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ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

The Anarchist and the Technocrat: Herbert Read, C. P. Snow, and the Future of Britain

Matthew S. Adams

International Relations, Politics and History, Loughborough University, Loughborough, United Kingdom
Email: m.s.adams@lboro.ac.uk

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Abstract

A conceptual revision occurred at the heart of anarchist theory between the end of the nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries. As anarchist thinkers grappled with a state transformed beyond recognition by technological change, they reassessed their critique of state power and the rhetorical methods used to expose its inherent violence. Where nineteenth-century anarchists favored organic metaphors to emphasize the monstrosity of the state, twentieth-century anarchists tended to adopt a set of mechanical metaphors. This change focused attention on the idea of technocracy, and informed a more comprehensive assessment of the state's activities. This article analyses this innovation in anarchist political thought, before tracing it through to Herbert Read's critical appraisal of C. P. Snow's influential lecture "The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution," and Snow's response to Read. Their debate, in which Read challenged Snow's argument that the pursuit of technological and political modernization was essential to maintain the nation's international role and address the social and economic challenges of the mid-century, was a contest for Britain's future. Drawing on his anarchism, Read saw such ideas as an existential threat, with the unthinking promotion of a technological "revolution" imperiling "the tender shoots of all that is human." Contextualizing Read in his anarchist intellectual milieu, this article recovers a neglected voice in British intellectual and cultural history, the complexities of an overlooked political tradition, and a radical vision of Britain's future that questioned the dominant assumptions of the age.

Keywords: Anarchism; technocracy; science; planning; state; education

Herbert Read was an "English intellectual with a European reputation," his outré aesthetic values matched by appropriately avant-garde political beliefs when he declared for anarchism in the aftermath of the Spanish Revolution.[1] He was also a forgotten participant in a famous debate when, in the summer of 1959, he became embroiled in a public spat with the novelist, civil servant, and scientist C. P. Snow in the pages of *The London Magazine*. Read's review of Snow's Rede Lecture "The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution" was an early contribution to what would become known as the "two cultures" debate and was distinctive in both gainsaying the approbation that initially met Snow's talk, and for

[1] Paul Potts, "The Seed Beneath the Snow," *Poetry Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (1945): 76–78, at 77. For Read's status, consider David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow* (Liverpool, 2006), 175–82; James King, *The Last Modern: A Life of Herbert Read* (New York, 1990); David Goodway, ed., *Herbert Read Reassessed* (Liverpool, 1998); Michael Paroskos, ed., *ReReading Read* (London, 2007).

anticipating the more famous critique of F. R. Leavis.[2] While there is now a rich literature on this controversy, Read's involvement provides an opportunity to reconstruct the cultural politics that informed his intervention and the changes underway in the largely neglected political tradition upon which he drew. If Snow and Leavis respectively represented "technocratic" and "radical" liberalisms, Read, with anarchism as his touchstone, was a distinctive interlocutor in this debate.[3] Following Guy Ortolano, therefore, this article looks at the two cultures debate as an "episode" in British intellectual and cultural history, but uses Read's quarrel with Snow to reconstruct intellectual shifts in anarchist politics as its theorists strived to reinvent anarchism in the context of the post-Second World War state.[4]

Snow was, as David Edgerton has suggested, an "anti-historian" of British state modernization.[5] His lecture played an important role in erasing the history of British science and technology and its relationship to government, an ideological project informing a persuasive "technocratic narrative" that led to much handwringing across the 1960s about the economic and political consequences of the nation's supposedly antediluvian technical capabilities.[6] The Labour Party's efforts in the 1960s to position itself as a party of planning and efficiency against a perceived state tradition of aristocratic dilettantism were inspired by this reading, one mirrored in the Fulton Committee's indictment of the model of the "intelligent amateur" dominating the civil service.[7] The anti-historical technological narrative has similarly inspired a tradition of "declinist" histories of the British state that cut across the political spectrum.[8] For these onlookers, Britain's post-war history betrayed the essentials of Snow's diagnosis: the endurance of an "organic liberalism" incapable of achieving "sustained and structural intervention;" the resilience of "obdurate" traditions impeding technical innovation; or simply that the nation had "blown her very last chance" to achieve a vital transformation.[9]

While these histories effectively "wrote expertise out" of accounts of the state, another tradition typically written out of modern British history was developing a parallel critique of the transformation of contemporary state power.[10] Carissa Honeywell, Sophie Scott-Brown, and Benjamin Pauli have done much to recover this generation of British anarchist intellectuals, who far from seeing a mid-century state characterized by amateurishness, confronted a state transformed by the rise of technocratic forms of administration and control.[11] This article focuses on anarchists' mid-century reckoning with Britain's "technocratic moment," concentrating chiefly on the work of Read and his milieu.[12]

[2] Guy Ortolano, *The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge, 2009), 2, 28, 59.

[3] Ortolano, *Two Cultures*, 28–100.

[4] Ortolano, *Two Cultures*, 1.

[5] David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920–1970* (Cambridge, 2006), 196.

[6] Edgerton, *Warfare State*, 202; Alix Green, "History as Expertise and the Influence of Political Culture on Advice for Policy Since Fulton," *Contemporary British History* 29, no. 1 (2015): 27–50, at 31.

[7] Glen O'Hara, "'Dynamic, Exciting, Thrilling Change': The Wilson Government's Economic Policies, 1964–70," *Contemporary British History* 20, no. 3 (2006): 383–402; W. H. Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition*, vol. 3, part 1 (London, 1987), 194.

[8] Edgerton, *Warfare State*, 299–304; Jim Tomlinson, "Thrice Denied: 'Declinism' as a Recurrent Theme in British History in the Long Twentieth Century," *Twentieth Century British History* 20, no. 2 (2009): 227–51.

[9] Perry Anderson, "The Figures of Descent," *New Left Review* 161 (1987): 20–77, at 75; John Saville, *The Politics of Continuity: British Foreign Policy and the Labour Government, 1945–46* (London, 1993), 162, 160; Correlli Barnett, *The Verdict of Peace* (Oxford, 2002), 515; Edgerton, *Warfare State*, 301–03.

[10] Edgerton, *Warfare State*, 3.

[11] Carissa Honeywell, *A British Anarchist Tradition: Herbert Read, Alex Comfort and Colin Ward* (London, 2011), 11–25; idem, "Bridging the Gaps: Twentieth-Century Anglo-American Anarchist Thought," in *The Continuum Companion to Anarchism*, ed. Ruth Kinna (London, 2012), 111–39; Sophie Scott-Brown, *Colin Ward and the Art of Everyday Anarchy* (London, 2023); Benjamin J. Pauli, "The New Anarchism in Britain and the US: Towards a Richer Understanding of Post-war Anarchist Thought," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 20, no. 2 (2015): 131–55.

[12] Edgerton, *Warfare State*, 191.

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The first section places his generation of anarchists in its historical context, examining a series of defining shifts in anarchist rhetoric as these thinkers labored to refine the anarchist analysis of the state. Here, nineteenth-century tendencies to define the state in terms of its monstrosity were replaced by images of the state as an all-consuming machine. This shift reflected a broader concern in intellectual circles in the 1930s over the colonizing tendencies of technology on human life, a dominion that spread beyond the merely technological to embrace various forms of technocratic governance that brought with them greater regulation, political centralization, and the rise of expertise.[13] The second section traces Read's overlooked application of these rhetorical strategies in his analysis of Snow's lecture.[14] Finally, the article concentrates on an area that both Read and Snow considered the route out of Britain's current predicament: education. It shows, however, that Read, inspired by anarchism's fresh analysis of the state, saw a revolutionized education as an antidote to the narrow-minded technocratic vision he discerned in Snow.

The Octopus and the Machine

While anarchism's fortunes in Britain waxed and waned in the decades before the First World War, it had been a significant current in British socialism and had exerted an influence on the intellectual life of the country more broadly.[15] The apparently benign magnetism of Peter Kropotkin, who started exile in Britain in 1886, and was described by Oscar Wilde as "a man with the soul of that beautiful, white Christ whom Russia is destined to give birth to," had much to do with this.[16] His personal appeal, coupled with his expansive intellectual interests, drew a number of figures into his orbit, from William Morris and George Bernard Shaw to Robert Cunninghame Graham and Henry Walter Bates. Whether these interlocutors were, like Morris, drawn to Kropotkin's anarchism, or, like Shaw, opposed to it, anarchism was nevertheless a tradition that forced comment.[17]

Internecine conflict over the legitimacy of the First World War did much to undermine this vibrancy, ending its "heroic period" as a number of its leading theorists, most notably Kropotkin and Errico Malatesta, also in exile in Britain, became embroiled in acrimonious debate.[18] Such disputes served to undermine unity just as increased official scrutiny damaged the infrastructure the movement had established in the previous decades.[19] The offices of the newspaper *Freedom*, co-founded by Kropotkin after his arrival in Britain in 1886, was subject to a number of wartime police raids, disrupting its activities. The image of a seemingly successful socialist revolution in Russia in 1917 also served to reduce anarchism's appeal.[20] After a period of erratic publication *Freedom* itself ceased to appear in 1927.

Read's association with anarchism began in the wake of the Spanish Revolution, an event that demonstrated that it was not the moribund tradition this history of decline may have suggested. In an age when intellectuals were forced to "take sides," as Nancy Cunard's 1937 survey of writers' responses to the crisis in Spain demanded, Read was an early convert to

[13] Mark Grief, *The Age of Crisis in Man: Thought and Fiction in America* (Princeton, 2015), 47–51. See also Frank Fischer, *Technocracy and the Politics of Expertise* (London, 1990), 14.

[14] There is a rare mention, in passing, in Guy Ortolano, "F. R Leavis, Science, and the Abiding Crisis of Modern Civilisation," *History of Science* 43, no. 2 (2005): 161–85.

[15] John Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse* (London, 1978), 238–39.

[16] Oscar Wilde, *Complete Writings of Oscar Wilde* (New York, 1905), 131. Quail and Kinna challenge this benign image of Kropotkin, emphasizing his credentials as a revolutionary. See Quail, *Fuse*, 52; Ruth Kinna, *Kropotkin: Reviewing the Classical Anarchist Tradition* (Edinburgh, 2016), 17–19, 56–60.

[17] George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumović, *The Anarchist Prince* (New York, 1971), 224–25, 228–29. See George Bernard Shaw, *The Impossibilities of Anarchism* (London, 1895).

[18] Benjamin Franks, *Rebel Alliances: The Means and Ends of Contemporary British Anarchism* (Edinburgh, 2006), 30.

[19] Matthew S. Adams, "Anarchism and the First Word War," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism*, ed. Carl Levy and Matthew Adams (Cham, 2019), 389–408.

[20] Rob Ray, *A Beautiful Idea: History of the Freedom Press Anarchists* (London, 2018), 49–50.

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the anarchist cause, welcoming "the spirit to resist the bureaucratic tyranny of the State and the [...] intolerance of all doctrinaires" he perceived in the revolution.[21] His statement caught the attention of Emma Goldman, then a representative of the CNT-FAI in London, who wrote to Read commending him for being that rare beast, an "Englishman who has the courage to write about THE NECESSITY OF ANARCHISM."[22]

Goldman may have considered Read a "miracle of miracles" in being a "real honest-to-God Anarchist" among "the British intelligentsia," but he was one of a number of intellectuals drawn to anarchism in these years.[23] Indeed, some followed his example. George Woodcock, later to become the most famous historian of anarchism and a public intellectual in Canada, was partly drawn into the movement by Read, the "best-known anarchist in Britain."[24] The novelist Ethel Mannin, whom Goldman also courted as a supporter of anarchist Spain and who shared a stage with Read – as well as the actor Miles Malleson – at a "Literary & Musical Evening" in support of Spanish refugees in London in April 1938, privately confessed to a "fannish" appreciation of his politics, deeming him an "avowed anarchist."[25] Alex Comfort, pioneering sexologist and gerontologist, developed a close relationship with Read too, recognizing him as an ally in a project to broaden anarchism's intellectual ambitions. As he suggested to Read in 1951, their project needed to strive to move beyond an anarchism that amounted to little more than a "slogan on a pole" and revive the Freedom group as an "ideas-factory."[26] Behind Comfort's vision was the practical fact that renewed interest in anarchism helped rebuild the movement's infrastructure. The newspaper *Freedom* began appearing again in 1936, reverting to its original name in 1945, with much of this organizational energy coming from Vernon Richards and his wife Marie-Louise Berneri, both children of Italian anarchists.[27] The publisher began reissuing classic works by figures like Kropotkin and Malatesta, as well as pamphlets by contemporaries, including Read, Woodcock, and Comfort.[28]

For all the continuities of name, this was a qualitatively different politics from its nineteenth-century incarnation, representing a "new anarchism," as Honeywell and Pauli have shown.[29] One characteristic of this was that while the Freedom group had always attracted its share of intellectuals – or "middle-class faddists" as one hostile turn-of-the-century commentator had it – the new generation were notable for the breadth of their intellectual enthusiasms, as Comfort's image captured.[30] The second key feature of this new anarchism was a hostility to political violence and a skeptical stance regarding conventional understandings of revolution. This position typically rested on an argument that political violence was inherently authoritarian, and that by assuming a pacifist stance, anarchism remained, in Comfort's words, "the sole revolutionary movement which does not carry in itself the seeds of post-revolutionary tyranny."[31] Anarchist critics of this position, like Albert Meltzer, deemed this a self-defeating "liberal negativism" and decried the infiltration of intellectuals into a movement that was losing sight of the primacy of class struggle.[32]

[21] *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War* (London, n.d. [1937]), n.p.

[22] Emma Goldman to Herbert Read: 22 January 1938, TAM.012, 71M4:32, Tamiment Library & Wagner Labor Archives (hereafter TL).

[23] Emma Goldman to Herbert Read: 3 May 1938, 71M4:34, TL.

[24] George Woodcock, *Letter to the Past: An Autobiography* (Toronto, 1982), 240.

[25] "Literary & Musical Evening: 26th April, 1938," TAM454: 1: 4/29/38, TL; Ethel Mannin, *Young in the Twenties: A Chapter of Autobiography* (London, 1971), 183; Ethel Mannin to Herbert Read: 1 July 1938, 61/121/1, Herbert Read Papers University of Victoria (hereafter HRPUV). See also Morris Brodie, "'Crying in the Wilderness?' The British Anarchist Movement During the Spanish Civil War 1936–1939," *Anarchist Studies* 27, no. 2 (2019): 21–40.

[26] Alex Comfort to Herbert Read: 27.1.51, HR/AC-9, HRPUV; Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds*, 240.

[27] Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds*, 126; Ray, *Beautiful Idea*, 60–98.

[28] Ray, *Beautiful Idea*, 82–132.

[29] Honeywell, *Anarchist Tradition*; Pauli, "New Anarchism."

[30] Quail, *Fuse*, 59; Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds*, 253; Alex Comfort to Herbert Read: 27.1.51.

[31] Alex Comfort, "An Anarchist View: The Political Relevance of Pacifism," *Peace News*, 7 December 1945, 2.

[32] Albert Meltzer, *I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels* (London, 1996), 145.

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Rejecting revolution also encouraged anarchists to focus attention on the possibility of securing "partial anarchy in the present" rather than "complete anarchy in the future," a trend most notably represented by Colin Ward.[33] With his politics shaped by Woodcock and Read, who were already active when he entered the movement, Ward was, Meltzer feared, another proponent of "bourgeois sanitised 'anarchism'," but he exerted considerable influence on its intellectual tradition, especially through the journal *Anarchy* that he edited between 1961 and 1970.[34] *Anarchy* served, as Woodcock's wartime journal *Now* had twenty years before, as a hub for a renewed, international, anarchist intellectual culture. These bonds were especially strong with a varied group of thinkers in the United States who similarly identified with the anarchist tradition while questioning its revolutionary heritage. This group included the countercultural icon Paul Goodman, whose diverse interests included urban planning, poetry, and gestalt therapy (justifying Norman Podhoretz's description of his milieu as being "in love with ideas"); the critic, and founder-editor of the journal *politics*, Dwight Macdonald; and the poet Kenneth Rexroth.[35] As Andrew Cornell has highlighted, the transatlantic links between these anarchist intellectuals were strong, as they all pondered what it meant to be anarchists in "advanced capitalist societies as the Cold War" took shape.[36]

While these anarchists worked to reinvent their tradition in order to maintain its relevance in a world of superpower hostility, they were also engaged in reckoning with a state transformed from the edifice confronted by their nineteenth-century forbears. These thinkers drew on the resources afforded by anarchist political thought in navigating this new terrain, but their maps also bore the imprint of their individual intellectual passions. Uniting them all, however, was a critique of technocracy and its manifold abuses, and Read, as the elder statesman of this group, stands as a representative of a shifting set of rhetorical strategies that had significant implications for mid-century Anglo-American anarchist political thought. In contrast to nineteenth-century anarchists, who had tended to portray the state in organic, monstrous terms – an entity increasingly inveigling its way into the domains of social life – twentieth-century anarchists adopted a new set of mechanical metaphors to understand the state. Technocratic control was at the heart of this vision, and it amounted to a more comprehensive assessment of the state's activities than the nineteenth-century tradition. In turn, the appeal to the organic now took on a new rhetorical role, as anarchists stressed the violence that the machine-like state inflicted on the organic processes of human life.

For a political tradition prone to fissiparousness, rejection of the state is a rare point of unity for anarchists.[37] Emerging as an independent political movement in the mid-nineteenth century, anarchist theorists rejected accounts of state formation rooted in social contract theory, arguing instead that the state was an institution founded upon various forms of coercion and manipulation, benefiting "entrenched hierarchies."[38] Accompanying this "abstract" critique of the state in principle – which often occluded differences between individual states – the experience of state expansion and professionalization in the mid-to-late nineteenth century sharpened anarchist critiques of the state in practice, as the political, economic, and social changes produced by this process disrupted long-established social patterns.[39] Anarchists advocated a range of revolutionary methods

[33] George Woodcock, *Beyond the Blue Mountains: An Autobiography* (Toronto, 1987), 93.

[34] Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds*, 252–53.

[35] Norman Podhoretz, *Making It* (New York, [1967] 2017), 89. On the connections between Comfort, Rexroth, and Woodcock, see James Gifford, *Personal Modernisms: Anarchist Networks and the Later Avant-Gardes* (Edmonton, 2014), 129–33.

[36] Andrew Cornell, *Unruly Equality: U.S. Anarchism in the 20th Century* (Oakland, CA, 2016), 198.

[37] Ruth Kinna, *Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford, 2005), 15–26, 38.

[38] Randall Amster, "Anti-Hierarchy," in *Anarchism: A Conceptual Approach*, ed. Benjamin Franks et al. (London, 2018), 15–27, at 19.

[39] Ruth Kinna, *The Government of No One* (London, 2019), 12.

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to combat this injustice, but promoting anarchist viewpoints was always a key part of this strategy.[40] Literary propaganda was central; it was marked by a commitment to rhetorical experimentation and, as Quentin Skinner writes in a different context, "exploit[ed] the power of words to [...] undermine the construction of our social world."[41]

For nineteenth-century anarchists one rhetorical technique was to expose the state's inherent violence by defining it in a language of monstrosity. If there is an inherent ambiguity in the idea of the monstrous as something both horrifying for evading human control, but hopeful in its revelation of alternative ways of being, anarchist representations of the state mirrored this tension: the state possessed an insatiable will to dominate, but also an organic vulnerability.[42] Imagining, as Peter Kropotkin did, the state as an octopus allowed him to dramatize its inherent expansionism, as its functionaries "spread [...] their tentacles over the country," colonizing ever larger portions of social life.[43] He embellished this simile when describing taxation as one arm of this effort to exert greater control:

> An octopus with a thousand heads and a thousand suckers, like the sea monsters of old tales, it makes it possible to envelop all society and to channel all individual efforts so as to make them result in the enrichment and governmental monopoly of the privileged classes.[44]

Elsewhere, Kropotkin favored the arachnidian metaphor, depicting an "army of employees" as "light-fingered spiders" clandestinely pursuing their work behind "murky windows," and he invoked images of pestilence – "plague" and "miasma" – to depict the stifling of individual spirit in the present.[45]

While denying that the state had any "organic reality," and deeming it an abstraction, like "gods and devils," Emma Goldman was also drawn to monstrous language in describing its operations. Nietzsche's image of the state as a "cold monster" held particular appeal for her, and she wondered what he would have thought had he seen this "hideous beast" in the form of "modern dictatorship."[46] Goldman similarly inveighed against the "Bolshevik Frankenstein monster" – a "bureaucratic Frankenstein monster" – and, reaching for Nietzsche again, the "cold monster" of the state.[47] She adopted the same language to describe those institutions or social forces that she saw working in tandem with the state to perpetuate its dominance. The Catholic Church was thus a "black monster" and, alongside the Spanish throne, a "hydra monster"; the architects of British imperialism – Chamberlain, Rhodes, Milner – were "greedy and insatiable monsters"; and capitalists were "idle vampires" living off the labor of the poor.[48] She also inverted popular conceptions of anarchism as a "blood-curdling" doctrine advanced by "black monster[s] bent on swallowing

[40] Mike Finn, *Debating Anarchism: A History of Action, Ideas and Movements* (London, 2021), 60–92.

[41] Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds*, 182; Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Regarding Method* (Cambridge, 2002), 5.

[42] Margrit Shildrick, "Visual Rhetorics and the Seductions of the Monstrous: Some Precautionary Observations," *Somatechnics* 8, no. 2 (2018): 163–77, at 163.

[43] Peter Kropotkin, "The State: Its Historic Role," in *Fugitive Writings*, ed. George Woodcock (Montreal, 1993), 159–201, at 198. Early translations of this text rendered octopus as "blood-suckers"; in the original French version Kropotkin uses "pieuvre." See Peter Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historic Role* (London, 1908), 40; Pierre Kropotkine, "L'État: Son Role Historique," *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 9 Juillet 1897, 1–2, at 2.

[44] Peter Kropotkin, "The Modern State [1913]," in *Modern Science and Anarchy*, ed. Iain McKay (Edinburgh, 2018), 279–363, at 306.

[45] Peter Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel* (Montreal, 1992), 25, 29. See also Richard Morgan, *The Making of Kropotkin's Anarchist Thought* (London, 2021).

[46] Emma Goldman, *The Place of the Individual in Society* (Chicago, 1940), 5, 9.

[47] Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, vol. 2 (London, 1932), 780, 826, 896.

[48] Emma Goldman, "Francisco Ferrer and the Modern School," in *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York, 1917), 151–72, at 152, 153; Emma Goldman, "The Effect of War on the Workers," *Freedom* 14, no. 146 (March–April, 1900), 10–11 at 11; Emma Goldman, "Anarchy and the Sex Question [1896]," in *Anarchy and the Sex Question: Essays on Women and Emancipation*, ed. Shawn P. Wilbur (Oakland, CA, 2016), 15–19, at 17.

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everything," arguing that, in fact, the state embodied these qualities.[49] Her erstwhile mentor, the German anarchist Johann Most, deployed a similar tactic. In his pamphlet *The Social Monster* (1890), he introduced the figure of the anarchist, "pockets brimful with dynamite-bombs," but pointed to anarchism's positive ambitions to negate associations with monstrosity. It was the state, instead, with its "monstrous governmental machinery," supported by the "frivolous superstition" of words like "goodness [...] and wisdom and justice" that was the real social monster.[50]

For those anarchists whose political education had taken place in the nineteenth century, the monstrous metaphor was a seductive one as it allowed them to highlight a number of features defining the state. Depicting it as an octopus offered an image of its invasion into every area of society; presenting it as a vampire, ghoul, or monster stressed its alien presence, gaining sustenance from social life; and its functionaries were portrayed in monstrous terms too, as either masters or minions. This essentially parasitical vision of the state is also a noticeable component of Kropotkin's broader historical theory.[51] Bosses and bureaucrats might be "'vermin', 'vampires', and 'werewolves'," and even those anarchists who tended to portray the state in more abstract terms, like Bakunin, were apt to emphasize its cannibalistic nature as it "consumes the life of the people," or its macabre and satanic qualities, as a "vast cemetery" or "altar" upon which the "freedom and welfare of peoples are immolated."[52]

While the monstrous allowed anarchists to portray an invasive and egregious state, the organicism of the metaphor also pointed to paths beyond it. As one scholar has noted, Kropotkin was a quintessential *fin de siècle* thinker in his recourse to motifs of degeneracy and decay, organic susceptibilities that included the state.[53] His image of state society was thus that it was monstrous but also vulnerable, a society trundling on "like wornout old men, their skin shrivelled and their feet stumbling, gnawed at by mortal sickness," as they approached their end.[54] This shift from a language of monstrosity to that of sickness allowed anarchists to present anarchism as the cure. Responding to an imaginary interlocutor, the British anarchist George Barrett retorted that the question "if you abolish government, what will you put in its place?" entirely missed the point. One would not, he replied, ask a doctor, "if you take away my illness, what will you give me in its place?," and he reassured his readers that "just as when disease is eradicated health remains" the revolutionary abolition of the state would witness a return to vigor.[55] The American individualist anarchist Benjamin Tucker, no fan of revolution, similarly expressed the implications of the organic metaphor in clear terms. The state is indeed an "organism," he wrote, and "so is a tiger [...] seeking to devour the people, and they must either kill or cripple it."[56]

For Read and the anarchist intellectuals in his milieu the metaphor of the monstrous state held less appeal. A key reason for this discursive shift is one that his debate with Snow would make clear: a transformation of the character of the nation-state and its relationship to technology. This process was well underway in the mid-nineteenth century, but appeals to the rule of the "scientist, technologist, and the engineer" found a broader audience in the chaos of the 1930s.[57] As one popular introduction suggested, the "malodorous sense of wrong-doing" following the Wall Street Crash did much to burnish technocracy's credentials.

[49] Emma Goldman, "Anarchism: What It Really Stands For," in *Anarchism*, 53–74, at 55.

[50] John Most, *The Social Monster: A Paper on Communism and Anarchism* (New York, 1890), 1, 7, 17.

[51] Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (London, 1908), 155–222.

[52] Sharif Gemie, "Counter-Community: An Aspect of Anarchist Political Culture," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 2 (April 1994): 349–67, at 357; Michael Bakunin, "Open Letters to Swiss Comrades of the International," in *The Basic Bakunin: Writings 1869–1871*, ed. Robert M. Cutler (New York, 1992), 169–79, at 176, 177.

[53] Morgan, *Kropotkin's Anarchist Thought*, 71–95.

[54] Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel*, 24.

[55] George Barret, *Objections to Anarchism* (London, 1921), 22–23.

[56] Benjamin R. Tucker, *Instead of a Book: By a Man too Busy to Write One* (New York, 1897), 33.

[57] Frank Arkright, *The ABC of Technocracy* (London, 1933), 70. See Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State Since 1800* (Cambridge, 2013), 33–35.

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And as Howard Scott, one of the founders of the ephemeral Technocracy Movement had it, in the "dilemma of alternatives" presenting themselves in that troubled decade, "modern common sense" pointed to technocratic solutions.[58] Such pleas for the primacy of planners had a different resonance after the experiences of the mid-century. By then, ideas of "Scientific Management" configured world affairs, in ways that both Read and Snow, despite their differences, recognized.[59] In this context, the utility of the organic metaphor favored by anarchists to attack the state waned. Instead, metaphors that focused on the concatenation of technical, scientific, and bureaucratic expertise at the heart of the modern state, and its fusion of military and industrial interests, became commonplace.

Descriptions of the state as a machine do have a longer history in political thinking, but, just as any political metaphor is to a degree "specific" to an era, its twentieth-century appropriations by anarchists highlighted a particular set of historically specific characteristics.[60] In July 1951, Read gestured towards these features in a brief exploration of "machinism":

> We tend to speak of the State in terms of the machine – 'the machinery of government', 'the bureaucratic machine', etc. Metaphors, no doubt, but the day is not so distant when Whitehall will become one vast calculating machine, with forms fed in at one end and infallible statistics controlling our lives coming out at the other.[61]

A number of mid-century anarchist intellectuals shared this vision, and their analysis made three central claims: that the nature of the state machine resulted in alienation and dehumanization; that the gargantuan modern state was all-consuming; and that the system, operated by technocratic functionaries, was incapable of change and became a prison, limiting opportunities for free thought.

Read saw the first of these ideas developing in tandem with processes of urbanization and mechanization, "words," he thought, "as ugly as the things they signify." They created a world in which "direct contact with the organic processes of nature" had been lost, cultivating an "alienation of sensibility" that found its apotheosis in the "delinquency" of the modern city.[62] Kenneth Rexroth discerned a similar congruence. Accompanying the usurpation of "local initiative [...] to the rule of the central State," Rexroth saw a process of "concentration and depersonalization" exacerbated by a "computerization and automation" that made life "ever more unreal, aimless and empty of meaning."[63]

In deeming this "dehumanization," Rexroth's reading of the state echoed a theme central to Comfort's work.[64] Comfort's vision of the impact of the modern state machinery on individual development rested on a juxtaposition of mechanical and organic processes, a device favored by Read and Rexroth to dramatize the state's impersonality and impact on individuals. Treating "sexual maladjustment" as an index of the latter, Comfort traced the blame for inhibited sexuality to the pace of change in urban, industrial, and capitalist societies and the "asociality" that was now a feature of the "prosperity and isolation" of contemporary life.[65] Concentration of power and centralization were key features of this process, and Comfort saw inherent instability in the rise of "professional governments" that monopolized

[58] Allen Raymond, *What is Technocracy?* (London, 1933), 15; Howard Scott et al., *Introduction to Technocracy* (London, 1933), 49, 38. See also Harold Loeb, *Life in a Technocracy: What It Might Be Like* (New York, 1933). For an overview, see William E. Akin, *Technocracy and the American Dream: The Technocrat Movement, 1900–1941* (Berkley, 1977).

[59] Richard G. Olson, *Scientism and Technocracy in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Scientific Management* (London, 2016), 83.

[60] Adreas Anter, *Max Weber's Theory of the Modern State: Origins, Structure and Significance* (Basingstoke, 2014), 200, in particular, 195–202.

[61] Herbert Read, "Kicks and Ha'pence: Machinism," *Freedom: An Anarchist Weekly*, 7 July 1951, 2.

[62] Herbert Read, *The Contrary Experience: Autobiographies* (London, 1963), 342.

[63] Kenneth Rexroth, *Communalism: From its Origins to the Twentieth Century* (London, 1974), xii.

[64] Rexroth, *Communalism*, xii.

[65] Alex Comfort, *Sex in Society* (London, 1963), 48.

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power at the expense of any meaningful "field of individual activity."[66] As he wrote, "human beings are social as long as they recognise one another as human beings," but the habit of transferring responsibility to "institutions and conceptions" was enervating as well as morally dangerous.[67] Comfort's vision was one of individuals cowed by the demands of a mechanical society that reduced individual activity to mastering the "techniques" by which people earned a living. "Individual responsibility" had been "virtually abolished" by a bloating of "authority," and life was "technically advanced but personally insecure, subject to a complicated mechanism of institutional order" but characterized by prevailing "boredom" relieved by "kick-hunting."[68]

If one aspect of this critique was the idea that the modern technocratic state mutilated the individuals caught in its gears, the second was a sense of the state's all-consuming power. Comfort illustrated this by reaching for a set of organic and mechanical juxtapositions. Seeing the space for "organic growth" colonized by the machinery of the modern state, and the "scope for normal human biology and initiative" conquered by its organizational logic, he diagnosed widespread "social neurosis."[69] When looking at the post-New Deal state, Paul Goodman similarly discussed the state's all-encompassing domination and the attenuated liberalism he thought sought to legitimize it. The substitution of a language of "civil rights" for "civil liberties" was revealing, he argued, for where liberalism once pursued "the exercise of initiative" in its model of citizenship, the focus was now on creating "clients" who were granted legal protections but were nevertheless ultimately prevented from "going one's own way."[70] Liberalism's evolution from the protection of eccentricity to a fixation on rights was indicative of the supremacy of one vision of the legitimate social order:

> All have cumulatively added up to the one interlocked system of big government, big corporations, big municipalities, big labor, big education, and big communications, in which all of us are pretty regimented and brainwashed, and in which direct initiative and deciding have become difficult or impossible.[71]

Anxiety over the size of the state was clearly one component of this critique, and the organic metaphor was once more invoked to accentuate the contrast between the artificiality of modern society and the modes of living that had characterized human history. George Woodcock consistently stressed this idea, seeing in history patterns of decentralization that justified the vision of the "cellular society" rather than the "nightmares of megapolitics."

Woodcock's comment that these were "cells of sane living in the interstices of a belligerent world" pointed to the role that war was seen to play in hastening these processes of state centralization.[72] An inflection of this argument particular to British anarchists was to challenge the thesis that the warfare state engendered a welfare state that was necessarily an improvement on the present.[73] For thinkers like Colin Ward, who devoted most attention to this issue, welfarism embodied the essential, pernicious characteristics of the technocratic state in that it was depersonalizing, inefficient, and corrupted traditions of "working-class self-help and mutual aid."[74] Flipping the Bevanite logic behind the foundation of the

[66] Comfort, *Sex in Society*, 49.

[67] Alex Comfort, "The Right Thing to Do," in *Against Power and Death: The Anarchist Articles and Pamphlets of Alex Comfort*, ed. David Goodway (London, 1994), 109–13, at 112.

[68] Comfort, *Sex in Society*, 49, 50.

[69] Alex Comfort, *Authority and Delinquency: A Study in the Psychology of Power* (London, [1950] 1970), 116, 117.

[70] Paul Goodman, *People or Personnel and Like a Conquered Province* (New York, 1968), 29.

[71] Goodman, *People*, 45.

[72] George Woodcock, "Not any Power: Reflections on Decentralism," in *The Rejection of Politics* (Toronto, 1972), 51–57, at 56. On the war and its impact on anarchist identities, see Honeywell, *Anarchist Tradition*.

[73] On the complexities of this narrative, see David Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: A Twentieth-century History* (London, 2018), 222–45.

[74] Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London, [1973] 1996), 35, 10, 11.

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National Health Service (NHS), Ward condemned the "top-heavy governmental machine" that eroded patterns of local control, asking "why didn't the whole country become, not one big Tredegar, but a network of Tredegars?"[75] As this example implied, Ward thought that by incorporating welfare provision, the technocratic state had helped cultivate the fetish that "government provision is the best way of meeting social needs," a belief that meant meeting these obligations was increasingly assumed by "institutions" that were "top-heavy" and possessed managerial classes that bloated as the number of those actually involved in providing care contracted.[76] Such centralization rendered people powerless before the "vast central agglomerations of power in the modern, military-industrial state."[77]

Ward's criticism of the welfare state points to a difference between British and American anarchist conceptualizations of the technocratic state, although the distinction is largely one of degree. American anarchists broadly echoed this line, albeit in a more muted fashion, reflecting the comparatively "laggard" nature of the development of a welfare state that was slowly emerging in response to the economic crisis of the 1930s.[78] Early anarchist responses to the New Deal thus feared that it would achieve little of value for those in poverty, while massively extending the reach of the state.[79] Later, Goodman would bemoan the loss of initiative he saw in a welfarism that reinforced the tendency to centralization in a modern technocratic system "running for its own sake." Whatever the intentions of pioneering social reformers, he added, rather than the "revolutionary democratizing of society" they championed, the result had been its antithesis: an increase in the power of government so all-encompassing that a "sovereign citizenry is no longer even thought of."[80]

The third feature mid-century anarchists highlighted as characteristic of the modern technocratic state was the creation of a class of functionaries to operate the machinery of government. Goodman offered the figure of "Organization Man" as the embodiment of this operative: a person created by the state to ensure its smooth running, but as dehumanized as those trapped in the sprawl of the modern city. Expertise, and the academic structures that created and legitimized it, were central to this system. Goodman saw a "new class of bureaucratized intellectuals, a kind of monkhood" of sociologists, consultants, and social workers, whose primary job was to provide the "rationalizations for the centralizing programs of liberal government."[81] Ward's critique of the tendency of governments to spend vast sums on consultancies to guide projects of innovation in the NHS – only, ultimately, to be directed towards expanding "administration" – echoed Goodman's vision.[82]

Such bureaucratization necessitated the unprecedented marshaling of scientific activity by the state. As Goodman suggested, adding to the pernicious loss of scientific discoveries to the military-industrial complex was the reality that most scientists seemed blind to their subsumption. Echoing a point Read would make in his debate with Snow, Goodman argued that the "doctrine of pure science and its moral neutrality" was always trumpeted by scientists whenever it was most threatened, and it now seemed like "self-deception" as legions of scientists found themselves "salaried or subsidized" by the state.[83] He thought this entire process had a profound impact on the functioning of power and the status of knowledge, but it was also psychologically damaging. As Goodman noted playfully in his most influential book *Growing Up Absurd*, where the stereotypical image of the scientist tended towards the "bumbling" and "unkempt," the modern reality was that of a "surgeon

[75] Ward, *Anarchy*, 14; Colin Ward, *Social Policy: An Anarchist Response* (London, 1996), 10, 11, 15, 16.
[76] Ward, *Anarchy*, 15, 109, 14.
[77] Ward, *Anarchy*, 23.
[78] Stein Kuhnle and Anne Sander, "The Emergence of the Western Welfare State," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State*, ed. Daniel Béland et al. (Oxford, 2010), 62–80, at 76.
[79] Cornell, *Unruly Equality*, 124–29, 287.
[80] Goodman, *People*, 166, 45, 46; see also 29–31.
[81] Goodman, *People*, 30.
[82] Ward, *Anarchy*, 14.
[83] Paul Goodman, *The Moral Ambiguity of America* (Quebec, [1966] n.d.), 43.

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with rubber gloves or a cold maniac with diabolic power in his eyes." However, given the unpalatability of this image, another was promoted: the "Organization Man," "neat" and "cooperative," but with "nothing in his eyes at all."[84]

Parodying J. K. Galbraith, Goodman saw this functionary as a product of the "empty" society, an automaton built to service a system defined by "overcentralization."[85] Coupled with its ability to produce its own operatives, the resilience of this technocratic system also rested in its capacity to inhibit the possibility of thinking differently. In *Journey through Utopia*, Marie-Louise Berneri challenged the increasingly paradigmatic rejection of utopian politics by liberal theorists, who saw recent history as reason enough to abandon hope for a future purged of conflict.[86] Berneri instead opened her study by insisting that the present crisis made a radical reimagining of the possibilities of social change all the more necessary. "Our age is an age of compromises, of half-measures," she wrote, "visionaries are derided [...] and 'practical men' rule our lives."[87] Only a reconnection with the spirit of utopianism, she judged, could break the confines of the present.

Berneri's effort to rehabilitate utopianism to combat technocracy centered on an assumption that the modern state machine restricted creative thinking, but a more pressing challenge was the idea that the state might actively foster an essential amorality. Pondering the complexities of the German people's complicity in the crimes of fascism, Dwight Macdonald argued that, in this context, "deep respect for law and order" had "assumed a sinister aspect." But he cautioned that anyone condemning those German citizens who blamed their actions on obeying commands from above, could only do so from a position of demonstrable willingness "to resist authority themselves when it conflicts too intolerably with their personal moral code."[88] Yet Macdonald feared that even in ostensibly democratic states, the capacity to exercise independent moral judgement was increasingly atrophied:

> The principles on which our mass-industry economy is built – centralization of authority, division of labor (or specialization of function), rigid organization from the top down in which each worker fits at his appointed hierarchical level – [...] have been carried over into the political sphere. The result is that [...] the individual has little choice about his behavior, and can be made to function [...] in ways quite opposed to any he would voluntarily choose.[89]

Just as Comfort and Goodman highlighted the withering of an individual's capacity to exercise responsibility, Macdonald was, like Berneri, alive to the threat posed by a political focus on "practicality." Adopting the term "totalitarian liberalism" to describe the Western democracies, he saw an inherent amorality in their willingness to let "principles yield to circumstances;" their pervasive double standard regarding the legitimate actions states may take; and in their assumption that "effective power carries its own justification" that served to distort relations between large and small powers.[90]

Macdonald's analysis, and his totalitarian liberal fusion, echoed a wider contemporary concern in dissident forms of liberal politics about the expansion of the state. It departed from them in encouraging reconnection with anarchism's moral heart as a liberation

[84] Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized Society* (New York, [1956] 2012), 88.

[85] Goodman, *Moral Ambiguity*, 14; Goodman, *People*, 72.

[86] Matthew S. Adams, "Sleeping Dogs and Rebellious Hopes: Anarchist Utopianism in the Age of Realized Utopia," *History of European Ideas* 46, no. 8 (2020): 1093–106.

[87] Marie-Louise Berneri, *Journey through Utopia* (London, 1982), 1, 8.

[88] Dwight Macdonald, "The Responsibility of Peoples," in *The Memoirs of a Revolutionist: Essays in Political Criticism* (New York, 1957), 33–71, at 61.

[89] Macdonald, "Responsibility," 61–62.

[90] Dwight Macdonald, "What is Totalitarian Liberalism?," in *Memoirs*, 292–96, at 295.

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from the prison of "rationalization," rather than urging reconciliation with religion or an egotistical assertion of individual self-interest.[91] His fusion also points to a tension in anarchist thinking more broadly. While the critique of the technocratic state demonstrates that anarchists *were* sensitive to the historical and cultural particularities of state forms, anarchist invective could often obliterate such differences in an abstract condemnation of statism in principle.[92]

One characteristic of the anarchist critique of the state was a rhetorical shift from a set of organic to mechanical metaphors across the twentieth century. However, this move from the octopus to the machine was not static. Given that anarchists writing towards the end of the nineteenth century were doing so during a period of state transformation, when the "technostate" was being forged in the heat of technological innovation, it is unsurprising to find that mixed metaphors were abundant.[93] Kropotkin may, like Goldman, have condemned the state's "wornout old engine," at the same time as he deemed its functionaries "spiders."[94] However, by the mid-twentieth century, and by the time that Read challenged Snow, the transformation of the state had created something patently different. Mid-century anarchist intellectuals, recognizing this novel form of state power, focused on its consequences for the individuals trapped in its gears, including those who thought themselves its operators, and, drawing on anarchism's moral critique of the state and capitalism, envisioned alternative possibilities. The stance that Read adopted in his debate with Snow rested on this revision. While there were differences of emphasis between British and American formulations of this technocratic state, especially regarding the state's role in administering welfare, there was a sense that these forms converged. Read's quip that the only difference between cultural life in Britain and the United States was that in the latter art languished in museums where "the guards sometimes carry guns," pointed to a sense of cultural and political homogeneity that was part of the anarchist critique.[95] Such comments also show the tendency for anarchists, in certain rhetorical contexts, to elide the differences between states. While the rise of the technocratic state demanded innovation in rhetoric and tactics, examining the subtle variations between them was not a priority, and Read echoed Macdonald in suggesting that even "totalitarian" and "democratic" states had a "tendency [...] to approximate" in this era of modern domination. Nevertheless, the power of the new technocratic state – an "inelastic, inorganic, and anti-vital machine" – posed an existential threat, and Read's answer to the crisis that Snow presented as a product of the diverging cultures would rest on this new perception of the modern state.[96]

Bouvardisms: The Debate

Read's anarchism offered a critique of technocratic domination that drew on a set of machinic images and metaphors. It was this politics that shaped his reading of Snow's "two cultures" lecture, and it was a politics that he thought had roots in British intellectual history.[97] As well as highlighting their fundamentally competing visions of "progress," Read's response to Snow also betrayed his deviation from a set of ideas that were becoming political orthodoxy in the 1950s and 1960s concerning British economic decline and the

[91] Helena Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism* (Princeton, 2018), 268–74; Dwight Macdonald, "The Root is Man: Part Two," *Politics* (July 1946): 194–214, at 214.

[92] This challenges the claim that anarchist theory was therefore "ahistorical." David DeLeon, *The American as Anarchist* (Baltimore, 1978), 126.

[93] Joyce, *Freedom*, 53–56, 317–19.

[94] Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel*, 25. See also the description of the state as a "machine for the protection and preservation of property," in London Anarchist Communist Alliance, *An Anarchist Manifesto* (London, 1895), 5.

[95] Herbert Read, *The Grass Roots of Art: Lectures on the Social Aspects of Art in an Industrial Age* (London, 1955), 127.

[96] H. Read, *The Politics of the Unpolitical* (London, 1943), 117.

[97] See Read, *Contrary Experience*, 200–01; idem, *Anarchy & Order: Essays in Politics* (London, 1954), 22, 29; idem, *The Cult of Sincerity* (London, 1968), 76–77.

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importance of modernization.[98] If this was Britain's "technocratic moment," and Snow's lecture its "opening salvo," it was anarchism's too, in the sense that the ensuing debate revealed, in the language and strategy adopted by Read, the shifts that had refined anarchist approaches to understanding the state.[99] While Snow would ultimately argue that Read did not register in any "serious intellectual sense," he was staking out a different position, one departing from the dominant logic about the Britain that must emerge from this technological revolution.[100]

Delivering the Rede Lecture at the University of Cambridge in 1959, C. P. Snow warned his audience of a gulf developing between literary intellectuals, many of whom were "natural Luddites," and scientists.[101] "Mutual incomprehension" defined these two camps: scientists viewing the literary milieu as "constrained" and anti-intellectual in its self-absorption, and literary intellectuals considering scientists "brash and boastful" in their self-estimation.[102] The solipsism of literary intellectuals encouraged many scientists to think of the literati as callous, "lacking in foresight, [and] peculiarly unconcerned with their brother men."[103] Snow deemed both perspectives problematic. Rejecting the idea that scientists were excessively optimistic, he argued that many were well aware of the "tragic" condition of life, but where this encouraged a turning inward for literary intellectuals, scientists were more likely to recognize the realities of a "social condition" defined by poverty and hunger.[104] Such realization strengthened a will to "see if something can be done," a tendency not matched, he thought, among literary intellectuals, where obsession with "one's unique tragedy" could encourage an "imbecile [...] anti-social feeling."[105]

While Snow saw both sides as impoverished by their mutual ignorance, it was clear that he thought this more damaging for literary intellectuals. For all that scientists often lacked a grounding in literature, their intellectual culture – "intensive, rigorous, and constantly in action" – furnished a good moral sense.[106] The literary class, in contrast, tended to be "vainer," dismissive of scientific "specialists," and as a result ignorant of an "immense range of intellectual experience."[107] Tracing the divide between the two cultures back through history, Snow saw the Industrial Revolution as a key moment in this division. Pointing to John Ruskin and William Morris, he accused both of having "shuddered away" in "various kinds of fancies" as they singularly failed to recognize that industrialization held the promise of progress that would be particularly beneficial to the poor.[108] The problem confronting the world now was the "gap between the rich countries and the poor," an issue that only scientific and technical innovation could address.[109]

Snow's fear, however, was that Britain was poorly placed to address this defining humanitarian problem. A Cold War calculation ran through this reading too, as he argued that only the two superpowers were currently capable of nurturing the much needed "scientific revolution on the world-scale."[110] Moreover, he thought that the Soviet Union had an immediate advantage. There, Snow argued, the division between the literary and scientific was less profound, and its decision makers had recognized what "a country needs to come out top in

[98] Jim Tomlinson, "The British 'Productivity Problem' in the 1960s," *Past & Present* 175 (May 2002): 188–210. See also Edgerton, *Warfare State*, 5.
[99] Edgerton, *Warfare State*, 191.
[100] C. P. Snow, "Correspondence," *The London Magazine* 6, no. 10 (October 1959): 57.
[101] C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures* (Cambridge, [1959] 1998), 22, 4.
[102] Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 4, 5.
[103] Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 5.
[104] Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 6, 7.
[105] Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 7, 8.
[106] Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 12, 13.
[107] Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 14.
[108] Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 25.
[109] Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 46.
[110] Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 46.

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the scientific revolution."[111] With an immediate advantage in its conception of technical education, Snow cautioned that unless the West followed suit, the Soviet Union would intervene to shape this global technological revolution.[112]

While modern scholarly assessments of Snow's argument have tended to deem it "garbled and wrong-headed," early responses to his lecture were enthusiastic, as his portrayal of Britain's lack of technical sophistication tapped into broader anxieties about the future of a nation apparently hindered by an "archaic establishment."[113] Leavis's famously astringent response to Snow's lecture in 1962 would mark a departure from this convention, but Read was a pioneering dissenter, taking Snow to task in August 1959.[114] His first objection to Snow's lecture was the "polarity" in question, insisting that there were, in fact, three cultures: the literary, the scientific, and the technological.[115] In missing this last category, he argued that Snow confused the problem: there was no looming scientific revolution, but rather a technological one. Anticipating Leavis, Read argued that it was this that caused literary intellectuals anxiety, for while these writers were not necessarily ignorant of science, they were worried about the impact of this "functional or mechanical" revolution on "certain mental processes upon which human life, in any valuable sense, finally depends."[116] While scientific culture rests on value-neutrality and the pursuit of knowledge, the technological application of this research was quite different and informed a set of assumptions where "power for its own sake [...] power for the sake of productivity, for the sake of more goods" was at the forefront. The danger, he thought, was that such technologism risked destroying "such vital factors as sensuous discrimination and formative imagination," the "vital sources of our humanism."[117]

While framed as an objection to Snow's blithe reading of technology's impact, Read nevertheless thought that his assessment of the purity of scientific thinking was also misguided. This distinction between science and technology was characteristic of critiques of Snow emanating from liberals too, who were equally perturbed by the technocratic implications of the argument. Michael Polyani, for example, who had already railed against "planning" in science in the liberal democracies as an afront to intellectual independence, and deemed social planning in the Soviet Union as meaning anything but "order and intelligent foresight," argued that Snow had misjudged the case in seeing science's influence on society as "too feeble."[118] Read's critique echoed this assessment, but departed from Polyani's liberalism by seeing capitalism's rapacity as a decisive factor.[119] "Political economy" is a science, he argued and judged it "a disgrace to our technological civilisation" that is riven by rival sects engaged in "scholastic bickerings" and committed to a narrow materialism that justified skepticism about the sanctity of science. Again, anticipating Leavis, he also thought that Snow's commitment to a universal industrial revolution was problematic:

> Only by [...] ruthless, urgent, massive industrialization can the native's mud-hut become an air-conditioned apartment, his daily bowl of rice a succulent steak, his loin-cloth a

[111] Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 37.

[112] Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 50.

[113] Edgerton, *Warfare State*, 5; Ortolano, *Two Cultures*, 257. On Snow's immediate reception, see Ortolano, *Two Cultures*, 28. Popular assessments of Snow's thesis tend to be much more positive. See, for example: Lawrence M. Kraus, "An Update on C. P. Snow's "Two Cultures," *Scientific American*, 1 September 2009. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/an-update-on-cp-snows-two-cultures/; Jonathan Jones, "The Prescience of CP Snow, 50 years on," *The Guardian*, 7 May 2009. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/may/07/cp-snow.

[114] F. R. Leavis, *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow* (Cambridge, [1962] 2013).

[115] Herbert Read, "Mood of the Month – X," *The London Magazine* 6, no. 8 (August 1959): 39–43, at 39.

[116] Read, "Mood of the Month", 39. Leavis, *Two Cultures?*, 70–71.

[117] Read, "Mood of the Month," 40.

[118] Michael Polyani, *The Logic of Liberty: Reflections and Rejoinders* (London, 1951), 89; idem, *The Contempt of Freedom* (New York, [1940] 1975), 60; idem, "The Two Cultures," *Encounter* (September 1959): 61–64, at 61.

[119] Read, "Mood of the Month," 40.

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> decent two-piece Terylene suit [...] He will exchange the peace and the poverty, the languor and cow-shit [...] for the noise and lethal fumes of internal-combustion engines, the nervous anxiety and stomach ulcers of the industrialized city. He has lost his primitive faith and has no explanation, mythical or religious, for the frantic life he leads [...] but in compensation he has a longer expectation of life.[120]

Such comments demonstrate that Read had a keen sense of the international context of Snow's lecture, while conceding that this very different assessment of the language of development would invite the accusation of being another "intellectual Luddite."[121] Nevertheless, he concluded that the "technological revolution is a disaster [...] likely to end in the extermination of humanity."[122]

A number of issues divided Read and Snow, the most significant being competing perceptions of the role of science – and by extension scientific education – in contemporary political decision-making, as well as the neutrality of technological change. Evidently piqued by Read's attack, Snow offered a biting response in the October issue of the magazine. He began by adopting a tactic used later by Leavis, attempting to ridicule Read's pretensions, and accusing him of lacking "any sense of intellectual responsibility."[123] Pointing to an unacknowledged textual revision in one of Read's works, he argued that this was evidence of a shift in his political thinking that he had, immorally, tried to obscure.[124] Despite suggesting that this made honest debate with Read pointless, Snow then proceeded to highlight six perceived minor distortions of his argument and, invoking Gustave Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* – a story of two conceited clerks' intellectual bungling – three "Bouvardisms" in Read's critique.

The first Bouvardism concerned Read's comments on political economy, the concept of usury, and his allied defense of Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis.[125] In a foreshadowing of Leavis's line of attack, Read had suggested that the real animus here may rest in the fact that Snow "had neither the talent nor genius" for poetry, but he also defended the poets' critique of "the prevailing money system" that identified "usury" as "the major cause of misery in the modern world."[126] While demonstrating that Read bought into a familiar set of anti-Semitic tropes, Snow responded by stressing usury's role in supporting the kind of technological change he believed essential.[127] The remaining two Bouvardisms extended this point about technological and economic progress, again questioning the sense of moral responsibility at the heart of Read's position. To Read's comment that "peace and poverty" may be preferable to the "noise and lethal fumes" of the modern city, Snow impressed on him to "go and tell that to the Indians and Africans" for whom he assumed to speak.[128] Snow's final Bouvardism repeated this point, skewering Read's comment that "the vital source of the will to live – depends not on comfort or 'health, food and education'," as he urged Read to "tell that to the poor of the world also."[129]

Read reiterated his core thesis in his response the following month. Insisting that his politics had remained consistent, he chided Snow for his belief in the ethical benignity of

[120] Read, "Mood of the Month," 42; Leavis, *Two Cultures?*, 71.

[121] Read, "Mood of the Month," 42. See Ortolano, *Two Cultures*, 194–218.

[122] Read, "Mood of the Month," 42.

[123] Snow, "Correspondence," 57–59, at 57; Leavis, *Two Cultures?*, 53–54.

[124] Snow, "Correspondence." The text in question was Read's introduction to the 1936 collection *Surrealism*, where he declared that "Surrealism, like Communism, does not call upon artists to surrender their individuality." This was changed in the reprint of his essay in *The Philosophy of Modern Art* (1952) to "Surrealism does not, like Communism, call upon artists to surrender their individuality." Read's response was that his position was consistent, but that the popular understanding of the term 'communism' had changed since his use of it in 1936.

[125] Snow, "Correspondence," 57.

[126] Read, "Mood of the Month," 41.

[127] David Peal, "Antisemitism by Other Means? The Rural Cooperative Movement in Late Nineteenth-Century Germany," *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 32, no. 1 (January 1987): 135–53, at 135; Read, "Mood of the Month," 58.

[128] Read, "Mood of the Month," 58.

[129] Read, "Mood of the Month," 58.

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technological change, a "complacency typical of technologists."[130] The point that Snow missed, Read argued, was that "man does not live by bread alone," and he asked whether Snow would deem Jesus Christ a Bouvardist for pioneering this argument.[131] But Read's central concern was the threat posed by the kind of narrow technocratic thinking he perceived in Snow:

> It is not science that we criticize, but its amoral or immoral application [...] the narrow-minded logic of scientific rationalism, the false ethic of objectivity, the brutality and complacency of all those who in the name of "progress" drive their machines over the tender shoots of all that is human.[132]

Read clearly thought he had the better of Snow in this spat, and he decided to reprint his article with modest stylistic revisions four years later under the new title "The Great Debate," a decision that may also reflect the renewed focus on Snow's lecture after Leavis's intervention.[133]

At the heart of the disagreement between Read and Snow were incommensurable visions of the world that reflected incompatible personal and professional identities. Read's cultural politics, to borrow the title of a collection of his literary essays, aimed to speak with "the true voice of feeling." This hinted at a fundamental principle of his aesthetics: while an arch modernist, he looked to romanticism as a wellspring for modernism.[134] Allied to this, and made evident in his debate with Snow, was the shifting anarchist critique of the state, as Read honed in on the banality of technocratic political culture, but also the threat it posed in the post-colonial moment.[135] In the ridiculing of Snow's uncritical assessment of industrialism and technology, the concern for the cultural idiosyncrasies lost to the homogeneity of modernity, and a sense that rethinking education was key, there are echoes of Leavis's intervention.[136] But Read's contribution had distinctive roots and ambitions. If Leavis's position was indebted to John Stuart Mill's defense of "individuality," Read consciously located his politics in a more radical tradition of "libertarian communism," confronting the state and capitalism.[137] Moreover, if we follow Stefan Collini in seeing Leavis's true object as a defense of the "critical function" from that threat posed by the blunderings of a figure like Snow, Read's anxieties were more far reaching.[138] Their divergence is apparent in their solutions too. Where Leavis looked to a reformed university with English "as the chief of the humanities," nurturing a critical elite, Read's perception of education was, as we shall see, both more ambitious and self-consciously utopian.[139]

Snow, in contrast, was distinctly "nonutopian": a "political realist," devoted to working with existing institutions to advance social progress.[140] Committed to the project of "spread[ing] the scientific revolution all over the world," he would have seen Read's pastoralism as ridiculous "talk about a pre-industrial Eden," and a morally repugnant excuse to do

[130] Herbert Read, "Correspondence," *The London Magazine* 16, no. 11 (November 1959): 73–74, at 73.
[131] Read, "Correspondence," 74.
[132] Read, "Correspondence."
[133] Herbert Read, "The Great Debate," in *To Hell With Culture: and Other Essays on Art and Society* (London, 1963), 178–86.
[134] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 108; idem, *Art and Society* (London, [1936] 1967), 112–35; idem, *Contrary Experience*, 271–81.
[135] Ortolano, *Two Cultures*, 194–96, 201–11.
[136] Leavis, *Two Cultures?*, 69–72, 73, 75–77.
[137] F. R. Leavis, "Introduction," in *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge* (London, 1950), 1–38, at 16; Read, "Correspondence," 74; Ortolano, *Two Cultures*, 66–100.
[138] Stefan Collini, "Introduction," in Leavis, *Two Cultures?*, 25. See also Leavis's comments on Matthew Arnold for this sense of the importance of the "critical intelligence in a civilized community." Leavis, "Introduction," 38.
[139] F. R. Leavis, *Education & the University: A Sketch for an 'English School'* (London, 1961), 33, 55; Ortolano, *Two Cultures*, 129.
[140] John de la Mothe, *C. P. Snow and the Struggle of Modernity* (Austin, TX, 1992), 150, 151.

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nothing to address global injustices. Where Read thought Snow's prescription threatened all that was distinctly human, Snow, in a collective response to his critics, commented that to stand in the way of this technological revolution was "simply to be inhuman."[141]

Grit in the Machine

The tendency for nineteenth-century anarchists to represent the state in organic terms also shaped how they imagined the process of liberation. For Bakunin, the "heroic" masses would kill it; for Kropotkin, the state would be hygienically excised from the social body, the wound cauterized by "fire and iron," or the octopus "crush[ed]."[142] The monstrous metaphor therefore channeled anarchist solutions towards essentially curative perceptions of revolutionary transformation. For many of the mid-century anarchist intellectuals considered here, however, the rapid development of the modern machinery of government made these solutions problematic. There were a number of reasons for this shift, but even by the late-nineteenth century, some anarchists came to recognize that the state's technical apparatus, and advances in modern military science, made the idea of the seizure of power by even the most determined revolutionaries unworkable.[143]

To Macdonald, the lesson here was familiarly anarchist, in that given the "totalization of State power," it was misguided to think of a solution in terms of an "equally centralized and closely organized" political party.[144] This assessment reflected established anarchist logic concerning the necessary congruence of means and ends – in contrast to the technocratic obsession with means – as he called for a challenge on a "different plane" that would use the state's dominance against itself.[145] There was, therefore, a practical argument here as well as a moral one. When surveying the state's modern complexity, it was apparent that "the smooth running of the vast mechanism could be thrown out by the presence of [...] a gritty particle precisely because of the machine's delicately-geared hugeness."[146]

Where nineteenth-century anarchists' visions of the monstrous state induced them to conjure heroic images of the risen populace, viewing the state as a machine encouraged mid-twentieth century anarchist intellectuals to reach for a grittier set of oppositional analogies. Here, the juxtaposition of the state's mechanical qualities and the delicate, organic vision of life were common. Framed as "cellular," "molecular," or, in Goodman's vernacular, "wild" and "woolly," these strategies focused on creating spaces evading the state's reach, while also providing the opportunity to cultivate individual qualities stymied by existing political arrangements.[147] This critique reflected anarchist anxieties about the modernization of the post-war state and its defining features: professionalization; a managed economy; and national systems of education, all of which brought homogenization and centralization.[148] Many mid-century anarchists looked to experimentation in the "interstices" as a solution to the technocratic state, in an effort to foster a countervailing "effective pluralism."[149] In Ward's formulation this was an ambition to justify anarchist arguments not from the perspective of "theories, but from actual examples of tendencies which already exist," on the basis that, in Woodcock's words, "nurturing these trends" would make a revolution – already

[141] C. P. Snow, "The Two Cultures: A Second Look," in *Public Affairs* (London, 1971), 47–79, at 63, 66, 64.

[142] Michael Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy* (Cambridge, [1873] 2005), 28, 39, 181; Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel*, 33; Kropotkin, "Modern State," 301. See also Morgan, *Kropotkin's Anarchist Thought*, 71–95.

[143] Jeremy Jennings, *Syndicalism in France: A Study of Ideas* (Basingstoke, 1990), 15.

[144] Macdonald, "The Root," 212.

[145] Macdonald, "The Root," 212. For means and ends, consider Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 179. For the technocratic assessment of means, see Jeffrey Friedman, *Power Without Knowledge: A Critique of Technocracy* (Oxford, 2019), 1–5.

[146] Macdonald, "The Root," 213.

[147] Woodcock, "Not any Power," 56; Read, "Anarchism," 6; Goodman, *People*, 370.

[148] Glen O'Hara, *Governing Post-War Britain: The Paradoxes of Progress* (Basingstoke), 5, 11–17, 153–65.

[149] Woodcock, "Not any Power," 56; Goodman, *People*, 362.

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condemned as self-defeating – redundant.[150] For all that Ward presented this as evidence of a "pragmatist" turn in anarchism, however, it rested on a deep theoretical reassessment of the tradition's ambitions and tactics, something clear in the renewed significance of education in anarchist politics.[151] While education had always been a focus of interest for anarchists, for its nineteenth-century practitioners, it rarely displaced a commitment to revolutionary change. In the mid-twentieth century, as anarchists grappled with a new theory of the state as a dominating machine, education took on a new significance.[152]

That a new approach to education was essential was a rare point of agreement between Read and Snow. For Snow, reconciling the two cultures was central to meeting the dual crisis of global poverty and Britain's declining international importance as its technological lead shortened.[153] Reflecting a post-war political context in which there was a broad will to reshape the education system, Snow's vision was, essentially, fourfold.[154] First, reflecting the recommendations of the 1946 Barlow Commission, of which he was a member, Snow looked to a broad expansion of the country's university system.[155] Second, accompanying enlargement, greater provision for science and technology would ensure a critical mass of scientists that would help bridge the divide between the two cultures and cultivate "a common culture in which science is an essential component."[156] Couched as a philosophical desire for reconciliation, Snow was in reality led by a third objective: a technocratic ambition to equip government with the expertise it needed to meet the challenges of a bipolar world in which technological sophistication was key.[157] As he observed, raising the general level of scientific literacy in the public was important, but the education system needed to provide for the fact that "the scientific decisions inside government are, and will be increasingly, of critical importance." Elsewhere, he described this as scientific foresightedness to be added to the "tough, tolerant, and generous" determination of professional administrators.[158]

As Ortolano has shown, however, despite Snow's promotion of university expansion and his meritocratic assumptions about expertise in government, his image was not an egalitarian one.[159] His fourth assumption was that the modernization of education was necessary to develop an intellectual elite. "Education," Snow argued, "cannot become an elaborate masquerade to disguise the fact that some are more gifted than others."[160] From this perspective, while university expansion and comprehensive schooling were necessary, it was important to remember that only by providing space for the "elite" could intellectual life, and society more broadly, thrive. Selective institutions where "the very bright educate one another," were therefore vital, Snow thought, and their absence would lead to a general intellectual impoverishment. "Social justice," Snow cautioned his readers, "is not comfortably reconciled to intellectual excellence."[161]

Snow's timely promotion of the idea that merit, modernity, and planning were fundamentally interconnected was central to his political success, but this vision of the relationship between science and government was not uncontested.[162] Read, for one, thought that leaving

[150] Colin Ward, *Anarchy* (London [1973] 2008), 163; George Woodcock, "Nurture the Positive Trends," *Freedom*, 27 October 1956, 2–4, at 2.

[151] Colin Ward, "Who Rules the Schools?," *Freedom* 18, no. 8 (14 May 1957): 3–4, at 3.

[152] For a wider perspective on anarchism and education, see Judith Suissa, *Anarchism and Education: A Philosophical Perspective* (Oakland, CA, 2010).

[153] Snow, *Two Cultures*, 18.

[154] Desmond King and Victoria Nash, "Continuity of Ideas and the Politics of Higher Education Expansion in Britain from Robbins to Dearing," *Twentieth Century British History* 12, no. 2 (2001): 185–207.

[155] Ortolano, *Two Cultures*, 101–09.

[156] Snow, "Prologue," in *Public Affairs*, 7–12, at 10.

[157] Ortolano, *Two Cultures*, 114, 139; Snow, *Two Cultures*, 49–51.

[158] Snow, "Prologue," 10; C. P. Snow, "Science and Government," in *Public Affairs*, 99–150, at 147.

[159] Ortolano, *Two Cultures*, 228.

[160] C. P. Snow, "The Case of Leavis and the Serious Case," in *Public Affairs*, 81–98, at 90.

[161] Snow, "The Case of Leavis," 91.

[162] Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom 1951–1970* (Cambridge, 2011), 366–70.

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education in the hands of technocrats fixated on questions of efficiency and national strength would be disastrous. In a 1944 conference address, he condemned the "materialistic and vocational conception of education [...] born of the Industrial Revolution" advanced by figures like Snow, criticizing it for displacing the cultivation of character and virtue as educational objectives.[163] While framing this as a reconnection with the educational principles of an Aristotle, Kant, or Schiller, he nevertheless offered a radical rethinking of education that rested on the juxtaposition of the mechanical state and organic life familiar to mid-century anarchism:

> Let us be quite clear that the whole machinery of the democratic state [...] is in question. It is that machinery, with its depersonalized and bureaucratic structure, its inevitable drift towards centralization, its dependence on demagogic leadership, its subservience to the power of money, its indifference to religion, poetry and all spiritual values – it is that machinery which destroys all human, all personal values. It is that machinery which has got beyond human control.[164]

Read's "spiritual" assessment of the failings of education placed him at some distance from Snow, but also meant that he was prone to greet contemporary developments in educational policy with despair.

He was horrified, for instance, by the first interim report of the Conservative Party's subcommittee on education issued in 1942. A reflection of back bench Conservative opinion, the report proved controversial across the political spectrum, with even some Conservatives viewing it as a step towards "Christian fascism."[165] Invited by its chairman, Geoffrey Faber, to share his opinion, Read's response echoed that of other left-leaning intellectuals like Harold Laski. For Laski, the report's departure from the principles of the 1938 Spens Report was cause for concern. Laski commended the Spens Report's argument that "individual development" should be the chief object of schooling, and condemned Faber's model for its promotion of a "strong sense of national obligation" as the foundation for education.[166] This shift of focus, Laski objected, would mean that "the individual is the instrument, the State is the end."[167]

Read was similarly agitated by the vision of state power implied by Faber's report, challenging it for its emphasis on "national obligation," an idea that he thought would perpetuate a "principle of nationalism, of national sovereignty, which more and more people are coming to regard as the curse of our civilization."[168] Just as Faber's intervention bore the imprint of its wartime context in its patriotic appeals, so did Read's response in its call for education to promote a "supra-national or humanist ideal" that would challenge the "artificial and divisional prejudice" of nationalism. Proposing "world citizenship" instead of national loyalty, Read baldly presented the issue as a simple choice between "anarchism, which I adopt, and fascism which I hope you won't adopt."[169]

Read confessed to Faber that his response was principally an exercise in "self-clarification" and that he did not expect a reply. He did not get one and, unsurprisingly, Faber did not make the anarchist turn that Read encouraged.[170] Nevertheless the debate

[163] Herbert Read, "Power Politics & Human Values: A Conference at Jordans: May 20–21, 1944," *HRPUV* 1, no. 7: 1–23, at 20.

[164] Read, "Power Politics," 23.

[165] Clive Griggs, *The TUC and Education Reform: 1926–1970* (London, 2002), 115; Daniel Todman, *Britain's War: A New World, 1942–1947* (London, 2021), 239.

[166] Harold J. Laski, *Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London, 1943), 294.

[167] Laski, *Reflections*.

[168] "Herbert Read to Geoffrey Faber: 12th September 1942," *HRPUV*, SC100-8.38; Julia Stapleton, "Citizenship Versus Patriotism in Twentieth-century England," *Historical Journal* 48, no. 1 (2005): 151–78, at 169–70.

[169] Read to Faber.

[170] Read to Faber.

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generated by the interim report highlights the distinctiveness of the intellectual position that Read assumed. While Laski and Read shared anxieties about the report's authoritarian implications, they parted ways in the search for an alternative. Laski, encouraged by the Spens Report's emphasis on securing the "fullest self-discovery," saw this as a means to "build" an active citizenry, uniting this with a hope that the broadening of state-control occasioned by the war would continue "into the era of the planned society" where economic power would be democratized through the "historic methods of parliamentary democracy."[171]

This was not Read's vision, and neither was the "humane education" of Leavis's model university.[172] Cautiously impressed by the comparatively "imaginative" Spens Report, he nonetheless judged its recommendations limited, and therefore self-defeating. Praising the importance it gave to "aesthetic" subjects, he argued that this should have gone further and called for the "introduction of the aesthetic criterion into every aspect of school life" as the key to "physical and mental integration."[173] Against the functional and technocratic vision of the school, such an aesthetic bias must be all-encompassing, extending to its buildings and furniture as much as its lessons. His emphasis on the integrative quality of aesthetic education also informed his antipathy to the report's proposed division between grammar and technical schools, something he thought promised the entrenchment of narrowly materialistic values:

> [T]here is no reason to suppose that a technically educated individual will confine his mental processes to questions connected with the engineering and building industries. Indeed, we can already see, especially in America, the emergence of a specifically technical intelligence which claims to think in its own way on all aspects of existence. Essentially materialistic, it extends its almost wholly unconscious philosophy into the spheres of economics and history, and sees no reason why its Weltanschauung should not be made the basis of politics.[174]

"Fundamentally," Read concluded, "the technocrat denies that 'values' are a constituent of the objective world," a position he thought untenable.[175]

Educational concerns had always been a part of Read's philosophy, but his calls for change became more strident after his declaration for anarchism. His inaugural lecture at the beginning of his ill-fated tenure as the Watson Gordon Chair of Fine Art at the University of Edinburgh in 1931 railed against "specialisation" in education, proposing instead the cultivation of artistic "sensibility."[176] While this represented a similar line to Leavis's, his closing call for art to "dominate our lives" in such a way that it challenged the idea of "art" as a category divorced from ordinary life anticipated the more radical position he assumed in the 1940s.[177] His key intervention, *Education Through Art*, positioned itself squarely in the context of a "libertarian conception of democracy," with Read arguing that if the purpose of education was the tandem development of individual "uniqueness [and] [...] social consciousness," then making art the "basis of education" was essential.[178] Aesthetic education – conceived broadly to encompass "all modes of self-expression" – had both psychological and political value, he continued, because it cultivated the "senses" that were the ultimate source of human intelligence and judgment. Such education, therefore, countered the

[171] Laski, *Reflections*, 290, 307.
[172] Leavis, *Education*, 9.
[173] Herbert Read, *Education through Art* (London, 1943), 215.
[174] Read, *Education through Art*, 238.
[175] Read, *Education through Art*.
[176] King, *Last Modern*, 98–102; Herbert Read, *The Place of Art in a University* (Edinburgh, 1931), 15.
[177] Read, *Place of Art*, 28. See Read, *To Hell with Culture*; Read, *Unpolitical*; Ortolano, *Two Cultures*, 128–9.
[178] Read, *Education through Art*, 5, 1.

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fracturing processes that mid-century anarchists perceived in modern mass democracies, offering "integration" in place of those "unbalanced types familiar to the psychiatrist."[179]

Central to Read's vision of aesthetic education was the familiar anarchist contrast between the mechanical and the organic. One of the most "disastrous" effects of education was the imposition of "arbitrary systems of thought, dogmatic or rationalistic in origin" that violated "organic life" by making it conform to "logical or intellectual" patterns.[180] He located this model in anarchist political contexts by describing his solution as "federal," dismissing the idea of "inviolable frontiers" between scholarly disciplines, and counterposing the "integration of all biologically useful faculties in a single organic activity": aesthetics.[181] This organicism extended to Read's view of art more generally. Art was not a "metaphysical" concept but an "organic [...] phenomenon," something most obvious in the significance of form.[182] This reading of the universality of the aesthetic experience through its relation to natural forms informed Read's argument that aesthetic education was particularly suited to social integration. The great error in educational theory, he argued, was to impede "the spontaneous emergence of co-operation and self-government" that was the source of meaningful discipline.[183] The universality of the aesthetic experience, and the uncoerced discipline that artistic activity cultivated, offered, he concluded, a fresh model for education that could ultimately be "the only necessary revolution."[184]

It is easy to imagine Snow's response to Read's intervention in educational theory. Given Snow's immersion in the world of the Barlow and Robbins reports, Read's notion that the future could be saved through the contemplation of universal forms would seem like another Bouvardism: utopianism in the face of the very real social problems that only science and technology could fix.[185] Read's solution also highlights his departure from the liberal critique of Snow's lecture represented by a figure like Polyani. They may have agreed that the "consummation of scientific rationalism" had "corrupted the public life of our century," but Read would nevertheless have balked at the suggestion that a commitment to "piecemeal progress" was a genuine departure from Snow's politics.[186] In contrast, Read embraced the utopian label. As he wrote in 1954, echoing Berneri, the problem with modern politics was precisely the triumph of the "piecemeal planning, practical politics" embodied by a technocrat like Snow, a situation that justified the absurdity of the present as inevitable, and created the conditions "against which reasonable men must repeatedly revolt."[187] The value of utopianism in this context was the "poeticization of all possibilities," a protest against the "accidie" that threatened to overtake the political imagination constrained by the contemplation of the immediately practicable.[188] This was the spirit of Read's criticism of Snow's technologism: a protest against the "brutality" that the singular pursuit of "progress" inflicted on the delicately human.[189]

Conclusion

The debate between Read and Snow in *The London Magazine* revealed two very different visions for the path to a better future. As much as Snow may have avoided the "rapture of causes," it was of course his "technocratic liberalism" that triumphed over Read's

[179] Read, *Education through Art*, 7.
[180] Read, *Education through Art*.
[181] Read, *Education through Art*, 11.
[182] Read, *Education through Art*, 14; see also 15–16, 34.
[183] Read, *Education through Art*, 268, 277.
[184] Read, *Education through Art*, 297.
[185] Snow, "Correspondence," 57; Read, *Education through Art*, 297.
[186] Polyani, "Two Cultures," 63; Michael Polyani, *Beyond Nihilism* (Cambridge, 1960), 29.
[187] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 14, 15.
[188] Read, *Anarchy and Order*, 23, 21.
[189] Read, "Correspondence," 74.

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anarchism in this contest for the meaning of British modernity.[190] While this assures Snow his status in accounts of post-war Britain, Read's position is more ambiguous.[191] He is overshadowed in the two cultures debate by Leavis's more famous challenge to Snow's argument, and his position does not sit comfortably with broader narratives of the "technocratic moment" in British political life.[192]

In confronting Snow, Read drew on the intellectual resources of a political tradition that he saw as a part of Britain's cultural history. But this was not an immutable set of political values. The mid-century witnessed anarchism's technocratic moment too, as a critique of technocracy became a defining thread of anarchist thinking as its theorists worked to develop new rhetorical modes – and new tactical stances – that accounted for the transformation of the state across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this context, Read saw Snow's lecture not primarily as an urgent call for how Britain should be, but how, lamentably, it already was. His fear was that Snow's demand for the universalization of technological progress would inflict catastrophic violence upon the world, posing an existential menace to cultural distinctiveness. The threat, in other words, of the machine, and the technocrat, to the "the tender shoots of all that is human."[193]

Matthew S. Adams is Senior Lecturer in the History of Political Thought at Loughborough University. I benefited from discussions with my colleagues Ruth Kinna and Alexandre Christoyannopoulos while preparing this article. The finishing touches were made while I was a Visting Fellow in the Department of History at Cornell University, and I am indebted to Ray Craib for arranging this position. I am also grateful to the journal's anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments on earlier versions of this article.

[190] de la Mothe, *C. P. Snow*, 187; Ortolano, *Two Cultures*, 48.
[191] Ortolano, *Two Cultures*, 257.
[192] Edgerton, *Warfare State*, 191.
[193] Read, "Correspondence," 74.

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