The Reformist Anarchism of John Clark

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John P. Clark, *The Impossible Community: Realizing Communitarian Anarchism,* London: Bloomsbury 2013

1. Prologue: Communitarian Anarchism

This book is written by an academic philosopher, a professor at Loyola University in New Orleans, essentially for other academics, and it is motivated by two distinct concerns. The first is clearly to impress other academics, so please swot up on your French and German (as I can only converse in English and Chinyanja I had problems!) and on Hegelian metaphysics, as well as familiarising yourself with the obscurantist musings of Jacques Lacan. The second is Clark's worthy and stimulating attempt to explore and *defend* the political tradition of anarchist-communism (p. 5), otherwise known by a variety of terms: revolutionary socialism, social anarchism, class struggle anarchism, libertarian socialism and, especially for Clark, communitarian anarchism. All these are virtual synonyms (Van der Walt and Schmidt 2009: p. 19).[1]

But rather confusingly Clark tends to use the term communitarian anarchism to refer both to a political tradition or philosophy (anarchist-communism) and to a specific political praxis or form of direct action *within* this tradition, namely community activism or reformism. This is the strategy long ago advocated by Colin Ward (1973) as 'anarchy in action', though Clark, for reasons of his own, makes no mention at all of Ward's seminal writings. This form of community activism was described by the class struggle anarchist Albert Meltzer as 'revisionist' anarchism, a sectarian form of 'non-violent, bourgeois, sanitized anarchism' which in essence is reformist (1996: p. 322, but cf Levy 2013 on Ward's anarchist politics). The same could be said of Clark's communitarian politics.

Thus Clark never loses an opportunity to criticise, berate or even ridicule all other forms of anarchist politics or direct action. These include protest in its many forms and insurrectionism (Alfredo Bonanno), class struggle anarchism or anarcho-syndicalism (Sam Dolgoff, Albert Meltzer), and the political anarchism which stresses the creation of local democratic assemblies (Murray Bookchin, Dimitrius Roussopoulos). Indeed Clark tends to insinuate the basest motives for anyone advocating class struggle anarchism – that is, being *opposed* to state power and capitalism, or even advocating a socialist *revolution* (the reformist Proudhon, of course, felt the same).

Kropotkin, like most anarchist-communists, viewed protests and insurrectionism, anarcho-syndicalism and class struggle, the advocacy of local political assemblies and community activism to be complementary political strategies – or forms of direct action – not, like Clark, as being *opposed* strategies.

The title of the book *The Impossible Community* is, of course, a complete misnomer, and quite misleading. Communities (or societies) are not 'impossible', nor are they 'spooks', for they have a real existence, not only among social mammals (badgers, hyenas, and many primates), but among human beings, and throughout human history. Among contemporary hunter-gatherers and African peasant smallholders, for example, people live in family-households (the main productive unit), in kin groups or forest camps (affinity groups essentially), in local communities as settlements or villages, as well as in wider ethnic communities based on cultural and linguistic criteria (Morris 2014: pp. 228-232, 2017: pp. 75-89, *cf* Landauer 1978: p. 126).

Anarchist–communism, as Kropotkin suggested, envisages a society in which 'all mutual relations of its members are regulated, not by laws, not by authorities, whether self-imposed or elected, but by mutual agreements between members of that society' (Baldwin 1970: p. 157). Thus, for Kropotkin, and

[1] This is not the only form of anarchism but in historical terms anarchist-communism has been the dominant philosophical tendency, specifically in being closely associated with anarchism as a working class movement that emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century. Anarchist-communism, as Kropotkin emphasised, was not the invention of academic philosophers like Clark.

for anarchist-communists (including Murray Bookchin) mutual aid, social solidarity, individual liberty through free co-operation, was to be the basis of social life, and he came to describe anarchism as the 'no-government system of *socialism*' (Baldwin 1970: p. 46). Or as 'free *communism*' not simply 'free community' that Clark continually alludes to. The functions of government were to be replaced by local communities and local assemblies, united through a federal system, and Kropotkin insisted on maintaining and expanding what later scholars called the human life-world (*lebenswelt*) – 'the precious kernel of social; customs without which no human society can exist' (Baldwin 1970: pp. 130-137, Morris 2014: pp. 206-207).

John Clark's book consists of a collection of ten essays, all undated, on a wide variety of topics relating to communitarian anarchism. It includes, for example, chapters on theories of utopia, on the Sarvodaya movement associated with Gandhi (in which Gandhi is portrayed as an anarchist?) on the political struggle and grassroots community organisations that sprang up after the hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, and on the radical critique of 'domination', which anarchists, of course, long ago initiated, although Clark focuses his own critique mainly on liberal scholarship. Most of these essays will be of interest to class struggle anarchists, all are well-researched, though some are rather dense and scholastic, and many contain important insights.

One essay entitled 'The Third Concept of Liberty: Theorizing the Free Community' offers Clark's reflections on the liberal philosopher Isaiah Berlin's famous essay on 'Two Concepts of Liberty'. Stuck firmly in the same philosophical rut as Berlin, Clark completely fails to mention that the distinction between negative and positive freedom was first broached not by Berlin but by Michael Bakunin. Berlin simply filched Bakunin's ideas in typical academic fashion without any acknowledgement, and then berated the anarchist as a philosophical ignoramus, specifically in completely accepting 'glib Hegelian claptrap' (as Berlin put it). Bakunin, of course, drawing on Hegel, made a distinction between a negative conception of freedom – consisting of freedom *from* oppression, coercion and all forms of authority – and a positive conception of freedom, which Bakunin conceived as 'eminently social'. He defined the positive conception of freedom as 'the full development and full enjoyment of all human faculties and powers in every man', that is, in terms of self-realisation (Lehning 1973: p. 149, Morris 1993: pp. 89-91).

What Bakunin sought, like all anarchist-communists, was to unite these two conceptions of liberty, through the creation of a libertarian *socialist* society, or what Clark simply denotes as a 'free community'. Murray Bookchin, likewise, used the concept 'social freedom'. Drawing on the work of Hegel, Gustav Landauer and Joel Kovel – all mystical pantheists – Clark thus, in this interesting essay, simply reaffirms in philosophical language what Bakunin and Kropotkin were telling us in simple prose, at the end of the nineteenth century. But Clark neglects to mention that the religious anarchist Landauer supported the Bavarian Soviet Republic shortly before his death in 1919, and that Joel Kovel, towards whom Clark expresses a close affinity, proposes an unholy marriage between mysticism and Marxism (what a heady mixture), and advocated a form of eco-socialism that embraces both market socialism and the democratic state (Morris 2014: p. 93). Both market socialism and the democratic state are, of course, as anarchist-communists have long emphasised, oxymorons, contradictions in terms (Rubel and Crump 1987, Fotopoulos 1995). Given his vagueness when it comes to politics, one is unsure whether or not Clark actually shares Kovel's political vision?

In the rest of this review I shall focus specifically on Clark's rather warped understanding of Bookchin's anarchist-communism, which is presented in two substantial chapters and which in fact comprise around 24 per cent of the book.

2. The Misinterpretation Of Murray Bookchin's Anarchist-Communism

In Chapter Seven entitled 'Bridging the Unbridgeable Chasm' Clark offers the reader a critique of Murray Bookchin's well-known polemic *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism* (1995). Having a rather warped understanding of Bookchin's own critique, Clark gives us, I regret, a gross *mis*interpretation of Bookchin's sterling defence and affirmation of anarchist communism (or social anarchism).

Long ago Bookchin wrote another harsh polemic tract entitled 'Listen Marxist!' (1974: pp. 173-220). It critiqued the authoritarian Marxists not for their revolutionary socialism, but for their lack of a *libertarian* perspective. He explicitly affirmed his own commitment to anarchist-communism. Likewise, at the other extreme, Bookchin critiqued, in his well-known polemic, life-style anarchists and individualist anarchists not because they were libertarians (anarchists) but because they expressed a petty bourgeois (abstract) conception of the individual and lacked any real *socialist* (or communist – they're synonymous) perspective. In fact the life-style anarchists he specifically criticised proudly described themselves not as anarchists (that is, anarchist-communists) but as adherents of 'post-left anarchy'. They even viewed society as the 'enemy' of the individual – the unique one (Parker et al. 2011).

It is important to realise that Bookchin made both these polemic critiques because he stood firmly in the anarchist-communist (or libertarian socialist) tradition that had its roots historically in the 'legacy' of St.Imier – invoked at the meetings in Switzerland in 1872 of a group of revolutionary socialists. From its inception anarchism (anarchist-communism) was defined as an anti-capitalist ideology, and a form of revolutionary *socialism* (Van der Walt and Schmidt 2009: p. 46). It was particularly associated with such revolutionary socialists as Bakunin, Kropotkin, Elisée Reclus, Malatesta, Louis Michel, Alexander Berkman and Rudolf Rocker.

The political tradition that Bookchin embraced and defended stridently in his polemic essay *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism* – anarchist communism – combined, as many scholars have emphasised, the best of both radical liberalism, with its emphasis on *liberty* and individual freedom, and *socialism*, with its emphasis on equality, social solidarity and voluntary associations. This unity, which indeed defines anarchist-communism, was more succinctly expressed in the well-known maxim of Michael Bakunin, which Bookchin often quoted: 'Liberty without socialism is privilege and injustice. Socialism without liberty is slavery and brutality'(Lehning 1973: p. 110, Bookchin 1999: p. 160).

More than a decade after Bookchin, Clark in the opening page of this book, paraphrases Bakunin's maxim, and suggests that he intends to defend this thesis, one that combines the anarchist conception of freedom and the communitarian conception of social solidarity – that is, anarchist communism (p. 5). Yet earlier, seeking the approval of the neo-Marxists, Clark rebukes Bookchin for his Bakuninist tendencies, suggesting that his politics is 'firmly in the tradition of Bakuninist anarchism!' (1998: p. 138). True! Bookchin stood firmly in the Bakuninist tradition that understood anarchism as combining *libertarianism* – with the emphasis on social freedom, communal individuality and self-realisation – and *socialism* (communism) – with the emphasis on social solidarity, common property, voluntary co-operation, workers' self-management and local assemblies. For Bookchin 'every personal relationship has a social dimension; every social relationship has a deeply personal side to it'. All social forms must therefore be consistent, he argued 'with the fullest realization of personal and social freedom' (1974: p. 143).

When Clark writes that contemporary anarchism continues 'a long history of successfully synthesizing personal and communal liberation, and has much to offer the project of re-affirming and realizing the libertarian communitarian tradition' (p. 25) he seems blissfully unaware that it was precisely this tradition – as anarchist communism (with the emphasis on 'communism' not merely on 'community') that Bookchin was defending in his polemic against the life-style anarchists!

I have always been intrigued by the fact that there are two John Clarks: there is the surly, abusive, Max Cafard who plays with the 'foxes' – and expresses his affinities with deep ecologists, Christian

mystics, neo-primitivists, goddess theologians, Nietzschean aesthetes and Stirnerite egoists; and there is the John P. Clark who runs with the 'hounds' – displaying his erudition and seeking the approval of neo-Marxists and bourgeois academic philosophers.

Bookchin's polemical essay *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism* is fundamentally a *defence* – long before Clark – of anarchist communism, a tradition that intrinsically combines an emphasis both on personal freedom and social solidarity. It is also a focussed critique – of the petty bourgeois individualism that became prominent and fashionable in the 1990s, especially in radical circles.

Significantly in the essay Bookchin engages with *specific* individuals and their images of thought: namely, the existentialist individualism of Susan Brown, although recognising her allegiance to anarchist communism; the Nietzchean aesthetics and narcissism of Hakim Bey (aka Peter Lamborn Wilson); the Stirnerite egoism of Jason McQuinn and his associates; and the neo-primitivism of John Zerzan and David Watson. Bookchin also makes some telling criticism of the metaphysics of Max Stirner, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, the doyens of radical individualists and the postmodernists (1995: pp. 50-53).

Bookchin extends his polemic against lifestyle anarchism to include individualist anarchism, an earlier current of thought associated particularly with the followers of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, such as Benjamin Tucker. Otherwise known as mutualism, reformist anarchism or market socialism, individual anarchism is not egoism. For Bookchin recognised (contra Clark) that Proudhon emphasised the importance of mutual aid, was deeply involved in working class politics, and thought of himself as a socialist. But mutualism, for Bookchin, embraced the bourgeois conception of the possessive (abstract) individual, and thus advocates private property, the market economy and wage-labour. As Landauer acknowledged, it was a 'socialism of the petty bourgeois' (1978: p. 108). Proudhon was thus opposed to strikes or the need for revolutionary change (Van Der Walt and Schmidt 2009: p. 84). In fact, individualist or reformist anarchism, which Clark is clearly attracted to, is not socialist at all, but a form of petty capitalism. Bookchin opposed the radical *individualism* of the individualist anarchists, not their emphasis on co-operation and mutual aid. Clark seriously misinterprets (as usual) Bookchin's critique.

Anyone reading Bookchin's polemic *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism* with even a modicum of respect and understanding would have recognised that it is a defence of anarchist communism, and a critique of its detractors – the radical egoists and petty bourgeois individualists. Not so, Clark, who suggests, quite fallaciously, that Bookchin posited an *opposition* between individual autonomy and self-realisation and social solidarity or community. This is patently untrue, for Bookchin always emphasised that there was an intrinsic dialectical relationship between individual liberty and self-expression and society (communal life). Bookchin, like Kropotkin before him, advocated a form of 'communal individuality' or as he expressed it, 'social freedom', not autonomy in the sense of petty bourgeois individualism (or radical egoism).

For Bookchin the opposition – 'the chasm' as he rhetorically puts it – was between anarchist-communism (libertarian socialism) and bourgeois individualism (whether expressed as radical egoism or market socialism) NOT between the self-realisation of the individual person and social solidarity. Clark wilfully misinterprets Bookchin's polemical essay, though some of his criticisms of Bookchin's rhetorical flourishes may have a certain validity.

But it is of interest to note that Clark makes no mention at all in his own critique of the scholars that so aroused Bookchin's ire – namely, Hakim Bey (Lamborn Wilson), Rudolf Bahro, Martin Heidegger and John Zerzan.

Clark brings into his critique of Bookchin the fact that in the first decade of the twenty-first century there were widespread protests and demonstrations. These were particularly associated with the anti-globalisation and Occupy movements, and many anarchist groups employed consensus decision-making within those movements. Bookchin, of course, was always highly sceptical of consensus politics, given his own early experiences, and his concern to develop a new democratic form of politics. Four points, however, may be made in this context.

First, these demonstrations were not specifically anarchist but involved people from right across the political spectrum – social democrats, pacifists, trade unionists, environmentalists, various NGOs, Quakers and other religious groups, Marxists of various persuasions, as well as anarchists.

Secondly, although anarchists were indeed at the heart of both anti-capitalist movements, it is questionable whether these were solely anarcho-primitivists, Stirnerite egoists and Nietzschean aesthetes like Hakim Bey – the focus of Bookchin's own critique. Most of the anarchists involved were good old-fashioned libertarian socialists – anarchist communists (Sheehan 2003; Franks 2006). Moreover, in these demonstrations anarchists expressed a diversity of tactics ranging from peaceful protest and non-violent direct action to sabotage and armed rebellion, not all of which entailed consensus politics. There were often disputes within the anarchist camp as practitioners of non-violence (Clark?) often rejected the sabotage and confrontational politics, even complaining to the police in an effort to curb the tactics of the class-struggle anarchists (Gelderloos 2013)...

Thirdly, Bookchin was never opposed to the protests, demonstrations and insurrectionism. To the contrary, throughout his life Bookchin was a fervent anti-capitalist (unlike Clark) and always acknowledged and supported protests and struggles to create a better world – whether centred around nuclear power, ecological issues, health care and education, or the defence of local communities or natural landscapes – as well as supporting the anti-globalisation movements in challenging capitalism. But Bookchin always advocated *social* protest, not narcissistic acts of rebellion. Disquisitions by Clark on 'propaganda by deed' by earlier anarchist-communists (p. 180) has little relevance to Bookchin's own critique and his advocacy of anarchist-communism.

Finally, like Kropotkin and many anarchist-communists before him Bookchin always advocated both *opposition* to state power, capitalist exploitation and all forms of social oppression and alienation and the *creation* of new relationships and institutions – worker's co-operatives, voluntary organisations, affinity groups, mutual aid societies, and, with Bookchin, given the complexity of modern society, the formation of local democratic community assemblies and a federal system long ago suggested by Proudhon and Kropotkin. The two tactics, for Bookchin, were complementary.

3. The Critique Of Democratic Assemblies

Chapter ten of the present book is entitled 'Beyond the Limits of the City'. It presents a revised version of Clark's communitarian anarchist critique of 'libertarian municipalism'. This is Bookchin's conception of the political dimension of anarchist-communism. For like Kropotkin, Bookchin envisaged a decentralised society, one that was socialist, libertarian, ecological and *democratic*.

The chapter, as Clark mentions in a footnote (p. 253), is a re-draft of a paper he circulated at a gathering in Dunoon, Scotland, of the International Social Ecology Network some twenty years ago (August 1995) (see Clark 1999 for the original text). Bookchin, shocked and dismayed at Clark's hostile critique, described it as a 'propaganda tract' against libertarian municipalism (1997: p. 157).

It is of interest that in his early draft of the critique Clark lauded Murray Bookchin for having launched 'an impressive and inspiring defence of local direct democracy in his theory of libertarian municipalism', and writes of the 'magnitude' of Bookchin's contribution to ecological, communitarian and democratic theory. He even applauds Bookchin for grounding his politics in the ethics and philosophy of nature, and affirms that his own critique is in 'complete accord' with Bookchin's social ecology and philosophy of dialectical naturalism (1999: pp. 524-527).

Once a close associate of Bookchin and editor of a *Festschrift* for the social ecologist (Clark 1990), Clark's essay in the present book sets a very different tone. It is more measured and subdued, but still manages to distort Bookchin's own seminal ideas on local democracy. In fact, like the earlier critique, it tends to *mis*represent Bookchin's ideas in order to portray him as a philosophical naïf with authoritarian tendencies – an 'aspiring anarchist Lenin' as Clark describes him (1998: p. 188).

Some academics have a tendency to filch the clothes (ideas) of an earlier generation of scholars, usually without any acknowledgement, and then berate them for being 'naked' – in the process, of course, distorting their mentors' original ideas.

Perhaps unfairly, I have the distinct impression that this scenario is reflected in Clark's own relationship to Murray Bookchin, for he often expresses ideas, sentiments and even phrases that simply echo or even replicate what Bookchin was expressing over thirty years ago. He appropriates Bookchin's ideas as his own in order to critique Bookchin! In fact, Clark more or less admits this in a footnote (p. 251), in the process constructing a misleading dichotomy between an early Bookchin as a radical utopian social ecologist and a later Bookchin as a revolutionary political theorist who has completely lost a sense of community and has abandoned his earlier ecological vision. This portrait of Bookchin's life-trajectory is completely overdrawn and reflects Clark's dualistic mind-set (see Bookchin 1987: pp. 161-163).

Following slavishly the reactionary nihilist Friedrich Nietzsche, whom Clark portrays as a heroic figure, an anarchist (no less!) who celebrates the 'eternal re-birth of the gods' (Cafard 2004: p. 86), Clark suggests that leftists, that is, revolutionary socialists and class struggle anarchists, are motivated by an unhealthy *ressentiment* against the state and capitalism. Apparently, in their struggles against power and in the crusades against 'domination' (which Clark himself critiques!) anarchist-communists have by doing so turned themselves into fanatical power-hungry dogmatists (Cafard 2004: p. 90). On Clark's reckoning by opposing fascism you yourself become a fascist. Clark even has a name for this syndrome: the 'ethos of reactivity' (p. 86), although he seems to have a high regard for the consensus politics as practised by these same militant protestors.

Needless to say, Bookchin is tarred with the same brush, his ardent polemics in favour of anarchist-communism being an expression, according to Clark, not only of *resentment* but of a 'cult of negativity' that is not only against 'domination' but 'every existing reality' (Cafard 2004: p. 90) Phew! The sentiments of an arch reactionary?

But actually it is John Clark himself who is filled with *ressentiment* – against Bookchin. Thus Clark never loses an opportunity not only to criticise, but to rebuke, insult, belittle, denigrate, mock and malign the life and work of Murray Bookchin. He therefore comes to depict Bookchin, his erstwhile mentor, as an 'intellectual bum', and as one of those anarchists who despite their 'ideological purity', despite incessant talk of 'humanity' and 'ecology' cannot 'love actual human beings nor can they love the earth' (Cafard 1997: pp. 20-23, 2004: p. 90).

Not surprisingly, throughout this chapter and the book, you will find Bookchin portrayed as dogmatic and sectarian, as no longer exhibiting any ecological sensibility, and as someone who, motivated purely by social revolutionary fantasies, has completely lost touch with social reality (the capitalist system!). Bookchin is also described as a theorist who has no sense of 'dialectics' and is an 'idealist' – someone who has strayed into 'abstract universalism' (p. 18) (presumably because Bookchin is concerned about the well-being of 'humanity' and the 'earth'?). Clark thus concludes that Bookchin's anarchist communism and his advocacy of democratic politics is a form of 'abstract idealism' and 'ideological sectarianism' (p. 248).

It is quite beyond the scope of the present review to explore in depth Clark's critique of Bookchin's political anarchism, but I will offer a few reflections. In any case, Bookchin himself long ago responded to Clark's misjudged and rather misleading critique of libertarian municipalism. (Bookchin 1997: see Eiglad 2014 and Roussopoulos 2015 for more positive assessments of Bookchin's libertarian municipalism).

Bookchin, of course, was an 'idealist' in the sense that he was a utopian thinker who like all anarchist communists had a vision of a libertarian *socialist* society that was free of all forms of social oppression and economic exploitation, a society that was both ecological and democratic. But he was not an idealist in a philosophical sense – but a committed evolutionary *naturalist*, like almost all anarchist communists.

The pretentious John Clark continually trumpets his own profound dialectical sensibility, while, on page after page, denounces Bookchin's lack of 'dialectics', trusting like all the propagandists, that by continual repetition the reader will come to believe him. Please don't! Bookchin was a deeply historical thinker, like his mentor, Hegel, and had a much keener sense of dialectics than does Clark. Indeed

Clark is best described not as a dialectical thinker but as an adherent of what the dialectical biologists Richard Levins and Richard Lewontin describe as idealist or obscurantist 'holism' (1989: p. 275). It is Clark not Bookchin who is the abstract idealist. Clark's writings are littered with abstractions. Note this from the present book: 'Concrete universality can only be achieved if the abstract singular and the abstract universal are negated, transcended and concretized through the universal particular' (p. 16). Even better, if you have a penchant for abstractions, follow Clark on his surr(egion)al journeys into Nietzschean 'post-mortemism'. The idea that anarchism is a kind of left Platonism (Cafard 2004: p. 89) is scholastic nonsense on stilts.

Some fifty years ago Lacan presented us with a rather esoteric mixture of psychoanalysis, surrealism and a rather Platonic version of structuralism. Lacan's word-play seems to have completely besotted not only the Marxist philosophers Louis Althusser and Slavoj Zizek but also John Clark as he delves into the 'deepest mysteries' of social subjectivity (p. 139). So don't be surprised if you find lurking in the pages of this book the 'Great Floating Signifier' (p. 129) and the 'Big Other' (in capitals, please!) as well as lengthy disquisitions on Hegel's metaphysics, including both his dialectics and his pantheistic mysticism, focussed around that ultimate 'spooky' entity, the world-spirit *(geist)*. You get a sense of this academic text on communitarian anarchism when you note that Hegel, the idealist metaphysician and the ideologist par excellence of the state, gets over fifty references while there is only one reference – of the briefest kind – to Errico Malatesta. But then Malatesta was not a philosopher but only an ordinary working bloke, an autodidact; and, as a rather elitist scholar, Clark has nothing but disdain for autodidacts (Bookchin 1999: p. 217). There's no mention in the book at all of the likes of Rocker and Dolgoff – they're clearly not spiritual enough. The only anarchists that Clark seriously engages with – besides Reclus and Bookchin – are the religious anarchists, Martin Buber, Landauer and Gandhi.

What then does Clark himself have to offer in the way of metaphysics?

Following the deep ecologists Clark suggest a motley collection of many diverse and quite contradictory worldviews. He affirms, for example, his faith in some ineffable *geist* or world-spirit – the abstract universal par excellence – thus embracing a form of pantheistic mysticism that one associates with Eckhart, Boehme and the anarchist Landauer. But Clark also extols the spiritual ecology of the Catholic priest Thomas Berry (a form of Christian mysticism), the goddess theology of the radical environmentalist Starhawk, the tribal animism of the neo-primitivist David Watson, and clearly identifies with the life and thoughts of Mahatma (sic) Gandhi who was a devotee of mystical Hinduism – advaita vedanta. But Clark also explicitly embraces the Daoist and Buddhist worldviews. Whether or not he still affirms Bookchin's dialectical naturalism is rather unclear. If Clark had really followed the Buddha and became 'awakened' through meditation, as he urges others to do, he would have realised like the Buddha, that *geist* (spirit), god and Brahman are simply 'delusions' (as the Buddha put it) based on ignorance. An academic philosopher so 'befuddled' hardly seems equipped to pass judgement on Bookchin's own philosophy of social ecology – dialectical naturalism.

Following in the footsteps of Bakunin and Kropotkin, Bookchin strongly affirmed the importance of weaving a new form of radical politics, one based purely on anarchist communist principles. It would involve the creation of a decentralised socialist society consisting of local communities or municipalities – neighbourhoods, cities, towns, villages – that embodied diverse forms of social life based on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation. These social forms might include, for example, housing associations, food co-operatives, organic forms of agriculture, affinity groups, family-households, co-operative day care centres, cultural or civic associations, and self-managed workers' assemblies. Being a socialist society, all land and key resources would be held in common, not privately owned (Bookchin 1974: pp. 143-169, 1980: pp. 173-191).

The management of the affairs of the local community or municipality would be achieved through public assemblies, involving all members of the community, and entail collective democratic decision-making. It would be a form of direct or participating democracy. As Bookchin envisaged a complex society, not a return to the Pleistocene or to agrarian village life, local communities would be linked administratively to other free communities through a confederal political system. There would be a

close and intricate relationship, Bookchin felt, between the political sphere – the local assemblies – and the social sphere of life.

It is quite misleading to infer, as Clark does, that direct democracy implies the separation or autonomy of political life – the popular assembly – from everyday social life, or that majority decision making by the community entails majority *rule* or that the assembly makes *all* the decisions that relate to life within the community, such that the assembly becomes a kind of mini-state. Bookchin always insisted, as an anarchist-communist, that all social forms and institutions must be consistent with 'the fuller realization of personal and social freedom' (1974: p. 143). For Bookchin democracy was not a kind of rule.

The concept of citizen, for Bookchin, as for Takis Futopoulos (1995) relates *only* to direct or participatory democracy. The liberal idea that members of a nation-state are citizens is completely fraudulent – they are political subjects; indeed the very idea of a democratic state is an oxymoron. Representative government, as Kropotkin argued long ago, is a form of oligarchy. The concept of 'earth citizen' proposed by Clark, may have a symbolic function for radical environmentalists, but in political terms, Bookchin rightly argues, it is meaningless. He dismissed the idea as 'deep ecology babble' (1997: p. 165).

In critiquing Bookchin Clark inadvertently emphasises his own liberal reformism, and even leads one to question whether or not he is an anarchist. He rebukes Bookchin as sectarian and dogmatic for not getting involved in electorial state politics (like his friend Kovel, the neo-Marxists and the Green Party), sings the virtues of reformism and representative government, and chides Bookchin for not theorising a 'judicial realm' as a formal system of 'law' – which would imply some form of coercive authority. Unlike Clark, Bookchin in his 'ideological purity' always made a clear distinction between the state and anarchist politics (focussed around the local community and the democratic assembly), and like all anarchists completely repudiated the state.

In his portrayal of the local community, which hardly matches the richness of Bookchin's own account of 'forms of freedom', Clark mentions not only families, affinity groups, cooperatives, small communities and ashrams (people will no doubt cease to be citizens and become devotees of some spiritual guru?), but also small capitalist enterprises. Clark thus seems to retain, in his communitarian vision, private property and the market economy – who knows, he suggests, what the future may hold – petty capitalism? He thus seems to lack, as Fotopoulos remarks, 'any knowledge of the dynamics of a market economy'. Indeed Fotopoulos suggests that Clark views democracy not as a social institution, but rather as a 'state of mind' in that every action in every sphere of life, according to Clark, is a kind of 'legislating' (Clark 1999: p. 554, Fotopoulos 1995: p. 84).

Clark even has the gall to accuse Bookchin of lacking an ecological sensibility, in that he failed to employ the concept 'bioregion' in his later writings. As a true social ecologist (unlike Clark the mystical ecologist) Bookchin, of course, recognised that in any particular bioregion humans have created many diverse and complex forms of social life and that having an ecological sensibility did not entail biocentrism (see, for example, my study of the land and people of the Shire Highlands, Malawi Morris 2017). Bookchin always emphasised that human societies must endeavour to create an 'ecological community', in creatively seeking a balanced harmony with their natural surroundings (1974: pp. 80-82).

Alleging that Bookchin's ideas on local democratic assemblies and confederal politics are 'unrealistic' and 'impractical' (impossible?) Clark also berates Bookchin for the fact that his ideas have not been widely adopted, still less have they sparked a socialist revolution.

Such criticisms have been flung at anarchist-communists for over a century! Anarchist *communism* is for Clark, an impossible dream?

What we need, Clark tells us, is a 'spiritual revolution more than a political platform, and a regenerated community more than a political movement' (1995: p. 2).

What does this entail, and what does Clark offer us?

Basically, a combination of meditation, pantheistic mysticism, appeals to the spirits or some deity, petty capitalism and community politics – focussed around small communities, affinity groups and ashrams (with or without spiritual gurus?).

All these have long been tried, with little success in undermining either state power or the capitalist market economy.

But Clark's plea to reaffirm and revitalise community life is important and salutary. Indeed this is something Colin Ward was emphasising some forty years ago. There is, therefore, Clark writes, the need to create 'strong, thriving communities of solidarity and liberation. There is the need for an ethos that expresses hope and creativity in concrete form' (p. 154). This is something which Bookchin would have fully endorsed, but he also emphasised the need for class struggle and for new political forms based on democratic principles.

Bookchin and Clark in many ways share a common libertarian ethos, which their harsh polemics tended to oblate. But fundamentally Bookchin was an ecological humanist, steeped in the enlightenment tradition, with its emphasis on empirical knowledge and reason, and was an advocate of libertarian socialism (anarchist communism) whereas Clark is a spiritual idealist, embracing forms of pantheistic mysticism and animism, with an emphasis on meditation and spiritual intuition, and advocates reformist anarchism and communitarianism.

In her fine biography of Murray Bookchin, Janet Biehl (2015: p. 287) describes him in his last years as being rather like a whale stranded on the beach. This may well be true, but as John Clark affirmed, in his better moments, Bookchin's synthesis of social ecology, dialectical philosophy and libertarianism and utopian thought was an outstanding contribution to western philosophy (1984: p. 11). Bookchin's legacy as a pioneer anarchist theorist certainly lives on, despite Clark's attempt in this book to sully his vision.

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