decision-making practices, often seeking consensus. The commune, the collective, the soviet, the affinity group, the cooperative—are all models to achieve the same ends—face-to-face decentralized decision-making in a true democratic structure.

Anarchist theory also developed a very sophisticated criticism of ideological repression. Beginning with Stirner's early deconstruction of the "spooks" of religion and ideology, its most recent theoretical manifestation is a critique of "ideology" itself. [As an aside, however, I confess to wondering how we organize our political thoughts with no ideology at all.] Part of this critique was based on the Enlightenment belief in rational discourse as opposed to superstition. The Enlightenment critique remains relevant because the pre-modern mind is still with us today. According to Andrew Sullivan in a recent review of Dinesh D'Souza's new book, *The Enemy at Home: The Cultural Left and Its Responsibility for 9/11*, "D'Souza believes that the distinction in American politics is no longer between the economic right and the economic left . . . the real divide is between authority and autonomy, between faith-based politics and individual freedom."

This book is only the latest assault on modernity and the secular humanist vision of the Enlightenment, and it should serve to remind us that fundamentalist thinking is still with us, and its influence globally is significant. We overlook the power of these ideas at our great peril. Nineteenth century anarchist theorists all addressed in one way or another what they called the "religious question," in part because they were aware of the power the church hierarchies held in the cultural and political sphere, and the tendency of religion to place itself in the service of political power. Other criticism focused on religion's power over the mind, resulting in people who are other-directed, who find comfort in the rigidity and authoritarianism inherent in fundamentalist thought. One of the basic principles of Leo Strauss' neo-conservatism is advocating the use of religion to political ends—any religion will do. For a good overview of the roots of American evangelical fundamentalism, you might want to read Hofstadter's book, "Anti-Intellectualism in American Life."

The antidote to power in anarchist theory is one of the most powerful statements about freedom in political thought. There are two aspects to the anarchist conception of freedom—freedom from, and freedom to. Anarchist theory is anti-authoritarian, and against coercion of any sort—freedom from. “Freedom to” was a call for unbridled individual freedom to act, think, speak and do. This profound belief in self-expression and self-actualization was in part a rebellion against the built-in social repressions based on custom. But it also demanded removal of all obstacles to freedom of action—especially those imposed by government and church.

Most anarchist theorists recognized that freedom was dependent upon respecting the freedom of others, as well. These collective freedoms must be negotiated in a democratic environment. To be free, and respect the freedom of others, requires a tremendous confidence that people act rationally and responsibly.

Technology, Progress and Politics. Historically, many (but not all) anarchist theorists were suspicious (if not outright critical) of progress and technology for some very good reasons. Anarchist theory is based on decentralizing power, and technology centralized control of the means of production and limited the freedom of individual workers. Early on, the Luddites took direct action against the power loom machines because they stole their livelihoods. They recognized that technology was the lover of the Industrial Revolution and so-called progress resulted only in centralization of power and wealth. Many utopian and dystopian writers in the 19th and 20th century challenged the belief in progress and the amelioration of life through technology, and consciously developed democratic models that encouraged political as well as economic direct control. One of the most cogent critics of technology in the 20th century was Lewis Mumford, who saw “totalitarian technics” as a major threat to democracy, and Jacques Ellul who argued that “technique is opposed to nature . . . It destroys, eliminates, or subordinates the natural world.”

Today we live within a centralized, authoritarian technology that still dreams the dream of progress and abundance. Technology controls every facet of our lives, making us ever more dependent, taking control through the obeisance to data and standardization and systemization. Further, there is a sense of inevitability, which directly contradicts anarchist ideas of freedom and independent thought. On the other hand, it allows us to connect, to network, to deliver services efficiently, to run our traffic lights, our sewage systems, warm our homes. So what is the anarchist to do?

Given our near total dependence on technological centralization today, anarchist theory has a new challenge—how to mitigate the entrenched system without causing a catastrophic collapse of society. We only need to look at the suffering of the Iraqi people to see how a modern society collapses. Change always has unintended consequences.

To revise our approach to technology, we have to first of all understand its connectedness and enmeshment in our lives. We have to assess, and then dismantle those technologies that threaten freedom and are destroying the planet, but we can’t just dismantle the machinery one factory at a time. Dismantling technology will require a sophisticated plan. We need to ask ourselves a series of questions. How much

centralization is enough? Are there good and bad technologies? How do we know? Which technologies should we keep? Which reject? Biomedical advances? The space program? Power plants? Ipods, radio, television? Public transportation? What about the internet? It requires a huge investment in infrastructure. What technologies are good for us? For the earth? Should we freeze all new technological developments while we sort this out?

One contemporary stream of anarchist thought has argued for a return to a more primitive form of society—low technology, low impact on the earth. But Primitivism isn't a solution. While the human race may end up there anyway if we do nothing about reversing the degradation of the earth, its appeal is limited when the consequences of such a transition are taken into consideration.

When we decide what to do, then we need to decide how to do it. The solution, of course, will have to be a political one. But here it gets messy. What type of direct action will we take? Who will decide? How will decisions be made? By community? Through consultation with experts? Whose experts? Fortunately, there are political models for critiquing new ideas and technological advances. For example, over two thousand years ago, in *The Republic*, Plato recommended that a democratically elected Nocturnal Council be established to review all new ideas coming into Greek society.

Mulford Q. Sibley, an important, but little known political philosopher with anarchist tendencies, was my adviser 30 years ago. In his book *Nature, Technology and Society*, he quotes a medieval proverb: quod omnes tangit ab omnibus approbetur. "Whatever touches all should be approved by all." He suggested two principles to begin re-evaluating any technology.

1. the burden of proof should be on the creators of technology to prove that it will do no harm, and perhaps even be of supreme benefit
2. There should be a democratic up or down vote about whether the technology should be adopted or dismantled.

The Individual and Society. Closely linked with the anarchist idea of freedom, is the celebration of the individual. Just what sort of individual has been a particular point of contention for anarchists. But sorting out the definitions of individual, individualism, individuality is a complicated matter. The roots of individualist anarchism can be traced to the 18th century theories of Englishmen John Locke and William Godwin, and the self-confidence in the perfectibility of human nature that lies at the heart of the Enlightenment. The individualist theory of the German philosopher Max Stirner also continues to fascinate and garner adherents. Unlike Godwin, who posited a universal standard of good to which individuals would aspire, Stirner rejected all standards other than the individual's. Some of Stirner's critics even suggest that his approach is pathological, bordering on solipcism.

To challenge Stirner's philosophy, we need to ask, can people really act totally on their own initiative? Is freedom always in opposition to community? Free of context, individual activities have little meaning. One

cannot really become a completely free individual without a social context. A philosophy of “going it alone” is ultimately only about self. Isolated actions are not really statements of freedom. And there is no self outside of community. The true self is an active, empowered self; active with others and through others; active in the context of others; within political community.

The critique of individualist anarchism was engaged early on. Kropotkin argued that it tended to encourage competition rather than cooperation. Critics of contemporary libertarian philosophies (which argue that competition is natural and good) find that the result is often a sort of “economic Darwinism” that can easily slip over into capitalism. Alexander Berkman was critical of the core principle of Stirner’s theory—that “might makes right.” Extreme individualism could easily lead to repression of others. Emma Goldman, one of the most ardent advocates of free expression and individuality, nevertheless believed that we need both individuality and cooperation to be fully human. She made a distinction between an individualism that she identified with the “rugged” individualism in the United States, and individuality, the freedom of self-expression.

Individualist anarchist theory celebrates individual rebellious action in the name of freedom of expression. There is a certain romantic cache’ about artists and political rebels on the cutting edge who make a political statement. In its artistic, creative mode, individual action provides an example of how we might all break out of existing modes of thought, of image, of action. The Situationists called these actions *detournment*. By standing out, being outrageous, the individual sharpens the distinction between human action and the deadening standardization of the techno-consumer world.

There is another inherent weakness in the individualist position—it is easier for imbedded power structures to “divide and conquer.” If “political” means acting together for the common good, it is particularly hard to make a case for the good of all when people act only on their own behalf.

Because consumer culture appropriates and distorts the idea of individual “freedom,” true individuality is further compromised. This new kind of individualism—what Canadian political philosopher C. B. Macpherson called “possessive individualism”—is a hallmark of capitalism. At its foundation is a proprietarian attitude that fragments the social order and the ethic of mutual caring and responsibility. Hauntingly reminiscent of Stirner, it says I can take what I want, I have an individual “right” to appropriate, and further, I am not human unless I possess things. Consumer culture is a mass culture, it does not respect individuals. This kind of mass individualism destroys community.

Individual desire set free of community is the engine of economic life in the consumer society. Nothing stands between my wants and the object to be consumed, so my desire becomes my reality. Consumer desire undermines our politics because it is linked to the idea of freedom through the idea of choice, and choice is never mediated through community. Through the manipulation of desire, the very notion of democratic collective decision-making is subverted. Consumer freedom is a false freedom; individual “desire” is enclosed

desire, channeled into only choosing what to consume, not whether to consume. This limited idea of choice has perverted the idea of democratic choice as the power of self-rule.

Consumer culture also threatens human freedom. As Vaneigem noted, “Whatever you possess possesses you in return. Everything that makes you into an owner adapts you to the order of things”¹⁵⁴ Consumption is a kind of forced labor; we are caught on the gerbil’s wheel of desiring-working-buying, desiring-working-buying. The more we buy, the more our freedom is enclosed. Consumer desire disempowers. It is not active. It is passive. To consume is to be manipulated; to follow another’s direction, another’s siren call, another’s choice. It wants to be fed; it does not feed. It does not create, it does not give.

Where do we go next? What the early anarchist theorists warned about has come to pass—the tremendous centralization of wealth, power, and technological dependence. Today, we are more dependent than ever, but we are less connected to each other. We have no access to even minimal means of survival—no access to land and no survival skills. We don’t know how to build houses, plant gardens, put up healthy vegetables, make our own clothes. To those concerns we can add a new concern—environmental degradation and the specter of the destruction of the planet.

We have some individual freedoms, but we are increasingly isolated. Our mobility is taken for granted, even glorified and expected. Families are scattered across the country, generations are isolated from one another, millions of people never even sit down to share a meal—they eat in their cars. People don’t know their neighbors. Despite the celebration of so-called individual expression, we have no community, our politics is reduced to consumer choice, and we are everywhere subject to the control and manipulation by others.

Is our Big Idea relevant in this new world? Where should we start?

We can begin by rethinking the economic and political foundations of our society. Some of these ideas are not new, but there is a new urgency to find creative ways of living and working together.

First, we need to develop and promulgate theories of property about having enough, about meeting basic human needs, and leaving, as even John Locke argued, “enough and as good left over” for others to enjoy. We have to redefine the meaning of “public,” and demand access to a common pool of resources from which individuals may take what they need. What will be public? Will access to public goods be limited? By whom? How many trees can I cut down to heat my house in the winter? How many cows can I pasture on the common meadow? Can I use as much electricity as I wish? Drive a car as much as I want? Put poison on my lawn or garden if I wish? Who will “make me” respect the commons, the public sphere?

It will be difficult to unravel the consumer economy. For example, what would we do with all the unemployed? How would they live? Two-thirds of all economic activity in the United States is buying and selling “stuff.” We all participate in capitalism; we are not outside of it. We are all affected by this economic Chernobyl; the destructive practices of capitalism touch us all. We must go to the heart of the problem: overproduction in the name of endless growth, progress and unequal distribution. We need to determine the

difference between our needs and our wants, not just individually but collectively. We need to offer a real, viable theoretical, emotional and social alternative to shopping. Once we kicked the habit of endless consumption, what next?

What about politics? Political resistance to the hegemony of the corporate state and the consumer culture is crucial at this juncture in our history, because our very freedom is at stake. Corporations no longer need the nation state; they rule through control of the economy and the global media. Anarchist theory has a well-developed critique of the nation state, which can be applied to a critique of the corporate state and expanded to make apparent the money and power ambitions of the corporate state. Marx was right. Capitalism can never be democratic, and the wealth that it encloses must be redistributed to ensure economic and political justice. We must demand equal opportunity to use (but not own) resources that are the birthright of all. Life and living cannot be owned and we must reclaim food, housing, social welfare, and our work.

The key to altering the economic structure of our lives is collective action. We must become engaged in dialog with others, we must teach and learn. Anarchists must reclaim and rebuild the territories of civil and economic society through a new political process of collective decision-making. This will not be easy. Democracy requires an economic environment that is decentralized and continually open to negotiation and discussion at the lowest level. It also requires an economic environment that is small in scale, to ensure collective control of economic decisions. “Small” is not only “Beautiful,” as E.F. Schumacher taught us, but it also makes us free. Fortunately there is a rich history of anarchist success building alternative governance and economic structures: the Mondragon network of cooperatives in Spain, mutual aid societies, syndicalism, consumer cooperatives, to name only a few.

In the Midwest there is an especially rich tradition of social and economic cooperatives with strong anarchist roots. For over 125 years, this cooperative movement successfully merged self-interest with the common good, empowering people to take control of their political and economic lives. Its principle ethic was: “we help ourselves by helping others”. One of the anarchist founders of the Cooperative League of the USA, James Peter Warbasse, was deeply committed to blending the Finnish cooperative experience with Kropotkin’s ideas in the American setting:

“Cooperation offered a viable way to reconstruct society . . . [A] ‘voluntary association of neighbors’ could gradually take over as the state withered. Furthermore, cooperation worked, as England and Northern Europe had already proved. It was the only form of social action that used means entirely consistent with its ends: it worked for a cooperative society not through politics, but through the establishment of cooperatives.

Cooperatives worked. In 1917, The Non-Partisan League took over the state of North Dakota and created a cooperative commonwealth. Our challenge will be to bring these cooperative ideas to life in a modern, largely urban reality.

Power and politics lie at the core of communities. There is no self outside of community and connectedness. The great myth of the modern era is that there is a self that is independent, set free of all context, of all community. Politics is about creating community with others. Politics is partly about being “against,” but it is more about figuring out how to be “with.”

Power relations between people exist, they will never go away. So what kind of power do we want? Might makes right? Tyranny of the majority? Our challenge is how to create a society where power over others is limited, and cannot gather its resources to expand. The core theoretical questions about power are WHO? and HOW MUCH? Power is always political, always collective. It is never individual. The individual has no political power without others. Conversely, collective power must constantly be mediated by attention to the individual’s role in collaboration and consent. Defining and shaping political power relations is the deepest meaning of direct action—acting every day in concert with others to control our own reality.

A good place to begin is to understand how power operates in our collective lives. Reclaiming our power will require an understanding of our contemporary powerlessness and how to overcome it. You might want to read Michael Lerner’s *Surplus Powerlessness*. We can also begin taking responsibility for ways in which we are individually complicit with the system that controls and represses us, and how we have internalized the reproduction of repression in our own and others’ lives. We can help others learn how to take control over their lives, to overcome powerlessness, and cease being spectators and instead become actors and directors. This is possible.

So how do you think political communities of the future will be organized? By neighborhood and workplace? This was how the Communist party in Turin, Italy organized to resist Fascism—neighborhood and workplace. In the mid-1980s, the Austin United Support Group organized striking Hormel workers, their families and neighborhoods to provide economic support for 1500 families for nearly two years. Will we organize by identity? Age? Class? What role do the politics of identity play in anarchist theory? Are there emerging new communities? Will they be virtual communities? I hope not. Not political communities anyway. It’s easy to delete boring conversations, difficult decisions, challenges to your ideas. Politics must always be face to face. Voting is faceless and abstract, with a potential for tyranny by the majority. Politics is people, talking, arguing, coming to consensus.

Cultural Solutions. Next, I’d like to look briefly at some of the personal values that might guide our future political thinking and action. We must begin with creating and expanding our own anarchist communities. In the 1997 symposium, Howard Ehrlich observed that “Our primary task at this time is to create anarchists. There are too few anarchists today to do the work that needs to be done.” How do we do this? How do we find our comrades? We can only survive as communities of people. We must ask ourselves each day, everywhere we go, how am I connected to the Big Idea? What is my political context? A people who do not create, nurture, and respect context will not survive. We are studying the history of our Big Idea this weekend.

History is the backdrop against which we can weigh our current realities, it can provide a storehouse of knowledge of hope and persistence and endurance. We must encourage others to share our Big Idea.

We must celebrate diversity. Diversity is the primary axiom of all of nature, yet we seldom apply this concept to our political lives. All monocultures are destructive of life. Monocultures of plants are vulnerable to disease and annihilation. Monocultures of animals destroy habitat, or breed themselves out of existence. Monocultures of economic production create corporate monopoly. A healthy community is diversity. Diversity maintains a vital balance, limits power over and revitalizes equitable political power relations between people. Diversity is also a respect for individual difference and individuality . Individuality without balance and without diversity is a perilous, fragile existence, and cannot create stable communities. We must solve the social conundrum of intolerance and racism and the other ways in which we destroy instead of appreciate others. True communities celebrate the special, the odd, the unique, the unusual, the different, the strange—in a word, diversity.

We want to change the world, we believe in change. So we must embrace change, and encourage others to welcome change. How do we empower others, all of the people, to make decisions and undertake changes? Can we really get beyond our own small worlds and envision a future of economic and social justice? Can we yet embrace a new “green” lifestyle with joy? Emma Goldman believed that “real wealth” is “utility and beauty,” strong healthy bodies, and beautiful surroundings to live in. Perhaps these values could also guide our thinking.

We also need to encourage a major shift in human values. Art can be especially helpful here. We need new mythologies, new visions, new dreams to replace those of industrial growth and progress. And we need to broaden our concept of love. Love is not just between human beings. We cannot separate love for human beings from love for place or for Nature. Love can be a kind of reverence, developing a sense of belonging to a place, a people, the earth. The earth is not “outside” of us; it needs to be inside our hearts. The most important context for human survival is, of course, the earth itself and the integrity of its diverse bioregions. We must find ways to make real our connections to the natural world—real connections, beyond aesthetic appreciation.

Environmental Solutions. I believe anarchists have a unique role to play in the emerging ecological crisis. We know the old ways of doing business won’t work. We are confronted with uncertainty on all fronts. Progress is part of the problem and not the solution, technology won’t save us, the rapture isn’t happening, and government and corporate politicians do not have the good of the whole earth in mind. We cannot escape to another planet. We’re stuck here, so have to get busy. The sirens of corporate capitalism are already at work soothing fears and assuring us that the “market” can solve the problem painlessly and even big corporations can become green overnight.

The world will need new, bold ideas. People are seeking a vision, a hope, a different dream. Anarchist theory is uniquely equipped to point out the enemies of life, face change, and deal joyfully with uncertainty.

Who else has a Big Vision that isn't tied to money and power dreams? Who else is open and flexible enough to address and creatively respond to the challenges facing the human relationship with natural world? It is a theory of connections, relationships, interactions, solutions. It can act in a holistic way to solve a holistic problem. It understands the power of individual action to change the world.

The most profound failure of the environmental movement for the past 30 years is this: they never got political. They focused on the earth, not on people. They never took on the underlying problem—capitalism and the fantasy that more technology will “fix” all problems. As French author Herve Kempf noted in his recently published book, *How the Rich are Destroying the Planet*, "Ingenuous comrades, there are bad men on the Earth. If you want to be an ecologist, you have to stop being a dummy." We have to redirect the environmental conversation to focus on the political challenges.

In a review of Kempf's book, Leslie Thatcher observed that

“The ecological crisis is not about “the Earth,” but “the possibilities of human life on the planet.” The solution lies in embracing humanist principles: humanism, the values of mutual respect and tolerance, a restrained and rich relationship with nature, and cooperation among human beings.

To achieve those goals,” he continues, “it is not enough for society to become aware of the urgency of the ecological crisis. . . . It will further be necessary that ecological concerns articulate themselves as a radical political analysis of current relationships of domination. We will not be able to decrease global material consumption if the powerful are not brought down and if inequality is not combated. To the ecological principle . . . "Think globally; act locally," - we must add the principle . . . "Consume less; share better."

The liberal environment movement is proposing a narrow, individualistic, consumerist approach to the challenges. We all have our individual “carbon footprint,” and we're individually responsible. Keep on doing what you're doing, but plant a few trees, or better yet, if you have money, just “buy” your piece of guilt-free consuming. But we are not going to shop our way out of an environmental meltdown. We are not going to recycle our way out of an environmental meltdown. Do we really believe that the planet be saved one random act at a time? Or that we can advertise our way out of this crisis?

We must change, and we must change quickly. Our challenge is to bring to the whole planet our belief in the power of people to embrace change. So how to begin? We can start with a grand conversation to assess and redefine the role of technology in our culture. Only anarchist theory has consistently explored this theme, and we have a wealth of ideas. What would a sustainable technology include? What could we do without? A return to decentralized, low (but efficient) technologies and need-based economic activities will go a long way toward preserving the earth. The answer is not primitivism. We need to create something achievable. Why not

the United States 1940? We had penicillin, public transportation, no plastic, a viable local agriculture, good schools.

We also need to initiate a discussion about carrying capacity and population growth—for the planet, for livable cities. Carrying capacity is a real issue—for the planet, for politics. In recent years this topic has been largely avoided, because it can easily be coopted by supporters of eugenics and racist ideologies. Nevertheless, the fact remains. Among many burdens on the planet, numbers of people are certainly a factor. Carrying capacity is also a political organization issue—and should be especially important for anarchists to explore because of the commitment to decentralized democratic decision-making and local control. Sibley argued convincingly that high density populations require more regulation, because density creates higher levels of frustration leading to irrational behavior and irrational behavior reduces freedom of all: “Freedom to become rational and autonomous human beings [a core principle of anarchist theory] thus tends to be counteracted by the magnified tendency to irrationality” (Sibley, 225). So where would the anarchist stand on “more regulation,” and higher versus lower density?”

We must devise a global model to share and develop resources for the good of all. While some undreamed of new energy source or technology might be in the offing, a plan must be developed to redistribute existing resources worldwide. In order to do this, Sibley argued, we need to accept “such principles as public ownership of land and natural resources, regulation of migration on a world scale, establishment of world-administered food reserves, and fundamental changes of consumer habits within the developed nations” (Sibley, 229). The Midwest, for example, may have to feed the world—how would anarchists achieve that goal? Will the land be used to feed people, or grow corn to drive American cars? Who will decide?

Finally, I just want to say that the world today is poised on the edge of another great enlightenment. It is our singular role to nourish that flickering light. Nourishing means freeing up that energy of independence and joy, of freedom and spontaneity that characterizes anarchist theory. It also means keeping alive the principles of economic and social justice, of cooperation and caring.

Several years ago, the Columbia Anarchist League published a marvelous manifesto, outlining the challenges that anarchist theory faces. They concluded: “The only type of movement which can ever hope for real change is one which challenges the social system as a whole at all times, even when it is concentrating on particular aspects of that system.” This is what anarchist theory can do for the world. Keep the whole in mind at all times. Open up the Big Idea, bring us into the Big Idea, make the Big Idea our vision for the future. And let in the light.