Social Ecology and Communalism
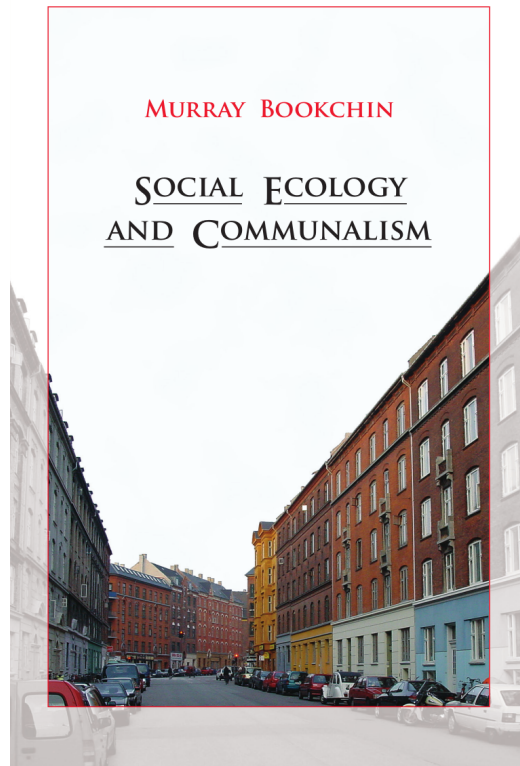
Murray Bookchin

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Contents

An Introduction to Social Ecology and Communalism

We are standing at a crucial crossroads. Not only does the age-old "social question" concerning the exploitation of human labor remain unresolved, but the plundering of natural resources has reached a point where humanity is also forced to politically deal with an "ecological question." Today, we have to make conscious choices about what direction society should take, to properly meet these challenges.

At the same time, we see that our very ability to make the necessary choices are being undermined by an incessant centralization of economic and political power. Not only is there a process of centralization in most modern nation states that divests humanity of any control over social affairs, but power is also gradually being transferred to transnational institutions.

Simultaneously, the elites governing the multinational corporations are virtually given free rein to continue exploiting people as well as the natural world, in a series of new "free trade" agreements that in turn have provoked a range of popular protests. The last few years have also witnessed, in the ongoing "War on Terror," serious encroachments on a range of civil rights that we, in the Western world, have come to take for granted. So, at a time when the social and ecological crises are intensified in breadth and scope, we find ourselves utterly disempowered, and virtually stripped of possibilities to arrest and reverse this destructive "development."

None of the established political tendencies, no matter how "radical" they claim to be, seem to be able to counter these processes.

One after another, the European Social Democratic parties, not to speak of the once so promising Green tendencies, have all lowered their banners and come to accept the most pernicious market forces. Their participation in national parliaments continuously hollows out their expressed ideals. Not only has the traditional Left crumbled ideologically with the collapse of the Eastern Bloc — which indeed is a tragic irony — but today, there exists no real extraparliamentary movement, with the will and ability to foster and advance an *alternative politics*. No left libertarian *movement* has yet emerged that could make use of the vast opportunities that opened up as "Real Existing Socialism" ceased to exist. The great hopes that were nurtured by the many new social movements which emerged in the twentieth century have all but faded away, and where the radical Left has not simply "melted into air," it has become highly confused. This is a trend that echoes throughout the world, and, despite the recent resurgence of *protest* movements, there are still no visible tendencies which advance practical and credible alternative directions to the destructive tracks we are on.

If we are not able to intelligently respond to these challenges, it is clear that popular discontents will be channeled through the Right instead, as we indeed witness in many industrialized countries today — notably the disconcerting growth of religious fundamentalisms. Inasmuch as there exists no clear and principled Left radicalism, the conservatives and the reactionaries can set the political agenda, and as a result, the whole political spectrum has tilted markedly toward

the Right. The current political climate is itself a reason to be concerned, as there is an urgent need to find political *alternatives* that can seriously deal with the social and ecological crisis in which we find ourselves. We have to open up a debate and clarify the basic theoretical issues at stake, before we can carve out a possible Left agenda suited for our time. It is in this quest for political alternatives that we turn to the radical theorist Murray Bookchin.

This book is a collection of essays written by Bookchin, a man who dedicated his whole life to seeking rational alternatives to capitalist society. Bookchin was born in January 1921, in New York City to Jewish-Russian immigrants. His grandparents had been members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party of Russia, and fled the country in the wake of the failed revolution of 1905. In the working class neighborhoods of the Bronx, Bookchin's childhood and youth were strongly marked by the hopeful enthusiasm that followed in the aftermath of the October revolution of 1917. As America entered headlong into the Great Depression, Bookchin got in touch with the radical organizations agitating in his New York neighborhood, and quickly he became very politically active.

This marked the beginning of a long life dedicated to the cause of social freedom.

Because of his family's economic situation, Bookchin had to start working at an early age, and got involved in the activities of the trade union movement. In the thirties, he was a member of the various organizations spawned by the Communist Party, acting as an agitator, organizer and study leader, although he gradually became strongly critical of many of its policies. Already by the outbreak of the Spanish Revolution, he broke with the Communists, mainly because of their Popular Front strategy (notoriously the Stalinist betrayal of the Spanish working class). He then became involved in the Trotskyist movement — while Trotsky was still alive — and wrote his first articles for dissident Left groups. After the Second World War, he gravitated more and more toward a libertarian socialism, and started reevaluating the basic premises and the logical conclusions of conventional radical theory.

Bookchin was an untiring activist and theorist in most of the significant radical movements that emerged after the Second World War. He was in the worker's movement while it was still truly radical, and was active as a shop steward and a strike leader. He was one of the definitive pioneers of ecological thought, and participated in the environmental movement from its tentative inception in the 1950s. Bookchin was also a part of the Civil Rights Movement, the anti- nuclear movement, involved with Students for a Democratic Society, and a series of urban development projects. He was very engaged in efforts to develop neo-anarchist ideas, groups and projects. Later on he became heavily involved in the emergence of the Greens, and was active in local issues and electoral campaigns in his home town, Burlington, Vermont. It was only in the last few years that physical infirmities impeded him from taking part in active politics, and relegated him to the writer's desk. Indeed, it is probably for his theoretical contributions Bookchin is most well-known and valued.

Bookchin published more than twenty books, and a wide range of articles, lectures and essays, and his work has been translated into many different languages. His writings have encompassed a great variety of subject matters, including history, anthropology, philosophy, science, and technology, as well as culture and social organization. Still, it is his treatment of ecological and political issues that has made Bookchin known to most readers, and some of his older books, notably *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, *Toward an Ecological Society*, and *The Ecology of Freedom*, have been sources of inspiration for several generations of radicals.

Murray Bookchin experienced many radical movements in his lifetime, and had a relationship to all the major radical ideological trends of the last century. Still, he managed to hammer out a unique political philosophy that attempts to build on the best in these traditions. The purpose of his work was to renew radical theory so that it maintains its best principles and draws lessons from a broad spectrum of historical experiences, while being adapted to new issues and challenges.

Although by no means his first relevant work, it was with his 1964 essay, "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought" that Bookchin started to define the outlines of the body of ideas he called social ecology — a theory that was to be more fully developed in books like *The Ecology of Freedom*, *Remaking Society*, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, and *Re-enchanting Humanity*. In 1971, his "Spring Offensives and Summer Vacations" was hinting at a libertarian municipalist approach, that later was carved out in the pages of *The Limits of the City*, and particularly in *From Urbanization to Cities*, as well as in a series of shorter essays. His historical writings have recently culminated in his massive history of revolutionary popular movements — the four-volume *The Third Revolution* (1996–2005).

For more than four decades, the theory of social ecology has been continually nuanced and developed. For a rounded introduction to his body of ideas, readers should turn to Janet Biehl's excellent presentation in *The Murray Bookchin Reader*.

The basic promise of social ecology is to re-harmonize the relationship between society and nature, and to create a rational, ecological society. Here Bookchin suggests a dialectical interpretation of human history, culture, and natural evolution. By looking at humanity's *potentialities* for freedom and cooperation he argues that history itself suggests to us, if only in a fragmented and incomplete form, how such a rational future can and *ought* to be formed.

While Bookchin relied partly on the the theories of Karl Marx (particularly his critique of capitalism), he saw the need to distance himself from the Marxist tradition, of which he had been a part, in order to clarify the liberatory content of his ideas. As an anti-authoritarian and a libertarian socialist, he tried to build upon the viable fragments of anarchism to create a rounded libertarian complement to Marx's ideas on the radical Left. In order to create a new ecological body of thought, as well as a new politics, he used the words "*post-scarcity* anarchism" to express the new transcendence his perspective reflected of both libertarian and Marxian views. Still, he gradually felt that the traditional radical orthodoxies inhibited the logic of his ideas. After making great efforts at defending (and trying to *fill with meaning*) variably an "anarchist-communism," an "eco-anarchism," and "social anarchism" that maintained a coherency and political radicalism, he came to a point where this project no longer seemed feasible. The inherent flaws of anarchism became all the more apparent as Bookchin studied the historical emergence of its basic ideas and its various organized expressions: Not only had anarchism been infected by current trends of nihilism and lifestyle approaches, it was indeed a product of *individualist* and *anti-social* attitudes from its very inception. He openly broke with anarchism at the second International Conference on Libertarian Municipalism, in Vermont, 1999 — and made it clear that his theory of social ecology had to be embodied in the ideology he called Communalism.

This is not to say that the anarchist tradition did not provide a set of sound *sentiments*, namely anti-statism, federalism, and self- management (however naïvely they were formulated), but that they never made up a coherent theoretical framework for radical social action. Accordingly, Bookchin urged serious libertarians to *transcend* anarchism, along with Marxism and other radical ideologies. It is necessary, he contended, to create a new body of thought based on a coherent

and revolutionary social approach that integrates and goes beyond all traditional forms of socialist radicalism. Indeed, vague libertarian ideals of popular self- management, mutual aid, and a stateless community, are through Bookchin's social ecology, developed into aspects of a coherent *political* theory, marked by direct democracy, municipalization, and confederalism. This constitutes the *political* alternative that Bookchin argued could confront the market economy and powerful centralized institutions.

These political ideas have been developed over many decades, and are based on both concrete lessons as well as the creative formulations of a man who passionately dedicated his life to the radical movement, a glowing passion that is clearly expressed in the essays here presented.

The purpose of this small collection of essays is to give a general overview of Murray Bookchin's fundamental ideas on social ecology and Communalism. Of course four essays cannot replace the many books and polemical essays written by Bookchin on these subjects, and this collection is not meant as a substitute for a more thorough study of his ideas. Still, these essays can indeed serve as a decent introduction for serious readers, and give a good sense of the theoretical outlines of Bookchin's theoretical corpus.

The first essay, "What is Social Ecology?," gives an important overview of the basic theoretical tenets of social ecology. Here Bookchin offers a *developmental* perspective on society and nature, explaining how "second nature" (human culture) has developed out of "first nature" (biological evolution), and showing that the very "idea of dominating nature" is connected to the historical emergence of hierarchies, and later to the breakthrough of capitalism. In order to create an ecological society, Bookchin claimed, we have to confront and challenge all hierarchical relationships, and ultimately abolish hierarchy as such from the human condition.

The essay was originally published in an anthology edited by Michael Zimmerman, *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1993), although it was revised both in 1996 and 2001.

The second essay, "Radical Politics in an Era of Advanced Capitalism," appeared in *Green Perspectives* (#18, November 1989). The essay begins with a critique of Marxism and its economistic class orientation, urging radicals to understand the changing nature of capitalism. Bookchin urges us to clarify the relationship between "society," "politics," and "the state," in order to develop an new radical ecological politics, by expanding on the historical advances made by the public domain and the city. It is, in my view, one of the clearest expressions of his proposal for a new libertarian politics, insisting on the centrality of the municipality and of confederalism. This essay was revised by Murray Bookchin in 2001.

The third essay, "The Role of Social Ecology in a Period of Reaction," was written in 1995, when Bookchin had just finished writing *Re-enchanting Humanity*. It makes very clear distinctions between social ecology, and contemporary trends like "deep ecology," mysticism, anti-humanism, as well as postmodernist eclecticism and relativism. It was first sent to an International Gathering of social ecologists in Dunoon, Scotland, in August of that year, and it was subsequently published as "Theses on Social Ecology in a Period of Reaction" in *Green Perspectives* (# 33, October 1995).

In addition to many interesting comments on current cultural and philosophical trends, Bookchin here places social ecology unequivocally in the trajectory of the Enlightenment and its revolutionary offshoots, and for those reasons I consider this essay particularly appropriate to include in this anthology.

The final essay, "The Communalist Project," is in my view the most significant essay in this anthology, binding the other essays together by defining a new outlook. Although an earlier version (that was to be significantly revised and expanded) was circulated as "The Communalist Moment," this essay was first published in the journal *Communalism* (#2, November, 2002). Bookchin details the need to go beyond all the ideologies of the traditional Left, such as Marxism, anarchism, and syndicalism, and create a new, coherent libertarian radicalism. He explains the relationship between Communalism and libertarian municipalism. This essay constitutes the best exposition to the extent that Bookchin had shaken off all the "anarchist" trappings that were formerly identified with his theories of social ecology. In fact, this essay was initially published with an appendix on "Anarchism and Power in the Spanish Revolution," that criticizes anarchism for not having any theory of power, and for not being able to deal with this important question in real life politics. This appendix has been left out of this collection for one reason: in these pages, I wanted to present only general essays — essays which were neither considered too polemical nor too specific — which would constitute a short book properly expressing *the main ideological aspects* of Bookchin's theoretical writings. (The appendix is available at www.communalism.org, and will be published, along with other critiques of anarchism and Marxism, in a forthcoming anthology presenting Bookchin's recent writings on Libertarian Municipalism.)

The red thread running through all these essays is the drive to understand and explain the struggle for a rational society, and to understand the necessary ideological underpinnings of a contemporary radical politics. Although the essays included are very different in focus and emphasis, I think that taken together, they convey the ideological foundations of this political project, and its roots in the rich and fecund theory of social ecology.

This book gives a highly accessible introduction to social ecology and Communalism, as it has been developed by one of the most exciting and pioneering thinkers of the twentieth century. Its purpose is to give a general overview of Murray Bookchin's ideas, and convey a sense of his originality, by presenting some of his most central contributions to radical theory. Despite Bookchin's insistence that the ideas he proposed are a product of revolutionary movements of the past, and of the ideals of the Enlightenment, he nevertheless created a new and unique synthesis. This political philosophy suggests that the solution to the enormous social and ecological problems we face today, fundamentally lie in the formation of a new citizenry, its empowerment through new political institutions, and a new political culture. It is my profound belief that Communalism, as a coherent body of ideas — with a dialectical philosophy of nature, a confederalist politics, a nonhierarchical social analysis, and an ethics based on complementarity — can be an inspiration for a new radical popular movement in the years to come, indeed, for the resuscitation of the Left in a meaningful sense.

At this crossroads, we now have to decide where we want to go, and how we can get there. The current ecological crisis is also a social one, and we must redefine humanity's relationship to the natural world by remaking the basic social institutions and advancing a new ecological humanism, in order to make science, technology, and the human intellect serve both social development and a natural evolution guided by reason. To carve the outlines of a rational ecological future, and to initiate the necessary steps in that direction, has now become not only a desideratum, but a necessity. As Murray Bookchin so challengingly asks, "humanity is too intelligent not to live in a rational society. It remains to see whether it is intelligent enough to achieve one."

Eirik Eiglad,
January 14th, 2006

What is Social Ecology?

Social ecology is based on the conviction that nearly all of our present ecological problems originate in deep-seated social problems. It follows, from this view, that these ecological problems cannot be understood, let alone solved, without a careful understanding of our existing society and the irrationalities that dominate it. To make this point more concrete: economic, ethnic, cultural, and gender conflicts, among many others, lie at the core of the most serious ecological dislocations we face today — apart, to be sure, from those that are produced by natural catastrophes.

If this approach seems a bit too sociological for those environmentalists who identify the primary ecological problem as being the preservation of wildlife or wilderness, or more broadly as attending to "Gaia" to achieve planetary "oneness," they might wish to consider certain recent developments. The massive oil spills that have occurred over the past two decades, the extensive deforestation of tropical forest and magnificent ancient trees in temperate areas, and vast hydroelectric projects that flood places where people live, to cite only a few problems, are sobering reminders that the real battleground on which the ecological future of the planet will be decided is clearly a social one, particularly between corporate power and the long-range interests of humanity as a whole.

Indeed, to separate ecological problems from social problems — or even to play down or give only token recognition to their crucial relationship — would be to grossly misconstrue the sources of the growing environmental crisis. In effect, the way human beings deal with each other as social beings is crucial to addressing the ecological crisis. Unless we clearly recognize this, we will fail to see that the hierarchical mentality and class relationships that so thoroughly permeate society are what has given rise to the very idea of dominating the natural world.

Unless we realize that the present market society, structured around the brutally competitive imperative of "grow or die," is a thoroughly impersonal, self-operating mechanism, we will falsely tend to blame other phenomena — such as technology or population growth — for growing environmental dislocations. We will ignore their root causes, such as trade for profit, industrial expansion for its own sake, and the identification of progress with corporate self- interest. In short, we will tend to focus on the *symptoms* of a grim social pathology rather than on the pathology itself, and our efforts will be directed toward limited goals whose attainment is more cosmetic than curative.

Some critics have recently questioned whether social ecology has treated the issue of spirituality in ecological politics adequately. In fact, social ecology was among the earliest of contemporary ecologies to call for a sweeping change in existing spiritual values. Indeed, such a change would involve a far-reaching transformation of our prevailing mentality of domination into one of complementarity, one that sees our role in the natural world as creative, supportive, and deeply appreciative of the well-being of nonhuman life. In social ecology a truly *natural* spirituality, free of mystical regressions, would center on the ability of an emancipated humanity to

function as ethical agents for diminishing needless suffering, engaging in ecological restoration, and fostering an aesthetic appreciation of natural evolution in all its fecundity and diversity.

Thus, in its call for a collective effort to change society, social ecology has never eschewed the need for a radically new spirituality or mentality. As early as 1965, the first public statement to advance the ideas of social ecology concluded with the injunction: "The cast of mind that today organizes differences among human and other life-forms along hierarchical lines of 'supremacy or 'inferiority' will give way to an outlook that deals with diversity in an ecological manner — that is, according to an ethics of complementarity."[1] In such an ethics, human beings would complement nonhuman beings with their own capacities to produce a richer, creative, and developmental whole — not as a "dominant" species but as supportive one. Although this ethics, expressed at times as an appeal for the "respiritization of the natural world," recurs throughout the literature of social ecology, it should not be mistaken for a theology that raises a deity above the natural world or even that seeks to discover one within it. The spirituality advanced by social ecology is definitively *naturalist* (as one would expect, given its relation to ecology itself, which stems from the biological sciences) rather than supernaturalistic or pantheistic areas of speculation.

The effort in some quarters of the ecology movement to prioritize the need to develop a pantheistic "eco-spirituality" over the need to address social factors raises serious questions about their ability to come to grips with reality. At a time when a blind social mechanism — the market — is turning soil into sand, covering fertile land with concrete, poisoning air and water, and producing sweeping climatic and atmospheric changes, we cannot ignore the impact that an aggressive hierarchical and exploitative class society has on the natural world. We must face the fact that economic growth, gender oppressions, and ethnic domination — not to speak of corporate, state, and bureaucratic incursions on human well- being — are much more capable of shaping the future of the natural world than are privatistic forms of spiritual self-redemption. These forms of domination must be confronted by collective action and by major social movements that challenge the social sources of the ecological crisis, not simply by personalistic forms of consumption and investment that often go under the oxymoronic rubric of "green capitalism." The present highly cooptative society is only too eager to find new means of commercial aggrandizement and to add ecological verbiage to its advertising and customer relations efforts.

Nature and Society

To escape from this profit-oriented image of ecology, let us begin with some basics — namely, by asking what society and the natural world actually are. Among the many definitions of *nature* that have been formulated over time, the one that has the most affinity with social ecology is rather elusive and often difficult to grasp because understanding and articulating it requires a certain way of thinking — one that stands at odds with what is popularly called "linear thinking." This "nonlinear" or organic way of thinking is developmental rather than analytical, or in more technical terms, it is dialectical rather than instrumental. It conceives the natural world as a

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[1] Murray Bookchin, "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought," originally published in the libertarian socialist periodical *Comment* (September 1965) and collected, together with all my major essays of the 1960s, in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (Berkeley: Ramparts Press, 1972; reprinted Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1977). The expression "ethics of complementarity" is from my *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (San Francisco: Cheshire Books, 1982; revised edition Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991; reprinted with a new introduction by AK Press, 2005).

developmental process , rather than the beautiful vistas we see from a mountaintop or images fixed on the backs of picture postcards. Such vistas and images of nonhuman nature are basically static and immobile. As we gaze over a landscape, to be sure, our attention may momentarily be arrested by the soaring flight of a hawk, or the bolting leap of a deer, or the low-slung shadowy lope of a coyote. But what we are really witnessing in such cases is the mere kinetics of physical motion, caught in the frame of an essentially static image of the scene before our eyes. Such static images deceive us into believing in the "eternality" of single moments in nature.

But nonhuman nature is more than a scenic view, and as we examine it with some care, we begin to sense that it is basically an evolving and unfolding phenomenon, a richly fecund, even dramatic development that is forever changing. I mean to define nonhuman nature precisely as an evolving process, as the *totality*, in fact, of its evolution. Nature, so concerned, encompasses the development from the inorganic into the organic, and from the less differentiated and relatively limited world of unicellular organisms into that of multicellular ones equipped with simple, then, complex, and in time fairly intelligent neural apparatuses that allow them to make innovative choices. Finally, the acquisition of warm-bloodedness gives to organisms the astonishing flexibility to exist in the most demanding climatic environments.

This vast drama of nonhuman nature is in every respect stunning and wondrous. Its evolution is marked by increasing subjectivity and flexibility and by increasing differentiation that makes an organism more adaptable to new environmental challenges and opportunities and that better equips living beings (specifically human beings) to *alter* their environment to meet their own needs rather than merely adapt to environmental changes. One may speculate that the potentiality of matter itself — the ceaseless interactivity of atoms in forming new chemical combinations to produce ever more complex molecules, amino acids, proteins, and under suitable conditions, elementary life-forms — is inherent in inorganic nature.[2] Or one may decide quite matter-of-factly that the "struggle for existence" or the "survival of the fittest" explains why increasingly subjective and more flexible beings are capable of addressing environmental change more effectively that are less subjective and flexible beings. But the simple fact remains that these evolutionary dramas did occur, indeed the evidence is carved in stone in the fossil record. That nonhuman nature is this record, this history, this developmental or evolutionary process, is a very sobering fact that cannot be ignored without ignoring reality itself.

Conceiving nonhuman nature as its own interactive evolution rather than as a mere scenic vista has profound implications — ethical as well as biological — for ecologically minded people. Human beings embody, at least potentially, attributes of nonhuman development that place them squarely within organic evolution. They are not "natural aliens," to use Neil Evernden's phrase, strong exotics, phylogenetic deformities that, owing to their tool-making capacities, "cannot evolve *with* an ecosystem anywhere."[3] Nor are they "intelligent fleas," to use the language of Gaian theorists who believe that the earth ("Gaia") is one living organism.[4] These untenable disjunctions between humanity and the evolutionary process are as superficial as they are poten-

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[2] I am not saying that complexity necessarily yields subjectivity, merely that it is difficult to conceive of subjectivity without complexity, specifically the nervous system. Human beings, as active agents in changing their environments to suit their needs, could not have achieved their present level of control over their environments without their extraordinary complex brains and nervous systems – a remarkable example of the specialization of an organ system that had highly general functions.

[3] Neil Evernden, *The Natural Alien* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), p. 109.

[4] Quoted in Alan Wolfe, "Up from Humanism," *American Prospect* (Winter 1991), p. 125.

tially misanthropic. Humans are highly intelligent, indeed, very self-conscious primates, which is to say that they have emerged — not diverged — from a long evolution of vertebrate life-forms into mammalian and finally primate life-forms. They are a product of a significant evolutionary trend toward intellectuality, self-awareness, will, intentionality, and expressiveness, be it in verbal or in body language.

Human beings belong to a natural continuum, no less than their primate ancestors and mammals in general. To depict them as "aliens" that have no place or pedigree in natural evolution, or to see them essentially as an infestation that parasitizes the planet the way fleas parasitize dogs and cats, is not only bad ecology but bad thinking. Lacking any sense of process, this kind of thinking — regrettably so commonplace among ethicists — radically divides the nonhuman from the human. Indeed, to the degree environmental thinkers romanticize nonhuman nature as wilderness and see it as more authentically "natural" than the works of humans, they freeze nonhuman nature as a circumscribed domain in which human innovation, foresight, and creativity have no place and offer no possibilities.

The truth is that human beings not only belong in nature, they are products of a long, natural evolutionary process. Their seemingly "unnatural" activities — like the development of technology and science, the formation of mutable social institutions, highly symbolic forms of communication, and aesthetic sensibilities, and the creation of towns and cities — all would have been impossible without the large array of physical human attributes that have been aeons in the making, be they the large human brain or the bipedal motion that frees human hands for making tools and carrying food. In many respects, human traits are enlargements of nonhuman traits that have been evolving over the ages. Increasing care for the young, cooperation, the substitution of mentally guided behavior for largely instinctive behavior — all are present more keenly in human behavior. Among humans, as opposed to nonhuman beings, these traits are developed sufficiently to reach a degree of elaboration and integration that yields cultures, comprising institutions of families, bands, tribes, hierarchies, economic classes, and the state — in short, highly mutable *societies* for which there is no precedent in the nonhuman world, unless the genetically programmed behavior of insects is to be regarded as social. In fact, the emergence and development of human society has been a continual process of shedding instinctive behavioral traits and of clearing a new terrain for potentially rational behavior.

Human beings always remain rooted in their biological evolutionary history, which we may call "first nature," but they produce a characteristically human social nature of their own, which we may call "second nature." Far from being unnatural, human second nature is eminently a creation of organic evolution's first nature. To write second nature out of nature as a whole, or indeed to minimize it, is to ignore the creativity of natural evolution itself and to view it one-sidedly. If "true" evolution embodies itself simply in creatures like grizzly bears, wolves, and whales — generally, animals that *people* find aesthetically pleasing or relatively intelligent — then human beings are *de*-natured. Such views, whether they see human beings as "aliens" or as "fleas," essentially place them outside the self-organizing thrust of natural evolution toward increasing subjectivity and flexibility. The more enthusiastic proponents of this de-naturing of humanity may see human beings as existing apart from nonhuman evolution, as a "freaking," as Paul Shepard put it, of the evolutionary process. Others simply avoid the problem of clarifying humanity's unique place in natural evolution by promiscuously putting human beings on a par with beetles in terms of their "intrinsic worth." The "either/ or" propositional thinking that produces such obfuscations either separates the social from the organic altogether or flippantly makes it disappear

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into the organic, resulting in an inexplicable dualism at one extreme or a naive reductionism at the other. The dualistic approach, with its quasi-theological premise that the world was "made" for human use, is saddled with the name *anthropocentrism*, while the reductionist approach, with its almost meaningless notion of a "biocentric democracy," is saddled with the name *biocentrism*.

The bifurcation of the human from the nonhuman reflects a failure to think organically or to approach evolutionary phenomena with an evolutionary way of thought. Needless to say, if nature were no more than a scenic vista, then mere metaphoric and poetic descriptions of it might suffice to replace systematic thinking about it. But *nature is the history of nature*, an evolutionary process that is going on to one degree or another under our very eyes, and as such, we dishonor it by thinking of it in anything but a processual way. That is to say, we require a way of thinking that recognizes that "what is," as it seems to lie before our eyes, is always developing into "what is not," that it is engaged in a continual self-organizing process in which past and present, along a richly differentiated but shared continuum, give rise to a new potentiality for an ever-richer degree of *wholeness*. Life, clearly in its human form, becomes open-endedly innovative and transcends its relatively narrow capacity to adapt only to a pregiven set of environmental conditions. As V. Gordon Childe once put it, "Man makes himself; he is not preset to survive by his genetic makeup."

By the same token, a processual, organic, and dialectical way of thinking has little difficulty in locating and explaining the emergence of the social out of the biological, of second nature out of first nature. It seems more fashionable these days to deal with ecologically significant social issues like an accountant. Thus, one simply juxtaposes two lists of cultural facts — one labeled "old paradigm" and the other, "new paradigm" — as though they were columns of debits and credits. Obviously distasteful items like *centralization* are listed under "old paradigm," while more appealing ones like *decentralization* are regarded as "new paradigm." The result is an inventory of bumper-sticker slogans whose "bottom line" is patently absolute good versus absolute evil. All of this may be deliciously synoptic and easy on the eyes, but it is singularly lacking as food for the brain. To truly *know* and be able to give interpretive *meaning* to the social issues and ideas so arranged, we should want to know how each one derived from the other and what its part is in an overall development. What, in fact, is meant by "decentralization," and how, in the history of human society, does it derive from or give rise to centralization? Again, we need processual thinking to comprehend processual realities, if we are to gain some sense of *direction* — practical as well as theoretical — in addressing our ecological problems.

Social ecology seems to stand alone, at present, in calling for an organic, developmental way of thinking out problems that are basically organic and developmental in character. The very definition of the natural world as a development (albeit not any one) indicates the need for organic thinking, as does the derivation of human from nonhuman nature — a derivation from which we can draw far-reaching conclusions for the development of an ecological ethics that in turn can provide serious guidelines for the solution of our ecological problems.

Social ecology calls upon us to see that the natural world and the social are interlinked by evolution into one nature that consists of two differentiations: first or biotic nature, and second or social nature. Social nature and biotic nature share an evolutionary potential for greater subjectivity and flexibility. Second nature is the way in which human beings, as flexible, highly intelligent primates, inhabit and *alter* the natural world. That is to say, people create an environment that is most suitable for their mode of existence. In this respect, second nature is no different from the environment that *every* animal, depending upon its abilities, partially creates as well as primarily

adapts to — the biophysical circumstances or ecocommunity in which it must live. In principle, on this very simple level, human beings are doing nothing that differs from the survival activities of nonhuman beings, be it building beaver dams or digging gopher holes.

But the environmental changes that human beings produce are profoundly different from those produced by nonhuman beings. Humans act upon their environments with considerable technical *foresight*, however lacking that foresight may be in ecological ideals. Animals adapt to the world around them; human beings innovate through thought and social labor. For better or worse, they alter the natural world to meet their needs and desires — not because they are perverse, but because they have evolved quite naturally over the ages to do so. Their cultures are rich in knowledge, experience, cooperation, and conceptual intellectuality; however, they have been sharply divided against themselves at many points of their development, through conflicts between groups, classes, nation- states, and even city-states. Nonhuman beings generally live in ecological niches, their behavior guided primarily by instinctive drives and conditioned reflexes. Human societies are "bonded" together by *institutions* that change radically over centuries. Nonhuman communities are notable for their general fixity, by their clearly preset, often genetically imprinted rhythms. Human communities are guided in part by ideological factors and are subject to changes conditioned by those factors. Nonhuman communities are generally tied together by genetically rooted instinctive factors — to the extent that these communities exist at all.

Hence human beings, emerging from an organic evolutionary process, initiate, by the sheer force of their biological and survival needs, a social evolutionary development that clearly involves their organic evolutionary process. Owing to their naturally endowed intelligence, powers of communication, capacity for institutional organization, and relative freedom from instinctive behavior, they refashion their environment — as do nonhuman beings — to the full extent that their biological equipment allows. This equipment makes it possible for them to engage not only in social life but in social development. It is not so much that human beings, in principle, behave differently from animals or are inherently more problematical in a strictly ecological sense, as it is that the social development by which they grade out of their biological development often becomes more problematical for themselves and nonhuman life. How these problems emerge, the ideologies they produce, the extent to which they contribute to biotic evolution or abort it, and the damage they inflict on the planet as a whole lie at the very heart of the modern ecological crisis. Second nature as it exists today, far from marking the fulfillment of human potentialities, is riddled by contradictions, antagonisms, and conflicting interests that have distorted humanity's unique capacities for development. Its future prospects encompass both the danger of tearing down the biosphere and alas, given the struggle to achieve an ecological society, the capacity to provide an entirely new ecological dispensation.

Social Hierarchy and Domination

How, then, did the social emerge from the biological? We have good reason to believe that as biological facts such as kin lineage, gender distinctions, and age differences were slowly institutionalized, their uniquely social dimension was initially quite egalitarian. Later this development acquired an oppressive hierarchical and then an exploitative class form. The lineage or blood tie in early prehistory obviously formed the organic basis of the family. Indeed, it joined together groups of families into bands, clans, and tribes, through either intermarriage or fictive forms of de-

scent, thereby forming the earliest social horizon of our ancestors. More than in other mammals, the simple biological facts of human reproduction and the protracted maternal care of the human infant tended to knit siblings together and produced a strong sense of solidarity and group inwardness. Men, women, and their children were socialize by means of a fairly stable family life, based on mutual obligation and an expressed affinity that was often sanctified by initiation ceremonies and marital vows of one kind or another.

Human beings who were outside the family and all its elaborations into bands, clans, tribes, and the like, were regarded as "strangers" who could alternatively be welcomed hospitably or enslaved or put to death. What mores existed were based on unreflective *customs* that seemed to have been inherited from time immemorial. What we call *morality* began as the rules or commandments of a deity or various deities, in that moral beliefs required some kind of supernatural or mystical reinforcement or sanctification to be accepted by a community. Only later, beginning with the ancient Greeks, did *ethics* emerge, based on rational discourse and reflection. The shift from blind custom to a commanding morality and finally to a rational ethics occurred with the rise of cities and urban cosmopolitanism, although by no means did custom and morality diminish in importance. Humanity, gradually disengaging its social organization from the biological facts of blood ties, began to admit the "stranger" and increasingly recognize itself as a shared community of human beings (and ultimately a community of citizens) rather than an ethnic folk or group of kinsmen.

In this primordial and socially formative world, other human biological traits were also reworked from the strictly natural to the social. One of these was the fact of age and its distinctions. In social groups among early humans, the absence of a written language helped to confer on the elderly a high degree of status, for it was they who possessed the traditional wisdom of the community, including knowledge of the traditional kinship lines that prescribed marital ties in obedience to extensive incest taboos as well as survival techniques that had to be acquired by both the young and the mature members of the group. In addition, the *biological* fact of gender distinctions was slowly reworked along *social* lines into what were initially complementary sororal and fraternal groups. Women formed their own food-gathering and care-taking groups with their own customs, belief systems, and values, while men formed their own hunting and warrior groups with their own behavioral characteristics, mores, and ideologies.

From everything we know about the socialization of the biological facts of kinship, age, and gender groups — their elaboration into early institutions — there is no reason to doubt that these groups existed initially in complementary relationships with one another. Each, in effect, needed the others to form a relatively stable whole. No one group "dominated" the others or tried to privilege itself in the normal course of things. Yet even as the biological underpinnings of consociation were, over time, further reworked into social institutions, so the social institutions were slowly reworked, at various periods and in various degrees, into hierarchical structures based on command and obedience. I speak here of a historical trend, in no way predetermined by any mystical force or deity, and one that was often a very limited development among many preliterate or aboriginal cultures and even in certain fairly elaborate civilizations.

Hierarchy in its earliest forms was probably not marked by the harsh qualities it has acquired over history. Elders, at the very beginnings of gerontocracy, were not only respected for their wisdom but were often beloved of the young, with affection that was often reciprocated in kind. We can probably account for the increasing harshness of later gerontocracies by supposing that the elderly, burdened by their failing physical powers and dependent upon their community's

goodwill, were more vulnerable to abandonment in periods of material want than any other part of the population. "Even in simple food-gathering cultures," observed anthropologist Paul Radin, "individuals above fifty, let us say, apparently arrogate to themselves certain powers and privileges which benefited themselves specifically, and were not necessarily, if at all, dictated by considerations either of the rights of others or the welfare of the community."[5] In any case, that gerontocracy was probably the earliest form of hierarchy is corroborated by its existence in communities as disparate as the Australian Aborigines, tribal societies in East Africa, and Native communities in the Americas. Many tribal councils throughout the world were really councils of elders, an institution that never completely disappeared (as the word *alderman* suggests), even after they were overlaid by warrior societies, chiefdoms, and kingships.

Patricentricity, in which masculine values, institutions, and forms of behavior prevail over feminine ones, seems to have developed in the wake of gerontocracy. Initially, the emergence of patricentricity may have been a useful adjunct to a life deeply rooted in the primordial natural world; preliterate and early aboriginal societies were essentially small domestic communities in which the authentic center of material life was the home, not the "men's house" so widely present in later, more elaborate tribal societies. Male rule, if such it can strictly be called, takes on its harshest and most coercive form in *patriarchy*, an institution in which the eldest male of an extended family or clan has a life-and-death command over *all* other members of the group. Women may be ordered whom to marry, but they are by no means the exclusive or even the principal object of a patriarch's domination. Sons, like daughters, may be ordered how to behave at the patriarch's command or be killed at his whim.

So far as patricentricity is concerned, however, the authority and prerogative of the male are the product of a long, often subtly negotiated development in which the male fraternity edges out the female sorority by virtue of the former's growing "civil" responsibilities. Increasing population, marauding bands of outsiders whose migrations may be induced by drought or other unfavorable conditions, and vendettas of one kind or another, to cite common causes of hostility or war, create a new "civil" sphere side by side with woman's domestic sphere, and the former gradually encroaches upon the latter. With the appearance of cattle-drawn plow agriculture, the male, who is the "master of the beasts," begins to invade the horticultural sphere of woman, whose primacy as the food cultivator and food gatherer gives her cultural preeminence in the community's internal life, slowly diluting her preeminence. Warrior societies and chiefdoms carry the momentum of male dominance to the level of a new material and cultural dispensation. Male dominance becomes extremely active and ultimately yields a world in which male elites dominate not only women but also, in the form of classes, other men.

The causes of the emergence of hierarchy are transparent enough: the infirmities of age, increasing population numbers, natural disasters, technological changes that privileged activities of hunting and animal husbandry over horticultural responsibilities, the growth of civil society, and the spread of warfare. All served to enhance the male's standing at the expense of the female's. It must be emphasized that hierarchical domination, however coercive it may be, is not the same thing as class exploitation. As I wrote in *The Ecology of Freedom*, hierarchy

> must be viewed as *institutionalized* relationships, relationships that living beings
> literally institute or create but which are neither ruthlessly fixed by instinct on the

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[5] Paul Radin, *The World of Primitive Man* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 211.

one hand nor idiosyncratic on the other. By this, I mean that they must comprise a clearly *social* structure of coercive and privileged ranks that exist apart from the idiosyncratic individuals who seem to be dominant within a given community, a hierarchy that is guided by a social logic that goes beyond individual interactions or inborn patterns of behavior.[6]

They are not reducible to strictly economic relationships based on the exploitation of labor. In fact, many chiefs earn their prestige, so essential to their authority, by disposing of gifts, and even by a considerable disaccumulation of their personal goods. The respect accorded to many chiefs is earned, not by hoarding surpluses as a source of power but by disposing of them as evidence of generosity.

By contrast, classes tend to operate along different lines. In class societies power is usually gained by the *acquisition* of wealth, not by its disposal; rulership is guaranteed by outright physical coercion, not simply by persuasion; and the state is the ultimate guarantor of authority. That hierarchy is historically more entrenched than class can perhaps be verified by the fact that despite sweeping changes in class societies, even of an economically egalitarian kind, women have still been dominated beings for millennia. By the same token, the abolition of class rule and economic exploitation offers no guarantee whatever that elaborate hierarchies and systems of domination will also disappear.

In nonhierarchical societies, certain customs guide human behavior along basically decent lines. Of primary importance among early customs was the principle of the *irreducible minimum* (to use Paul Radin's expression), the shared notion that all members of the same community are entitled to the means of life, irrespective of the amount of work they perform. To deny anyone food, shelter, and the basic means of life because of their infirmities or even their frivolous behavior would have been seen as a heinous denial of the very right to live. Nor were the basic resources needed to sustain the community ever permitted to be privately owned; overriding individualistic control was the broader principle of *usufruct* — the notion that the means of life that were not being used by one group could be used, as needed, by another. Thus unused land, orchards, and even tools and weapons, if left idle, were often at the disposition of anyone in the community who needed them. Lastly, custom fostered the practice of *mutual aid*, the rather sensible cooperative sharing of things and labor, so that an individual or family in straitened circumstances could expect to be helped by others. Taken as whole, these customs became so sedimented into organic society that they persisted long after hierarchy became oppressive and class society became predominant.

The Idea of Dominating Nature

Nature, in the sense of the biotic environment from which humans take the simple things they need for survival, often has no meaning to preliterate peoples as a general concept. Immersed in it as they are, even celebrating animistic rituals in an environment they view as a nexus of life, often imputing their own social institutions to the behavior of nonhuman species, as in the case of beaver "lodges" and humanlike spirits, the concept of "nature" a such eludes them. Words

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[6] Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom* (Palo Alto, CA: Cheshire Books, 1982), p. 29.

that express our conventional notions of nature are not easy to find, if they exist at all, in the languages of aboriginal peoples.

With the rise of hierarchy and domination, however, the seeds were planted for the belief that first nature not only exists as a world that is increasingly distinguishable from the community but one that is hierarchically organized and can be dominated by human beings. The worldview of magic reveal this shift clearly. Here nature was not conceived as a world apart; rather, a practitioner of magic essentially pleaded with the "chief spirit" of a game animal (itself a puzzling figure in the dream world) to coax it in the direction of an arrow or a spear. Later, magic became almost entirely instrumental; the hunter used magical techniques to "coerce" the game to become prey. While the earliest forms of magic may be regarded as the practices of a generally nonhierarchical and egalitarian community, the later kinds of animistic beliefs betray a more or less hierarchical view of the natural world and of latent human powers of domination over reality.

We must emphasize here that the *idea* of dominating nature has its primary source in the domination of human by human and in the structuring of the natural world into a hierarchical chain of being (a static conception, incidentally, that has no relationship to the dynamic evolution of life into increasingly advanced forms of subjectivity and flexibility). The biblical injunction that gave command of the living world to Adam and Noah was above all an expression of a *social* dispensation. Its idea of dominating nature — so essential to the view of the nonhuman world as an object of domination — can be overcome only through the creation of a society without those class and hierarchical structures that make for rule and obedience in private as well as public life, and the objectifications of reality as mere materials for exploitation. That this revolutionary dispensation would involve changes in attitudes and values should go without saying. But new ecological attitudes and values will remain vaporous if they are not given substance and solidity through real and objective institutions (the structures by which humans concretely interact with each other) and through the tangible realities of everyday life from childrearing to work and play. Until human beings cease to live in societies that are structured around hierarchies as well as economic classes, we shall never be free of domination, however much we try to dispel it with rituals, incantations, ecotheologies, and the adoption of seemingly "natural" lifeways.

The idea of dominating nature has a history that is almost as old as that of hierarchy itself. Already in the *Gilgamesh* epic of Mesopotamia, a drama whose written form dates back some four thousand years, the hero defies the deities and cuts down their sacred trees in his quest for immortality. The *Odyssey* is a vast travelogue of the Greek warrior, more canny than heroic, who in his wanderings essentially subdues the nature deities that the Hellenic world had inherited form its less well-known precursors (ironically, the dark pre-Olympian world that has been revived by purveyors of eco-mysticism and spiritualism). Long before the emergence of modern science, "linear" rationality, and "industrial society" (to cite causal factors that are invoked so flippantly in the modern ecology movement), hierarchical and class societies laid waste to much of the Mediterranean basin as well as the hillsides of China, beginning a vast remaking and often despoliation of the planet.

To be sure, human second nature, in inflicting harm on first nature, created no Garden of Eden. More often than not, it despoiled much that was beautiful, creative, and dynamic in the biotic world, just as it ravaged human life itself in murderous warfare, genocide, and acts of heartless oppression. Social ecology maintains that the future of human life goes hand in hand with the future of the nonhuman world, yet it does not overlook the fact that the harm that hierarchical

and class society inflicted on the natural world was more than matched by the harm it inflicted on much of humanity.

However troubling the ills produced by second nature, the customs of the irreducible minimum, usufruct, and mutual aid cannot be ignored in any account of anthropology and history. These customs persisted well into historical times and surfaced sometimes explosively in massive popular uprisings, from revolts in ancient Sumer to the present time. Many of those revolts demanded the recovery of caring and communistic values, at times when these were coming under the onslaught of elitist and class oppression. Indeed, despite the armies that roamed the landscape of warring areas, the tax-gatherers who plundered ordinary village peoples, and the daily abuses that overseers inflicted on peasants and workers, community life still persisted and retained many of the cherished values of a more egalitarian past. Neither ancient despots nor feudal lords could fully obliterate them in peasant villages and in the towns with independent craft associations. In ancient Greece, a rational philosophy that rejected the encumbering of thought and political life by extravagant wants, as well as a religion based on austerity, tended to scale down needs and delimit human appetites for material goods. Together they served to slow the pace of technological innovation sufficiently that when new means of production were developed, they could be sensitively integrated into a balanced society. In medieval times, markets were still modest, usually local affairs, in which guilds exercised strict control over prices, competition, and the quality of the goods produced by their members.

"Grow or Die"

But just as hierarchies and class structures had acquired momentum and permeated much of society, so too the market began to acquire a life of its own and extended its reach beyond a few limited regions into the depths of vast continents. Where exchange had once been primarily a means to provide for essential needs, limited by guilds or by moral and religious restrictions, long-distance trade subverted those limits. Not only did trade place a high premium on techniques for increasing production; it also became the progenitor of new needs, many of them wholly artificial, and gave a tremendous impetus to consumption and the growth of capital. First in northern Italy and the European lowlands, and later — and most decisively — in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the production of goods exclusively for sale and profit (the production of the capitalistic commodity) rapidly swept aside all cultural and social barriers to market growth.

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the new industrial capitalist class, with its factory system and commitment to limitless expansion, had embarked on its colonization of the entire world, including most aspects of personal life. Unlike the feudal nobility, with its cherished lands and castles, the bourgeoisie had no home but the marketplace and its bank vaults. As a class, it turned more and more of the world into a domain of factories. In the ancient and medieval worlds, entrepreneurs had normally invested profits in land and lived like country gentry, given the prejudices of the times against "ill-gotten" gains from trade. But the industrial capitalists of the modern world spawned a bitterly competitive marketplace that placed a high premium on industrial expansion and the commercial power it conferred, functioning as though growth were an end in itself.

In social ecology it is crucially important to recognize that industrial growth did not and does not result from changes in cultural outlook alone — least of all from the impact of scientific and technological rationality on society. Growth occurs above all from *harshly objective factors* churned up by the expansion of the market itself, *factors that are largely impervious to moral considerations and efforts at ethical persuasion.* Indeed, despite the close association between capitalist development and technological innovation, the most driving imperative of any enterprise in the harshly capitalist marketplace, given the savagely dehumanizing competition that prevails there, is the need of an enterprise to grow in order to avoid perishing at the hands of its savage rivals. Important as even greed may be as a motivating force, sheer survival requires that the entrepreneur must expand his or her productive apparatus in order to remain ahead of others. Each capitalist, in short, must try to devour his or her rivals — or else be devoured by them. The key to this law of life — to survival — is expansion, and the quest for ever- greater profits, to be invested, in turn, in still further expansion. Indeed, the notion of progress, once regarded as faith in the evolution of greater human cooperation and care, is now identified with ever greater competition and reckless economic growth.

The effort by many well-intentioned ecology theorists and their admirers to reduce the ecological crisis to a cultural crisis rather than a social one becomes very obfuscatory and misleading. However ecologically well-meaning an entrepreneur may be, the harsh fact is that his or her very survival in the marketplace precludes the development of a meaningful ecological orientation. The adoption of ecologically sound practices places a morally concerned entrepreneur at a striking and indeed fatal disadvantage in a competitive relationship with a rival — who, operating without ecological guidelines and moral constraints, produces cheap commodities at lower costs and reaps higher profits for further capital expansion. The marketplace has its own law of survival: only the most unscrupulous can rise to the top of that competitive struggle.

Indeed, to the extent that environmental movements and ideologies merely moralize about the wickedness of our anti- ecological society and call for changes in personal lifestyles and attitudes, they obscure the need for concerted social action and tend to deflect the struggle for far-reaching social change. Meanwhile, corporations are skillfully manipulating this popular desire for personal ecologically sound practices by cultivating ecological mirages. Mercedes-Benz, for example, declaims in a two-page magazine advertisement, decorated with a bison painting from a Paleolithic cave wall, that "we must work to make progress more environmentally sustainable by including environmental themes in the planning of new products."[7] Such messages are commonplace in Germany, one of western Europe's worst polluters. Such advertising is equally manipulative in the United States, where leading polluters piously declare that for them, "every day is Earth Day."

The point social ecology emphasizes is not that moral and spiritual persuasion and renewal are meaningless or unnecessary; they are necessary and can be educational. But modern capitalism is *structurally* amoral and hence impervious to moral appeals. The modern marketplace is driven by imperatives of its own, irrespective of what kind of CEO sits in a corporation's driver's seat or holds on to its handlebars. The direction it follows depends not upon ethical prescriptions and personal inclinations but upon objective laws of profit or loss, growth or death, eat or be eaten, and the like. The maxim "Business is business" explicitly tells us that ethical, religious, psychological, and emotional factors have virtually no place in the predatory world of production, profit,

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[7] *Der Spiegel* (Sept. 16, 1991), pp. 144–45.

and growth. It is grossly misleading to think that we can divest this harsh, indeed mechanistic world of its objective characteristics by means of ethical appeals.

A society based on the law of "grow or die" as its all-pervasive imperative must of necessity have a devastating impact on first nature. Nor does "growth" here refer to population growth; the current wisdom of population-boomers to the contrary, the most serious disruptors of ecological cycles are found in the large industrial centers of the world, which are not only poisoning water and air but producing the greenhouse gases that threaten to melt the ice caps and flood vast areas of the planet. Suppose we could somehow cut the world's population in half: would growth and the despoliation of the earth be reduced at all? Capital would insist that it was "indispensable" to own two or three of every appliance, motor vehicle, or electronic gadget, where one would more than suffice if not be too many. In addition, the military would continue to demand ever more lethal instruments of death and devastation, of which new models would be provided annually.

Nor would "softer" technologies, if produced by a grow-or-die market, fail to be used for destructive capitalistic ends. Two centuries ago, large forested areas in England were hacked into fuel for iron forges with axes that had not changed appreciably since the Bronze Age, and ordinary sails guided ships laden with commodities to all parts of the world well into the nineteenth century. Indeed, much of the United States was cleared of its forests, wildlife, and aboriginal inhabitants with tools and weapons that could have easily been recognized, however much they were modified, by Renaissance people centuries earlier. What modern technics did was *accelerate* a process that had been well under way at the close of the Middle Ages. It cannot be held solely responsible for endeavors that were under way for centuries; it essentially abetted damage caused by the ever-expanding market system, whose roots, in turn, lay in one of history's most fundamental social transformations: the elaboration of a system of production and distribution based on exchange rather than complementarity and mutual aid.

An Ecological Society

Social ecology is an appeal not only for moral regeneration but, and above all, for social reconstruction along ecological lines. It emphasizes that, taken by itself, an ethical appeal to the powers that be, based on blind market forces and ruthless competition, is certain to be futile. Indeed, taken by itself, such an appeal *obscures* the real power relationships that prevail today by making the attainment of an ecological society seem merely a matter of changing individual attitudes, spiritual renewal, or quasi-religious redemption.

Although always mindful of the importance of a new ethical outlook, social ecology seeks to redress the ecological abuses that the prevailing society has inflicted on the natural world by going to the structural as well as the subjective sources of notions like the domination of first nature. That is, it challenges the entire system of domination itself — its economy, its misuse of technics, its administrative apparatus, its degradations of political life, its destruction of the city as a center of cultural development, indeed the entire panoply of its moral hypocrisies and defiling of the human spirit — and seeks to eliminate the hierarchical and class edifices that have imposed themselves on humanity and defined the relationship between nonhuman and human nature. It advances an ethics of complementary in which human beings play a supportive role in perpetuating the integrity of the biosphere — the potentiality of human beings to be the most conscious products of natural evolution. Indeed, humans have an ethical responsibility to function

creatively in the unfolding of that evolution. Social ecology thus stresses the need to embody its ethics of complementarity in palpable social institutions that will make human beings conscious ethical agents in promoting the well-being of themselves and the nonhuman world. It seeks the enrichment of the evolutionary process by the diversification of life-forms and the application of reason to a wondrous remaking of the planet along ecological lines. Notwithstanding most romantic views, "Mother Nature" does not necessarily "know best." To oppose activities of the corporate world does not require one to become naively biocentric. Indeed by the same token, to applaud humanity's potential for foresight, rationality, and technological achievement does not make one anthropocentric. The loose usage of such buzzwords, so commonplace in the ecology movement today, must be brought to a definitive end by reflective discussion, not by deprecating denunciations.

Social ecology, in effect, recognizes that — like it or not — the future of life on this planet pivots on the future of society. It contends that evolution, both in first nature and in second, is not yet complete. Nor are the two realms so separated from each other that we must choose one or the other — either national evolution, with its "biocentric" halo, or social evolution, as we have known it up to now, with its "anthropocentric" halo — as the basis for a creative biosphere. We must go beyond both the natural and the social toward a new synthesis that contains the best of both. Such a synthesis must transcend both first and second nature in the form of a creative, self-conscious, and therefore "free nature," in which human beings intervene in natural evolution with their best capacities — their ethical sense, their unequaled capacity for conceptual thought, and their remarkable powers and range of communication.

But such a goal remains mere rhetoric unless a *movement* gives it logistical and social tangibility. How are we to organize such a movement? Logistically, "free nature" is unattainable without the decentralization of cities into confederally united communities sensitively tailored to the natural areas in which they are located. Ecotechnologies, and of solar, wind, methane, and other renewable sources of energy; organic forms of agriculture; and the design of humanly scaled, versatile industrial installations to meet the regional needs of confederated municipalities — all must be brought into the service of an ecologically sound world based on an ethics of complementarity. It means too an emphasis not only on recycling but on the production of high-quality goods that can, in many cases, last for generations. It means the replacement of needlessly insensate labor with creative work and an emphasis on artful craftspersonship in preference to mechanized production. It means the free time to be artful and to fully engage in public affairs. One would hope that the sheer availability of goods, the mechanization of production, and the freedom to choose one's material lifestyle would sooner or later influence people to practice moderation in all aspects of life as a response to the consumerism promoted by the capitalist market.[8]

But no ethics or vision of an ecological society, however inspired, can be meaningful unless it is embodied in a living politics. By *politics*, I do not mean the statecraft practiced by what we call politicians — namely, representatives elected or selected to manage public affairs and formulate policies as guidelines for social life. To social ecology, politics means what it meant in the democratic *polis* of classical Athens some two thousand years ago: direct democracy, the for-

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[8] I spelled out all these views in my 1964–65 essay "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought," and they were assimilated over time by subsequent ecology movements. Many of the technological views advanced in my 1965 essay "Toward a Liberatory Technology" were also assimilated and renamed "appropriate technology," a rather socially neutral expression in comparison with my original term ecotechnology. Both of these essays can be found in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism.*

mulation of policies by directly democratic popular assemblies, and the administration of those policies by mandated coordinators who can easily be recalled if they fail to abide by the decision of the assembly's citizens. I am very mindful that Athenian politics, even in its most democratic periods, was marred by the existence of slavery and patriarchy, and by the exclusion of the stranger from public life. In this respect, to be sure, it differed very little from most of the other ancient Mediterranean civilizations — and certainly ancient Asian ones — of the time. What made Athenian politics unique, however, was that it produced institutions that were extraordinarily democratic — even directly so — by comparison with the republican institutions of the so-called "democracies" of today's world. Either directly or indirectly, the Athenian democracy inspired later, more all-encompassing direct democracies, such as many medieval European towns, the little- known Parisian "sections" (or neighborhood assemblies) of 1793 that propelled the French Revolution in a highly radical direction, and more indirectly, New England town meetings, and other, more recent attempts at civic self-governance.[9]

Any self-managed community, however, that tries to live in isolation and develop self-sufficiency risks the danger of becoming parochial, even racist. Hence the need to extend the ecological politics of a direct democracy into confederations of ecocommunities, and to foster a healthy interdependence, rather than an introverted, stultifying independence. Social ecology would be obliged to embody its ethics in a politics of libertarian municipalism, in which munic-ipalities conjointly gain rights to self-governance through networks of confederal councils, to which towns and cities would be expected to send their mandated, recallable delegates to adjust differences. All decisions would have to be ratified by a majority of the popular assemblies of the confederated towns and cities. This institutional process could be initiated in the neighborhoods of giant cities as well as in networks of small towns. In fact, the formation of numerous "town halls" has already repeatedly been proposed in cities as large as New York and Paris, only to be defeated by well-organized elitist groups that sought to centralize power rather than allow its decentralization.

Power will always belong to elite and commanding strata if it is not institutionalized in face-to-face democracies, among people who are fully empowered as social beings to make decisions in new communal assemblies. Attempts to empower people in this manner and form constitute an abiding challenge to the nation- state — that is, a dual power in which the free municipality exists in open tension with the nation-state. Power that does not belong to the people invariably belongs to the state and the exploitative interests it represents. Which is not to say that diversity is not a desideratum; to the contrary, it is the source of cultural creativity. Still it never should be celebrated in a nationalistic sense of "apartness" from the general interests of humanity as a whole, or else it will regress into the parochialism of folkdom and tribalism.

Should the full reality of citizenship in all its discursiveness and political vitality begin to wane, its disappearance would mark an unprecedented loss in human development. Citizenship, in the classical sense of the term, which involved a lifelong, ethically oriented education in the art of participation in public affairs (not the empty form of national legitimation that it so often consists of today), would disappear. Its loss would mean the atrophying of a communal life beyond the limits of the family, the waning of a civic sensibility to the point of the shriveled ego, the complete replacement of the public arena with the private world and with private pursuits.

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[9] See "The Forms of Freedom" in *Post Scarcity-Anarchism;* "The Legacy of Freedom" in *The Ecology of Freedom* ; and "Patterns of Civic Freedom " in *From Urbanization to Cities: Towards a New Politics of Citizenship* (1982, 1992; rev.

The failure of a rational, socially committed ecology movement would yield a mechanized, aesthetically arid, and administered society, composed of vacuous egos at best and totalitarian automata at worst. Before the planet was rendered physically uninhabitable, there would be few humans who would be able to inhabit it.

Alternatively, a truly ecological society would open the vista of a "free nature" with a sophisticated eco-technology based on solar, wind, and water; carefully treated fossil fuels would be sited to produce power to meet rationally conceived needs. Production would occur entirely for use, not for profit, and the distribution of goods would occur entirely to meet human needs based on norms established by citizens' assemblies and confederations of assemblies. Decisions by the community would be made according to direct, face-to-face procedures with all the coordinative judgments mandated delegates. These judgments, in turn, would be referred back for discussion, approval, modification, or rejection by the assembly of assemblies (or Commune of communes) *as a whole*, reflecting the wishes of the fully assembled majority.

We cannot tell how much technology will be expanded a few decades from now, let alone a few generations. Its growth and the prospects it is likely to open over the course of this century alone are too dazzling even for the most imaginative utopian to envision. If nothing else, we have been swept into a permanent technological and communications revolution whose culmination it is impossible to foresee. This amassing of power and knowledge opens two radically opposing prospects: either humanity will truly destroy itself and its habitat, or it will create a garden, a fruitful and benign world that not even the most fanciful utopian, Charles Fourier, could have imagined.

It is fitting that such dire alternatives should appear now and in such extreme forms. Unless social ecology — with its naturalistic outlook, its developmental interpretations of natural and social phenomena, its emphasis on discipline with freedom and responsibility with imagination — can be brought to the service of such historic ends, humanity may well prove to be incapable of changing the world. We cannot defer the need to deal with these prospects indefinitely: either a movement will arise that will bestir humanity into action, or the last great chance in history for the complete emancipation of humanity will perish in unrestrained self-destruction.

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ed. London: Cassell, 1995).

Radical Politics in an Era of Advanced Capitalism

Defying all the theoretical predictions of the 1930s, capitalism has restabilized itself with a vengeance and acquired extraordinary flexibility in the decades since World War II. In fact, we have yet to clearly determine what constitutes capitalism in its most "mature" form, not to speak of its social trajectory in the years to come. But what is clear, I would argue, is that capitalism has transformed itself from an *economy* surrounded by many precapitalist social and political formations into a society that itself has become "economized." Terms like *consumerism* and *industrialism* are merely obscurantist euphemisms for an all-pervasive embourgeoisement that involves not simply an appetite for commodities and sophisticated technologies but the expansion of commodity relationships — of market relationships — into areas of life and social movements that once offered some degree of resistance to, if not a refuge from, utterly amoral, accumulative, and competitive forms of human interaction. Marketplace values have increasingly percolated into familial, educational, personal, and even spiritual relationships and have largely edged out the precapitalist traditions that made for mutual aid, idealism, and moral responsibility in contrast to businesslike norms of behavior.

There is a sense in which any new forms of resistance — be they by left libertarians, or radicals generally — must open alternative areas of life that can countervail and undo the embourgeoisement of society at all its levels. The issue of the relationship of "society," "politics," and "the state" becomes one of programmatic urgency. Can there be any room for a radical public realm beyond the communes, cooperatives, and neighborhood service organizations fostered by the 1960s counterculture — structures that easily degenerated into boutique-type businesses when they did not disappear completely? Is there, perhaps, a public realm that can become an arena for the interplay of conflicting forces for change, education, empowerment, and ultimately, confrontation with the established way of life?

Marxism, Capitalism, and the Public Sphere

The very concept of a *public realm* stands at odds with traditional radical notions of a *class realm*. Marxism, in particular, denied the existence of a definable "public," or what in the Age of Democratic Revolutions of two centuries ago was called "the People," because the notion ostensibly obscured specific class interests — interests that were ultimately supposed to bring the bourgeoisie into unrelenting conflict with the proletariat. If "the People" meant anything, according to Marxist theorists, it seemed to mean a waning, unformed, nondescript petty bourgeoisie — a legacy of the past and of past revolutions — that could be expected to side mainly with the capitalist class it aspired to enter and ultimately with the working class it was forced to enter. The proletariat, to the degree that it became class conscious, would ultimately express the gen-

eral interests of humanity once it absorbed this vague middle class, particularly during a general economic or "chronic" crisis within capitalism itself.

The 1930s, with its waves of strikes, its workers' insurrections, its street confrontations between revolutionary and fascist groups, and its prospect of war and bloody social upheaval, seemed to confirm this vision. But we cannot any longer ignore the fact that this traditional radical vision has since been replaced by the present-day reality of a managed capitalist system — managed culturally and ideologically as well as economically. However much living standards have been eroded for millions of people, the unprecedented fact remains that capitalism has been free of a "chronic crisis" for a half-century. Nor are there any signs that we are faced in the foreseeable future with a crisis comparable to that of the Great Depression. Far from having an internal source of long-term economic breakdown that will presumably create a general interest for a new society, capitalism has been more successful in crisis management in the last fifty years than it was in the previous century and a half, the period of its so-called "historical ascendancy."

The classical industrial proletariat, too, has waned in numbers in the First World (the historical *locus classicus* of socialist confrontation with capitalism), in class consciousness, and even in political consciousness of itself as a historically unique class. Attempts to rewrite Marxian theory to include salaried people in the proletariat are not only nonsensical, they stand flatly at odds with how this vastly differentiated middle-class population conceives itself and its relationship to a market society. To live with the hope that capitalism will "immanently" collapse from within as a result of its own contradictory self-development is illusory as things stand today.

But there are dramatic signs that capitalism, as I have emphasized elsewhere, is producing external conditions for a crisis an ecological crisis — that may well generate a general human interest for radical social change. Capitalism, organized around a "grow-or-die" market system based on rivalry and expansion, must tear down the natural world — turning soil into sand, polluting the atmosphere, changing the entire climatic pattern of the planet, and possibly making the earth unsuitable for complex forms of life. In effect, it is proving to be an ecological cancer and may well simplify complex ecosystems that have been in the making for countless aeons.

If mindless and unceasing growth as an end in itself — forced by competition to accumulate and devour the organic world — creates problems that cut across material, ethnic, and cultural differences, the concept of "the People" and of a "public sphere" may become a living reality in history. Some kind of radical ecology movement has yet to be established that could acquire a unique, cohering, and political significance to replace the influence of the traditional workers' movement. If the *locus* of proletarian radicalism was the factory, the *locus* of the ecology movement would be the community: the neighborhood, the town, and the municipality. A new alternative, a political one, would have to be developed that is neither parliamentary on the one hand nor locked into direct action and countercultural activities on the other. Indeed, direct action could mesh with this new politics in the form of community assemblies oriented toward a fully participatory democracy — in the highest form of direct action, the full empowerment of the people in determining the destiny of society.

Society, Politics, and the State

If the 1960s gave rise to a counterculture to resist the prevailing culture, the following decades have created the need for popular counter-institutions to countervail the centralized state. Al-

though the specific form that such institutions could take may vary according to the traditions, values, concerns, and culture of a given area, certain basic theoretical premises must be clarified if one is to advance the need for new institutions and, more broadly, for a new radical *politics*. The need once again to define politics — indeed, to give it a broader meaning than it has had in the past — becomes a practical imperative. The ability and wilingness of radicals to meet this need may well determine the future of movements like the Greens and the very possibility of radicalism to exist as a coherent force for basic social change.

The major institutional arenas — the social, the political, and the statist — were once clearly distinguishable from each other. The social arena could be clearly demarcated from the political, and the political, in turn, from the state. But in our present, historically clouded world, these have been blurred and mystified. Politics has been absorbed by the state, just as society has increasingly been absorbed by the economy today. If new, truly radical movements to deal with ecological breakdown are to emerge and if an ecologically oriented society is to end attempts to dominate nature as well as people, this process must be arrested and reversed.

It easy to think of society, politics, and the state ahistorically, as if they had always existed as we find them today. But the fact is that each one of these has had a complex development, one that should be understood if we are to gain a clear sense of their importance in social theory and practice. Much of what we today call *politics*, for one, is really statecraft, structured around staffing the state apparatus with parliamentarians, judges, bureaucrats, police, the military, and the like, a phenomenon often replicated from the summits of the state to the smallest of communities. But the term *politics*, Greek etymologically, once referred to a public arena peopled by conscious citizens who felt competent to directly manage their own communities, or *poleis*.

Society, in turn, was the relatively private arena, the realm of familial obligation, friendship, personal self-maintenance, production, and reproduction. From its first emergence as merely human group existence to its highly institutionalized forms, which we properly call society, social life was structured around the family or *oikos*. (Economy, in fact, once meant little more than the management of the family.) Its core was the domestic world of woman, complemented by the civil world of man.

In early human communities, the most important functions for survival, care, and maintenance occurred in the domestic arena, to which the civil arena, such as it was, largely existed in service. A tribe (to use this term in a very broad sense to include bands and clans) was a truly social entity, knitted together by blood, marital, and functional ties based on age and work. These strong centripetal forces, rooted in the biological facts of life, held these eminently social communities together. They gave them a sense of internal solidarity so strong that the tribes largely excluded the "stranger" or "outsider," whose acceptability usually depended upon canons of hospitality and the need for new members to replenish warriors when warfare became increasingly important.

A great part of recorded history is an account of the growth of the male civil arena at the expense of this domestic or social one. Males gained growing authority over the early community as a result of intertribal warfare and clashes over territory in which to hunt. Perhaps more important, agricultural peoples appropriated large areas of the land that hunting peoples required to sustain themselves and their lifeways.

It was from this undifferentiated civil arena (again, to use the word *civil* in a very broad sense) that politics and the state emerged. Which is not to say that politics and statecraft were the same from the beginning. Despite their common origins in the early civil arena, these two were sharply opposed to each other. History's garments are never neat and unwrinkled. The evolution

of society from small domestic social groups into highly differentiated, hierarchical, and class systems whose authority encompassed vast territorial empires is nothing if not complex and irregular.

The domestic and familial arena itself — that is to say, the social arena — helped to shape the formation of these states. Early despotic kingdoms, such as those of Egypt and Persia, were seen not as clearly civil entities but as the personal "households" or domestic domains of monarchs. These vast palatial estates of "divine" kings and their families were later carved up by lesser families into manorial or feudal estates. The social values of present-day aristocracies are redolent of a time when kinship and lineage, not citizenship or wealth, determined one's status and power.

The Rise of the Public Domain

It was the Bronze Age "urban revolution," to use V. Gordon Childe's expression, that slowly eliminated the trappings of the social or domestic arena from the state and created a new terrain for the political arena. The rise of cities — largely around temples, military fortresses, administrative centers, and interregional markets — created the basis for a new, more secular and more universalistic form of political space. Given time and development, this space slowly evolved an unprecedented public domain.

Cities that are perfect models of such a public space do not exist in either history or social theory. But some cities were neither predominantly social (in the domestic sense) nor statist, but gave rise to an entirely new societal dispensation. The most remarkable of these were the seaports of ancient Hellas and the craft and commercial cities of medieval Italy, Russia, and central Europe. Even modern cities of newly forming nation- states like Spain, England, and France developed identities of their own and relatively popular forms of citizen participation. Their parochial, even patriarchal attributes should not be permitted to overshadow their universal humanistic attributes. From the Olympian standpoint of modernity, it would be as petty as it would be ahistorical to highlight failings that cities shared with nearly all "civilizations" over thousands of years.

What should stand out as a matter of vital importance is that these cities created the public domain. There, in the agora of the Greek democracies, the forum of the Roman republic, the town center of the medieval commune, and the plaza of the Renaissance city, citizens could congregate. To one degree or another in this public domain a radically new arena — a political one — emerged, based on limited but often participatory forms of democracy and a new concept of civic personhood, the citizen.

Defined in terms of its etymological roots, *politics* means the mangement of the community or *polis* by its members, the citizens. *Politics* also meant the recognition of civic rights for strangers or "outsiders" who were not linked to the population by blood ties. That is, it meant the idea of a universal *humanitas*, as distinguished from the genealogically related "folk." Together with these fundamental developments, politics was marked by the increasing secularization of societal affairs, a new respect for the individual, and a growing regard for rational canons of behavior over the unthinking imperatives of custom.

I do not wish to suggest that privilege, inequality of rights, supernatural vagaries, custom, or even mistrust of the "stranger" totally disappeared with the rise of cities and politics. During the most radical and democratic periods of the French Revolution, for example, Paris was rife with

fears of "foreign conspiracies" and a xenophobic mistrust of "outsiders. " Nor did women ever fully share the freedoms enjoyed by men. My point, however, is that something very new was created by the city that cannot be buried in the folds of the social or of the state: namely, a public domain. This domain narrowed and expanded with time, but it never completely disappeared from history. It stood very much at odds with the state, which tried in varying degrees to professionalize and centralize power, often becoming an end in itself, such as the state power that emerged in Ptolemaic Egypt, the absolute monarchies of seventeenth-century Europe, and the totalitarian systems of rule established in Russia and in China in the past century.

The Importance of the Municipality and the Confederation

The abiding physical arena of politics has almost always been the city or town — more generically, the municipality. The size of a politically viable city is not unimportant, to be sure. To the Greeks, notably Aristotle, a city or *polis* should not be so large that it cannot deal with its affairs on a face-to-face basis or eliminate a certain degree of familiarity among its citizens. These standards, by no means fixed or inviolable, were meant to foster urban development along lines that directly countervailed the emerging state. Given a modest but by no means small size, the *polis* could be arranged institutionally so that it could conduct its affairs by rounded, publicly engaged men with a minimal, carefully guarded degree of representation.

To be a political person, it was supposed, required certain material preconditions. A modicum of free time was needed to participate in political affairs, leisure that was probably supplied by slave labor, although it is by no means true that all active Greek citizens were slaveowners. Even more important than leisure time was the need for personal training or character formation — the Greek notion of *paidaeia* — which inculcated the reasoned restraint by which citizens maintained the decorum needed to keep an assembly of the people viable. An ideal of public service was necessary to outweigh narrow, egoistic impulses and to develop the ideal of a general interest. This was achieved by establishing a complex network of relationships, ranging from loyal friendships — the Greek notion of *philia* — to shared experiences in civic festivals and military service.

But politics in this sense was not a strictly Hellenic phenomenon. Similar problems and needs arose and were solved in a variety of ways in the free cities not only in the Mediterranean basin but in continental Europe, England, and North America. Nearly all these free cities created a public domain and a politics that were democratic to varying degrees over long periods of time. Deeply hostile to centralized states, free cities and their federations formed some of history's crucial turning points in which humanity was faced with the possibility of establishing societies based on municipal confederations or on nation-states.

The state, too, had a historical development and cannot be reduced to a simplistic ahistorical image. Ancient states were historically followed by quasi- states, monarchical states, feudal states, and republican states. The totalitarian states of this century beggar the harshest tyrannies of the past. But essential to the rise of the nation-state was the ability of centralized states to weaken the vitality of urban, town, and village structures and replace their functions by bureaucracies, police, and military forces. A subtle interplay between the municipality and the state, often exploding in open conflict, has occurred throughout history and has shaped the societal landscape of the present day. Unfortunately, not enough attention has been given to the fact that the capacity

of states to exercise the full measure of their power has often been limited by the municipal obstacles they encountered.

Nationalism, like statism, has so deeply imprinted itself on modern thinking that the very idea of a municipalist politics as an option for societal organization has virtually been written off. For one thing, as I have already emphasized, politics these days has been identified completely with statecraft, the professionalization of power. That the political realm and the state have often been in sharp conflict with each other — indeed, in conflicts that exploded in bloody civil wars — has been almost completely overlooked.

The great revolutionary movements of the past, from the English Revolution of the 1640s to those in our own century, have always been marked by strong community upsurges and depended for their success on strong community ties. That fears of municipal autonomy still haunt the nation-state can be seen in the endless arguments that are brought against it. Phenomena as "dead" as the free community and participatory democracy should presumably arouse far fewer opponents than we continue to encounter.

The rise of the great megalopolis has not ended the historic quest for community and civic politics, any more than the rise of multinational corporations has removed the issue of nationalism from the modern agenda. Cities like New York, London, Frankfurt, Milan, and Madrid can be *politically* decentralized institutionally, be they by neighborhood or district networks, despite their large structural size and their internal interdependence. Indeed, how well they can function if they do not decentralize structurally is an ecological issue of paramount importance, as problems of air pollution, adequate water supply, crime, the quality of life, and transportation suggest.

History has shown very dramatically that major cities of Europe with populations approaching a million and with primitive means of communication functioned by means of well-coordinated decentralized institutions of extraordinary political vitality. From the Castilian cities that exploded in the *Comuñero* revolt in the early l500s through the Parisian sections or assemblies of the early 1790s to the Madrid Citizens' Movement of the 1960s (to cite only a few), municipal movements in large cities have posed crucial issues of where power should be centered and how societal life should be managed institutionally.

That a municipality can be as parochial as a tribe is fairly obvious — and is no less true today than it has been in the past. Hence, any municipal movement that is not confederal — that is to say, that does not enter into a network of mutual obligations to towns and cities in its own region — can no more be regarded as a truly political entity in any traditional sense than a neighborhood that does not work with other neighborhoods in the city in which it is located. Confederation, based on shared responsibilities, full accountability of confederal delegates to their communities, the right to recall, and firmly mandated representative forms an indispensable part of a new politics. To demand that existing towns and cities replicate the nation-state on a local level is to surrender any commitment to social change as such.

What is of immense practical importance is that prestatist institutions, traditions, and sentiments remain alive in varying degrees throughout most of the world. Resistance to the encroachment of oppressive states has been nourished by village, neighborhood, and town community networks, as witness such struggles in South Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. To ignore the communal basis of this resistance would be as myopic as to ignore the latent instability of every nation-state; worse would be to take the nation-state as it is for granted and deal with it merely on its own terms. Indeed, whether a state remains "more" of a state or "less" — no trifling matter to radical theorists as disparate as Bakunin and Marx — depends heavily upon the power

of local, confederal, and community movements to countervail it and hopefully establish a dual power that will replace it. The major role that the Madrid Citizens' Movement played nearly three decades ago in weakening the Franco regime would require a major study to do it justice.

Notwithstanding Marxist visions of a largely economistic conflict between "wage labor and capital," the revolutionary working class movements of the past were not simply industrial movements. The volatile Parisian labor movement, largely artisanal in character, for example, was also a *community* movement that was centered on quartiers and nourished by a rich neighborhood life. From the Levellers of seventeenth-century London to the anarcho-syndicalists of Barcelona in the twentieth century, radical activity has been sustained by strong community bonds, a public sphere provided by streets, squares, and cafes.

The Need for a New Politics

This municipal life cannot be ignored in radical practice and must even be recreated where it has been undermined by the modern state. A new politics, rooted in towns, neighborhoods, cities, and regions, forms the only viable alternative to the anemic parliamentarism that is percolating through various Green parties today and similar social movements — in short, their recourse to sheer and corruptive statecraft in which the larger bourgeois parties can always be expected to outmaneuver them and absorb them into coalitions. The duration of strictly single-issue movements, too, is limited to the problems they are opposing. Militant action around such issues should not be confused with the long-range radicalism that is needed to change consciousness and ultimately society itself. Such movements flare up and pass away, even when they are successful. They lack the institutional underpinnings that are so necessary to create lasting movements for social change and the arena in which they can be a permanent presence in political conflict.

Hence the enormous need for genuinely political grassroots movements, united confederally, that are anchored in abiding and democratic institutions that can be evolved into truly libertarian ones.

Life would indeed be marvelous, if not miraculous, if we were born with all the training, literacy, skills, and mental equipment we need to practice a profession or vocation. Alas, we must go though the toil of acquiring these abilities, a toil that requires struggle, confrontation, education, and development. It is very unlikely that a radical municipalist approach, too, is meaningful at all merely as an easy means for institutional change. It must be fought for if it is to be cherished, just as the fight for a free society must itself be as liberating and self-transforming as the existence of a free society.

The municipality is a potential time-bomb. To create local networks and try to transform municipal institutions that replicate the state is to pick up a historic challenge — a truly political one — that has existed for centuries. New social movements are foundering today for want of a political perspective that will bring them into the public arena, hence the ease with which they slip into parliarnentarism. Historically, libertarian theory has always focused on the free municipality that was to provide the cellular tissue for a new society. To ignore the potential of this free municipality because it is not yet free is to bypass a slumbering domain of politics that could give lived meaning to the great libertarian demand: a commune of communes. For in these municipal institutions and the changes that we can make in their structure — turning them more and more

into a new public sphere — lies the *abiding* institutional basis for a grassroots dual power, a grassroots concept of citizenship, and municipalized economic systems that can be counterposed to the growing power of the centralized nation-state and centralized economic corporations.

The Role of Social Ecology in a Period of Reaction

Social ecology developed out of important social and theoretical problems that faced the Left in the post-World War II period. The historical realities of the 1940s and the 1950s completely invalidated the perspectives of a proletarian revolution, of a "chronic economic crisis" that would bring capitalism to its knees, and of commitment to a centralistic workers' party that would seize state power and, by dictatorial means, initiate a transition to socialism and communism. It became painfully evident in time that no such generalized crisis was in the offing; indeed, that the proletariat and any party — or labor confederation — that spoke in the name of the working class could not be regarded as a hegemonic force in social transformation.

Quite to the contrary: capitalism emerged from the war stronger and more stable than it had been at any time in its history. A generalized crisis could be managed to one degree or another within a strictly bourgeois framework, let alone the many limited and cyclical crises normal to capitalism. The proletariat, in turn, ceased to play the hegemonic role that the Left had assigned to it for more than a century, and Leninist forms of organization were evidently vulnerable to bureaucratic degeneration.

Moreover, capitalism, following the logic of its own nature as a competitive market economy, was creating social and cultural issues that had not been adequately encompassed by the traditional Left of the interwar era (1917–39). To be sure, the traditional Left's theoretical cornerstone, notably, the class struggle between wage labor and capital, had not disappeared; nor had economic exploitation ceased to exist. But the issues that had defined the traditional Left — more precisely, "proletarian socialism" in all its forms — had broadened immensely, expanding both the nature of oppression and the meaning of freedom. Hierarchy, while not supplanting the issue of class struggle, began to move to the foreground of at least Euro-American radical concerns, in the widespread challenges raised by the sixties "New Left" and youth culture to authority as such, not only to the State. Domination, while not supplanting exploitation, became the target of radical critique and practice, in the early civil rights movement in the United States, in attempts to remove conventional constraints on sexual behavior, dress, lifestyle, and values, and later, in the rise of feminist movements, ecological movements that challenged the myth of "dominating" the natural world, and movements for gay and lesbian liberation.

It is unlikely that any of these movements would have emerged had capitalism at midcentury not created all the indispensable technological preconditions for a libertarian communist society — prospects that are consistent with Enlightenment ideals and the progressive dimensions of modernity. One must return to the great debates that began in the late 1950s over the prospects for free time and material abundance to understand the ideological atmosphere that new technologies such as automation created and the extent to which they were absorbed by the "New Left" of the 1960s.

The prospect of a post-scarcity society, free of material want and demanding toil, opened a new horizon of potentiality and hope — ironically, reiterating the prescient demands of the Berlin Dadaists of 1919 for "universal unemployment," which stood in marked contrast to the traditional Left's demand for "full employment."

The Struggle for a Rational Society

Social ecology, as developed in the United States in the early sixties (long after the expression had fallen into disuse as a variant of "human ecology"), tried to advance a coherent, developmental, and socially practical outlook to deal with the changes in radicalism and capitalism that were in the offing. Indeed, in great part, it actually anticipated them. Long before an ecology movement emerged, social ecology delineated the scope of the ecological crisis that capitalism must necessarily produce, tracing its roots back to hierarchical domination, and emphasizing that a competitive capitalist economy must unavoidably give rise to unprecedented contradictions with the nonhuman natural world. None of these perspectives, it should be noted, were in the air in the early sixties — Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* with its emphasis on pesticides notwithstanding. Indeed, as early as 1962, social ecology projected the alternative of solar energy, wind power, and water power, among other new ecotechnologies, and alternatives to existing productive facilities that were to become axiomatic to a later generation of ecologists. It also advanced the vision of new ecocommunities based on direct democracy and nonhierarchical forms of human relations. These facts should be emphasized in view of deep ecology's attempt to rewrite the history of the ecology movement in terms of its own quasi-religious and scarcity-oriented outlook. Nor should we overlook the fact that social ecology's antihierarchical analyses laid the theoretical basis for early feminism, various community movements, the antinuclear movement, and in varying degrees, Green movements, before they turned from "nonparty parties" into conventional electoral machines.

Nonetheless, social ecology makes no claim that it emerged ab novo. It was — and it remains — deeply rooted in Enlightenment ideals and the revolutionary tradition of the past two centuries. Its analyses and goals have never been detached from the understandably less developed theoretical analyses of Karl Marx and classical radical thinkers (like Peter Kropotkin), or from the great revolutions that culminated in the Spanish Revolution of 1936–37. It eschews any attempt to defame the historic traditions of the Left in favor a neo-liberal patchwork of ideas or a queasy political centrism that parades as "postmodernism" and "post- industrialism," not to speak of the "post-materialist" spiritualism fostered by eco-feminists, life-style anarchists, deep ecologists, and so-called "social deep ecologists" or "deep social ecologists."

Quite to the contrary: social ecology functions to countervail attempts to denature the Enlightenment and revolutionary project by emphasizing the need for theoretical coherence, no less today than it did in the 1960s, when the "New Left" drifted from a healthy libertarian populism into a quagmire of Leninist, Maoist, and Trotskyist tendencies. Social ecology retains its filiations with the Enlightenment and the revolutionary tradition all the more emphatically in opposition to the quasi-mystical and expressly mystical trends that are thoroughly sweeping up the privileged petty bourgeoisie of North America and Europe, with their goulash of antirational, spiritualistic, and atavastic ideologies. Social ecology is only too mindful that capitalism today has a nearly infinite capacity to coopt, indeed commodify, self-styled "oppositional trends" that

remain as the detritus of the "New Left" and the old counterculture. Today, anarchism comes packaged by Hakim Bey, Bob Black, David Watson, and Jason McQuinn, and is little more than a merchandisable boutique ideology that panders to petty- bourgeois tastes for naughtiness and eccentricity.

Ecology, too, has been packaged and repackaged into a variety of "deep ecologies" that generally emphasize an animalistic reductionism, neo-Malthusian "hunger politics," antihumanism, and bio- or "eco-"centrism — in short, a pastiche that renders it equally palatable to members of the British royal family at the summit of the social hierarchy and to lumpenized anarchoids at its base. Feminism, initially a universalized challenge to hierarchy as such, has devolved into parochial, often self-serving, and even materially rewarding species of eco-feminism and express theisms that pander to a myth of gender superiority (no less ugly when it concerns women than when it concerns men) in one form or another — not to speak of the outright wealth-oriented "feminism" promoted by Naomi Wolf et al.

Capitalism, in effect, has not only rendered the human condition more and more irrational, but it has absorbed into its orbit, to one degree or another, the very consciousness that once professed to oppose it. If Fourier insightfully declared that the way a society treats its women can be regarded as a measure of its status as a civilization, so today we can add that the extent to which a society devolves into mysticism and eclecticism can be regarded as measure of its cultural decline. By these standards, no society has more thoroughly denatured its once-radical opponents than capitalism in the closing years of the twentieth century.

The Relevance of Social Ecology

This devolution of consciousness is by no means solely the product of our century's new global media, as even radical theorists of popular culture tend to believe. Absolutism and medievalism, no less than capitalism, had its own "media," the Church, that reached as ubiquitously into every village as television reaches into the modern living room. The roots of modern cultural devolution are as deep-seated as the ecological crisis itself. Capitalism, today, is openly flaunted not only as a system of social relationships but as the "end of history," indeed, as a natural society that expresses the most intrinsic qualities of "human nature" — its ostensible "drive" to compete, win, and grow. This transmutation of means into ends, vicious as the means may be, is not merely "the American way"; it is the bourgeois way.

The commodity has now colonized every aspect of life, rendering what was once a capitalist economy into a capitalist culture. It has produced literally a "marketplace of ideas," in which the coin for exchanging inchoate notions and intuitions is validated by the academy, the corrupter par excellence of the "best and brightest" in modern society and the eviscerator of all that is coherent and clearly delineable. Indeed, never has "high culture," once guarded by academic mandarins, been so scandalously debased by academic presses that have become the pornographers of ideology.

Bourgeois society qua culture, particularly its academic purveyors, abhors a principled stand, particularly a combative one that is prepared to clearly articulate a body of coherent principles and thrust it into opposition against the capitalist system as a whole. Theoretically and practically, serious opposition takes its point of departure from the need to understand the logic of an ideology, not its euphemistic metaphors and drifting inconsistencies. Capitalism has nothing

to fear from an ecological, feminist, anarchist, or socialist hash of hazy ideas (often fatuously justified as "pluralistic" or "relativistic") that leaves its social premises untouched. It is all the better for the prevailing order that reason be denounced as "logocentrism," that bourgeois social relations be concealed under the rubric of "industrial society," that the social need for an oppositional movement be brushed aside in favor of a personal need for spiritual redemption, that the political be reduced to the personal, that the project of social revolution be erased by hopeless communitarian endeavors to create "alternative" enterprises.

Except where its profits and "growth opportunities" are concerned, capitalism now delights in avowals of the need to "compromise," to seek a "common ground" — the language of its professoriat no less than its political establishment — which invariably turns out to be its own terrain in a mystified form.

Hence the popularity of "market socialism" in self-styled "leftist" periodicals; or possibly "social deep ecology" in deep ecology periodicals like *The Trumpeter*; or more brazenly, accolades to Gramsci by the *Nouvelle Droite* in France, or to a "Green Adolf" in Germany. A Robin Eckersley has no difficulty juggling the ideas of the Frankfurt School with deep ecology while comparing in truly biocentric fashion the "navigational skills" of birds with the workings of the human mind. The wisdom of making friends with everyone that underpins this academic "discourse" can only lead to a blurring of latent and serious differences — and ultimately to the compromise of all principles and the loss of political direction.

The social and cultural decomposition produced by capitalism can be resisted only by taking the most principled stand against the corrosion of nearly all self-professed oppositional ideas. More than at any time in the past, social ecologists should abandon the illusion that a shared use of the word "social" renders all of us into socialists, or "ecology," into radical ecologists. The measure of social ecology's relevance and theoretical integrity consists of its ability to be rational, ethical, coherent, and true to the ideal of the Enlightenment and the revolutionary tradition — not of any ability to earn plaudits from the Prince of Wales, Al Gore, or Gary Snyder, still less from academics, spiritualists, and mystics. In this darkening age when capitalism — the mystified social order par excellence — threatens to globalize the world with capital, commodities, and a facile spirit of "negotiation" and "compromise," it is necessary to keep alive the very idea of uncompromising critique. It is not dogmatic to insist on consistency, to infer and contest the logic of a given body of premises, to demand clarity in a time of cultural twilight. Indeed, quite to the contrary, eclecticism and theoretical chaos, not to speak of practices that are more theatrical than threatening and that consist more of posturing than convincing, will only dim the light of truth and critique. Until social forces emerge that can provide a voice for basic social change rather than spiritual redemption, social ecology must take upon itself the task of preserving and extending the great traditions from which it has emerged.

Should the darkness of capitalist barbarism thicken to the point where this enterprise is no longer possible, history as the rational development of humanity's potentialities for freedom and consciousness will indeed reach its definitive end.

The Communalist Project

Whether the twenty-first century will be the most radical of times or the most reactionary — or will simply lapse into a gray era of dismal mediocrity — will depend overwhelmingly upon the kind of social movement and program that social radicals create out of the theoretical, organizational, and political wealth that has accumulated during the past two centuries of the revolutionary era. The direction we select, from among several intersecting roads of human development, may well determine the future of our species for centuries to come. As long as this irrational society endangers us with nuclear and biological weapons, we cannot ignore the possibility that the entire human enterprise may come to a devastating end. Given the exquisitely elaborate technical plans that the military-industrial complex has devised, the self- extermination of the human species must be included in the futuristic scenarios that, at the turn of the millennium, the mass media are projecting — the end of a human future as such.

Lest these remarks seem too apocalyptic, I should emphasize that we *also* live in an era when human creativity, technology, and imagination have the capability to produce extraordinary material achievements and to endow us with societies that allow for a degree of freedom that far and away exceeds the most dramatic and emancipatory visions projected by social theorists such as Saint- Simon, Charles Fourier, Karl Marx, and Peter Kropotkin.[1] Many thinkers of the postmodern age have obtusely singled out science and technology as the principal threats to human well-being, yet few disciplines have imparted to humanity such a stupendous knowledge of the innermost secrets of matter and life, or provided our species better with the ability to alter every important feature of reality and to improve the well-being of human and nonhuman life-forms.

We are thus in a position either to follow a path toward a grim "end of history," in which a banal succession of vacuous events replaces genuine progress, or to move on to a path toward the *true* making of history, in which humanity genuinely progresses toward a rational world. We are in a position to choose between an ignominious finale, possibly including the catastrophic nuclear oblivion of history itself, and history's rational fulfillment in a free, materially abundant society in an aesthetically crafted environment.

Notwithstanding the technological marvels that competing enterprises of the ruling class (that is, the bourgeoisie) are developing in order to achieve hegemony over one another, little of a subjective nature that exists in the existing society can redeem it. Precisely at a time when we, as a species, are capable of producing the means for amazing objective advances and improvements in the human condition and in the nonhuman natural world — advances that could make for a free and rational society — we stand almost naked morally before the onslaught of social forces that

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[1] Many less-well-known names could be added to this list, but one that in particular I would like very much to single out is the gallant leader of the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party, Maria Spiridonova, whose supporters were virtually alone in proposing a workable revolutionary program for the Russian people in 1917–18. Their failure to implement their political insights and replace the Bolsheviks (with whom they initially joined in forming the first Soviet government) not only led to their defeat but contributed to the disastrous failure of revolutionary movements in the century that followed.

may very well lead to our physical immolation. Prognoses about the future are understandably very fragile and are easily distrusted. Pessimism has become very widespread, as capitalist social relations become more deeply entrenched in the human mind than ever before, and as culture regresses appallingly, almost to a vanishing point. To most people today, the hopeful and very radical certainties of the twenty-year period between the Russian Revolution of 1917–18 and the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939 seem almost naïve.

Yet our decision to create a better society, and our choice of the way to do it, must come *from within ourselves*, without the aid of a deity, still less a mystical "force of nature" or a charismatic leader. If we choose the road toward a better future, our choice must be the consequence of our ability — and *ours alone* — to learn from the material lessons of the past and to appreciate the real prospects of the future. We will need to have recourse, not to ghostly vagaries conjured up from the murky hell of superstition or, absurdly, from the couloirs of the academy, but to the innovative attributes that make up our very humanity and the *essential* features that account for natural and social development, as opposed to the social pathologies and accidental events that have sidetracked humanity from its self-fulfillment in consciousness and reason. Having brought history to a point where nearly *everything* is possible, at least of a material nature — and having left behind a past that was permeated ideologically by mystical and religious elements produced by the human imagination — we are faced with a new challenge, one that has never before confronted humanity. We must consciously create our own world, not according to demonic fantasies, mindless customs, and destructive prejudices, but according to the canons of *reason*, *reflection*, and *discourse* that uniquely belong to our own species.

Capitalism, Classes, and Hierarchies

What factors should be decisive in making our choice? First, of great significance is the immense accumulation of social and political experience that is available to revolutionaries today, a storehouse of knowledge that, properly conceived, could be used to avoid the terrible errors that our predecessors made and to spare humanity the terrible plagues of failed revolutions in the past. Of indispensable importance is the potential for a new theoretical springboard that has been created by the history of ideas, one that provides the means to catapult an emerging radical movement beyond existing social conditions into a future that fosters humanity's emancipation.

But we must also be fully aware of the scope of the problems that we face. We must understand with complete clarity *where* we stand in the development of the prevailing capitalist order, and we have to grasp *emergent* social problems and address them in the program of a new movement. Capitalism is unquestionably the most dynamic society ever to appear in history. By definition, to be sure, it *always* remains a system of commodity exchange in which objects that are made for sale and profit pervade and mediate most human relations. Yet capitalism is also a highly *mutable* system, continually advancing the brutal maxim that whatever enterprise does not grow at the expense of its rivals must die. Hence "growth" and perpetual change become the very laws of life of capitalist existence. This means that capitalism *never* remains permanently in only one form; it must *always* transform the institutions that arise from its basic social relations.

Although capitalism became a dominant society only in the past few centuries, it long existed on the periphery of earlier societies: in a largely commercial form, structured around trade between cities and empires; in a craft form throughout the European Middle Ages; in a hugely

industrial form in our own time; and if we are to believe recent seers, in an informational form in the coming period. It has created not only new technologies but also a great variety of economic and social structures, such as the small shop, the factory, the huge mill, and the industrial and commercial complex. Certainly the capitalism of the Industrial Revolution has not completely disappeared, any more than the isolated peasant family and small craftsman of a still earlier period have been consigned to complete oblivion. Much of the past is always incorporated into the present; indeed, as Marx insistently warned, there is no "pure capitalism," and none of the earlier forms of capitalism fade away until radically new social relations are established and become overwhelmingly dominant. But today capitalism, even as it coexists with and utilizes precapitalist institutions for its own ends (see Marx's *Grundrisse* for this dialectic), now reaches into the suburbs and the countryside with its shopping malls and newly styled factories. Indeed, it is by no means inconceivable that one day it will reach beyond our planet. In any case, it has produced not only new commodities to create and feed new wants but new social and cultural *issues*, which in turn have given rise to new supporters and antagonists of the existing system. The famous first part of Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*, in which they celebrate capitalism's wonders, would have to be periodically rewritten to keep pace with the achievements — as well as the horrors — produced by the bourgeoisie's development.

One of the most striking features of capitalism today is that in the Western world the highly simplified two-class structure- the bourgeoisie and the proletariat-that Marx and Engels, in T *he Communist Manifesto*, predicted would become dominant under "mature" capitalism (and we have yet to determine what "mature," still less "late" or "moribund" capitalism actually is) has undergone a process of reconfiguration. The conflict between wage labor and capital, while it has by no means disappeared, nonetheless lacks the *all-embracing importance* that it possessed in the past. Contrary to Marx's expectations, the industrial working class is now dwindling in numbers and is steadily losing its traditional identity as a class — which by no means excludes it from a potentially broader and perhaps more extensive conflict of society as a whole against capitalist social relations. Present-day culture, social relations, cityscapes, modes of production, agriculture, and transportation have remade the traditional proletariat, upon which syndicalists and Marxists were overwhelmingly, indeed almost mystically focused, into a largely petty-bourgeois stratum whose mentality is marked by its own bourgeois utopianism of "consumption for the sake of consumption." We can foresee a time when the proletarian, whatever the color of his or her collar or place on the assembly line, will be completely replaced by automated and even miniaturized means of production that are operated by a few white-coated manipulators of machines and by computers.

By the same token, the living standards of the traditional proletariat and its material expectations (no small factor in the shaping of social consciousness!) have changed enormously, soaring within only a generation or two from near poverty to a comparatively high degree of material affluence. Among the children and grandchildren of former steel and automobile workers and coal miners, who have no proletarian class identity, a college education has replaced the high school diploma as emblematic of a new class status. In the United States once-opposing class interests have converged to a point that almost 50 percent of American households own stocks and bonds, while a huge number are proprietors of one kind or another, possessing their own homes, gardens, and rural summer retreats.

Given these changes, the stern working man or woman, portrayed in radical posters of the past with a flexed, highly muscular arm holding a bone-crushing hammer, has been replaced by the

genteel and well-mannered (so-called) "working middle class." The traditional cry "Workers of the world, unite!" in its old historical sense becomes ever more meaningless. The class-consciousness of the proletariat, which Marx tried to awaken in *The Communist Manifesto*, has been hemorrhaging steadily and in many places has virtually disappeared. The more existential class struggle has not been eliminated, to be sure, any more than the bourgeoisie could eliminate gravity from the existing human condition, but unless radicals today become aware of the fact that it has been *narrowed* down largely to the individual factory or office, they will fail to see that a new, perhaps more expansive form of social consciousness can emerge in the generalized struggles that face us. Indeed, this form of social consciousness can be given a refreshingly new meaning as the concept of the rebirth of the *citoyen* — a concept so important to the Great Revolution of 1789 and its more broadly humanistic sentiment of sociality that it became the form of address among later revolutionaries summoned to the barricades by the heraldic crowing of the red French rooster.

Seen as a whole, the social condition that capitalism has produced today stands very much at odds with the simplistic class prognoses advanced by Marx and by the revolutionary French syndicalists. After the Second World War, capitalism underwent an enormous transformation, creating *broad new social issues* with extraordinary rapidity, issues that went beyond traditional proletarian demands for improved wages, hours, and working conditions: notably environmental, gender, hierarchical, civic, and democratic issues. Capitalism, in effect, has *generalized* its threats to humanity, particularly with climatic changes that may alter the very face of the planet, oligarchical institutions of a global scope, and rampant urbanization that radically corrodes the civic life basic to grassroots politics.

Hierarchy, today, is becoming as pronounced an issue as class — as witness the extent to which many social analyses have singled out managers, bureaucrats, scientists, and the like as emerging, ostensibly dominant groups. New and elaborate gradations of status and interests count today to an extent that they did not in the recent past; they blur the conflict between wage labor and capital that was once so central, clearly defined, and militantly waged by traditional socialists. Class categories are now intermingled with hierarchical categories based on race, gender, sexual preference, and certainly national or regional differences. *Status differentiations*, characteristic of hierarchy, tend to converge with class differentiations, and a more *all-inclusive* capitalistic world is emerging in which ethnic, national, and gender differences often surpass the importance of class differences in the public eye. This phenomenon is not entirely new: in the First World War countless German socialist workers cast aside their earlier commitment to the red flags of proletarian unity in favor of the national flags of their well-fed and parasitic rulers and went on to plunge bayonets into the bodies of French and Russian socialist workers — as they did, in turn, under the national flags of their own oppressors.

At the same time capitalism has produced a new, perhaps paramount contradiction: the clash between an economy based on unending growth and the desiccation of the natural environment.[2] This issue and its vast ramifications can no more be minimized, let alone dismissed, than the need of human beings for food or air. At present the most promising struggles in the West, where socialism was born, seem to be waged less around income and working conditions than around nuclear power, pollution, deforestation, urban blight, education, health care, community

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[2] I frankly regard this contradiction as more fundamental than the often-indiscernible tendency of the rate of profit to decline and thereby to render capitalist exchange inoperable – a contradiction to which Marxists assigned a decisive role in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

life, and the oppression of people in underdeveloped countries-as witness the (albeit sporadic) antiglobalization upsurges, in which blue- and white-collar "workers" march in the same ranks with middle-class humanitarians and are motivated by common social concerns. Proletarian combatants become indistinguishable from middle- class ones. Burly workers, whose hallmark is a combative militancy, now march behind "bread and puppet" theater performers, often with a considerable measure of shared playfulness. Members of the working and middle classes now wear many different social hats, so to speak, challenging capitalism obliquely as well as directly on cultural as well as economic grounds.

Nor can we ignore, in deciding what direction we are to follow, the fact that capitalism, if it is not checked, will in the future-and not necessarily the very distant future — *differ appreciably from the system we know today*. Capitalist development can be expected to vastly alter the social horizon in the years ahead. Can we suppose that factories, offices, cities, residential areas, industry, commerce, and agriculture, let alone moral values, aesthetics, media, popular desires, and the like will not change immensely before the twenty-first century is out? In the past century, capitalism, above all else, has *broadened* social issues — indeed, the historical social question of how a humanity, divided by classes and exploitation, will create a society based on equality, the development of authentic harmony, and freedom — to include those whose resolution was barely foreseen by the liberatory social theorists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Our age, with its endless array of "bottom lines" and "investment choices," now threatens *to turn society itself into a vast and exploitative marketplace.*[3]

The public with which the progressive socialist had to deal is also changing radically and will continue to do so in the coming decades. To *lag* in understanding behind the changes that capitalism is introducing and the new or broader contradictions it is producing would be to commit the recurringly disastrous error that led to the defeat of nearly all revolutionary upsurges in the past two centuries. Foremost among the lessons that a new revolutionary movement must learn from the past is that it must *win over broad sectors of the middle class* to its new populist program. No attempt to replace capitalism with socialism ever had or will have the *remotest chance of success* without the aid of the discontented petty bourgeoisie, whether it was the intelligentsia and peasantry-in-uniform of the Russian Revolution or the intellectuals, farmers, shopkeepers, clerks, and managers in industry and even in government in the German upheavals of 1918–21. Even during the most promising periods of past revolutionary cycles, the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, the German Social Democrats, and Russian Communists *never* acquired absolute majorities in their respective legislatives bodies. So-called "proletarian revolutions" were *invariably* minority revolutions, usually even *within the proletariat itself*, and those that succeeded (often briefly, before they were subdued or drifted historically out of the revolutionary movement) depended overwhelmingly on the fact that the bourgeoisie lacked active support among its own military forces or was simply socially demoralized.

Marxism, Anarchism and Syndicalism

Given the changes that we are witnessing and those that are still taking form, social radicals can no longer oppose the predatory (as well as immensely creative) capitalist system by using the

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[3] Contrary to Marx's assertion that a society disappears only when it has exhausted its capacity for new technological developments, capitalism is in a state of permanent technological revolution – at times, frighteningly so. Marx

ideologies and methods that were born in the first Industrial Revolution, when a factory proletarian seemed to be the principal antagonist of a textile plant owner. (Nor can we use ideologies that were spawned by conflicts that an impoverished peasantry used to oppose feudal and semifeudal landowners.) None of the professedly anticapitalist ideologies of the past — Marxism, anarchism, syndicalism, and more generic forms of socialism — retain the same relevance that they had at an earlier stage of capitalist development and in an earlier period of technological advance. Nor can any of them hope to encompass the multitude of new issues, opportunities, problems, and interests that capitalism has repeatedly created over time.

Marxism was the most comprehensive and coherent effort to produce a systematic form of socialism, emphasizing the material as well as the subjective historical preconditions of a new society. This project, in the present era of precapitalist economic decomposition and of intellectual confusion, relativism, and subjectivism, must never surrender to the new barbarians, many of whom find their home in what was once a barrier to ideological regression-the academy. We owe much to Marx's attempt to provide us with a coherent and stimulating analysis of the commodity and commodity relations, to an activist philosophy, a systematic social theory, an objectively grounded or "scientific" concept of historical development, and a flexible political strategy. Marxist political ideas were eminently relevant to the needs of a terribly disoriented proletariat and to the particular oppressions that the industrial bourgeoisie inflicted upon it in England in the 1840s, somewhat later in France, Italy, and Germany, and very presciently in Russia in the last decade of Marx's life. Until the rise of the populist movement in Russia (most famously, the *Narodnaya Volya*), Marx expected the emerging proletariat to become the great majority of the population in Europe and North America, and to inevitably engage in revolutionary class war as a result of capitalist exploitation and immiseration. And especially between 1917 and 1939, long after Marx's death, Europe was indeed beleaguered by a mounting class war that reached the point of outright workers' insurrections. In 1917, owing to an extraordinary confluence of circumstances — particularly with the outbreak of the First World War, which rendered several quasi-feudal European social systems terribly unstable — Lenin and the Bolsheviks tried to use (but greatly altered) Marx's writings in order to take power in an economically backward empire, whose size spanned eleven time zones across Europe and Asia.[4]

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erred on this score: it will take more than technological stagnation to terminate this system of social relations. As new issues challenge the validity of the entire system, the political and ecological domains will become all the more important. Alternatively, we are faced with the prospect that capitalism may pull down the entire world and leave behind little more than ashes and ruin – achieving, in short, the "capitalist barbarism" of which Rosa Luxemburg warned in her "Junius" essay.

[4] I use the word *extraordinary* because, by Marxist standards, Europe was still objectively unprepared for a socialist revolution in 1914. Much of the continent, in fact, had yet to be colonized by the capitalist market or bourgeois social relations. The proletariat – still a very conspicuous minority of the population in a sea of peasants and small producers – had yet to mature as a class into a significant force. Despite the opprobrium that has been heaped on Plekhanov, Kautsky, Bernstein et al., they had a better understanding of the failure of Marxist socialism to embed itself in proletarian consciousness than did Lenin. Luxemburg, in any case, straddled the so-called "social-patriotic" and "internationalist" camps in her image of a Marxist party's function, in contrast to Lenin, her principal opponent in the so-called "organizational question" in the Left of the wartime socialists, who was prepared to establish a "proletarian dictatorship" under all and any circumstances. The First World War was by no means inevitable, and it generated democratic and nationalist revolutions rather than proletarian ones. (Russia, in this respect, was no more a "workers' state" under Bolshevik rule than were the Hungarian and Bavarian "soviet" republics.) Not until 1939 was Europe placed in a position where a world war was inevitable. The revolutionary Left (to which I belonged at the time) frankly erred profoundly when it took a so-called "internationalist" position and refused to support the Allies (their imperialist pathologies notwithstanding) against the vanguard of world fascism, the Third Reich.

But for the most part, as we have seen, Marxism's economic insights belonged to an era of emerging factory capitalism in the nineteenth century. Brilliant as a theory of the material *pre-conditions* for socialism, it did not address the ecological, civic, and subjective forces or the *efficient* causes that could impel humanity into a movement for revolutionary social change. On the contrary, for nearly a century Marxism stagnated theoretically. Its theorists were often puzzled by developments that have passed it by and, since the 1960s, have mechanically appended environmentalist and feminist ideas to its formulaic *ouvrierist* outlook.

By the same token, anarchism — which, I believe, represents in its *authentic* form a highly individualistic outlook that fosters a radically unfettered lifestyle, often as a substitute for mass action-is far better suited to articulate a Proudhonian single-family peasant and craft world than a modern urban and industrial environment. I myself once used this political label, but further thought has obliged me to conclude that, its often-refreshing aphorisms and insights notwithstanding, it is simply not a social theory. Its foremost theorists celebrate its seeming openness to eclecticism and the liberatory effects of "paradox" or even "contradiction," to use Proudhonian hyperbole. Accordingly, and without prejudice to the earnestness of many anarchistic practices, a case can made that many of the ideas of social and economic reconstruction that in the past have been advanced in the name of "anarchy" were often drawn from Marxism (including my own concept of "post-scarcity," which understandably infuriated many anarchists who read my essays on the subject). Regrettably, the use of socialistic terms has often prevented anarchists from telling us or even understanding clearly what they are: individualists whose concepts of autonomy originate in a strong commitment to *personal* liberty rather than to *social* freedom, or socialists committed to a structured, institutionalized, and responsible form of social organization. Indeed the history of this "ideology" is peppered with idiosyncratic acts of defiance that verge on the eccentric, which not surprisingly have attracted many young people and aesthetes.

In fact anarchism represents the most extreme formulation of liberalism's ideology of unfettered autonomy, culminating in a celebration of heroic acts of defiance of the state. Anarchism's mythos of self-regulation (*auto nomos*) — the radical assertion of the *individual over or even against society and the personalistic absence of responsibility for the collective welfare* — leads to a radical affirmation of the all-powerful will so central to Nietzsche's ideological peregrinations. Some self-professed anarchists have even denounced mass social action as futile and alien to their private concerns and made a fetish of what the Spanish anarchists called *grupismo*, a small-group mode of action that is highly personal rather than social.

Anarchism has often been confused with revolutionary syndicalism, a highly structured and well-developed *mass* form of libertarian trade unionism that, unlike anarchism, was long committed to democratic procedures,[5] to discipline in action, and to organized, long-range revolutionary practice to eliminate capitalism. Its affinity with anarchism stems from its strong libertarian bias, but bitter antagonisms between anarchists and syndicalists have a long history in nearly every country in Western Europe and North America, as witness the tensions between the Spanish CNT and the anarchist groups associated with *Tierra y Libertad* early in the twentieth century; between the revolutionary syndicalist and anarchist groups in Russia during the 1917 revolution; and between the IWW in the United States and the SAC in Sweden, to cite the more illustrative

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[5] Kropotkin, for example, rejected democratic decision-making procedures: "Majority rule is as defective as any other kind of rule," he asserted. See Peter Kropotkin, "Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles," in *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*, edited by Roger N. Baldwin (1927; reprinted by New York: Dover, 1970), p. 68.

cases in the history of the libertarian labor movement. More than one American anarchist was affronted by Joe Hill's defiant maxim on the eve of his execution in Utah: "Don't mourn — Organize!" Alas, small groups were not quite the "organizations" that Joe Hill, or the grossly misunderstood idol of the Spanish libertarian movement, Salvador Seguí, had in mind. It was largely the shared word *libertarian* that made it possible for somewhat confused anarchists to coexist in the same organization with revolutionary syndicalists. It was often verbal confusion rather than ideological clarity that made possible the coexistence in Spain of the FAI, as represented by the anarchist Federica Montseny, with the syndicalists, as represented by Juan Prieto, in the CNT-FAI, a truly confused organization if ever there was one.

Revolutionary syndicalism's destiny has been tied in varying degrees to a pathology called *ouvrierisme*, or "workerism," and whatever philosophy, theory of history, or political economy it possesses has been borrowed, often piecemeal and indirectly, from Marx — indeed, Georges Sorel and many other professed revolutionary syndicalists in the early twentieth century expressly regarded themselves as Marxists and even more expressly eschewed anarchism. Moreover, revolutionary syndicalism lacks a strategy for social change beyond the general strike, which revolutionary uprisings such as the famous October and November general strikes in Russia during 1905 proved to be stirring but ultimately ineffectual. Indeed, as invaluable as the general strike may be as a prelude to direct confrontation with the state, they decidedly do not have the mystical capacity that revolutionary syndicalists assigned to them as means for social change. Their limitations are striking evidence that, as episodic forms of direct action, general strikes are not equatable with revolution nor even with profound social changes, which presuppose a mass movement and require years of gestation and a clear sense of direction. Indeed, revolutionary syndicalism exudes a typical *ouvrierist* anti-intellectualism that disdains attempts to formulate a purposive revolutionary direction and a reverence for proletarian "spontaneity" that, at times, has led it into highly self-destructive situations. Lacking the means for an analysis of their situation, the Spanish syndicalists (and anarchists) revealed only a minimal capacity to understand the situation in which they found themselves after their victory over Franco's forces in the summer of 1936 and no capacity to take "the next step" to institutionalize a workers' and peasants' form of government.

What these observations add up to is that Marxists, revolutionary syndicalists, and authentic anarchists all have a fallacious understanding of *politics*, which should be conceived as the civic arena and the institutions by which people democratically and directly manage their community affairs. Indeed the Left has repeatedly mistaken statecraft for politics by its persistent failure to understand that the two are not only radically different but exist in radical tension — in fact, opposition — to each other.[6] As I have written elsewhere, historically politics did not emerge from the state — an apparatus whose professional machinery is designed to dominate and facilitate the exploitation of the citizenry in the interests of a privileged class. Rather, politics, almost by definition, is the active engagement of free citizens in the handling their municipal affairs and in their defense of its freedom. One can almost say that politics is the "embodiment" of what the French revolutionaries of the 1790s called *civicisme*. Quite properly, in fact, the word *politics* itself contains the Greek word for "city" or *polis*, and its use in classical Athens, together with *democracy*, connoted the *direct* governing of the city by its citizens. Centuries of civic degradation,

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[6] I have made the distinction between politics and statecraft in, for example, Murray Bookchin, *From Urbanization to Cities: Toward a New Politics of Citizenship* (1987; reprinted by London: Cassell, 1992), pp. 41–3, 59–61.

marked particularly by the formation of classes, were necessary to produce the state and its corrosive absorption of the political realm.

A defining feature of the Left is precisely the Marxist, anarchist, and revolutionary syndicalist belief that *no distinction exists*, in principle, between the political realm and the statist realm.

By emphasizing the nation-state — including a "workers' state"- as the locus of economic as well as political power, Marx (as well as libertarians) notoriously failed to demonstrate how workers could *fully* and *directly* control such a state without the mediation of an empowered bureaucracy and essentially statist (or equivalently, in the case of libertarians, governmental) institutions. As a result, the Marxists unavoidably saw the political realm, which it designated a "workers' state," as a repressive entity, ostensibly based on the interests of a single class, the proletariat.

Revolutionary syndicalism, for its part, emphasized *factory control* by workers' committees and confederal economic councils as the locus of social authority, thereby simply bypassing any popular institutions that existed outside the economy. Oddly, this was economic determinism with a vengeance, which, tested by the experiences of the Spanish revolution of 1936, proved completely ineffectual. A vast domain of real governmental power, from military affairs to the administration of justice, fell to the Stalinists and the liberals of Spain, who used their authority to subvert the libertarian movement — and with it, the revolutionary achievements of the syndicalist workers in July 1936, or what was dourly called by one novelist "The Brief Summer of Spanish Anarchism."

As for anarchism, Bakunin expressed the typical view of its adherents in 1871 when he wrote that the new social order could be created "only through the development and organization of the nonpolitical or antipolitical social power of the working class in city and country," thereby rejecting with characteristic inconsistency the very municipal politics which he sanctioned in Italy around the same year. Accordingly, anarchists have long regarded every *government* as a *state* and condemned it accordingly — a view that is a recipe for the elimination of *any* organized social life whatever. While the state is the instrument by which an *oppressive* and *exploitative* class regulates and coercively controls the behavior of an exploited class by a ruling class, a *government* — or better still, a *polity* — is an ensemble of institutions designed to deal with the problems of consociational life in an orderly and hopefully fair manner. Every institutionalized association that constitutes a system for handling public affairs — with or without the presence of a state — is *necessarily* a government. By contrast, every state, although necessarily a form of government, is a force for class repression and control. Annoying as it must seem to Marxists and anarchist alike, the cry for a *constitution*, for a responsible and a responsive government, and even for *law* or *nomos* has been clearly articulated — and committed to print! — by the oppressed for centuries against the capricious rule exercised by monarchs, nobles, and bureaucrats. The libertarian opposition to law, not to speak of government as such, has been as silly as the image of a snake swallowing its tail. What remains in the end is nothing but a retinal afterimage that has no existential reality.

The issues raised in the preceding pages are of more than academic interest. As we enter the twenty-first century, social radicals need a socialism — libertarian and revolutionary — that is neither an extension of the peasant-craft "associationism" that lies at the core of anarchism nor the proletarianism that lies at the core of revolutionary syndicalism and Marxism. However fashionable the traditional ideologies (particularly anarchism) may be among young people today, a truly progressive socialism that is informed by libertarian as well as Marxian ideas but tran-

scends these older ideologies must provide intellectual leadership. For political radicals today to simply resuscitate Marxism, anarchism, or revolutionary syndicalism and endow them with ideological immortality would be obstructive to the development of a relevant radical movement. A new and comprehensive revolutionary outlook is needed, one that is capable of systematically addressing the generalized issues that may potentially bring *most* of society into opposition to an ever-evolving and changing capitalist system.

The clash between a predatory society based on *indefinite expansion* and nonhuman nature has given rise to an ensemble of ideas that has emerged as the explication of the present social crisis and meaningful radical change. Social ecology, a coherent vision of social development that intertwines the mutual impact of hierarchy *and* class on the civilizing of humanity, has for decades argued that we must reorder social relations so that humanity can live in a protective balance with the natural world.

Contrary to the simplistic ideology of "eco-anarchism," social ecology maintains that an ecologically oriented society can be progressive rather than regressive, placing a strong emphasis not on primitivism, austerity, and denial but on material pleasure and ease. If a society is to be capable of making life not only vastly enjoyable for its members but also leisurely enough that they can engage in the intellectual and cultural self-cultivation that is necessary for creating civilization and a vibrant political life, it must not denigrate technics and science but bring them into accord with visions of human happiness and leisure. Social ecology is an ecology not of hunger and material deprivation but of plenty; it seeks the creation of a rational society in which waste, indeed excess, will be controlled by a new system of values; and when or if shortages arise as a result of irrational behavior, popular assemblies will establish rational standards of consumption by democratic processes. In short, social ecology favors management, plans, and regulations formulated democratically by popular assemblies, not freewheeling forms of behavior that have their origin in individual eccentricities.

Communalism and Libertarian Municipalism

It is my contention that Communalism is the overarching political category most suitable to encompass the fully thought out and systematic views of social ecology, including libertarian municipalism and dialectical naturalism.[7] As an ideology, Communalism draws on the best of the older Left ideologies-Marxism and anarchism, more properly the libertarian socialist tradition-while offering a wider and more relevant scope for our time. From Marxism, it draws the basic project of formulating a rationally systematic and coherent socialism that integrates philosophy, history, economics, and politics. Avowedly dialectical, it attempts to infuse theory with practice. From anarchism, it draws its commitment to antistatism and confederalism, as well as its recognition that hierarchy is a basic problem that can be overcome only by a libertarian socialist society.[8]

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[7] Several years ago, while I still identified myself as an anarchist, I attempted to formulate a distinction between "social" and "lifestyle" anarchism, and I wrote an article that identified Communalism as "the democratic dimension of anarchism" (see *Left Green Perspectives*, no. 31, October 1994). I no longer believe that Communalism is a mere "dimension" of anarchism, democratic or otherwise; rather, it is a distinct ideology with a revolutionary tradition that has yet to be explored.

[8] To be sure, these points undergo modification in Communalism: for example, Marxism's historical materialism, explaining the rise of class societies, is expanded by social ecology's explanation of the anthropological and his-

The choice of the term *Communalism* to encompass the philosophical, historical, political, and organizational components of a socialism for the twenty-first century has not been a flippant one. The word originated in the Paris Commune of 1871, when the armed people of the French capital raised barricades not only to defend the city council of Paris and its administrative substructures but also to create a nationwide confederation of cities and towns to replace the republican nation-state. Communalism as an ideology is not sullied by the individualism and the often explicit antirationalism of anarchism; nor does it carry the historical burden of Marxism's authoritarianism as embodied in Bolshevism.

It does not focus on the factory as its principal social arena or on the industrial proletariat as its main historical agent; and it does not reduce the free community of the future to a fanciful medieval village. Its most important goal is clearly spelled out in a conventional dictionary definition: Communalism, according to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, is "a theory or system of government in which virtually autonomous local communities are loosely bound in a federation."[9]

Communalism seeks to recapture the meaning of politics in its broadest, most emancipatory sense, indeed, to fulfill the historic potential of the municipality as the developmental arena of mind and discourse. It conceptualizes the municipality, potentially at least, as a transformative development *beyond* organic evolution into the domain of *social* evolution. The city is the domain where the archaic blood-tie that was once limited to the unification of families and tribes, to the exclusion of outsiders, was-juridically, at least-dissolved. It became the domain where hierarchies based on parochial and sociobiological attributes of kinship, gender, and age could be eliminated and replaced by a free society based on a shared common humanity. Potentially, it remains the domain where the once-feared stranger can be fully absorbed into the community-initially as a protected resident of a common territory and eventually as a *citizen*, engaged in making policy decisions in the public arena. It is above all the domain where institutions and values have their roots not in zoology but in civil human activity.

Looking beyond these historical functions, the municipality constitutes the only domain for an association based on the free exchange of ideas and a creative endeavor to bring the capacities of consciousness to the service of freedom. It is the domain where a mere *animalistic* adaptation to an existing and pregiven environment can be radically supplanted by *proactive*, *rational* intervention into the world — indeed, a world yet to be made and molded by reason- with a view toward ending the environmental, social, and political insults to which humanity and the biosphere have been subjected by classes and hierarchies. Freed of domination as well as material exploitation-indeed, recreated as a rational arena for human creativity in all spheres of life — the municipality becomes the *ethical* space for the good life. Communalism is thus no contrived product of mere fancy: it expresses an abiding concept and practice of political life, formed by a dialectic of social development and reason.

As a explicitly *political* body of ideas, Communalism seeks to recover and advance the development of the city (or *commune*) in a form that accords with its greatest potentialities and historical traditions. This is not to say that Communalism accepts the municipality as it is today. Quite to

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torical rise of hierarchy. Marxian dialectical materialism, in turn, is transcended by dialectical naturalism; and the anarcho-communist notion of a very loose "federation of autonomous communes" is replaced with a confederation from which its *components*, functioning in a democratic manner through citizens' assemblies, may withdraw *only* with the approval of the confederation *as a whole*.

[9] What is so surprising about this minimalist dictionary definition is its overall accuracy: I would take issue

the contrary, the modern municipality is infused with many statist features and often functions as an agent of the bourgeois nation-state. Today, when the nation-state still seems supreme, the rights that modern municipalities possess cannot be dismissed as the epiphenomena of more basic economic relations. Indeed, to a great degree, they are the hard-won gains of commoners, who long defended them against assaults by ruling classes over the course of history — even against the bourgeoisie itself.

The concrete political dimension of Communalism is known as libertarian municipalism, about which I have previously written extensively.[10] In its libertarian municipalist program, Communalism resolutely seeks to eliminate statist municipal structures and replace them with the institutions of a libertarian polity. It seeks to radically restructure cities' governing institutions into popular democratic assemblies based on neighborhoods, towns, and villages. In these popular assemblies, citizens — including the middle classes as well as the working classes-deal with community affairs on a face- to-face basis, making policy decisions in a direct democracy, and giving reality to the ideal of a humanistic, rational society.

Minimally, if we are to have the kind of free social life to which we aspire, *democracy* should be our form of a shared political life. To address problems and issues that transcend the boundaries of a single municipality, in turn, the democratized municipalities should join together to form a broader confederation. These assemblies and confederations, by their very existence, could then challenge the legitimacy of the state and statist forms of power. They could expressly be aimed at replacing state power and statecraft with popular power and a socially rational transformative politics. And they would become arenas where class conflicts could be played out and where classes could be eliminated.

Libertarian municipalists do not delude themselves that the state will view with equanimity their attempts to replace professionalized power with popular power. They harbor no illusions that the ruling classes will indifferently allow a Communalist movement to demand rights that infringe on the state's sovereignty over towns and cities. Historically, regions, localities, and above all towns and cities have desperately struggled to reclaim their local sovereignty from the state (albeit not always for high-minded purposes). Communalists' attempt to restore the powers of towns and cities and to knit them together into confederations can be expected to evoke increasing resistance from national institutions. That the new popular-assemblyist municipal confederations will embody a dual power against the state that becomes a source of growing political tension is obvious. Either a Communalist *movement* will be radicalized by this tension and will resolutely face all its consequences, or it will surely sink into a morass of compromises that absorb it back into the social order that it once sought to change. How the movement meets this challenge is a clear measure of its seriousness in seeking to change the existing political system and the social consciousness it develops as a source of public education and leadership.

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only with its formulations "virtually autonomous" and "loosely bound," which suggest a parochial and particularistic, even irresponsible relationship of the components of a confederation.

[10] My writings on libertarian municipalism date back to the early 1970s, with "Spring Offensives and Summer Vacations," *Anarchos*, no. 4 (1972). The more significant works include the books *From Urbanization to Cities* (1987; reprinted by London: Cassell, 1992) and *The Limits of the City* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1974), as well as the articles "Theses on Libertarian Municipalism," *Our Generation* [Montreal], vol. 16, nos. 3–4 (Spring/Summer 1985); "Radical Politics in an Era of Advanced Capitalism," (included herein); "The Meaning of Confederalism," *Green Perspectives*, no. 20 (November 1990); and "Libertarian Municipalism: An Overview," *Green Perspectives*, no. 24 (October 1991). For a concise summary, see Janet Biehl, *The Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1998).

Communalism constitutes a critique of hierarchical and capitalist society as a whole. It seeks to alter not only the political life of society but also its economic life. On this score, its aim is not to nationalize the economy or retain private ownership of the means of production but to *municipalize* the economy. It seeks to integrate the means of production into the existential life of the municipality, such that every productive enterprise falls under the purview of the local assembly, which decides how it will function to meet the interests of the community *as a whole*. The separation between life and work, so prevalent in the modern capitalist economy, must be overcome so that citizens' desires and needs, the artful challenges of creation in the course of production, and role of production in fashioning thought and self-definition are not lost. "Humanity makes itself," to cite the title of V. Gordon Childe's book on the urban revolution at the end of the Neolithic age and the rise of cities, and it does so not only intellectually and esthetically, but by expanding human needs as well as the productive methods for satisfying them. We discover ourselves — our potentialities and their actualization — through creative and useful work that not only transforms the natural world but leads to our self-formation and self-definition.

We must also avoid the parochialism and ultimately the desires for proprietorship that have afflicted so many self-managed enterprises, such as the "collectives" in the Russian and Spanish revolutions. Not enough has been written about the drift among many "socialistic" self-managed enterprises, even under the red and red-and-black flags, respectively, of revolutionary Russia and revolutionary Spain, toward forms of collective capitalism that ultimately led many of these concerns to compete with one another for raw materials and markets.[11]

Most importantly, in Communalist political life, workers of different occupations would take their seats in popular assemblies not as *workers* — printers, plumbers, foundry workers and the like, with special occupational interests to advance — but as *citizens*, whose overriding concern should be the *general interest* of the society in which they live. Citizens should be freed of their particularistic identity as workers, specialists, and individuals concerned primarily with their own particularistic interests. Municipal life should become a school for the formation of citizens, both by absorbing new citizens and by educating the young, while the assemblies themselves should function not only as permanent decision-making institutions but as arenas for *educating* the people in handling complex civic and regional affairs.[12]

In a Communalist way of life, conventional economics, with its focus on prices and scarce resources, would be replaced by *ethics*, with its concern for human needs and the good life. Human solidarity — or *philia*, as the Greeks called it — would replace material gain and egotism. Municipal assemblies would become not only vital arenas for civic life and decision-making but centers where the shadowy world of economic logistics, properly coordinated production, and civic operations would be demystified and opened to the scrutiny and participation of the citizenry as a whole. The emergence of the *new citizen* would mark a transcendence of the particularistic class

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[11] For one such discussion, see Murray Bookchin, "The Ghost of Anarchosyndicalism," *Anarchist Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 1993).

[12] One of the great tragedies of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Spanish Revolution of 1936 was the failure of the masses to acquire more than the scantiest knowledge of social logistics and the complex interlinkages involved in providing for the necessities of life in a modern society. Inasmuch as those who had the expertise involved in managing productive enterprises and in making cities functional were supporters of the old regime, workers were in fact unable to actually take over the full control of factories. They were obliged instead to depend on "bourgeois specialists" to operate them, individuals who steadily made them the victims of a technocratic elite.

being of traditional socialism and the formation of the "new man" which the Russian revolutionaries hoped they could eventually achieve. Humanity would now be able to rise to the universal state of consciousness and rationality that the great utopians of the nineteenth century and the Marxists hoped their efforts would create, opening the way to humanity's fulfillment as a species that embodies reason rather than material interest and that affords material post-scarcity rather than an austere harmony enforced by a morality of scarcity and material deprivation.[13]

Classical Athenian democracy of the fifth century B.C.E., the source of the Western democratic tradition, was based on face-to-face decision-making in communal assemblies of the people and confederations of those municipal assemblies. For more than two millennia, the political writings of Aristotle recurrently served to heighten our awareness of the city as the arena for the fulfillment of human potentialities for reason, self-consciousness, and the good life. Appropriately, Aristotle traced the emergence of the *polis* from the family or *oikos* — i.e., the realm of necessity, where human beings satisfied their basically animalistic needs, and where authority rested with the eldest male. But the association of several families, he observed, "aim[ed] at something more than the supply of daily needs"[14]; this aim initiated the earliest political formation, the village. Aristotle famously described man (by which he meant the adult Greek male[15]) as a "political animal" (*politikon zoon*) who presided over family members not only to meet their material needs but as the material precondition for his participation in political life, in which discourse and reason replaced mindless deeds, custom, and violence. Thus, "[w]hen several villages are united in a single complete community (*koinonan*), large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing," he continued, "the *polis* comes into existence, *originating* in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life."[16]

For Aristotle, and we may assume also for the ancient Athenians, the municipality's proper functions were thus not strictly instrumental or even economic. As the locale of human consociation, the municipality, and the social and political arrangements that people living there constructed, was humanity's *telos*, the arena par excellence where human beings, over the course of history, could actualize their potentiality for reason, self-consciousness, and creativity. Thus for the ancient Athenians, politics denoted not only the handling of the practical affairs of a polity but civic activities that were charged with moral obligation to one's community. All citizens of a city were expected to participate in civic activities as *ethical* beings.

Examples of municipal democracy were not limited to ancient Athens. Quite to the contrary, long before class differentiations gave rise to the state, many relatively secular towns produced the earliest institutional structures of local democracy. Assemblies of the people may have existed

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[13] I have previously discussed this transformation of workers from mere class beings into citizens, among other places, in *From Urbanization to Cities* (1987; reprinted by London: Cassell, 1995), and in "Workers and the Peace Movement" (1983), published in The *Modern Crisis* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987).

[14] Aristotle, *Politics* (1252 [b] 16), trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* , Revised Oxford Translation, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), vol. 2, p. 1987.

[15] As a libertarian ideal for the future of humanity and a genuine domain of freedom, the Athenian *polis* falls far short of the city's ultimate promise. Its population included slaves, subordinated women, and franchiseless resident aliens. Only a minority of male citizens possessed civic rights, and they ran the city without consulting a larger population. Materially, the stability of the polis depended upon the labor of its noncitizens. These are among the several monumental failings that later municipalities would have to correct. The *polis* is significant, however, not an example of an emancipated community but for the successful functioning of its free *institutions*.

[16] Aristotle, *Politics* (1252 [b] 29–30), trans. Jowett; emphasis added. The words from the original Greek text may be found in the Loeb Classical Library edition: Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).

in ancient Sumer, at the very beginning of the so-called "urban revolution" some seven or eight thousand years ago. They clearly appeared among the Greeks, and until the defeat of the Gracchus brothers, they were popular centers of power in republican Rome. They were nearly ubiquitous in the medieval towns of Europe and even in Russia, notably in Novgorod and Pskov, which, for a time, were among the most democratic cities in the Slavic world. The assembly, it should be emphasized, began to approximate its truly modern form in the neighborhood Parisian sections of 1793, when they became the authentic motive forces of the Great Revolution and *conscious* agents for the making of a new body politic. That they were never given the consideration they deserve in the literature on democracy, particularly democratic Marxist tendencies and revolutionary syndicalists, is dramatic evidence of the flaws that existed in the revolutionary tradition.

These democratic municipal institutions normally existed in combative tension with grasping monarchs, feudal lords, wealthy families, and freebooting invaders until they were crushed, frequently in bloody struggles. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that *every great revolution in modern history had a civic dimension* that has been smothered in radical histories by an emphasis on class antagonisms, however important these antagonisms have been. Thus it is unthinkable that the English Revolution of the 1640s can be understood without singling out London as its terrain; or, by the same token, any discussions of the various French Revolutions without focusing on Paris, or the Russian Revolutions without dwelling on Petrograd, or the Spanish Revolution of 1936 without citing Barcelona as its most advanced social center. This centrality of the city is not a mere geographic fact; it is, above all, a profoundly political one, which involved the ways in which revolutionary masses aggregated and debated, the civic traditions that nourished them, and the environment that fostered their revolutionary views.

Libertarian municipalism is an integral part of the Communalist framework, indeed its praxis, just as Communalism as a systematic body of revolutionary thought is meaningless without libertarian municipalism. The differences between Communalism and authentic or "pure" anarchism, let alone Marxism, are much too great to be spanned by a prefix such as *anarcho-*, *social-*, *neo-*, or even *libertarian*. Any attempt to reduce Communalism to a mere variant of anarchism would be to deny the integrity of both ideas — indeed, to ignore their conflicting concepts of democracy, organization, elections, government, and the like. Gustave Lefrancais, the Paris Communard who may have coined this political term, adamantly declared that he was "a Communalist, not an anarchist."[17]

Above all, Communalism is engaged with the problem of power.[18] In marked contrast to the various kinds of *communitarian* enterprises favored by many self-designated anarchists, such as

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[17] Lefrancais is quoted in Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (New York: Horizon Press, 1968), p. 393. I too would be obliged today to make the same statement. In the late 1950s, when anarchism in the United States was a barely discernible presence, it seemed like a sufficiently clear field in which I could develop social ecology, as well as the philosophical and political ideas that would eventually become dialectical naturalism and libertarian municipalism. I well knew that these views were not consistent with traditional anarchist ideas, least of all post-scarcity, which implied that a modern libertarian society rested on advanced material preconditions. Today I find that anarchism remains the very simplistic individualistic and antirationalist psychology it has always been. My attempt to retain anarchism under the name of "social anarchism" has largely been a failure, and I now find that the term I have used to denote my views must be replaced with Communalism, which coherently integrates and goes beyond the most viable features of the anarchist and Marxist traditions. Recent attempts to use the word *anarchism* as a leveler to minimize the abundant and contradictory differences that are grouped under that term and even celebrate its openness to "differences" make it a diffuse catch-all for tendencies that properly should be in sharp conflict with one another.

[18] For a discussion of the very real problems created by anarchists' disdain for power during the Spanish Revolu-

"people's" garages, print shops, food coops, and backyard gardens, adherents of Communalism mobilize themselves to electorally engage in a potentially important center of power — the municipal council — and try to compel it to create legislatively potent neighborhood assemblies. These assemblies, it should be emphasized, would make every effort to delegitimate and depose the statist organs that currently control their villages, towns, or cities and thereafter act as the real engines in the exercise of power. Once a number of municipalities are democratized along communalist lines, they would methodically confederate into municipal leagues and challenge the role of the nation-state and, through popular assemblies and confederal councils, try to acquire control over economic and political life.

Finally, Communalism, in contrast to anarchism, decidedly calls for decision-making by majority voting as the only equitable way for a large number of people to make decisions. Authentic anarchists claim that this principle — the "rule" of the minority by the majority — is authoritarian and propose instead to make decisions by consensus. Consensus, in which single individuals can veto majority decisions, threatens to abolish society as such. A free society is not one in which its members, like Homer's lotus-eaters, live in a state of bliss without memory, temptation, or knowledge. Like it or not, humanity has eaten of the fruit of knowledge, and its memories are laden with history and experience. In a lived mode of freedom — contrary to mere café chatter — the rights of minorities to express their dissenting views will always be protected as fully as the rights of majorities. Any abridgements of those rights would be instantly corrected by the community — hopefully gently, but if unavoidable, forcefully — lest social life collapse into sheer chaos. Indeed, the views of a minority would be treasured as potential source of new insights and nascent truths that, if abridged, would deny society the sources of creativity and developmental advances — for new ideas generally emerge from inspired minorities that gradually gain the centrality they deserve at a given time and place — until, again, they too are challenged as the conventional wisdom of a period that is beginning to pass away and requires new (minority) views to replace frozen orthodoxies.

The Need for Organization and Education

It remains to ask: how are we to achieve this rational society? One anarchist writer would have it that the good society (or a true "natural" disposition of affairs, including a "natural man") exists beneath the oppressive burdens of civilization like fertile soil beneath the snow. It follows from this mentality that all we are obliged to do to achieve the good society is to somehow eliminate the snow, which is to say capitalism, nation-states, churches, conventional schools, and other almost endless types of institutions that perversely embody domination in one form or another. Presumably an anarchist society — once state, governmental, and cultural institutions are merely removed-would emerge intact, ready to function and thrive as a free society. Such a "society," if one can even call it such, would not require that we proactively create it: we would simply let the snow above it melt away. The process of rationally creating a free Communalist society, alas, will require substantially more thought and work than embracing a mystified concept of aboriginal innocence and bliss.

A Communalist society should rest, above all, on the efforts of a new radical organization to change the world, one that has a new political vocabulary to explain its goals, and a new program

and theoretical framework to make those goals coherent. It would, above all, require dedicated individuals who are willing to take on the responsibilities of education and, yes, *leadership*. Unless words are not to become completely mystified and obscure a reality that exists before our very eyes, it should minimally be acknowledged that leadership *always* exists and does not disappear because it is clouded by euphemisms such as "militants" or, as in Spain, "influential militants." It must also be acknowledge that many individuals in earlier groups like the CNT were not just "influential militants" but outright leaders, whose views were given more consideration — and deservedly so! — than those of others because they were based on more experience, knowledge, and wisdom, as well as the psychological traits that were needed to provide effective guidance. A serious libertarian approach to leadership would indeed acknowledge the reality and crucial importance of leaders — all the more to establish the greatly needed formal *structures and regulations* that can effectively *control and modify* the activities of leaders and recall them when the membership decides their respect is being misused or when leadership becomes an exercise in the abusive exercise of power.

A libertarian municipalist movement should function, not with the adherence of flippant and tentative members, but with people who have been schooled in the movement's ideas, procedures and activities. They should, in effect, demonstrate a serious commitment to their organization — an organization whose structure is laid out explicitly in a formal *constitution* and appropriate *bylaws*. Without a democratically formulated and approved institutional framework whose members and leaders can be held accountable, clearly articulated standards of responsibility cease to exist. Indeed, it is precisely when a membership is no longer responsible to its constitutional and regulatory provisions that authoritarianism develops and eventually leads to the movement's immolation. Freedom from authoritarianism can best be assured only by the clear, concise, and detailed allocation of power, not by pretensions that power and leadership are forms of "rule" or by libertarian metaphors that conceal their reality. It has been precisely when an organization fails to articulate these regulatory details that the conditions emerge for its degeneration and decay.

Ironically, no stratum has been more insistent in demanding its freedom to exercise its will against regulation than chiefs, monarchs, nobles, and the bourgeoisie; similarly even well- meaning anarchists have seen individual autonomy as the true expression of freedom from the "artificialities" of civilization. In the realm of *true* freedom — that is, freedom that has been actualized as the result of consciousness, knowledge, and necessity — to know *what we can and cannot do* is more cleanly honest and true to reality than to avert the responsibility of knowing the limits of the lived world. Said a very wise man more than a century and a half ago: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please."

Creating a New Left

The need for the international Left to advance courageously beyond a Marxist, anarchist, syndicalist, or vague socialist framework toward a Communalist framework is particularly compelling today. Rarely in the history of leftist political ideas have ideologies been so wildly and irresponsibly muddled; rarely has ideology itself been so disparaged; rarely has the cry for "Unity!" on

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tion, see the appendix originally written to this article, "Anarchism and Power in the Spanish Revolution." (Available at www.communalism.org.)

any terms been heard with such desperation. To be sure, the various tendencies that oppose capitalism should indeed unite around efforts to discredit and ultimately efface the market system. To such ends, unity is an invaluable desideratum: a united front of the entire Left is needed in order to counter the entrenched system-indeed, culture-of commodity production and exchange, and to defend the residual rights that the masses have won in earlier struggles against oppressive governments and social systems.

The urgency of this need, however, does not require movement participants to abandon mutual criticism, or to stifle their criticism of the authoritarian traits present in anticapitalist organizations. Least of all does it require them to *compromise the integrity and identity of their various programs.* Th vast majority of participants in today's movement are inexperienced young radicals who have come of age in an era of postmodernist relativism. As a consequence, the movement is marked by a chilling eclecticism, in which tentative opinions are chaotically mismarried to ideals that should rest on soundly objective premises.[19] In a milieu where the clear expression of ideas is not valued and terms are inappropriately used, and where argumentation is disparaged as "aggressive" and, worse, "divisive," it becomes difficult to formulate ideas in the crucible of debate. Ideas grow and mature best, in fact, not in the silence and controlled humidity of an ideological nursery, but in the tumult of dispute and mutual criticism.

Following revolutionary socialist practices of the past, Communalists would try to formulate a minimum program that calls for satisfaction of the immediate concerns of the masses, such as improved wages and shelter or adequate park space and transportation. This minimum program would aim to satisfy the most elemental needs of the masses, to improve their access to the resources that make daily life tolerable. The maximum program, by contrast, would present an image of what human life could be like under libertarian socialism, at least as far as such a society is foreseeable in a world that is continually changing under the impact of seemingly unending industrial revolutions.

Even more, however, Communalists would see their program and practice as a process. Indeed, a transitional program in which each new demand provides the springboard for escalating demands that lead toward more radical and eventually revolutionary demands. One of the most striking examples of a transitional demand was the programmatic call in the late nineteenth century by the Second International for a popular militia to replace a professional army. In still other cases, revolutionary socialists demanded that railroads be publicly owned (or, as revolutionary syndicalists might have demanded, be controlled by railroad workers) rather than privately owned and operated. None of these demands were *in themselves* revolutionary, but they opened *pathways*, politically, to revolutionary forms of ownership and operation — which, in turn, could be escalated to achieve the movement's maximum program. Others might criticize such step-by-step endeavors as "reformist," but Communalists do not contend that a Communalist society can be legislated into existence. What these demands try to achieve, in the short term, are new rules of engagement between the people and capital — rules that are all the more needed at a time when "direct action" is being confused with protests of mere events whose agenda is set entirely by the ruling classes.

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[19] I should note that by *objective* I do not refer merely to existential entities and events but also to potentialities that can be rationally conceived, nurtured, and in time actualized into what we would narrowly call realities. If mere substantiality were all that the term objective meant, no ideal or promise of freedom would be an *objectively* valid goal unless it existed under our very noses.

On the whole, Communalism is trying to rescue a realm of public action and discourse that is either disappearing or that is being be reduced to often-meaningless engagements with the police, or to street theater that, however artfully, reduces serious issues to simplistic performances that have no instructive influence. By contrast, Communalists try to build lasting organizations and institutions that can play a socially transformative role in the real world. Significantly, Communalists do not hesitate to run candidates in *municipal* elections who, if elected, would use what real power their offices confer to legislate popular assemblies into existence. These assemblies, in turn, would have the power ultimately to create effective forms of town-meeting government. Inasmuch as the emergence of the city — and city councils — long preceded the emergence of class society, councils based on popular assemblies are not inherently statist organs, and to participate seriously in municipal elections countervails reformist socialist attempts to elect statist delegates by offering the historic libertarian vision of municipal confederations as a practical, combative, and politically *credible* popular alternative to state power. Indeed, Communalist candidacies, which explicitly *denounce* parliamentary candidacies as opportunist, keep alive the debate over how libertarian socialism can be achieved — a debate that has been languishing for years.

There should be no self-deception about the opportunities that exist as a means of transforming our existing irrational society into a rational one. Our choices on how to transform the existing society are still on the table of history and are faced with immense problems. But unless present and future generations are beaten into complete submission by a culture based on queasy calculation as well as by police with tear gas and water cannons, we cannot desist from fighting for what freedoms we have and try to expand them into a free society wherever the opportunity to do so emerges. At any rate we now know, in the light of all the weaponry and means of ecological destruction that are at hand, that the need for radical change cannot be indefinitely deferred. What is clear is that human beings are much too intelligent not to have a rational society; the most serious question we face is whether they are rational enough to achieve one.

After Murray Bookchin

Murray Bookchin unfortunately did not live to see the publication of *Social Ecology and Communalism.* July 30th, 2006, he died peacefully in his home, surrounded by family and friends.

Until his very last breath, Bookchin never abandoned his commitment to humanism and Enlightenment, and he was always a forceful representative of the great radical traditions he strove to nurture and develop. Although his impact on the ecology movement and on grassroots activism is recognized and appreciated, Bookchin's real importance and originality has yet to be asserted. Fortunately Bookchin was not only a lifelong activist but also a prolific writer, leaving behind numerous books, essays, lectures, and interviews. Bookchin was a real *thinker* — controversial and stimulating — and he maintained a consistent social focus all his life. Without doubt, the loss of this great revolutionary will be felt for many years to come.

The publication of these essays seems particularly appropriate now, as they can help us understand how Bookchin has left us a comprehensive and coherent corpus. This book is important for two reasons. First, it provides a decent and accessible introduction to Bookchin's basic ideas, and it is my sincere hope that this book will encourage the reader to take a closer look at his rich theoretical works. Second, it provides a very definable and ideological focus by which we can evaluate his older works and his many polemics. Indeed, "The Communalist Project" was the last proper essay Bookchin ever wrote, and the oldest essays were revised quite recently. (It could also be noted that I presented my editorial choices to him while working on this project, and he even read and commented on the introduction I have written for this book.) Bookchin was enthusiastic about this specific collection of essays, and thought that they represented the most recent and, in many ways, clearest expression of his ideological stance. In that respect, they can be considered a political testament.

I believe that social ecology and Communalism, and the whole body of ideas that Bookchin created, has left us with a tremendous legacy that will continue to challenge us and inspire us in the struggle for a new libertarian and ecological society. Let us make sure these ideas get the attention they deserve, and help create the free society that Bookchin never had the privilege to see come into being. Creating a new radical movement, and indeed a new society, is an immense project that can not be taken lightly. As Bookchin himself wrote in *Re-enchanting Humanity*: "The achievement of freedom must be a free act on the highest level of intellectual and moral probity, for if we cannot act vigorously to free ourselves, we will not deserve to be free."

Murray Bookchin threw down the gauntlet.

The future is our responsibility.

Eirik Eiglad,

October 30th, 2006

Murray Bookchin
Social Ecology and Communalism
2006

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