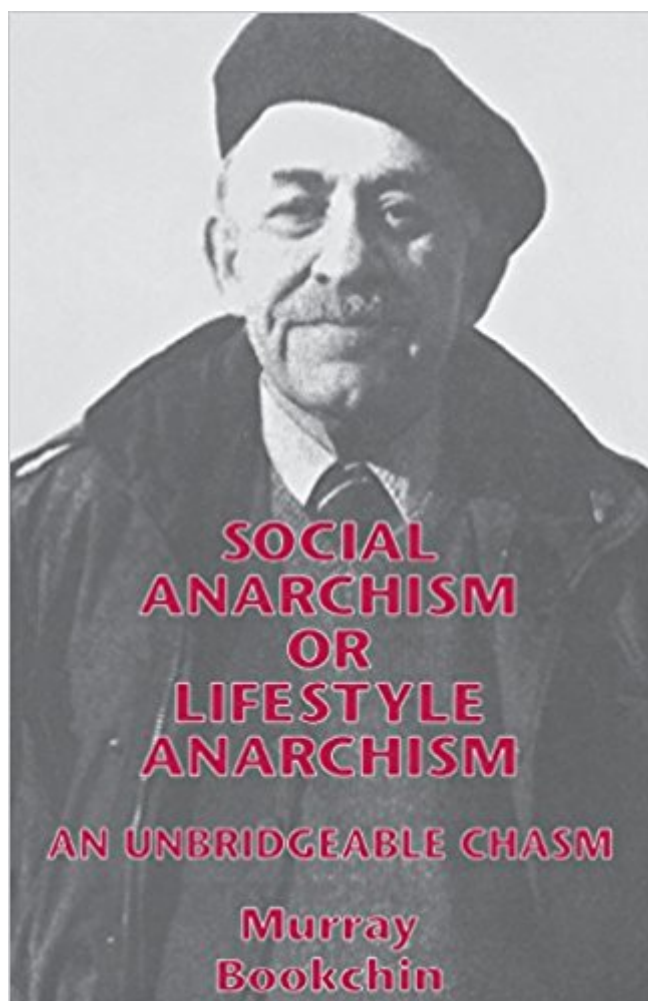


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Social Anarchism Or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm



Synopsis

This book asks - and tries to answer - several basic questions that affect all Leftists today. Will anarchism remain a revolutionary social movement or become a chic boutique lifestyle subculture? Will its primary goals be the complete transformation of a hierarchical, class, and irrational society into a libertarian communist one? Or will it become an ideology focused on personal well-being, spiritual redemption, and self-realization within the existing society? In an era of privatism, kicks, introversion, and post-modernist nihilism, Murray Bookchin forcefully examines the growing nihilistic trends that threaten to undermine the revolutionary tradition of anarchism and co-opt its fragments into a harmless personalistic, yuppie ideology of social accommodation that presents no threat to the existing powers that be. Includes the essay, "The Left That Was."

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Customer Reviews

This book asks - and tries to answer - several basic questions that affect all Leftists today. Will anarchism remain a revolutionary social movement or become a chic boutique lifestyle subculture? Will its primary goals be the complete transformation of a hierarchical, class, and irrational society into a libertarian communist one? Or will it become an ideology focused on personal well-being, spiritual redemption, and self-realization within the existing society? In an era of privatism, kicks, introversion, and postmodernist nihilism, Murray Bookchin forcefully examines the growing nihilistic trends that threaten to undermine the revolutionary tradition of anarchism and co-opt its fragments into a harmless personalistic, yuppie ideology of social accommodation that presents no threat to

the existing powers that be. This small book, tightly reasoned and documented, should be of interest to all radicals in the "postmodern age", socialists as well as anarchists, for whom the Left seems in hopeless disarray.

Murray Bookchin is cofounder of the Institute for Social Ecology. An active voice in the ecology and anarchist movements for more than forty years, he has written numerous books and articles, including: *Anarchism, Marxism and the Future of the Left*, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism*, *The Spanish Anarchists*, *The Ecology of Freedom*, *Urbanization Without Cities*, and *Re-enchanting Humanity*. He lives in Burlington, Vermont.

Most of the reviews I've read here that give one star to "Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm" by Murray Bookchin want to qualify Bookchin's argument until it dies the death of a thousand qualifications. Instead, I think it's helpful to recognize the necessary corrective that Bookchin has put forth. Sure, he disagrees with much outside his own view of anarcho-communism/social ecology - but why wouldn't he? You give reasons for why you disagree with a political programme. Of course, he does take the tone of a "grumpy old man", and perhaps his condemnation of anarchist tendencies outside of his own are treated with "Stalinist" disdain - but, I think Bookchin's argument is a refreshing, logical, and necessarily divisive argument for why these two approaches to anarchism need to be recognized for what they are and for what they stand for. I would have, however, liked to see Bookchin treat the other side a little more fairly. This doesn't undermine his argument, but, I think he sometimes uses sources that aren't the best representations of the other side: Hakim Bey, Susan Brown, and Mumford. I think you find in these folks the prototype of the currently-nauseating Crimethink ex-worker's collective that is leading many kids who listen to hardcore and eat vegan to think they are taking part in revolution. His treatment of Emma Goldman is sparse, calling her not the "ablest" thinker on the individualistic anarchist side of the argument. I would have liked to see more thoughtful response to her tendency. Overall, I would recommend this book to folks who are viewing their anarchism as an individual "escape" from capitalism rather than an opportunity to organize the discontent of masses caught in the social relations of capitalism. And, if the eyes of some that makes me a Marxist, then a Marxist I shall be!

Written some ten years ago, Bookchin's devastating and concise critique is even more relevant today than when it was written. Anarchism today in the English speaking world especially is in a state of total disarray, having its socialistic core washed away and its previous concern for genuine

change and an actual social revolution destroyed. In 1999 Bookchin, as a result of what was happening to Anarchism in the West, broke with Anarchism while remaining a revolutionary libertarian socialist -- a specific form of libertarian socialism he has termed Communalism. One cannot blame Bookchin at all for his action. For he had seen a movement he had participated in for some 40 years collapsing around him into a bourgeoisified mystical, New Age, misanthropic, anti-civilizational, cult for middle class kids who want to simply "do their own thing" but not actually do anything that might genuinely challenge the establishment. Bookchin may very well be vindicated in the end as the movement he left behind dissolves into irrelevancy, his leaving it and moving to a genuinely revolutionary democratic and libertarian philosophy, program, and ideal may help someday bring the Left back its ethical vision of a free and just world. Hopefully some person interested in Anarchism will read this and learn that if Anarchism is to have any relevance in the struggle for human liberation, it must ask itself some very difficult questions, hopefully Bookchin's book will provoke them to do just that and create a movement that might actually change the world for the better.

Murray Bookchin's honest eye-opening piece, "Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm," rightfully and finally asks the question that had been festering in the anarchist movement since the days of Proudhon; either anarchism will be social or it will be lifestyle. Ultimately Bookchin would break with anarchism, "I'm tired of defending anarchism against the anarchists": "I do not fault myself for trying to expand the horizon of anarchism in the sixties along cultural lines. I regret only that I failed, not that I saw the wrong possibilities for profoundly changing our society. Tragically, many self-professed American anarchists didn't even try to do much back then and have since abandoned their convictions for private life and academic careers. Surely failure doesn't mean that one shouldn't try?" I cannot summarize anymore about what this piece is about other than what its title states; George Woodcock turned out to be right--anarchists had no taste for democracy. At least Murray had the satisfaction of knowing he had tried. In the end, his loyalty to democracy as a concept and a praxis was stronger than his loyalty to anarchism. So when he had to choose between them, he chose democracy. In continuance with his writings on libertarian municipalism, Murray in his later years of life settled on democratic communalism as his vision for a future non-hierarchical, free and egalitarian society based upon a confederation of municipalities based on community control. For further references see: "Bookchin Breaks With Anarchism", an article written by his longtime companion Janet Biehl in order to clarify why Murray split with anarchism:[...]

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