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The Twilight Comes Early

Murray Bookchin

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The twilight comes early, as it should in the autumn of the seasons and in the autumn of life. Every part of my body announces the eternity that must soon follow — the growing pain that fatal diseases colonize my body, the failure of my organs, the loss of energy, the desire for death. Even society seems to be dying, to desert me, to bid its farewell. To those who are near to death, this is as it should be. To those who are still young, I feel nothing but sorrow. How sad that my children should be faced with a full lifetime of sterility and fear.

Three days have passed since Bush was reelected. History threatens to roll back an epoch! What held my life together was socialism. Whether a society will ever appear that is based on community, care, and solidarity; whether above all it will be based on reason, I do not know. Reason has always guided my beliefs, often my actions; now my ardor dims, however much my convictions are as strong as ever.

This has been the guiding — and painful — light of my life. Socialism is the star by which I navigated my thoughts, however much it has failed me and eluded my hopes. To know me is to know my rational ideas, not to know the chronology of biological events — to

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ready my “book” of life. These rational ideas, each ordered dialectically into actualities as distinguished from realities, form the core of my very being. All else counts for foibles, disorderly discontinuities, often mere events. It is from this legacy of freedom that my own sense of continuity formed the double helix of my thoughts, interacting with a legacy of domination — each intertwining with the other. Taken together, it was the ribcage of my being, one depositing itself in the other legacy, exhausting itself in the other, until freedom reached its fullest (if unknowable) extent that was possible for its time and place.

I don’t know if there is an “end of history” — which is to say that I don’t know if there ever can be one. Reason impels me to believe that there never can be. But I don’t have to believe that there must be. What should have happened is that the legacy of freedom — personal as well as social — should slowly expand to a point where, through its interaction, it will absorb the legacy of domination. The two will finally become one in the sense that domination will have become meaningless. It will have become too irrational to lay any claim against freedom.

But this, I recognize, is the romantic that dwells in me as my principle of hope. Just as economics should become an ethics in a rational society (which is the society I wanted to see come into existence), so I give to the romantic an abiding place in human affairs. To live without a social romance is to see without color. Imagine what life would be like in black and white, without being able to hear — to be deaf to music. Step by step our potentialities like hearing became organized sound, and the Marseillaise was born.