

# Paul Goodman

## Finding an Audience for Anarchism in Twentieth-Century America

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Paul Goodman became an influential social critic in the 1960s after he published *Growing Up Absurd*, which looked at the problems of youth in the “organized system” of modern American society. With the publication of this book, he was well placed to address the anti-institutional social movements that emerged at this time. His books criticized the failings of the centrally organized technological society and advocated the recreation of modern society on a humanly intelligible scale. He positioned himself as an iconoclast of contemporary American politics and culture using his anarchist ideology of active individualism, community participation, and radical decentralization. Goodman was the principal anarchist political intellectual in America in the mid-twentieth century, and his contribution to Anglo-American radical thought, whilst generally overlooked in the recent resurgence of interest in anarchist political ideas, is worthy of emphasis and examination, both for its contemporary influence and for its contribution to key anarchist concerns. The period from 1945 to approximately 1999, during which Goodman is a figure of towering significance, has tended to be overlooked in anarchist studies. As a result, there remains a rather conspicuous theoretical and historical gap separating pre-World War II classical or old anarchism from the new, more recent resurgence of interest in anarchist approaches among activists and scholars. In particular,

insufficient attention has been paid to Goodman's role in transmitting the themes and concerns of anarchism to the early New Left in America.

The many anthologies of anarchist thought that appeared in the 1960s and early '70s usually gave Goodman a prominent place, and the outpouring of obituaries and final assessments when he died made the extent and value of his influence abundantly clear. In 1972, the year of his death, Susan Sontag wrote, "For twenty years he has been to me quite simply the most important American writer. He was our Sartre, our Cocteau."<sup>1</sup> At the height of Goodman's fame, Theodore Roszak stated, "Whenever he speaks one feels for sure there is a contingent of the young somewhere nearby already inscribing his words on a banner."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Richard King claimed that "[i]n its way *Growing Up Absurd* was to the generation of the early sixties what *Catcher in the Rye* had been to the youth of the fifties."<sup>3</sup> In Goodman's own lifetime, his reputation as anarchist critic was widely recognized, and it was generally understood even among nonanarchist audiences that his was the chief anarchist and decentralist voice of his times. As late as 1986, Dwight Macdonald attested to the influence of Goodman, who, he wrote, "opened my eyes to the frightening essence of American society today."<sup>4</sup> Goodman's anti-institutional influence can also be traced in Noam Chomsky's reference to Goodman in his 1973 volume *For Reasons of State*, in which Chomsky quotes from Goodman's book *Compulsory Miseducation*: "The issue is not whether people are 'good enough' for a particular type of society; rather it is a matter of developing the kind of social institutions that are most conducive to expanding the potentialities we have for intelligence, grace, sociability and freedom."<sup>5</sup> However, in more recent treatments, Goodman's name rarely appears, and often as merely one in a long list of influences on the New Left. The sources of anarchist influence on 1960s radicalism and its relationship to contemporary movements and ideas are generally overlooked. Further, recent literature tends to misrepresent Goodman's place in the development of ideological traditions in the twentieth century.

In a twenty-first-century account of Goodman's work, Kevin Mattson argues that Goodman was fighting a rearguard action against the postwar betrayal of the liberal agenda in America. Mattson argues that Goodman injected a richer and more culturally grounded liberal vision into the ideological malaise created by technocratic domestic policy and aggressive anticommunist foreign policy. Whilst sympathetic to Goodman's political project, this argument assumes

that his professed anarchism was not a sincere ideological commitment to the tradition. It is true that Goodman did develop a pessimism regarding the New Left and unreflective youth movements by 1969 and found himself defending liberalism, which he had previously equated with fascism. It is also true that Goodman's work with the group Americans for Democratic Action, an important liberal organization, contributed to the attempt to define what they termed a "qualitative liberalism."<sup>6</sup> However, Goodman's adoption of the label "anarchist" was not mere posturing. His ideas developed from anarchist sources and advanced the anarchist tradition in the twentieth-century American context. He rejected modern liberalism for its complicity with centralization and state building and for its tendency toward technocratic policy and social engineering. He rejected alternative radical ideologies like Marxism for the same reasons. Anarchist political ideas were for Goodman the only ideological framework that could satisfactorily underpin his formulations of freedom and social change. As he argued: "Of the political thought of the past century, only anarchism or, better, anarcho-pacifism—the philosophy of institutions without the State and centrally organized violence—has consistently foreseen the big shapes and gross dangers of present advanced societies, their police, bureaucracy, excessive centralization of decision-making, social-engineering, and inevitable militarization."<sup>7</sup>

Goodman utilized the anarchist tradition to formulate his distinctive critique of contemporary America according to the principles of decentralization, participatory democracy, autonomy, and community. He also formulated a biological grounding of anarchism in concepts drawn from the field of psychology, which underpinned Goodman's critiques of the managed and proscribed nature of centralized and heavily administered societies. Goodman expressed this conception in his work in the utopian, city planning tradition and in his work in the psychological-therapeutic field. This article will illustrate Goodman's unambiguous place in the anarchist tradition, his development of that tradition, and his application of its insights to early New Left movements. This case is most immediately demonstrated by pointing to his contribution to later twentieth-century radical pedagogical thought. The material that follows will also support these claims about the role and significance of Goodman's work by tracing his development from the New York intellectual scene of the 1940s to the role of campus movement intellectual of the 1960s. The subsequent discussion will offer a detailed examination

of his input into anarchist thinking about human agency, which drew on psychological schools of thought. This will feed into an examination of how this set of insights, and their synthesis of pragmatic and idealistic emphases, fits into the traditional anarchist emphasis on decentralization. Overall, the following examination of Goodman's work aims to show that a clear and precise awareness of the anarchist underpinning of his work develops our understanding of its contribution to twentieth-century debate and fosters greater insight into the development of anarchist ideas in later Anglo-American, twentieth-century contexts. In particular, this examination can help scholars interested in radical thought to recognize his distinctive anarchist combination of individualistic and socially oriented values, his radical synthesis of idealism and pragmatism, and his deployment of established European and American traditions of radical thought.

### **Paul Goodman and Anarchism in the Twentieth Century**

A specific focus of Goodman's indictment of the institutional framework of modern society was the school. The relationship between anarchism and libertarian educational theory and practice that underpinned this critique is consistent enough to identify as a distinct tradition in the history of ideas. This tradition included the work of William Godwin, Leo Tolstoy, and Peter Kropotkin. It also included the Francisco Ferrer-inspired experiments of the Modern School Movement, particularly the New York circle of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman in the early twentieth century, and to the experiments of the freeschooling and deschooling movements of the later twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> Goodman drew heavily on the persistent anarchist concern with education, which sprang from more than a concern with education as an instrument for the realization of its ideal social order or the training ground for a new generation of revolutionaries. The consistent pedagogical focus of anarchist thought, reflected in Goodman's approach, is more significantly orientated around a conception of reforming relationships in the educational sphere as the paradigm of ideal human relations. The anarchist concern with education also derives from a moral and a pedagogical commitment to freedom. What is distinct in the anarchist approach to education, through the emphasis on reason, independence, autonomy, and self-reliance, is a

clear portrayal of what constitutes freedom for the individual. This is partly expressed in Stirnerian terms of self-ownership, the capacity for the exercise of independence. Only by owning your own thoughts, values, and ideas could you truly own yourself and truly be free, and only by consciously choosing them could they be yours. Only if thoughts were the product of active (often implying expressive and spontaneous) choice could it be said that individuals owned themselves and were thereby free.

Thus, an education for freedom would not only respect the free will of the individual but would work to develop and strengthen it. In line with the majority of anarchist theorizing on the topic, Goodman's formulation of the anarchist agenda in relation to education asserted that the development of the independence of the individual is only possible in community with the development of other independent selves. Working within this tradition, Goodman argued that the effect of modern education was to institutionalize youth and alienate it from society, rather than contribute toward a useful, and thus fulfilling, life. He argued that "[l]ike jails and insane asylums, schools isolate society from its problems, whether in preventing crime, or in curing mental disease, or in bringing up the young."<sup>9</sup> He also stated that "formal schooling is now used as universal social engineering."<sup>10</sup>

The anarchist approach to education can be identified in terms of four elements. First, anarchist approaches to education demonstrate a commitment to an understanding of freedom that precludes any form of coercion. Second, anarchist philosophies espouse a pedagogy that reflects this through asserting the authentic, spontaneous route to learning through the child's own motivation and initiatives. Third, anarchist perspectives demonstrate a commitment to the strengthening of independence and judgment in the individual through their continual exercise. Fourth, anarchism maintains a persistent concern with the potential political and ideological manipulation of individuals by an education directed according to the needs of church, state, the values of capitalist society, and the needs of an industrial economy. Included in this is a concern about the inherent nature of institutional organization to diminish the independent capacities of the individual. According to this view, it is the nature of any hierarchical institutional arrangement to diminish an individual's exercise of reason and judgment, as it conditions docility and obedience rather than stimulating independent judgment and a critical attitude toward authority. All of these elements were features of Goodman's

perspective on education and his relationship with the freeschooling and deschooling movements of the later twentieth century. He argued that “[t]he form that progressive education takes in each era is prophetic of the next social revolution.”<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, he identified progressive education in the 1960s as a “reaction against social-engineering,” “against obedience, authoritarian rules, organizational role playing instead of being, [and] the destruction wrought by competition and grade-getting.”<sup>12</sup>

In one of the most revealing statements of Goodman’s anarchism, the following passage from his 1966 essay “Reflections on the Anarchist Principle” highlighted key features of his position, including the principles of decentralization, participatory democracy, autonomy, community, and the biological grounding of anarchism in concepts drawn from the field of psychology:

Anarchism is grounded in a rather definite proposition: that valuable behavior occurs only by the free and direct response of individuals or voluntary groups to the conditions presented by the historical environment. It claims that in most human affairs, whether political, economic, military, religious, moral, pedagogic, or cultural, more harm than good results from coercion, top-down direction, central authority, bureaucracy, jails, conscription, states pre-ordained, standardization, excessive planning, etc. Anarchists want to increase intrinsic functioning and diminish extrinsic power. This is a socio-psychological hypothesis with obvious political implications.<sup>13</sup>

Goodman’s utilization of the anarchist tradition deployed its anti-institutional bias, its focus on organic notions of community formation, and the emphasis on notions of autonomous individuality, personal judgment, and individual choice. This drew together the federative principles of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Godwin’s distrust of political institutions, and Kropotkin’s commitment to natural associations and voluntary groupings. Goodman not only worked within an anarchist framework of values and concepts but also contributed to the anarchist tradition via his development of an ontology of selfhood that asserted the significance of the unique human sensational and cognitive processes for freedom and located the experience of selfhood in the relationships between the individual and the human and material environment. The importance of direct human primary experience of the immediate physical and human environment for Goodman’s anarchism tied

his ideas to a significant feature of modern formulations of anarchism. This is the cluster of emphases on change in the present, the importance of the immediacy and pragmatism of goals, and the significance of directness in human interaction. Accordingly, anarchism was for Goodman a philosophy of appropriate, freedom-engendering responses to actual situations, a principle he referred to as “neo-functionalism” that expressed “an humane appropriateness thru and thru: an easy body for the breath of the creator spirit to bring alive.” He described this approach to the relationship between means and ends as “[t]his aesthetics which asks both for the efficiency of the means toward the end and of the human appropriateness of the end, for the means also consumes one’s time of life, and the end of life is to live well also during that time. And the end is *prima facie* suspicious if its means too do not give satisfaction.” Goodman was hereby expressing one of the most significant conceptual features of twentieth-century Anglo-American anarchism, a present-focused and context-centered approach to social change. As he asked: “why not start here now with this man making, using, and experiencing this object?”<sup>14</sup>

Goodman saw basic evolutionary tendencies toward freedom and community naturally counterbalancing negative tendencies in mass society. His anarchism was grounded in the proposition that valuable behavior occurred only by the free and direct response of individuals or voluntary groups to the conditions presented by the historical environment. This engendered a do-it-yourself approach to social change that was for Goodman both anarchist and American. Goodman drew American populist and democratic thinkers of the early independence era into his anarchist perspective. The American context, for Goodman, included its heritage of radical thought, including the values expressed in Walt Whitman’s poetry and John Dewey’s philosophy, the classless and democratic values of the frontier culture of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, populism, the pacifism of Randolph Bourne, and Lewis Mumford’s critique of suburban sprawl, and all indigenous radicalisms that adhered to American beliefs in democracy. As he put it: “Anarchist and Jeffersonian politics have relied on the tension between human nature and institutional roles as the possibility for social change.”<sup>15</sup>

Further illustrating his fusion of anarchism and American democratic thought, in this case highlighting their particular agreement over the question of means and ends, Goodman argued, “It was the genius of American

pragmatism, our great contribution to world philosophy, to show that the means define and color the ends.”<sup>16</sup> Goodman commented with approval that American populism was a political movement definitively concerned with “how to preserve practical democracy in high industrial conditions.”<sup>17</sup> This concern also nourished the functionalism and pragmatism of American thought. For Goodman, further illustrating his allegiance to these stands of thought, “They constitute the specifically American contribution to world philosophy, following and perfecting Jefferson and Emerson: the idea of humanizing industrialism and re-establishing community democracy among alienated and powerless masses.”<sup>18</sup> Goodman claimed that Americans possessed a characteristic conception of sovereignty: “It is what is made up by political people as they go along, a continuous series of existential constitutional acts.”<sup>19</sup> This specifically American brand of sovereignty meant that civil disobedience did not imply disrespect for law and order, but rather a Jeffersonian or Deweyan conception of “regulated permanent revolution” that tended to increase civil order rather than destroy it because it cut through frustrating processes and revived belief in community.<sup>20</sup> And, as such, American political history exhibited a pattern of challenge and renewal in law through individuals engaging in illegal actions.<sup>21</sup> This justification of the legitimacy of civil disobedience in America, according to a dynamic, popular notion of sovereignty, explained for Goodman the fact that dissonant groups framed their protest in a manner that was loyal to the spirit of the American constitution: “Unlike in many other countries, our extreme groups—Birchites, students of the New Left, Negroes who want Black Power—are sincerely loyal to this history and spirit, more loyal indeed than the center is, which is lulled by its self-satisfied belief in social engineering.”<sup>22</sup>

The result of this was a set of concepts, fed by Goodman into a renewed American radicalism, woven together of European and American sources. The ongoing significance of this unifying perspective can be read into the references to Goodman in Noam Chomsky’s book *For Reasons of State*, which draws on patriotic radicalisms and anti-institutionalist anarchist influences as they were shaped by Goodman. A key emphasis in Goodman’s work was the focus he placed on the decentralist or federative aspects of the anarchist tradition. One of his key contributions to anarchist ideology was the anthropology, social psychology, political philosophy and concrete public policy proposals for decentralization. The evils he was addressing were

centralization, systemization, and the treatment of people in organizational, abstract, indirect, procedural terms.

## War and Anarchism in the 1940s: The Engaged Intellectual

Goodman as a figure was both consistently anarchist and publicly prominent. Recent commentaries tend to recognize one or the other feature but rarely both together. Tracing the development of Goodman's political agenda and public role leads to reassessments of these interpretations, and means we can form a more complete picture of the character and role of anarchism in the twentieth century. Goodman emerged from within the New York intellectual scene of the 1930s and 40s, particularly those writers connected with *Partisan Review*. Their sense of independence was expressed in terms of an avant-garde elitism, the essential component of their communal identity in political and cultural senses, combining the vanguardist elements of Marxism and modernism. Goodman was drawn to the artistic avant-gardism of this group and their sense that artistic experimentation and challenge had a positive effect on the social awareness of its audience. It was from the avant-garde milieu that Goodman drew his identity as a literary critic of contemporary social forms and the impoverished processed culture of the American mainstream. However, Goodman came to see himself as working on the side of his audience. He aimed to strengthen popular awareness of independence and community by highlighting shared cultural resources and thereby counter the atomizing and homogenizing experience of mass entertainment and commercialization. By the 1960s Goodman had become a campus cult figure and a movement intellectual. In *Growing Up Absurd*, first published in 1960, Goodman conclusively demonstrated his move from avant-garde artist to connected critic. For an audience concerned with poverty and injustice, racism and urban blight, imperialism and militarism, Goodman pointed to the organized system as the cause, and the young were highly receptive. The vital point about Goodman and his desire to address his reflections to a public audience was that he used and developed the anarchist tradition as his ideological framework.

From the start Goodman's attachment to anarchism and pacifism placed him on the fringes of the *Partisan Review* group. In 1942, when the Allies seemed

to be losing the war and the *Partisan Review* was turning toward support for their efforts, Goodman adamantly persisted with his refusal to consider the war as a legitimate struggle between fascism and democracy. At this point the *Partisan Review* was still publishing a fairly wide range of political opinion, including a controversy over pacifism and war that included statements by Alex Comfort and George Orwell.<sup>23</sup> But from 1943, when the editorial line became firmly prowar, and since he would not rescind his pacifism, Goodman was ostracized from New York literary circles of influence. This placed him in contact with the smaller, more marginal bohemian New York scene, including radical subcommunities, small cooperatives, anarchist publications, avant-garde theatres, and bohemian clusters. Goodman also began to write for the anarchist magazine *Why?*, published by the new generation of young radicals meeting in the Spanish Anarchists' Hall on Lower Broadway. Even more than conscription and pacifism, they were interested in mutual aid, communal living, and decentralization.

Goodman became more involved in the journal *politics*, Macdonald's breakaway attempt at a new political magazine, and his influence on the developing political stance of *politics* was marked.<sup>24</sup> Influenced by Goodman's anarchism, the journal heralded pacifism and nonviolence as important political alternatives. The activities and perspectives of wartime conscientious objection provided *politics* with a model for a new form of leftism, which included an attack on mass society and the advocacy of an individualist form of socialism. With these attempts at ideological innovation, argues Mattson, *politics* became a "seedbed for later New Left thinking."<sup>25</sup> Proposals for decentralized, spontaneous activism prefigured the activism of the following decades, with its suspicion of technology and bureaucracy and its radical humanist emphasis on personal empowerment. Via these inputs into new political cultures, Goodman and his anarchism were at the center of developments, emerging from dissatisfaction with the traditional left in America, toward political and cultural formulations associated with the new social movements of the 1960s. As Mattson notes, regarding the significance of Macdonald's journal, *politics* was one of the chief ways in which audiences were introduced to the key thinkers in the development of New Left thinking, especially C. Wright Mills and Goodman.<sup>26</sup>

Building on his contributions to *politics*, Goodman's *May Pamphlet* was a collection of his essays written in the 1940s advocating draft resistance

and resistance to the war in general. They constituted his first explicitly political body of work and outlined the naturalist conceptual framework that identified the whole of his career of social criticism. This was the work that most explicitly demonstrated the conviction of his turn toward an anarchist social philosophy and identified the significance of the war, including rejection of the draft, conscientious objection, and the critique of war aims, for precipitating this anarchist commitment. The opening essay, "Drawing the Line," identified nature rather than rebellion as the grounds and defense of draft resistance. Modern society, Goodman argued, was organized for the benefit of the industrial machine, and man was alienated from his natural powers. This was the cause of war, coercion, and disaffection. The solution to the ills of dysfunctional society was a return to natural behavior, including mutual aid, individual fulfillment through meaningful work, and direct decision making. Because Goodman presupposed an unchanging human nature, and saw the "natural force" in an individual as "no different in kind from what it will be in a free society," the expression of the natural in the behavior of individuals and groups had revolutionary implications.<sup>27</sup> Like the draft resister, each man had to draw a line beyond which he would not go along with society's demands, or be party to its acts.

Goodman's *Communitas*, written with his architect brother, was a book concerning urban planning and utopian social thought. It was another key work of his 1940s writing that, alongside the *May Pamphlet*, lay the foundation of his whole system of critique. In it, the solution for an impoverished human nature was to be found in new arrangements for self and community creation, in a civic culture on a human scale. Rejecting both state and capitalist industrial city projects, he argued that city creation was analogous to self-creation: "The background of the physical plant and the foreground of human activity are profoundly and intimately dependent on one another."<sup>28</sup> The work made explicit his admiration of the Greek ideal of citizenship and the fusion of the identities of public and private. An Athenian citizen was at ease and capable of relaxed personal interaction in the public places of the city. There was no sharp distinction between private affairs and public affairs.<sup>29</sup> This social style was directly correlated with the system of direct democracy, a political system not distinguished from the life of the city in general and in which each man participated directly as in matters of his own affairs. Goodman's anarchism was related to an ancient Greek sense of the

public and its relationship to democracy. This ideal was fused with Kropotkin's advocacy of an organic public style of life centered on communal squares and popular rituals. A key message of this work concerned the nature and political ends of the relationship between the individual and his environment. For Goodman, the origin of politics was the self engaging in his environment. Freedom rested upon the free act and the willful appropriation of social and material contexts.

According to Goodman, the crisis of modern society was rooted in the disengagement of the individual from everyday life. Since individual existence was bound to that of the group, genuine community consisted of individuals interacting openly with other. This rendered all human interaction political, and the self as a concept was tied to the notion of the public and defined by the existence of others. The democratic design and planning of the city would represent how and what people chose for themselves. Such participatory and engaged experience facilitated the development of the individual. In this way the design of the physical environment was our self in the making, and Goodman included in this notion of self-development our ability to mature autonomously as well as cooperatively. In *Communitas* and in the whole of his body of work, Goodman asserted the direct relationship between man making his environment and man making himself free.

In line with this view, Goodman thought that the desirable human character would develop in an authentically democratic and civilizing city. He belonged in a tradition of thinking about the American city that depicted it as inherently insurrectionary, a conduit of the experimental character of the American personality, and generating opportunities for participation, fraternity, creativity, and equality.<sup>30</sup> King rightly highlights Goodman's place in this American city tradition, claiming that Goodman's ideas drew on the "functionalist-pragmatic" tradition of American social analysis beginning with Thoreau and carried on in the twentieth century by Dewey and Thorstein Veblen.<sup>31</sup> Goodman argued that "[t]here is no substitute for the spontaneous social conflux whose atoms unite, precisely as citizens of the city."<sup>32</sup> As Goodman developed it, the concept of community implied that man's social relationships, his perspective on the world, and his values were represented in his self-construction of his own habitat. In various ways this idea was a central theme of Goodman's philosophy. The relationship between the developed self and his environment was an area of thought developed even

further in Goodman's psychological thought and in the work he contributed to the Gestalt Therapy school of psychiatry in the 1950s. The development of his thinking in this area brought him to the concepts and themes from which he formulated his 1960s critiques of the atomization and disengagement of life in modern societies, which were to bring him to the audience for his anarchist philosophy that he sought.

### ***Gestalt Therapy***

The relationship that Goodman asserted between selfhood and the environment, in his *Communitas* and most comprehensively in *Gestalt Therapy*, was a vital component of his contribution to the anarchist tradition. This theory of self tied together the inner life of the individual and the integrated social life of vibrant societies into a single notion of selfhood. For Goodman the human self existed at the point of contact between the organism and its environment, analogous to the relationships between breathing and air, eating and food, and seeing and light. There was no animal function without an object, and no feeling or emotion that did not address an environment. This point of contact between the organism and the environments in which its functions operated, including socio-cultural, animal, and physical contexts, he called the "organism/environment field."<sup>33</sup> There was thus a direct unity between the energy of the organism and the possibilities of the environment, which led to awareness of the further unities of body and mind, self and external world, subjective and objective, and personal and social. For Goodman, this meant that individuals are the agents of their adjustment with their environment, and individuals had to shape reality and engage with social change as a factor in their mental health.

This fed Goodman's voluntarism, his emphasis upon political and social initiative, and the centrality of the here-and-now in his work. This focus on the here-and-now in modern anarchism is closely related to the anarchist emphases on congruity between means and ends and prefigurative forms of social change. For Goodman, the important focus in this respect was the emphasis on primary experience. Man could act in an effective autonomous way only in the finite and concrete framework of his primary experience, in which he could actually exert his powers of creation, initiative, and

control. Beyond this, the world became an abstraction; the individual would have to rely on middlemen, specialists, and bureaucrats for managing and representing him in a world to which he had no access. In all areas of life the sense of causality was lost through the indirect nature of experience: the real environment was hidden, real needs were manipulated and subverted, necessary tasks were replaced with meaningless ones, even authority was impersonal. Thus, initiative was lost, stupor set in, and life was unnatural and “absurd.” Society must be decentralized, he argued, to develop face-to-face communities and thereby establish a more direct intercourse between man and his environment.

The key feature of the psychological tradition that interested Goodman and prompted his contribution to the anarchist emphasis on agency, and its environmental context, was the biological focus he perceived in Freud’s thought, which provided him with a justification for the self’s resistance to adaptation to prevailing social and cultural structures. As part of the support for his conceptual framework based on nature, Goodman defended the instinctual in human behavior. Drawing on Wilhelm Reich’s speculations on the connection between sexual and political repression, Goodman attacked neo-Freudians like Erich Fromm for abandoning Freud’s emphasis on the centrality of sex, and thus the biological instincts generally, and thereby sanctioning a psychology of social engineering. The novelty of Goodman’s basic thesis in this respect was the assertion that a coercive society depended upon the repression of human instincts. From this perspective, Goodman challenged behaviorists, psychoanalytic revisionists, and social psychologists. As Goodman saw it, the implication of Freud’s theories was that humans come into the world bearing an innate set of dispositions, such as the instincts for love and aggression. Thus, human nature itself put absolute constraints on the nature of community.

Goodman used his interpretation of Freud against those psychoanalysts and others who maintained that human nature was indefinitely malleable and could be redesigned to fit the social order. In his article “The Political Meaning of some Recent Revisions of Freud,” which appeared in the July 1945 issue of *politics*, Goodman argued that thinkers like Karen Horney and Erich Fromm diminished the role of instinctual drives to argue that character directly reflected the social pattern: “What is alarming is not their deviation from the orthodox Freudian sociology and implied politics, in which a good

deal is faulty, but the fact that most of these deviations lead step by step to a psychology of non-revolutionary social adjustment that is precisely the political ideal (by no means the political action) of the New Deal, the Beveridge Plan, Stalinism, etc.”<sup>34</sup> Goodman’s view irritated many left-wingers as well as orthodox psychoanalysts. C. Wright Mills and Patricia J. Salter wrote an attack on it for the October 1945 issue of *politics*. Illustrating the traditional radical commitment to a nonessential view of man, they wrote:

For a long time conservatives have stressed the biological immutability of man’s nature, whereas progressives have emphasized the social plasticity of his character structure. Conservatives have tried to buttress every status quo by appealing to the biological instincts of man. Now Paul Goodman seeks to overturn a particular status quo by appealing to the apparently same instinctual nature. He presents us with a metaphysics of biology in which he would do no less than anchor a revolution.<sup>35</sup>

Goodman drew on conceptualizations of “natural” and “unnatural” in his analysis of patterns of society and behavior. Modern society, he argued, was organized for the benefit of the industrial machine, and man was alienated from his natural powers. This was the cause of war, coercion, and disaffection. The solution to the ills of dysfunctional society was a return to natural behavior. This included mutual aid, individual fulfillment through meaningful work, the realization of human capacities, and direct decision-making. Goodman presupposed an essential human nature. He argued that the “natural force” in an individual was “no different in kind from what it will be in a free society.” As such, the expression of natural instincts in the behavior of individuals and groups had revolutionary implications.<sup>36</sup> This notion of naturalness was tied to Goodman’s emphasis on the importance of the development of the individual and his capacities. Goodman used language as an illustration of the difference between natural and unnatural institutions. Communication was physically and socially natural. A particular language was a natural convention in so far as it was a means of making or fulfilling the physical and social capacity for speech as a “living act,” a means of exercising the human power to communicate need, feeling, desire, and experience. An unnatural convention conversely prevented a human power from becoming a living act. Goodman went on to criticize the pattern of the

modern economy using this distinction. English, he argued, was becoming unnatural because of its use in advertising. In advertising, language was manipulated according to the aim of establishing automatic reflex response behaviors, and “thus it debauches the words so that they no longer express felt need, nor communicate a likeness of affection between persons . . . nor correspond to the desire for objects really experienced.”<sup>37</sup>

In his educational writing, learning to speak represented for Goodman a key representation of the power of the uncoerced, incidental learning experience. Learning speech, he noted, represented an incredible intellectual achievement with its subtleties and complexities and vast amounts of technical detail. The significance lay in the fact that this learning was achieved in a natural, “incidental” manner, according to intrinsic, useful, and natural motivations, such as the desire to communicate.<sup>38</sup> The significance of learning to speak was the emphasis on the power of the unassisted natural drive to learn. This point related to natural motivation, and to the importance of relating learning to the whole environment of activity and experience. Given a freely stimulating environment, Goodman emphasized, children would naturally learn because learning was essentially an integral, incidental, organic process.

Goodman’s use of the natural capacity of children to learn language as an example to support his anti-institutional critique is echoed Chomsky’s *For Reasons of State*, the work in which he most explicitly identifies Goodman’s influence. In this volume Chomsky launched a searing critique of American policy in Vietnam and reflected on the culpability of the American social order for those acts. In the process he reflected on the dangers of an “indefinitely malleable” conception of man “with no innate structures of mind” that, if accurate, would render humankind fit subjects for institutional molding by the state, corporations, and technocrats. Those concerned with the moral consciousness of individuals in a free community would, he argued, like Goodman, seek to identify the “intrinsic human characteristics” that support and develop them.<sup>39</sup> Like Goodman, Chomsky thought that the development of human language provided an insight into “possibilities for free and creative action within the framework of a system of rules that in part, at least, reflect intrinsic properties of human mental organization.”<sup>40</sup> Further, following Goodman, Chomsky tentatively added, “I like to believe that the intensive study of one aspect of human psychology—human language—may contribute to a humanistic social science that will serve, as well, as an instrument for social action.”<sup>41</sup>

Goodman's emphasis on "natural" human capacities was a key anchor for his libertarian political outlook. It led to his emphasis on the importance of biological instincts and the psychological grounding of a notion of an essential human self. His interest in psychological thinking was rooted in, and consistently followed, an interest in the biological underpinnings it offered for an emphasis on a stable or essential notion of human nature. Goodman's anarchism was firmly orientated around a biological ontology of human individuality. As he said of his system of thought, "Of course, this reasoning presupposes that there is a nature of things, including human nature, whose right development can be violated. There is."<sup>42</sup> This form of thought was linked to his emphasis on human psychology and the significance of the processes of human perception. In his 1940s essays, Goodman began to develop the idea that the biological emphasis of Freud offered the grounds for supporting his conception of human nature. The key feature of the psychological tradition which interested Goodman was the biological focus he perceived in Freud's thought, which provided him with a justification for the self's resistance to adaptation to prevailing social and cultural structures.<sup>43</sup>

As part of the support for his conceptual framework based on nature, Goodman defended the instinctual in human behavior. He claimed that "[t]he libertarian manifests the nature in him much more vehemently than we who have been trained to uniformity. His voice, gestures, and countenance express the great range of experience from child to sage. When he hears the hypocrite orator use words that arouse disgust, the libertarian vomits in the crowd."<sup>44</sup> It was a thesis completely in line with his basic anarchist premise that human nature was an essential quality, not a socially determined entity. His was a set of ideas fundamentally orientated around the self as the primary unit of concern and source of social development. The processes and values of the organized system, for Goodman, were based on a false view of human nature, the idea that human beings could be shaped to fit the externally imposed needs, jobs, and tasks of the system. Similarly, Goodman attacked Marxism's perspective on human nature as the source of its political failings. Where anarchism utilized the drive to freedom and inventiveness of human nature, Marxism encouraged an image of human beings as totally socialized by their conditions. Goodman also rejected Marxian ideas about the inherent, systemic collapse of capitalism and the

objectively necessitated dawn of revolution, and instead consistently argued that the concept of democracy relied upon ordinary citizens committing themselves to projects of political change.<sup>45</sup>

Goodman wanted to argue, in defense of an inviolable conception of freedom, that humanity retained an essence outside the control of history, propaganda, advertising, and social structures. As he stated: “the freedom and spontaneity of men are natural, but the institutions have been made.”<sup>46</sup> Goodman argued in this vein that “[f]reedom consists not, as Fromm says, in the agreement to participate as an equal member in a vast social system . . . but in the continuing revolution of new demands and ideas as they emerge from the depths, called forth by and transforming the reality, including the institutions. A free society is one that is peacefully permeable by this revolution.”<sup>47</sup> The criticisms of Mills and Salter were based on the opposing view: “Rationality and freedom are values which must be socially achieved.” They attacked Goodman’s “Rousseauian conception” that “freedom is ‘naturally’ given to individual men.”<sup>48</sup> They argued: “The locus of freedom, and of the historical dynamic, is not the gonads but the political and economic order.”<sup>49</sup>

In his attack on the various schools of post-Freudian psychoanalysis for their conformist political implications, Goodman focused in particular on what he took to be the hidden agenda of Fromm’s popular *Escape from Freedom*. According to Goodman, books like Fromm’s aimed to support the continued and more efficient working of the modern industrial system. In contrast, according to Goodman, Reich provided a more radical and confrontational view. In his move away from Freud, the early Reich insisted on more immediate physical responsiveness, including that of the sexual body, in defiance of social controls. Goodman championed Reich’s activist approach and nonadjustive psychotherapy, which included contraceptives and sex counseling for working-class youth. Upon entering into therapy himself with Lore Perls in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and coming into contact with her husband Fritz Perls, Goodman became interested in their mixture of Freudian analysis and Gestalt psychology. Goodman took over these ideas as his own in his dominating coauthorship of the book *Gestalt Therapy* in 1951.

Goodman’s relationship with Perls was based on a shared interest in Reich’s psychology. But this relationship and the sources the two thinkers drew on led Goodman away from Reich’s individualistic psychology to the position he

argued in *Gestalt Therapy* that the self and society could be integrated without succumbing to conformity. In an era when Freudian orthodoxy implied that mental health meant helping individuals adjust to society, Goodman insisted that society had to be made to adjust to individual needs. Goodman's version of Gestalt therapy encompassed an assertion of the centrality of the here-and-now, and the reliance on a radical phenomenology as the basis for constructing theoretical principles. Goodman's *Gestalt Therapy* owed much to American pragmatism, specifically through the image of the human organism as a problem solver, as an active creator and not a passive recipient of reality, and the notion of the open-ended nature of reality. His use of sources like Gestalt psychology infused the American tradition of Emerson and Dewey with a flavor of the European tradition of psychology.

*Gestalt Therapy* drew partly on the school of Gestalt psychology, which stated that human beings must be viewed as open systems in active interaction with their environment. According to this psychology, the human experiential machinery naturally organized perceptions according to inbuilt cognitive patterns. The academic Gestalt school had made valuable contributions to perception and cognitive theory, but it neglected the broader realm of personality and psychotherapy. Goodman attempted to draw out the political implication of the Gestalt perspective. Through the focus in Gestalt thinking on the relationship between the objects of perception and the perceptive machinery by which they are experienced, there was an implicit focus on the impact of individual subjectivity on the experienced structure of reality. This view implicitly highlighted the importance of lived experience and the physical environment for the formation of the human personality. Drawing on these implications, Goodman's *Gestalt Therapy* combined phenomenological and existential approaches in its view of the growth of human beings.

Goodman's view started from the assertion that the human self existed at the point of contact of the organism and its environment. He posited a direct unity between the energy of the organism and the possibilities of the environment. Personality, thus conceived, was not organized according to the additive style of behaviorism, nor in associative-symbolic Freudian terms, but structured by the inner and outer aspects of human self and other awareness. In this emphasis on the organic relationship between the organism and the environment, Goodman developed an antidualistic approach to human experience. The individual and his environment, his inner and outer experiences, constituted

a unity of selfhood. The self was the system of contacts in the environment field; it was the boundary between the organism and the environment, and it belonged to both: "To paraphrase Aristotle, 'When the thumb is pinched, the self exists in the painful thumb.'"<sup>50</sup> This led Goodman to reject unconscious and historical approaches to the human self in favor of a phenomenological approach to how the individual is in the world at the present moment. This fed Goodman's voluntarism and his emphasis upon political and social initiative. At the center of *Gestalt Therapy* lay the promotion of "awareness." Patients were encouraged to become aware of their own feelings and behaviors, and their effect upon the environment. The way in which patients interrupted or sought to avoid contact with their environment was considered to be a substantive factor when addressing their psychological disturbances. By focusing on the patient's awareness of himself as part of reality, new insights could be made into the patient's behavior, and as such, emphasis was placed on conscious activity, not the unconscious realm of dreams.<sup>51</sup>

Goodman's *Gestalt Therapy* ideas represented the full flowering of his theory of the self that was the basis for his input into the anarchist tradition. Central to his view of the self was a focus on the importance of spontaneity and creativity. For Goodman, the individual was the agent of his adjustment with his environment, and individuals had to shape reality and engage with social change as a factor in their mental health. Human creative adjustment, or growth, occurred at the boundary of inner and outer experience as the self coped with new experience. For growth to occur, therefore, there had to be an environment for the organism to contact "because the organism's every living power is actualized only in its environment." Thus the environment had to be "amenable to appropriation and selection; it must be plastic to be changed and meaningful to be known."<sup>52</sup> Creative adjustment was the essential source of the growth of the self. The self was the "artist of life," engaged in "finding and making the meanings we grow by."<sup>53</sup>

Goodman's social and political approach rested on the idea that man could act in an effective autonomous way only in the finite and concrete framework of his primary experience, in which he could actually exert his powers of creation, initiative, and control. Beyond this, the world became an abstraction, and the individual had to rely on middlemen, specialists, and bureaucrats for managing and representing him in a world to which he had no access. The aim had to be to decentralize society and install face-to-face

community, thereby establishing a more direct intercourse between man and his environment. If the environment presented no objects worthy of engagement by the organism, the self could not form and neurosis resulted. Goodman's emphasis was on the importance of scale, of bringing social institutions down to proportions that could be responsive to individual initiative, self-regulation, creative adjustment, and utopian experiment. Under this view pragmatism and phenomenology informed ethical choices, and mutual aid and direct action served as the fundamental mechanisms of citizenship. This set of political views was developed from Goodman's *Gestalt Theory*, applied to his educational writing, and was central to his influence on early New Left politics.

### ***Growing Up Absurd* and Finding an Audience**

In *Growing Up Absurd*, first published in 1960, Goodman conclusively demonstrated his move from avant-garde artist to connected critic. Looking at the fashionable issue of teenage dissidents, and in particular at the extent of teenage dropout rates from school, Goodman suggested that the problem lay not with the teenagers but the institutions from which they dropped out. He argued that the young in the America experienced disaffection, frustration, and eventually apathy because they were unable to grow and mature in a society without useful and meaningful identities around which to aspire and achieve a sense of meaning and worth. They lacked the contact boundary between the organism and the environment that *Gestalt Therapy* had emphasized as the site of the development of the healthy self. The basic thesis was from *Gestalt Therapy*: if society failed to provide a meaningful environment with which to interact, human nature was thwarted and an individual could not grow. Individuals thus became role players, or organization men, or they dropped out. Maturing human nature, for Goodman, required significant social identities or vocations in an accessible community environment. He argued that American society had been rationalized into a "system" that by its very nature was not referenced according to its human components for any other objective than the continuing operation of the system for its own sake. The social and physical environment had grown out of human scale; it had moved away from human logic to a mechanical logic. People relied on

technology that they did not understand so that the cycle of consumption could continue. Human relationships had become mysterious because of the anonymous nature of the new managerial code, abstract systemization, and the indirect wielding of social control. Indirectness was a particular source of inauthenticity, subterfuge, and disempowerment for Goodman. In all areas of life, the sense of causality was lost through the indirect nature of experience. The philosophical anthropology developed in *Gestalt Therapy* pictured man as the productive creator with a unique need to be active and socially useful.

Goodman's answer to the flaws of the rationalized environment was his system of free schooling. The aim was to decentralize education, bringing it out of the schools and giving children access to the educative functions of society, through very small street schools and a wider, more flexible apprenticeship system. At the same time, the schooling experience would no longer be compulsory.<sup>54</sup> Goodman's writing on education drew the attention of emerging youth movements, and his initial faith in their programs led him to support the causes of the young in America. As Roszak noted, "For the New Left he has functioned as the foremost theoretician of participative democracy, bringing back into lively discussion a tradition of anarchist thought."<sup>55</sup> Goodman saw the youth as the actors of change and looked hopefully to the activities of emerging political movements. Specifically, he had high hopes for the Free Speech Movement that emerged at the University of California at Berkeley in 1964. Students reacted vigorously to university attempts to limit their recruiting of civil rights workers for Southern campaigns and were confronted with university police. One of Goodman's statements in support of the Berkeley students included the comment: "Our society has been playing with the fire of mass higher learning; it is our duty to let it feel the blast of University truth."<sup>56</sup> Goodman was suggesting that, although modern universities were complicit in the state apparatus through corporate and defense research and the suppression of democratic activity, the university still retained some of its essence as a center of questioning and investigation. As part of this vision of the university, Goodman enthusiastically supported the creation of free universities. When he went to California to cover the events in Berkeley, he saw a direct relationship between this movement and the political vision of self-willed action, democratic participation, and decentralized activism that he had helped to articulate. He claimed that "its ferment will spread not only to other campuses but finally to other institutions of society."<sup>57</sup> He argued that

the young had recognized the dehumanizing impact of modern organized society, and that anarchism underpinned the wave of student protest: “The spontaneity, the concreteness of the issues, and the tactics of direct action are themselves characteristic of Anarchism.”<sup>58</sup> By the mid 1960s, as Mattson notes, “When an organizer needed a speech made for a protest, Goodman made it. When a group needed a pamphlet, Goodman often promised to write it.”<sup>59</sup>

Examining Goodman’s role in the development of the ideas that influenced the early New Left fills a gap in the history of the movement. The term “anarchist” has often been used to describe part or all of the New Left, particularly its earlier phases. Although it is regularly observed that anarchist themes were implicit in the early New Left commitments to personal revolt, antibureaucracy, and antiauthoritarianism, insufficient attention has been paid to Goodman’s role in directly conducting anarchism’s influence to the New Left. Mattson has emphasized the role of Goodman’s ideas in the New Left, paying attention to his grounding of radicalism in psychological and populist traditions and to his decentralism.<sup>60</sup> However, Mattson pays insufficient attention to the twentieth-century anarchist tradition of thought. Putting anarchism at the center of our framework for understanding Goodman’s ideas and their relationship to the movements of the period enriches the understanding of the history of student movements in America and facilitates a greater understanding of the development of the anarchist tradition in the twentieth century.

## Decentralization

One of Goodman’s most important anarchist injections into the ideas of 1960s youth and New Left movements was the emphasis he placed on the decentralist or federative aspects of the anarchist tradition. One of his key contributions to anarchist ideology was the attack on centralization on the grounds of social psychology and political philosophy and his concrete public policy proposals for decentralization. The evils he was addressing were centralization, systematization, and the treatment of people in organizational, abstract, indirect, procedural terms: “Overcentralization is an international disease of modern times.”<sup>61</sup> For Goodman, centralization was humanly stultifying, ruinous to democracy, and productive of anomie. Its main faults

were abstraction and indirectness. For Goodman, centralization was related to over-capitalization, mass consumption, mass democracy, and mass education. It was also the cause of modern rootlessness and helplessness, failing democracies, inefficiency, and waste. Decentralization, on the other hand, he argued, created the environment for the human organism to develop selfhood and autonomy. His support for decentralization rested on his perspective on nature and human nature and on his ideological position against power. In fact, the term “decentralization” in Goodman’s writing seemed to stand as a synonym for anarchism, as in the following statement: “Decentralization is not lack of order or planning, but a kind of coordination that relies on different motives from top-down direction, standard rules, and extrinsic rewards like salary and status, to provide integration and cohesiveness.”<sup>62</sup>

Goodman’s first argument for decentralization focused on the inefficiencies and organizational deficiencies of centralization. The centralized system, Goodman argued, was designed for the discipline of armies, the keeping of records, the collection of taxes and other bureaucratic functions, and for the mass production of goods, but it had become socially and politically pervasive.<sup>63</sup> Centralization in the organization of administration, production, and distribution “mathematically guarantees stupidity.”<sup>64</sup> Information is abstracted at each stage of its passage to the decision-making center, and it loses a layer of useful, relevant content at every level. By the time it reaches the decision-making, processing center, it is entirely irrelevant. Also, the transmission of information to the center owes more of its content to the prediction of the desires of the holders of power by subordinate figures. In centralized systems of organization, information is abstracted and molded into a standardized form. The result is that the decisions or conclusions reached at the center are applicable to nobody, and fit no particular case. As Goodman argued, the standard “misfits every actual instance” and “particular appropriateness is ruled out like any other peculiarity.”<sup>65</sup> Such abstraction approximates, generalizes, omits, standardizes, and loses appropriateness, quality, and fit. Under such systems of organization, meaning is lost, people do not understand their work, and they are incapable of initiation or responsibility. The whole system is characterized by ignorance and waste, systems became run for their own sake, and there is a total loss of connection to function. Decentralization, on the other hand, allows projects to be organized autonomously “by professionals, artists, and workmen intrinsically committed to the job,” and

the result is the multiplication of economies in every direction. People are creative, inventive, and resourceful regarding the means at hand. They pay attention to what works rather than standard procedures, they improvise, and all available skills are put to use. These efficiencies result from the fact that “[t]he task is likely to be seen in its essence rather than abstractly.”<sup>66</sup>

Efficiency is not the main benefit of decentralizing function. More important for Goodman were the implications of decentralization for the quality of democratic society that resulted. For, him the human implications of decentralization were voluntarism, cooperation, engagement, decision making, community, independence, and autonomy. This would lead to greater public association and community activity. It would create social dynamics that work against authority, coercion, and alienation. This type of voluntaristic society, in Goodman’s view, “has yielded most of the values of civilization.”<sup>67</sup> The principle at the core of his moral approval of decentralization was the attack on the concept of power: “Living functions, biological, psychological, or social, have very little to do with abstract, preconceived ‘power’ that manages and coerces from outside the specific functions themselves.”<sup>68</sup> This kind of extrinsic motivation was not needed in healthy human society, which had its own drives and capacities for decision making and its own adjusting mechanisms. The exercise of abstract power operated against the development of those very skills and dispositions by which society could do without external management and coercion. Multiplying the centers of decision making led to increasing awareness and initiation, and direct engagement in function. The principle of decentralization was related to the capacity for spontaneity and direct action. Real initiating and deciding, grounded in acquaintance and trust, and all the other virtues of decentralization added up to enhanced prospects for participatory democracy: “The operative idea in participatory democracy is decentralizing in order to multiply the number who are responsible, who initiate and decide.”<sup>69</sup>

Goodman answered the objection that decentralizing put too much faith in human nature by reversing it and arguing that power destroys character: “Imagine being deified like Mao-tse-tung or Kim Il Sung, what that must do to a man’s character. Or habitually thinking the unthinkable, like our Pentagon.”<sup>70</sup> The concentration of power had to be avoided precisely because human nature is fallible. Democracy, because it divides power, does not cause the atrophy of the human moral sense but encourages the potential

for intelligence and grace in human activity. A social order built to the human scale possesses the elasticity for evolutionary trial and error and can absorb fallibilities. Goodman added that large organizations engaged people officially in behavior to which, as a matter of course, people individually would react with revulsion.<sup>71</sup> In Goodman's own words: "Our mistake is to arm anybody with collective power. Anarchy is the only safe polity."<sup>72</sup> The personalization of the collectivity was exactly the evil that centralization embodied: "In a centralized enterprise, the function to be performed is the goal of the organization rather than of persons."<sup>73</sup>

In 1964 and 1965, Goodman worked at the Institute for Policy Studies, a major progressive think tank, drawing on his experience of decentralization, direct action, and participatory democratic currents in the civil rights and peace movements to develop practical policy suggestions for decentralization. Goodman saw the institute as a real and practical attempt to engage with the need for new political approaches outside of government administration. His contributions included numerous proposals based on the principle of decentralization: ideas for youth camps, arts projects, worker self-management, breaking up the mass media, and community planning based on the ideal of an integrated neighborhood working in partnership with federal power and local initiative. Goodman's attempt to translate anarchism into public policy, even though it employed government to his decentralist ends, demonstrated that he saw anarchism not as an outsider philosophy but as part of the range of public policy options. He saw anarchism as the inspirational force for practical and applicable democratic solutions to policy issues concerning public space and social behavior. For Goodman, anarchist perspectives were part of the family of political ideas in a healthy democratic society. This view was related to his interpretation of anarchism, which saw it as part of the Western tradition of thought and experience and not "merely utopian dreams and a few bloody failures." He saw evidence of anarchism throughout the Western tradition, including "guild democracy," the "liberation of conscience and congregations since the Reformation," "the abolition of serfdom," and some of the developments in "progressive education." He added that these "bread-and-butter topics of European history are never called 'anarchist,' but they are."<sup>74</sup> The point to emphasize regarding Goodman is just how pertinent he considered the ideology of anarchism to be to modern problems of public policy and political philosophy.

A feature of Goodman's decentralist philosophy was its American flavor. He placed himself, his anarchism, and his decentralism, within the cultural tradition in which he saw himself belonging. Demonstrating the American taste for decentralist politics, Goodman observed, "The Americans have always been quick to form voluntary associations."<sup>75</sup> He had at his disposal a long American tradition of hostility to the state and defense of personal autonomy. The tension in Goodman's work between his disillusionment with the products of modernity and his abiding faith in essential humanism is strongly reminiscent of the American literary figures Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman. This included his optimism about the resilience of the creative, free essence of individuals. Further reflections of the relationship between his thought and the American romantic tradition were his idolization of nature, his preoccupation with heroism and idealism, and his sense of the artist as individual creator and purveyor of spiritual truth. The American romantic writers championed self-reliance and combined it with a suspicion of society, with its insidious creation of passive majorities, and a reverence for the virtues of nonconformity and independence. Like Goodman they defended an absolute right to exercise moral judgment in the face of law and the coercive institutions and the pressure for conformist behavior in modern civilization. They recommended decentralization and informal patterns of voluntary cooperation as part of a gradualist strategy of withdrawing from and standing aloof from an allegiance to the state. This was part of an attempt to manage the disintegrative forces of both democracy and technology under the conditions of rising affluence and materialism in nineteenth-century America. They emphasized the failure of American politics under these conditions to express the highest values of a democratic society.

Goodman's emphasis on decentralist policy via reformist measures has been misunderstood by fiercely critical radical commentators such as Kingsley Widmer as "wobbly anarchism" and a "retreat from his earlier utopianism."<sup>76</sup> Widmer could not comprehend a reformist, pragmatic, piecemeal, national-tradition-grounded form of anarchism. This was despite Goodman's arguments that "piecemeal" was the authentic tactic of modern anarchism, "In Anarchist theory, 'revolution' means the moment when the structure of authority is loosed, so that free functioning can occur. The aim is to open areas of freedom and defend them. In complicated modern societies it is probably safest to work at this piecemeal, avoiding chaos which tends

to produce dictatorship.<sup>77</sup> The piecemeal, reformist nature of Goodman's proposals was misunderstood by Widmer as "diluted anarchism."<sup>78</sup> Widmer assumed reformism was antithetical to anarchism, but the small-scale style of social change was essential to the decentralist, face-to-face, self-oriented aspirations of Goodman's anarchism.

Even more recent accounts of Goodman's "reformism" underestimate the radical and profoundly anarchist hopes he attached to his proposals. Wayne Price, unable to reconcile the idea of small-scale homespun praxis with effective change, accuses Goodman of "major error" in a "contradictory" stance that demonstrates that he had been "fooled" by the ruling classes.<sup>79</sup> Anarchist historian George Woodcock, however, demonstrated a more subtle awareness of Goodman's impact on the anarchist tradition when he noted, in relation to Goodman's educational ideas in particular, that his anarchism sought to "liberate natural social urges" rather than engage in a "suicidal course of political revolution."<sup>80</sup> Goodman saw the radical agenda as a mission to conserve and extend those positive social patterns, tendencies, and traditions that the centralized state worked to destroy. The revolutionary project was thus a mission to resist change that reduced the naturalness of a society and promote changes that made individuals more free. Freedom was fostered by this combination of vigilance and initiative. Anarchism was for Goodman a condition of appropriate, freedom-engendering, responses to actual situations.

## Conclusion

A greater focus on Goodman's utilization and development of the anarchist tradition in relation to contemporary concerns contributes to a more satisfactory awareness of the steady presence of anarchist ideas in the twentieth century, and highlights the engaging revisions and contributions that Goodman made to anarchist thought. The examination of his work here has demonstrated his unambiguous place in the anarchist tradition. It is clear that he developed the insights of anarchism in order to apply them to the contemporary era. The anarchist tradition provided him with the means to formulate his critique of modern political administration and organization and his proposals for decentralizing society to a humanly comprehensible

scale. Goodman's works were one of the main ways that anarchism made available to the 1960s counterculture and early New Left an individually and communally oriented celebration of spontaneity and self-regulation, and a critique of the centralized state. His ideas were also the main channel by which traditional anarchist concerns with education fed into libertarian pedagogical currents in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Goodman was both consistently anarchist in his ideological framework and politically prominent in radical intellectual debates of the twentieth century. Reexamining his contribution highlights the tendency of anarchism as a philosophy to carefully balance tradition and novelty in an attempt to address contemporary concerns. Goodman utilized the anarchist tradition to formulate his distinctive critique of contemporary America according to the principles of decentralization, participatory democracy, autonomy, and community. He also formulated a biological grounding of anarchism in concepts drawn from the field of psychology. Goodman drew on the anti-institutional bias, the focus on community formation, and the emphasis on individuality, judgment, and choice of the anarchist tradition. He combined inward- and outward-looking components of individual freedom in one phenomenological conception of self-development. This reconciled the social and individualist strands of anarchism, conventionally assumed to be starkly antithetical.

Goodman's thought also drew anarchism into a careful balance of pragmatism and idealism. This was chiefly through his radical emphasis on the possibilities held in the temporally and spatially proximate context. The phenomenological conception of self-development and the emphasis on the radical possibilities of the immediate environment led Goodman to his characteristic emphasis on the necessity for an interactive, accessible environment for healthy development. The focus on the importance of the tangible and plastic human and material environment for individual and social health underpinned Goodman's social and environmental concerns. His trajectory in this respect led him from author to therapist to political intellectual whose critique of the organized system was taken up by the political radicals of the early New Left. Goodman's anarchism constituted a powerful assertion of the necessity for selfhood and engagement in the liberated human experience. This was a modern formulation of anarchism's concerns with freedom, individuality, society, and power, in response to the pattern of large-scale modern administrative systems.

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