

ONTOLOGY AND VALUE: THE ECOLOGY OF FREEDOM

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Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*. Palo Alto, Ca: Cheshire Books, 1982. 385 pp.

Introduction

Nature metaphors have performed an abiding, variable, and powerful role — for good and evil — in the history of human self-understanding, from pre-literate organicism and mythology through Oriental metaphysics and the nature philosophy of classical antiquity to social Darwinism, the Nazi 'blood and soil' cult, and the 'dialectics of nature' endorsed by Soviet Marxist orthodoxy. A broadly benign modern variant has been taking many faceted intellectual form under the master concept of 'ecology', and, through articulations ranging from a host of 'environmentally' concerned texts to works like Gregory Bateson's *Ecology of Mind* and Murray Bookchin's own *Toward an Ecological Society*, contributing strategic new social, political, and cultural dimensions to traditional discussions in ontology and epistemology. *The Ecology of Freedom* is Bookchin's most comprehensive and ambitious effort to discover in the ecological concept cluster the means for illuminating an epic evolutionary scenario within which emancipatory possibilities for the advancement of life may find natural support (although no guarantees) against the destructive and dangerous continuum of the domination of human by human and hence of nature by society.

Bookchin, now in his early 60s and living in New Jersey, is an impressive figure with enduring integrity at the utopian pole of North American radical thought. In the course of an actively political public life, which has taken him through a variety of oppositional formations in the roles of militant activist, anarchist theorist, or radical educator, he has become known as a brilliant orator, a formidable polemist, and a reliably compelling essayist whose contribution is distinctive, credible, and increasingly highly regarded. With respect to ecological politics, he has been a leading opponent since the 1950s of the growing use of pesticides and food additives, radioactive pollution, and the construction of nuclear reactors. He has been involved in anti-nuke alliances such as Clamshell and Shad, as well as their predecessor, Ecology Action East, whose manifesto, "The Power to Destroy, the Power to Create," he wrote in 1969. Indeed, Bookchin has served as an influential pioneer of the social ecology movement since well before the 1960s and 1970s were marked by Carson's *Silent Spring* and Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful*, Alinsky's urban activism, the engineering and design proposals of such figures as Fuller, Heronemus, Meinel, Glaser, O'Neil, Soleri, or the environmental politics of the Seabrook occupation, MUSE, Greenpeace, or Commoner's Citizen's Party.

As a historian of radical social movements and of urbanization, and as an ecological philosopher, over a generation of writing in the tradition of Aristotle, Fourier, Kropotkin, Mumford, and Goodman, in periodical publications such as *Liberation*, *Telos*, the more recent *Comment*, and the new *Harbinger*, and in his earlier books, including *Our Synthetic Environment*, *The Spanish Anarchists*, *The Limits of the City*, and the classic *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, Bookchin has staked out with admirable consistency a crucial minority position within radical discourse and ecological discussions in particular. His emphasis has always fallen on the toxic social institutions and values that underpin the ecological crisis on the planet — broadly speaking, the crisis of life. He has repeatedly advanced the thesis that ecology must mean *social* ecology, his stance resting on “the conviction that the very concept of dominating nature stems from the domination of human by human, indeed, of women by men, of the young by their elders, of one ethnic group by another, of society by the state, of the individual by bureaucracy, as well as of one economic class by another or a colonized people by a colonizing power.” In consequence, he has again and again pointed to the compelling imperative to renew humanity, and thus the relation between humanity and nature, through strategies for global social change governed by a consciously non-domineering sensibility. In *The Ecology of Freedom*, Bookchin goes further, to argue that such an emancipatory social momentum can find its ultimate grounding in nature. Here, he undertakes to present his long range project of sketching the dialectical reunification of social history and natural history. His propositions culminate, as I will summarize, in a teleological ontology which turns, without theological nuances, to nature as the basis for ethics. That Bookchin’s image of nature is credible, attractive, and helpful is demonstrated persuasively by his text. That ‘nature’ allows of such a construction is not in doubt. What may be the final epistemological status of these reflections and how provisional the objectivity they postulate, is closely tied to ongoing debates about representation to which, also, this text has something to contribute.

All of Bookchin’s well-known themes are recast and reinforced within a systematic framework in a text organized around a conceptual narrative of human history from the earliest organic consociations to the most recent social forms hollowed by bureaucracy. The thread that he tugs at unwaveringly to unravel the tapestry of human life is the thread of *hierarchy*, announced in the book’s speculatively optimistic subtitle: “The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy.” In following this thread, Bookchin is able to formulate propositions that aim for universal reference and call for some response equal to the challenge. He aims to encompass far more than mere environmental engineering (e.g. ‘limits to growth’, ‘alternative’ power sources), merely quantitative futuristic extrapolation (e.g. Toffler, Kahn, Erlich, Fuller), as well as other radical critiques of social life that are less thoroughgoing than his (e.g. Marxism, psychoanalysis). His intellectual strategy is also oriented self-consciously on a different path from the ones taken by libertarian skeptical currents or contemporary endeavours to reconstruct the human project on

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strictly subjectivist foundations. In taking account of the accelerating tempo of destruction that is engulfing physical, social, and psychic life, Bookchin is unashamed about highlighting the utopian imperative of a radical ecological reconstruction — down to the level of the molecular relationships in society — on the principles of natural ecology: diversity, complementarity, spontaneity.

He argues that this will involve the restoration of human scale, the renewal of community and a self-governing civil self, and the persistent striving for face-to-face democracy, liberatory technologies, and non-hierarchical values and institutions. It is the worthy intention of the text to stimulate the imaginative development and interchange of utopian views in public dialogue in order to evoke the details of reconstruction. In his own words: "utopian thinking today requires no apologies. Rarely has it been so crucial to stir the imagination into creating radically new alternatives to every aspect of daily life. . . . Utopian *dialogue* in all its existentiality must infuse the abstractions of social theory.

The Order of Domination

Even Bookchin's earlier work barely prepares the reader for the rich and lucid exploration of the conspicuous features in the development of our world that *The Ecology of Freedom* offers. In brief, the book anatomizes the "curse of domination" that, since its inception long before the rise of economic classes, has profoundly infused virtually every human achievement in rationality, institution, technique, science, ideology, and art. Bookchin refuses the mystifying explanations that place the blame on 'reason', 'technology', or the pressures of a 'stingy' nature, analysing, instead, the sinister institution of subjugation consequent on the emergence of elites, and the correlative psychological self-abnegation that comes with the social conflict and repression that accompany the rise of hierarchy.

The text analyses the imposition of rule, acquisitive impulses, property rights, contracts, and the rule of equivalence on a recalcitrant archaic world. It reviews the stupendous mobilization of materials, wealth, human intellect, and human labour over the centuries for the goal of domination, with the result that in our own time domination has spread over the social landscape to a point where it seems out of control and where it has penetrated our basic socialization processes and our most intimate experiences. Freedom is betrayed "by our treatment of children and women, by our physical stance and most personal relationships, by our private thoughts and daily lives, by our unconscious ways of ordering our experiences of reality. The betrayal occurs not only in our political and economic institutions but in our bedrooms, kitchens, schools, recreation areas, and centers of moral education such as our churches and psychotherapeutic 'conventicles'. Hierarchy and domination preside over our self-appointed movements for human emancipation..."

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The Legacy of Freedom

What most sharply distinguishes Bookchin's work, however, from that of prophetic dystopian critics of human life — for example, Jerome Deshusses in his impressive *The Eighth Night of Creation* — is his commitment to rescuing "the legacy of freedom that the legacy of domination has sought to extirpate from the memory of humanity." What relieves the grim account of the rise of hierarchy is the account of the enduring features of a subterranean libertarian realm. Ranging from the earliest archaic customs, through the Gnostic heresies and radical moments in Christian intellectual history, to the modern secular traditions of resistance and freedom, Bookchin's text takes note of the technics, forms of association, religious beliefs, conventicles, and institutions of this realm of freedom. He finds "residual areas of freedom in communities where the word simply does not exist, in loyalties that are freely given without expectations of recompense, in systems of distribution that know no rules of exchange, and in interpersonal relations that are completely devoid of domination."

In effect, Bookchin articulates this 'legacy of freedom' at five levels. First, the history of ideas and ideals. Thus from the early 'Land of Cockayne' story of a bountiful nature through medieval chiliasm to the hedonism of Rabelais and Fourier, Bookchin embraces the libertarian utopian imagination and endorses its fundamental commitment to fecundity, sensuousness, and the principle of pleasure. He writes, for example: "The greatness of the Dadaist tradition, from its ancient roots in the gnostic Ophites to its modern expression in Surrealism — a celebration of the right to indiscipline, imagination, play, fancy, innovation, iconoclasm, pleasure, and a creativity of the unconscious — is that it criticizes this 'hidden' realm of hierarchy..." Correspondingly, at a second level, he embraces the social instances of libertarian resistance and struggle, for example, popular movements in the medieval world like the Crusade of the Shepherds (13th C.), the Taborites of Bohemia (15th C.), the Diggers (17th C.), the sweeping popular revolutionary movements from the time of the Reformation to the Paris Communards (19th C.), and the counter-cultural radicals of the 1960s.

The question remains of how to account for the persistence of these empirical instances of the striving for freedom and whether there are grounds to believe that they resurface again and again not only as ad hoc responses to the pressures of domination but that their reproduction and endurance is nourished from deep roots. Bookchin's answer is to offer interpretations of three deeper layers in the legacy of freedom: the historical heritage of freedom with its basic social programme embedded in the customary relations of the earliest pre-literate organic societies; early socialization through mother-love; and finally, as the grand source of the freedom strivings of human subjectivity, the dynamic evolutionary subjectivity of nature *per se*.

Bookchin's analysis endeavours to move through "the layered membranes of freedom," from its outward surface manifested in struggles for justice (what

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Bookchin calls "the inequality of equals", a mutilated form of quantitative balancing belonging to hierarchical societies, built around the quasi-radical and quasi-mystifying principle of equal treatment of people with unequal situations), through various economic layers of equivalence, finally to "its core as a caring personal sensibility, a supportive domestic life, and its own rule of the equality of unequals" (this last, a form of qualitative sharing, being Bookchin's term for a reconciliatory, compensatory social logic, still echoed in Marx's "to each according to his need", which offers to equalize by compensation for inescapable inequalities in attributes, skills, powers, etc.).

The Outlook of Organic Societies — Updated

In criticizing modern societies built on property and bureaucratic power, it is not surprising that Bookchin's strategic sense would be to stress the links between freedom and community, and that his attention would turn to the other great model of human association, the model of the family. Indeed, he finds in the outlook of pre-hierarchical organic societies, of the primal communities based on blood-ties, fundamental principles of human life that he urges us to recover. His review of anthropological data concerning the habits and values of early hunting and foraging groups and of communities like the Hopi, Wintu, Ithalmiut and others — which "might well be called *organic societies* because of their intense solidarity internally and with the natural world" — uncovers as their most prominent operative features the practice of usufruct, the guarantee of an irreducible minimum, and complementarity.

'Complementarity' works as the fundamental social articulation in the absence of coercive and domineering values: people, things, and relations are not hierarchized into 'superior' and 'inferior' groupings but appreciated for their dissimilarities, variety and differences being valued as priceless ingredients of communal unity, entailing equality and respect for all individuals (irrespective of age, sex, or attributes) as a byproduct of the democratic structure of the culture itself and not as a calculating principle to be applied. Sharing follows as a matter of group solidarity and offers inalienable access to the 'irreducible minimum' of food, shelter, and clothing to every individual in the community, simply by virtue of belonging to the community, irrespective of the amount of work contributed by the individual to the acquisition of the means of life.

Finally, the practice of 'usufruct' comprises the freedom of individuals in a community to appropriate resources merely by virtue of the fact that they are using them, thus placing unconscious emphasis on use and need that are "free of psychological entanglements with proprietorship, work, and even reciprocity". Thus, Bookchin argues, usufruct differs qualitatively from the subsequently arising quid pro quo of reciprocity, exchange, mutual aid, and the world of contracts, all of which, with their 'just' ratios and 'honest' balance sheets, taint consociation by the rationality of arithmetic and degrade the human spirit to a quantitative world of 'fair dealings' between calculating egos

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whose ideology of interest barely conceals a mean-spirited proclivity for acquisition.

Bookchin's argument is that there was a period in humanity's early development marked by the disinterested willingness to pool needed things and needed services and by an unthinking sense of responsibility and cooperation that both prized individual uniqueness and fostered the unity of consociation. His point is that "we should not disdain these almost utopian glimpses of humanity's potentialities, with their unsullied qualities for giving and collectivity... Rarely is history notable for its capacity to select and preserve the most virtuous traits of humanity. But there is still no reason why hope, reinforced by consciousness and redolent with ancestral memories, may not linger within us of what humanity has been in the past and what it can become in the future."

Bookchin makes two further arguments on this score. First, that these features in the heritage of freedom have never entirely died out but faded and mutated within the subterranean libertarian realm that remains active, if always under threat, within the order of domination. And secondly, that the appropriate response to the dangers arising from the insane irrationalities of our world is to recover not only the best features of organic societies, but to recover those features as mediated by the benefits of the intervening era of civilization/domination. This is not the same as saying that civilization/domination was a necessary evil for a greater future good (Marxism), but rather that the passage beyond the parochial boundaries of blood kinship offers creative opportunities in spite of the dark side of history. An ecological society would not only be based on usufruct, complementarity, and the irreducible minimum, but would also recognize the existence of a universal humanity and the claims of individuality. It would embrace the 'stranger' and exogenous cultures, and, beyond tribal society's respect for the person and for uniqueness of behaviour and character structure within a group context, would embrace the individual's autonomy to act in accordance with his or her sovereign judgment of 'freedom of will', that is, to select or formulate personal needs, to choose or create the constituents of choice, to function as a competent, hence rational, self-determined, self-active, self-governing being.

Indeed, irreversibly, civilization has rendered customary and unconsciously practised ancient values ideational and conceptual, with particularly enormous potentialities latent in the formation of ethical standards for a shared *humanitas*, a human community, and in the placement of emphasis on volition as a formative element in social life and culture, especially to the extent that the will has been identified with personal freedom. "A free-flowing realm of ethics, as distinguished from a world of hardened customs (however admirable these may be), is a *creative* realm in which the growth of mind and spirit is possible on a scale that has no precedent in the world of traditional mores. Ethics, values, and with them, social relationships, technics, and self-cultivation can now become self-forming, guided by intellect, sympathy, and love."

If civilization has usually betrayed its promise of ideational and personal

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self-creativity, if both collective ethics and individual volition have found expression in domination, if both community and individual autonomy are declining through a fetishization and bureaucratization of needs that reduces freedom to the level of normalized custom, nevertheless the reality of these potentialities and the many achievements in which they were actualized is not altered. Bookchin looks to the tradition of artistic creativity as a permanent model of the right to imagine life as an art rather than as a conflict. He writes: "In contrast to the parochial world of the kin group and its fixity in custom, 'civilization' has given us the wider world of the social group and its flexibility in ratiocination. Today, the real issue posed by this historic transcendence is no longer a question of reason, power, and *techné* as such, but the function of imagination in giving us direction, hope, and a sense of place in nature and society."

"Second Nature" and "Third Nature"

But again, what can support the imagination of freedom against the massive power of domination? Bookchin turns for a ray of hope to the mother-infant relationship, to the *initial* step in the socialization process, and to its monumental (if now declining or altering) role in shaping human thought processes and sensibilities. In an analysis which (like his analysis of organic societies) some will see as one-sided and marked by elements of sentimentalism — even though his purpose is to urge that hopeful features abstracted from the concrete history of human life need to be self-consciously nurtured to pre-eminence for the growth and enhancement of future life — Bookchin represents the early mother-infant relationship, the point at which biology and socialization are conjoined, as the cradle in which the need for consociation is created and the most fundamental canons of reason are formed.

A human 'second nature' is structured around nurture, support, concern, love, and a deobjectified world of experience within the maternal, domestic universe, rather than a world guided by domination, self-interest, and exploitation. Indeed, to accommodate humanity to war and obedience involves the undoing not only of human 'first nature' as an animal but also of this human 'second nature' as an infant. Thus it is possible and necessary to lament that "the story of reason in the history of 'civilization' is not an account of the sophistication of this germinal rationality along libertarian lines; it is a vast political and psychological enterprise to brutally extirpate this rationality in the interest of domination, to supplant it by the 'third nature' of authority and rule."

As always, Bookchin's analysis here is also a call to action. He notes that 'modernity' may well "demarcate an era in which the cradle of reason has finally been demolished." But also that: "As barbarous as its most warlike, cruel, exploitive, and authoritarian periods have been, humanity has soared to radiant heights in its great periods of social reconstruction, thought, and art — despite the burdens of domination and egotism. Once these burdens are removed, we have every reason to hope for a degree of personal and social enlightenment for

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which there are no historical precedents. Through the mother-infant relationship, we regularly plant the seeds of a human nature that can be oriented toward selfless endearment, interdependence, and care. These are not trite words to describe the womb of human renewal, generation after generation, and the love each child receives in virtually every society. They become clichés only when we ignore the possibility that separation can yield an aggressive egotism and sense of rivalry, when material insecurity produces fear toward nature and humanity, and when we 'mature' by following the pathways of hierarchical and class societies."

Nature and Society: Evolution and History

We must, urges the author, try to create a new culture, not merely another movement that attempts to remove the symptoms of our crises without affecting the sources. We must create a new culture around the most hopeful and free aspects of our total history. But our total history involves natural history, indeed, conversely, natural history as evolution includes social history — or, put differently, the dialectical and hermeneutical circle of the story of life must be made comprehensive by rejoining nature and society. It is in this prospect that Bookchin now finds the deepest elemental motivation for the project of freedom and for the self-conscious direction and integrative meaning of an ecological society. Considering our experience with the power exercised by reactionary and oppressive traditions of theologically tainted naturalism, it is here that his deliberate departures from the conventional wisdoms and strategic directions of radical social criticism are likely to prove most risky and controversial; but it is also here that they appear most daring, most ambitious, and perhaps most fruitful.

1. *Commonality.* In short, Bookchin starts with the proposition that "the concept of an ecological society must begin from a sense of assurance that society and nature are not inherently antithetical." We need to see the commonality of society with nature, as a 'niche' in a given bioregion and ecosystem. We do not need to extol the very failings of civilization, the domineering and exploitive relationships to nature and human beings, which are falsely represented as intrinsic social attributes, as evidence of the disembeddedness of society from nature (e.g. Marx).

Humanity is a manifestation of nature, however unique and destructive, and it is not the case that human 'interference' in the natural world need necessarily be seen in a pejorative light, as 'unnatural'. When human society cultivates food, pastures animals, removes trees and plants, that is, 'tampers' with an ecosystem, these seeming acts of 'defilement' may enhance nature's fecundity rather than diminish it. "To render nature more fecund, varied, whole, and integrated may well constitute the hidden desiderata of natural evolution. That human beings become rational agents in this all-expansive natural trend... is no more an intrinsic defilement of nature than the fact that deer limit forest growth and preserve grasslands by feeding on the bark of saplings."

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In other words, humanity's well being, even survival, may depend on consciously abetting the thrust of natural evolution toward a more diversified, varied, and fecund biosphere. It is clear in the context that this is not meant to justify the reduction of nature to a mere object of human manipulation as a 'something' that merely exists 'for us'. In fact, Bookchin suggests, it may be the task of ecological ethics to discriminate which of our actions serve and which hinder the thrust of natural evolution whenever humanity, a unique product of that evolution, "brings its powers of reasoning, its creative fingers, its high degree of conscious consociation — all qualitative developments of natural history — to nature.

2. *From Biology to Culture.* Secondly, Bookchin stresses that natural evolution phases into social evolution in that we are heirs to a strong natural thrust toward association. Owing to our prolonged dependency as children and the plasticity of mind that this long period of growth provides, we are destined to live together as a species, to care for our own kind, to collaborate, whether in village or town, *polis* or city, commune or megalopolis. Indeed, the kinship tie or blood oath is a more strictly biological basis for association than any form we know. Yet the *strictly* biological, parochial and restrictive as it is, may not be more 'natural' than the human social attributes produced by natural evolution. "Our very concept of nature may be more fully expressed by the way in which biological facts are *integrated structurally* to give rise to more complex and subtle forms of natural reality."

On this account, if human nature is part of nature, the associations that rest on universal human loyalties, nourished by our modern commitment to a universal *humanitas* beyond the blood tie, "may well be expressions of a richer, more variegated nature than we hitherto have been prepared to acknowledge." In other words, conscious cultural affinity on the basis of tastes, cultivated similarities, emotional compatibilities, sexual preferences, and intellectual interests, can be regarded as a more creative and no less natural basis for association than the unthinking demands of kin loyalties and tribal forms, with the result that "it is not 'retribalization' that an ecological society is likely to seek but rather recomunalization with its wealth of creative libertarian traits." Society might take the form of a Commune composed of many small communes, containing the best features of the Greek *polis* without its fatal ethnic parochialism and political exclusivity, networked confederally through ecosystems and bioregions, artistically tailored to their surroundings, and aspiring "to live with, nourish, and feed upon the life-forms that indigenously belong to the ecosystems in which they are integrated."

3. *The Natural Ground of Libertarian Ethics.* Thirdly, in order to find general coordinates by which to take our social bearings, Bookchin offers to illuminate the human enterprise by way of the distinction between 'libertarian' and 'authoritarian', the latter referring to all the social and psychic forms of hierarchy and domination, the former guided by his description of the ecosystem: "the image of unity in

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diversity, spontaneity, and complementary relationships, free of all hierarchy and domination." What he considers decisive for a new rationality, for shaping a new approach to subjectivity, is to raise "a biotically variegated ethical standard based on the fecundity of life, on the virtue of complementarity, on the logical image of an ever-richer mosaic of experience..." And he proposes that a libertarian ethics can be grounded objectively — beyond the vagaries of opinion, taste, or instrumental effectiveness, and also apart from 'inexorable dialectical laws' — on an "intentionality latent in nature, a graded development of self-organization that yields subjectivity and, finally, self-reflexivity in its highly developed human form." The argument opens out to a full philosophy of nature with emphasis on the purposive structure and behaviour of organism and the inwardness of substance. Life can be known only by life, and as a result of life; that is, life "can never, by its very nature, be dissociated from its potentiality for knowingness..."

Bookchin's arguments need to be read in their complete form, then debated and expanded. But the net effect is to dissociate from Bertrand Russell's image of life and consciousness as the meaningless product of mere accident, and to place the properties of inorganic matter and of organic life into some kind of unified context. Based on a variety of scientific and philosophical reflections touching on molecular self-organization and mutation toward complexity, Bookchin here makes every effort to consolidate his understanding of nature as active rather than passive. He writes: "The prospect that life and all its attributes are *latent* in substance as such, that biological evolution is rooted deeply in symbiosis or mutualism, indicates how important it is to reconceptualize our notion of 'matter' as *active* substance."

Indeed, on this account, the self-organization of substance into ever-more complex forms, its ever-striving, creative *development*, provides a picture of unceasing growth and evolution as the epic drama of the universe, an evolution that is entropy-reducing and charges the universe with meaning, even ethical meaning. Moreover, there is no suggestion here whatever of a supernatural deity to be invoked *ex machina* to introduce design exogenously into the universe. Bookchin writes:

Hence our study of nature — all archaic philosophies and epistemological biases aside — exhibits a self-evolving patterning, a 'grain,' so to speak, that is implicitly ethical. Mutualism, freedom, and subjectivity are not strictly human values or concerns. They appear, however germinally, in larger cosmic and organic processes that require no Aristotelian God to motivate them, no Hegelian Spirit to vitalize them. If social ecology provides little more than a coherent focus to the unity of mutualism, freedom, and subjectivity as aspects of a cooperative society that is free of domination and guided by reflection and reason, it will remove the taints that blemished a naturalistic ethics from its inception; it will provide both

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humanity and nature with a common ethical voice. No longer would we have need of a Cartesian — and more recently, a neo-Kantian — dualism that leaves nature mute and mind isolated from the larger world of phenomena around it. To vitiate community, to arrest the spontaneity that lies at the core of a self-organizing reality toward ever-greater complexity and rationality, to abridge freedom — these actions would cut across the grain of nature, deny our heritage in its evolutionary processes, and dissolve our legitimacy and function in the world of life. No less than this ethically rooted legitimation would be at stake — all its grim ecological consequences aside — if we fail to achieve an ecological society and articulate an ecological ethics.

Mutualism, self-organization, freedom, and subjectivity, cohered by social ecology's principles of unity in diversity, spontaneity, and non-hierarchical relationships, are thus ends in themselves. Aside from the ecological responsibilities they confer on our species as the self-reflexive voice of nature, they literally define us. Nature does not 'exist' for us to use; it simply legitimates us and our uniqueness ecologically. Like the concept of 'being', these principles of social ecology require no explanation, merely verification. They are the elements of an ethical *ontology*.

Conclusion: Ontology and Value

Hans Jonas noted in the Epilogue to *The Phenomenology of Life* that ontology as the ground of ethics was the original tenet of philosophy, before the 'objective' and 'subjective' realms were divorced. If their reunion was to be effected, it had to be from the 'objective' end, through a revision of the idea of nature. This is the project that animates Bookchin's reflections, to found an ethics, no longer foundable on divine authority, on a principle discoverable in the nature of things, in the immanent direction of natural evolution, and thus to avoid the relativism that plagues the modern temper. At the same time, he argues for a loose conception of teleology, and open-ended relationship between potentiality and actualization, as the frame for representing human subjectivity in continuity with nature but free to play a role as the creative, self-governing heir of evolution's thrust toward mind.

On this speculative account — whose scope of parameters, polemical edge, and totalizing reach for coherence will not be readily embraced universally but whose sense of urgency communicates to set in sharp relief the issues and values at stake — our options are to continue on a moribund, counter-evolutionary path, destroy life on the planet, and leave our Earth "a dead witness to cosmic failure." Or else, to recover nature in history and restore

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history to evolution, create a new world and sensibility based on self-reflexivity and an ecological ethics, and thus "reclaim our legitimacy as the fullness of mind in the natural world — as the rationality that abets natural diversity and integrates the workings of nature with an effectiveness, certainty and directedness that is essentially incomplete in nonhuman nature."

There remain, inevitably, many problem clusters open to discussion and dispute, among others: the evaluation of past, present, and future forms of reason and sensibility, forms of association and politics, forms of communication, science, technics, ethics, and aesthetics as to their 'libertarian' and 'authoritarian' dimensions; the composite features of the earliest forms of human consociation; ontogenesis and early socialization; the relationship between morality and politics; the emergence of will as a dimension of subjectivity, and its articulations and representations; the relationship between ethical and aesthetic value, the assignment of a quasi-hegemonic role to ethics, the question of value abundance and value hierarchy generally, and the scope of imagination; the representation of natural value as displaying the warm current of an ethical tropism; the nature, place, and implications of teleology; and the epistemological mediations of ontological propositions.

Most broadly, the haunting problem is that the questions of value and interpretation at the level of human history — at a more complex, subtle, *ambivalent*, and *problematical* level than non-human nature — are not likely to be resolved by either ontologizing or ethicizing the *structural integration* of non-human nature. More specifically, there remain questions as to how the prominent features of nature and their social analogues — symbiosis and predation, cooperation and conflict — are to be highlighted and interpreted, for ontology and for ethics. One line of inquiry would lead us to ask whether nature might not lend itself more readily to a Manichean ontology or some other variant of Gnostic dualism than to a mutualist ecological monism? On what authority are we entitled to believe that the dark side of the force is intrinsically dissolvable (even allowing for the occasional empirical "cosmic failure") into some Hegelianized or naturalized version of Augustine's *Omnia cooperant in bonum, etiam peccata* ('All things, even sin, work together for good')? Or why would the fact that life is in principle entropy-reducing guarantee suspension of the second law of thermodynamics which proposes entropy for the universe, the eventual loss of universal coherence? Again, put differently, why would the seemingly perpetual opposition between entropic and counter-entropic forces, in human society as in nature, not provide greater support for a dualist metaphysics than for Bookchin's monistic preferences? What guarantees that the pre-eminence of Good is inscribed in the nature of things?

To pursue this ontological speculation further might be to review the ethical closure of ontology that is implied at one level of Bookchin's argumentation. It would seem, recasting somewhat his own account of the thrust of natural evolution, that the action of the counter-entropic force of life in regions of the universe can be read as the creation of value in the course of the self-organization of evolutionary substance. The dynamic principles of complexity,

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diversity, spontaneity, and complementarity add up to an operative guidance system for the generation of value abundance. Such value creation proceeds into human history, but the strategic question would seem to concern what we are to make of the realm of *ambivalence* (indeed, polyvalence) that appears to arise in natural evolution with the emergence of self-conscious human life? And closely linked, the consequent question: when and in what ways (under what conditions) does ambivalence — the imprint of alternativity and human choosing (in short, freedom) on natural ontology — become *problematical* (entropic) and tendentially destructive of value (hypothetically, by homogenization, dispersion, inhibition, extermination, or some other mode of reduction and dissolution)?

Interpretive problems of course abound. Is human predation an ambivalent social analogue of ecological predation among animals or the problematical, entropic distortion of cooperative possibilities? Is the strongly matricentric bias of Bookchin's warm hermeneutic, undoubtedly important corrective as it is, on its own an ecologically sound basis for human life? Are the ambivalent dimensions of individuation characteristic features of a new stage of complexity or problematical, entropic offshoots of aberrant hierarchy? In general, how can we best apprehend the ontological topology of the relations between the ambivalent (polyvalent) and the problematical (entropic)? Finally, if "harmony" is a helpful teleological aspiration, how can it be theorized and fleshed out to be of counter-entropic use in attacking the problematical destruction of value without entropically undermining the ambivalent creation of value?

In brief, precisely because value, in an evolutionary frame, is expansionary and not only regulative, the ethical question does not exhaust the value question at the ontological levels. The emergence of value in the human sphere comprehends the broad range of existential and structural dimensions that make up human history, including all its rich buzz and sparkle. It seems desirable to incorporate an ecumenical dimension into our social-ontological speculation to support an attraction that many of us will feed for a somewhat more positive evaluation of civilization than Bookchin is inclined to offer. I suspect that a more ecumenical embrace of the structural-institutional-technological-existential evolution of complexity that human civilization comprises goes, in any case, with the grain of the *evolutionary/ontological* arguments, and can be understood to do so while providing us with cognitive, affective, volitional, and practical grounds for all the more relentlessly confronting the problematical, value-destructive, *ethical* atrocities that curse and haunt human history with the spectre of entropy.

I do not wish to suggest, by raising some abiding analytical and speculative problems of ontology-construction and value theory, that Bookchin is mistaken either in articulating an ontology *per se*, or in proposing that an ethics is derivable therefrom, or even in claiming that such an ethics can validly be articulated as a libertarian, life-enhancing, counter-entropic ethics. On the contrary, the ontological scope of his concerns, and his particular ethical principles, can take us a long way toward placing our world on a better footing.

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Indeed, to say, as he does, that the natural thrust of the evolution of life is counter-entropic, is in the end to offer a valid account of the emergence of the human and of human subjectivity in our region of the universe. To urge that this unique level of natural subjectivity, the human, be self-optimizing and reflectively oriented to enhancing the counter-entropic forces in this region is to urge a cosmic evolutionary ethic (by way of the social-historical-cultural) that is right and sane, responsible to the universe, favourable to the survival and life interests of the human race, and authentically grounded in the potentialities and actualizations of nature. If we are compelled to note, nevertheless, that the concrete questions of valuation, symbolization, and objectivation are not thereby resolved, we are merely taking note of the ambivalent constituents in the self-organization of a gradient of life evolved to a point of relative indeterminacy in programming where the daily drama of life is not decisively informed by non-human natural analogues, and where the ambivalent and the problematical need to be recognized and distinguished.

Ultimately, and here lies both the classicism and the contemporary strategic merit of Bookchin's approach, he is looking for a self-definition of mankind in order to (re)orient the human project. Definition, on his method, emerges only from the total history (both natural and social). Hence he turns, especially under the pressure of society's war on nature and nature's incipient revenge, to the big picture that situates our predicament within a broad evolutionary frame. And since this history is neither completely known nor completed — indeed, seems to be at a decisive cusp, a point of choosing — he develops a processual form of definition that can span a broad continuum of life and frame a processual ontology that is not intrinsically bound to any essentialism of origins, manifestations, or ends. In value terms, the stress falls on abundance, difference, complexity. And the growth of life. It needs to be said that for a potential community of embodied minds who have been denied a dynamic communal and personalizing transformational logic by both the reductiveness of the Marxist labour theory of value and the strict culturalism and ultra-Kantianism of the structuralist and post-structuralist allegories, Bookchin offers pathways to renewed self-awareness and renewed praxis.

Even to have raised an agenda as complex and significant as the abbreviated list above of issues outstanding suggests, and, much more, to have offered carefully supported and clearly argued perspectives within such a broad range of strategic parameters, testifies to the courage, dedication, and intelligence of the author. Bookchin's text provides so many insights and practical challenges that, in addition to its educational role in a broadly conceived and indeterminate public realm, it can properly prove to be directly relevant to the concerns of a large sector in the oppositional community, including many engaged in ecological, feminist, peace, cultural, anarchist, or socialist politics, and especially the incipient Green politics currently taking organizational and philosophical shape in Germany, Canada, and elsewhere. *The Ecology of Freedom* can serve as an extraordinary stimulus to imaginative social dialogue and it deserves a reception which ungrudgingly accords it that function.

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