

Murray Bookchin

1921–2006



An annotated bibliography

to accompany the collected works of Murray Bookchin
given to the Vermont State Libraries in honor of the
Centennial Celebration (2021) of Bookchin's life.

Murray Bookchin was a philosopher and social theorist born in the Bronx, New York in 1921. He was a pioneer of ecological thought, and lived in Burlington, Vermont between the early 1970s and his death in 2006. He was politically active from an early age, serving as a street corner orator in New York City and a labor organizer. He published a book-length article on chemicals in food in 1954, and from that point on started to explore the intersection of ecology and politics. In 1962 his work, *Our Synthetic Environment*, originally published under the pseudonym Lewis Herber, came out 6 months before Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which has been credited with starting the modern environmental movement. In an essay titled, "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought," published in 1964 he warned of the probability of global climate change if we did not curb emissions of greenhouse gases. Throughout his work, Bookchin brought forth a radical analysis that explored the social roots of the environmental crisis, one which has proven to be prescient.

Bookchin first moved to Burlington in 1971, drawn to the state's environmental ethic and its tradition of local town meeting democracy. His writing drew a direct link between top-down forms of economic and political organization and ecological degradation. He put forth the central idea that to end the historically disastrous attempt to dominate nature, we must eliminate all forms of domination in human society. He elaborated these ideas in a philosophy he called social ecology, and detailed a political practice based on the concept of direct democracy embodied in the Vermont town meeting tradition.

In 1974 Bookchin and cultural anthropologist Dan Chodorkoff founded the Institute for Social Ecology, initially based at Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont. The Institute, at its original center at Cate Farm, developed practical applications of solar energy, wind power and organic aquaculture, utilizing experiential learning to introduce these technologies to Vermont. Bookchin understood the potential for these "alternative technologies" to address the growing environmental crisis, but insisted that they be rooted in a larger matrix of decentralized, directly democratic social change.

Bookchin went on to write hundreds of articles and 25 books, which influenced growing ecological and social movements in Vermont and around the world, including the anti-nuclear movement, ecofeminism, Green politics, the alter-globalization movement, Occupy Wall Street, and the climate justice movement. His work has been translated into more than 15 languages and provided ideas that have recently taken shape in municipalist movements that have gained political power across Europe, particularly in Spain, as well as in the Kurdish region of northern Syria known as Rojava, where 4 million people are living in a system of Democratic Confederalism inspired by Bookchin's ideas.

Bookchin's legacy lives on in Vermont and around the world. In 2021, his centenary year, we invite Vermonters to become better acquainted with the work of this important and prescient thinker. We still have a great deal to learn from him.

The Books

(1962). *Our Synthetic Environment*.

New York: Knopf (published under the pseudonym 'Lewis Herber'). (1975). London: Harper & Row.

Our Synthetic Environment was among the earliest works to sound the alarm about the health impacts of postwar Americans' increased exposure to toxic synthetic substances in our food, soil, air, and water. Among the most important causes of ill health, Bookchin asserts, are poverty-related social factors such as poor nutrition, overcrowded urban slums, stressful and unsatisfying workplaces, and the lack of access to nature. Released in 1962 a few months before *Silent Spring*, which is widely credited with sparking the modern environmental movement, it touches on most of the major philosophical themes of social ecology. Rigorous citation of current scientific research is combined with critique of the primacy of profit over human well-being when confronted with information about the carcinogenic nature of tobacco, agrichemicals, and nuclear radiation. The emphasis throughout is on human health as inextricably related to environmental health. In opposition to the wholesale rejection of technology advocated by some romantics, Bookchin posits human-scale production, both agricultural and industrial, in decentralized communities where ordinary citizens have control over everyday necessities of survival, as the ultimate path to rebalancing humanity and nature.

(1971). *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*.

Berkeley: Ramparts Press. Chico, CA: AK Press (2004).

"The anarchic movements of the past failed largely because of material scarcity," writes Murray Bookchin in May of 1969, the memory of the almost-revolution in France still fresh in his mind. With this, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* presents a vision of post-scarcity tied to freedom and ecology. Reading partly like an up-to-date companion to Peter Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread* with added polemics, the book collects Bookchin's most popular essays from the sixties and is emblematic of the optimism generated in the middle of the "Long Sixties." The opening essays of the book deal with the possibility of a post-scarcity anarchism that integrates ecology, liberatory technology, and dialectical thought. The next section contains "Listen, Marxist!" a lively polemic that criticizes Marxism's fixation on the proletariat and centralized vanguard party and instead affirms social anarchism and revolutionary spontaneity. The final section deals with Bookchin's notes on the near-revolutionary May–June 1968 events in France. Bookchin's vision of a post-scarcity anarchism differs from other formulations such as "fully automated luxury communism" in that, in place of narrowly technological solutions for ecological and capitalist crises, it centers on creating concrete "forms of freedom" – directly democratic popular assemblies – combined with ecological and liberatory technology.

(1974). *The Limits of the City*.

New York: Harper & Row.

The Limits of the City is Bookchin's early contribution to left urban theory, centering a libertarian perspective on the development of the city. Building on Marx's notes on the city developed in the *Grundrisse* and elsewhere, Bookchin sketches the dialectical development of the city by looking at how pre-capitalist forms slowly transformed into the bourgeois city of today. For Bookchin, the limits of the bourgeois city lie in the harsh separation between town and country, and the harsh environmental toll the city takes on the surrounding ecology. Bookchin suggests we need to go beyond the bourgeois city to produce a new kind of community that abolishes the separation between the urban and rural while harmonizing the best features of both. Readers interested in Marxist urban thinkers like Henri Lefebvre or David Harvey will find useful perspectives in this book.

(1977). *The Spanish Anarchists*.

New York: Harper and Row.

Murray Bookchin developed an early interest in the anarchist revolution that preceded the Spanish Civil War, and engaged in many years of intensive historical research that drew upon both scholarly and first-hand sources, including extended interviews with surviving participants. In this first of three books on the subject, he explores the origins and early growth of the Spanish anarchist movement, beginning with the role of itinerant educator-organizers and local uprisings in the late 19th century. He examines the emergence of both syndicalist and agrarian forms of anarchism in Spain, including the origins and growth of the CNT (*Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*) and FAI (*Federación Anarchista Iberica*). Bookchin describes the movement's evolution through both the military dictatorship of the 1920s and the emergence of the 1930s era Republic, right up to the pre-revolutionary events during the first half of 1936.

(1980). *Toward an Ecological Society*.

Montreal: Black Rose Books.

Toward an Ecological Society is a collection of Bookchin's most important environmental and theoretical essays from the 1970s. These writings reflect on the promise and potential of the environmental movement in its early stages, assess the limitations of mainstream environmental politics, and argue for a more consistently radical critique of contemporary social life. The opening essays expand upon Bookchin's assessment of the revolutionary potential of ecological thought and movements that he first articulated in the mid-1960s. The middle part of the book engages with issues of technology and urban design that were becoming increasingly contentious during the seventies and continue to resonate today. The last several chapters expand upon Bookchin's critique of 20th century Marxism and its rising influence in activist circles. They represent some of his most thoroughgoing critiques of Marxist theory and praxis, addressing both historical and theoretical dimensions, and urging readers to look beyond Marxism to advance a revolutionary theory for the modern era.

(1982). *Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*.

Palo Alto, CA: Cheshire Books. Montreal: Black Rose Books (1991). Chico, CA: AK Press (2005).

The Ecology of Freedom, hailed as Bookchin's magnum opus, is a classic of left ecological thought. Starting with the simple yet radical premise that the "very notion of the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human," this rich work creatively draws from philosophy, anthropology, ecology, history, political theory, and more not only to describe the historical emergence and development of hierarchy, but to advance a political program for its potential transcendence by a truly ecological, democratic, and free society. *The Ecology of Freedom* offers a sweeping counter-narrative to Marx's narrower focus in *Capital* on class and exploitation, one which demands an expanded analysis of hierarchy in all forms and an even more utopian anti-statist vision of emancipation.

(1986). *The Modern Crisis*.

Philadelphia: New Society.

This volume contains four expansive essays from the early to mid-1980s that explore a wide array of theoretical and political questions. Bookchin begins by addressing various issues raised by his dialectical approach to nature philosophy and views on human participation in the natural world, as well as his evolving strategic outlook on municipal politics. "What is Social Ecology?" attempts a comprehensive overview, focused significantly on the "deep-seated continuity between nature and society," and how our understanding of nature shapes human possibilities. "Market Economy or Moral Economy?" proposes a resolutely ethical approach to local economics, starting with the need for living relationships

among economic actors in a “social ecosystem” rooted in a reclaimed citizenship – in direct contrast to the anonymity of the capitalist market. The concluding essay examines a variety of contemporary concerns, from acid rain to the threat of nuclear annihilation, as a starting point to rethink political strategy from within a contemporary American context.

(1990). *Remaking Society*.

Montreal: Black Rose Books.

A comprehensive overview of Bookchin’s worldview at the time it was written, *Remaking Society* serves as what is arguably the best summary of the basics of social ecology ever written. Starting with an introduction to social ecology, Bookchin then writes about social problems and hierarchy, before moving into his theories of what a good society is comprised of and how to get there. This book summarizes many of the most essential features of *The Ecology of Freedom*.

(1990). *The Philosophy of Social Ecology: Essays on Dialectical Naturalism*.

Montreal: Black Rose Books (second edition 1995). Forthcoming in a new revised edition from AK Press in Winter 2022.

The Philosophy of Social Ecology is a collection of the most in-depth philosophical writings Bookchin ever published. Bookchin reworks dialectical philosophy into a dialectical naturalism, including a developmental epistemology, logic, ontology, and ethics. In the text, he derives an ethics from objective naturalistic potentials for freedom, mutual aid, complementarity, unity in diversity, self-organization, and non-hierarchy. He advances a view of nature as a “participatory realm of interactive life forms whose most outstanding attributes are fecundity, creativity, and directiveness, marked by a complementarity that renders the natural world the grounding for an ethics of freedom rather than domination.” Bookchin writes about society and nature as a continuum, latent with the potential in both to develop a free nature where humanity is in harmony with itself and the broader ecological world.

(1991). *Defending the Earth: A Dialog Between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman*.

Bookchin, M. and Foreman, D. Boston: South End Press

During the height of the 1980s-90s debates surrounding social ecology and deep ecology, South End Press editor Steve Chase and the New York City-based Learning Alliance organized a public debate between Murray Bookchin and Earth First’s co-founder and then-leading ideologue, Dave Foreman. This book offers a transcript of that discussion, together with a pair of follow-up essays by the two principals. Bookchin and Foreman discuss the role of humans in non-human nature; right, left and centrist perspectives on ecology; the role of wilderness; and problems of racism in the movement, among many other issues, striking a rather conciliatory tone compared to the often-heated polemics of that period.

(1992). *Urbanization Without Cities: The Rise and Decline of Citizenship*.

Montreal: Black Rose Press. Also published in 1987 as *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books); and in 1995 as: *From Urbanization to Cities: Toward a New Politics of Citizenship* (London; New York: Cassell). Forthcoming in a new revised edition as *From Urbanization to Cities: The Politics of Democratic Municipalism* from AK Press in Fall 2021.

Urbanization without Cities offers a history of cities that pits them in tension with states, describing the history of urban movements for popular power that develop in opposition to top-down rule. This elaboration of Bookchin’s political vision

of libertarian municipalism details the important distinction between politics and statecraft, a concrete conception of directly democratic practice and a libertarian conception of citizenship, a revolutionary process of dual power through popular assemblies, and a unique approach to local elections based on abolishing and/or democratizing various functions of local government.

(1993). *Which Way for the Ecology Movement?*

Edinburgh and San Francisco: A.K. Press.

This small book contains four essays examining key controversies that significantly shaped environmental debates in the 1990s, with continuing relevance for today. Bookchin addresses the atavism and mysticism he saw as damaging the ecology movement, as well as the rise in overtly misanthropic outlooks that entailed a rather grim view of the future. The two opening chapters are followed by a pair of essays exploring ongoing debates around population growth and E.O. Wilson's studies in "sociobiology." Bookchin offers a detailed breakdown of the Malthusian outlooks at the root of much population advocacy in the environmental movement, and dissects the underlying assumptions and historical antecedents behind sociobiology, a key precursor to evolutionary psychology and other current views. In contrast to anti-humanist environmental philosophies, Bookchin insists on a social ecology that understands the emancipation of humanity and protection of non-human nature as harmonious parts of the same political project.

(1994). *To Remember Spain: The Anarchist and Syndicalist Revolution of 1936.*

Edinburgh and San Francisco: A.K. Press.

This small booklet contains two major essays on the Spanish Revolution of the 1930s. The first was Bookchin's first published writing on the subject, his introduction to Sam Dolgoff's classic compilation, *The Anarchist Collectives*, from 1974. Here, Bookchin summarizes the origins and evolution of the Spanish anarchist movement, a story he would develop in considerably more detail in his popular 1977 book, *The Spanish Anarchists*. The second half is an article that first appeared in 1986 in the journal *New Politics*, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Spanish Revolution. Here, Bookchin describes the uniquely revolutionary character of the urban and rural popular movements in Spain, the emergence of radical forms of workers' control in 1936, and the systematic betrayal of the revolution by Republican forces allied with Stalin's Soviet Union. The revolution is described here as "the most far-reaching and challenging of all such popular movements of the great revolutionary era," going all the way back to the Atlantic revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries, a story Bookchin would go on to tell in elaborate detail in his 4 volume opus, *The Third Revolution*, which culminates with a detailed reassessment of the Spanish Revolution's rise and fall.

(1995). *Re-enchanting Humanity: A Defense of the Human Spirit against Antihumanism, Misanthropy, Mysticism, and Primitivism.*

London; New York: Cassell.

In this book, Bookchin takes aim at what he considered a tide of irrationality sweeping the U.S., the "assault antihumanism has mounted against the rational faculties that make us human." He spares no one his withering critique: deep ecologists, sociobiologists, New Agers, Buddhists, Yogis, Malthusians, Gaians, postmodernists, and "primitivists," etc. His concerns focused on the dangers of subsuming reason and the ability to think logically to the more limbic aspects of humanity, those parts of the brain and body attuned to emotion, mood, instinct, fear, and pleasure. It is humanity's evolved capacity to reason, he claims, that separates us from other species and provides the tools to create culture. Despite occasionally sweeping generalizations and the troubling erasure of many capacities which also make us more fully human

(imagination, insight, aesthetics, intuition, etc.), its warning about the totalitarianisms inherent in the irrational has much contemporary relevance. If this book fails to find the sweet spot between the dry sterility of reason and the more fecund terrain of imagination, mythos, emotion, contemplation, and wonder, it provides a healthy reminder of the excesses that preclude the establishment of a just, ethical, and sustainable society.

(1995). *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm.*

Edinburgh and San Francisco: A.K. Press.

Standing the test of time as Bookchin's most controversial writing among anarchists, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism* poses anarchism against itself. Bookchin points out how the anarchist movement as it has developed includes both socialist organizational varieties of anarchism as well as anti-socialist and anti-organizational anarchism. By posing individualist anarchism versus social anarchism, autonomy versus freedom, chaos versus order, mysticism versus rationality, and anti-civilization worldviews versus society, Bookchin argues that there are multiple incompatibilities within anarchism. Bookchin ends with an appeal for rescuing the democratic, revolutionary, rational, and communalist dimensions of anarchism from a prevailing lifestyle-oriented anarchism.

(1999). *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future of the Left: Interviews and Essays, 1993-1998.*

Edinburgh and San Francisco: A.K. Press.

The essays in this book elaborate Bookchin's ideas in relation to the major revolutionary left tendencies. Bookchin poses his own train of thought against various currents within anarchism and Marxism while searching for the gems in each. Additionally, in these essays Bookchin clarifies and elaborates his ideas in relation to arguments raised by various critics from within 1990's era anarchism and ecology.

(1990–2005). *The Third Revolution: Popular Movements in the Revolutionary Era, vols. 1–4*

Vol 1, 1990, London: Cassell. Vol 2, 1998, London: Cassell.

Vol 3, 2004, London: Continuum. Vol 4, 2005, London: Continuum.

This four-volume monumental work resulted from Bookchin's deep concern about the weakening of the revolutionary tradition and the era of revolutions being erased from the consciousness and memory of the old and new generations. Traversing four centuries, together these volumes shed light on the institutional and organizational structures of the "grassroots" formations of the events and focus on the social, economic, cultural and political developments in the background of each revolution.

In Murray's own words (from the Preface): "This book has been written because of a deepening concern I have felt over the past two decades: the ebbing of the revolutionary tradition. The era of the great revolutionary movements, from that of the English Revolution of the 1640s to that of the Spanish Revolution of 1936–39, is waning today from the consciousness of even radical young people, let alone the reasonably educated...The names of the people who tried to rescue their liberatory potentialities are nearly lost, and so too are the exhilarating ideas they propounded...That the revolutionary era of the past four centuries continually widened the radical horizon of freedom is equally unknown to the present generation. Few people today are aware of the radical programs, achievements, and gains, as well as the errors that were made, especially at the popular base of revolutionary movements. Ordinary people—peasants, workers, artisans, radical intellectuals—made

great attempts to take full control of society, establish fairly egalitarian forms of social organization, and defend important human rights as well as expound lofty goals of freedom.”

Volume 1 begins with the peasant uprisings in central Europe during the Middle Ages and examines the English, American and French Revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries. Volume 2 describes the continuing revolutionary legacy in France throughout the 19th century. Volume 3 addresses the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, and Volume 4 continues the story through the first half of the 20th century, examining revolutionary uprisings in Germany and Hungary, and then Bookchin’s reassessment of the events of the Spanish Revolution of the 1930s.

(1999). *The Murray Bookchin Reader*.

Ed. by Janet Biehl. Montreal: Black Rose Books.

This slim volume is the most accessible overall introduction to the work of Murray Bookchin. It contains excerpts from his complete oeuvre organized to address a range of topics: An ecological society; Nature, first and second; Organic Society; The legacy of domination; Scarcity and post-scarcity; Marxism; Anarchism; Libertarian municipalism; Dialectical naturalism; and Reason and history. This collection spans five decades of his writing on philosophy, politics, ecology and revolution, providing readers with his key ideas in easily digested, often pithy reflections on the crucial questions facing us in the 21st century.

(2006) *Social Ecology and Communalism*.

Ed. By Eirik Eiglad. AK Press (published posthumously)

This small collection of essays offers a general overview of Murray Bookchin’s fundamental ideas on Social Ecology and Communalism. The essays serve as an introduction for serious readers, and give a good sense of the theoretical outlines of Bookchin’s theoretical corpus. The thread running through all these essays is the drive to understand and explain the struggle for a rational society, and to understand the necessary ideological underpinnings of a contemporary radical politics. Although the essays included are very different in focus and emphasis, taken together, they convey the ideological foundations of this political project, and its roots in the rich and fecund theory of social ecology.

(2015) *The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy*.

Ed. by Debbie Bookchin and Blair Taylor. London/New York: Verso

Emblematic of Bookchin’s post-anarchist period, *The Next Revolution* collects the most representative political essays of Bookchin’s later thought. In the opening essays, Bookchin argues for a new dialectical synthesis of anarchism, Marxism, and ecological thought into social ecology and communalism. Bookchin then makes the case for libertarian municipalism and confederalism as a promising praxis for a twenty-first century politics, grounding these concepts in the liberatory potential of cities. In the latter essays, Bookchin affirms the anti-statist and anti-nationalist paradigm of anarchism but rejects anti-organizationalism and anti-institutionalism, reaffirming communalism as a new synthesis of the best of the revolutionary left tradition.

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