




ARTICLE

Murray Bookchin and the Postwar Environmental Moment: The Early Bookchin and the Politicization of Ecology, 1948–1964

Maximilian Fenner 

Christ's College, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK
Email: mf718@cam.ac.uk

(Received 16 February 2023; revised 17 April 2024; accepted 20 May 2024)

Murray Bookchin (1921–2006) is best known today for pioneering a novel synthesis between social anarchism and ecology in the 1960s. Both his writing and his activism had a substantial impact on the young New Left and the radical ecology movement, and were in polemic dialogue with radical environmentalists, anarcho-primitivists, and deep ecologists. This article explores the development of Bookchin's early political thought within the framework of a "postwar environmental moment" and uncovers how he uniquely politicized ecological science in the 1950s. I argue that Bookchin's early writings were a critical response to both the dire environmental issues of his time and the limitations he perceived in Old Left politics. Furthermore, I demonstrate that Bookchin's understanding of ecological science was not simply a product of a turn to anarchism, but was directly linked to debates among 1950s ecologists, typically overlooked in the recent scholarship on Bookchin.

Introduction

Murray Bookchin (1921–2006) is best known today for pioneering a novel synthesis between social anarchism and ecology in the 1960s. Both his writing and his activism had a substantial impact on the young New Left and the radical ecology movement, and were in polemic dialogue with radical environmentalists, anarcho-primitivists, and deep ecologists.¹ While Bookchin has been credited, along with George Woodcock, Colin Ward, and Noam Chomsky, for revitalizing the anarchist tradition in the US and Britain in the twentieth century,² he has largely fallen off the radar for intellectual

¹Brian Morris, *Pioneers of Ecological Humanism: Mumford, Dubos and Bookchin* (Montreal, 2017); Andy Price, *Recovering Bookchin: Social Ecology and the Crises of Our Time* (Norway, 2012); Damian F. White, *Bookchin: A Critical Appraisal* (London, 2008); Keith Woodhouse, *The Ecocentrists* (New York, 2018).

²Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible* (New York, 1993); Benjamin J. Pauli, "The New Anarchism in Britain and the US: Towards a Richer Understanding of Post-war Anarchist Thought," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 20/2 (2015), 134–55; Sophie Scott-Brown, "Inventing Ordinary Anarchy in Cold War Britain," *Modern Intellectual History* 20/4 (2023), 1251–72.

and environmental historians. Partly, this has to do with an anachronistic assumption that Bookchin's views on ecology are fully indebted to Peter Kropotkin, including his early work in the 1950s. This article explores Bookchin's treatment of food adulteration, ecological science, and environmentalism *before* he read Kropotkin in the 1960s in order to add more nuance in understanding his early thought and context.

Historians and political theorists tend to focus on an "environmental moment" in the late 1960s, especially between Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and the *Torrey Canyon* oil spill (1967), or on the globalization of environmental action in the 1970s.³ Some scholars have begun to challenge this origin story by historicizing these debates in a longer history of environmentalism.⁴ A closer look at Bookchin further affirms recent scholarship on how the elite scientific question of "man's place in the environment" moved to a broader public discussion on food politics and consumer health.⁵ The spread of a "new" language of ecology with ecosystem niches, populations, the biosphere, the biome, metabolism, and so on cannot simply be subsumed underneath a single discourse.⁶ Seeking to navigate a political response to the threat of "mass poisoning," while steering a path between conservationist, Malthusian, and marketplace environmentalism, studying Bookchin unlocks a missing context of politicized ecology on the left. Bookchin's early work sheds light on how ecological ideas were used in a unique way, namely to address the need for a new revolutionary strategy that could more adequately theorize ecological breakdown and make it politically salient.

Yet the development of Bookchin's thought before anarchism—that is, leading up to his 1964 essay "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought"⁷—has largely been overlooked by subsequent commentators, who have deemed his earlier work peripheral to understanding his mature social thought. This article aims to correct this oversight by highlighting the significance of Bookchin's writing on scientific authority, soil chemistry, and nutrition to further a better understanding both of this episode in postwar politics and of Bookchin's mature theory of social ecology. By placing his early writings in this context, I demonstrate that Bookchin's politicization of ecology was intricately linked to thinkers and discussions with which he is not usually associated. For instance, he drew on the British ecologist Charles Elton, the British anarchist writer and horticulturist Edward Hyams, the American zoologist Ralph Buchsbaum, Francis E. Ray, and the American biochemist Clive McCay.

Bookchin's early understanding of climate change and his embryonic engagement with ecological science are never far from the discussion of the postwar environmental

³See D. Stradling, *The Environmental Moment: 1968–1972* (Seattle, 2012).

⁴Chad Montrie, *The Myth of Silent Spring* (Oakland, 2018); Pierre Charbonnier, *Affluence and Freedom: An Environmental History of Political Ideas*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge, 2021); Katrina Forrester and Sophie Smith, eds., *Nature, Action and the Future: Political Thought and the Environment* (Cambridge, 2018); Duncan Kelly, *Politics and the Anthropocene* (Cambridge, 2019).

⁵Paul Warde, Libby Robin, and Sverker Sörlin, *The Environment: A History of an Idea* (Baltimore, 2018); Andrew Case, *The Organic Profit* (Seattle, 2018); Thomas Jundt, *Greening the Red, White, and Blue: The Bomb, Big Business, and Consumer Resistance in Postwar America* (Oxford, 2014).

⁶Robert P. McIntosh, *The Background of Ecology: Concept and Theory* (Cambridge, 1985); John Bellamy Foster, *The Return of Nature* (New York, 2020).

⁷Murray Bookchin, "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought (1964)," *Anarchy* 6/11 (1965), 321–40. In Murray Bookchin Papers, Tamiment Library, New York University; hereafter MBPTL.

crisis.⁸ What goes missing, however, is a study of how the questions that Bookchin posed, as well as the answers he provided, in this environmental moment were qualitatively different from those of more canonical figures in environmental intellectual history. In what follows, I first reconstruct Bookchin's ideological context, outlining his interventions as part of the *postwar environmental moment* between 1948 and 1964. Drawing on a wide range of archival and source material, I focus on how Bookchin held on to the Old Left's commitment to revolutionary politics but transformed it to fit with the new demands of environmental crisis. The next section focuses on his *politicization* of ecology, uncovering his sources and how he expanded the meaning of three central ecological concepts: completeness, balance, and diversity. Instead of proposing an economic theory of capitalism's limits or advocating for a managerial politics of regionalism in response to environmental change, Bookchin interpreted the "new" ecology as having direct political implications. Here, I focus on how Bookchin leveraged the work of several prominent ecologists. In a third section, I argue that this reading of the relationship between Bookchin's early intellectual development and the way he politicized ecology helps refine our understanding of Bookchin's later work, as well as recover another discourse that "puts the intellectual back in environmental history."⁹ I conclude with the suggestion of placing him within the much larger picture of how science, politics, and nature were connected in postwar environmentalism.

Bookchin's ideological context and the postwar environmental moment

In December 1951, a thirty-year-old Murray Bookchin finished writing an article responding to the first round of hearings from the House Select Committee to Investigate the Use of Chemicals in Foods and Cosmetics (the Delaney committee). Months before, Bookchin had married Beatrice Appelstein, a mathematical engineer, whom he had met at a City College student meeting a few years prior. When Bea, who worked as an engineer and technician at Bell Laboratories in New York City, stumbled upon an article about the hearings in a science magazine laid out in one of the employee lounges at 463 West Street, the couple sent off for a copy of the transcripts. The issue of what exactly the Delaney committee was up to, how scientists would talk about the environmental threat that the couple thought was caused by capitalism, and what kind of response could be expected from the government was indeed an auspicious angle in this moment. It also fit neatly with the interests of the post-Trotskyist group that both Bookchins belonged to, the Movement for a Democracy of Content, which published a quarterly magazine called *Contemporary Issues* (CI).

Similar in scope to Dwight Macdonald's recently defunct *politics* magazine,¹⁰ the CI group was a mishmash of concerned intellectual types—college professors,

⁸Etienne Benson, *Surroundings: A History of Environments and Environmentalisms* (Chicago, 2020); Michael Egan, *Barry Commoner and the Science of Survival* (Cambridge, MA, 2007); Jundt, *Greening the Red, White, and Blue*.

⁹Paul S. Sutter, "Putting the Intellectual Back in Environmental History," *Modern Intellectual History* 18/2 (2021), 596–605.

¹⁰See Richard King, *The Party of Eros: Radical Social Thought and the Realm of Freedom* (Chapel Hill, 1972); Dwight Macdonald, "Why 'Politics'?", *Politics* 1/1 (1944), 6–8; Gregory Sumner, *Dwight Macdonald and the Politics Circle* (Ithaca, 1996).

journalists, activists, shell-shocked revolutionaries—who scorned both American capitalism and Russian socialism, experimenting with a more utopian and libertarian politics. The *CI* group organized weekly reading groups to discuss their articles, current affairs, and organizational strategy.¹¹ They took particular offense with postwar neo-Malthusian science writers like William Vogt and Fairfield Osborn, who they thought ignored the role that capitalism played in reshaping society and dominating nature.¹² But they also distanced themselves from scientific Marxism and the “Old Left,” fitting well into new cultural and artistic experiments on the left in response to the Cold War.¹³

Already in the 1930s, Bookchin had been impressed by *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs*,¹⁴ a best-selling book put together by members of the Consumer Research Inc., and he developed an early interest in the environmental impacts of the industrial economy on American society.¹⁵ Politicizing ecology—indeed thinking about and through a radical and genuinely ecological politics—would become his life’s work. Over the next decade, Bookchin would continue to write idiosyncratically about the environmental impact of consumer culture, criticizing both traditional science and ecology, on the one hand, and the Old Left, on the other side. Bookchin found in ecology a new foundation for a serious critique of politics, developing his ideas out of a very particular, historically specific experience of the changing natural environment. Ecological politics was anticapitalist to the core, and it bent towards revolution and a new and updated movement on the left.

In 1939, Bookchin was working in a metal foundry in New Jersey and was active as a labor organizer and member of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). During these years of fracture in the communist movement, Bookchin was becoming increasingly disillusioned by the doctrine of proletarian revolution after painstakingly, but unsuccessfully, trying to organize foundry workers in New Jersey, who ended up signing a no-strike pledge. Bookchin encountered Josef Weber, also known as “Johre,” a former leader of the exiled branch of the German Fourth International, the Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands, who had settled in New York City sometime between 1941 and 1942.¹⁶ When Bookchin met Weber at an SWP meeting, and having read some of Weber’s writing, he was impressed by Weber’s unique political stance, combining a critique of the SWP leadership and Trotsky’s revolutionary theory.

The encounter with Weber, who would become a major influence on Bookchin over the next fifteen years and the leader of the *CI* group, came right before Bookchin took a job at General Motors in New York out of frustration in New Jersey in 1944, freeing

¹¹See Janet Biehl, *Ecology or Catastrophe* (New York, 2015); the editors, “Editorial,” *Contemporary Issues* 1/1 (1948), 1; Marcel van der Linden, “The Prehistory of Post-scarcity Anarchism: Josef Weber and the Movement for a Democracy of Content (1947–1964),” *Anarchist Studies* 9/2 (2001), 127–45. All *Contemporary Issues* editions are in the Cambridge University Library Archives.

¹²William Vogt, *Road to Survival* (New York, 1948); Henry Fairfield Osborn, *Our Plundered Planet* (Boston, 1948).

¹³See Louis Menand, *The Free World* (New York, 2021).

¹⁴Arthur Kallet and F. J. Schlink, *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs: Dangers in Everyday Foods, Drugs, and Cosmetics* (New York, 1931).

¹⁵Murray Bookchin, “The Plowboy Interview,” *Mother Earth News* 10 (July 1971), 5–10, at 7.

¹⁶Josef Weber, *Dinge der Zeit: Kritische Beiträge zu Kultur und Politik*, ed. Michael Schneider (Hamburg, 1995).

up his time to become more active with the SWP. He also anticipated a more fruitful, maybe even revolutionary, workers' struggle with General Motors, a corporation profiting immensely during the war. Here, Bookchin was active in the United Auto Workers union but was once again disillusioned by a no-strike deal that ended in "civil service-type benefits, safety nets, and so forth, that greatly vitiated their traditional militancy."¹⁷ After the Soviet Union invaded Finland in 1939, Bookchin aligned himself with Max Shachtman's dissident faction of the SWP that criticized Trotsky's leadership.

In 1947, Weber formally left the SWP and started a new project, A Movement for a Democracy of Content, with some fellow dissidents in the Fourth International, including Bookchin. The movement, a transnational activist collective, began publishing *CI* out of London, however, under the direction of Weber from New York.¹⁸ It was an intellectual network which brought together socially active, heterodox Marxists of a more libertarian brand from the US, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, South Africa, and Japan. The magazine was also published in German as *Dinge der Zeit*, steeped in both German and anglophone interwar traditions of Marxism, left Hegelianism and American pragmatism. Similar to other publications that split with traditional socialist reviews, there was a space for the readers to respond, offering insights and discussion. Where others in this period—such as J. I. Rodale with his organic movement digest *Prevention*—used reader letters as a tool to advertise the efficacy of their products to sell more subscriptions,¹⁹ the *CI* group was more interested in fielding support for their movement.

Since arriving in the United States, Weber was very concerned with the impact of capitalism on the natural environment, and he was deeply offended by American consumer culture.²⁰ At his most satirical, he tells us,

My stomach revolts, but I enforce iron discipline. I must get my fill of the unspeakable horror with which I am imbued at the sight of men in their mass devouring mustard, Coca-Cola and sausages. I must assert that these mass-men have no traveling faces, nor midday-rest faces, but quite definitely Coca-Cola-mustard-hot-dogs faces. I must also exclaim: Ghastly America! How can people "make love" who have for lunch planted in their stomachs one or two hot dogs, four ounces of mustard and one or two bottles of Coca-Cola, and all that standing up, too?²¹

Other *CI* members didn't share his particular brand of anti-Americanism, but it still catalyzed an environmental perspective on society within the group. Environmental history here did seem to "begin in the belly."²² Worries about health, the body, and

¹⁷Murray Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism and the Future of the Left* (Edinburgh, 1999), 47.

¹⁸Van der Linden, "The Prehistory of Post-Scarcity Anarchism."

¹⁹Case, *The Organic Profit*, 49.

²⁰Josef Weber, "The Problem of Social Consciousness in Our Time," *Contemporary Issues* 8/31 (1957), 478–528; Weber, "Critical Revue (New York Eriksonized)," *Contemporary Issues* 2/7 (1950), 229–35.

²¹Weber, "Critical Revue," 234.

²²Nicolaas Mink, "It Begins in the Belly," *Environmental History* 14/2 (2009), 312–22.

waste, which they found in economic overproduction and a culture of wastefulness, triggered a sustained theoretical response.

The group read William Vogt's *Road to Survival* when it was published in 1948. In an early review, they expressed worries about the new Malthusianism, which they also found in Henry Fairfield Osborn's *Our Plundered Planet* (1948), and they started thinking about environmental issues as a consequence of capitalist production.²³ This was "environmental Malthusianism" built on conservation thinking, but it was voiced by bona fide scientists, which, according to Robertson, conflated "ecology, overpopulation, overconsumption, limits and sustainability—and potential apocalypse."²⁴ Following the Marxist critique of Malthus, the *CI* group identified the reactionary political implications of Vogt's survivalist agenda, with his heavy emphasis on the relationship between population and food. Vogt argued, "The earth is not made of rubber; it cannot be stretched; the human race, every nation, is limited in the number of acres it possesses. And as the number of human beings increases, the relative amount of productive earth decreases by that amount."²⁵ An article titled "The Great Utopia" (1950) would more directly attack the new Malthusianism by arguing that the problem wasn't geography, but rather that the capitalist economy did not function to meet the needs of a growing population, serving the capitalist profit motive.²⁶ Crucially, the *CI* member who reviewed Vogt also thought that he overlooked the technological potential of agricultural fertilization techniques in addressing overpopulation. Bookchin would take serious issue with this in subsequent years.

Here we can see the *postwar environmental moment* taking shape. Recently, scholars of intellectual environmental history have persuasively argued that the concept of the "environment" first had to be invented, roughly around 1948, to deal with the colossal changes in ways that the future was being imagined, expert knowledge was valued and worked in tandem with government, trust in numbers and the ability to predict and calculate real-world fluctuations was solidified, and the capacity to connect various levels of organization and cooperation—scaling—became ubiquitous.²⁷ Bookchin and the *CI* group were also searching for new ways of understanding and thinking through an anticapitalist politics that did not just repeat well-worn Marxian crisis theory or the Old Left's emphasis on working-class politics in the factory. Bookchin was well aware of the limits to this brand of organization and increasingly felt it could not respond to consumerism, affluence, abundance, waste, and environmental degradation caused by a capitalist economy.

As the *CI* group was just publishing their first issues in 1948, a massive environmental crisis was sweeping a small town in Donora, Pennsylvania. The "Donora smog" was a severe air pollution episode caused by a combination of weather conditions and emissions from a local zinc plant. The resulting smog covered the town for several

²³ Phil MacDougal, "Humanity's Resources and the New Malthusianism," *Contemporary Issues* 1/3 (1949), 233–48.

²⁴ Thomas Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment: Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism* (New Brunswick, 2012), 47.

²⁵ Vogt, *Road to Survival*, 194.

²⁶ Josef Weber, "The Great Utopia," *Contemporary Issues* 2/5 (1950), 3–21.

²⁷ Warde, Robin, and Sörlin, *The Environment*, 17.

days, leading to an alarming increase in respiratory illnesses and ultimately causing the deaths of twenty-two people in the first instance, and another fifty the following month.²⁸ The incident was widely covered in the media at the time and the tragedy greatly changed perceptions of air pollution among the public. A series of other smog incidents across the United States helped make the issue a working-class problem. Bookchin's union—the United Auto Workers—supported a major string of lawsuits in response to exposure to toxic substances at the workplace. Unions also played a major role in popularizing the wilderness conservation message of interconnection and holism among working-class citizens, connecting questions of working conditions with air and water pollution as well as food adulteration.²⁹ Indeed, as we will see below, Bookchin would use “killer smog” incidents like in Donora (1948) and London (1952) to think more deeply about the social origins of “dirty skies.”³⁰

Most of the members of *CI* wrote under pseudonyms, including Bookchin. Pseudonyms helped the authors protect themselves from the political atmosphere of the emerging McCarthy era and the “red scare,” with their critique of American free-market capitalism. They were also highly critical of Soviet communism, so the use of pseudonyms was a way to protect themselves from Stalinists, especially because some of Weber's colleagues had been murdered by assassins while in French exile. But pseudonyms also lent a creative license, where different names could be used to explore different topics and styles, oftentimes allowing for an extremely varied (and sometimes confusing) discussion with each other and with themselves. I cannot do justice to the rich and varied list of topics that the *CI* group covered over the fifteen years when Bookchin was a member. But I can offer some insight into Bookchin's intellectual development.

Over the next decade, Bookchin would cultivate four different pseudonyms in the pages of *CI*. Inflected by his own experience as a Russian Jew, “M. S. Shiloh” integrated an examination of political economy and “State Capitalism in Russia” with an analysis of the distinctive role of European Jewry during World War II.³¹ He also experimented with an argument for explaining genocide in Eastern Europe as a social problem caused by capitalism,³² but later renounced the article and reaffirmed the singularity of the Shoah. This analysis applied to anti-Semitism was perhaps more compelling,³³ but he also looked at the anti-Semitism in Russia,³⁴ and war crimes in the context of

²⁸ Jundt, *Greening the Red, White, and Blue*, 68.

²⁹ See Scott Dewey, “Working for the Environment: Organized Labor and the Origins of Environmentalism in the United States, 1948–1970,” *Environmental History* 3/1 (1998), 45–63; Dewey, “Working-Class Environmentalism in America,” in John Butler, ed., *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History* (Oxford, 2019), DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.690; Chad Montrie, *A People's History of Environmentalism in the United States* (London, 2011).

³⁰ Murray Bookchin, *Crisis in Our Cities* (New York, 1965), published under the pseudonym Lewis Herber.

³¹ Murray Bookchin, “State Capitalism in Russia,” *Contemporary Issues* 2/7 (1950), 206–24.

³² Murray Bookchin, “Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe,” *Contemporary Issues* 4/13 (1952), 39–50.

³³ Murray Bookchin, “A Social Study in Genocide,” *Contemporary Issues* 10/3 (1952), 119–35.

³⁴ Murray Bookchin, “The Fate of American Civil Liberties,” *Contemporary Issues* 16/4 (1953), 206–48.

Yugoslavia.³⁵ The “social-origins” framework would later be applied to the problem of environmental crisis.

As “Robert Keller,” Bookchin tried his hand at an economic critique of “Eastern Europe under the Iron Heel.”³⁶ He also produced a study of the American economy and how Eisenhower’s policies were “an attack on the middle classes,” undoing any remnants of reform under Roosevelt that had protected against monopolies.³⁷ There is an interesting story here, related to the ecological vision the group was developing, namely that in a footnote in this article, Bookchin mentions that he was working on a further study called “Basis for Utopia: The Outlines of an Economic Plan for a New Society.”³⁸ This study was never published. But it clues us in to a larger project that the group sought to develop, namely a way of calculating and planning a decentralized economy that could deal with the environmental impact of industry. This first required the *CI* group to study Marx’s *Capital*, Keynesian economics, and mathematical modeling a bit more closely, leading to a rift in the *CI* group by the end of the 1950s.³⁹

Bookchin’s writing under the pseudonym “Lewis Herber” is most significant to placing him within environmental intellectual history. It was by far his most successful alter ego, putting him on a path that would become his life’s work, the synthesis of political theory with an ecological outlook. While “The Problem of Chemicals in Food” did not kick off the debate on chemical additives in Western democracies,⁴⁰ it was an important intervention for Bookchin’s budding career. It also generated a significant amount of publicity for the magazine, receiving far more letters from readers than did other articles. There was even a follow-up to the first 1952 article, and Bookchin responded to *CI* readers, their concerns, criticisms, and encouragement.⁴¹

The debate further revealed the group’s more nuanced views on ecological science, especially an understanding of a Marxist perspective on capitalism’s impact on the environment.⁴² In this early work, Bookchin did use the language of Marxist political economy, but would later avoid the jargon. Bookchin’s piece dissects a US Congress investigation, which ran from June 1950 to January 1953, looking into the effects of chemical additives upon consumer health.⁴³ While the Delaney committee, chaired by

³⁵Murray Bookchin, “The Fate of American Civil Liberties,” *Anvil: And Student Partisan* 4/3 (1952), 15–18.

³⁶Murray Bookchin, “Eastern Europe under the Iron Heel,” *Contemporary Issues* 4/13 (1952), 2–39.

³⁷Murray Bookchin, “Year One of the Eisenhower Crusade,” *Contemporary Issues* 5/18 (1954), 86–112, at 101.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 103.

³⁹See Martin Davis, “Jack Schwartz Meets Karl Marx,” in Martin Davis and Edmond Schonberg, eds., *From Linear Operators to Computational Biology: Essays in Memory of Jacob T. Schwartz* (London, 2013), 23–37; Biehl, *Ecology or Catastrophe*.

⁴⁰Murray Bookchin, “The Problem of Chemicals in Food,” *Contemporary Issues* 3/12 (1952), 206–41.

⁴¹Murray Bookchin, “A Follow-Up on the Problem of Chemicals in Food,” *Contemporary Issues* 6/21 (1955), 51–7.

⁴²See Weber’s response to Bookchin’s “Follow Up”: Josef Weber, “Fragments on Chemicals in Food and Other Questions,” *Contemporary Issues* 10/39 (1960), 216–40.

⁴³See United States Congress, *Chemicals in Food Products: Hearings before the House Select Committee to Investigate the Use of Chemicals in Food Products* (Washington, 1951).

US House Representative James Delaney, was special in its attempt at scientific rigor, calling fifty-nine hearings with 217 witnesses,⁴⁴ it is only part of a longer legal saga of food politics and consumer health regulation in the United States.⁴⁵

The group rejected Malthusian solutions, contending that the underlying issue lay not in a scarcity of redeemable land or a genuine demographic threat but in societal repression hindering land reclamation. The world confronts overpopulation due to a declining culture withholding the means to sustain its people. They underscored the global organization of oppression, with states taking the lead, resulting in two world wars and constraints on productivity in less prosperous nations.⁴⁶ Successful solutions to resource depletion and perceived overpopulation required a genuinely democratic foundation, despite the existing availability of remedies. But there was also disagreement within the group as to whether optimism could be placed in agricultural technology, especially surrounding hopes in artificial fertilization techniques borne out of the new chemical industry. Overuse of artificial fertilizers could result in soil degradation, water pollution, and the depletion of vital nutrients, posing a particular risk to consumers. Bookchin was already interested in the problem of the American as a “guinea pig,”⁴⁷ and found the critique of chemicals laid out in “The Great Utopia” compelling. Capitalist agricultural practices driven by the profit motive led to extremely detrimental effects for the Earth, but also, as he polemically claimed, to the rise of cancer and other “production diseases.”⁴⁸ According to Weber, a new, “great” utopia was required to meet this environmental crisis, and he developed a preliminary sketch. As we will see, Bookchin wasn’t too concerned with utopian theorizing just yet, but he did take Weber’s warning seriously, which followed the German chemist Justus Liebig, where man must “return to Nature what he takes” lest nature “avenge itself.”⁴⁹

Over the next few years, Bookchin and the CI group would think more deeply about this question, the ecological perspective offered in “The Great Utopia,” the question of material scarcity and environmental economic planning only provisionally outlined therein, and the nature of the locus and scale of political action. A first big success after the 1952 article for Bookchin was the solicitation of a German translation, published as *Lebensgefährliche Lebensmittel* in 1953 also under the pseudonym “Lewis Herber.”⁵⁰ The translator, Götz Ohly, was a key figure in the organic-food movement in Germany. In the mid-1930s, Ohly pioneered the development of yeast extracts, and in 1961 the company underwent a transformation into Deutsche Hefewerke GmbH, specializing

⁴⁴Vincent Kleinfeld, “The Delaney Committee: What Has It Wrought?,” *Food, Drug, Cosmetic Law Journal* 8/5 (1953), 285–92, at 286.

⁴⁵See Xaq Frohlich, “Making Food Standard: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s Food Standards of Identity, 1930s–1960s,” *Business History Review* 96/1 (2022), 145–76; David Kinkela, *DDT and the American Century* (Chapel Hill, 2011); Bee Wilson, *Swindled: The Dark History of Food Fraud, from Poisoned Candy to Counterfeit Coffee* (Princeton, 2008); David F. Smith, “The Politics of Food and Nutrition Policies,” in Anne Murcott, Warren Belasco, and Peter Jackson, eds., *The Handbook of Food Research* (London, 2013), 398–409.

⁴⁶See Josef Weber, “War as a Way Out?,” *Contemporary Issues* 2/7 (1950), 155–74.

⁴⁷Kallet and Schlink, *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs*.

⁴⁸Weber, “The Great Utopia,” 7.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁰Murray Bookchin and Gotz Ohly, *Lebensgefährliche Lebensmittel* (Krailling, 1953), published under the pseudonym Lewis Herber.

in the production of both fresh baker's yeast and yeast extracts.⁵¹ Ohly's legacy endures today in Ohly Yeast, now owned by Associated British Foods, a multinational corporation with products sold in your average grocery store in fifty-three countries, with nine out of ten British homes using an Associated British Foods brand.⁵² In Ohly's comment on Bookchin's 1952 article, he compliments Bookchin's analysis of the social roots of the environmental crisis with the Nazi ecologist Werner Kollath's dictum that "in the future, the healthy human is the primary directive of the State."⁵³

Bookchin couldn't have anticipated that his translator would leverage the "Problem of Chemicals in Food" article to propel his own agenda back in Germany, and it might have worried him that Ohly was using Nazi ecologists to prop up his ideas. In contrast to Bookchin, whose approach was inspired by a systematic post-Marxian theory, Ohly seized upon the new genre of "apocalyptic environmentalism" in Germany, playing a pivotal role in influencing the German debate on the new food law passed in 1958.⁵⁴ Corinna Treitel argues that besides Ohly belonging to a group of "life reformers," many of whom came out of scientific research traditions from the Nazi era, Bookchin's involvement reveals the evolving connection between West German and American activists, encompassing both professionals and enthusiasts.⁵⁵ The introduction was penned by Clive McCay, a nutrition professor at Cornell University, also known for creating the Cornell "health bread," and he was one of the experts called for the Delaney committee. Indeed, there is some irony to this episode in the reception of Bookchin's ideas: as we will see, Bookchin in America did not take off, but Bookchin in Germany kick-started a major debate in German food politics and the modern environmental movement.⁵⁶ The handwritten dedication Ohly sent Bookchin in the second edition from 1955 reads, "Mr. Lewis Herber, to my friend, who I think of as one of the most important journalists in the USA, I say: We are on the right path together."⁵⁷

The Castle Bravo H-bomb test in 1954 marked a turning point that spurred Bookchin into antinuclear activism. In *Stop the Bomb: An Appeal to the Reason of the American People*, anonymously published as a CI leaflet, Bookchin demonstrated the fusion of his activism with theoretical work during this period.⁵⁸ Widely distributed, this leaflet highlighted Bookchin's engagement in antinuclear advocacy, drawing inspiration from the influential antinuclear voice of Lewis Mumford. Notably, it solicited a response from Mumford to the CI group. This collaboration and activism align with the observations of environmental historians who emphasize the interconnectedness

⁵¹See Ohly, an ABF Ingredients Company, "Ohly: A History of Taste," Ohly corporate website, at www.ohly.com/en/about-us/our-history (accessed 17 Nov. 2023).

⁵²Associated British Foods plc, "Grocery," ABF corporate website, at www.abf.co.uk/our-businesses/grocery (accessed 17 Nov. 2023).

⁵³Bookchin and Ohly, *Lebensgefährliche Lebensmittel* (1953), 141.

⁵⁴Corinna Treitel, *Eating Nature in Modern Germany: Food, Agriculture, and Environment, c.1870 to 2000* (Cambridge, 2017), 263.

⁵⁵Ibid., 244.

⁵⁶See Alice Weinreb, *Modern Hungers* (Oxford, 2017).

⁵⁷See copy in MBPTL. Murray Bookchin and Gotz Ohly, *Lebensgefährliche Lebensmittel*, 2nd edn (Krailling, 1955), published under the pseudonym Lewis Herber.

⁵⁸Murray Bookchin, *Stop the Bomb: An Appeal to the Reason of the American People* (1954), courtesy of the Bookchin Trust, published anonymously as a *Contemporary Issues* leaflet. In the Bookchin Family Archives.

of the antinuclear movement and early environmentalism during this era.⁵⁹ This also included more general worries about the responsibility of scientists and experiments in nuclear warfare and as an energy as “experiments in annihilation,”⁶⁰ and the group republished Albert Schweitzer’s famous 1955 article from the *Daily Herald*, “Scientists Must Speak Up.”⁶¹

Relatedly, the group also connected questions of nuclear warfare directly with environmental issues relating to energy. After Lewis Strauss’s infamous “Too Cheap to Meter” speech, which emphasized the great potential and affordability of nuclear energy, the group was arguing that the “tone of the Strauss statement is itself significant; there is no humility, no regret, no apology—not even a crocodile tear is shed in the interests of propaganda for the Marshallese, Japanese or American victims. To shed such a tear would be to acknowledge that something had gone wrong.”⁶² They would later pick up this issue more directly related to the “Windscale accident,” a nuclear reactor meltdown in Britain in 1957.⁶³ Bookchin later became engaged in the first antinuclear movement in the United States concerning the construction of a nuclear reactor in Queens in the early 1960s.

In “Arms to Hungary! (Address to the Emergency Committee for Arms to Hungary, Jager House, New York City, 1956),” published under the pseudonym “Robert Keller,” Bookchin’s focus shifted significantly. This period marks a crucial dynamic of his development, as his activism took precedence over writing between 1956 and 1958. He dedicated himself to street-level activism, advocating for US support for militant action in Hungary against Russia. Notably, Bookchin’s commitment to activism extended to reading Marx’s *Capital* in a close-reading group with other *CI* members in 1957. This close examination prompted a reevaluation of his economics, leading him to engage with left Keynesian economics and delve into the nuances of socialist planning. However, the group became divided on how to progress Marx’s thought, forcing Bookchin to revise many of his standard Marxist views.⁶⁴ This period of intellectual exploration also pushed him to rethink the location of the ecological “Great Utopia”—considering where and how it could be planned and economically managed.

Bookchin’s major breakthrough was with *Our Synthetic Environment* (1962), establishing his pseudonym “Lewis Herber” as a contending voice in the emerging DDT debate.⁶⁵ The genre itself—science writing for a general public in the early 1960s—lacked a scientific expert with a radical politics. Bookchin filled this void by consolidating a decade of thinking, campaigning, and street-level activism centered around the brute facts of ecologists. The book encompassed an edited and updated version of his original treatment of the Delaney committee, but it also marked a significant departure from this earlier theme by expanding the environmental crisis to address not just

⁵⁹ Joachim Radkau, *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment* (Cambridge, 2008).

⁶⁰ Jules Laurents, “Annihilation and Ideologies,” *Contemporary Issues* 6/22 (1955), 91–111.

⁶¹ Albert Schweitzer, “A Letter by Albert Schweitzer to a Scientist,” *Contemporary Issues* 6/22 (1955), 90.

⁶² Jules Laurents, “Experiment in Annihilation,” *Contemporary Issues* 5/20 (1954), 214–53, at 220.

⁶³ Andrew Maxwell, “The Accident at Windscale,” *Contemporary Issues* 9/33 (1958), 1–49.

⁶⁴ See Biehl, *Ecology or Catastrophe*.

⁶⁵ Murray Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment* (New York, 1962), published under the pseudonym Lewis Herber; Kinkela, *DDT and the American Century*.

soil fertility and human health but air pollution and nuclear radiation too. He offered detailed discussions of biology, chemistry, and physics. Notably, while embracing ecological science, Bookchin subversively upgraded the Old Left's analysis of capitalism's impact on the natural environment. He called for a social response to the social problem of environmental degradation, proposing a unique vision of an ecological utopia that emphasized decentralized management as the key solution.

In particular, the range of topics discussed was innovative, and he reveals his political vision in the final chapter. Urban decentralization was crucial for ecological control in agriculture. Through careful planning, he argued, communities didn't need to reduce population size, but rather play the part of stewards of plants and animals to control pests without relying extensively on chemical methods. Additionally, decentralized communities held the promise of conserving natural resources, particularly by utilizing local sources of energy such as wind power, solar energy, and hydroelectric power. Bookchin foresaw the potential of these energy sources to conserve petroleum and coal, potentially postponing or eliminating the need for radioactive substances and nuclear reactors as major industrial energy sources. Here we have Bookchin as an early theorist of climate change and ecological technology, a theme he would explore more deeply once the environmental movement really took off in the mid-1960s.⁶⁶

But *Our Synthetic Environment* was overshadowed by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. In fact, William Vogt reviewed both books in 1963 and commended Bookchin: "Mr. Herber ranges far more widely than Miss Carson and discusses not only herbicides and insecticides, but also nutrition, chemical fertilizers (he is no organic gardener), soil structure, food additives, stresses that result from overurbanization, our physical deterioration from excessive dependence on machines, and other side effects of civilization." He also added that while these books "cannot be adequately discussed in such limited space ... I should like to urge every reader: if you have time for but two books next year, read these; if only one, read one of them."⁶⁷ Pushing Lewis Mumford's regionalist political agenda in a much more anti-technocratic and anticapitalist direction,⁶⁸ Bookchin's writing style and New Left politics were just less approachable than what Carson was up to in *Silent Spring*.

Crucially, Bookchin was holding on to his Old Left radical critique of industrial society, much to the offense of more conservative citizens who were part of the early environmental movement. In many ways, he is flogging the dead horse with facts about chemistry and bold statements about the uses of ecology, as was instructively seen in another joint review in *The Economist* called "Cassandra in the Cornfields": Bookchin is painted as the "deeper-dyed pessimist."⁶⁹ While this review wasn't as harsh on Carson as those in other magazines, it did end with an indictment of both of them: "is this cause for alarm? No one knows. A feature of the postwar generation is its childlike belief that everything scientific must be good, but here is a case for science does not know the answers and it is no use getting heavily offended when people like Miss Carson start

⁶⁶Murray Bookchin, "Towards Liberatory Technology (1965)," *Anarchy* 7/8 (1967), 225–60, MBPTL.

⁶⁷William Vogt, "Reviews: On Man the Destroyer," *Natural History* 72 (1963), 3–5, at 3.

⁶⁸See Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York, 1934).

⁶⁹"Cassandra in the Cornfields" (review of Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, and Lewis Herber, *Our Synthetic Environment*), *The Economist*, 23 Feb. 1963, 711, MBPTL.

making snide remarks about it.”⁷⁰ There is an important generational politics going on here, an important aspect of New Left student activism in which Bookchin would become deeply involved in the 1960s.⁷¹

In response to this “editorial flop,”⁷² Bookchin escalated his outreach efforts. Following the book’s publication, he wrote a piece for the *Consumer Bulletin* on the “Dangerous Environment of Man,”⁷³ and he also spoke on the radio at WBAI-FM in New York City about the need to ratchet up our concern that new developments in agricultural technology and automation could not fill the gap of environmental decay. Instead, it was more likely to cause further crisis, while at the same time further harming the working-class condition.⁷⁴ Then there was the campaign against Con Edison’s plans to build a nuclear reactor at the Ravenswood Generating Station in Queens. Bookchin became involved in the strong resistance that formed from local residents, where the general national anxiety about the nuclear weapons race fueled the first organized movement against a commercial nuclear power plant in the United States.⁷⁵ And Bookchin drafted the first preliminary report on the possible outcomes of nuclear fallout in Queens for the Citizens Committee for Radiation Information.⁷⁶

To round up this portrait of the early years, Bookchin’s initial focus on chemicals thus catapulted him intellectually. What he stumbled upon was that the findings of the Delaney committee provided a perfect example of how capitalist production causes environmental crisis and not overpopulation. On the one hand, this lent support to the group’s critique of neo-Malthusianism. But on the other hand, this gave Bookchin an argument against the Old Left’s reliance on technological innovation. He would conclude this early phase of science writing with a focus on air pollution in 1965—what he called the problem of “dirty skies,” once again making extensive use of hard science to address the environmental challenges faced by cities.⁷⁷ Bookchin’s place in environmental history may have “began in the belly,” by looking at food adulteration from early on, but he also used the problem of air to identify the social reproduction of environmental problems caused by capitalism. But by then he was already turning to a new historical canon for help to think about how to bring about an ecological utopia: the history of anarchism. Thus his alter ego Lewis Herber—who had failed to achieve critical acclaim like Rachel Carson—moved in a different direction after reading Kropotkin for the first time in the early 1960s. He moved to the Lower East Side and circulated his greatest work yet, “Ecology and Revolutionary Thought,” later published by Colin Ward

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹See, for a discussion of generational politics on the left, Terence Renaud, *New Lefts: The Making of a Radical Tradition* (Princeton, 2021).

⁷²See Juan Diego Pérez Cebada, “An Editorial Flop Revisited: Rethinking the Impact of M. Bookchin’s ‘Our Synthetic Environment’ on Its Golden Anniversary,” *Global Environment* 6/12 (2013), 250–73.

⁷³Murray Bookchin, “Dangerous Environment of Man,” *Consumer Bulletin* 45 (1962), 23–9, Janet Biehl Papers, International Institute of Social History Archives, Amsterdam, hereafter JBPIISG.

⁷⁴See Murray Bookchin, “The Changing Environment,” *Contemporary Issues* 46 (1963), 21–23.

⁷⁵See George T. Mazuzan, “Very Risky Business’: A Power Reactor for New York City,” *Technology and Culture* 27/2 (1986), 262–84.

⁷⁶Murray Bookchin, “Citizens’ Committee for Radiation Information, November 1963,” 1963, JBPIISG.

⁷⁷Bookchin, *Crisis in Our Cities*.

in *Anarchy* and countless other places, including his peak 1960s collection of essays *Post-scarcity Anarchism* (1971).⁷⁸ This has since overshadowed what he was up to in the early years, especially the radical possibilities that he believed lay in an ecological science.

The politicization of ecology

Bookchin's intellectual context was shaped by an outside world where citizens were dealing with a qualitatively new kind of environmental anxiety that makes it especially important to scrutinize this moment more thoroughly. In this section I will demonstrate how Bookchin developed a radical interpretation of the "new" ecology, holding on to the centrality of studying humans as animals embedded in a web of interconnected "communities." By "new" ecology I mean the burgeoning genre of scientific research that pioneered a language of ecosystems,⁷⁹ which, when viewed from the perspective of social history, had a strong Marxist inflection, especially in Britain, coming out of a dialectic between ecology and socialism.⁸⁰ In fact, he politicized a wide range of ecological concepts to expand their meanings.

Before uncovering Bookchin's sources and how he utilized them, it is important to untangle what I mean by "politicization." I take the process of politicization to include moments which mark an opening of something as political, as "playable."⁸¹ To play with concepts and ideas in this way means to take, for example, the notion of "diversity" as a feature of a stable ecosystem and extend it into a normative argument about why "balance and harmony in nature, in society, and by inference in behavior, are achieved not by mechanical standardization but by its opposite, organic differentiation."⁸² Bookchin penned this in 1965, which was at the very end of a decade-long development where he experimented with using ecological findings to engage with the Delaney hearings, and using various environmental and social crises against various conservative or liberal actors. Thus, for Bookchin, ecological concepts now increasingly "served as weapons in political conflicts among antagonistic classes, strata, and movements."⁸³

Bookchin explains his position not as a "sentimental naturalism" but as a form of "rational humanism" that combines social and political analysis with ecological science.⁸⁴ Ecology was not simply about describing the natural world and its relation to organisms:

⁷⁸Murray Bookchin, *Post-scarcity Anarchism* (Berkeley, 1971).

⁷⁹McIntosh, *The Background of Ecology*.

⁸⁰Foster, *The Return of Nature*.

⁸¹Kari Palonen, "Four Times of Politics: Policy, Polity, Politicking, and Politicization," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 28/2 (2003), 171–186, at 171.

⁸²Bookchin, "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought (1964)," 328.

⁸³Reinhart Koselleck, "Introduction: Translation of Reinhart Koselleck's 'Krise,' in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*," trans. Melvin Richter and Michaela W. Richter, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67/2 (2006), 343–356, at 351.

⁸⁴Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, xvi.

Ecology ... deals with the interrelationships of living things (including man) and their environment. The more these interrelationships are explored, the more evident become the interdependence of most organisms in a given locality and the needs that each species fulfills for the others. Most ecological studies are limited and highly concrete, but the material at hand suggests a number of practical generalizations.⁸⁵

Building on this sentiment, he sought to expand the meaning of three central ecological concepts and their relation to studying human populations: *completeness*, *balance*, and *diversity*. Where completeness presupposed the “unrestricted access to the countryside as well as the town, to soil as well as to pavement, to flora and fauna as well as to libraries and theaters,” balance allowed for a “lasting equilibrium between land and city; animals, men, and plants; air, water, and industry.” Diversity, perhaps the most powerful concept in his arsenal, presupposed “an awareness that nearly every species perpetuates the stability of the biosphere, either directly or indirectly.”⁸⁶

Bookchin’s rhetorical redescription of these concepts was rooted in close readings of prominent ecologists. In the introduction to *Our Synthetic Environment*, he specifically mentions that he was influenced most by Alexis Carrel, William Albrecht, Charles Elton, Hans Selye, and Lewis Mumford in forming his views on human biology, health, agriculture, ecology, stress, and urban development. But Bookchin was not just appropriating these writers’ ideas; he also sent his work to an impressive list of scientists to provide input and suggestions on various topics covered in his book. Margaret Nice, the ornithologist and child psychologist, provided feedback on the impact of pesticides on wildlife. He also sent a chapter to Mumford for feedback on urban decay. He asked a neuropsychologist, Joseph Meiers, to comment on the connection between stress and chronic illness, and he received comments from Francis E. Ray, the director of the Cancer Research Laboratory at the University of Florida, on his discussion of cancer, which drew heavily on Ray’s research. Finally, he corresponded with Barry Commoner, who would become a leading light in the environmental movement, citing his 1958 *Student Life* article on “The Fallout Problem.”⁸⁷

Commoner argued that there was “no scientific way to balance the possibility that a thousand people will die from leukemia against the political advantages of developing more efficient retaliatory weapons. This requires a moral judgment in which the scientist cannot claim a special competence which exceeds that of any other informed citizen.”⁸⁸ The argument here hinged on the need for an “informed citizen,” and in a letter to Bookchin, Commoner was pleased with Bookchin’s effort as the fine points of these issues were “very much in need of the public’s informed attention.”⁸⁹ Bookchin was suggesting that “the emerging environmental crisis was the result of the pressures

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 176; Barry Commoner, “The Fallout Problem,” *Science* 127/3305 (1958), 1023–6.

⁸⁸ Commoner, “The Fallout Problem,” 1025.

⁸⁹ Barry Commoner to Murray Bookchin, 3 Aug. 1961, Barry Commoner Papers, LoC, Box 4, quoted in Egan, *Barry Commoner*, 218.

imposed on nature by the capitalist system,”⁹⁰ yet, intriguingly, Bookchin does not mention capitalism once in *Our Synthetic Environment*. This both points to an awareness of how antagonizing Marxian terminology was in this late 1950s moment leading up to the birth of the environmental movement, and highlights that ecology had a political message that could speak for itself.

The precision of Bookchin’s message to the “informed” citizen is striking throughout the 1950s. Bookchin’s 1952 article not only described the scientific facts with great precision—perhaps too exacting for a twenty-first-century reader expecting Bookchin the radical social ecologist—but also always connected information with a political implication. Where Congressional hearings discussed the “possibilities” of chemicals in agriculture, Bookchin turns this on its head. The so-called “possibilities” lie in the technological capacity of industry to maximize yields, at the cost, however, of soil, vegetation, and animal health. He proceeds to put the contemporary situation in historical, economic, and technological perspective.⁹¹ Drawing on Clive McCay, the biochemist who famously discovered that caloric restriction prolonged the lifespan of rats, Bookchin documents how the addition of hormones to the diets of poultry, pigs, and dairy calves creates disease for the animals, such as udder, thyroid, and lymph cancer. Hormones increasingly were creating diseases both for the animals themselves and for other animals, such as hormone-treated chickens fed to foxes and mink.⁹² While hormones did increase the size of the animals, it predominantly added fat, and not protein, downgrading the American diet as well as the health of the livestock.⁹³

For Bookchin, the American food industry had become a “modern Circe: turning men into swine—in appearance if not in habits.”⁹⁴ Here, Francis E. Ray’s research and testimony in the hearings helps complicate the local view of cancer—that only certain cancer-causing additives create tumors in the body. Bookchin expands the causes of cancer to include “the tempo and insecurity of existence and wholesale alteration.”⁹⁵ Ray’s research helped Bookchin argue that changes to the built environment (fluoride in water, lower levels of toxins in food) caused cancer as much as psychological stress and a diet based on adulterated food. Herein lies one of the major conceptual innovations that Bookchin developed over the 1950s: he distinguished between the “synthetic” and “natural” environments. The burgeoning synthetic environment, largely driven by large-scale industry seeking to maximize profit through new petroleum-based products (such as plastics), was divorced from both the science and the technologies that it used to raise yields, as well as from the growing distance between citizens and public accountability.

This was Bookchin’s way into the potential that new scientific findings could have in reinforcing a radical political message. Even if solid science required slow progress and specialization to produce a full picture, citizens could still start from what Ralph and Mildred Buchsbaum called the “ecological viewpoint.” Bookchin thought that because

⁹⁰Egan, *Barry Commoner*, 80.

⁹¹Bookchin, “The Problem of Chemicals in Food,” 206–8.

⁹²Ibid., 224.

⁹³Ibid., 227.

⁹⁴Ibid., 229.

⁹⁵Ibid., 239.

the “environmental setting developed by natural selection over many millions of years must be considered to have some merit,” nuclear, health, and apocalyptic anxieties presupposed a recognition of the stability of ecological patterns.⁹⁶ From this judgment, changes could therefore only be made at a small scale. In addition to Buchsbaum’s viewpoint, Clive McCay’s research showed how animals were affected by mass farming, disrupting the relative stability of individual ecosystems, and Francis E. Ray’s cancer research provided the proof needed to show how “production diseases” were caused by a neglect for how human health fit in with a bigger picture of the built environment. This is how he uses the work of ecologists to expand the meaning of “completeness” into a politically viable argument for decentralized management within distinct yet interconnected spheres—ecosystems—of human action.

To affect his extension of the meaning of the ecological concept of *balance*, Bookchin drew directly on the work of Edward Hyams and his concept of “soil community.” In 1952, shortly after Bookchin published his original chemicals article, Hyams published *Soil and Civilization*.⁹⁷ Soil, according to Hyams, is not just “some inanimate collection of mineral and organic particles”; rather, it is a “biological, an organic, a living entity.”⁹⁸ As a thick concept, soils have communities, not just the plants that reproduce the soil, but the animals that live upon it. He tells that in any soil community there is, “as a condition of its stability, a balance between the parts.”⁹⁹ This symbiotic partnership is thus based on balancing the relationship between the subterranean, biological entity and the overstory of those animals that live off the soil in the community. Membership in this community, however, comes with responsibilities. If imbalance occurs, as Hyams argues through an exploration of several moments in human history, man becomes a “parasite on the soil.”¹⁰⁰ And this “soil parasitism” can lead to disease, where he sees disease as “a failure of the balance by means of which species live together in community, whether in a relationship of mutual aid, or one of parasite and host.”¹⁰¹ What is recommended is a rekindling of various agricultural techniques, similar to Albert Howard’s revival of Indian farming techniques in *An Agricultural Testament*,¹⁰² so that man can become a “soil maker” and not just a “disease.”

Bookchin exploits Hyams’s argument to expand the meaning of “balance” in his work. Following Hyams, the agricultural practices that destroyed fertile areas and turned them into deserts in the past were being repeated in the United States, and Bookchin takes this as a problem not only of large-scale industry but of the wider problem of “hurrying along” any means for profit in a capitalist economy.¹⁰³ Indeed, Bookchin draws on Howard to further underline how balance is erased from the human experience, arguing that nature “seldom cultivates a single crop to the exclusion of all others. Variety and combination, of both plants and animals, constitute

⁹⁶ Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, 30.

⁹⁷ Edward Hyams, *Soil and Civilization* (London, 1952).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁰² Albert Howard, *An Agricultural Testament* (London, 1943).

¹⁰³ Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, 37.

the basis for natural equilibrium.”¹⁰⁴ Balance requires equilibrium, and equilibrium requires variety. But this variety upon which a soil community is founded has been manipulated. Here Bookchin speaks of the soil community as an ecosystem, and an ecosystem as a “pattern of life.”¹⁰⁵ But guarding himself against the romantic, naturalist belief that we should therefore just “leave nature alone,” Bookchin pulls the political implication from manipulation:

An ecological point of view that emphasizes the use of organic materials and the practice of biocentric control admittedly restricts man. It requires him to reconstruct the agricultural situation along more natural lines, to defer to the dictates of ecology rather than those of economics. To borrow the words of Charles Elton, this point of view is not intended “to promote any idea of complete *laissez faire* in the management of the ecosystems of the world ... The world’s future has to be managed, but this management would not be just like a game of chess—more like steering a boat.”¹⁰⁶

This is a metaphor—steering a boat—that Bookchin would return to in his later writing.¹⁰⁷ Balance can be protected neither by manipulation, nor by a *laissez-faire* ideology. Rather, human animals must play the role of steward, and this also takes us to the ecological concept of diversity and invasion ecology.

Charles Elton’s 1927 *Animal Ecology* is remembered today for both initiating and clarifying the systematic study of ecology,¹⁰⁸ as well as for establishing ground rules for conservancy agencies in the United States and Britain.¹⁰⁹ For Elton, ecology was just “a new name for a very old subject. It simply means scientific natural history.”¹¹⁰ The focus of this book was on animal communities, specifically understanding how an individual animal population is dispersed, fits into a niche, and functions within a particular habitat over space and time. Community, as for Hyams, is an “elastic” concept that is meant to describe the linking up of many different levels of interconnection.¹¹¹ Communities should therefore be studied as part of a whole range of historical and biological processes, ranging from the fauna of an individual animal, to the fauna of the parasites that inhabit its body, to the fauna of the plants that sustain the animal.

Following Elton, Bookchin tells us that, for humans, the “great diversity of racial types reminds us that human communities have followed their own distinctive lines of

¹⁰⁴Bookchin, “Dangerous Environment of Man,” 35.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 60.

¹⁰⁶Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, 61.

¹⁰⁷Bookchin, “Ecology and Revolutionary Thought (1964)”; Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom* (Palo Alto, 1982).

¹⁰⁸Charles Elton, *Animal Ecology* (New York, 1927).

¹⁰⁹Roger L. Kitching, “A World of Thought: ‘The Ecology of Invasions by Animals and Plants’ and Charles Elton’s Life’s Work,” in David M. Richardson, ed., *Fifty Years of Invasion Ecology* (Chichester, 2011), 4; see also Alison Bashford, *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth* (New York, 2014).

¹¹⁰Elton, *Animal Ecology*, 1.

¹¹¹Ibid., 17.

evolution. Each has adapted itself over many millennia to different climatic and physical conditions.”¹¹² Studying populations as communities thus allows Elton to make the broader claim that to understand the origin of species, ecologists need to pay closer attention to the similarities and not the differences between animal communities. This includes counting the size and dispersal of populations to better understand fluctuations in tandem with the entire communal interaction with a wide range of biotic factors. For Elton, this means that animal communities are social systems just as complex as human communities. However, in this work he also preliminarily broaches the subject of species dispersal, spread, and invasion that can effect the whole ecological succession; that is, how the entire web that an individual animal community is embedded in can radically change over time.

Against this backdrop Elton greatly expanded the idea of the invasive spread of species in the now classic study *The Ecology of Invasions*.¹¹³ He directly links this consideration to the changes caused by nuclear explosions, drawing a parallel to what he calls “ecological explosions.”¹¹⁴ Population sizes can explode to the extent that individual populations become invasive. Underneath the astonishing, yet imperceptible, richness in species diversity from his ecological analysis of an interconnected “community” lies the clue to Elton’s pathbreaking argument that ecological explosions—the rise of invasive species—are heavily conditioned by a decline in species variety. Where Elton’s teacher, Julian Huxley, who wrote the editor’s introduction to *Animal Ecology*, saw that ecology was “destined to a great future” exactly because of its ability to contribute to a better understanding of “man’s food-supply and prosperity,”¹¹⁵ Elton now made this point more explicit. Due to monocultures, rigid pesticide-spraying programs, and a reduction in biodiversity, ecosystems are now more prone to invasive species. And Elton directly connects this hypothesis with the cause for greater diversity, offering three reasons: (1) it is the “right relation between man and living things”, (2) it gives “opportunities for richer experience”, and (3) it tends to promote “ecological stability.”¹¹⁶ This ecological forecast should lead to the need to reduce direct power over nature and learn how to “steer” the boat and “manipulate more wisely the tremendous forces of population growth in plants and animals.”¹¹⁷

Yet the political implications of the ecological principle of diversity are not so clear-cut. What is the “right” relationship between man and living things? And how does diversity enlarge “experience”? This is where Bookchin radicalizes Elton’s hypothesis, subversively turning the principle of diversity into a revolutionary claim. Not only in the sphere of agriculture does the environment experience a reduction in biodiversity, but also the politics of a synthetic environment simplifies the human experience, especially in the city. He sums it up like this:

¹¹²Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, 27.

¹¹³Charles Elton, *The Ecology of Invasions by Animals and Plants* (London, 1958).

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 15.

¹¹⁵Elton, *Animal Ecology*, xiv–xv.

¹¹⁶Elton, *The Ecology of Invasions by Animals and Plants*, 145.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 151.

We normally associate metropolitan life with a diversity of individual types and with variety and subtlety in human relations. But diversity among men and complexity in human relations are social and cultural phenomena. From a biological point of view, the drab, severe metropolitan world of mortar, steel, and machines constitutes a relatively simple environment, and the sharp division of labor developed by the modern urban economy imposes extremely limited, monotonous occupational activities on many of the individuals who make their livelihood in a large city.¹¹⁸

This simple, increasingly synthetic environment, therefore, must be countered by a political program of diversity. What sort of politics lends itself to implementing the principle? According to Bookchin, Elton's thesis of the conservation of variety translates directly into a politics of "organic differentiation" that logically counteracts the mechanical standardization that reduces variety. Ecology is thus both the practical and theoretical antidote to the nihilistic rejection of the status quo: it is "an emphatic affirmation of life."¹¹⁹ If biological studies of diversity demonstrate that fluctuations in populations are dependent on the number of species in an ecosystem, then stability is "a function of complexity, variety, and diversity."¹²⁰

Taking stock of Bookchin's sources, he leverages the work of a wide range of ecologists to politicize three ecological principles: completeness, balance, and diversity. Each has a different political role to play. Completeness, based on the "ecological viewpoint," pointed logically in the direction of precaution, requiring political action even if a full picture could not be attained. Ecological politics thus acknowledges a "totality" from which action can be inferred without having grasped the workings of the "total" environment. This required a decentralized management of society to integrate many different systems within a whole. Balance invited an extension of the interconnectedness of human life with its natural surroundings. Just like the soil, a human community is an ecological pattern, part of a broader system based on equilibrium. And from these dangers of imbalance and the need to carefully steer ecological patterns, Bookchin infers the need for a politics of diversity, which he radically extends to also require a differentiation of human experience.

Surely this was a highly schematic enterprise that Bookchin was involved in, and he needed to balance several competing strategic considerations. He had political ideals that conflicted with those of his potential audiences, and he also was trying to find a voice in a burgeoning science-writing genre. But it is important to appreciate that Bookchin was politicizing ecological science in a unique way, drawing on extremely complex sources, with relative success. As we saw, his emphasis on small-scale management, his worries about synthetic environments and the chemical industry, and his plea for renewable energy sources was extremely progressive. And he got to these conclusions in part by reformulating the "new" ecology of the postwar era to have a genuinely political message.

¹¹⁸Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, 61.

¹¹⁹Bookchin, "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought (1964)," 328.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 329.

Rethinking Bookchin's place in the history of intellectual environmental history

Can we now make better sense of the early Bookchin's intellectual development in the postwar environmental moment with his politicization of ecological science? One immediate realization is that it is not entirely correct for Woodhouse to assert that Bookchin simply provided a "pre-assembled philosophy for integrating the 'new' issue of environmentalism into the Left's overall radical analysis."¹²¹ Rather, Bookchin was a figure who developed an intellectual system that was deeply conditioned by his surroundings and the spread of new forms of scientific knowledge. That is not to say that the *CI* group completely parted ways with intellectual resources from the Old Left. Rather, a range of political events offered Bookchin the opportunity to develop a new approach to thinking politically about what was different about this moment. Ecological crisis profoundly shaped Bookchin's interaction with politics as he (and the world) was slowly becoming environmental.

In this section, I will argue that the early Bookchin can now be placed on much firmer ground in intellectual environmental history as a figure who carved out a more radical political space than is usually attributed to environmental theorists of the era. On the one hand, this changes the way we think about the political lines of conflict that existed at the time, which do not usually give space to a "revolutionary environmentalism" in the 1950s. Instead, scholarship has focused on "romantic environmentalism," "Malthusian environmentalism," and "marketplace environmentalism." More radical forms of environmentalism usually only show up in the 1970s. Bookchin, however, defies these three categories. He already saw ecology in these early years as the "subversive science," pointing towards a revolutionary politics.¹²²

Bookchin's position can be distinguished from the other emerging languages of the environment in the 1950s. First, "romantic environmentalism" was perhaps the most pervasive of the languages of discourse in this moment. Early twentieth-century preservationists and conservationists built upon the nineteenth-century "cultural invention of wilderness" which found in untouched nature a form of religious refuge that radically erased the history of how that wilderness came into being.¹²³ The wilderness movement, especially as exemplified by the Sierra Club, offered a language of environmental politics which held on to the romantic notion found in Thoreau that ascribed theological meaning to nature, reducing it, however, to an abstract proposition. As Purdy has put it, this "Romantic style of individualism and skepticism toward politics has contributed to both success and failure for environmental politics. Romantic environmentalism proved an easy fit with established American attitudes, especially in its early constituency of the wealthy and traditional elites."¹²⁴ It was exactly in this romantic imagination, where the individual was free of social responsibilities, that Bookchin's critique of the social origins of the environmental problem started. Indeed,

¹²¹Woodhouse, *The Ecocentrists*, 51.

¹²²See Paul Shepard and Daniel MacKinley, eds., *The Subversive Science: Essays toward an Ecology of Man* (Boston, MA, 1969).

¹²³See William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1/1 (1996), 7–28.

¹²⁴Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), 122.

as we have seen already, Bookchin himself distinguishes his “rational humanism” from a “sentimental naturalism.”¹²⁵

Considering what we saw regarding the problematization of atomic science both in Bookchin’s ideological context and in his politicization of ecology, I think the distance he was trying to carve out between his position and romantic environmentalism protects him against the charge of romanticizing the “ecological outlook.” The framework he was trying to cultivate was one rooted in scientific knowledge in process, except that he saw that science was being used by politicians to push an agenda that he thought only reinforced the very problem it was trying to solve. The emphasis Bookchin placed on his three ecological principles points away from a romanticism and towards a rationalism, hopeful that scientific facts can provide a context for a greater rationalization of society. Where completeness was challenged by increasing specialization, bureaucratization, and intellectualization, Bookchin thought that ecology provided an antidote to the growing complexity of the postwar world. Balance could be extended not just as a romantic ideal but as a grounded principle observable in animal and plant communities. This not only provided a political argument for balanced ecosystems that included humans, but further broke down the divide between humans and nonhuman animals: scientific authorities could now provide hard evidence that ecological patterns applied to all organisms. Bookchin’s approach in the 1950s resisted romanticism by elevating facts, and this would lead by the 1960s to an even greater expansion of the meaning of ecology. This development lends historical context to his most advanced restatement of social ecology in that the ecological principle of “diversity” was about an “evolutionary process of graded and phased development that indicates increasing fecundity, diversity and complexity, and is characterized by the developing and ever-expanding activities of self-consciousness, subjectivity, creativity and freedom.”¹²⁶

As we saw before, of course, Bookchin’s early intellectual effort to think through the problem of ecological crisis in part stemmed from a reckoning with “Malthusian environmentalism.” While science writers like Osborn and Vogt used population anxieties to politicize ecological science, the subsequent unfolding of a radically depoliticized response to ecological crisis culminated in the Nixon administration’s environmental policies, which did not locate the economy as a source of the crisis. Although these writers did mainstream a sense of apocalyptic urgency, they did so in a way that made overpopulation, as opposed to the misuse of industry or an attitude of hierarchical domination, the source of crises. It was also this explanation which presupposed global resource scarcity that would fuel Paul Ehrlich’s efforts in *The Population Bomb* in the 1960s.¹²⁷ The political response was that of biological engineering, where the “Malthusian worry about the relationship between population and food was being repurposed to suggest new technological and energy-based resolutions.”¹²⁸ As we have

¹²⁵ Bookchin, *Our Synthetic Environment*, xvi.

¹²⁶ Brian Morris, “Remembering Murray Bookchin (1921–2006): Dialectical Naturalism,” *Anarchist Studies* 30/2 (2022), 79–94.

¹²⁷ See Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York, 1968); Paul Sabin, *The Bet: Paul Ehrlich, Julian Simon, and Our Gamble over Earth’s Future* (New Haven, 2013).

¹²⁸ Kelly, *Politics and the Anthropocene*, 36.

seen, in Bookchin's earliest writings this analysis completely neglected the social reproduction of scarcity as a facet of the capitalist economy. But as Bookchin progressed and adopted the "ecological viewpoint," his position changed. Bookchin started arguing that the social origins of the ecological crisis lie in an attitude that simply reduced nature to a set of resources. In his mature work, he would theorize this more completely as an "epistemology of rule," where the domination of nature arises from a historically conditioned attitude of hierarchical domination of man by man.¹²⁹

Ironically, the issue of population is part of the story about why Bookchin has cultivated such a negative public image since the 1990s. The "Bookchin caricature" has sought to paint him as an angry, abusive, and condescending philosopher who cultivated a sectarian politics against anyone who did not adopt his creed of social ecology.¹³⁰ But as in the context of "Malthusian environmentalism," Bookchin lucidly dealt with the implications of the population myth quite systematically, calling out the racist implications of what he perceived as the Malthusianism of deep ecology:

During the early twenties, when "Anglo Saxon" racism peaked in the U.S. against "darker" peoples like Italians, Jews, and so-called "Eastern Europeans" the notion of "biological inferiority" led to explicitly exclusionary immigration laws that favored "northern Europeans" over other, presumably "subhuman" peoples. Malthusianism, now prefixed with a "neo" to render it more contemporary, thoroughly permeated this legislation. Population in the U.S. had to be "controlled" and American "cultural" (read: racial) purity had to be rescued—be it from the "Yellow Peril" of Asia or the "Dark Peril" of the Latin and Semitic worlds.¹³¹

In that sense, the early Bookchin's rejection of "Malthusian environmentalism" was responding to the embryonic tendencies of an ideology that legitimated a wide range of American policies that were not directed at human populations, but in response to pest invasions.¹³² As we saw, the early Bookchin problematized connecting neo-Malthusian population anxieties with new agricultural technologies, especially in his treatment of DDT. Bookchin's politicization of ecology sought to counteract this tendency by exposing the fact that invasion ecology needed to be viewed within a larger story about how ecological principles can guide politics, and not the other way around.

Finally, the early Bookchin's politicization of ecology also resisted "marketplace environmentalism." For consumers in the 1950s who harbored apocalyptic anxieties surrounding what they ate and the air they breathed, the arena of electoral politics was hopelessly lost to agribusiness, but there was another possibility to be found in "practicing politics in the marketplace."¹³³ J. I. Rodale, the new poster child of the organic movement in the United States, championed "green" consumption habits in response to the growing fears caused by the problem of chemicals in food.¹³⁴ Rodale, who had risen

¹²⁹See Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*.

¹³⁰See Price, *Recovering Bookchin*.

¹³¹Murray Bookchin, "The Population Myth," *Green Perspectives* 8 (1988), 1–6, at 1.

¹³²Kinkela, *DDT and the American Century*.

¹³³See Jundt, *Greening the Red, White, and Blue*, 62.

¹³⁴Case, *The Organic Profit*.

to prominence with his popular-science magazines *Organic Gardening* and *Prevention*, filled a void in the consumer movement, providing “an open space for critiquing material ecology, contesting scientific and medical understandings of health and the environment, and creating personal styles of living that reflected changing environmental values.”¹³⁵ Rodale’s politicization of ecology was therefore radically different from Bookchin’s, in that he sought to extend the application of science to everyday consumption patterns. Drawing on similar sources to Bookchin, he used the work of soil scientists like Albert Howard to argue for a return to a more organic lifestyle, which in turn could be capitalized by his own company to sell his own magazine, products, and supplements. Marketplace environmentalism was thus part of the capitalist framework that sustained a consumption-oriented system, a system that Bookchin saw as causing ecological crisis.

While it is clear that Bookchin’s expansion of ecology’s meaning was fundamentally different to market ecology, there are some interesting parallels that can be highlighted between the audience that both Bookchin and Rodale were speaking to and the strategy they followed for using scientific facts in their political argument. Rodale was one of the witnesses called in front of the Delaney committee, and Bookchin cites his views favorably in his 1952 article as “a very unorthodox view in the United States.”¹³⁶ But by 1962 Bookchin would not mention Rodale in his writings, which is revealing considering how successful Rodale had become by this time among environmentally concerned Americans. Rodale sought to mobilize an audience of consumers against agribusiness to consume organic products, in part marketed by his own publications.

Bookchin’s intended audience had considerable overlap with Rodale’s. The *CI* group would also engage with their readers by soliciting and responding to letters to start a more radical public debate. The group was trying to view them as citizens and not just as consumers, and Bookchin’s work throughout the 1950s tried to get people coming out of those radical Old Left traditions which had failed in the face of postwar capitalism not to turn to the marketplace. But there is an important difference in the ways in which each figure used ecological science. Rodale sought to delegitimize ecology, and along with it science as well, choosing to draw only on those facts that allowed him to bolster his own marketing campaign for the organic lifestyle. Bookchin also wanted to show that science was not neutral and often produced irrational results. But I think it telling that as Bookchin progressed in his thinking throughout the 1950s, he believed that in a legitimization of ecology, science was actually at its most hopeful, perhaps exactly because of the major parallels that could be drawn between animal and human communities. This broke down the distinctions between an abstract nature out there, which could be looked at as a set of resources, and human culture, as somehow separate entities.

All things considered, Bookchin’s early work is perhaps best placed alongside Barry Commoner’s work that sought to challenge the authority of science without challenging its usefulness.¹³⁷ While only rising to prominence with his “Four Laws of Ecology”

¹³⁵Ibid., 8.

¹³⁶Bookchin, “The Problem of Chemicals in Food,” 212.

¹³⁷See Egan, *Barry Commoner*, 9.

after Bookchin and Carson's 1962 books,¹³⁸ Commoner played a significant role in galvanizing global environmental action in the 1970s. But even this parallel with Bookchin should be taken with a grain of salt because, as Bookchin tells us in a 2004 introduction to his *Post-scarcity Anarchism*,

the world was afflicted by the pop rubbish of “radical ecologists”, exotic technicians and biologists like Buckminster Fuller, Barry Commoner, and the like, who in my view became celebrities more than serious social theorists. People who can on Monday applaud Paul Ehrlich, who flaunted neo-Malthusian opinions, then suddenly denounce the same neo-Malthusian views on Tuesday have hardly earned my admiration.¹³⁹

In that vein, Bookchin's early writing remains a unique perspective from which to consider how ecological science was being used in political argument. He is therefore perhaps best understood as promoting an idiosyncratic form of “revolutionary environmentalism” that defies neat classification. His ideas about decentralized management were an inspiration to rural communes that started emerging in the late 1960s,¹⁴⁰ but as this study of his early work has shown, he believed in ecological science and meant to interpret it with a revolutionary message. This is perhaps also the great strength of taking the early Bookchin seriously: he developed a way out of the ecological crises of the 1950s that moved beyond the Old Left; he drew on ecological authorities to offer an interpretation of the facts that was politically radical; and he theorized social ecology, climate change, and even renewable energy within a framework that problematized the social roots of environmental degradation and viewed ecological politics as an end in itself.

Conclusion

This article has explored the development of Murray Bookchin's ecological political thought within the framework of the postwar environmental moment and uncovered how he uniquely politicized ecological science. I have argued that Bookchin's early writings were a critical response to both the dire environmental issues of his time and the limitations he perceived in Old Left politics. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that Bookchin's understanding of ecological science was not simply a product of his turn to “green anarchism” but was directly linked with 1950s ecologists typically overlooked in the recent scholarship.

Further research, however, is needed to fully understand the intellectual roots of Bookchin's early thought. One promising avenue would be to explore more directly the influence of Josef Weber on Bookchin's ideas about utopia. Weber's critique of both capitalism and socialism played a significant role in shaping Bookchin's understanding of these issues, yet this influence remains understudied. Similarly, greater attention should be paid to Lewis Mumford's influence on Bookchin's conceptualization of cities

¹³⁸ Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle* (New York, 1971), 33–48.

¹³⁹ Murray Bookchin, *Post-scarcity Anarchism*, 3rd edn (Edinburgh, 2004), xli.

¹⁴⁰ Jundt, *Greening the Red, White, and Blue*, 151.

as the location for an ecological utopia. Unraveling these influences in context could offer new insights into how Bookchin's political ecology emerged from a complex web of intellectual exchanges and events preceding the 1960s. But they could also better tease out Bookchin's pathways towards "green anarchism" and his influence on the New Left.

Acknowledgments. I would like to thank Brandon Byrd, Duncan Kelly, Duncan Bell, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions. I am grateful to Debbie Bookchin, Bea Bookchin, Casey Blake, Sean Fleming, and Lisa Fenner for their excellent feedback during the research process and on earlier drafts.

Cite this article: Maximilian Fenner, "Murray Bookchin and the Postwar Environmental Moment: The Early Bookchin and the Politicization of Ecology, 1948–1964," *Modern Intellectual History* (2025), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244324000349>