

**MURRAY BOOKCHIN**

# **THE NEXT REVOLUTION**

**POPULAR ASSEMBLIES & THE  
PROMISE OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY**

**FOREWORD BY URSULA K. LE GUIN**

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# THE NEXT REVOLUTION

Popular Assemblies and the  
Promise of Direct Democracy



*Essays by Murray Bookchin*

*Edited and with an Introduction by  
Debbie Bookchin and Blair Taylor*

*Foreword by Ursula K. Le Guin*



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For Bea Bookchin

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confidante, intellectual partner,  
and dearest friend to Murray Bookchin  
for more than fifty years

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# Foreword

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By Ursula K. Le Guin

“The Left,” a meaningful term ever since the French Revolution, took on wider significance with the rise of socialism, anarchism, and communism. The Russian revolution installed a government entirely leftist in conception; leftist and rightist movements tore Spain apart; democratic parties in Europe and North America arrayed themselves between the two poles; liberal cartoonists portrayed the opposition as a fat plutocrat with a cigar, while reactionaries in the United States demonized “commie leftists” from the 1930s through the Cold War. The left/right opposition, though often an oversimplification, for two centuries was broadly useful as a description and a reminder of dynamic balance.

In the twenty-first century we go on using the terms, but what is left of the Left? The failure of state communism, the quiet entrenchment of a degree of socialism in democratic governments, and the relentless rightward movement of politics driven by corporate capitalism have made much progressive thinking seem antiquated, or redundant, or illusory. The Left is marginalized in its thought, fragmented in its goals, unconfident of its ability to unite. In America particularly, the drift to the right has been so strong that mere liberalism is now the terrorist bogey that anarchism or socialism used to be, and reactionaries are called “moderates.”

So, in a country that has all but shut its left eye and is trying to use only its right hand, where does an ambidextrous, binocular Old Rad like Murray Bookchin fit?

I think he'll find his readers. A lot of people are seeking consistent, constructive thinking on which to base action—a frustrating search. Theoretical approaches that seem promising turn out, like the Libertarian Party, to be Ayn Rand in drag; immediate and effective solutions to a problem turn out, like the Occupy movement, to lack structure and stamina for the long run. Young people, people this society blatantly short-changes and betrays, are looking for intelligent, realistic, long-term thinking: not another ranting ideology, but a practical working hypothesis, a methodology of how to regain control of where we're going. Achieving that control will require a revolution as powerful, as deeply affecting society as a whole, as the force it wants to harness.

Murray Bookchin was an expert in nonviolent revolution. He thought about radical social changes, planned and unplanned, and how best to prepare for them, all his life. This book carries his thinking on past his own life into the threatening future we face.

Impatient, idealistic readers may find him uncomfortably tough-minded. He's unwilling to leap over reality to dreams of happy endings, unsympathetic to mere transgression or pretending to be political action: “A ‘politics’ of disorder or ‘creative chaos,’ or a naïve practice of ‘taking over the streets’ (usually little more than a street festival), regresses participants to the behavior of a juvenile herd.” That applies more to the Summer of Love, certainly, than to the Occupy movement, yet it is a permanently cogent warning. Bookchin is no grim puritan. I first read him as an anarchist, probably the most eloquent and

thoughtful one of his generation, and in moving away from anarchism he hasn't lost his sense of the joy of freedom. He doesn't want to see that joy, that freedom, come crashing down yet again, among the ruins of its own euphoric irresponsibility.

What all political and social thinking has finally been forced to face is, of course, the irreversible degradation of the environment by unrestrained industrial capitalism: the enormous fact of which science has been trying for fifty years to convince us, which technology provided us ever greater distractions from it. Every benefit industrialism and capitalism have brought us, every wonderful advance in knowledge and health and communication and comfort, casts the same fatal shadow. All we have, we have taken from the earth; and, taking with ever-increasing speed and greed, we now return little but what is sterile or poisoned. Yet we can't stop the process. A capitalist economy, by definition, lives by growth; as he observes: "For capitalism to desist from its mindless expansion would be for it to commit social suicide." We have, essentially, chosen cancer as the model of our social system.

Capitalism's grow-or-die imperative stands radically at odds with ecology's imperative of interdependence and limit. The two imperatives can no longer coexist with each other; nor can any society founded on the myth that they can be reconciled hope to survive. Either we will establish an ecological society or society will go under for everyone, irrespective of his or her status.

Murray Bookchin spent a lifetime opposing the rapacious ethos of grow-or-die capitalism. The nine essays in this book represent the culmination of that labor: the theoretic underpinning for an egalitarian and directly democratic ecological society, with a practical approach for how to build it. He critiques the failures of past movements for social change, resurrects the promise of direct democracy and, in the last essay in this book, sketches his hope of how we might turn the environmental crisis into a moment of true choice—a chance to transcend the paralyzing hierarchies of gender, race, class, nation, a chance to find a radical cure for the radical evil of our social system. Reading it, I was moved and grateful, as I have so often been in reading Murray Bookchin. He was a true son of the Enlightenment in his respect for clear thought and moral responsibility and in his honest, uncompromising search for a realistic hope.

# Introduction

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The world today confronts not one, but a series of interlocking crises—economic, political, social, and ecological. The new millennium has been marked by a growing gap between rich and poor that has reached unprecedented levels of disparity, consigning an entire generation to diminished expectations and dismal prospects. Socially, the trajectory of the new century has been equally bleak, particularly in the developing world, where sectarian violence in the name of religion, tribalism, and nationalism has turned entire regions into insufferable battle zones. Meanwhile, the environmental crisis has worsened at a pace that has exceeded even the most pessimistic forecasts. Global warming, rising sea levels, pollution of the air, soil, and oceans, and the destruction of massive tracts of rain forest have accelerated at such alarming rates that the environmental catastrophe that was expected to reach grave proportions sometime in the next century has instead become the pressing, urgent concern of this generation.

Yet, in the face of these ever-worsening crises, the perverse logic of neoliberal capitalism is so entrenched that, despite its spectacular collapse in 2008, the only thinkable response has been more neoliberalism: an ever-increasing deference to corporate and financial elites which posits privatization, slashing services, and giving free reign to the market as the only way out. The result has been a predictable rise in disenfranchisement politically and an electoral politics devoid of substantive debate and choice—an exercise in showmanship—whether in Argentina, Italy, Germany, or the United States. Still, while political and economic elites insist “there is no alternative” and cynically double down on the status quo of austerity, activists around the world have challenged this conventional wisdom with a new politics demanding a more expansive form of democracy. From New York and Cairo to Istanbul and Rio, movements like Occupy Wall Street and the Spanish *indignados* have pried open new space with an exciting politics that defies existing categories, attacking both capitalism, inequality and ossified “representative” democracies. The voices and demands are diverse but at their root is a direct challenge to the current political ethos in which the economic and social policies of elected governments—left, right, or center—have blurred into an indistinguishable consensus of tinkering around the edges and unquestioning obeisance to global market capitalism. These movements have ignited widespread excitement, attracting millions of participants around the world to massive rallies, and have kindled once again the hope that from the streets will arise the flame of a revolutionary new social movement.

Despite inspired moments of resistance, the radical democracy forged in squares from Zuccotti to Taksim has still not congealed into a viable political alternative. The excitement and solidarity on the ground has yet to coalesce into a political praxis capable of eliminating the current array of repressive forces and replacing it with a visionary, egalitarian—and, importantly, achievable—new society. Murray Bookchin directly addresses this need, offering a transformative vision and new political strategy for a truly free society—a project that he called “Communalism.”

A prolific author, essayist and activist, Bookchin devoted his life to developing a new kind of left politics that speaks to both movement concerns and the diverse social problems they confront. Communalism moves beyond critique to offer a reconstructive vision of

fundamentally different society—directly democratic, anticapitalist, ecological, and opposed to all forms of domination—that actualizes freedom in popular assemblies bound together in a confederation. Rescuing the revolutionary project from the taint of authoritarianism and the supposed “end of history,” Communalism advances a bold politics that moves from resistance to social transformation.

Bookchin’s use of the term Communalism signifies his arrival, after six decades as an activist and theorist, at a philosophy of social change that was shaped by a lifetime on the left. Born in 1921, he became radicalized at the age of nine, when he joined the Young Pioneers, the Communist youth organization in New York City. He became a Trotskyist in the late thirties and, beginning in 1948, spent a decade in the libertarian socialist Contemporary Issues group, which had abandoned orthodox Marxist ideology. In the late 1950s, he began to elaborate the importance of environmental degradation as a symptom of deeply entrenched social problems. Bookchin’s book on the subject, *Our Synthetic Environment*, appeared several months before Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, while his seminal 1964 pamphlet *Ecology and Revolutionary Thought* introduced the concept of ecology as a political category to the New Left. That essay’s groundbreaking synthesis of anarchism, ecology, and decentralization was the first to equate the grow-or-die logic of capitalism with the ecological destruction of the planet and presented a profound new understanding of capitalism’s impact on the environment as well as social relations. His 1968 essay “Post-Scarcity Anarchism” reformulated anarchist theory for a new era, providing a coherent framework for the reorganization of society along ecological-anarchistic lines. As Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was imploding into Marxist sectarianism at its final convention in 1968, Bookchin was distributing his pamphlet *Listen Marxist!*, which criticized the retrogressive return to dogmatic Marxism by various factions of SDS. He advocated for an alternative anarchist politics of direct democracy and decentralization, ideas that were buried in the rubble of the crumbling organization but which resonated with those movements that would later become dominant on the left. His essays from this period, originally published in the magazine *Anarchos* by a New York City group that Bookchin cofounded in the mid-1960s, were collected in the 1971 anthology *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, a book that exerted a profound influence on the New Left and became a classic articulation of twentieth-century anarchism.

Authoring twenty-three works of history, political theory, philosophy, and urban studies, Bookchin drew on a rich intellectual tradition that ranged from Aristotle, Hegel, and Marx to Karl Polanyi, Hans Jonas, and Lewis Mumford. In his major work, *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982), he elaborated the historical, anthropological, and social roots of hierarchy and domination and their implications for our relationship to the natural world in an expansive theory that he called “social ecology.” He challenged and influenced every major figure of the period, from Noam Chomsky and Herbert Marcuse to Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Guy Debord.

In 1974, Bookchin cofounded the Institute for Social Ecology (ISE), a unique education project in Vermont offering classes in political theory, radical history, and practical ecological initiatives like organic agriculture and solar energy. He was an important influence on the overlapping tendencies of nonviolent direct action, peace, radical feminism, and ecology that comprised the new social movements of the late 1970s and 1980s. Drawing on his own activist background as, variously, a young street agitator, autoworker shop steward, and civil rights organizer for CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality), he played a leadership role

the antinuclear Clamshell Alliance and in the formation of the Left Green Network. In his book *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s*, Barbara Epstein credits Bookchin with introducing the concept of affinity groups and popularizing the European Critical Theory of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. His ideas of face-to-face participatory democracy, general assemblies, and confederation were adopted as the basic modes of organization and decision-making by much of the antinuclear movement worldwide and later by the alterglobalization movement, which employed them to ensure democracy in their organization and decision-making processes. Bookchin also met and corresponded with German Green leaders and was a key voice in the *Realo/Fundi* debate over whether the Greens should remain a movement or become a conventional party. His work had a global reach and was widely translated and reprinted throughout Europe, Latin America, and Asia.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Bookchin was a central interlocutor for critical theorists like Cornelius Castoriadis and a frequent contributor to the influential journal *Telos*. He engaged in lively debates with prominent ecological thinkers like Arne Ness and David Foreman. Meanwhile, the Institute for Social Ecology played an important role in the alterglobalization movement that emerged in Seattle in 1999, becoming a space for activist reflection while advocating direct democracy and anticapitalism in contrast to the reformist, anticorporate discourse of many NGOs, and launched a variety of left libertarian and ecological initiatives. But by the mid-1990s, problematic tendencies within some strains of anarchism toward primitivism, lifestyle politics, and aversion to organization led Bookchin first to try to reclaim a social anarchism before eventually breaking with the tradition entirely. Reflecting on his lifetime of experience on the left, Bookchin spent the last fifteen years before his death in 2006 working on a comprehensive four-volume study of revolutionary history called *The Third Revolution*, in which he offered astute conclusions about the failure of revolutionary movements—from peasant uprisings to modern insurrections—to effect lasting social change. These insights informed a new political perspective, one he hoped could avoid the pitfalls of the past and lead to a new, emancipatory praxis—Communalism.

It was during this period that Bookchin published many of the essays contained in this collection, formally elaborating the concept of Communalism and its concrete political dimension, libertarian municipalism. Communalist politics suggests a way out of the familiar deadlock between the anarchist and Marxist traditions, offering a missing third pole in the recent debate between Simon Critchley and Slavoj Žižek. Rejecting both the modesty of Critchley's purely defensive politics of resistance as well as Žižek's obsession with the seizure of oppressive state power, Bookchin instead returns to the recurrent formation arising in nearly every revolutionary upsurge: popular assemblies. From the *quartiers* of the Paris Commune to the general assemblies of Occupy Wall Street and elsewhere, these self-organized democratic councils run like a red thread through history up to the present. Yet revolutionaries of all stripes have largely overlooked the broader potential of these popular institutions. Subjected to centralized party discipline by Marxists and viewed with suspicion by anarchists, these institutions of popular power, which Hannah Arendt called the "lost treasure" of the revolutionary tradition, are the foundation of Bookchin's political project. Communalism develops this recurring historical form into the basis for a comprehensive libertarian socialist vision of direct democracy.

One of Bookchin's early formulations of libertarian municipalism appeared in 1987, when he wrote *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship* (republished later as *From Urbanization to Cities*), a follow-up to his earlier book *The Limits of the City* (1971), in which he traced the history of the urban megalopolis and argued for decentralization. In the later volume, Bookchin revisited the history of the city to explain the importance of an empowered citizenry as the fundamental basis for creating free communities. He distinguished "statecraft," in which individuals have a diminished influence in political affairs because of the limits of representational government, from "politics," in which citizens have direct, participatory control over their governments and communities. The ideas contained in this book, in which Bookchin returns to the Greek polis to flesh out notions of face-to-face participatory democracy, general assemblies, and confederation, offer a prefigurative strategy in which a new society is created in the shell of the old. This concept of direct democracy has played a growing role in the libertarian leftism of activists today and has become the fundamental organizational principle of Occupy Wall Street, even if many of its adherents were unaware of its origins. As David Harvey observed in his book *Rebel Cities*, "Bookchin's proposal is by far the most sophisticated radical proposal to deal with the creation and collective use of the commons across a wide variety of scales."

The nine essays here offer an excellent overview of Bookchin's political philosophy and the most mature formulation of his thinking with respect to the forms of organization necessary to develop a countervailing force to the coercive power of the nation-state. Each was originally written as a stand-alone work; in collecting them for this volume we have edited the essays where necessary to avoid excessive repetition and preserve clarity. Taken together they challenge us to accomplish the changes necessary to save our planet and achieve real human freedom, and offer a concrete program by which to accomplish this sweeping social transformation. The writings in this collection serve as both an introduction and culmination to the work of one of the most original thinkers of the twentieth century.

In the opening essay, "The Communalist Project," Bookchin situates Communalism vis-à-vis other left ideologies, arguing that the world has changed significantly from the times that birthed anarchism and Marxism; he contends that these older ideologies are no longer capable of addressing the new and highly generalized problems posed by the modern world, from global warming to postindustrialization. The second essay, "The Ecological Crisis and the Need to Remake Society," elucidates the core insight of Bookchin's social ecology—that the ecological and social crises are intertwined, indeed, that our domination of nature is the projection of domination of human by human in society. Rejecting ecological arguments that blame individual choices, technology, or population growth, Bookchin argues that the ecological crisis is caused by an irrational social system governed by the cancerous logic of capitalism, driven by its competitive grow-or-die imperative and its endless production directed not toward meeting human needs but accumulating profit. Arguing against the extremes of an authoritarian state or totally autonomous self-sufficiency, Bookchin offers Communalism as an emancipatory alternative capable of saving ourselves and nature at the same time.

The three middle essays, "A Politics for the Twenty-First Century," "The Meaning of Confederalism," and "Libertarian Municipalism: A Politics of Direct Democracy," describe in detail different aspects of libertarian municipalism. The first outlines how confederate

assemblies can assert popular control over the economy in order to abolish it as a separate social realm, directing it to human needs rather than profit. “The Meaning of Confederation” further elaborates on these themes and addresses specific objections to the concept of confederal direct democracy. It answers common questions such as, Is confederation feasible in a globalized world? How would local assemblies address bigger problems in a democratic manner? Would local communities cooperate or compete with each other, or could localism devolve to parochialism? “Libertarian Municipalism: A Politics of Direct Democracy” traces the familiar historical trajectory from movements into parties—social democratic, socialist, and Green alike—which have consistently failed to change the world but instead are changed by it. By contrast, libertarian municipalism changes not only the content but also the *form* of politics, transforming politics from its current lowly status as what reviled politicians do *to* us into a new paradigm in which politics is something we, as fully engaged citizens, do *for* ourselves, thus reclaiming democratic control over our own lives and communities.

Exploring the unique liberatory potential of the city and the citizen throughout history, “Cities: The Unfolding of Reason in History” examines the degradation of the concept of “citizen”—from that of a free individual empowered to participate and make collective decisions to a mere constituent and taxpayer. Bookchin seeks to rescue the Enlightenment notion of a progressive, but not teleological, concept of History wherein reason guides human action toward the eradication of toil and oppression; or put positively, freedom.

The essays “Nationalism and the ‘National Question’” and “Anarchism and Power in the Spanish Revolution” elucidate a libertarian perspective on questions of power, cultural identity, and political sovereignty. In the former, Bookchin places nationalism in the larger historical context of humanity’s social evolution, with the aim of transcending it, suggesting instead a libertarian and cosmopolitan ethics of complementarity in which cultural differences serve to enhance human unity. In “Anarchism and Power in the Spanish Revolution” he confronts the question of power, describing how anarchists throughout history have seen power as an essentially negative evil that must be destroyed. Bookchin contends that power will always exist, but that the question revolutionaries face is whether it will remain in the hands of elites or be given an emancipatory institutional form.

The concluding, previously unpublished, essay “The Future of the Left” assesses the fate of the revolutionary project during the twentieth century, examining the Marxist and anarchist traditions. Bookchin argues that Marxism remains trapped by a limited focus on economy and is deeply marred by its legacy of authoritarian statism. Anarchism, by contrast, retains a problematic individualism that valorizes abstract and liberal notions of “autonomy” over a more expansive notion of freedom, ducking thorny questions about collective power, social institutions, and political strategy. Communalism resolves this tension by giving freedom a concrete institutional form in confederated popular assemblies. The essay concludes with a passionate defense of the Enlightenment and a reminder that its legacy of discerning the “is” from the “ought” still constitutes the very core of the Left: critique directed toward unlocking the potentiality of universal human freedom.

Today, few deny the grim reality of overlapping political, economic, and ecological crises that currently confront the world. Yet, despite inspiring moments of popular outrage and mobilization, no viable alternative social vision has emerged; hypercompetition, austerity, and ecological degradation march on, opposed yet also unstoppable. The present exhaustion of

conventional politics calls for bold new ideas that speak to the radically democratic aspirations at the core of contemporary global movements. Bookchin's *Communalism* circumvents the stalemate between the state and the street—the familiar oscillation between empowering but ephemeral street protest and entering the very state institutions designed to uphold the present order. He expands our horizons from endlessly opposing the venality of politicians and corporate power to a new organization of society, which redefines politics from a detested thing done to us to something we do ourselves, together, giving substance to the term “freedom” by allowing us to take control of our lives. Bookchin offers a vision of what such a truly free society might look like, and a road map capable of transporting us there. Therefore, we offer this book with the hope that the ideas do not lie dormant on the page, but inspire thought and action that enables us to move from resistance to social transformation.

*Debbie Bookchin and Blair Taylor*

## 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. 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 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 and materially abundant society in an aesthetically crafted environment.

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 and morally before the onslaught of social forces that may very well lead to our physical immolation. Prognoses about the future are understandably very fragile and are easily distrusted. Pessimism has become 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.

Having brought history to a point where nearly everything is possible, at least of a materi-

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 mindless customs and destructive prejudices, but according to the canons of *reason, reflection, and discourse* that uniquely belong to our own species.

What factors should be decisive going forward? Of great significance is the immense accumulation of social and political experience that is available to activists 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 of the past. Also, 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; 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, 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 predicted would become dominant under “mature” capitalism 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 number 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 into a largely petty bourgeois stratum whose mentality is marked by its own utopianism of “consumption for the sake of consumption.” We can foresee a time when the proletariat, 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.

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—namely, 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 interest now 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 in 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.

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.<sup>2</sup> 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 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 a

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.<sup>3</sup>

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 ideologies and methods that were born in the first Industrial Revolution, when a factory proletariat 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. 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

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 economical backward empire, whose size spanned eleven time zones across Europe and Asia.<sup>4</sup>

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 preconditions for socialism, it did not address the ecological, civic, and subjective forces of 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 had passed it by and, since the 1960s, have mechanically appended environmentalist and feminist ideas to its formulaic *ouvrierist* outlook. By the same token, anarchism represents, even in its authentic form, a highly individualist outlook that fosters a radically unfettered lifestyle, often as a substitute for mass action.

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 Nietzschean 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,<sup>5</sup> 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 Sweden, to cite the more illustrative cases in the history of the libertarian labor movement.

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; 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

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 *ouvrier* anti-intellectualism that disdains attempts to formulate a purposive revolutionary direction and has a reverence for proletarian “spontaneity,” which, 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.<sup>6</sup> As I have written elsewhere, historically, politics did not emerge from the state—an apparatus whose professional machinery was 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 of 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, 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 or

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 that he sanctioned in Italy around the same year. Accordingly, anarchists have long regarded every government as a state and condemned it—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. Even 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 anarchists 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 Marxist ideas but transcends 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.<sup>7</sup>

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 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 techni-

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.

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. 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.<sup>8</sup>

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 an offhanded 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."<sup>9</sup>

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 mechanical adaptation to an existing and pre-given 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 insularity to which humanity and the biosphere have been subjected by classes and hierarchies. Freed of domination as well as material exploitation—indeed, re-created 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 an explicitly political body of ideas, Communalism seeks to recover and advance the development of the city 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 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. 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 socially rational transformative politics. And they would become arenas where class conflict 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, regional 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). Communalist

attempt to restore the powers of towns and cities and to knit them together in confederations can be expected to evoke increasing resistance from national institutions. 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 that develops as a source of public education and leadership.

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 artistic 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 aesthetically 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.<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup>

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 the transcendence of the particularistic class 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 postscarcity rather than an austere harmony enforced by a morality of scarcity and material deprivation.<sup>13</sup>

Classical Athenian democracy of the fifth century BCE, 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*—that is, 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”;<sup>14</sup> this aim initiated the earliest political formation, the village. Aristotle famously described man (by which he meant the adult Greek male)<sup>15</sup> 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, “when several villages are united in a single complete community (*koinonon*), 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.”<sup>16</sup>

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 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

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