Municipal Dreams: Social Ecological Critique of Bookchin's Politics

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Contents

In the following discussion, Murray Bookchin's libertarian municipalist politics is analyzed from the perspective of social ecology. This analysis forms part of a much larger critique, in which I attempt to distinguish between social ecology as an evolving dialectical, holistic philosophy, and the increasingly rigid, non-dialectical, dogmatic version of that philosophy promulgated by Bookchin. An authentic social ecology is inspired by a vision of human communities achieving their fulfillment as an integral part of the larger, self-realizing earth community. Eco-communitarian politics, which I would counterpose to Bookchin's libertarian municipalism, is the project of realizing such a vision in social practice. If social ecology is an attempt to understand the dialectical movement of society within the context of the larger dialectic of society and nature, eco-communitarianism is the project of creating a way of life consonant with that understanding. Setting out from this philosophical and practical perspective, I argue that Bookchin's politics is not only riddled with theoretical inconsistencies, but also lacks the historical grounding that would make it a reliable guide for an ecological and communitarian practice.[1]

One of my main contentions in this critique is that because of its ideological and dogmatic aspects, Bookchin's politics remains, to use Hegelian terms, in the sphere of morality rather than reaching the level of the ethical. That its moralism can be compelling I would be the last to deny, since I was strongly influenced by it for a number of years. Nevertheless, it is a form of abstract idealism, and tends to divert the energies of its adherents into an ideological sectarianism, and away from an active and intelligent engagement with the complex, irreducible dimensions of history, culture and psyche. The strongly voluntarist dimension of Bookchin's political thought should not be surprising. When a politics lacks historical and cultural grounding, and the real stubbornly resists the demands of ideological dogma, the will becomes the final resort. In this respect, Bookchin's politics is firmly in the tradition of Bakuninist anarchism.

[1] In the course of this critique, I will sometimes refer to Bookchin's response to some of the points I make. His criticisms are contained in a lengthy document entitled "Comments on the International Social Ecology Network Gathering and the 'Deep Social Ecology' of John Clark." Bookchin wrote this polemic in response to a rough draft of the present article, excerpts of which were presented at the International Social Ecology Conference in Dunoon, Scotland. He originally distributed the document widely by mail and later published it in *Democracy and Nature*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 154–197. While revisions of the draft were made, I quote Bookchin's comments only on those parts that remain unchanged. The term "Deep Social Ecology" comes from a comment by editor David Rothenberg on an article I wrote for *The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy* Bookchin mistakenly read Rothenberg's depiction of my ideas as my own self-description.

Democracy, Ecology and Community

The idea of replacing the state with a system of local political institutions has a long history in anarchist thought. As early as the 1790's, William Godwin proposed that government should be reduced essentially to a system of local juries and assemblies, which would perform all the functions that could not be carried out voluntarily or enforced informally through public opinion and social pressure.[1] A century later, Elisée Reclus presented an extensive history of the forms of popular direct democracy, from the Athenian polis to modern times, and proposed that their principles be embodied in a revolutionary system of communal self-rule.[2] Today, the most uncompromising advocate of this tradition of radical democracy is Murray Bookchin, who has launched an extensive and often inspiring defense of local direct democracy in his theory of libertarian municipalism.[3] Bookchin's ideas have contributed significantly to the growing revival of interest in communitarian democracy. For many years, he was one of the few thinkers to carry on the tradition of serious theoretical exploration of the possibilities for decentralized, participatory democracy. Perhaps the only comparable recent work has been political theorist Benjamin Barber's defense of "strong democracy." While Barber offers a highly detailed presentation of his position, and often argues for it persuasively, he undercuts the radicality of his proposals by accepting much of the apparatus of the nation-state.[4] Thus, no one in contemporary political theory has presented a more sustained and uncompromising case for the desirability of radical "grassroots" democracy than has Bookchin. Furthermore, he has been one of the two contemporary theorists of his generation (along with Cornelius Castoriadis) to raise the most important philosophical issues concerning radical democracy.[5] This critique recognizes the importance of Bookchin's contribution to ecological, communitarian democratic theory and investigates the issues that must be resolved if the liberatory potential in certain aspects of his thought are to be freed from the constraints of sectarian dogma.

One of the strongest points in Bookchin's politics is his attempt to ground it in ethics and the philosophy of nature. In viewing politics fundamentally as a sphere of ethics his political theory carries on the Aristotelian tradition. Aristotle saw the pursuit of the good of the polis, the political community, as a branch of ethics, the pursuit of the human good as a whole. He called this ultimate goal for human beings *eudaimonia*, which is often translated as "the good

[1] See John P. Clark, The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 192–93, 243–47.

[2] See John P. Clark and Camille Martin, *Liberty, Equality, Geography: The Social Thought of Elisée Reclus* (Littleton, CO : Aigis Publications, forthcoming).

[3] See especially Murray Bookchin, "From Here to There," in *Remaking Society* (Montréal : Black Rose Books, 1989), pp. 159–207, and Ch. 8, "The New Municipal Agenda," in *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship* (San Francisco : Sierra Club Books, 1987), pp. 225–288.

[4] See Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy : Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1984).

[5] For Castoriadis's politics, see especially *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1991).

life." Bookchin expands this concept of the larger good even further to encompass the natural world. Beginning with his early work, he has argued that the development of a political ethics implies "a moral community, not simply an 'efficient' one," "an ecological community, not simply a contractual one," "a social praxis that enhances diversity," and "a political culture that invites the widest possible participation." (1968)[6]

For Bookchin, politics is an integral part of the process of evolutionary unfolding and self-realization spanning the natural and social history of this planet. Social ecology looks at this history as a developmental process aiming at greater richness, diversity, complexity, and rationality. The political, Bookchin says, must be understood in the context of humanity's place as "nature rendered self-conscious."[7] The goal of politics from this perspective is the creation of a free, ecological society, in which human beings achieve self-realization through participation in a creative, non-dominating human community, and in which planetary self-realization is furthered through humanity's achievement of a balanced, harmonious place within the larger ecological community of the earth. A fundamental political task is thus the destruction of those forms of domination which hinder the attainment of greater freedom and self-realization, and the creation of new social forms that are most conducive to these ends.

This describes "politics" in the larger, classical sense of a political ethics, but leaves open the question of which "politics" in the narrower sense of determinate social practice best serves such a political vision. While Bookchin has always emphasized the importance of such political precedents as the Athenian polis and the Parisian sections of the French Revolution, it was not always clear what specific politics was supposed to follow from this inspiration. Often he expressed considerable enthusiasm for a variety of approaches to political, economic and cultural change. In "The Forms of Freedom" (1968) he envisions a radically transformative communalism rapidly creating an alternative to centralized, hierarchical, urbanized industrial society. In terms reminiscent of the great utopian Gustav Landauer, he suggests that "we can envision young people renewing social life just as they renew the human species. Leaving the city, they begin to found the nuclear ecological communities to which older people repair in increasing numbers," as "the modern city begins to shrivel, to contract and to disappear."[8] The almost apocalyptic and millenarian aspects of Bookchin's views in this period reflect not only the spirit of the American counterculture at that time, but also his strong identification with the utopian tradition.

Several years later, in "Spontaneity and Organization," he sees the "development of a revolutionary movement" as depending on "the seeding of America" with affinity groups, communes and collectives. His ideas are still heavily influenced by the 1960's counterculture (which his own early works in turn theoretically influenced), and he lists as the salient points of such entities that they be "highly experimental, innovative, and oriented toward changes in life-style as well as consciousness."[9] They were also to be capable of "dissolving into the revolutionary institutions" that were to be created in the social revolution that he believed at the time to be a

[6] Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (Berkeley, CA : Ramparts Press, 1971, p. 124.

[7] This idea, like many of Bookchin's concepts, was expressed almost a century before by the great French anarchist geographer Elisée Reclus. Reclus begins his 3500-page magnum opus of social thought, *L'Homme et la Terre*, with the statement that "l'Homme est la Nature prenant conscience d'elle-même," or "Humanity is Nature becoming self-conscious." For extensive translation of Reclus' most important work and commentary on its significance, especially in relation to social ecology, see Clark and Martin, *Liberty, Equality, Geography : The Social Thought* of Elisée Reclus.

[8] Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, p. 169.

[9] Murray Bookchin, *Toward An Ecological Society* (Montréal : Black Rose Books, 1980), p. 263.

real historical possibility.[10] Indeed, he could write in 1971 that "this is a revolutionary epoch" in which "a year or even a few months can yield changes in popular consciousness and mood that would normally take decades to achieve."[11]

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., p. 273. Admittedly, he was careful to note that he would not argue that the United States was (in 1971) "in a 'revolutionary period' or even a 'pre-revolutionary period" (p. 263). But then again, who would have argued this? Richard Nixon's landslide reelection the next year and subsequent U.S. history suggests that the mood of actual people living through the epoch was somewhat less than revolutionary. Furthermore, despite the wishful thinking of dogmatic anarchists, studies of electoral abstentionists has shown their outlook to be strikingly similar to that of voters.

Revolution in America (1969–1997)

Statements like this one express Bookchin's deep faith in revolutionary politics, a faith which, while far from being spiritual, is certainly "religious" in the conventional sense of the term. Like religious faith, it shows great resilience in the face of embarrassing evidence from the merely temporal realm. One of the most enduring aspects of Bookchin's thought is his hope for apocalyptic revolutionary transformation, and his quest to create a body of ideas that will inspire a vast revolutionary movement and lead the People into their great revolutionary future. His exaggerated assessment of the revolutionary potential of American society a quarter-century ago is not an isolated aberration in his thought. It prefigures many later analyses, including his recent discovery of supposedly powerful historical tendencies in the direction of his libertarian municipalism.

Bookchin himself points to his article "Revolution in America" for evidence of his astuteness concerning historical trends in the earlier period.[1] A careful examination of that text indicates instead a disturbing ideological tendency in his thought. In that article, published in February 1969 under the pseudonym "Robert Keller," Bookchin wisely denies that there was at that time a "revolutionary situation" in the United States, in the sense of an "immediate prospect of a revolutionary challenge to the established order."[2] However, he contends, as he reiterates several years later, that we have entered into a "revolutionary epoch." His depiction of this epoch betrays the unfortunate theoretical superficiality that was endemic to the 1960's counterculture, and shows a complete blindness to the ways in which the trends that he embraced so uncritically were products of late capitalist society itself. Furthermore, it hearkens back in the anarchist tradition to Bakuninism, with its idealization of the marginalised strata, its voluntarist overemphasis on the power of revolutionary will, and its Manichaen view of the future.

According to Bookchin "the period in which we live closely resembles the revolutionary Enlightenment that swept through France in the eighteenth century — a period that completely reworked French consciousness and prepared the conditions for the Great Revolution of 1789."[3] Interestingly, what he sees as spreading through America society in a seemingly inexorable manner is a questioning of "the very existence of hierarchical power as such," a "rejection of the commodity system," and a "rejection of the American city and modern urbanism."[4] He finds symptoms of these trends in the fact that "the society, in effect, becomes disorderly, undisciplined, Dionysian" and that "a vast critique of the system" is expressed for example in "an angry gesture,

[1] Murray Bookchin, "Revolution in America," in *Anarchos* #1 (1968). I am grateful to Bookchin himself for his suggestion that I give this article more attention. Specifically, he stated of my earlier draft of the present analysis that "had [Clark] represented my views with a modicum of respect, he might have consulted 'Revolution in America." ("Comments," p. 172.) I readily admit that in reading thousands of pages of Bookchin's writings, I dismissed that early article as a very minor and poorly-written work. I now recognize it, though, as a revealing statement of Bookchin's Bakuninist tendencies.

[2] Bookchin, "Revolution in America," p. 3.

[3] Ibid., p. 4

[4] Ibid.

a 'riot' or a conscious change in life patterns," all of which he interprets as "defiant propaganda of the deed."[5] He praises various social groups for their contribution to the "new Enlightenment," including, "most recently, hippies."[6]

However, what is most interesting for those interested in Bookchin's anarchism are his Bakuninesque statements concerning the transformative virtues of spontaneous violence. He claims that "the 'rioter' and the "Provo' have begun to break, however partially and intuitively, with those deep-seated norms of behavior which traditionally weld the masses to the established order," and that "the truth is that 'riots' and crowd actions represent the first gropings of the mass toward individuation."[7] Elsewhere, he praises the "superb mobile tactics" used in a demonstration in New York, calls for "the successful intensification of these street tactics," and stresses the need for these tactics to "migrate" to other major cities.[8] Overall, he takes a rather mechanistic view of the "revolutionary" movement that he sees developing. According to his diagnosis, the problem is that "an increasing number of molecules" (as the result of what he calls the "seeping down" of the "vast critique" mentioned earlier) "have been greatly accelerated beyond the movement of the vast majority."[9] Switching rapidly from physical to biological imagery, he concludes that the challenge is for radicalized groups to "extend their own rate of social metabolism to the country at large."[10]

Certain tendencies that have always impeded Bookchin's development of a truly communitarian outlook are already evident in his conclusions on the place of "consciousness' in this process. "What consciousness must furnish above all things is an extraordinary flexibility of tactics, a mobilization of methods and demands that make exacting use of the opportunities at hand."[11] In this analysis, Bookchin expresses a Bakuninism (or anarcho-Leninism) that has been a continuing undercurrent in his thought, and which has recently come to the surface in his programmatic municipalism. His conception of consciousness at the service of ideology stands at the opposite pole from an authentically communitarian view of social transformation, which sees more elaborated, richly-developed conceptions of social and ecological interrelatedness (not in the sense of mere abstract "Oneness," but rather as concrete unity-in-diversity) as the primary challenge for consciousness as reflection on social practice.

"Revolution in America" illustrates very well Bookchin's enduring tendency to interpret phenomena too much in relation to his own political hopes, and too little in relation to specific cultural and historical developments. In this case, he fails to consider the possibility that the erosion of traditional character structures and the delegitimation of traditional institutions could be "in the last instance" the result of the transition from productionist ("early," "classical") capitalism to consumptionist ("late," "post-modern") capitalism. For Bookchin, "what underpins every social conflict in the United States, today, is the demand for the self-realization of all human potential-

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., p. 5. Bookchin has unfortunately never produced a full-scale theoretical analysis of the relation between the hippies and the Enlightenment. His naive enthusiasm for the hippy movement and similar cultural phenomena is reminiscent of the musings of another middle-aged utopian of the time, Charles Reich, who in *The Greening of America*, lapsed into a similarly breathless misassessment of the significance of the American youth culture.

[7] Ibid., p. 5.

[8] Ibid., pp. 11–12.

[9] Ibid. pp. 10, 4, 10.

[10] Ibid., p. 10.

[11] Ibid., p. 12. Bookchin's italics.

ities in a fully rounded, balanced, totalitistic way of life."[12] He asserts that "we are witnessing" nothing less than "a pulverization of all bourgeois institutions," and contends that the "present bourgeois order" has nothing to substitute for these institutions but "bureaucratic manipulation and state capitalism."[13] Amazingly, there is no mention of the enormous potential for manipulation of the public through mass media and commodity consumption — presumably because the increasingly enlightened populace was in the process of rejecting both.

Bookchin concludes with the Manichean pronouncement that the only alternatives at this momentous point in history are the realization of "the boldest concepts of utopia" through revolution or "a disastrous [sic] form of fascism."[14] This theme of "utopia or oblivion" continued into the 70's and beyond with his slogan "anarchism or annihilation" and the enduring message that eco-anarchism is the only alternative to ecological catastrophe. The theme takes on a new incarnation in his recent "Theses on Municipalism," which he ends with the threat that if humanity turns a deaf ear to his own political analysis (social ecology's "task of preserving and extending the great tradition from which it has emerged") then "history as the rational development of humanity's potentialities for freedom and consciousness will indeed reach its definitive end."[15] While Bookchin is certainly right in saying that we are at a crucial turning-point in human and earth history, he has never demonstrated through careful analysis that all types of reformism (and indeed all other alternatives to his own politics) inevitably end in either fascism or global ecological catastrophe. His claims are reminiscent of those of Bakunin, who spent years writing a long work, one of whose major, yet quite unsubstantiated, theses was that Europe's only options were military dictatorship or his own version of anarchist social revolution.[16]

Bookchin claims to be shocked (indeed, "astonished") by such criticism of the Bakuninist aspects of his work. What amazes him is that "a self-proclaimed anarchist would apparently deny a basic fact of historical revolutions, that both during and after those revolutions people undergo very rapid transformations in character."[17] However, while anarchism as a romanticist ideology of revolution might uncritically accept the inevitability of such transformations, anarchism as a critique of domination will retain a healthy skepticism concerning claims of rapid changes in character structure among masses of people.

It is important to take a much more critical approach than does Bookchin toward accounts of the history of revolutions. Revolutionaries have tended to idealize revolutions and explain away their defects, while reactionaries have tended to demonize them and explain away their achievements. For example, anarchists have had a propensity to emphasize accounts of the Spanish Revolution by anarchists and sympathizers, and to ignore questions raised about extravagant claims of miraculous transformations. It is seldom mentioned, as Fraser's interviews in *Blood of Spain* reveal, that there were anarchists who believed that if the anarchists had won the war, they would have needed another revolution to depose the anarchist militants who were dominating

[12] Ibid., p. 7. While "underpinning" is not a very sophisticated theoretical category, the implication is clearly that there is a strong connection between the phenomena thus related.

[13] Ibid. This was long before the think tanks of the bourgeois order finally discovered, as Bookchin has revealed recently, that it could perpetuate itself through deep ecology and "lifestyle anarchism."

[14] Ibid.

[15] "Theses on Social Ecology" in *Green Perspectives* 33 (Oct., 1995), p. 4

[16] Michel Bakounine, *L'Empire Knouto-Germanique et la revolution sociale*, ed. Arthur Lehning (Paris : Editions Champ Libre, 1982).

[17] Bookchin, "comments," p, 173.

the collectives.[18] Considering the problems of culture and character-structure that existed, this second revolution might have really meant a long process of self-conscious personal and communal evolution. While ideological apologists always contend that revolutionary movements are betrayed by renegades, traitors and scoundrels, a critical analysis would also consider the limitations and, indeed, the contradictions inherent in any given form of revolutionary process itself.[19]

Furthermore, it is necessary to point out that there is an important anarchist tradition that has stressed the fact that the process of "transformation in character" is one that can only progress slowly, and that what some, like Bakunin and Bookchin, would attribute to the alchemy of revolution is really the fruit of long and patient processes of social creativity. This is the import of Elisée Reclus' reflections on the relationship between "evolution and revolution," and even more directly, of Gustav Landauer's view that "the state is a relationship" that can only be undone through the creation of other kinds of non-dominating relationships developed through shared communitarian practice. To overlook the continuity of development and to count on vast changes in human character during "the revolution" (or even through participation in institutions like municipal assemblies) leads to unrealistic expectations, underestimation of limitations, and ideological distortions and idealizations of revolutionary periods.

Finally, it should be noted that Bookchin misses the main point of the criticism of Bakunin's and his own revolutionism. Beyond their idealization of revolutions themselves, both exhibit a tendency to idealize revolutionary movements (and even potentially revolutionary movements and tendencies) so that these phenomena are seen as implicitly and unconsciously embodying the ideology of the anarchist theorist who interprets them (as exemplified by Bookchin's "Revolution in America," his more recent observations on an emerging "dual power,"[20] and by almost everything Bakunin wrote about contemporary popular movements in Europe.) Not only revolutions, but these social movements are depicted as producing very rapid changes in consciousness and character that are in reality possible only through gradual organic processes of growth and development. Furthermore, the movements are attributed an inner "directionality" leading them to exactly the position the revolutionary theorist happens to hold, whatever the actual state of the social being and consciousness of the participants may be. Thus, Bookchin conclusion that my analysis "raises serious questions about [Clark's] own acceptance of the possibility of revolutionary change as such."[21] is correct. Indeed, I question his or any uncritical revolutionism that abstractly, idealistically, and voluntaristically conceives of "revolutionary changes" as existing "as such" (an sich) and overlooks the many historical, cultural, and psychological mediations that are necessary for them to exist as self-realized, consciously developed social practices (für sich)

Bookchin is much more convincing when he puts aside his revolutionary fantasies and focuses instead on a comprehensive, many-dimensional program of social creation. His vision of an organically-developing libertarian ecological culture has inspired many, and has made an important contribution to the movement for social and ecological regeneration. In "Toward a Vision

[18] See the interview with Fernando Aragon in Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain : An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York : Pantheon Books, 1979), pp. 367–69.

[19] The deepest contradiction in the Spanish anarchist revolutionary movement is stated quite clearly by Vernon Richards, one of its most radical anarchist critics : "only a small section of the Spanish revolutionary movement was in fact libertarian." *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution (1936–1939)* (London : Freedom Press, 1972), p. 206.

[20] Bookchin, "The Rise of Urbanization," p. 256.

[21] Bookchin, "Comments," p. 173.

of the Urban Future," for example, he looks hopefully to a variety of popular initiatives in contemporary urban society. He mentions block committees, tenants associations, "ad hoc committees," neighborhood councils, housing cooperatives, "sweat equity" programs, cooperative day care, educational projects, food co-ops, squatting and building occupations, and alternative technology experiments as making contributions of varying importance to the achievement of "municipal liberty."[22]

While Bookchin has always combined such proposals with an emphasis on the importance of the "commune" or municipality in the process of social transformation, the programs now associated with his program of libertarian municipalism have taken precedence, while other approaches to change have received increasingly less attention. The municipality becomes the central political reality, and municipal assembly government becomes the preeminent expression of democratic politics.

[22] Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society*, pp.183–86.

Citizenship and Self-Identity

Bookchin contends that the "nuclear unit" of a new politics must be the citizen, "a term that embodies the classical ideals of philia, autonomy, rationality, and above all, civic commitment."[1] He rightly argues that the revival of such an ideal would certainly be a vast political advance over a society dominated by self-images based on consumption and passive participation in mass society.[2] To think of oneself as a citizen contradicts the dominant representations of the self as egoistic calculator, as profit-maximizer, as competitor for scarce resources, or as narcissistic consumer of products, images, experiences, and even other persons. It replaces narrow self-interest and egoism with a sense of ethical responsibility toward one's neighbors, and an identification with a larger whole — the political community. Furthermore, it reintroduces the idea of moral agency on the political level, through the concept that one can in cooperation with others create social embodiments of the good. In short, Bookchin's concept challenges the ethics and moral psychology of economistic, capitalist society and presents an edifying image of a higher ideal of selfhood and community.

Yet this image has serious limitations. To begin with, it seems unwise to define any single role as such a "nuclear unit," or to see any as the privileged form of self-identity, for there are many important self-images with profound political implications. A notable example is that of personhood. While civic virtue requires diverse obligations to one's fellow-citizens, respect, love and compassion are feelings appropriately directed at all persons. If (as Bookchin has himself at times agreed) we should accept the principle that "the personal is political," we must explore the political dimension of personhood and its universal recognition.[3]

Furthermore, the political significance of our role as members of the earth community can hardly be overemphasized. We might also conceive of this role as an expression of a kind of citizenship — if we think of ourselves not only as citizens of a town, city or neighborhood, but also as citizens of our ecosystem, of our bioregion, of our georegion, and of the earth itself. In

[1] Bookchin. *The Rise of Urbanization*, p. 55.

[2] Bookchin objects strongly to the concept of "self-image" as a fundamental concept in social theory. (See "Comments," pp. 164–165). In Bookchin's scheme of reality, there is, on the one hand, the real world in which we live, and, on the other, the imagined world that we might create with expansive vision, concerted effort, and correct organization. This simplistic division is part of Bookchin's dualism, which succeeds in combining both reductionist and idealist elements. It is quite distinct from an authentically dialectical analysis, which recognizes the centrality of the imaginary to all social reality. In particular, the way we imagine the self is seen as central to all our practical and theoretical activity.

[3] Bookchin contends in his "Comments" that the statement just made implies that I want to "reduce 'citizenship' to personhood." Yet, I think that it is clear that to analyze the political implications of personhood is not the same as equating personhood with citizenship. Bookchin seems to lapse into confusion by falsely projecting into my discussion his own premise that citizenship is the only form of self-identity with political implications and then concluding invalidly that since I attribute political implications to personhood, I must consider it to be a form of citizenship. He also seems confused when he claims that after citizens have been reduced to taxpayers, I want to "further reduce" them to persons. ("Comments," p. 166) While I do not in fact propose such a definition of citizenship, conceiving of someone as a "person" rather than a "taxpayer" hardly seems a reduction. In fact, the very concept of "reducing" human beings to persons seems rather confused and bizarre.

doing so, we look upon ourselves as citizens in the quite reasonable sense of being responsible members of a community. Interestingly, Bookchin believes that acceptance of such a concept of citizenship implies that various animals, including insects, and even inanimate objects, including rocks, must be recognized as citizens.[4] This exhibits his increasingly rigid, unimaginative and quite non-dialectical approach to the life of concepts. Just as we can act as moral agents in relation to other beings that are not agents, we can exercise duties of citizenship in relation to other beings who are not citizens.[5] Furthermore, Bookchin himself uses the term "ecocommunities" to refer to what others call ecosystems. By his own standards of rationalist literalism, one might well ask him how human beings could achieve "communal" or "communitarian" relationships with birds and insects — or, more tellingly, how the bird or insect might be expected relate "communally" to (for example) Murray Bookchin.

Bookchin's personal preferences concerning linguistic usage notwithstanding, in the real world the term "citizen" does not have the connotations that he absolutizes. The fact is that it indicates membership in a nation-state and subdivisions of nation-states, including states that are in no way authentically democratic or participatory. While Bookchin may invoke the linguistic authority of famous deceased radicals,[6] the vast majority of actually living people (who are expected to be the participants in the libertarian municipalist system) conceive of citizenship primarily in relation to the state, and not the municipality. The creation of a shared conception of citizenship in Bookchin's sense is a project that must be judged in relation to the actually-existing fund of meanings and the possibilities for social creation in a given culture.[7] The creation of a conception of citizenship in the earth community is no less a project, and one that has a liberatory potential that can only be assessed through cultural creativity, historical practice, and critical reflection on the result.[8]

Bookchin seems never to have gleaned from his readings of Hegel the distinction between an abstract and a concrete universal. While superficially invoking Hegel, he overlooks the philosopher's dialectical insight that any concept that is not developed through conceptual and historical articulation remains "vacuous." Much of the present critique of Bookchin's libertarian municipalism is a conceptual and historical analysis that draws out the implications and contradictions in his position, contradictions that are disguised through rhetorical devices, avoidance of difficult

[4] Ibid., p. 165. This feeble attempt at reductio ad absurdum is reminiscent of Luc Ferry's anti-ecological diatribe *The New Ecological Order* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1996). For a critique of Ferry's inept efforts to pin the charge of insectocentrism on the ecology movement, see John Clark, "Ecologie Aujourd'hui?" in *Terra Nova* 1 (1996) : 112–119.

[5] Presumably Bookchin's municipal citizens would have responsibilities in regard to the buildings, streets, soil, air, and other aspects (perhaps even the insects) of the municipality. Yet this does not imply that the buildings, etc., should be considered citizens, unless the sovereign assembly declares them to be so.

[6] Bookchin, "Comments," p. 166. In an apparent argumentum ad verecundiam, he claims that "revolutionaries of the last century — from Marx to Bakunin — referred to themselves as 'citizens' long before the appellation 'comrade' replaced it. In fact, in Bakunin's voluminous correspondence he typically referred to himself as a "friend," or used some other conventional phrasing. His preferred term with his closest political collaborators was "brother," though he sometimes used "comrade," and Citizen Bakunin signed himself "Matrena," in writing to Nechaev, whom he addressed as "Boy."

[7] It is a question of the social imaginary, to use a valuable concept that Bookchin contemptuously dismisses.

[8] It is possible that the liberatory potential in the entire concept of "citizenship" is seriously limited, and more inspiring communitarian self-images will play a more important role in the future. This is, however, a historical and experimental question, not one that be answered through stipulation, speculation, or dogmatic pronouncements.

issues, and bombastic but irrelevant replies to criticism.[9] In short, his concepts often lack articulation. But just as often he seems to lack the ability to distinguish between what is and is not articulated. He does not realize that, in themselves, concepts like "citizen of a municipality" and "citizen of the earth," are both "vacuous" and "empty" — that is, they are mere abstractions. Their abstractness cannot be negated merely by appealing to historical usage or to one's hopes for an improved usage in the future. They can be given more theoretical content by an exploration of their place in the history of ideas and in social history, by engaging in a conceptual analysis, and by reflecting on their possible relationship to other emerging theoretical and social possibilities. Yet they remain abstractions, albeit more fully-articulated ones. They gain concrete content, on the other hand, through their embodiment in the practice of a community — in its institutions, its ethos, its symbols and images.

Bookchin apparently confuses this historical concreteness with relatedness to concrete historical phenomena of the past. When he finds certain political forms of the past to be inspiring, they take on for him a certain numinous quality. Various models of citizenship become historically relevant today not because of their relation to real historical possibilities (including real possibilities existing in the social imaginary realm), but because they present an image of what our epoch assuredly ought to be. It is for this reason that he thinks that certain historical usages of the term "citizen" can dictate proper usage of the term today.

Of course, Bookchin is at the same time aware that the citizenship that he advocates is not a living reality, but only a proposed ideal. Thus, he notes that "today, the concept of citizenship has already undergone serious erosion through the reduction of citizens to 'constituents' of statist jurisdictions or to 'taxpayers' who sustain statist institutions."[10] Since he thinks above all of American society in formulating this generalization, one might ask when there was a Golden Age in American history when the populace were considered "citizens" in Bookchin's strong sense of "a self-managing and competent agent in democratically shaping a polity."[11] What has been "eroded" is presumably not the unrealized goals of the Democratic-Republican Societies, and other similar phenomena outside the mainstream of American political history. This remarkable form of "erosion" (a phenomenon possible only in the realm of ideological geology) has taken place between discontinuous historical models selected by Bookchin and the actually-existing institutions of contemporary society.

In addition to defending his concept of citizenship as the "true" meaning of the term, he also contends that its realization in society is a prerequisite for the creation of a widespread concern for the general good. He argues that "we would expect that the special interests that divide people today into workers, professionals, managers, and the like would be melded into a general interest in which people see themselves as citizens guided strictly by the needs of their community and region rather than by personal proclivities and vocational concerns."[12] Yet this very formulation preserves the idea of particularistic interest, i.e., that defined by whatever fulfills the needs of

[9] When one uses a reductio ad absurdum argument against Bookchin he replies (and perhaps thinks) that one believes in the absurd.

[10] Bookchin, "Comments," p. 166.

[11] Ibid. The closest approximation of this conception was found in the radical democracy movement of the 1790's, which unfortunately extended it to only a minority of the population, and had a very limited influence on the course of American social history. See John Clark, "The French Revolution and American Radical Democracy," in Y. Hudson and C. Peden, eds., *Revolution, Violence, and Equality* (Lewiston, NY : The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), pp. 79–118.

[12] Murray Bookchin, "Libertarian Municipalism : An Overview" in *Green Perspectives* 24 (1991) p. 4. Note that in this statement Bookchin slips into admitting the possibility of "citizenship" in a region.

one's own particular "community and region" — needs which could (and in the real world certainly would) conflict with the needs of other communities and regions. There will always no doubt be communities that have an abundance of certain natural goods, all of which might fulfill real needs of the community, but some of which would fulfill even greater needs of other communities entirely lacking these goods or having special conditions that render their needs more pressing.

Of course, one might say that in the best of all possible libertarian municipalisms, the citizens would see their highest or deepest need as contributing to the greatest good for all — "all" meaning humanity and the entire planet. Bookchin does in fact recognize that such a larger commitment must exist in his ideal system. But he does not recognize that its existence implies a broadened horizon of citizenship: that each person will see a fundamental dimension of his or her political being (or citizenship) as membership in the human community and, indeed, in the entire earth community.

There is a strong tension in Bookchin's thought between his desire for universalism and his commitment to particularism. Such a tension is inherent in any ecological politics that is committed to unity-in-diversity and which seeks to theorize the complex dialectic between whole and part. But for Bookchin this creative tension rigidifies into contradiction as a result of his territorializing of the political realm at the level of the particular municipal community. In an important sense, Bookchin's "citizenship" is a regression from the universality of membership in the working class, whatever serious limitations that concept may have had. While one's privileged being qua worker consisted in membership in a universal class, one's being qua citizen (for Bookchin) consists of being a member of a particular group — the class of citizens of a given municipality.

Bookchin will, however, hear none of this questioning of the boundaries of citizenship. From his perspective, the concept of citizen "becomes vacuous" and is "stripped of its rich historical content"[13] when the limits of the concept's privileged usage are transgressed. Yet he is floundering in the waters of abstract universalism, since he is not referring to any historically-actualized content, but merely to his idealized view of what the content ought to be. Citizenship is not developed (richly or otherwise) through some concept of "citizen" that Bookchin or any other theorist constructs. Nor can it be "developed" through a series of historical instances that have no continuity in concrete, lived cultural history. It becomes "richly developed" when concept and historical precedent are give meaning through their relationship to the life of a particular community — local, regional, or global. Bookchin, like anyone concerned with the transformation of society, is faced with a cultural repertoire of meanings that must be recognized as an interpretative background, from which all projects of cultural creativity must set out to recreate meaning. We cannot recreate that background, or any part of it (for example, the social conception of "citizenship") in our own image, or in the images of our hopes and dreams. Yet our ability to realize some of our hopes and dreams will depend in large part on our sensitivity to that background, and our capacity to find in it possibilities for extensions and transformations of meaning.

[13] Bookchin, "Comments," p. 167.

The "Agent of History"

Bookchin asks at one point the identity of the "historical 'agent' for sweeping social change."[1] In a sense, he has already answered this question in his discussion of the centrality of citizenship. However, his specific response focuses on the social whole constituted by the entire body of citizens : "the People." Bookchin has described this emerging "People," as a "'counterculture' in the broadest sense," and stipulated that it might include "alternative organizations, technologies, periodicals, food cooperatives, health and women's centers, schools, even barter-markets, not to speak of local and regional coalitions."[2] While this concept is obviously shaped and in some ways limited by the image of the American counterculture of the 1960's, it reflects a broad conception of cultural creativity as as the precondition for liberatory social change. This is its great strength. It points to a variety of community-oriented initiatives that develop the potential for social cooperation and grassroots organization.

But just as problems arise from privileging a particular self-image, so do they stem from the privileging of any unique "historical agent," given the impossibility of analytical or scientific knowledge of the processes of social creativity. It is likely that such agency will always be exercised in many spheres and at many overlapping levels of social being. It is conceivable that in some sense "the person" will be such a historical agent, while in another "the earth community" will be. In addition, as will be discussed further, alternatives deemphasized in his view of what contributes to forming such agency (such as democratic worker cooperatives) may have much greater liberatory potential than those stressed by Bookchin. From a dialectical holistic viewpoint, it is obvious that there will always be a relative unity of agency and also a relative diversity, so that agency can never have any simple location. While political rhetoric may require a reifying emphasis on one or the other moments of the whole, political thought must recognize and theorize the complexity of the phenomena. Bookchin's concept is a seriously flawed attempt to capture this social unity-in-diversity.

The idea of "the People" as the preeminent historical agent is central to Bookchin's critique of the traditional leftist choice of the working class (or certain other economic strata) for that role. Bookchin, along with other anarchists, was far ahead of most Marxists and other socialists in breaking with this economistic conception of social transformation. Indeed, post-modern Marxists and other au courant leftists now sound very much like Bookchin of thirty years ago, when they go through the litany of oppressed groups and victims of domination who are now looked upon as the preeminent agents of change. Bookchin can justly claim that his concept is superior to many of these current theories, in that his idea of "the People" maintains a degree of unity within the diversity, while leftist victimology has often degenerated into incoherent, divisive "identity politics."

[1] Murray Bookchin, *The Last Chance : An Appeal for Social and Ecological Sanity* (Burlington, VT : Comment Publishing, 1983), p. 48.

[2] Ibid.

But perhaps Bookchin, and, ironically, even some contemporary socialists go too far in deemphasizing the role of economic class analysis. Bookchin notes that while "the People" was "an illusory concept" in the 18th century, it is now a reality in view of various "transclass issues like ecology, feminism, and a sense of civic responsibility to neighborhoods and communities."[3] He is of course right in stressing the general, transclass nature of such concerns. But it seems clear that these issues are both class and transclass issues, since they have a general character, but also a quite specific meaning in relation to economic class, not to mention gender, ethnicity and other considerations. The growing concern for environmental justice and the critique of environmental racism have made this increasingly apparent. Without addressing the class (along with ethnic, gender and cultural) dimensions of an issue, a radical movement will fail to understand the question in concrete detail, and will lose its ability both to communicate effectively with those intimately involved in the issue, and more importantly, to learn from them. The fact is that Bookchin's social analysis has had almost nothing to say about the evolution of class in either American or global society. Indeed, Bookchin seems to have naively equated the obsolescence of the classical concept of the working class with the obsolescence of class analysis.

While "the People" are identified by Bookchin as the emerging subject of history and agent of social transformation, he also identifies a specific group within this large category that will be essential to its successful formation. Thus, in the strongest sense of agency, the "'agent' of revolutionary change" will be a "radical intelligentsia," which, according to Bookchin, has always been necessary "to catalyze" such change.[4] The nature of such an intelligentsia is not entirely clear, except that it would include theoretically sophisticated activists who would lead a libertarian municipalist movement. Presumably, as has been historically the case, it would also include people in a variety of cultural and intellectual fields who would help spread revolutionary ideas.

Bookchin is certainly right in emphasizing the need within a movement for social transformation for a sizable segment of people with developed political commitments and theoretical grounding. However, most of the literature of libertarian municipalism, which emphasizes social critique and political programs very heavily, has seemed thus far to be directed almost exclusively at such a group. Furthermore, it has assumed that the major precondition for effective social action is knowledge of and commitment to Bookchin's theoretical position. This ideological focus, which reflects Bookchin's theoretical and organizational approach to social change, will inevitably hinder the development of a broadly-based social ecology movement, to the extent that this development requires a diverse intellectual milieu linking it to a larger public. Particularly as Bookchin has become increasingly suspicious of the imagination, the psychological dimension, and any form of "spirituality," and as he has narrowed his conception of reason, he has created a version of social ecology that is likely to appeal to only a small number of highly-politicized intellectuals. Despite the commitment of social ecology to unity-in-diversity, his approach to social change increasingly emphasizes ideological unity over diversity of forms of expression. If the "radical intelligentsia" within the movement for radical democracy is to include a significant number of poets and creative writers, artists, musicians, and thoughtful people working in various professional and technical fields, a more expansive vision of the socially-transformative practice is necessary.

[3] Bookchin, *Remaking Society*, p. 173.

[4] Murray Bookchin, *The Modern Crisis* (Philadelphia : New Society Publishers, 1986), pp. 150–51.

Furthermore, a heavy emphasis on the role of a radical intelligentsia — even in the larger sense just mentioned — threatens to overshadow the crucial importance of cultural creativity by non-intellectuals. This includes those who create small cultural institutions, cooperative social practices, and transformed relationships in personal and family life. The non-hierarchical principles of social ecology should lead one to pay careful attention to the subtle ways in which large numbers of people contribute to the shaping of social institutions, whether traditional or newly evolving ones. Bookchin himself recognizes the importance of such activity when he describes the emergence of a "counterculture" that consists of a variety of cooperative and communitarian groups and institutions, and thereby promotes the all-important "reemergence of 'the People."[5] Why the intelligentsia, and not this entire developing culture is given the title of "historical agent" is not clearly explained. One must suspect, however, that the answer lies in the fact that the majority of participants in such a culture would be unlikely to have a firm grounding in the principles of Bookchin's philosophy. The true agents of history, from his point of view, will require precisely such an ideological foundation.

[5] Ibid., p. 152

The Municipality as Ground of Social Being

The goal of the entire process of historical transformation is, of course, the libertarian municipality. Bookchin often describes the municipality as the fundamental political, and, indeed, the fundamental social reality. For example, he states that "conceived in more institutional terms, the municipality is the basis for a free society, the irreducible ground for individuality as well as society."[1] Even more strikingly, he says that the municipality is "the living cell which forms the basic unit of political life … from which everything else must emerge: confederation, interdependence, citizenship, and freedom."[2] This assertion of the centrality of the municipality is a response to the need for a liberatory political identity that can successfully replace the passive, disempowering identity of membership in the nation-state, and a moral identity that can successful replace the amoral identity of consumer. The municipality for Bookchin is the arena in which political ethics and the civic virtues that it requires can begin to germinate and ultimately achieve an abundant flowering in a rich municipal political culture. This vision of free community is in some ways a very inspiring one.

It is far from clear, however, why the municipality should be considered the fundamental social reality. Bookchin attributes to the municipality a role in social life that is in fact shared by a variety of institutions and spheres of existence. It is not only the dominant dualistic ideologies of modern societies, which presuppose a division between private and public life, that emphasize the realm of personal life as as central to social existence. Many anarchists and utopians take the most intimate personal sphere, whether identified with the affinity group, the familial group or the communal living group, as fundamental socially and politically.[3] And many critical social analyses, including the most radical ones (for example, Reich's classic account of Fascism and Kovel's recent analysis of capitalist society) show the importance of the dialectic between the personal dimension and a variety of institutional spheres in the shaping of the self and values, including political values.[4]

One might suspect that Bookchin is using descriptive language to express his own prescriptions about what ought to be most basic to our lives. However, he sometimes argues in ways that

[1] Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization*, p. 249.

[2] Ibid., p. 282.

[3] Bookchin comments on this statement that the civitas of Libertarian Municipalism "is the immediate sphere of public life — not the most "intimate," to use Clark's crassly subjectivized word …" ("Comments," p. 193) What a "crassly subjectivized word" may be will probably remain one of the mysteries of Bookchinian linguistic analysis. What is clear, however, is that nowhere do I contend the municipality is the "most intimate" sphere, nor do I imply that Bookchin does so. But his misrepresentation of my claims gives him another opportunity to affirm exactly what I am questioning about his politics : that he is positing a "sphere of public life" that he idealistically and non-dialectically takes presents as "immediate" by systematically overlooking its cultural and psychological mediations.

[4] See Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (New York : Simon and Schuster, 1970), and Joel Kovel, *The Age of Desire* (New York : Pantheon Books, 1981). Kovel's analysis is an unsurpassed account of the complex dialectic between individual selfhood, the family, productionist and consumptionist economic insitutions, the state, and the technological system. It would be a mistake to privilege any psychological or institutional realm, as Bookchin habitually does, and as he misinterprets critics as doing, when he projects his own dualistic categories on their ideas.

are clearly an attempt to base his political norms in existing social reality. In his argument for the priority of the municipality he claims that it is "the one domain outside of personal life that the individual must deal with on a very direct basis" and that the city is "the most immediate environment which we encounter and with which we are obliged to deal, beyond the sphere of family and friends, in order to satisfy our needs as social beings."[5]

First of all, these statements really seem to be an argument for the priority of the family and, perhaps, the affinity group in social life, for the city is recognized as only the next most important sphere of life. But beyond this rather large problem, the analysis of the "immediacy" of the city seems to be a remarkably superficial and non-dialectical one. To begin with, it is not true that the individual deals in a somehow more "direct" way with the municipality than other institutions (even excluding family and friends). Millions of individuals in modern society deal more directly with the mass media, by way of their television sets, radios, newspapers and magazines, until they go to work and deal with bosses, co-workers and technologies, after which they return to the domestic hearth and further bombardment by the mass media.[6] The municipality remains a vague background to this more direct experience. Of course, the municipality is one context in which the more direct experience takes place. But there is also a series of larger contexts: a variety of political sub-divisions; various natural regions; the nation-state; the society; the earth.[7] There are few "needs as social beings" that are satisfied uniquely by "the municipality" in strong contradistinction to any other source of satisfaction.

Bookchin has eloquently made points similar to these in relation to the kind of "reification" of the "bourgeois city" that takes place in traditional city planning. "To treat the city as an autonomous entity, apart from the social conditions that produce it" is "to isolate and objectify a habitat that is itself contingent and formed by other factors. Behind the physical structure of the city lies the social community — its workaday life, values, culture, familial ties, class relations, and personal bonds."[8] It is important to apply this same kind dialectical analysis to libertarian municipalism, and thereby to develop it even further (even as certain of its aspects are negated in the process). The city or municipality is a social whole consisting of constituent social wholes, interrelated with other social wholes, and forming a part of even larger social wholes. Add to this the natural wholes that are inseparable from the social ones, and then consider all the mu-

[5] Bookchin, *Remaking Society*, p. 183. Emphasis added.

[6] Bookchin's response to this statement reveals his propensity to misread texts very badly in his haste to refute them, and, more significantly, it once more illustrates his idealist approach. According to Bookchin, " [t]his reduction of the historico-civilizational domain introduced by the city simply to individuals 'most directly' dealing 'with their television sets, radios, newspapers, and magazines' is not without a certain splendor, putting as it does our 'relationships' with the mass media on an equal plane with the relationships that free or increasingly free citizens could have in the civic sphere or political domain." ("Comments," p. 160.) The reader will note that in reference to that with which real, existing human beings "deal directly," I refer to the actual shaping of consciousness in contemporary society, a process with which those seeking social transformation are obliged to deal. Bookchin replies by invoking an abstract "historico-civilizational domain" that for all its inspirational qualities does not count for much politically unless it is embodied in actual social practice and actual cultural values. Otherwise, it retains a quite specific "splendor" : that of the vaporous moral ideal unrelated to the historically real. Secondly, Bookchin's idealism becomes more explicit when he accuses me of placing relationships that people actually have in the real world "on an equal plane" with those that they might have in Bookchin's ideal world. Of course, I do not. Rather, I distinguish between actually-existing cultural realities, possibilities that might be realized in the future, and Bookchin's idealist projections onto the reality that presently "is" of what he imagines "could be."

[7] I will return later to the contradictions entailed in Bookchin's hypostatizing of the municipality.

[8] Bookchin, *Toward An Ecological Society*, p. 137.

tual determinations between all of these wholes and all of their various parts, and we begin to see the complexity of a dialectical social ecological analysis. Such an analysis allows us to give a coherent account of what it is that we encounter with various degrees of immediacy, and what it is with which we deal with various degrees of directness, in order to satisfy our needs to varying degrees. This dialectical complexity is precisely what Bookchin's dogmatic social ecology seeks to explain away through its rigid and simplistic categories.[9]

[9] It is largely because of the complexity required by such an analysis that a less-objectifying, more holistic and process-oriented regional approach to being is more adequate than is a territorial view. See Max Cafard, "The Surre(gion)alist Manifesto" in *Exquisite Corpse* 8 (1990) : 1, 22–23.

The Social and the Political

Bookchin is at his weakest when he attempts to be the most philosophical. This is the case with one of his most ambitious theoretical undertakings: his articulation of the concept of "the political." Much as Aristotle announced his momentous philosophical discovery of the Four Causes, Bookchin announces his Three Realms. He points out that he has "made careful but crucial distinctions between the three societal realms: the social, the political, and the state.[1] In his own eyes, this discovery has won him a place of distinction in the history of political theory, for the idea "that there could be a political arena independent of the state and the social … was to elude most radical thinkers …"[2] For Bookchin, the social and statist realm cover almost everything that exists in present-day society. The statist sphere subsumes all the institutions and activities — the "statecraft," as he likes to call it — through which the state operates. The social includes everything else in society, with the exception of "the political." This final category encompasses activity in the "public sphere," a realm that he identifies "with politics in the Hellenic sense of the term."[3] By this, he means the proposed institutions of his own libertarian municipalist system, and, to varying degrees, its precursors — the diverse "forms of freedom" that have emerged at certain points in history. For those who have difficulty comprehending this "carefully distinguished" sphere, Bookchin points out that " [i]n creating a new politics based of social ecology, we are concerned with what people do in this public or political sphere, not with what people do in their bedrooms, living rooms, or basements."[4]

There is considerable unintentional irony in this statement. While Bookchin does not seem to grasp the implications of his argument, this means that, whatever we may hope for in the future, for the present we should not be concerned with what people do anywhere, since the political realm does not yet exist to any significant degree. Except in so far as it subsists in the ethereal realm of political ideas whose time has not yet come, the "political" now resides for Bookchin in his own tiny libertarian municipalist movement — though strictly speaking, even it cannot now constitute a "public sphere" considering how distant it is from any actual exercise of public power. Thus, the inevitable dialectical movement of Bookchin's heroic defense of the political against all who would "denature it," "dissolve it" into something else, etc., culminates in the effective abolition of the political as a meaningful category in existing society.

There is, however, another glaring contradiction in Bookchin's account of the "social" and "political." He hopes to make much of the fact (which he declares "even a modicum of a historical perspective" to demonstrate) that "it is precisely the municipality that most individuals must deal

[1] Bookchin, "Comments," p 158. Bookchin's distinction is heavily influenced by Arendt's distinctions in *The Human Condition* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1958). See especially, part II, "the Public and the Private Realm," pp. 22–78.

[2] Bookchin, *Rise of Urbanization*, p. 33.

[3] Bookchin, "Comments," p. 158.

[4] Ibid.

with directly, once they leave the social realm and enter the public sphere."[5] But since what he calls "the public sphere" consists of his idealized "Hellenic politics," it will be, to say the least, rather difficult for "most individuals" to find it in any actually-existing world in which they might become politically engaged. Instead, they find only the "social" and "statist" realms, into which almost all of the actually-existing municipality has already been dissolved, not by any mere theorist, as Bookchin seems to fear, but by the course of history itself. Thus, unless Bookchin is willing to find a "public sphere" in the existing statist institutions that dominate municipal politics, or somewhere in that vast realm of "the social," there is simply no "public sphere," for the vast majority of people to "enter."

While such implications already show the absurdity of his position, his theoretical predicament is in fact much worse than this. For in claiming that the municipality is what most people "deal with directly," he is condemned to define the municipality in terms of the social — precisely what he wishes most to avoid. Indeed, in a moment of theoretical lucidity he actually begins to refute his own position. "Doubtless the municipality is usually the place where even a great deal of social life is existentially lived — school, work, entertainment, and simple pleasures like walking, bicycling, and disporting themselves …"[6] Bookchin might expand this list considerably, for almost anything that he could possibly invoke on behalf of the centrality of "the municipality" will fall in his sphere of the "social." The actually-existing municipality will thus be shown to lie overwhelmingly in his "social" sphere, and his argument thus becomes a demonstration of the centrality of that realm. Moreover, what doesn't fall into the "social" sphere must lie in the actually-existing "statist" rather than the non-existent "political" one. In fact, his form of (fallacious) argumentation could be used with equal brilliance to show that we indeed "deal most directly" with the state, since all the phenomena he lists as lying within a municipality are also located within some nation-state. Indeed, this anarchist's argument works even more effectively as a defense of statism, since even when one walks, bicycles, "disports oneself," etc., outside a municipality one almost inevitable finds oneself within a nation-state.[7] Bookchin shows some vague awareness that his premises do not lead in the direction of his conclusions. After he lists the various social dimensions of the municipality, and as the implications of his argument begin to dawn on him, he protests rather feebly that all this "does not efface its distinctiveness as a unique sphere of life."[8] But that, of course, was not the point in dispute. It is perfectly consistent to accept the innocuous propositions that the municipality is "distinctive" and that it is "a unique sphere of life" while rejecting every one of Bookchin's substantive claims about its relationship to human experience, the public sphere, and the "political."

Bookchin's entire project of dividing society into rigidly defined "spheres" belies his professed commitment to dialectical thought. One of the most basic dialectical concepts is that a thing always is what it is not and is not what it is. However, this is the sort of dialectical tenet that Bookchin never invokes, preferring a highly conservative conception in which the dialectician somehow "educes" from a phenomenon precisely what is inherent in it as a potentiality.[9] Were he an authentically dialectical thinker, rather than a dogmatic one, he would, as soon as he posits

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Though there would, of course, be rare exceptions, as when one "disports oneself" in extra-territorial waters.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Bookchin often uses "eduction" as a pseudo-dialectical ploy for attacking his opponents. By means of "eduction," he uncovers various unsavory implications in their ideas that could never be deduced through rigorous argu-

different spheres of society (or any reality), consider the ways in which each sphere might be conditioned by and dependent upon those from which it is distinguished. In this connection, even those post-structuralist theorists of difference whom he dismisses with such uncomprehending contempt are more dialectical than Bookchin is, since they at least take the term "differ" in an active sense that implies a kind of mutual determination. In this, they work from the insight of Saussurian linguistics that the meaning of any signifier is a function of the entire system of significations. Bookchin, on the other hand, adheres to a dogmatic, non-dialectical view that things simply are what they are, that they are different from what they are not, and that anyone who questions his rigid distinctions must be either a dangerous relativist or a fool.

Gunderson, in *The Environmental Promise of Democratic Deliberation*, suggests how a more dialectical approach might be taken to questions dealt with dogmatically by Bookchin. Gunderson discusses in considerable detail the significance of deliberation as a fundamental aspect of Athenian democracy, the most important historical paradigm for Bookchin's libertarian municipalism. He notes that while the official institutions of democracy consisted of such explicitly "political" forms as the assembly, the courts, and the council, the "political" must also be seen to have existed outside these institutions, if the role of deliberation is properly understood. As Gunderson states it, "much of the deliberation that fueled their highly participatory democracy took place not in the Assembly, Council, or law courts, but in the agora, the public square adjacent to those places."[10] The attempt to constrain the political within a narrow sphere through the magic of definition is doomed to failure, not only when one begins to think dialectically, but also as soon one carefully examines real, historical phenomena with all their mutual determinations. In the same way that Bookchin's non-dialectical approach flaws his theoretical analysis, it dooms his politics to failure, since it systematically obscures the ways in which the possibilities for "political" transformation are dependent on the deeply political dimensions of spheres that he dismisses as merely "social."

Bookchin also demonstrates his non-dialectical approach to the social and the political in his discussion of Aristotle's politics and Greek history. He notes that "the two worlds of the social and political emerge, the latter from the former. Aristotle's approach to the rise of the polis is emphatically developmental … The polis is the culmination of a political whole from the growth of a social and biological part, a realm of the latent and the possible. Family and village do not disappear in Aristotle's treatment of the subject, but they are encompassed by the fuller and more complete domain of the polis."[11] But there are two moments in Aristotle's thought here, and Bookchin tellingly sides with the non-dialectical one. To the extent that Aristotle maintains a sharp division between the social and the political, his thought reflects a hierarchical dualism rooted in the institutional structure of Athenian society. Since the household is founded on patriarchal authority and a slave economy, it cannot constitute a political realm, a sphere of free interaction between equals. This dualistic, hierarchical dimension of Aristotle is precisely what Bookchin invokes favorably.

There is, on the other hand, a more dialectical moment in Aristotle's thought, which, though still conditioned by hierarchical ideology (as expressed in the concept of "the ruling part") envi-

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mentation. In his lectures, Bookchin typically pronounces the term "eduction" while gesturing as if coaxing something into reality out of thin air. This is a striking example of revelatory non-verbal communication.

[10] (Madison : University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), p. 4. Gunderson cites Mogens Herman Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes* in support of his interpretation.

[11] Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization*, p. 39. Emphasis added.

sions the polis as the realization of the self, family and village. Aristotle says that the polis is "the completion of associations existing by nature," and is "prior in the order of nature to the family and the individual" because "the whole is necessarily prior [in nature] to the part."[12] Implicit in this concept is the inseparable nature of the social and the political. Later, more radically dialectical thought has developed this second moment. An authentically dialectical analysis recognizes that as the political dimension emerges within society, it does not separate itself off from the rest of the social world to embed itself in an exclusive sphere. Rather, as the social whole develops, there is a transformation and politicization of many aspects of what Bookchin calls "the social" (a process that may take a liberatory or an authoritarian, and even a totalitarian, direction). In Hegel's interpretation of this process, for example, the state emerges as the full realization of society, yet it is also the means by which each aspect of society is transformed and achieves its fulfillment.

In a conception of the political that is less ideological than Hegel's, but equally dialectical (if we take the political as the self-conscious self-determination of the community with its own good as the end), the emergence of the political in any sphere will be seen both to presuppose and also to imply its emergence in other spheres. For Bookchin, on the other hand, the political remains an autonomous realm, and other spheres of society can only be politicized by being literally absorbed into that realm (as in the municipalization of production). This non-dialectical approach to the political is central to Bookchin's development of an abstract, idealist and dogmatic conception of social transformation.

[12] Ernest Barker, trans. *The Politics of Aristotle* (London : Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 5–6.

Paideia and Civic Virtue

One of the more appealing aspects of Bookchin's politics is his emphasis on the possibilities for self-realization through participation in political activity. His views are inspired by the Athenian polis, which "rested on the premise that its citizens could be entrusted with 'power' because they possessed the personal capacity to use power in a trustworthy fashion. The education of citizens into rule was therefore an education into personal competence, intelligence, moral probity, and social commitment."[1] These are the kind of qualities, he believes, that must be created today in order for municipalism to operate successfully. We must therefore create a similar process of paideia in order to combine individual self-realization with the pursuit of the good of the community through the instilling of such civic virtues in each citizen.

But there are major difficulties for this conception of paideia. The processes of socialization are not now in the hands of those who would promote the programs of libertarian municipalism or anything vaguely related to it. Rather, they are dominated by the state, and, above all, by economic power and the economistic culture, which aim at training workers (employees and managers) to serve the existing system of production, and a mass of consumers for the dominant system of consumption. Municipalism proposes that a populace that has been so profoundly conditioned by these processes should become a "citizenry," both committed to the process of self-rule and also fully competent to carry it out.

This is certainly a very admirable goal for the future. However, Bookchin's formulations sometimes seem to presuppose that such a citizenry has already been formed and merely awaits the opportunity to take power. He states, for example, that "the municipalist conception of citizenship assumes" that "every citizen is regarded as competent to participate directly in the 'affairs of state,' indeed what is more important, encouraged to do so."[2] But the success of the institutions proposed by Bookchin would seem to require much more than either an assumption of competence or the encouragement of participation in civic affairs. What is necessary is that the existing populace should be transformed into something like Bookchin's "People" through a process of paideia that pervasively shapes all aspects of their lives — a formidable task that would itself constitute and also presuppose a considerable degree of social transformation.

To equate this paideia primarily with the institution of certain elements of libertarian municipalism hardly seems to be a very promising approach. Indeed, to the extent that aspects of its program are successfully implemented before the cultural and psychological preconditions have been developed, this may very well lead to failure and disillusionment. A program of libertarian municipalism that focuses primarily on decentralization of power to the local level might indeed have reactionary consequences within the context of the existing political culture of the United States and some other countries. One might imagine a "power to the people's assemblies" that would result in harsh anti-immigrant regulations, extension of capital punishment, institution of

[1] Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society*, p. 179

[2] Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization*, p. 259.

corporal punishment, expanded restrictions on freedom of speech, imposition of religious practices, repressive enforcement of morality, and punitive measures against the poor, to cite some proposals that have widespread public support in perhaps a considerable majority of municipalities of the United States. It is no accident that localism has appealed much more to the right wing in the United States, than to the Left or the general population, and that reactionary localism is becoming both more extremist and more popular. The far right has worked diligently for decades at the grassroots level in many areas to create the cultural preconditions for local reactionary democracy.

Of course, Bookchin would quite reasonably prefer to see his popular assemblies established in more "progressive" locales, so that they could become a model for a new democratic, and indeed, a libertarian and populist, politics. But far-reaching success for such developments depends on a significant evolution of the larger political culture. To the extent that activists accept Bookchin's standpoint of hostility toward, or at best, unenthusiastic acceptance of the very limited value of alternative approaches to social change, this will restrict the scope of the necessary paideia, impede the pervasive transformation of society, and undercut the possibilities for effective local democracy.[3]

[3] One of the most yawning gaps in Bookchin's politics is the absence of any account of how participation in assemblies can effect such far-reaching changes in the character of human beings. Instead, we find vague generalizations such as that the assembly is the "social gymnasium" in which the self is developed. Yet one will find little philosophical psychology, philosophy of culture, and philosophy of education in Bookchin. Indeed, these fields endanger his municipalist politics, for the very discussion of the issues they pose leads to a consideration of the larger context of social questions that Bookchin seeks to answer within the confines of his artificially-bracketed "political" sphere.

The Municipalist Program

Libertarian municipalism has increasingly been presented not only as a theoretical analysis of the nature of radical democracy, but also as a programmatic movement for change. Indeed, Bookchin has proposed the program of libertarian municipalism as a basis for organization for the Green movement in North America. However, a serious problem in his political analysis is that it slips from the theoretical dimension to the realm of practical programs with little critical assessment of how realistic the latter may be. His discussions of a post-scarcity anarchist society seemed to refer to an ultimate ideal in a qualitatively different future (even if the coming revolution was sometimes suggested as a possible short-cut to that ideal). While the confederated free municipalities of libertarian municipalism sometimes also seem like a utopian ideal, municipalism has increasingly been presented as a strategy that is capable of creating and mobilizing activist movements in present-day towns and cities. Yet one must ask what the real possibilities for organizing groups and movements under that banner might be, given the present state of political culture, given the actual public to which appeals must be addressed, and not least of all, given the system of communication and information which must be confronted in any attempt to persuade.[1]

The relationship between immediate proposals and long-terms goals in libertarian municipalism is not always very clear. While Bookchin sees changes such as Burlington, Vermont's neighborhood planning assemblies as an important advance, even though these assemblies do not have policy-making (or law-making) authority, he does not see certain rather far-reaching demands by the Green movement as being legitimate. He recognizes as significant political advances structural changes (like planning assemblies or municipally-run services) that move in the direction of municipal democracy or economic municipalization, electoral strategies for gaining political influence or control on behalf of the municipalist agenda, and, to some degree, alternative projects that are independent of the state. On the other hand, he seems to reject, either as irrelevant or as a dangerous form of cooptation, any political proposal for reform of the nation state, beyond the local (or sometimes, the state) level.

Bookchin criticizes harshly, as capitulation to the dominant system, all approaches that do not lead toward municipal direct democracy and municipal self-management. This critique of reformism questions the wisdom of active participation by municipalists, social ecologists, left Greens and anarchists in movements for social justice, peace, and other "progressive" causes when the specific goals of these movements are not linked to a comprehensive liberatory vision of social, economic, and political transformation (or, more accurately, to his own precisely cor-

[1] Bookchin considers the kind of questions that I raise here "galling in the extreme." ("Comments," p. 174.) But those who have good answers to questions seldom respond to them with such anguish. In this case, the questions reminds him of the troubling fact that a social movement will not succeed (or even emerge as a significant historical force) merely because a small number of proponents espouse some ideal and will vehemently that it be realized. The question of what might lead large numbers of people to share that ideal and to desire its attainment seems like a good one.

rect vision). Bookchin often disparages such "movement" activity and urges activists to focus on working exclusively on behalf of the program of libertarian municipalism.

For example, he and Janet Biehl attack the Left Greens for their demand to "cut the Pentagon budget by 95 percent," and their proposals for "a $10 per hour minimum wage," "a thirty-hour work week with no loss of income," and a "workers' superfund."[2] The supposed error in these proposals is that they do not eliminate the last 5% of the budget for so-called "defense" of the nation-state, and that they perpetuate economic control at the national level. Bookchin later dismisses the Left Greens' proposals as "commonplace economic demands."[3] Furthermore, he distinguishes between his own efforts "to enlarge the directly democratic possibilities that exist within the republican system" and the Left Greens' "typical trade unionist and social democratic demands that are designed to render capitalism and the state more palatable."[4] It is impossible, however, to deduce a priori the conclusion that every institution of procedures of direct democracy is a historically significant advance, while all efforts to influence national economic policy and to demilitarize the nation-state are inherently regressive, and the empirical evidence on such matters is far from conclusive. It is at least conceivable, for example, that improvement of conditions for the least privileged segments of society might lead them to become more politically engaged, and perhaps even make them more open to participation in grassroots democracy. In his sarcastic attacks on the Left Greens, we hear in Bookchin's statements the voice of dogmatism and demagogy.[5]

There is, in fact, an inspiring history of struggles for limited goals that did not betray the more far-reaching visions, and indeed revolutionary impulses, of the participants. To take an example that should be meaningful to Bookchin, the anarchists who fought for the eight-hour work day did not give up their goal of the abolition of capitalism.[6] There is no reason why left Greens today cannot fight for a thirty-hour work week without giving up their vision of economic democracy.

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[2] Murray Bookchin and Janet Biehl, "A Critique of the Draft Program of the Left Green Network" in *Green Perspectives* 23 (1991), p. 2. My references to the "Left Greens" refer in particular to the Left Green Network, a small coalition of eco-anarchists and eco-socialists within the American Green Movement. Bookchin became disillusioned with the Left Greens when they failed to adopt his Libertarian Municipalism as their official ideology.

[3] Bookchin, "Comments," p. 174.

[4] Ibid., p. 175.

[5] Hawkins, the primary object of this attack on the Left Greens, was for years an ally of Bookchin and the latter must be, at least on some level of conceptual thought, aware of the fact that Hawkins' goal is not to bolster the legitimacy of capitalism and the state. But Hawkins has committed the one unpardonable sin : that of embracing the faith and then falling away from it. Conceptual thought therefore cedes its place to irrational denunciations. In a response common to both leftist-sectarianism and religious fundamentalism, the charge is defection to the most hatred of enemies. Hawkins now does the work of the Devil, seeking "to render capitalism and the state more palatable."

[6] Bookchin does not, however, accept this example. He replies that the eight-hour demand was made only because it was part of the pursuit of "the goal of insurrection" and "was designed to reinforce what was virtually an armed conflict." ("Comments," p. 175.) Even if this were correct, it would not support his argument that reformist demands mean capitulation to the status quo. However, Bookchin's explanation is a simplistic, inaccurate reading of history in support of his attack on the Left Greens. The goals of the anarchists in the eight-hour day movement were complex. One aim was indeed the radicalization of the working class. Secondly, the achievement of its limited goal as a real advance for the workers was also considered important to many. Finally, an important motivation was a feeling of solidarity with the workers and their struggles, apart from any pragmatic long or short-term gains. This identification transcended the kind of strategic thinking that Bookchin emphasizes. A notable exponent of the later two justifications was Emma Goldman, who originally followed Johann Most in rejecting the significance of such limited demands as working against the radicalization of workers. She attributes her change in outlook to the moving words of an elderly worker in the audience at one of her lectures. See *Living My Life (*New York : Dover Books, 1970), Vol. I, pp. 51–53.

Indeed, it seems important that those who have utopian visions should also stand with ordinary people in their fights for justice and democracy — even when many of these people have not yet developed such visions, and have not yet learned how to articulate their hopes in theoretical terms. Unless this occurs, the prevailing dualistic split between reflection and action will continue to be reproduced in movements for social transformation, and the kind of "People" that libertarian municipalism presupposes will never become a reality. To reject all reform proposals at the level of the nation-state a priori reflects a lack of sensitivity to the issues that are meaningful to actual people now. Bookchin correctly cautions us against succumbing to a mere "politics of the possible." However, a political purism that dogmatically rejects reforms that promise a meaningful improvement in the conditions of life for many people chooses to stand above the actual people in the name of "the People" (who despite their capitalization remain merely theoretical).[7]

Bookchin is no doubt correct in his view that groups like the Left Greens easily lose the utopian and transformative dimension of their outlook as they become focused on reform proposals that might immediately appeal to a wide public. It is true that a Left Green proposal to "democratize the United Nations" seems rather outlandish from the decentralist perspective of the Green movement. Yet it is inconsistent for Bookchin to dismiss all proposals for reform, merely because they "propose" something less than the immediate abolition of the nation-state. Libertarian municipalism itself advocates for the immediate present working for change within subdivisions of the nation-state, as municipalities (and states, including small ones like Vermont) most certainly are. Bookchin has himself made a cause célèbre of a campaign against the extension of Vermont's gubernatorial term from two to four years. While this is a valid issue concerning democratic control, its implications for the possible transformation of state power cannot be compared to those of a serious debate on the need for the drastic reduction of military expenditures.

Social ecological politics requires a dialectical analysis of social phenomena, which implies a careful analysis of the political culture (in relation to its larger natural and social context) and an exploration of the possibilities inherent in it. The danger of programmatic tendencies, which are endemic to the traditional left and to all the heretical sectarianisms it has spawned, is that they rigidify our view of society, reinforce dogmatism, inflexibility and attachment to one's ideas, limit our social imagination, and discourage the open, experimental spirit that is necessary for creative social change.

While libertarian municipalism is sometimes interpreted in a narrower, more sectarian way (as it appears especially in Bookchin's polemics against other points of view), it can also be taken as a more general orientation toward radical grassroots democracy. Looked at in this broader sense, municipalism can make a significant contribution to the development of our vision of a free, cooperative community. Bookchin has sometimes presented a far-reaching list of proposals for developing more ecologically-responsible and democratic communities. These include the establishment of community credit unions, community supported agriculture, associations for local self-reliance, and community gardens.[8] Elsewhere he includes in the "minimal steps" for creating "Left Green municipalist movements" such activities as electing council members who support "assemblies and other popular institutions"; establishing "civic banks to fund municipal

[7] It is noteworthy that almost all of Bookchin's allies over the past several decades who have become heavily involved in grassroots ecological, peace and social justice movements have discarded narrowly Bookchinist politics, and this aspiring anarchist Lenin has been left stranded at the Finland Station along with his ideological baggage.

[8] Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization*, p. 276.

enterprises and land purchases"; and forming "grassroots networks" for various purposes.[9] In a discussion of how a municipalist movement might be initiated in the state of Vermont, he presents proposals that emphasize cooperatives and even small individually-owned businesses.[10] He suggests that the process could begin with the public purchase of unprofitable enterprises (which would then be managed by the workers), the establishment of land trusts, and the support for small-scale productive enterprises. This could be done, he notes, without infringing "on the proprietary rights of small retail outlets, service establishments, artisan shops, small farms, local manufacturing enterprises, and the like."[11] He concludes that in such a system "cooperatives, farms, and small retail outlets would be fostered with municipal funds and placed under growing public control."[12] He adds that a "People's Bank" to finance the economic projects could be established, buying groups to support local farming could be established, and public land could be used for "domestic gardening."[13]

These proposals present the outline of an admirable program for promoting a vibrant local economy based on cooperatives and small businesses. Yet it is exactly the "municipalist" element of such a program that might be less than practical for quite some time. It seems likely that for the present the members of cooperatives and the owners of small enterprises would have little enthusiasm for coming under "increasing public control," if this means that the municipality (either through an assembly or local officials) increasingly takes over management decisions. Whatever might evolve eventually as a cooperative economy develops, a program for change in the real world must either have an appeal to an existing public, or must have a workable strategy for creating such a public. There is certainly considerable potential for broad support for "public control" in areas like environmental protection, health and safety measures, and greater economic justice for workers. However, the concept of "public control" of economic enterprises through management by neighborhood or municipal assemblies is, to use Bookchin's terminology, a "nonsense demand," since the preconditions for making it meaningful do not exist, and are not even addressed in Bookchin's politics.[14]

[9] Bookchin, "Libertarian Municipalism," p. 4.

[10] It is not always clear why his own endorsement of small businesses is legitimate while others who support them as part of a decentralized, localist and regionalist economy are condemned for selling out to capitalism. Presumably, the difference is that despite his statements in favor of small businesses, he holds the doctrinaire position that all private businesses and indeed every aspect of the market must be eliminated, while those he attacks accept the possibility of experimenting with various combinations of community-owned enterprises, self-management, and small private enterprises in pursuit of a just and democratic economic order.

[11] Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization*, p. 275.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., p. 276.

[14] Social ecological proposals for grassroots democracy would appeal more to potential activists (with the exception of some theoretically-oriented, politicized leftists), if the rhetoric of "Libertarian Municipalism" were dropped entirely and replaced with more populist concepts such as "neighborhood power" (in addition to more ecological concepts that will be discussed further). While municipalism is a non-concept for most North Americans and Western Europeans, identification with one's neighborhood is sometimes fairly strong, and is capable of being developed much further in a liberatory direction. Similar localist tendencies exist in Latin America and many other places in which the urban neighborhood or the village are strong sources of identity. In fact, the idea of the creation of the urban village, incorporated into a larger bioregional vision, would be a social ecological concept that would be both radical and traditionalist in many cultural contexts.

The Fetishism of Assemblies

While Bookchin sees the municipality as the most important political realm, he identifies the municipal assembly as the privileged organ of democracy politics, and puts enormous emphasis on its place in both the creation and and functioning of free municipalities. "Popular assemblies," he says, are the minds of a free society; the administrators of their policies are the hands."[1] But unless this is taken as an attempt at poetry, it is in some ways a naive and undialectical view. The mind of society — its reason, passion, and imagination — is always widely dispersed throughout all social realms. And the more that this is the case, the better it is for the community. Not only is it not necessary that most creative thought take place in popular assemblies, it is inconceivable that most of it should occur there. In a community that encourages creative thinking and imagination, the "mind" of society would operate through the intelligent, engaged reflection of individuals, through a diverse, thriving network of small groups and local institutions in which these individuals would express and embody their hopes and ideals for the community, and through vibrant democratic media of communication in which citizens would exchange ideas and shape the values of the community. And though in an anarchist critique of existing bureaucracy, administrators might be depicted rhetorically as mindless, it does not seem desirable that in a free society they should be dismissed as necessarily possessing this quality. All complex systems of social organization will require some kind of administration, and will depend not only on the good will but also on the intelligence of those who carry out policies. It seems impossible to imagine any form of assembly government that could formulate such specific directives on complex matters that administrators would have no significant role in shaping policy. Bookchin tellingly lapses into edifying rhetoric and political sloganeering when he discusses the supremacy of the assembly in policy-making. Were he to begin to explore the details of how such a system might operate, he would immediately save others the trouble of deconstructing his system.

The de facto policy-making power of administrators might even be greater in Bookchin's system than in others, in view of the fact that he does not propose any significant sphere for judicial institutions that might check administrative power. Unless we assume that society would become and remain quite simplified — an assumption that is inconsistent with Bookchin's beliefs about technological development, for example — then it would be unrealistic to assume that all significant policy decisions could be made in an assembly, or even supervised directly by an assembly. A possible alternative would be a popular judiciary; however, the judicial realm remains almost a complete void in Bookchin's political theory, despite fleeting references to popular courts in classical Athens and other historical cases. One democratic procedure that could perform judicial functions would be popular juries (as proposed by Godwin two centuries ago) or citizens' committees (as recently suggested by Burnheim)[2] that could oversee administrative decision-

[1] Bookchin, *Remaking Society*, p. 175.

[2] See John Burnheim, *Is Democracy Possible? The Alternative to Electoral Politics* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1985).

making. However, Bookchin's almost exclusive emphasis on the assembly — what we might call his "ecclesiocentrism" — precludes such possibilities.

Bookchin responds to these suggestions concerning popular juries and citizens' committees with what he thinks to be the devastating allegation that what I "am really calling for here" are "courts and councils, or bluntly speaking, systems of representation."[3] While it is far from clear that a "council" is inherently undesirable under all historical circumstances, what I discuss in the passage he attacks is citizens' committees, not councils.[4] What I "call for" is not some specific political form, but rather a consideration of various promising political forms whose potential can only be determined through practice and experimentation. Moreover, Bookchin's comments show ignorance of the nature of the proposals of Godwin and Burnheim that are cited, and unwillingness to investigate them before beginning his attack. Neither proposes a system of "representation." One of the appealing aspects of the jury or committee proposals is that since membership on juries or committees is through random selection (not election of "representatives"), all citizens have an equal opportunity to exercise decision-making power. Some of the possible corrupting influences of large assemblies (encouragement of egoistic competition, undue influence by power-seeking personalities, etc.) are much less likely to appear in this context. Furthermore, such committees and juries offer a way of avoiding the need for representation, since they are a democratic means of performing necessary functions that cannot possibly be carried out at the assembly level. As will be discussed, Bookchin's municipalism does not successfully address the question of how "confederal" actions can be carried out without representation, and proponents of decentralized democracy would therefore be wise to consider various means by which the necessity for representation might be minimized in a less than utopian world.

In discussing his conception of "participatory democracy," Bookchin notes the roots of the concept in the politics of the New Left and the counterculture of the 1960's. One implication of democracy in this context was that "people were expected to be transparent in all their relationships and the ideas they held."[5] He laments the fact that these democratic impulses were betrayed by a movement toward dogmatism, centralization and institutionalization. Yet, the concept of transparency, like that of "the unmediated," requires critical analysis. Bookchin might have achieved a more critical approach to such concepts had he applied a dialectical analysis to them. Unfortunately, the naive expectation that people merely "be" transparent may become a substitute for the more difficult and time-consuming but ultimately rewarding processes of self-reflection and self-understanding on the personal and group levels. Values like "transparency" and "immediacy" often inhibit understanding of group processes, and function as an ideology that disguises implicit power-relationships and subtle forms of manipulation, which are often quite opaque, highly mediated and resistant to superficial analysis.

It is important that such disguised power-relations should not find legitimacy through the ideology of an egalitarian, democratic assembly, in which "the People" act in an "unmediated"

[3] Bookchin, "Comments," p. 183.

[4] The only references to "councils" in the text attacked by Bookchin are in quotations from him or references to these quotations. While I have never "called for" councils, as if they were another panacea competing with Bookchin's assemblies, I have supported the expansion of the City Council in my own city from seven to at least twenty-five members, as one element in a comprehensive process of expanding local democracy (along with neighborhood assemblies, municipalized utilities, and other similar ideas). As we will see later, despite his apparent dislike for the concept, Bookchin himself "calls for" a kind of council, though in a form that seems entirely unworkable.

[5] Bookchin, *Remaking Society*, p. 143.

fashion, and in which their will is "transparent." The fact is that in assemblies of hundreds, thousands or even potentially tens of thousands of members (if we are to take the Athenian polis as a model), there is an enormous potential for manipulation and power-seeking behavior. If it is true that power corrupts, as anarchists more than anyone else have stressed, then anarchists cannot look with complacency on the power that comes from being the center of attention of a large assembly, from success in debate before such an assembly, and from the quest for victory for one's cause. To minimize these dangers, it is necessary to avoid idealizing assemblies, to analyze carefully their strengths and weaknesses, and to experiment with processes that can bring them closer to the highest deals that inspire them. In addition, there is the option of rejecting Bookchin's proposal that all political power be concentrated in the assembly, and separating it instead among various participatory institutions.

Whatever the strengths and weaknesses assemblies may have as an organizational form, we must ask whether it is even possible for sovereign municipal assemblies to be viable as the fundamental form of political decision-making in the real world. Bookchin concedes that local assemblies might have to be less than "municipal" in scope. He recognizes that given the size of existing municipalities there will be a need for more decentralized decision-making bodies. He suggests that "whether a municipality can be administered by all its citizens in a single assembly or has to be subdivided into several confederally related assemblies depends much on its size" and proposes that the assembly might be constituted on a block, neighborhood or town level.[6] Since contemporary municipalities in much of the world range in population up to tens of millions, and neighborhoods themselves up to hundreds of thousands, the aptness of the term "municipalism" for a form of direct democracy should perhaps be questioned.[7] It would seem that in highly urbanized societies it would be much more feasible to establish democratic assemblies at the level of the neighborhood or even smaller units than at the municipal level, as Bookchin himself concedes.

The problem of defining neighborhood communities often poses difficulties. Bookchin claims that New York City, for example, consists of neighborhoods that are "organic communities."[8] It is true that there exists a significant degree of identification with neighborhoods that can contribute to the creation of neighborhood democracy. Yet to describe the neighborhoods of New York or other contemporary cities as "organic communities" is a vast overstatement, and one wonders if Bookchin is referring more to his idealized view of the past than to present realities. Contemporary cities (including New York) have been thoroughly transformed according to the exigencies of the modern bureaucratic, consumerist society, with all the atomization and

[6] Ibid., p. 181.

[7] It is not only the size of the modern urban sprawl that brings into question Bookchin's "municipalist" outlook, but the qualitative changes that have taken place. Mumford pointed out in *The City in History* that what has emerged "is not in fact a new sort of city, but an anti-city" that "annihilates the city whenever it collides with it." (*The City in History* [New York : Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961], p. 505). Bookchin recognizes this change on the level of moralism, as an evil to be denounced, but he does not take it seriously as an object of careful analysis and a challenge to ideas of practice formed in previous historical epochs. Luccarelli, in *Lewis Mumford and the Ecological Region* (New York : Guilford Press, 1995), points out that Mumford's idea of the "anti-city" prefigured recent analyses of a "technurbia" that has emerged out of social transformations in a "post-Fordist" regime which is "driven by telecommunications and computer-assisted design," which produces "forces that tend to disperse and decentralize production," and results in a "diffused city." (P. 191) Bookchin's municipalism has yet to come to terms with these transformations and their effects on either organizational possibilities or subjectivity.

[8] Bookchin, *Rise of Urbanization*, p. 246.

privatization that this implies. Natives of metropolitan centers such as Paris complain that traditional neighborhoods have been completely destroyed by commercialization, land speculation, and displacement of the less affluent to the suburbs. In the United States, much of traditional urban neighborhood life has been undermined by social atomization, institutionalized, structural racism, and the migration of capital and economic support away from the center. Bookchin correctly cites my own community of New Orleans as an example of a city that has a strong tradition of culturally distinct neighborhoods that have endured with strong identities until recent times.[9] But it is also a good example of the culturally corrosive effects of contemporary society, which progressively transforms local culture into a commodity for advertising, real estate speculation and tourism, while it destroys it as a lived reality. Thus, the neighborhood "organic community" is much more an imaginary construct (that is often entangled with nostalgic feelings and reflects class and ethnic antagonisms) than an existing state of affairs. It is essential to see these limitations in the concept, and then to develop its imaginary possibilities as part of a liberatory process of social regeneration.

However we might conceptualize existing urban neighborhoods, the large size of assemblies to be constituted at that level raises questions about how democratic such bodies could be. In Barber's discussion of these assemblies, he suggests that their membership would range from five to twenty-five thousand.[10] Bookchin says that they might encompass units from a single block up to dozens of blocks in an urban area, and thus might sometimes reach a similar level of membership. It is difficult to imagine the city block of present-day urban society as the fundamental political unit (though visionary proposals for a radically-transformed future have made a good case for recreating it as a small eco-community). Yet, libertarian municipalism is almost always formulated in terms of municipal and neighborhood assemblies. Therefore, in practical terms it is proposing very large assemblies for the foreseeable future in highly populated, urbanized societies.

Bookchin's discussion is curiously (and rather suspiciously) vague on the topic of the scope of decision-making by assemblies. He does make it clear that he believes that all important policy decisions can and should be made in the assembly, even in the case of emergencies. He confidently assures us that, "given modern logistical conditions, there can be no emergency so great that assemblies cannot be rapidly convened to make important policy decisions by a majority vote and the appropriate boards convened to execute these decisions — irrespective of a community's size or the complexity of its problems. Experts will always be available to offer their solutions, hopefully competing ones that will foster discussion, to the more specialized problems a community may face."[11] But this mere affirmation of faith is hardly convincing. In a densely populated, technologically complex, intricately interrelated world, every community will face problems that can hardly be dealt with on an ad hoc basis by large assemblies.

It seems rather remarkable that Bookchin never explores the basic theoretical question of whether any formal system of local law should exist, and how policy decisions of assemblies should be interpreted and applied to particular cases. Yet his discrete silence is perhaps wise, since his position would seem to collapse were he to give any clear answer to this question. If general rules and policy decisions (i.e., laws) are adopted by an assembly, then they must be ap-

[9] Ibid., p. 102.

[10] Barber, *Strong Democracy*, p. 269.

[11] Bookchin, *Remaking Society*, p. 175.

plied to particular cases and articulated programatically by judicial and administrative agencies. It is then inevitable that these agencies will have some share in political power. But this alternative is inconsistent with his many affirmations of the supremacy of the assembly. On the other hand, if no general rules are adopted, then the assembly will have the impossibly complex task of applying rules to all disputed cases and formulating all important details of programs. We are left with a purgatorial vision of hapless citizens condemned to listening endlessly to "hopefully competing" experts on every imaginable area of municipal administration. Given these two unpromising alternatives, Bookchin seems, at least implicitly, to choose the impossible over the inconsistent.

There are certain well-known dangers of large assemblies that pose additional threats to Bookchin's neighborhood or municipal assemblies. Among the problems that often emerge in such bodies are competitiveness, egotism, theatrics, demagogy, charismatic leadership, factionalism, aggressiveness, obsession with procedural details, domination of discussion by manipulative minorities, and passivity of the majority. While growth of the democratic spirit might reduce some of these dangers, they might also be aggravated by the size of the assembly, which would be many times larger than most traditional legislative bodies. In addition, the gap in political sophistication between individuals in local assemblies will no doubt be much greater than in bodies composed of traditional political elites. Finally, the assembly would lose one important advantage of representation. Elected representatives or delegates can be chastised for betraying the people when they seem to act contrary to the will or interest of the community. On the other hand, those who emerge as leaders of a democratic assembly, and those who take power by default if most do not participate actively in managing the affairs of society, can be accused of no such dereliction, since they are acting as equal members of a popular democratic body.[12]

To say the least, an extensive process of self-education in democratic group processes would be necessary before large numbers of people would be able to work together cooperatively in large meetings. And even if some of the serious problems mentioned are mitigated, it is difficult to imagine how they could be reduced to insignificance in assemblies with thousands of participants, as are sometimes proposed, at least until wider processes of personal and social transformation has radically changed the members' characters and sensibilities. Indeed, the term "face-to-face democracy" that Bookchin often uses in reference to these assemblies seems rather bizarre when applied to these thousands of faces (assuming that most of them face up to their civic responsibilities and attend).

An authentically democratic movement will recognize the considerable potential for elitism and power-seeking within assemblies. It will deal with this threat not only through procedures within assemblies, but above all by creating a communitarian, democratic culture that will express itself in decision-making bodies and in all other institutions. For the assembly and other organs of direct democracy to contribute effectively to an ecological community, they must be purged of the competitive, agonistic, masculinist aspects that has often corrupted them. They can only fulfill their democratic promise if they are an integral expression of a cooperative community that embodies in its institutions the love of humanity and nature. Barber makes exactly this

[12] It is certainly conceivable for an assembly of some size to function democratically without succumbing to these threats. Whether or not it does so to a significant degree depends in part on whether it confronts them openly and effectively, but even more on the nature of the larger culture and the way in which the character of the participants is shaped by that culture. But once again, the assembly itself can hardly be called upon as the primary agent of a paideia that would make non-competitive, non-manipulative assemblies possible.

point when he states that strong democracy "attempts to balance adversary politics by nourishing the mutualistic art of listening," and going beyond mere toleration, seeks "common rhetoric evocative of a common democratic discourse should "encompass the affective as well as the cognitive mode."[13] Such concerns echo recent contributions in feminist ethics, which have pointed out that the dominant moral and political discourse have exhibited a one-sided emphasis on ideas and principles, and neglected the realm of feeling and sensibility. In this spirit, we must explore the ways in which the transition from formal to substantive democracy depends not only on the establishment of more radically democratic forms, but on the establishment of cultural practices that foster a democratic ethos.

[13] Barber, *Strong Democracy*, p. 176.

Municipal Economics

One of the most compelling aspects of Bookchin's political thought is the centrality of his ethical critique of the dominant economistic society, and his call for the creation of a "moral economy" as a precondition for a just ecological society. He asserts that such a "moral economy" implies the emergence of "a productive community" to replace the amoral "mere marketplace," that currently prevails. It requires further that producers "explicitly agree to exchange their products and services on terms that are not merely 'equitable' or 'fair' but supportive of each other."[1] He believes that if the prevailing system of economic exploitation and the dominant economistic culture based on it are to be eliminated, a sphere must be created in which people find new forms of exchange to replace the capitalist market, and this sphere must be capable of continued growth. Bookchin sees this realm as that of the municipalized economy. He states that "under libertarian municipalism, property becomes "part of a larger whole that is controlled by the citizen body in assembly as citizens."[2] Elsewhere, he explains that "land, factories, and workshops would be controlled by popular assemblies of free communities, not by a nation-state or by worker-producers who might very well develop a proprietary interest in them."[3]

However, for the present at least, it is not clear why the municipalized economic sector should be looked upon as the primary realm, rather than as one area among many in which significant economic transformation might begin. It is possible to imagine a broad spectrum of self-managed enterprises, individual producers and small partnerships that would enter into a growing cooperative economic sector that would incorporate social ecological values. The extent to which the communitarian principle of distribution according to need could be achieved would be proportional to the degree to which cooperative and communitarian values had evolved — a condition that would depend on complex historical factors that cannot be predicted beforehand. Bookchin is certainly right in his view that participation in a moral economy would be "an ongoing education in forms of association, virtue, and decency"[4] through which the self would develop. And it is possible that ideally "price, resources, personal interests, and costs" might "play no role in a moral economy" and that there would be "no 'accounting' of what is given and taken."[5] However, we always begin with a historically determined selfhood in a historically determined cultural context. It is quite likely that communities (and self-managed enterprises) might find that in the task of creating liberatory institutions within the constraints of real history and culture, the common good is attained best by preserving some form of "accounting" of contributions from citizens and distribution of goods. To whatever degree Bookchin's anarcho-communist system of distribution are desirable as a long-term goal, the attempt to put them into practice in the short run, with-

[1] Bookchin, *The Modern Crisis*, p. 91.
[2] Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization*, p. 263.
[3] Bookchin, *Remaking Society*, p. 194.
[4] Bookchin, *The Modern Crisis*, p. 93.
[5] Ibid., p. 92.

out developing their psychological and institutional preconditions, would be a certain recipe for disillusionment and economic failure.

Bookchin attributes to municipalization an almost miraculous power to abolish egoistic and particularistic interests. He and Biehl attack proposals of the Left Greens for worker self-management on the grounds that such a system does not, as in the case of municipalization, "eliminate the possibility that particularistic interests of any kind will develop in economic life."[6] While the italics reflect an admirable hope, it is not clear how municipalization, or any other political program, no matter how laudable it may be, can assure that such interests are entirely eliminated. Bookchin and Biehl contend that in "a democratized polity" workers would develop "a general public interest,"[7] rather than a particularistic one of any sort. But it is quite possible for a municipality to put its own interest above that of other communities, or that of the larger community of nature. The concept of "citizen of a municipality" does not in itself imply identification with "a general public interest." To the extent that concepts can perform such a function, "citizen of the human community" would do so much more explicitly, and "citizen of the earth community" would do so much more ecologically.

Under Bookchin's libertarian municipalism, there is a possible (and perhaps inevitable) conflict between the particularistic perspective of the worker in a productive enterprise and the particularistic perspective of the citizen of the municipality. Bookchin and Biehl propose that "workers in their area of the economy" be placed on advisory boards that are "merely technical agencies, with no power to make policy decisions."[8] This would do little if anything to solve the problem of conflict of interest. Bookchin calls the "municipally managed enterprise" at one point "a worker-citizen controlled enterprise,"[9] but the control is effectively limited to members of the community acting as citizens, not as workers.[10] Shared policy-making seems on the face of it more of a real-world possibility, however complex it might turn out to be. In either case (pure community democracy, or a mixed system of community and workplace democracy), it seems obvious that there would be a continual potential for conflict between workers who are focused on their needs and responsibilities as producers and assemblies that are in theory focused on the needs and responsibilities of the local community.

Putting aside the ultimate goals of libertarian municipalism, Bookchin suggests that in a transitional phase, its policies would "not infringe on the proprietary rights of small retail outlets, service establishments, artisan shops, small farms, local manufacturing enterprises, and the like."[11] The question arises, though, of why this sector should not to continue to exist in the long term, alongside more cooperative forms of production. There is no conclusive evidence that such small enterprises are necessarily exploitative or that they cannot be operated in an ecologically sound manner. Particularly if the larger enterprises in a regional economy are democratically operated, the persistence of such small enterprises does not seem incompatible with social ecological val-

[6] Bookchin and Biehl, "Critique of the Draft Program," p. 3. Their italics.

[7] Ibid., p. 4.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Bookchin, *The Modern Crisis*, p. 160.

[10] It is not clear whether under Libertarian Municipalism citizens could work in a nearby enterprise that happened to be outside the borders of their municipality. If not, they would then have no voice in decision-making concerning their workplace except as advisors to the citizens.

[11] Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization*, p. 275.

ues. This is even more the case to the degree that the community democratically establishes just and effective parameters of social and ecological responsibility.[12]

However, Bookchin dogmatically rejects this possibility. He claims that if any sort market continues to exist, then "competition will force even the smallest enterprise eventually either to grow or to die, to accumulate capital or to disappear, to devour rival enterprises or to be devoured."[13] Yet Bookchin has himself noted that historically the existence of a market has not been equivalent to the existence of a market-dominated society. He has not explained why such a distinction cannot hold in the future. He has himself been criticized by "purist" anarchists who attack his acceptance of government as a capitulation to "archism." Yet he rightly distinguishes between the mere existence of governmental institutions and statism, the system of political domination that results from the centralization of political power in the state. Similarly, one may distinguish between the mere existence of market exchanges and capitalism — the system of economic domination that results from the concentration of economic power in large corporate enterprises. Bookchin asserts that the existence of any market sector is incompatible with widespread decentralized democratic institutions and cooperative forms of production. While he treats this assertion as if it were an empirically-verified or theoretically-demonstrated proposition, it is, until he presents more evidence, merely an article of ideological faith.[14]

But whatever the long-term future of the market may be, it is in fact the economic context in which present-day experiments take place. If municipally-owned enterprises are established, they will necessarily operate within a market, if only because the materials they need for production will be produced within the market economy. It is also likely that they would choose to sell their products within the market, since the vast majority of potential consumers, including those most sympathetic to cooperative experiments, would still be operating within the market economy. Indeed, it is not certain that even if a great many such municipal enterprises were created that they would choose to limit their exchanges entirely to the network of similar enterprises, rather than continuing to participate in the larger market. In view of the contingencies of history, to make any such prediction would reflect a kind of "scientific municipalism" that is at odds with the dialectical principles of social ecology. But whatever may be the case in the future, to the extent that municipalized enterprises are proposed as a real-world practical strategy, they will necessarily constitute (by Bookchin's own criteria) a "reform" within the existing economy. Thus, it is inconsistent for advocates of libertarian municipalism to attack proposals for self-management, such as those of the Left Greens, as mere reformism. These proposals, like Bookchin's are incapable of abolishing the state and capitalism by fiat. But were they adopted, they would represent a real advance in expanding the cooperative and democratic aspects of production, while at the same time improving the economic position of the less privileged members of society.

Bookchin has come to dismiss the idea that social ecology should emphasize the importance of developing a diverse, experimental, constantly growing cooperative sector within the economy,

[12] As might be done, for example, through law, a concept that is almost non-existent in Bookchin's political theory.

[13] Bookchin, "Comments," p. 186. Bookchin calls these dismal consequences of the market a "near certainty," and by the next paragraph he has convinced himself, if not the reader, that they will "assuredly" occur.

[14] Although Bookchin usually attacks Marx harshly, in this case he invokes Marx's "brilliant insights" that "reveal" what will "prevail ultimately." ("Comments," p. 186.) Yet despite Marx's insights into the tendencies of historical capitalism, his ideas cannot validly be used to prejudge the role a market might play in all possible future social for-

and now focuses almost exclusively on the importance of "municipalization of the economy."[15] But while he has been writing about municipalism for decades, he has produced nothing more than vague and seemingly self-contradictory generalizations about how such a system might operate. He does not present even vaguely realistic answers to many basic questions. How might a municipality of about 50,000 people (for example, metropolitan Burlington, Vermont), over one million people (for example, metropolitan New Orleans) or over eight million people (for example, metropolitan Paris) develop a coherent municipal economic plan in a "directly-democratic" way? Would the neighborhood or municipal assembly have even vaguely the same meaning in these diverse contexts (not to mention what it might mean in third world megalopolises like Mexico City, Lagos, or Calcutta, in the villages of Asia, Africa and Latin America, or on the steppes of Mongolia)? Could delegates from hundreds or thousands of block or neighborhood assemblies come to an agreement with "rigorous instructions" from their assemblies? Bookchin's municipalism offers no answers to these questions, and as we shall see, neither does his confederalism. He is certainly right when he states that "one of our chief goals must be to radically decentralize our industrialized urban areas into humanly-scaled cities and towns" that are "ecologically sound."[16] But a social ecological politics must not only aim at such far-reaching, visionary goals but also offer effective political options for the increasing proportion of human beings who live in highly populated and quickly growing urban areas, and who face serious urban crises requiring practical responses.

Bookchin's most fundamental economic principle also poses questions that he has yet to answer. He contends that with the municipalization of the economy, the principle of "from each according to his abilities and to each according to his needs" becomes "institutionalized as part of the public sphere."[17] How, one wonders, might abilities and needs be determined according to Bookchinist economics? Should a certain amount of labor be required of each citizen, or should the amount be proportional to the nature of the labor? Should those who have more ability to contribute, or whose work fulfills more needs, be required to work more? Of course, these questions can only be answered by specific communities through actual experiments in democratic decision-making and self-organization. However, debate over these issues has a long history within ethics and political theory, and socialists, communists, anarchists and utopians (not to mention liberals such as Rawls) have all devoted much attention to them. If the theory of libertarian municipalism is to inspire the necessary experiments, municipalists must at least suggest possible answers that might convince members of their own and other communities that the theory offers a workable future, or at least they must suggest what it might mean to try to answer such questions.

Bookchin finds it quite disturbing that I could judge "problematical" his invocation of the famous slogan concerning contribution according to abilities and distribution according to needs. One can almost hear his annoyance, as he explains that "the whole point behind this great revolu-

mations. This is not the first time that Marx's incisive critique has been used in behalf of heavy-handed dogmatism.

[15] Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization*, p. 262. He hastens to cite his "calls" for diversity when he is attacked for narrowness, but he then goes on to harshly attack anyone who questions the centrality of municipalism and the sovereign assembly.

[16] *Defending the Earth : A Dialogue Between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman* : (New York : South End Press, 1991), p. 79. Bookchin says that these communities must be "artfully tailored to the carrying capacities of the ecocommunities in which they are located." Unfortunately, this not only introduces the awkward metaphor of "tailoring" something to a "capacity," but, more seriously, utilizes the theoretically questionable concept of "carrying-capacity."

[17] Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization*, p. 264.

tionary slogan is that in a communistic post-scarcity economy, abilities and needs are not, strictly speaking, 'determined' — that is, subject to bourgeois calculation," which is to be replaced with "a basic decency and humaneness."[18] Once more one is tempted to ask how Bookchin can present himself as a staunch opponent of mysticism and yet orient his thought toward a final good that is an inexpressible mystery, not to mention a logical contradiction. It is clear that many of the revolutionaries who adhered to Bookchin's beloved slogan actually believed that needs and abilities could, at least in some general way, be "determined." However, Bookchin himself believes that certain acts should be performed and certain things should be distributed "according to" that which cannot be "determined." This may be an edifying belief, but it is also an absurdity, pure idealism, and an abdication of the "rationality" that Bookchin claims to value so highly.

But even if this particular form of mysticism were the correct standpoint toward some ultimately utopian society, it would not give us much direction concerning how to get there. Can anyone really take seriously a "libertarian municipalism" that proposes a municipalization of all enterprises, after which conditions of work and distribution of products would be determined (or perhaps we should say "non-determined") by "basic decency and humaneness"? Once again, the problem of Bookchin's lack of mediations between an idealized goal and actually-existing society becomes apparent. And this is not to say that his utopian goal is itself coherent. For despite his self-proclaimed role as the defender of "Reason," he scrupulously avoids consideration of the role of rationality in utopian distribution, in this case falling back instead on mere feeling, dualistically divorced from rationality according to the demands of ideological consistency. This is, of course, his only option short of a fundamental rethinking of his position. For reason, unfortunately for Bookchin, expresses itself in determinations, as tentative and self-transforming as these determinations may be.

Bookchin presents two additional arguments for his position, both of which have appeared many times in the Bookchinian oeuvre. And both reduce essentially to an appeal to faith. First, he claims that if "'primal' peoples" could "rely on usufruct and the principle of the irreducible minimum," then his ideal society could certainly do without "contractual or arithmetical strictures."[19] But this is merely a variation on the famous "if we can put a man on the moon, then we can do X" argument. According to this popular lunar fallacy, some proposal, the feasibility of which in no way follows from a moon landing, is held to be a viable option because the latter achievement proved possible. What is true of tribal societies is that they have usually followed distinct rules of distribution and, indeed, often quite strict and complex ones based on kinship and the circulation of gifts. Whatever the content of these rules (which have often been very humane, ecological, etc.), it certainly does not follow from the fact that previous societies have successfully followed these rules that some future society can get along without rules of distribution, quantitative or otherwise.

In his second argument, Bookchin notes that neither he nor I will make decisions for any future "post-scarcity society guided by reason," but only those who will actually live in it. This statement is undeniably true (assuming neither of us ever lives in it). However, this fact lends absolutely no support to Bookchin's position, since it is quite possible that these rational utopians might look back on his analysis of such a society and find it to be unconvincing or even absurd. If he wishes merely to express his faith that in his final rational utopia people will achieve things that we

[18] Bookchin, "Comments," p. 185.
[19] Ibid.

can hardly conceive of in our present fallen state, it would be difficult to argue with his position. However, if he intends to argue that a specific form of organization is a reasonable goal for a movement for social change, then he must be willing to offer evidence for this view, rather than the merely edifying conception that "in utopia all things are possible"

A Confederacy of Bookchinists

Anarchist political thought has usually proposed that social cooperation beyond the local level should take place through voluntary federations of relatively autonomous individuals, productive enterprises or communities. While classical anarchist theorists like Proudhon and Bakunin called such a system "federalism," Bookchin calls his variation on this theme "confederalism." He describes its structure as consisting of "above all a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular fact-to-face democratic assemblies, in the various villages, towns, and even neighborhoods of large cities."[1] Under such a system, we are told, power remains entirely in the hands of the assemblies. "Policymaking is exclusively the right of popular community assemblies," while "administration and coordination are the responsibility of confederal councils."[2] Councils therefore exist only to carry out the will of the assemblies. Toward this end, "the members of these confederal councils are strictly mandated, recallable, and responsible to the assemblies that chose them for the purpose of coordinating and administering the policies formulated by the assemblies themselves."[3] Thus, while majority rule of some sort is to prevail in the assemblies, which are the exclusive policy-making bodies, the administrative councils are strictly limited to following the directives of these bodies.

However, it is not clear how this absolute division between policy-making and administration could possibly work in practice. How, for example, is administration to occur when there are disagreements on policy between assemblies? Libertarian municipalism is steadfastly against delegation by assemblies of policy-making authority, so all collective activity must presumably depend on consensus of assemblies, as expressed in the "administrative councils." If there is a majority vote on policy issues, then this would mean that policy would indeed be made a the confederal level. Bookchin is quick to attack "the tyranny of consensus" as a decision-making procedure within assemblies in which each member of the group is free to compromise for the sake of the common good. Yet, ironically, he seems obliged to depend on it for decision-making in bodies whose members are rigidly mandated to vote according to previous directions from their assemblies.

Or at least he seems to be committed to such a position until he considers what will occur when some communities do not abide by the fundamental principles or policies adopted in common. Bookchin states that "if particular communities or neighborhoods — or a minority grouping of them — choose to go their own way to a point where human rights are violated or where ecological mayhem is permitted, the majority in a local or regional confederation has every right to prevent such malfeasance through its confederal council."[4] However, this proposal blatantly contradicts his requirement that policy be made only at the assembly level. If sanctions are imposed by a majority vote of the council, this would be an obvious case of a quite important policy

[1] Bookchin, "The Meaning of Confederalism" in *Green Perspectives* 20 (1990), p. 4.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Bookchin, "Libertarian Municipalism," p. 3. Emphasis added.

being adopted above the assembly level. A very crucial, unanswered question is by what means the confederal council would exercise such a "preventive" authority (presumably Bookchin has in mind various forms of coercion). But whatever his answer might be, such action would constitute policy-making in an important area. There is clearly a broad scope for interpretation of what does or does not infringe on human rights, or what does or does not constitute an unjustifiable ecological danger. If the majority of communities acting confederally through a council acts coercively to deal with such basic issues, then certain state-like functions would emerge at the confederal level.

It appears that the only way to avoid this result is to take a purist anarchist approach, and assume that action can only be taken at any level above the assembly through fully voluntary agreements, with full rights of secession on any issue (including "mayhem"). According to such an approach, a community would have the right to withdraw from common endeavors, even for purposes that others might think unjust to humans or ecologically destructive. Of course, the other communities would still be able to take action against the allegedly offending community because of its supposed misdeeds. They would have had this ability in any case, even if the offending community had never entered into the "non-policy-making" confederal agreement. Should Bookchin choose to adopt this position, he would have to give up the concept of enforcement at the confederal level. He would then be proposing a form of confederal organization in which everything would be decided by consensus, and in which the majority of confederating communities would have no power of enforcement in any area. His position would then have the virtue of consistency, though very few would consider it a viable way of solving problems in a complex world.

There are other aspects of Bookchin's confederalism that raise questions about the practicality or even the possibility of such a system. He proposes that activities of the assemblies be coordinated through the confederal councils, whose members must be "rotatable, recallable, and, above all, rigorously instructed in written form to support or oppose any issue that appears on the agenda."[5] But could such instruction be a practical possibility in modern urban society (assuming, as Bookchin seems to, that the arrival of municipalism and confederalism are not to be delayed until after the dissolution of urban industrial society)? Perhaps Paris might be taken as an example, in honor of the Parisian "sections" of the French Revolution that Bookchin recalls so often as a model for municipal politics. Metropolitan Paris has roughly eight and one-half million people. If government were devolved into assemblies for each large neighborhood of twenty-five thousand people, there would be three-hundred and forty assemblies in the metropolitan area. If it were decentralized into much more democratic assemblies for areas of a few blocks, with about a thousand citizens each, there would then be eight-thousand five-hundred Parisian assemblies. If the city thus had hundreds or even thousands of neighborhood assemblies, and each "several" assemblies (as Bookchin suggests) would send delegates to councils, which presumably would have to form even larger confederations for truly municipal issues, could the chain of responsibility hold up? And if so, how?

When confronted with such questions, Bookchin offers no reply other than that he doesn't believe in the existence of the kind of centralized, urbanized society in which these problems arise. However, his political proposals are apparently directed at people living in precisely such a world. If municipalism is not practicable in the kind of society in which real human beings

[5] Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization*, p. 246.

happen to find themselves, then the question arises of what other political arrangements might be practicable and also move toward the goals that Bookchin embodies in municipalism. Yet his politics does not address this issue. We are left with the abstract pursuit of an ideal and an appeal to the will that it be realized. Bookchin's late work in particular expresses a defiant will that history should become what it ought to be, and a poorly-contained rage at the thought that it stubbornly seems not to be doing so. Objections that his social analysis and political proposals lack an adequate relation to actual history are usually met with ridicule and sarcasm, and seldom with reasoned argument.

Municipalizing Nature?

As Bookchin has increasingly focused on the concept of municipalist politics, the theme of ecological politics has faded increasingly further into the background of his thought. In fact, the idea of a bioregional politics has never really been developed in his version of social ecology. Yet, there are two fundamental social ecological principles that essentially define a bioregional perspective. One is the recognition of the dialectic of nature and culture, in which the larger natural world is seen as an active co-participant in the creative activities of human beings. The other is the principle of unity-in-diversity, in which the unique, determinate particularity of each part is seen as making an essential contribution to the unfolding of the developing whole. While Bookchin has done much to stress the importance of such general principles, what has been missing in his discussion of politics is a sensitivity to the details of the natural world and the quite particular ways in which it can and does shape human cultural endeavors, and a sense of inhabiting a natural whole, whether an ecosystem, a bioregion, or the entire biosphere.

If one searches Bookchin's writings carefully, one finds very little detailed discussion of ecological situatedness and bioregional particularity, despite a theoretical commitment to such values. Typically, he limits himself to statements such as that there should be a "sensitive balance between town and country"[1] and that a municipality should be "delicately attuned to the natural ecosystem in which it is located."[2] In The Ecology of Freedom he says that ecological communities should be "networked confederally through ecosystems, bioregions, and biomes," that they "must be artistically tailored to their natural surroundings," and that they "would aspire to live with, nourish, and feed upon the life-forms that indigenously belong to the ecosystems in which they are integrated."[3] These statements show concern for the relationship of a community to its ecological context, but the terms chosen to describe this relationship do not imply that bioregional realities are to be central to the culture. Furthermore, Bookchin's discussions of confederalism invariably base organization on political principles and spatial proximity. He does not devote serious attention to the possibility of finding a bioregional basis for confederations or networks of communities.

It is possible that an underlying concern that discourages Bookchin from focusing on bioregional culture (and quite strikingly, on communal traditions also) is his mistaken perception that these realities somehow threaten the freedom of the individual. A bioregional approach places very high value on human creative activity within the context of a sense of place, in the midst of a continuity of natural and cultural history. Bioregionalism is based on a kind of commitment that Bookchin steadfastly rejects; that is, a giving oneself over to the other, a choosing without "choosing to choose," a recognition of the claim of the other on the deepest levels of one's being. Bookchin describes his ideal community as "the commune that unites individuals by what

[1] Bookchin, *Remaking Society*, p. 168.

[2] Ibid., p. 195.

[3] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, p. 344.

they choose to like in each other rather than what they are obliged by blood ties to like."[4] But when one affirms one's membership in a human or natural community, one is hardly concerned with "choosing what to like and not to like" in the community (though one may certainly judge one's own human community quite harshly out of love and compassion for it). The community becomes, indeed, an extension of one's very selfhood. Individualist concepts of choice, rights, justice and interest lose their validity in this context. It seems that Bookchin does not want to take the risk of this kind of communitarian thinking, and is satisfied with the weak communitarianism of libertarian municipalism, assembly government, and civic virtue.

Sometimes Bookchin seems to touch on a bioregional perspective, but he does not carry his thinking in this area very far. He says that in an ecological society, "land would be used ecologically such that forests would grow in areas that are most suitable for arboreal flora and widely mixed food plants in areas that are most suitable for crops."[5] Culture and nature would seemingly both get their due through this simple division. Yet a major ecological problem results from the fact that, except in the case of tropical rain forests, most areas that are quite well suited for forests (or prairies, or even wetlands) can also be used in a highly-productive manner for crop production. A bioregional approach would stress heavily the importance of biological diversity and ecological integrity, and have much less enthusiasm for the further development of certain areas on grounds that they are "suitable for crops,"[6] in cases in which such development is not necessary to provide adequately for human needs.

Bookchin comes closest to an authentically bioregional approach when he explains that "localism, taken seriously, implies a sensitivity to speciality, particularity, and the uniqueness of place, indeed a sense of place or topos that involves deep respect (indeed, 'loyalty,' if I may use a term that I would like to offset against 'patriotism') to the areas in which we live and that are given to us in great part by the natural world itself."[7] These admirable general principles need, however, to be developed into a comprehensive bioregional perspective that would give them a more concrete meaning. This perspective would address such issues as the ways in which bioregional particularity can be brought back into the town or city, how it can be discovered beneath the transformed surface, and how it can be expressed in the symbols, images, art, rituals and other cultural expressions of the community. Bioregionalism gives content to the abstract concept that the creation of the ecological community is a dialectical, cooperative endeavor between human beings and the natural world. A bioregional politics expands our view of the political, by associating it more with the processes of ecologically-grounded cultural creativity and with a mutualistic, cooperative process of self-expression on the part of the human community and the larger community of nature. Libertarian municipalism tends to focus on politics as communal economic management, and political processes as policy-making and self-development through collective decision-making in assemblies. Unlike bioregionalism, it constitutes at best a rather "thin" ecological politics.

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Bookchin, *Remaking Society*, p. 195.

[6] One of the challenges of a social ecological and bioregional perspective is to overcome one-sided approaches that undialectically focus on either production for human need or limiting production for the sake of ecological sustainability. Bookchin's social ecology has tended toward the former, especially as exhibited in his dogmatic, unrealistic statements concerning population, while some versions of deep ecology have tended toward the latter, as manifested in equally uncritical, reductionist analysis of population and "carrying capacity." In the resulting "debate," population is either the root of all evil, or no problem at all.

[7] Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization*, p. 253.

Conclusion: Social Ecology or Bookchinism?

The questions raised here about libertarian municipalism in no way question the crucial importance of participatory, grassroots democracy. Rather, they affirm that importance and point toward the need for diverse, many-dimensional experiments in democratic processes, and to the fact that many of the preconditions for a free and democratic culture lie in areas beyond the scope of what is usually called "democracy." Communes, cooperatives, collectives and various other forms of organization are sometimes dismissed by Bookchin as "marginal projects" that cannot challenge the dominant system.[1] And indeed, this has often been true (though the weakness of the economic collectives in the Spanish Revolution, to mention an important counter-example, was hardly that they were marginal or non-challenging). However, it is questionable whether there is convincing evidence — or indeed any evidence at all — that such approaches have less potential for liberatory transformation than do municipal or neighborhood assemblies or other municipalist proposals. An eco-communitarianism that claims the legacy of anarchism (as a critique of domination rather than as a dogmatic ideology) will eschew any narrowly-defined programs, whether they make municipalism, self-management, cooperatives, communalism or any other approach the privileged path to social transformation. On the other hand, it will see experiments in all of these areas as valuable steps toward discovering the way to a free, ecological society.

Proposals for fundamentally restructuring society through local assemblies (and also citizens' committees) have great merit, and should be a central part of a left Green, social ecological or eco-communitarian politics. But we must consider that these reforms are unlikely to become the dominant political processes in the near future. Unfortunately, partial adoption of such proposals (in the form of virtually powerless neighborhood assemblies and "town meetings," or citizens' committees with little authority) may even serve to deflect energy or diffuse demands for more basic cultural and personal changes. On the other hand, major cultural advances can be immediately instituted through the establishment of affinity groups, "base" communities, internally-democratic movements for change, and cooperative endeavors of many kinds. Advocates of radical democracy can do no greater service to their cause than to demonstrate the value of democratic processes by embodying them in their own forms of self-organization. Without imaginative and inspiring examples of the practice of ecological, communitarian democracy by the radical democrats themselves, calls for "municipalism," "demarchy" or any other form of participatory democracy will have a hollow ring.

Bookchin has made a notable contribution to this effort in so far as his work has helped inspire many participants in ecological, communitarian, and participatory democratic projects. However, to the extent that he has increasingly reduced ecological politics to his own narrow, sectarian program of Libertarian Municipalism, he has become a divisive, debilitating force in the ecology movement, and an obstacle to the attainment of many of the ideals he has himself proclaimed.

[1] Bookchin, *Remaking Society*, p. 103.

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