Utopia, Governance and the Commons

Towards a New Story

REVISED EDITION

by
Tom Wallace

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To my father, Thomas Lawson Wallace.

Table of Contents

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

THREE CONCERNS
SIX QUESTIONS
FOUR APPLICATIONS
A MORE PERSONAL CONCERN
GANDHI'S SOCIAL SINS

1. UTOPIAS

UTOPIAS AND IDEALS
ORIGINS OF UTOPIA
GOLDEN AGE — LOOKING BACK
GOLDEN AGE — LOOKING FORWARD
THREE UTOPIAS
PRIVATOPIA
CORNUCOPIA
ECOTOPIA
WHERE TO FROM HERE?
SOME INSPIRATION
IN SUMMARY

2. THE QUESTION OF OWNERSHIP

THE MEANING OF CAPITAL
OWNING THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION
WHY DO WE WANT TO OWN?

Ownership of Land
Money and Usury
What do the Utopias have to say about ownership?

3. DEFINING THE COMMONS

A Commons Exists for us Now
The Tragedy of the Commons
Natural Commons as Resource and Wild Nature
The Commons, Wealth and Capital
Widening the Commons
The Creative Commons
Commons and Cultural Heritage
The Prospects for Common Good Laws
Proposals for the Commons
Recognising the Commons invites a new Politics

4 POLITY

State versus Stateless
Individualism
Collectivism
Communism
The Purpose of Government
Types of Government
Federations and Assemblies
What do the Utopias make of the Governance Options?
Conclusion

5 COMMUNITY ON A SMALL SCALE

THE ISSUE OF SCALE
STARTING WITH OURSELVES
PERSONAL CHANGE LEADING TO VISION
NEW MISSIONS ARE FORMED BY WORKING TOGETHER
POWER AND HIERARCHY
EQUALITY IN GROUPS
COMMUNITY AND BUREAUCRACY
SOCIOCRACY
LOCAL DEMOCRACY
COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS
FROM SMALL TO LARGE

6 COMMUNITY ON A LARGE SCALE

PARAPOLITY
PARAPOLITY — SCALING UP FROM NEIGHBOURHOOD TO NATION
PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENTS AND CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES
PARECON
LEFT AND RIGHT
THE ADOPTION OF PARAPOLITY AND PARECON

7 THE ECONOMICS OF THE COMMONS

THE ECONOMIC BASE OF SOCIETY?
THE TRUE BASE OF SOCIETY
WHAT WE NEGLECT — WILD NATURE AND THE EMOTIONAL ECONOMY
VALUE
VALUE AND MONEY — THE FINANCIAL ECONOMY
WHAT SHOULD WE OWN?
WHAT SHOULD WE SHARE? EQUALITY AND THE

Welfare Net
What Should we Make? How Should we Trade?
Money making Money
Neo-liberalism
The Gift Economy
Does Capitalism have a Future?
The Importance of Corporations
Proposals
How Do the Utopias View the Social Commons?
Summary

8 NATURE

Natural Commons and Wild Nature
Connection and Inspiration from Nature
Our own Wild Nature
Nature and Value
Nature as part of the 'Moral Community'
Re-Wilding
Living on Wild Land
Seeking out the Wild

9 PLACE

The Mystery and Joy of Place
Competing Interests in Place
The Importance of Beauty
Taking back Control of our Places
Places 'Planned' by People
Communities Shape Place
Taking back the Commons
Business and Place

THE NIGHTMARE OF CARS
SLOW CITIES

10 A COMMONS OF COMPASSION

SYMPATHY, EMPATHY, COMPASSION
WHY COMPASSION?
COMPASSION FOR SELF
COMPASSION FOR OTHERS
GOVERNMENT AND COMPASSION
BUSINESS AND COMPASSION
WIDER CIRCLES OF COMPASSION

11 A COMMONS OF PLEASURE

JOY, PLEASURE AND HAPPINESS
GRADES OF PLEASURE?
ABUNDANCE — WHAT DO THE UTOPIAS MAKE OF PLEASURE?
DIFFERENT PLEASURES
PLEASURE AND NATURE
PLEASURE AND PLACE
PLEASURE AND COMPASSION
PLEASURE AND WORK
PLEASURE AND BUSINESS
CARNIVAL
PLEASURE AND SOUL
BEAUTY, SLOWNESS, SILENCE AND PEACE

12 A WIDER COMMONS

EDUCATION
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
WHY PRIVATOPIA WILL NOT WORK

CAN THE FUTURE BE A CORNUCOPIA?
IS ECOTOPIA ENOUGH?

13 WHAT WE MIGHT DECIDE, IF WE COULD DECIDE

WHO DECIDES?
WHAT DO WE OWN? WHAT SHOULD WE SHARE?
WHAT SHOULD WE MAKE? HOW SHOULD WE TRADE?

HOW SHOULD WE LIVE?

14 A NEW STORY

GETTING THE FACTS
FROM FACTS TO STORY
THE VOICE OF DISSENT
DAYDREAMING
EDUCATION WITHOUT CHARACTER
NAME YOUR PLEASURES
NAME YOUR FEARS
THE CURRENT STORY
A STORY OF ISOLATION OR A STORY OF TRUST?
THE NEW STORY
THE DEMISE OF THE CURRENT STORY?
PROSPECTS FOR THE NEW STORY

CONCLUSION

WHERE IS THE VISION?
THE GOOD LIFE
POLARISED POLITICS
THREE UTOPIAS
SIX QUESTIONS

THE NEW STORY
TRUST

GLOSSARY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

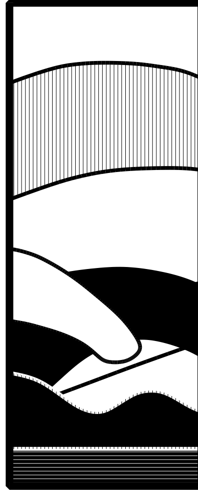
ENDNOTES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Preface

The main content of this book has been previously published, along with a series of memoirs, with the title Three Miles of Rice Pudding. (The origin of this phrase will become apparent in Chapter 1.) In Utopia, Governance and the Commons, I have stripped out a lot of the personal stories and focused on the more academic content. I hope, nonetheless, that the work will remain accessible. As a future project, I may produce a further work, combining all of the memoir and narrative elements of Three Miles. The reader may wish to check my Amazon authors page for news of this.

Meanwhile, I hope you will enjoy this work. I regard it as a 'commons' and am happy for it to be shared, in any format, on any platform, provided that an acknowledgement is given to the author and links provided back to where I have posted the manuscript. This revised edition contains only minor changes.



Introduction

'The skill of writing is to create a context in which other people can think.'

- Edwin Schlossberg

Do we dream of utopia? Utopias and dystopias are with us right now but I think we often do not acknowledge them. Our society is focused on good living and hopes for the future, perhaps as never before. At the same time though, the understanding and practice of a commons has greatly diminished — to such an extent that when I mention 'the commons' most people think I am referring to the House of Commons of the UK parliament. We will learn instead, in the course of this book, that a revival and extension of what we mean by commons is

central to how societies may be revived and how they might fae the future.

So utopia and the commons are problematic and our politics too is on very shaky ground. We yearn for a happy life and many enjoy an abundance of good living — at least in the West. But our sharing of the Earth's resources, our societies and our politics — these seem to be in disarray. We have utopias and dystopias.

There is certainly a lot out there in books and blogs and Youtube clips. Hopes of green or high-tech futures. Fears of climate hells. Post-capitalist future economics. How do we make sense of all this? The planet-saving, eco-warrior stuff may leave us with a guilt complex, or in need of a hippy make-over, or just feeling like a guilty hippy. The technological, futurist books seem overly optimistic and dismissive of the world's problems. The political books can be very obscure and often yearn for the overthrow of the monster of capitalism. They assure us that once the beast is slain, all will be well — but what might replace the beast can seem fanciful or unrealistic.

I've worked my way through many such writings and review several in the Bibliography. I've also interviewed a number of folks — of all political stripes — in the hope of incorporating their ideas. There are thankfully some exceptional people and exceptional works that have helped out. And even in the most obscure and difficult texts explored in my research, there was much to be gleaned. So there are a lot of wisdom nuggets out there. I decided to appropriate these nuggets and put them into my own book.

My first reason for writing then, is to collect up all the useful stuff that others have said and to try to present this coherently. Dipping into the utopian visions of ecological futures, high-tech futures and political change, I'm aiming to give a big picture that I hope will be food for thought for the ordinary person who may not have picked up a book on politics before.

But, whilst many books are excellent, and many conversations have been inspiring, there remain questions and concerns that do not seem to be fully addressed. That is my further reason for writing. It is to tackle those further questions, and try to give some simple and accessible explanations, from a layperson's point of view.

All authors of political writing, of course, are seeking to deliver a message that sums up their view of how the world may be made better. I don't feel that many deliver a balanced message. They are: Too eco. Too catastrophic. Too intent on wanting to overthrow capitalism. Too fixated on devising rules that will get people behaving in ways that fit in with their brand of utopia. Or, just too complicated. Or a combination of some or all of these. So my further aim is to get some balance, and provide a story that does not seem overwhelming or polarised or excessively radical. That way, I hope, the ordinary person may feel they could participate in some way, without having to become a revolutionary.

Let me make a start then, by summarising the concerns that have led me to write and the questions that these concerns have raised, and which I hope to address in this work.

Three Concerns

There are three main concerns I'm looking to address. The first concern is the one that is raised by Rutger Bregman in *Utopia for Realists*. The concern is, what has happened to our visions of utopia? We seem to have become a bit jaded, a bit cynical, a bit worldly-wise, such that dreams of paradise on Earth, or even good governance, appear to be hopelessly naïve. Where is the vision? Where is the hope for joy and pleasure? Is life now reduced to just a scrabble to hang onto a job, get a house and a car, enjoy a few holidays and then retire on a reasonable pension? What about everyone else, who maybe cannot afford such things? Can the rich only prosper at the expense of the poor?

The second concern follows on from the first. Why is our view for a good life so premised on wealth and consumption? To address this, we might ask, how is it that we determine what makes for a 'good life' today? The answer we are offered by politicians is all about economic growth. If the economy is growing — or so we are assured — then there are better prospects for jobs, for higher salaries, and for all that follows from this. Growth, we are told, makes it easier to find a job, and then our salary gives us some spending power to satisfy our basic needs. Perhaps after all that, we will have a bit of money left over; our 'disposable income'. (The name says it all.) Only then are we really into the realm of pleasure. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is a simple concept, but not such an obvious measure of success when looked at more closely. The worrying thing is that GDP seems several steps removed from what might

actually make us happy. Why don't we start instead with pleasure and celebration? And what about imagination, creativity, relationships, community, humour? There is no mention of these in the 'good life' promised to us by growing GDP. The 'good life' seems to just be premised on financial wealth and material possessions. But many people will challenge the idea that this is what is most important to them in life. So something is amiss.

The third concern: Why has politics become so polarised and why do politicians on both left and right not seem to be addressing the concerns of the people they claim to represent? We seem to be offered two radically different views of the way the world works by our rival political camps — and if anything, these two views are getting further apart rather than moving together into some kind of balance. This work is less about party politics and more about the values that underlie our societies. Nonetheless, the concern of polarised politics needs to be kept in mind.

Why these particular concerns? Well, it strikes me that we are short on vision, or shy of vision, as a society. Any visions we might have are mostly not coming to us through politics. Those offered to us by literature, film and television tend to be of the dystopian kind. Ideas about what might make for a good life are certainly out there, but media, politics and institutions are not really addressing these ideas in a coherent and wise manner. Also, in the background of the book, the climate emergency looms large. It affects all of the three concerns above. In particular, it is a contention of the book that the way we seek pleasure is a critical

question to ask when trying to address the changing climate. And finally, because of the problems the world faces, good governance is an essential question. A divided and polarised politics means that we face considerable obstacles, in many countries, to finding better government and therefore solving our problems.

Six Questions

The purpose of the book then is to answer the concerns raised above and along the way, to investigate what others have suggested and then arrive at a story that better fits with the world and the way we want to live. I'm approaching this by looking at current stories of how the world works and where it may be heading. I consider these to be utopian stories, even although the proponents of the various alternatives probably would not wish to be called utopian. Along the way, we'll be looking at the meaning of the commons, and how this fits, or does not fit, with the alternative narratives. And we'll also need to get into some politics. So the journey ahead is a journey into governance systems, community and economics. All of that is a lead up to asking about what we really want from our lives and from society and what will make for a better world. The journey is also one about nature, place, compassion and pleasure. I'll be taking these topics back to basics so as to get a handle on them. To do all this, I'm asking six main questions.

The six questions are: Who Decides? What do we own? What should we share? What should we make — or not make? How should we trade? Finally, and most important: How should we live?

We will be referring back to the questions throughout the work, as the discussion progresses.

The first of these questions, of course, is the question of governance. To get the broadest possible view of politics I'm going right back to asking whether or not we should have a government at all, and then we explore the various forms of governance on offer. We look at two particular varieties of governance system — Sociocracy and Participatory Politics — or Parapolity.

What we own and what we share are questions that the commons addresses especially well. We will look at the meaning of the commons and we will look at sharing in more detail in the chapter on compassion.

Questions of work, labour, production and trade are addressed in the chapter on economics, but have a bearing on several other chapters in the work. In relation to labour, production and trade, I also discuss a further aspect of governance, called Participatory Economics — or Parecon.

Finally, and a key feature of this work, is the question of where the pleasure lies in our lives, in our communities and in our societies. In the concerns above, I've suggested that we are led along a path of assuming that pleasure only follows once we have solved the basic questions of governance and economics. I'd suggest instead that, at the very least, the two work hand-in-hand. And maybe sometimes we are neglecting where our real pleasures lie and it would help us all to think this through. Utopias

are all about pleasure, so pleasure must be central to our discussions.

Four Applications

If we are to make pleasure our starting point and utopia our goal then we also need to look at reasons that we might be hopeful in setting out on this journey. Pleasure, people, places, creatures, nature, compassion, things to love — these, I suggest, should be our motivations. A hope for the future is essential. And we cannot leave all this to political leaders, or an intellectual elite or to activists. Each of us, I believe, no matter how humble our place in life, can play a part in making a better world for ourselves and for others.

So once those six basic questions are covered, we will turn to look at how solutions might be applied to four particular areas of concern — nature, place, compassion and pleasure. In the process, we will be devising an alternative story of utopia. Along the way we will touch on such issues as freedom, equality and justice. But these ideals are abstract and notoriously difficult to pin down. Utopias, by contrast, offer us the potential of concrete solutions. There is always a play-off between these two — the abstract, and the concrete — and we will see this contrast turn up many times as the work progresses.

A More Personal Concern

At this point I have a confession to make. I have something of an affliction. It is about trust in people. The big question for me is this. If we ever achieved a world in which everyone has a

say in how things are run, would we make sensible choices? Are most people okay — sensible and able to make reasonable decisions, given sufficient information? Are most people compassionate? Or are people reactive, making emotional responses without much thought, suspicious of others, suspicious of change, self-seeking, prejudiced, hostile to those who might seek more balanced and informed decision-making?

This is not necessarily a question about any particular class or demographic of people. People of all types might make bad choices — at least, that is my worry. Besides, who am I to set myself up to judge what is a good choice or a bad choice? I am naming my fear, but I don't have an easy answer to the issue of trust. The search for answers about how the world might be a better place is also a search for trust in others, in relationship and in community.

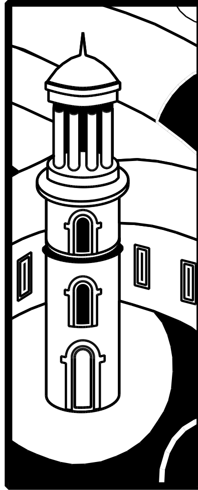
So, those are my concerns and questions, and it's these that have prompted me to try to write something to find answers. We will be looking at the idea of utopia first, and then getting to grips with ownership and the commons. Then it will be time to sort through the political views that might help us to administer owning and 'commoning' successfully. I hope that the reader will stay with me through the journey, explore the ideas proposed by the modern-day utopian stories and all with the hope of formulating a new story at the conclusion of our discussions.

Gandhi's Social Sins

To guide us on our journey and to warn us of dangers, I am keeping in mind Gandhi’s seven social sins:

Politics without principle.
Wealth without work.
Commerce without morality.
Pleasure without conscience.
Education without character.
Science without humanity.
Worship without sacrifice.

We’ll meet examples of each of these throughout the book and try to address them as they arise.



1. Utopias

'A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.'

- Oscar Wilde

'It's not a finished Utopia that we ought to desire, but a world where imagination and hope are alive and active.'

- Bertrand Russell — Political Ideas

'Creating a utopian paradise, a new Garden of Eden, is our only hope.'
- William H Koetke — The Final Empire

What better place to start our investigations than with all the things that we consider to be pleasurable in life? When it comes to utopia, it's all about pleasure. Many utopias look at what we ultimately want and the details about how such societies or worlds are sustained are mere technicalities. But there are also much more pragmatic ideas for making a better world. We will be looking at both types of utopia. To use some terms that will become more apparent as this book progresses: Utopia is the *vision*. The outworking of utopia — making it pragmatic — is the *mission*. And within this mission there are numerous *aims* required to bring about the detailed functioning of the better world that is being proposed.

Utopias and Ideals

The word utopia, as I've suggested in the Introduction, can often be used in a derisory way and the term is frequently scorned in modern societies. Sometimes the criticism is that utopias are idealistic — so we need to take a look at this claim.

Ideals are abstract concepts, like freedom, equality and justice, and it is true that some utopias are very much about these things. On that basis we would have to agree — utopias can be idealistic. Russell Jacoby, however, contrasts 'iconoclastic' utopias (that's the

idealistic type) with what he calls 'blueprint' utopias. Blueprint utopias are much more concrete in describing what a better world might be like. The blueprint, concrete types of utopias are the pragmatic visions.

But, in truth, we need a bit of both. So we keep an eye on ideals in this book, but also try to dig into the pragmatics. French philosopher Raceour told us that utopias are the challenge to ideals. Ideals can become too static and fossilised without the bold practical visions of utopia. Starhawk reminds us: 'We need more than psychology, more than spirituality and community: We need an economics, an agriculture, a politics of liberation, capable of healing the dismembered world and restoring the Earth to life. Most of all, we need to make a leap of the imagination that can let us envision how the world could be. Then we need to consider, step by step, in great detail, how to bring our vision about.' (Starhawk — *Truth or Dare*.)

Origins of Utopia

Beyond that simple sorting of the idealistic and the pragmatic, there is a mass of literature, both fiction and non-fiction, which looks at utopias of every kind. It is hardly possible to give even the briefest of summaries to the subject here. Instead I am looking to try to tease out some essential thoughts that will be our guide through the rest of the book.

In this chapter we will consider utopias that look backwards for inspiration — sometimes described as Golden Age utopias. We'll also

consider utopias that look forward to a future Golden Age. All of this is with the aim of seeing that there are utopian stories already playing out in our contemporary cultures. It's these stories that will then be our main focus, as we examine their pros and cons, and how their ideas may be adopted, adapted or rejected as we seek to forge a new story.

The work from which the word utopia is derived is the tale of the mythical island of Utopia, by Thomas More. Although many utopian ideas have been around for much longer, it is More's work that really started things off in the modern era. More seems to be punning two Greek words — *Outopia* — meaning no place, and *Eutopia* — meaning a good and beautiful place. This sets up an ambiguity that has been essential to the notion of utopia ever since: It suggests that it is both an abstract vision and a practical, realisable reality — so again that contrast of the idealistic and the concrete that we have discussed above. Patrick Geddes (*Our Social Inheritance*) took up that theme in his work.[1] Geddes never lost sight of the need for a broad vision, whilst being deeply involved in the practicalities of trying to bring the vision to life.

Referring to Thomas More's *Utopia*, Andrew Keen (*How to Fix the Future*) says:
'Today, on its five-hundredth anniversary, we are told that this idea of utopia is making a 'comeback'. But the truth is that More's creation never truly went away. Utopia's universal relevance is based on both its timelessness and its timeliness. And as we drift from an industrial toward a networked society, the big issues that More raises in his little book

— the intimate relationship between privacy and individual freedom, how society should provide for its citizens, the central role of work in a good society, the trust between ruler and ruled, and the duty of all individuals to contribute to improve society — remain as pertinent today as they have ever been.

'....By inventing an ideal society, More demonstrated our ability to imagine a better world. And by presenting his vision of this community to his readers, he has invited them to address the real problems in their own societies.'

In the first part of More's book, a traveller who has visited Utopia discusses some of the issues raised by its existence. (We could say this digs into the ideals of society, by carefully contrasting the values of Utopia with the values of the current society.) When it comes to the story of Utopia itself, the vision is a pragmatic one. Utopia is a large island, with several cities more or less identical. A hinterland of farms surrounds each city and provides for its sustenance. For the most part, the inhabitants work as farmers. They live communally and have no personal possessions. There is a tiered system of governance, from the local neighbourhood, to city, to nation. Freedom of religion is encouraged and the utopians are ever curious about new knowledge. Strangely perhaps, a few sorts of dissent are strongly discouraged, such as questioning the political status quo and unauthorised travel. Whilst the technology is inevitably of the Middle Ages, the sentiments expressed in this remarkable book are especially prescient.

More himself was a complex character, apparently very amiable in his personal life, but also quite ruthless in his working life, especially towards religious heresy. He was executed for treason — a charge he may well have been able to get out of. He even told a joke to his executioner when his head was about to be removed. So, some have speculated that *Utopia* was not an altogether serious work. Whatever the true motives behind it though, it's fair to say that it became the model for all future utopian speculations. It is difficult to think of any later work that can now be held up without comparison to More.

Golden Age — Looking Back

Western culture, along with many other cultures, has its creation myth and closely related time of a 'Golden Age' of humanity. In the christian tradition perhaps the focus is more on the 'fall' that follows closely behind the creation story. The details of Christianity's Golden Age can often be disregarded in the process.

The Golden Age of the Garden of Eden has some interesting features. Eden is set apart from whatever lay beyond (Wilderness? Chaos?). This is not too surprising for a desert culture, where a harsh wilderness contrasts so vividly with the occasional oasis of lush vegetation. (This idea did not start with the Hebrew or Christian faiths of course, but has come down to us mainly through them.) That split, between a protected place and the dangers of a wilderness, has stayed with us down the centuries. It is only in very recent years that wilderness has started to be seen as something positive. The

split persists though in our ongoing contrast of city and countryside. A lot of utopian thinking is city thinking, with nature the poor cousin. Evan Eisenberg (*The Ecology of Eden*) examines this contrast through history as the mountain (nature) and the tower (city/civilisation). In this book, I keep the split going in a slightly different form, contrasting the tamed garden (where we produce things to be used in our lives) with the wild nature that lies beyond. So, whether the contrast is between city and countryside, or garden and wilderness, the splits that Eden laid out for us are not necessarily problematic. Rather they keep us mindful of the ways in which we treat our cities, our agriculture, and the wilderness.

Another feature of Eden is the implication that nature, at least within the garden, was not premised on death and rebirth, predator and prey, but instead could endure forever.

The past Golden Age can become a fixed and unchanging perfection. Darren Anderson (*Imaginary Cities*) warns us:
'…the appeal of lost mythical cities requires a curious retrogressive nostalgia; the seductive deceptive idea that there was a golden age that requires resurrecting (often the purveyor's youth or their time-misted view of it). The problem with the past is that we are still living in its wake yet it is unreachable. We survey it with the torment of Tantalus; it is there just out of reach. Times which never really existed are elevated, as gilded eras of impossibly exacting perfection, often to justify fundamentalisms in the present. Even conservatives are Utopian!'

The legacy of Eden then is partly that we look upon nature and think she could be improved. Rather than embracing nature's ways, we directly or indirectly fight against her. What Eden seemed to promise stayed with us, with our dreams of taming the wild and conquering death. The story of the Fall added to this, suggesting that nature herself is 'fallen' and imperfect.

A further split, implicit in the story, is the difference between nature and society. This was often used in colonial times as a justification for exploitation and indeed extermination of foreign peoples. To describe a culture as 'in a state of nature' was already to do violence to it, by removing it from the normal circle of social conventions and moral principles. The people of such a society could then the more easily be treated as if they were a natural resource rather than a valid society in their own right. (See, in particular, Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*.)

The Fall for humans is a difficult idea. After all, knowledge of good and evil does not seem such a bad thing. Was ignorance really bliss? Implicit in the Eden story is that the state of innocence cannot be regained, so the christian tradition has a problem with trying to re-create Eden. Paradise cannot be regained, or at least paradise is delayed. Nonetheless, a lot of Western thinking has been about trying to regain something that has been lost — so this ambiguity continues to play out. In more secular times, we are more easily able to adopt a Golden Age myth without concerns over any

heresy regarding a Fall. There is no longer such a problem with re-creating Eden, perhaps minus the innocence.

Other cultures that look back to a Golden Age have, in contrast to the christian tradition, a somewhat easier time. In China, for instance, rebuilding a past Golden Age is seen as a distinct possibility.[2] Meanwhile, some Western authors set aside the idea of a Fall. They want to dispel the notion that we are a 'fallen' humanity, somehow violent and evil in our basic nature. They wish to believe there was a time when human culture was as we might like it to be again. In a sense then, they are promoting a Golden Age myth as a means for modelling the future. If there was an age of a 'noble savage' — or we can demonstrate that a nobility is still present in current indigenous, 'organic' (to use Murray Bookchin's term) peoples today — then there is hope for all of us, according to these authors and others like them. Most fundamentally, it means that human nature does not need to be changed. Instead, suitably arranging the basic living conditions and political circumstances of a society would be enough to realise a peaceful and harmonious culture. Possible? Apart from the fact that such authors may be projecting their own ideas back into people who we have no real hope of understanding, we cannot in any case go back. The Golden Age and the noble savage, if they ever existed at all, cannot be a model for the future. Even if we were to believe that human nature, of itself, is fundamentally good, we still have the massive and pervasive influence of culture that seems to go against this. Of course this is partly about the issue of trust I

mentioned in the Introduction. I think the answer — at least in terms of looking at history — is that we have evolved culturally not so much as good or bad individuals, but as groups. Whatever disagreements there may be about what people in the past or today's indigenous peoples may be like, there is general acknowledgement that we are very kind and protective of each other when we recognise a group identity. Any utopian vision, to prove effective, needs to recognise this. Utopias are primarily social constructs.

So, at best some very mixed messages are brought to us by Eden, and we will see these recurring as we look at alternative versions of utopias below. One thing potentially positive from the biblical account though, is the idea of stewardship. If nothing else, we might take this on board as an affirming message for today's world.

The medieval myth of Cockaigne is in a way a provocative forerunner of re-creating Eden. Eden of course, would lie to the East of Europe, whilst Cockaigne is set in the West. In Cockaigne, food is abundant, with birds and fish seemingly all too willing to be cooked. (So there is meat, in contrast to Eden's veggie diet.) There is even edible architecture. It is always Spring in Cockaigne. There is a fountain of youth and Cockaigners earn money whilst sleeping. Strangely, there are cheeky nuns, who seem intent on baring themselves for the delight of the Cockaigners. Understandably, people of the middle-ages would be obsessed with food. What is most interesting about Cockaigne is its deliberate flouting of established

order. All utopias need to have that sense of challenge and defiance in them to be vital and relevant. Most strange about Cockaigne was that it could only be reached by eating through three miles of rice pudding. This is not so bizarre as it might first appear. Ancient versions of paradise were often thought to be contained within a womb, or to be walled in by something, often an organic substance of some sort. Perhaps the message was that Cockaigne could at least be reached, whilst we are forever barred from entering Eden. Cockaigne, for all its subversive cheek, perhaps recognised that our dreams are hard-won. We must struggle through our rice pudding before we can reap the rewards of our efforts.

Like Cockaigne, many other utopias seem to lie to the West of Europe. The city of Ys — allegedly in Brittany, France — lay to the West. From Ys came the myth of Atlantis and the name for Paris — *Par Ys* — like Ys. Atlantis itself also lay to the West. The first of many accounts of Atlantis came from Solon and from Dionysius of Miletus. Plato also described Atlantis. 'The Island of the Blessed' (from Lucian) is a story similar to Atlantis, except that its inhabitants are bodiless, ethereal beings. They dwell in a city of gold with emerald walls. The Celts, meanwhile, had the story of Avalon, or, 'Apple Island', also in the Atlantic. There are stories of a land called 'Bresal' dating from the fifth century, and from which, perhaps, Brazil takes its name. The 'Fortunate Isles' are described as early as 1100, and may be a reference to the Canary Islands. A map of 1367 refers to the 'Fantastic Islands'.

Golden Age — Looking Forward

When Christianity looks forward to the consummation of history — its future Golden Age — then the vision is a city. The new Jerusalem is literally made of gold. That split between the human world and nature would then be more or less absolute. Getting there entails the destruction of the current world, or our physical death. The suggestion is that all that is good transcends us and is set in a future that we cannot bring about by our own efforts. All of these ideas resonate so much with our current Western culture and with consumer capitalism. What is so strange is that it is a vision of a completely sterile world, and yet even in this we are set about re-creating it. A place without dirt, or flaws, or contradictions, or diversity, utterly known and therefore never surprising. Today's 'smart city', is such a vision, as we will see. A Golden Age looking forward is arguable the defining myth of our times.

Two further, and useful, distinctions in utopian stories can be made here. One is the contrast between what we might call 'static' and 'dynamic' utopias. Cockaigne for instance was very much a static utopia. All of its features are sustained essentially by magic. If anyone were to question how things actually worked, that would introduce an element of contingency to the story — and crucially perhaps it is a contingency based on the potential failings of humanity. (For Cockaigne, maybe it is only to ask how things are maintained. But for other utopias, the problems of governance are tackled head-on. So, such systems we would have to call dynamic. More's utopia sits just at the

threshold of the two types. The island of Utopia is isolated and restricted enough to maintain a fairly static society. But nonetheless, the dynamic questions of governance still intrude.)

The final distinction I'd like to draw out is the degree of connection or disconnection between people in various utopias. This is perhaps most obvious in utopian and dystopian novels. It has to be said that many visions of future golden ages are distinctly lacking in human connection, despite their promises of material and technological wonders. The stand-out exception is Mare Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*.

We might conclude that utopias allow for elements of both looking back and looking forward and perhaps both could be accommodated, or synthesised in some way to create a modern vision. Murray Bookchin said:
'From a "backward-looking" utopianism, commonly based on the image of a bountiful nature and unfettered consumption arises a "forward-looking" utopianism based on the image of a bountiful economy and unfettered production. Between these two extremes, religions and anarchic movements develop a more balanced, although equally generous, vision of utopia that combines sharing with self-discipline, freedom with co-ordination, and joy with responsibility.' (Murray Bookchin — *The Ecology of Freedom*.)

Three Utopias

As I've alluded to above, I am suggesting that we are, right now, living in three particular utopian worlds. To explore this, I am going to

describe them as three specific 'flavours' of utopia. The first is Privatopia — a name taken from the title of a book by Evan McKenzie. Privatopia is the name I'm giving to our current Western consumer society, and to its neo-liberal political and economic systems. Cornucopia, the second utopian flavour, is a follow-on from Privatopia and is the mostly technological and very positive future that is often promised by today's society. Ecotopia is our third flavour. The name Ecotopia is taken from the title of a novel by Ernst Callenbach. It covers a broad range of ideas, from high-tech futures to a romanticised return to a more rural past. Sometimes Ecotopia can also be an apocalyptic vision.

The explanations and implications of these three flavours of utopia will hopefully become clear as we progress. Indeed, by studying visions, we will be able to explore all the issues that we need to cover by way of understanding society as it is now, and the directions it may be heading whilst offering various promises of a good life. These utopias are, to a greater or lesser extent, dystopias, but they clear the way for a synthesis of everything that is good and serve as an introduction to what I want to propose in this book. We look at each of them in turn below.

Privatopia

Arguably, at least in the wealthier nations of the world, a lot of the promised abundance of a Golden Age has been delivered by the joint efforts of technology and capitalism. We have food of all kinds, in all seasons, from anywhere

in the world. We are clothed and housed in relative comfort. Health care is good and improving. Life expectancy is improving. Politically, societies are relatively stable and there is at least a semblance of democracy through representative government. Wars are less frequent. Violent crime is for the most part reducing. Freedom and tolerance are increasingly prevalent. Equality of all kinds is at least recognised as a reasonable goal, even as we may struggle to realise it in reality.

Capitalism is often set up as the enemy, but in terms of material prosperity, it has delivered. We will look in more detail at the problems later, but for now, let's look at what kind of utopia capitalism and technology have created. I'm calling it 'Privatopia', and I hope the reasons for the choice of name will become clearer as we progress. The more we gain, the more defensive we are of our property. The more services are monetised, the less reliant we are on friends and neighbours. All that we need in life can be bought, and we can achieve this simply through work that often has no relation to our own neighbourhood. Life then is increasingly driven towards being private, isolated and atomised. Even entertainment, once something shared with a whole community, has shrunk down through radio and cinema to television, video games and now all of this is delivered to individuals through mobile phones and earbuds. Privatopia is perhaps a middle-class phenomenon — the more wealth the more there seems to be a desire to be separate from community and society. But that is not to say that poorer people would not aspire to the same exclusivity, given half a chance. If we are

happy like this, who needs the outside world? But in fact, we desperately do need the outside world, in a variety of ways, and the outside world desperately needs us. Something is very wrong with Privatopia.

Privatopia is about a mindset of who we are as individuals as well as how things stand with the surrounding culture. Privatopia aims at personal happiness, but this happiness carries a price in stress, bad relationships and an impoverished natural world. Consumption is an addiction that adds to our stress. This is not just about capitalism. If capitalism were to collapse or be overthrown, there may well still be a Privatopia.

Even the style of modern houses is beginning to reflect the mindset of Privatopia. In years gone by, 'public rooms' faced towards the street. Today, the main living space is often towards the rear of the house, looking out onto a private garden. Windows to the street are getting smaller and the front yard is reserved for vehicles. By implication, we only engage with our surrounding communities when we are climbing into our cars to go somewhere else. When we are at home we are absorbed just by our own private space. As economic crises proliferate and climate change begins to bite, then the desire to shut out the surrounding world only seems to grow. The more money an individual or family own, the more pronounced this exclusivity becomes. Darren Anderson says: 'As conditions decline, the need to become physically detached increases through private security, gated communities, tinted windows. This process of islanding finds its most blatant form in tax havens. For all their parasitism,

these are nevertheless utopias, however selective or morally questionable.' (Darren Anderson — *Imaginary Cities*)

When we buy a house today we just look at the physical thing — the building — and we have little opportunity to meet the community we will be living with, until we've moved in (and it's too late). We are buying a house, not a home, we are buying a thing, not a context, a relationship, an ecology. The material dominates over the social relationship.

Meanwhile, Richard Sennet stresses the independence and autonomy of Privatopia:
'Modern family life and, even more, modern business practice, has extended the idea of self-containment: dependency on others is taken as a sign of weakness, a failure of character; in raising children or at work, our institutions seek to promote autonomy and self-sufficiency; the autonomous individual appears free. But looked at from the perspective of a different culture, a person who prides him- or her-self on not asking for help appears a deeply damaged human being; fear of social embeddedness dominates his or her life.' (Richard Sennet — *Together*.)

The vision of Privatopia, if it could be said to have a vision, is to suck what we can out of life without much thought to the consequences. Privatopia is so insidious because it is more or less the dominant mindset of the developed world today. So it feels 'normal' — it is not recognised as an ideology. I have to confess my own Privatopia leanings — I am equally culpable. Privatopia is ultimately a vision that is paranoid

and narcissistic. Behind our gates and picket fences, there is something of a siege mentality. Our hard-won wealth is always vulnerable. The obsession with property and boundaries is a clear symptom, and so too is the addiction to materialism. Privatopia wears a false smile whilst stress and depression hit record levels. Privatopia also ignores the looming disaster of economies 'growing' only because of debt and it ignores the ecological crisis that is unfolding across the planet.

Privatopia, in turn, is pointing towards and changing into a promised technological utopia — the future Golden Age of Cornucopia.

Cornucopia

Cornucopians are people who believe that advances in technology will allow all of us to live in abundance. Also, within this, there is often a belief that either environmental problems will be solved directly, or we will easily adapt to a natural world that has been greatly changed by climate upheavals (rising sea levels, warmer temperatures, etc.). Technology is indeed advancing at an accelerating pace. Wi-fi technology, which seems innocent enough, is part of this. But it's a lot less benign than it might appear. The infrastructure for wi-fi will soon overtake aviation in terms of its impact on Carbon Dioxide emissions. If this seems remarkable, even with five billion mobile phones in the world, well, part of the reason is called the 'internet of things'. This refers to objects that are connected by wi-fi. At the time of writing, around 20 billion such connections exist. By 2050, the number could be into the trillions.

Such a prospect could make wi-fi the largest contributor to greenhouse gases, ahead of transport, ahead of energy, ahead of agriculture. This is happening right under our noses, as part of the natural progression of Privatopia into Cornucopia. I recognise that a Cornucopia can seem very appealing — after all, it means we can just live our lives and let technology deal with all the problems. But there are tricky issues that the Cornucopians seem to gloss over — the problems their high-tech world could bring about, the impacts on nature they choose often to ignore, the question of how an economy can be sustained when most work is automated, and the issue of whether society can psychologically cope with so much leisure. Evan Eisenberg (*The Ecology of Eden*) makes a contrast between 'managers' and 'fetishers', which is roughly equivalent to the Privatopia and Cornucopia stories I'm discussing here. We might say that Cornucopia fetishises the future and its associated high-tech society. There is no question, from the Cornucopians' point of view, that more technology is good and any problems we might have will be answered by technical solutions.

As we've seen, utopias, including our modern Privatopia and future Cornucopia, are often premised on abundance. Having to work for a living is an evil that many utopias hope to abolish. Many utopias try to deal with this matter of greatly increased leisure time and how we might spend our leisure. Pierre Joseph Proudhon, by contrast, saw an importance to work and limits to abundance.[3] (Whilst Proudhon spoke of 'pauperism' and contrasted this with 'poverty', a more modern reading

might contrast destitution with voluntary simplicity.) The more pragmatic utopias (including More's original) recognise the importance of work and the dangers of excess. Proudhon lived before the dangers of climate change and ecological collapse were recognised, but his observations to some extent anticipated the issues. Our third utopia — Ecotopia — takes up these concerns as its key premise.

Ecotopia

Ecotopia — the name made famous by the utopian novels of Ernest Callenbach — envisions a world that achieves full 'sustainability', for people and for nature. Ecotopians can often see this as coming about through some sort of revolution, such as the collapse, or deliberate overthrow, of capitalism. Or it may be that it is ecological collapse itself that brings about a new world order, as a result of extreme climate change. Some Ecotopians seem to positively relish the prospect — essentially they may be better designated 'survivalists'. But be careful what you wish for. A sudden collapse of capitalism, or a large-scale natural disaster, is not the start of a newer happier world — it's a zombie apocalypse. The timescale for transition to a sustainable world is therefore critical.

'Sustainable' is a difficult word to define and has been much misused of late. Chiefly, it is the continued endurance of nature that is important, as human society relies, in turn, on nature for its sustainability over time. Without an apocalyptic narrative — a disaster story for the future — Ecotopians are faced with the challenge of trying to get us all to radically

change our lifestyles by choice. It is a tall order, but arguably this would be a more pragmatic vision than simply saying that capitalism is about to collapse — or to try to speed its demise. Ecotopians though, with some notable exceptions, can be a bit lacking in proposals for political, economic and social change that might go along with the lifestyle changes they seek.

The vision for Ecotopia is for a world that could endure in perpetuity with a reasonable standard of living for its human inhabitants and abundant and sustained life for all other creatures on the planet. The positive message of stewardship is something that the Golden Age of Eden contributes to Ecotopia. Ecotopia tends to look more to the past than to the future for its inspiration, so Ecotopians are often 'retro' in their outlook, with close communities and 'gift economies' (or at least more direct means of exchanging goods) compared to today's societies.

So Ecotopia often romanticises primitive technology and has an aversion to high-tech. Ecotopia is often a rural vision, with human habitats reduced (somehow) to villages and great emphasis on farming methods such as organic farming, Permaculture, and Regenerative agriculture, along with sustaining nature through re-forestation and re-wilding. More people, therefore, would be returning to the land — the reverse process from the last 150 years of industrialisation — and the Ecotopians may well endorse Proudhon's views on the value of work and of thrift, mentioned above. Some technology is embraced by the Ecotopians, especially, of course, various means

of supplying renewable energy. And oddly, computer and mobile phone technology doesn't seem to be a problem for the Ecotopians. (I've highlighted the impact that the wi-fi network has on the planet in the previous section.) It almost feels like the Middle Ages with laptops. The 'hipster' character captures this technical ambivalence especially well.

There are some unashamedly high-tech versions of Ecotopia however. In particular, Stewart Brand (*Whole Earth Discipline*) sees an urban rather than a rural future and fully welcomes the contribution of technology towards a sustainable future. See also, David Owen's, *Green Metropolis*.

Ecotopians must in some way deal with the convergence of high-tech and low-tech that the future is likely to require. I feel that a problem with Ecotopia is that it adopts the nervous calculation of targets and strategies — aping consumer capitalism. 'Net zero carbon' and '350 parts per million' are abstract targets, that make no sense to a great many of us. They are, in effect, a 'cost-benefit analysis' of the future. Remember Einstein's famous quote: 'We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.' A problem with the Ecotopians is that they try too hard to appear normal, whilst the future world that they rightly consider necessary is, in fact, a radical departure from our current lifestyles. I think they would be better to recognise their inner hippy and genuinely embrace the changes that are proposed. But for all its faults, Ecotopia recognises the urgent need for change — a

feature mostly lacking in Privatopia and Cornucopia.

We could summarise our three utopian stories by saying that Cornucopia romanticises the future, Privatopia romanticises the present and Ecotopia, to a large extent, romanticises the past. We will be exploring different aspects of the three stories as the work progresses, and see how each may contribute. For an excellent exploration of the different aspects of utopia, see Gregory Claeys', *Utopia — The History of an Idea*. Also, Krishan Kumar's *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* gives excellent reviews of some of the best-known utopian and dystopian novels. Frank E. Manuel and Fritizie P. Manuel's *Utopian Thought in the Western World* provides excellent historic detail.

Where to from here?

Modern governments often try to defeat the concept of utopia. Perhaps they feel that if too much is promised then citizens' hopes and expectations will be raised. What I've suggested in this chapter is that despite the cynicism of politics, utopias are very much with us. We have stumbled into a Privatopia, accepting it as just the way the world is. And we are in danger of stumbling into a Cornucopia, with its fanciful aims of a fix-all without consequences. Are utopias 'pie-in-the-sky', as they are sometimes accused of being? What would that mean? It would mean having a dream of a better world that has little or no hope of fulfilment. In the meantime, we must muddle on with our unsatisfactory 'real world'. By contrast, as we've explored earlier, there are

more pragmatic utopias and a pragmatic utopia would tell a different story.

A viable utopia needs to be built as a conscious alternative to a vision that offers no hope of fulfilment. It needs to be a utopia that is being built in the here and now and that has everyone on board from the start. To achieve this we need to step back and consider the questions raised in the Introduction — questions about owning, sharing, making and trading, and about the type of lives we ultimately would like to live. These questions will lead us on to consider the commons, governance, peace-making, community and compassion. Let's not however lose sight of some of those wilder and more sensuous visions of utopia that are often proposed. That drive for pleasure is telling us something about human needs and aspirations. We will need to keep pleasure always in our minds as we seek to explore a new story.

How is it that we achieve utopia? Three main choices have been proposed — Revolution, Anarchism or Reform. The three options slide into each other to an extent; a mild revolution is reform, whilst the personal autonomy that is valued in most societies has elements of Anarchism.

Advocates of revolution need to keep in mind how complex the modern world is. We are heavily reliant on infrastructure — internet, wi-fi, telephone, railways, roads. We are equally reliant on institutions — schools, banks, the police, the judiciary, fire-brigade, hospitals, prisons, as well as the offices of government itself. Interrupting any of these, even for a few

hours, would bring chaos to a modern society. So I say again, be careful what you wish for. The more extreme forms of Ecotopia are on the edge of revolution in a sense, as they often believe in the imminent collapse of capitalism. (See, for instance, Charles Eisenstein and David Fleming.)

Anarchism can have a revolutionary flavour, but it offers a broad range of scenarios. Whilst a revolution might suggest a change in government, Anarchism challenges the institution of government itself. As I've suggested above, there are hints of anarchism in most societies, not least today in the neo-liberal stated desire to be free of government regulation and to allow free reign of the market economy — which we will be looking at more closely in a later chapter.

Change of any kind could be sudden or could be a slower transition. Reform suggests a gradual transformation from the existing situation. Depending on the nature of our utopia, this may be a possibility. Indeed, as I've suggested above, we are already creating and recreating Privatopia, at least for some of us, within the existing culture and within a capitalist economy in (for the most part) representative democracies. We may be sliding into Cornucopia, the natural extension of Privatopia. So reform of a sort is happening, even although we may not be consciously pursuing it.

Whether we look for revolution or reform, or even if we advocate anarchism, our societies still somehow need ways to organise themselves. If there is a problem now, it is a problem of the

state rather than a problem with politics. The state is the institution — big government, top-down authority. Politics, by contrast, is the way we organise ourselves — and this can be very local and personal as well as national and international. We are quick to condemn politics, but this is to confuse state power with the need for co-operation. From politics we have the word 'polity' and we will take a closer look at this in Chapter 4.

Some Inspiration

To fuel our imaginations, I want to finish up this chapter with a few visions of future worlds. The reader may be inspired or appalled by what follows. But hopefully, either way, this will be food for thought. So here goes:

'I have a dream of an astonishing plurality of cultures for the year 2050 — all in which friendships, networks, organisations, learning, storytelling and the arts flourish, in ways specific to their place and geography. City centres are highly walkable and bikable with millions of meeting places for chats and fun. The buildings are designed with care for the location, have passive ventilation with better air and uplifting day lighting. There is flirting, gossip, philosophical cafes, street theatre, peaceful protest marches, farmers markets and rock concerts a plenty. The cars hum quietly around and do not spread toxic compounds from combustion engines, except for the occasional retro shows where noisy Formula 1-type events draw the petro-nostalgic with great beer and barbecue. Markets and trade are vibrant, and treated more as conversations of value than as

efficient mechanisms of price equilibrium. The food is short-travelled, healthy, highly varied, and incredibly tasty and we will happily pay its full cost. The jobs are green and stimulate well-being through personal mastery and acknowledgement for work well done. A liveable minimum wage makes the freedom of social mobility more than a cliché. There is greenery everywhere in sight, on the streets and buildings, so sparrows and hawks have re-colonised the inner-city rooftops.'
Per Espen Stoknes — *What we think about when we try not to think about Global Warming.*

'Let's imagine a world where both light-hearted play and purposeful work, not drudgery, are the order of the day for all human beings — a world where our reality overflows with material abundance and where everyone can focus on maximising their potential instead of on scrounging for money. My greatest hope is that one day each human being — every one of us — will be able to participate in a society that is inherently just and that also considers well-being for future generations. To achieve this, we have to work together in appreciation of our differences and on behalf of common humanity. When enough of us work together for the common good, then, to paraphrase Buckminster Fuller, we will one day create a world that works for everyone.
Martin Adams — *Land.*

'…my generation will live in a world unimaginably more beautiful than the one we were born into. And it will be a world that is palpably improving year by year. We will reforest the Greek isles, denuded over two

thousand years ago. We will restore the Sahara Desert to the rich grassland it once was. Prisons will no longer exist, and violence will be a rarity. Work will be about, "How may I best use my gifts?" instead of, "How can I make a living?" Crossing a national border will be an experience of being welcomed, not examined. Mines and quarries will barely exist, as we will reuse the vast accumulation of materials from the industrial age. We will live in dwellings that are extensions of ourselves, eat food grown by people who know us, and use articles that are the best that people in the full flow of their talents could make them. We will live in a richness of intimacy and community that hardly exists today, that we know, because of a longing in the heart, must exist. And most of the time, the loudest noises we hear will be the sounds of nature and the laughter of children.'
Charles Eisenstein — *Sacred Economics*

'My utopia would probably include three levels of society, rather like medieval days, with knights, clerics and peasants. The warriors would be the aristocrats, and it would be their job to sit around doing nothing except creating and tending beautiful gardens, having parties and festivals in their big houses and acting as patrons of the arts, and being hospitable, giving away beer and food…. The clerics would be the writers, poets, artists and so on. They would live like peasants, freely and self-sufficiently. And the peasants would be the craftsmen, the stonemasons, shoemakers, woodworkers, ceramic-makers, potters, blacksmiths. All three classes would be involved in the creation of music and architecture. The money-spenders, the thinkers and the craftsmen.'

Tom Hodgkinson — *How to be Free.*

My own vision for utopia takes up similar themes. Conversation is the most prized resource in my utopia. People feel that their voices will be heard, so they are much more willing to participate in local democracy, centred around a new understanding of the commons.

Scotland (my home nation) has been largely re-forested and people seek out the forests, beaches, lochs and rivers for quiet retreats into nature. The spread of forest across Scotland is not an isolated phenomenon — natural habitats, from mangrove swamps to coral reefs and wetlands, are protected and expanding across the globe. Many of these places are seen as sacred and religions have morphed into ceremonies for Earth-centred worship. Farms are smaller, but farming is more intense. There is a lot of space given back to hedgerows, ponds and small copses of trees. Organic farming has largely replaced industrialised farming and the new farms serve a mainly vegetarian and vegan population.

There are a lot of parks and other small pockets of nature within towns and also numerous allotments and market gardens. With an intensely managed use of land, even the largest of cities can more or less feed itself. Greenhouses provide for many foodstuffs that would formerly have had to be imported into the UK.

Technology has greatly advanced. There are colonies on Mars and on one of Jupiter's moons. Probes have been sent to some nearby stars, to

explore possible Earth-like planets. Even so, back on Earth, technology is discreet. People prefer things to be hand-crafted and traditional, if at all possible.

Towns and cities are more compact, with layouts returning to a more traditional style of streets and squares. The suburbs are largely gone — replaced by more compact development and surrounded by farms and with nature. The private car is also gone, and with this many roads have been narrowed or removed. People generally walk or cycle, or use trains and buses. People woke up to the needs of the planet — perhaps a little too late — but in time to avoid total disaster. Genetic engineering has developed sufficiently to allow many extinct species to be resurrected from their saved DNA. Carbon emissions are steadily reducing, but even so, it will be several decades before global warming and sea-level rise stops. In the meantime, many major towns and cities are being rebuilt on higher ground.

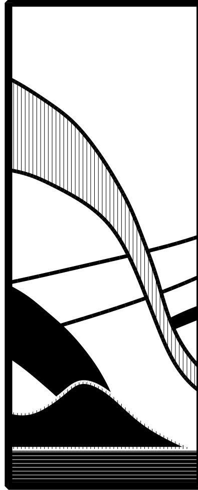
In Summary

Murray Bookchin told us: 'Rarely has it been so crucial to stir the imagination into radical new alternatives to every aspect of daily life. Now, when imagination itself is becoming atrophied or is being absorbed by the mass media, the concreteness of utopian thinking may well be its most rejuvenating tonic. Whether as drama, novel, science fiction, poetry, or an evocation of tradition, experience and fantasy must return in all their fullness to stimulate as well as to suggest.' (*The Ecology of Freedom*)

The ideas of a Golden Age looking back or looking forward have inspired visions of a better world. There are utopias about consumption, abundance, indulgence, sensuousness, and indeed decadence. There are utopias that are more grounded and look at the pragmatics of a good society. But a pragmatic utopia still has to acknowledge this drive to pleasure that underlies society. Pleasure always needs to be kept in mind. The delights of the more sensual utopias are sending a message that the joy we need to find in our lives is not to be ignored.

I have suggested that today's modern society has three flavours of utopia — Privatopia, Cornucopia and Ecotopia. These visions have their good points, especially Ecotopia. However, I feel that any one flavour on its own cannot fully address the problems the world faces and offer us an inspiring vision and practical solutions. Hence, the need to dig some more and explore all aspects of the visions in greater depth.

So to make a start, we will step back a little and take a close look at ownership, the commons, governance and community — building blocks that will help to address a couple of those questions from the Introduction: What do we own? What should we share?



2. The Question of Ownership

'The first man, who, after enclosing a piece of ground, took it into his head to say, "this is mine", and found people simple enough to believe him was the true founder of civil society..'

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau — The Discourse on the Origins of Inequality

One of Gandhi's seven social sins is relevant to this chapter — Wealth without Work. In modern societies, there are three main ways this is achieved. The first is that identified by political theories on the left — 'capitalists', meaning business owners — make money by taking profit from the labour of their workers. The second is to make money by renting out land or property.

The property generates wealth perhaps with little or no effort on the part of the owner. (Just the development of infrastructure and other properties around a particular piece of land, for instance, will result in an increased value of the land, without the owner doing anything.) The third way to acquire wealth without work is through money itself, for instance by making loans and then charging interest. All three forms are sometimes known as 'economic rent', even where no actual renting is involved. 'Rent-seeking', it is often argued, is the ultimate cause of economic disparities, and any changes that might be proposed to society must in some way have an impact on rent-seeking in order to be relevant. (Or, we could say, it is wealth disparity that is the cause of rent-seeking — it cuts both ways.) But this might mean changing the minds of the rent-seekers. A tall order.

I should add here that the definition I am using of economic rent is not agreed on by everyone. Some economists have added other forms of rent-seeking to the traditional definitions given above. This might be seen as muddying the waters, but on the other hand, it may point to the way things are moving in the societies of the developed world. We'll be taking a look at some of this in later chapters, but for now I'm sticking with just the three types of economic rent given above. In this chapter, what is meant by the ownership of land and property is the main concern, and in exploring this, we will be in a good position to move forward into looking at the commons and ideas about sharing. Our explorations around ownership, and then sharing and the commons in the next chapter, will have a bearing on the various governance

systems that we will be looking at later, in Chapter 4. Further chapters will then build on this groundwork, to show how the various commons and economies relate, and how we might choose to look at things in different ways as we seek a new story for the future.

The themes taken up in this chapter might seem at first to be a bit unrelated. I am introducing several subjects that we will pick up later in the work. They do however have a narrative running through them. The main themes here are — the meaning of capital, the means of production, ownership itself (more precisely, how our ownership is increasingly geared towards commodities rather than utilities) and the economic rents from land, labour and finance. Finance, in turn, then grows in importance.

Capital starts off as an accumulation of wealth. Once we had settled into agrarian societies, the surplus we created became important. We gathered into small cities and the division of labour added to the importance of capital but also led us into questions of who controls labour. We may have worked largely for ourselves, but exchange became more important (because of specialisation) hence the rise of the 'commodity' (goods produced for exchange) over 'utility'. And it is this rise in commodity that in turn fuelled a consumer mindset — hence the predominance and attraction of ownership. So this condensed history shows us the link between all the themes of this chapter, and we will see how commodities — or, commodification — feature heavily in our further discussions, along with the issues around economic rent.

We could simply describe this as a class issue — with the ruling class, monarchies, then land owners and capitalists — ruling over the poorer commoners — serfs and the working class. For a while the division was clear — between the rent-seekers and those who had no resources from which to extract rent. But now it is sometimes said that these class divisions are no longer so clear cut. We have all become 'rentiers' — entrepreneurs, to put a positive spin on it. Or, more realistically, we are the 'precariat' of a 'gig economy' — struggling to survive by renting out whatever assets we have at our disposal.

The Meaning of Capital

From the explanation above, we can see the importance of capital in framing our understanding of ownership. So before we set about looking at ownership, we need to make a small diversion into understanding the word 'capital' and some basics on the way our economies function. (As with all matters relating to economics, it has to be said that almost every statement that can be made is likely to be contested by some economist or another. I have chosen to take a few key works — cited in the Endnotes and Bibliography — as the basis of my descriptions. In one sense, it is not overly important if definitions are contested. I am not setting out a new theory of economics, just trying to glean enough understanding to give context to the ideas about utopia and a new story, which is the main aim of the book.)

We need to reach an understanding of capital by some other key ideas central to our economy —

'land', 'labour', 'wealth' and a few others. The word 'land' is used in economics to mean more than just the ground on which, for instance, a house may sit. Land has traditionally meant air, water, and other material resources, as well as just ground. It might also include tides and sunshine, soil and photosynthesis. To try to avoid any confusion in this book, I am using the term 'material resources' for all the things that nature affords us. Within this, land takes on its more limited and more typical meaning of just ground.

When people labour with these material resources, we produce material wealth, which is then either consumed or used to aid us with further production — and hence it is described as capital. The first meaning of capital then is, that part of production that is retained, either for later consumption, or for re-use.

Capital can also be the 'means of production', that is, the machinery and tools contained in a factory, for instance, and indeed the factory building itself. (This is described as 'constant capital', as opposed to labour, which is 'variable capital'.) All of this is the result of the past use of labour and material resources. We also produce the infrastructure that allows for future goods and services to be manufactured. In recent years, the word capital has expanded in meaning somewhat beyond the strict definition above, and we will look at this in more detail in later chapters.

Adam Smith (*The Wealth of Nations*) summarises the meaning of wealth and capital: 'His whole stock [wealth], therefore is

distinguished into two parts. That part which, he expects, is to afford his revenue is called his capital. The other is that which affords his immediate consumption.' In order to clarify the more traditional use of the word capital here, I am describing the production process as creating material capital. The basic components of material capital are illustrated in the figure below, and I've added the other elements of classical economics that are understood to constitute the production process — Land and Labour — to show how these fit in.

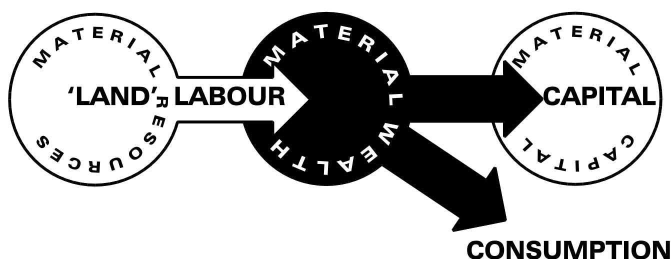


Figure 2.1

One point to note especially in this diagram, is labour. There is no capital without labour, and we will see later that this golden rule applies to even the more abstract definitions of capital that are with us today. Another point, as we have been exploring above, is the difference between capital and wealth, and also 'land'. The meanings of these terms have slipped over the years — with more and more things that are, strictly speaking, 'land' carried into the term capital. Henry George (*Progress and Poverty*) long ago said: 'The term land embodies [...] all natural materials, forces and opportunities, and, therefore, nothing that is freely supplied by nature can be properly classified as capital.'

George continues: ‘Capital is not a necessary factor of production. Labor exerted upon land can produce wealth without the aid of capital.’ Elsewhere, George provides a description of wealth and the three factors in production, illustrated above. See the endnote for further quotes.[1]

We sometimes hear the word capital used to also just mean money. Money in modern societies has taken on a life of its own, and, unfortunately, we can no longer ignore the term ‘financial capital’, which will be explored in Chapter 7. Money, in its right place, lubricates the world of trade and flows modestly between the inputs to goods and services and the takings from consumption. (See Figure 7.1 in Chapter 7.) Money, out of control, gets us into big problems, because as was said above, all capital, of whatever kind, ultimately relies on someone’s labour. The more abstract the financial economy becomes then the further it is removed from labour (see Figure 7.2 in Chapter 7), but labour must still be there at some point. Money made just from money works only for the few — someone’s labour must ultimately pay.

The diagram above is a starting point for our descriptions of the commons, and the various ‘capitals’ and ‘economies’ that follow on throughout the book. It is worth keeping this diagram in mind as we move forward, to see how the various things that are now described as ‘commons’, ‘capitals’ etc. relate back — or, sometimes, do not relate back — to the basic model.

Owning the Means of Production

Owning the means of production is the basis of one of the types of wealth without work mentioned at the beginning of the chapter — earning money from the labour of others. Wealthy capitalists own the tools and the factories where things are made, so this inevitably leaves the rest of us in the compromised position of selling our labour, as this is the only thing we have to offer in the process of society reproducing itself. Traditional left-wing politics has looked to 'the proletariat' (that's us workers) seizing the means of production and therefore allowing a more equitable distribution of the wealth raised through manufacture. Sometimes this process is seen as merely an exchange of goods and wealth, rather than being about the relations between those involved in the manufacturing processes themselves. Karl Marx (*Capital*), and subsequent Marxists, thought it was the class relations, in particular, that are key. Remember the critical importance of labour, mentioned above. It is the social relation that needs to be healed — the relations of workers with one another, with their customers and with their 'bosses', or whoever it is that is managing the business. Otherwise, this argument is just a reversal of the power game — with the working class taking what is currently with the rich. A more balanced approach might be to ask that everyone gets a fair share of what we produce as a society. And we might go further — the question is not who owns the means of production, but what we do with that ownership — what we make and who we serve. Do we honour others in our communities with our work?

Rather than destroy businesses and overturn ownership, can those who own companies see the benefit of sharing their gains with their workforce, such that the 'profit' is only such as is needed to sustain the business, and is not a 'rentier' gain by the owner? I'd suggest that the economic rent derived from the labour of others is not an inevitable consequence of the capitalist system. It could be changed without the whole system being overturned.

Why do we want to Own?

Why is it that we are so keen on owning stuff? Some books on economics tell us that society is based on scarcity. (Since they regard us as creatures of unlimited wants, it's perhaps not surprising that they see scarcity everywhere! Aristotle (*The Politics)* told us: 'It is the nature of desire to be infinite, and most people live for the satisfaction of desire.') For most of human history, for most people, scarcity was the norm — at least in terms of material possessions. Is it true today? Yes and no. Sometimes a scarce resource is exploited and sold back to us — or something is made to seem scarce so that its price can be increased. But from the perspective of this book, we might say that today our world of Privatopia is based on abundance (with the promise of more abundance as Privatopia evolves into Cornucopia). There is the promise, guarantee even, that anything that we could ever want is out there to be bought, or could be made for us. Advertising, meanwhile, creates a psychological need to consume. If there is scarcity, then it is mainly scarcity of money. The scarcity of money leads therefore to a 'scarcity' of stuff. The

actual abundance of stuff, combined with the scarcity of money is a lethal combination. It makes us cling tightly to our possessions, as they are often hard-won.[2]

There are also 'positional goods', such as a house in the countryside — where there can only be a few houses, by definition, before it ceases to be 'countryside'. Or a positional good may be a product that can only be made by skilled craft-workers, and is therefore scarce. It is the scarcity of these things that make them positional, and hence gives rise to status. So the status conferred by particular goods is another reason for owning. This is where scarcity has a bearing on our desire for ownership and consumption. It is this type of scarcity derived from positional goods that makes things symbols of our status. We are, in turn, very keen to protect what we own, and rightly see some things to be 'irreplaceable'.

A further reason for owning is that ownership helps to define who we are. This might be by way of positional goods, as described above, but it can more generally just be by our consumer choices, for things that are not necessarily scarce. For better or worse, our choice of clothes, houses, cars, furniture, gadgets, jewellery and all the rest, give us a sense of identity and sends out signals to others about what we are like as people, or at least, how we would like to be perceived.

Economists also recognise things such as time spent with family and friends as not being 'positional' and to be essentially outside the economy. In this book, anything that is

considered 'outside the economy' is especially interesting! In later chapters we will see how there are wholly different economies at work in society 'under the radar' so to speak, and how important it is to bring these into the light when we are trying to devise a new story for our future.

Some utopias, including Thomas More's original, suggest that ownership is wrong. But ownership is so wrapped up in our identity it is difficult to see the world in any other way. It might be concluded that this is a cultural thing. The surrounding culture, especially via advertising, persuades us that owning is good and important. Faced with the excess of stuff presented to us by consumer capitalism, our survival instinct goes into overdrive and leads us to store up goods which are really just there for the taking (or for the buying). The message implicit in this claim is that humans are not naturally selfish. We are just led along by a system that has become out of kilter. We are the victims rather than the perpetrators of excess. Those who take such a view are suggesting that if the system were to change then people would no longer have occasion to act in a seemingly selfish manner. There is not something inherently bad about us, they are saying. Given the right circumstances and we will behave less selfishly. The opposing idea is that actually we are selfish, and it is selfishness that has built the system of consumer capitalism and selfishness that sustains us. So we come down to what will be a familiar topic throughout this book — is it people who must change, or is it the system? Various aspects of this question will crop up throughout the chapters that follow.

Ownership of Land

This book takes the stance that any utopia worth the name is very much place-based. As such, questions of land and property ownership are especially important. Land, like many forms of material resource, is a finite resource and therefore ownership of land has its limits. We have to recognise limits to what can be owned, used, and indeed used up, by humans so that nature has space to endure and to thrive. Under capitalism however, land is almost invariably treated like a financial asset or just another form of capital and as if it were fully 'fungible' (convertible) to other types of resources.

Being an owner of land inevitably means being a 'rentier' — even if the owner does not literally rent out the land to someone else. Ownership of land leads to one of the ways of accumulating wealth without work. So this is our second definition of economic rent that we introduced at the head of the chapter. Because land — as distinct from some other material resources — is inevitably finite, it is especially susceptible to this accumulation of wealth — it embodies the scarcity on which economics is so often premised. Land, in a sense, is the ultimate 'positional good', and the ultimate monopoly. Winston Churchill said of land:
'Land monopoly is not the only monopoly, but it is by far the greatest of monopolies — it is a perpetual monopoly, and it is the mother of all other forms of monopoly.' (Speech to the House of Commons, 4th May 1909.)

If things are so bad, then why have we allowed the monopoly of land to continue? Well, those who own land have sought to perpetuate their advantage and meanwhile the ordinary citizen's lack of any real say in politics means we have little choice but to accept the status quo.

Owning land, therefore, is different from other types of owning. As we move from personal property (such as clothes, furniture and gadgets) towards ownership of land, then I suggest that we are moving from personal ownership towards a shared responsibility. Being a custodian of land is an important distinction from merely owning or using it. Land is a natural commons — as we will explore in the next chapter — and should therefore be treated differently from other types of resource. I am not necessarily suggesting that land should not have any owners at all, just that what is meant by ownership needs to be looked at closely and perhaps re-considered. I suggest that stewardship or custodianship are the key elements here and define what 'ownership' might mean.

'Usufruct' means the right to enjoy and benefit from property held in common, provided that the property is not damaged or destroyed in the process. It goes back to the religious idea of stewardship. In a letter to James Madison, Thomas Jefferson says:
'…the earth belongs in usufruct to the living… No man can, by natural right, oblige the lands he occupied, or the persons who succeeded him in that occupation, to the payment of debts contracted by him. For if he could, he might, during his own life, eat up the usufruct of lands

for several generations to come, and then the lands would belong to the dead and not the living.'

A phrase beloved of socialists comes from anarchist Pierre Joseph Proudhon. It is usually translated as, 'property is theft', but the context suggests that Proudhon had rather the social sin of wealth without work in mind when he said this. It is the economic rent derived from ownership that constitutes the theft. By contrast, elsewhere, Proudhon comes out strongly in favour of individual ownership.[3] In a similar manner, Wendell Berry is looking especially at land when he writes about the nature of ownership.[4] He suggests that caring for what we own is especially important, and this is all the more the case if that ownership is about a resource that will be used by others.

And again, Henry George:
'But who made the earth that any man may claim such ownership of it, or any part of it, or the right to give, sell or bequeath it? Since the earth was not made by us, but is only a temporary dwelling place on which one generation of men follow another; since we find ourselves here, are manifestly here with equal permission of the Creator, it is manifest that no one can have any exclusive right of ownership in land and that rights of all men to land must be equal and inalienable. There must be exclusive right of possession of land in order to reap the products of his labor. But his right of possession must be limited by the equal right of all, and should therefore be conditioned upon the payment to the community of an equivalent

for any special valuable privilege thus accorded him.'
Henry George — *Progress and Poverty*
Along similar lines, here's Thomas Paine:
'And it is impossible to separate the improvement made by cultivation from the earth itself, upon which the improvement is made, the idea of landed property arose from the inseparable connection; but it is nevertheless true, that it is the value of the improvement, only, and not the earth itself, that is individual property.... Every proprietor, therefore, of cultivated lands, owes to the community a ground-rent (for I know no better term to express the idea) for the land which he holds.'
Thomas Paine — *Agrarian Justice*
John Locke, in turn, suggested that what a person, 'removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *labour* with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *property*.'
Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*The Social Contract*) sought to put some restraints on how land is owned: 'In general, the following conditions are required in order to justify the right of first occupancy of any given piece of land. First, the land must as yet be uninhabited; secondly, no more must be occupied than needed for subsistence; and in the third place, possession must be taken not by empty ceremonies, but by work and cultivation, the only mark of ownership which ought, in default of juridical title, to be respected by others.' These restraints on the ownership of land have come to be known as the 'Lockean proviso'. (Locke may, in turn, have derived his ideas from Joseph Pufendorf — see, for instance, *The Noble*

Duty of Man According to the Law of Nature and *The Moral Person of the State*.)

Both Proudhon and George are making a distinction between property and possession. Property takes on the attributes of something owned outright — with no necessary responsibilities of stewardship and custodianship that are discussed above. Possession, however, is ownership with social responsibility. The quotes from Paine and Locke are introducing a further point to the question of ownership of land, and that is the argument about 'improvement'. It is again tempting to interpret this — as is so often done — as just a direct argument for ownership, pure and simple, and indeed an argument for the 'property' kind of ownership discussed above. But it's clear, from Paine at least, that he is suggesting possession, and the resultant responsibilities that this entails. Improvement does not therefore necessarily lead to inalienable rights on the owner, and this is a point we will be looking at again in the next chapter.

In *The Mystery of Capital*, Hernando de Soto presents the very simple argument that security of land and property makes an enormous difference to developing nations. Property rights took sometimes hundreds of years to emerge in the developed nations. Somehow these nations are so used to the idea of owning land and property that they often completely overlook the problems that lack of secure tenure causes in developing nations. Ownership, therefore, is not something to be automatically challenged. Secure tenure — hopefully with the understanding that this implies care,

responsibility and custodianship — is enormously important. (We can also note that forced re-distribution of land has been practised, arguably quite successfully, by capitalist, democratic nations as well as by communism, as explored by Andro Linklater in *Owning the Earth*.)

We can conclude that the wealth without work issue, concerning this form of economic rent, is more about the inappropriate exploitation of land and property than about ownership direct.

Money and Usury

Trade, of course, existed long before there was money. The 'coincidence of wants' allows bartering to take place, such that if you happen to have something I need, and vice versa, we can make an exchange that benefits us both. Money was initially a useful intermediary for this process. Money's first definition then is as a means of exchange. It is a veil, so to speak, for what we are really doing when we buy and sell things. A purchase is just an exchange, usually of our work, for something that we really want or need, like food or holidays. 'Owning' money is pointless by itself, since money is only the intermediary for goods. Money's further definition is as a way of defining value, a shorthand for what we consider useful, or scarce or desirable in its own right. In the meantime, what is used as money — that is, currency — has changed from something that held value in itself ('commodity money') to something that represented that value ('representative money') to just an abstract concept that no longer links directly to physical things ('fiat money').

Borrowing money came along as another intermediate step for when there was too much money, or too little, for an exchange of goods to take place directly. Banks give some guarantee of the legitimacy of currency and they also allow the saver and the borrower to 'find' each other. A modest charge for this service (and for creating the currency, the 'seigniorage') is arguably justified, but an excess charge is usually termed as 'usury'. Aristotle (*The Politics*) for instance, said: 'The trade of the petty usurer is hated the most with reason: it makes a profit from currency itself, instead of making it from the process that currency was meant to serve.' Usury, in turn, leads us to our third type of wealth without work — money from money itself.

There are many discussions about when capitalism, as a system, really got going. One suggestion is that it was when money was first lent at interest that capitalism truly began. It's the interest payable on loans, the argument goes, that keeps the capitalist system in business, as more and more resources go towards paying off the ever-increasing indebtedness. Would it still be capitalism, we might ask, if there were no debts? I think it's less important to decide on how capitalism began, and more important to address that question of whether debt is its inevitable consequence. We will be taking that question up later in the book.

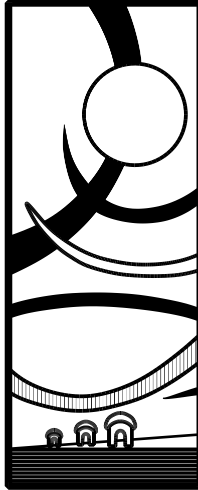
When we deposit money with a bank, invest in an insurance policy or a pension scheme, or buy shares in a company, we are in a way

participating in the process of accumulating money without work, or, more accurately, money via the labour of others, since everything eventually leads back to someone's labour. The banks even have a habit of describing their services as 'products', as if they wish to suggest that what they have to offer us is something material and tangible. But what they offer is, on the contrary, increasingly abstract. Lending money with interest has escalated over the centuries into all types of financial transactions. As with the other forms of economic rent, there is no clear-cut division for what is reasonable and what is exploitation here. I hope we've seen that 'ownership', has a bit of flexibility. I hope we've seen too, that making money from another's labour — owning the means of production — hides a deeper concern over the social relations involved in our economies. There might be some flexibility with money as well. Borrowing and selling stock in a company are arguably beneficial to society, but when financial transactions such as hedge funds and derivatives proliferate, the situation is increasingly complex.[5]

What do the Utopias have to say about ownership?

Privatopia loves ownership, and it is arguably progressing towards a 'rentier' society, where not just the rich and powerful are the owners extracting economic rent, everyone will be in on the act. The virtual monopoly created by land ownership is not acknowledged, but heavily subsidised and supported as a good and obvious thing to be doing. This can only continue with Cornucopia, and Chapter 13, A Wider Commons,

explores possible futures of ownership under this vision. It is only Ecotopia that challenges the notion of ownership. Increasingly, this challenge refers to the commons — both in land, and in the other material resources that we use — and use up — as a society. So the commons, and the question of what should we share, is where we now turn.



3. Defining the Commons

'If commoning has any meaning it must be the production of ourselves as a common subject.'

- Sylvia Federici —
Re-enchanting the World
— Feminism and the
Politics of the Commons

A Commons Exists for us Now

I must warn the reader that this chapter on the commons is probably the most difficult to follow. I have tried to sweep up all the various authors' thoughts on the meanings of capital and commons and harmonise them into something that I trust is coherent. I hope the reader will persevere through the following pages, so as to get a grounding for the remainder of the book.

Many of the terms introduced in this chapter are also summarised in the Glossary, so it is worth checking back there for an overview, particularly with regard to the various 'commons' and 'capitals' we will be exploring.

A commons means different things to different people. In this chapter I am mostly taking it to have the political meaning of shared land and property and shared resources, but we will be looking at wider definitions as well, as the discussion of the book continues.

In much of the developing world a commons is still the norm rather than the odd aberration that it has come to be in developed nations. I'm suggesting though that for the developed world a commons still exists, but in less recognisable forms. For instance, we accept that most roads are publicly owned, there are public buildings, city squares and pavements. Arguably this is public space rather than commons, but it is still a 'commonised' resource. Up to a point, wealth is shared by taxation; in the UK we are not forced to pay directly for public services such as education and health care, so the costs of these facilities are commonised.

So, if we were to be more aware of the commons, we'd see that it does not have to be re-invented where there has previously been nothing remotely considered a commons. It is more a question of shifting the boundaries — literally and metaphorically — as to what is described as commons and what is not. In the light of these thoughts, this chapter asks: What should we share? Are there changes to the way a commons is defined in society that would

make us all happier and also protect nature and maintain her and us in ecological stability?

The Tragedy of the Commons

Anyone who has heard the term commons at all is likely to immediately think of the so-called 'Tragedy of the Commons'. In its modern form, the name comes from an essay by Garrett Hardin. Traditionally, a commons was land available for ordinary people to do such things as graze cattle, collect firewood, forage and plant crops. Over time however, pressure from wealthy landowners resulted in 'enclosures', whereby the commoners, starting in England, were increasingly shut out from the land that had previously provided for their sustenance. Hardin, in his essay, takes up the traditional view of the commons and asks us to imagine individuals with cattle that they wish to graze on a particular piece of common land. Each such person, in their own self-interest, would be motivated to increase the number of cattle they graze so as to maximise the benefit derived from the land in the short-term. However, if everyone acts this way, then the land will be over-grazed and everyone will lose out. Hence, the tragedy. Hardin was not simply referring us back to something that might have happened in the past. His essay was really suggesting that we are doing the same thing on a much grander scale in today's world. Whilst, in the developed world at least, there is little or no common land remaining, nonetheless there are 'commons' of fossil fuels, forests, clean water, fish, minerals and ores. In the interests of short-term gain, we burn our way through these and risk our long-term tragedy. (Critics of the Tragedy of

the Commons theory point out that societies with common land for grazing or crops never have individuals acting in their own self-interest — there is always a community. But this, whilst true, rather misses the point of Hardin's argument. The developed world is essentially a world of private interests — a Privatopia — so the Tragedy of the Commons is a very real possibility, indeed an increasing reality.)

In a book, *Filters Against Folly*, Hardin goes on to explain a bit more about dealing with the potential tragedy identified in his commons essay.[1] Here, he makes the crucial distinction between a managed and an unmanaged commons. Hardin asks, Who benefits? Who pays? He suggests three alternatives — privatise, commonise or socialise. To privatise is to accrue the benefits of what we are doing, and to take responsibility for any losses. (This would be something like a business, acting responsibly, cleaning up any pollution, recycling, avoiding contributing to climate change and not using up resources that cannot be replaced.) To commonise, in Hardin's terms, is essentially the Tragedy of the Commons scenario. Individuals or businesses privatise profits — so keep them to themselves, and thereby benefit in the short-term — but commonise losses. So, everyone pays for clearing up pollution, adapting to climate change, etc. This is a 'commons' of sorts, but it is a blind commons that is forced on us because of the selfishness and irresponsibility of others. To socialise, by contrast, is a 'managed commons'. The gains and losses are shared out in a conscious and purposeful way. The full quote from Hardin's book is given in the endnote.

We can see echoes of the same mindset in Adam Smith's notion that if everyone is working blindly towards their own self-interest this creates — by way of an 'invisible hand' — a better society. But this idea is also the very idea that leads to the Tragedy of the Commons.

The important thing to grasp here is that a managed commons offers us the best hope of avoiding disaster in the future and a managed commons relies on community and good governance. So, it's not that there is no commons right now. It's that there is a commons of the worst possible kind. All the profit is extracted by a few. All the mess and waste is a shared cost borne by everyone. In summary, we are privatising profits and commonising losses when we could be sharing profits and privatising loss. (Some might have preferred if Hardin had exchanged what he meant by socialise and commonise in his explanations, but hopefully his meaning is still clear. It is a managed commons that Hardin is promoting. In fact, later in life, Hardin reflected that it might have been better for him to have called his essay, 'The Tragedy of the Unmanaged Commons'.[2]) We might add here, as is often said, that there is no commons without community; indeed no commons without a suitable economic model to regulate it. Authors Maria Mies and Veronika Benholdt-Thomsen (*The Subsistence Perspective*) say:
'In our view, we cannot simply say, "no commons without community", we must also say, "no commons without economy", in the sense of *oikonomia*, ie. the production of human beings within the social and natural household. Hence, reinventing the commons is linked to the

reinvention of the communal and the commons-based economy.'

Natural Commons as Resource and Wild Nature

As we've seen above, the usual conception of the commons is about land that provides shared grazing for animals or shared space for growing food. And then we hear about 'enclosures', where the land becomes private property. Land is taken by those with power and then rented back to those who once used it for free. The idea of enclosure vividly describes the process whereby features of the world that were once wild and free have become commodified.

It is nature that provides the resources of the commons, and it is clearly nature still that provides the resources, even after enclosures have been devised by humans. We did not make a change to this by enclosing land, but we shifted attention from our reliance on nature over to an emphasis on production, rent and profit. The link back to nature became obscured — and this process has only become worse. I am using the term 'natural commons' for what nature provides for us — that is — the natural resources we need in order to survive. There are natural resources that can be replaced or replenished, whist other resources that, so far as the Earth is concerned, will be used up forever.

It should be pointed out though, that common land can be owned by someone, either an individual or the government, yet still remain a commons. As the last chapter tried to show,

defining the commons is therefore not necessarily about ownership. The key thing is how the land is cared for and how a 'managed commons' is achieved.

The whole world has been at least indirectly affected by human activity. Chemicals in the air and water and changes to the atmosphere are all-pervasive and likely to increase in the foreseeable future. Even so, places that are as much untouched by humanity as possible are, I believe, critically important. The term I'm using in this work for such places is 'wild nature'. Those places where, as yet, the human footprint is light, need to be preserved and protected at all costs. Wild nature belongs as much to the other fauna and flora with which we share this world as it belongs to us. Wild nature is where the privileges all belong to the animals, birds, insects, trees and plants that live there, instead of to us humans. If we go to such places at all, it is only to visit, or perhaps there are indigenous people living there, so close to nature that their footprint is exceptionally light. Wild nature, then, is not a 'common wealth' in the sense of offering us resources for food, energy, minerals or whatever. Its value is not even by way of absorbing Carbon Dioxide and regulating rainfall and its run-off and in preserving and making soil. Its real value is just for itself, and for its beauty and its nourishment to the human soul. Chapter 8 — Nature — considers these matters in more detail. American biologist E. O. Wilson has the idea of 'half Earth' — leaving (or, giving back) half the Earth to nature and using only the remaining half for humans. (At the time of writing, humans take up about two thirds of available

land area — in the 1960's it was only around one third.)

It might be argued that indigenous peoples, and even people who abandon 'developed' society and choose to live 'off-grid', are not necessarily going to draw the sharp distinction between 'wild nature' and 'natural resources' that I am suggesting here. It is a fair point, but for one thing, the numbers of such people are very small, so their impact is minimal. For another thing, the belief systems of indigenous people (and even some off-gridders) will often mean they live in a careful balance with nature. Even though that balance may not be as I have defined it here, I think something similar is implicit. Indigenous people often have a relationship and reciprocity with nature that 'developed' societies have largely lost and which would be difficult to replicate.

The relationship of nature, place, the natural commons and wild nature are shown in the figure below.

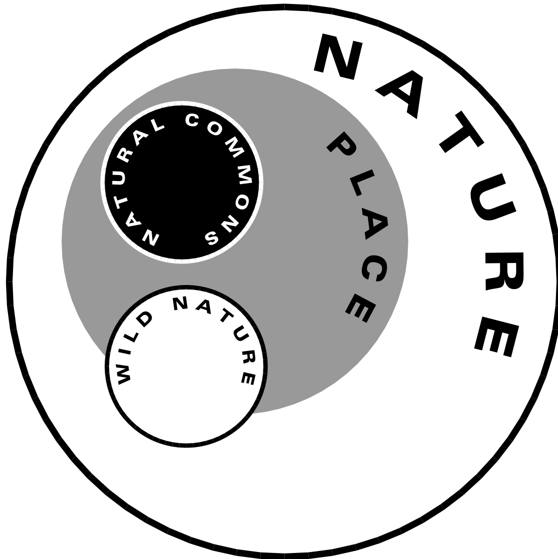


Figure 3.1 Nature, Place, Natural Commons, Wild Nature

The Commons, Wealth and Capital

I have chosen to identify nature as partly a resource and partly as wild nature in order to clarify what is going on when we look to her for our sustenance. The resource aspect of nature — what I'm calling the natural commons — is what was traditionally just called 'Land' by economists, as we discussed in the previous chapter. I have separated this out from wild nature. Wild nature, as we've said above, belongs to the animals, the birds, the fish, the trees and the plants. We humans may find beauty and rest within wild nature, but not 'resources' in the traditional sense. Inevitably there is some cross-over. Old growth forests, for instance, sit on the borderline between what

might be a resource and what might be preserved as wild nature. The important thing is to be conscious about what we are doing — to have a 'managed commons' of resources, in Hardin's terms — rather than blindly and inadvertently destroying both wild nature and the natural commons. The first act of managing is to make clear this split between what is reasonable to be used and what needs to remain untouched.[3]

Classical economics recognises that for wealth to be wealth, some kind of work needs to be done in order to render natural resources useable. Some of this wealth is then consumed directly whilst some is retained as 'capital' for future use. We need then to introduce human work and labour in order to produce wealth and capital. All capital is wealth, but not all wealth is capital. This process was illustrated in Figure 2.1 in the last chapter. The figure below combines Figure 2.1 with Figure 3.1 to show how the two relate.

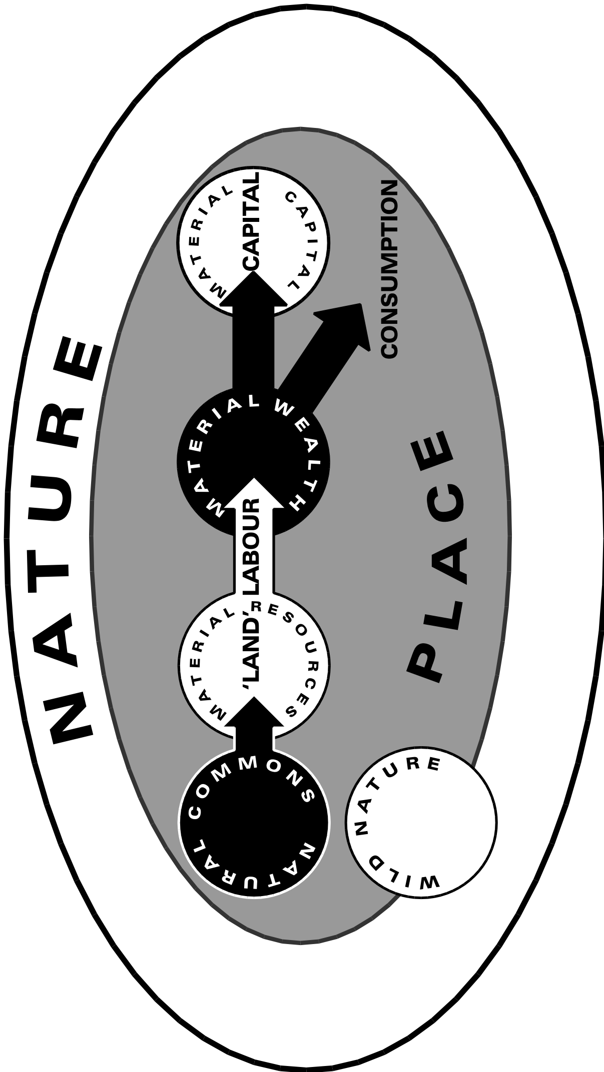


Figure 3.2 Natural Commons -> Resource + Work/Labour = Wealth -> Capital + Consumption

An important point to note here — which I will discuss again below — is that our material economy with its capital, wealth and consumption, is not somehow 'outside' nature. Everything we do is within nature, even although many of the products of human endeavour — including our waste products and pollution — may seem 'un-natural'. Environmentalists often balk at this conclusion, and perhaps the reason is that by calling everything 'nature' this might mean that those who exploit and/or destroy eco-systems then have an 'excuse' for their activities. But, in balance, I think describing everything as nature forces us to consider all of our activities as taking place within eco-systems, and this is a positive move. Some economists try to devise a similar pattern or process for the cultural economy as I have shown for the material economy.

Figure 3.3 The Cultural Economy, showing the mirror progression from 'Resource' to 'Capital'

So both those two main economies, the material and the cultural, are shown as linear processes. This is rather typical of our Western thought patterns, where things come from 'nothing' and are ultimately 'consumed' or destroyed. Everything else in the diagram seems to be floating around these linear processes. We could say that the way we try to organise all our economies wants to force us into these same linear arrangements that we ascribe to the material and the cultural. This sets up an awkward tension in the figures. There will be more to say on this in Chapter 7.

The parallels between the material economy and the cultural might suggest that culture is an 'industry' and its functioning mirrors very much the behaviour of the material economy. This might not be a problem for many — indeed it might be a welcome reflection, in their view, that there is a natural order in the way human endeavours of all kinds function. However, for others, the commoning that we have spoken of with regard to natural resources above, takes on an even more important role when it comes to culture. As we will see below, there is a desire to group activities into new definitions of commons. These ideas can be grouped under the collective term creative commons, and require some further exploration.

Widening the Commons

As I've suggested earlier, the terms capital and commons have been expanded to include a variety of different things. Physical capital is sometimes used as an alternative term for the material resources nature provides. Human

capital describes our ability to do work, essential, of course, for us to reproduce society through new goods and services. Cultural capital may be a term used to describe the contribution of intelligence, imagination and creativity. (It might be mentioned that imagination and creativity can be used for bad ends as well as good — so, presumably — 'negative capital'. But in this work I am taking the terms to mean their more usual designation as something positive — something that builds rather than destroys.) Social capital is the value inherent in community that might be realised by way of voluntary work, informal help between neighbours and so on (sometimes referred to as 'horizontal' relations, in contrast to more formal work, which is termed 'vertical'). Financial capital — dealt with more fully in Chapter 7 — recognises how integral money is to the flow of the economy, but also has a life of its own. Perhaps this proliferation of different capitals is a source of confusion. However, authors are perhaps attempting to show that the wealth of a culture owes as much to abstract qualities, such as compassion, imagination and social connections, as it does to physical resources. It might be that this suggests an attempt to quantify the less physical contributions and reduce them to number crunching. So the danger of the 'capitals' is that everything gets reduced to economics — or, elevated to economics — depending on your perspective. Along with this, it brings the notions of commodity, scarcity, transactional relationships and cost-benefit analyses. Maybe there is some justification for this with natural and cultural capital, but less so with social capital. But I think the intent of those authors who expand

the meaning of capital is to show the richness of human culture and how the economy is actually built off a foundation of social connections. This is the more positive motivation that I have followed here.

To summarise the further definitions of capital:
Physical Capital — What I've called Natural Resources, or Material Wealth.
Human Capital — Value innate to people, including labour and work.
Cultural Capital — Intelligence, imagination and creativity
Social Capital — The value in the connections between people — as described by Robert Putman (*Bowling Alone*). See Chapter 7.
Financial Capital — Sometimes just used to refer to money, but better if it refers to the flow of money in the economy, as a support for the flow of physical resources, material wealth, consumption and material capital. See endnote[4] and Chapter 7.

As with capital, there has also been a recent move to widen the meaning of commons, from the natural commons to the inclusion of human imagination and creativity. For the term natural commons itself — sometimes this is used to refer to all of nature. As discussed above however, I have suggested that we divide off part of nature as the commons part so as to recognise it is not all just a resource. But again, I don't wish to quibble too much over definitions. The fact that many are describing nature in some way as a commons is to be greatly welcomed. The flexibility of all these terms — the commons and the capitals — is probably annoying to academics, but should remind us

that all these things are fluid and waiting for us to resolve them into concrete decisions — indeed, our missions and aims will evolve over time, and the definitions we are discussing here will also evolve — it is always a process and not a destination.

The definitions of the more abstract commons I am taking mostly from Charles Eisenstein (*Sacred Economics*). Eisenstein identifies a cultural commons of intelligence, inventiveness and technical know-how, a spiritual commons of imagination and creativity and a social commons of compassion and sharing. To summarise the definitions of commons:

Natural Commons — Sometimes referring to all of nature, but preferably referring to that part of nature that humans need for our sustenance, so is used as a material resource.
Cultural Commons — Eisenstein refers to intellectual property and creative copyright here, but I prefer to use the term to refer to the actual wealth produced, as in invention, art, music, literature and celebration, rather than the copyrighting of these. (Perhaps we should also include trademarks, patents and trade secrets, to be concise.)
Spiritual Commons — Imagination and creativity.
Social Commons — Compassion, gifts and sharing.[5]

The Creative Commons

Just when you thought we'd mentioned every type of commons, along comes another! The term 'creative commons' has started to be used to refer to intellectual property and artistic

copyright, so it may safely be regarded as a collective term for the cultural and spiritual commons, following the definitions above — hence, intelligence, creativity, imagination and technical know-how.

In the last chapter, we looked at ideas around the ownership of land and saw that one claim to ownership was on the basis of 'improvement'. The idea was that if someone spent time and effort clearing a piece of ground of rocks and undergrowth, for instance, and then planted crops, the effort alone was sufficient for the person to claim ownership. (See John Locke.) In Classical economics, a similar argument is made to arrive at a general definition of wealth. Effort must be put in for wealth to be created. (Figure 2.1)

For imagination and creativity and their concomitant intellectual and creative copyright, we might take that same argument of improvement and apply it to the more abstract ideas of creativity and know-how. Minds need to be trained and the ideas of our imaginations take a lot of effort to bring to fruition as an invention, an artwork or a book. We might conclude therefore that the 'improvement' invested to bring something from an idea to an invention or a product mirrors the process of bringing natural resources into material wealth. The wealth that is created is cultural wealth and the capital derived from this is cultural capital.

Alternatively — and this is what is often behind the proposal for a creative commons — there is sometimes the wish that all cultural wealth should be a gift. Indeed, the term 'creative

commons' tends to conflate imagination and creativity with their output — the cultural wealth — and downplays all the effort that goes into bringing the promptings of imagination to birth as actual inventions, artworks, music and so forth. It is an argument therefore against creative copyright and intellectual property rights. Personally, I have no quibble with those who wish to offer their gifts without remuneration. But I feel that the parallels of material wealth and capital with creative wealth and capital are worth making. For artists engaged in social justice for instance, this is a critical issue, so we can appreciate the challenge they have in resolving such questions. They may wish to see the cultural commons as emblematic of a 'gift economy', an idea we will be exploring in Chapter 7.

The creative commons sits on the border between the material economy (where most things are commodified) and the social commons (where most things are gifts). In fact, culture is a way that the importance of the social commons can be brought to light. There is a further way to look at things, which might be helpful. The reader may recall that in the previous chapter we considered the difference between 'property' and 'possession' with regard to land. The first term regarded land simply as commodity. The second recognised a social responsibility that went along with ownership; a responsibility that is expressed well by the notions of stewardship and custodianship. The debates over intellectual property rights and artistic copyright get very complex. The notion of stewardship may be a way that we can cut through these arguments to a sensible balance.

As with land ownership, it is not ownership itself that is the real problem, it is how that ownership relates us to society. Social relations feature as much in the cultural economy as in the material — arguably more so. Could we find a way of rewarding the efforts of those who generate cultural wealth that also recognises the social aspect of what they produce? Could we have intellectual and artistic possession, rather than property — and what would this mean? The reader will appreciate, I'm sure, that a lot hinges on what we are like as people and how our societies function. I'm not going to explore this too much further here. However, I think one useful parallel can be drawn between the culture of today and how we treat the culture of the past.

Commons and Cultural Heritage

Some material production of past generations starts to be regarded as cultural wealth and of course artworks, literature and music endure beyond the lives of their creators. The cultural wealth feeds back to us as a resource, both in terms of artefacts and also physical places — buildings and landscapes. We often see these as a shared inheritance. This is partly because their creators are no longer around to benefit from what they have produced and also because communities, and sometimes nations, rightly regard such things as part of their culture. In the UK, we have protection for historic buildings by awarding them listed status, whilst whole areas of towns and cities may be protected in Conservation Areas. Landscapes, meanwhile, benefit from a variety of safeguards such as 'Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty', National

Parks and ownership by the National Trust. Sometimes when historic buildings are under threat in other countries, concerns are raised, indeed there are places that have World Heritage Status to protect them. Likewise, artefacts in museums and art galleries can be the subject of national and international interest when they are bought and sold or moved to new locations.

Historic artefacts, buildings and landscapes can often still be owned by someone and the owners may derive benefit from their ownership. Such owners are not the creators of their property, but they may well be its protectors and custodians. We see items that were once the products of human creativity moving gradually into a kind of common ownership. The more significant those things are considered to be, the wider the pool of people who regard them as somehow a shared inheritance. In this process any current owners seem to have an ever greater degree of trust and responsibility placed upon them for what they ‘possess’.

I hope the parallel with intellectual property and artist copyright is clear. As with cultural heritage, our contemporary cultural wealth could be treated with similar kinds of mutual agreements and shared responsibilities. Indeed, we can refer this right back to our material economy, and recognise the shared responsibilities around the natural commons and wild nature.

The Prospects for Common Good Laws

According to Montesquieu: 'the state owes all citizens a secure subsistence, food, suitable clothes and a way of life that does not damage their health.' (*The Spirit of the Laws*). It is tempting to see our understanding of the commons as fixed, but a look back in history reminds us that laws around land, sea and air have gone through countless changes and there are thousands of variations across the world. The commons is a process rather than a set of fixed laws and our governments are themselves processes. A process is open to change, so a change in our views of ownership and commons is a realistic possibility. I think climate change in particular has alerted us to the unfairness currently integral to the way the natural commons is exploited for the benefit of a few, whilst the rest of us pay for cleaning up the mess.

If the current systems aren't working, then what system will work? In my own country of Scotland, the terms 'common land' and 'common goods' (which includes buildings and sometimes furniture and other items) have a specific meaning. All 32 local authorities have a responsibility to keep records of common land and common goods and to hold a common good fund for any revenue that may be raised from their use, such as the rent of buildings. In fact, these laws are amongst the oldest in Scotland and some relatively recent proceedings have served to clarify the law with regard to the commons. England, likewise, had its 'Charter of the Forest' that dates back to the Magna Carta, although it was eventually taken into other laws in a much-diluted form. Guy Standing tells us:

'The Charter of the Forest [1217] asserted the rights of the common man to subsistence and to what were called *estovars*, the means of subsistence in the commons. In the thirteenth century, every church was required to read out the charter to congregations four times a year. One remarkable feature inserted in the revised Magna Carta was the right granted to widows to "reasonable *estovar* of the commons". Every widow had the right to a basic income, in the form of the right to take food, fuel and housing materials from the commons.' (Guy Standing — *Basic Income: And How We Can Make It Happen*.) See also, *Discourse on the Common Weal* (1507).

Now that we are realising the importance of the atmosphere, the oceans and our reserves of fossil fuels, it would be very welcome to have the law recognise a global commons more explicitly and to set in place legislation that clearly defines what the commons means today and how use of the commons should be managed. (See especially, Guy Standing — *The Plunder of the Commons.*)

Proposals for the Commons

The above discussion leads us inevitably towards the rules and laws surrounding the management of our natural commons and the protection of wild nature. To be a 'managed commons' requires regulation, and this in turn requires governance. See, for instance, Elinor Ostrom's, *The Governance of the Commons*, summarised in the endnote.[6] For better or worse, it is legislation that shapes our environments. We will be looking at governance in the next three chapters and fitting this

together with our understanding of the commons. For now though, here are some ideas to get us underway.

From our discussions, the natural commons of land, sea and air, fossil fuels, fish stocks, minerals, soils and forests is a commons for which we are the custodians and caretakers. If we truly took that on board, then we would be a long way towards taking care of this planet on which we rely, as well as agreeing fair shares amongst ourselves. The authors quoted in the last chapter, especially Henry George and Thomas Paine, have already made one proposal — a 'ground rent' payable to the community by land owners. More recent authors such as Adam Lent (*Land*) have fleshed out how things might work in a modern society. The proposal is now generally known as a Land Value Tax. Variations on this central idea also suggest that the tax may be reflective of the uses to which a particular piece of land is put. If local government were to be strengthened then communities will have a lot more say in how land is used. The social responsibility of land ownership can then be taken up more directly.

We might also see the actions of oil and mining companies brought under new legislation in terms of what they can take from the natural commons, as well as having accountability for the damage done to air, sea and climate. When a global commons is recognised, pollution and climate change take on a slightly different feel, as it is brought home to us that we are all affected. The culprits owe all of us for the damage they have done as we all own the global commons. So, we might see the producers of

fossil fuels paying recompense for their share of the damage, and this would be distributed to everyone. This 'Fee and Dividend' idea has already been proposed in the USA and other countries. Meanwhile, polluters that affect more local habitats may pay compensation directly to local residents. We might envisage Sovereign Wealth Funds, for income derived from the use of common resources, to be administered and shared out equitably to local residents. Such systems are already in place in Alaska and Norway, amongst a number of other nations.

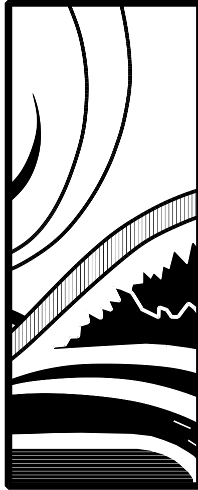
Peter Barnes (*Capitalism 3.0*) suggests establishing regulative bodies independent of government, who would make decisions about a nation's carbon budget, and so on. That way, the problem of governments fearing a backlash from unpopular policies on the use of fossil fuels would be partly overcome, as it would be the regulative body, and not the government, who would be imposing restrictions on the use of the commons. Barnes also suggests putting common good assets under the control of trusteeships, who would then rent the use of those assets back to private business (and, presumably, the government). In a sense, he is suggesting turning around the 'rentier' model of capitalism, to work in favour of the commons.

Such systems as sovereign wealth funds, fee and dividend, and the like, are often known collectively as 'pre-distribution' — in contrast to 're-distribution'. The Earth's wealth is therefore shared in advance, as it were, rather than waiting for a few people to appropriate it, become rich and then be taxed, so that everyone else will then benefit only indirectly, if

at all, from the wealth that arguably belongs to us all.[7] (It should be noted that the term pre-distribution is usually used by economists to refer to more mundane things such as minimum wage agreements, unions, good welfare benefits and easy bankruptcy laws. The extension of pre-distribution to include the benefits of a shared commons is stretching the meaning quite substantially!)

Recognising the Commons invites a new Politics

From the discussions I've had with a broad range of people, it's clear that a great many have never heard of the commons. 'Commoner' is a derisory term nowadays, but in truth we are all commoners, and if we saw this to mean participants in a vast commons of nature and culture then we might not think it so bad. What's more, that status of commoner should afford us rights. Those rights need to be taken out, dusted down and looked at anew, before our common heritage is squandered by those who don't care. I get the impression that if folks were to learn of the Charter of the Forest, for instance, and all the rights and privileges that were afforded all citizens, by law, in earlier centuries, then they may view our current systems as somewhat paltry and unimaginative by comparison! As I've discussed above, it is legislation that is needed to make all this happen. So thinking about governance is our next task — answering the question: Who Decides?



4 Polity

'If you can't dance, it's not my revolution.'
- Emma Goldman

'A nation of sheeps will beget a government of wolves.'
- Edward R. Murrow

Another of Gandhi's seven social sins — Politics without Principle — is an obvious starting point for this chapter. There are certainly a lot of principles floating around out there, but unfortunately for most of us, most of the time, the system isn't working. It seems we are still a long way from those ideas around ownership, sharing and the commons that we have explored in the preceding chapters. Big business and the interests of the super-rich seem to take precedence over the voices of the

poor and the care of the planet. This is all dressed up as 'progress', as if we will all one day benefit, and the problems of climate change and pollution will miraculously be sorted out along the way. So, the 'principles' we are presented with; maintaining economic growth, investing in new technology, even job security; are often smoke-screens for a far less palatable agenda. Meanwhile, the poor suffer: Poorer nations suffer from the exploitation and the excesses of the wealthy nations. Poor people in rich nations suffer from the growing inequalities within their societies. And future generations are being made poor already, as they will have to pick up the bill for our negligence and irresponsibility. Rousseau said,'…when the state is close to ruin and subsists only through empty and deluded forms, when in each man's heart the social bond is broken, when the crudest self-interest insolently adorns itself with sacred name of the public good, then the general will falls silent; the motives of all are kept secret, their votes are no more the votes of citizens than if the state never existed, and the decrees that are falsely passed, under the name of laws, have private interests as their only aim.' (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract.*)

In this chapter we're looking at that basic question raised in the Introduction: Who Decides? I've called this chapter Polity because it seems to encompass all of the possible descriptions that might be deployed to answering that question. There is a more specific meaning to polity, which we will get to later. But for now, let's make a start, by asking why there might be a polity or a government at all.

State versus Stateless

Any summary of political alternatives cannot fail to mention Thomas Hobbes (*Leviathan*) and his view that humanity, in its natural state, consists of a life that has: 'No arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continued fear of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. According to Hobbes, only by voluntarily submitting to an authority, such as a monarchy or a government, can people live together in relative peace and harmony. The suggestion is that what we sacrifice by way of freedom is more than compensated by the stability that is gained. It has to be said though, that for most people in most countries, we have never actually been given a choice about whether we take up this offer of government or not. Most monarchies and governments have taken power at some time in the past — often by violent means — and they have not since considered it appropriate to ask their citizens whether or not we really think it's a good idea! Most governments therefore are not legitimate, and to say that they govern by consent or 'have a mandate' is nonsense.

The counter-argument is that we need our freedom, and that we are sensible and wise enough to look after ourselves. A high level of good will and common sense amongst people is assumed, and this allows life to go on without much in the way of government or institutions. But this raises the question — are we really good and sensible enough for such freedom? The question of whether or not we have sufficient knowledge, skill and co-operation to

make society work without authority was posed long ago by Aristotle and he came down firmly on the side that says we cannot make it by ourselves. He said: 'He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must either be a beast or a god.' But there have always been plenty around who think otherwise, and their belief in freedom, independence, self-reliance, good will and common sense is often referred to as anarchism.[1] (The word is derived from the Greek *anarkhia* — *an* = without + *arkh(os)* = ruler/authority.) It is difficult to take in much of the broad sweep of ideas that anarchism includes, especially in more recent times, but a small review will hopefully bring out some salient features that are important for our discussion.

Anarchism, as hinted at above, is very optimistic about people and especially at pains to promote the notion that all that is bad in society is due to culture gone wrong, rather than some intrinsic problem with human nature. By ourselves then, and in our basic nature, we are good — the anarchist would claim. It is government, especially any form of state bureaucracy (that almost inevitably will involve hierarchy) where things go wrong.

Anarchism's way to organise society is to maximise freedom (especially individual freedom) and to minimise bureaucracy and all else relating to government and state. Nicholas Walter's pithy quote addresses this: 'Many people say that government is necessary because some men cannot be trusted to look after themselves, but anarchists say that

government is harmful because no man can be trusted to look after anyone else.' Nicholas Walter — *About Anarchism*.

A further definition, from Alexander Berkman, again stresses freedom: 'Anarchism teaches that we can live in a society where there is no compulsion of any kind. A life without compulsion naturally means liberty; it means freedom from being forced or coerced, a chance to lead the life that suits you best.'
Alexander Berkman — *ABC of Anarchism*.

And Proudhon (the reader may remember him from, 'property is theft') gave us this delightful quote:
'To be governed is to be watched over, inspected, spied on, directed, legislated, regimented, closed in, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, assessed, evaluated, censored, commanded, all by creatures that have neither the right nor wisdom nor virtue…. To be governed means that at every move, operation or transaction, one is noted, registered, entered into a census, taxed, stamped, authorised, recommended, admonished, prevented, reformed, set right, corrected. Government means to be subject to tribute, trained, ransomed, exploited, monopolised, extorted, pressured, mystified, robbed; all in the name of public utility and the general good. Then at first signs of resistance or word of complaint, one is repressed, fined, despised, vexed, pursued, hustled, beaten up, garrotted, imprisoned, shot, machine gunned, judged, sentenced, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed, and to cap it all, ridiculed, mocked, outraged and dishonoured.

That is Government. That is its justice and morality!'

Anarchists don't fully agree on what to do in place of government however. Traditionally, they have been divided into two broad camps — sometimes defined as the individualists and the collectivists.[2]

Individualism

It is arguably the individualists who promote the freedom aspect of anarchism the most. As earlier quotes have suggested, freedom means 'freedom from', that is, freedom from government, laws, institutions and bureaucracy. It also means 'freedom to' — freedom to choose one's own way of living. Later chapters will develop the 'freedom to' aspect as freedom to be the author of one's own story. But, as far as anarchism goes, this 'freedom to' idea often refers to freedom to pursue business interests and to own property. So, the individualist is for freedom, therefore ownership. Individualists are very much into the ownership of property as a guarantor of security, whilst collectivists saw property more or less as an evil. Why would we want more collectivism? Collectivism might suggest planned economies — therefore committees and bureaucracies — and therefore the suppression of freedom and the misery of endless meetings. The endnote gives more details of these contrasts.[3]

It might seem, at first strike, that a kind of individualist anarchism is very similar to today's liberal and libertarian notions.[4] We'll see below, however, that those who promote individual

freedom nevertheless have very strong ideas about how people should co-operate and above all promote the flourishing of everyone, not just themselves. The contrast with today's neo-liberal societies (and the utopia I've named Privatopia) could not be greater.

Collectivism

As with many of the subjects taken up in this book, there are many names and subtly different meanings that we could use to describe things. This is especially true of anarchism, which seems to have as many subsets as there are anarchist authors. To keep things simple, I'm trying to emphasise just two different categories of anarchism — those that stress the importance of the individual, as we've explored above — and those that look at some kind of organisation and shared action in society. For the second category, I am adopting the term 'collectivist'. Whilst individualist anarchism stresses freedom, collectivism stresses equality.

Perhaps even before humans formed settled communities, there was a tendency for some people to do very much more work that others. The success of one person might be down to hard work, or luck, or both. Meanwhile, failure might be the result of laziness, illness, bad luck or just old age. As such, some gathered large swathes of land for cultivating, whilst others ended up with little or nothing and became hired hands — or slaves — of the rich.

Andro Linklater (*Owning the Earth*) explains that as a younger man he had joined several communities looking to share resources with

each other in a fairer way than offered by the dominant culture of consumer capitalism. Sooner or later they all came up against the problems that had been faced by the early settlers in America. Some people are weaker than others, or just plain lazy, so trying to give them an equal share of what the stronger, harder-working members of the community had toiled to produce just did not seem fair.

Because of this issue — sometimes referred to as the 'free-rider problem' — all societies have tried to find ways to achieve a fairer distribution of land, property and other goods to address the imbalance. Compassion leads us to wish to share with those who, through injury, bad luck or old age, do not have the means to work and provide for themselves. But fairness demands that we receive a just reward for our efforts and those who work hardest deserve a larger share. Linklater traces how this story has been played out in different times and different places. Whilst the 'solutions' have been very different, the reasons for trying are really as described above.

So the issue comes down to a balance between freedom and equality. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*) recognised two types of inequality — natural, because of physical differences — and moral, or political, because of the laws and conventions of society. We saw above how society tries to address the 'natural inequality' issue through compassion for those who are less able. The 'political inequality' is the other aspect that society must address, the issue of fair shares. If we are free then we have the opportunity to

better ourselves any way we wish. If society does not restrict this freedom then we have what is known as 'equality of opportunity'. For some, equality of opportunity is still not enough. They might argue, for instance, that since we are all essentially owners of the land then we all have the right to the proceeds of land use. This approach is seen as favouring a different kind of equality — equality of outcome. 'To each according to his needs', is an especially ambiguous phrase — it is not obvious that we should all end up with the same levels of income and consumption. (Karl Marx's famous quote, originally from the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, says, 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!' It may have been taken from Louis Blanc, but also may be based on a quote from Pierre Leroux: 'From each according to his capacity; to each according to his work', but note the somewhat different meaning.) We might also note that the equality of outcome stance may be seen as unreasonable for other reasons than simply about what is a fair distribution. People are too diverse for fairness to be resolved by these simple equations. But if we favour distribution and fair shares, then at the very least we are saying that people should get what is owing to them for the amount of effort they have put in. This alternative kind of distribution is referred to as 'proportionality'. 'Genuine equality means not treating everyone the same, but attending equally to everyone's different needs', as Terry Eagleton has it. Ronald Dworken (*Taking Rights Seriously*) gave the example of putting two people on a diet of 3000 calories. One is an athlete who needs 5000 calories. The other is an elderly lady who requires only 2000. Both

have been treated equally, but treated unfairly. This balance of freedom and equality is one we will return to and please see also Murray Bookchin's comments in the endnote.[5]

Matthew Crawford (*The Case for Working with your Hands*) offers us yet another angle on this. He says: '… consider the paradoxical truth that equality is an aristocratic ideal. It is the ideal of friendship — of those who stand apart from the collective and recognize one another as piers. As professionals, or journeymen, perhaps. By contrast, the bourgeois principle is not equality but equivalence — a positing of interchangeability that elides human differences of rank.' (Crawford therefore, rather unexpectedly, seems to support aristocratic values to allow us to speak openly about difference.)

Deciding on fair shares raises the question of how this distribution is organised and administered and who decides what is fair. A community or a nation may have a 'welfare net' to distribute resources to those who need them. The welfare net stresses the community aspect of society. As societies become more complex, the various resources that make up a welfare net, especially the massive investments made for infrastructure in transport and telecommunications, likewise become more complex — we cannot simply take resources directly from production and hand them out to those in need. So the usual solution is to achieve the welfare net through taxation. Tax may be recovered from what people own, or it may be from the proceeds of their labour, or both.

But here we run up against the problems inherent in our various 'rights' of ownership. The political question that arises is, when does a fair distribution, which allows for life's unpredictable problems, become an imposition on our rights of ownership and the fruits of our labours? The enjoyment of our property and benefiting from the fruits of our labours are therefore rights that all political systems need to respect, along with trying to provide a welfare net for those who have fallen on hard times. So, from our anarchist perspective, we can see how the two poles of individualist and collectivist try to balance the considerations we have looked at above.

The collectivist end of the anarchism spectrum, therefore, might be seen as favouring the distribution side of this equation. So, the drive towards equality of the collectivists seems to involve a curtailment of the freedom of the individualists. It is hard to see though, given the complexities of modern societies alluded to above, how this could be achieved without bureaucracies and therefore something approaching government.

Proudhon is sometimes identified as an individualist anarchist, but also referred to as a 'mutualist'. He had a deep concern for equality. In particular, he identified the three forms of economic rent we discussed in the previous chapter, (from ownership and rent, from the labour of others and from money itself) and saw these as an evil to be eradicated so as to benefit the ordinary worker. See endnote for the full quote.[6]

Though they may see themselves as radically distinct, collectivist anarchism flows naturally into being more or less pure communism. So, in our brief summary of alternative polities, we will take a look at this next.

Communism

Communism is a system of government — or rather, no government — proposed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. (See, in particular, *The Communist Manifesto*.) Whilst there are similarities between collectivism and communism there are also differences. Communism distributes all wealth by default. Proudhon took up this problem of excessive sharing in *What is Property?* He says:

'Communism is oppression and slavery… Communism is essentially opposed to the free exercise of our faculties, to our noblest desires our deepest feelings…

communism violates the sovereignty of the conscience of equality: the first by restricting spontaneity of mind and heart, and freedom of thought and action; the second, by placing labour and laziness, skill and stupidity, and even vice and virtue on an equality in point of comfort.'

Pierre Joseph Proudhon — *What is Property?*

Proudhon, then, was picking up on the point above, about the equality of outcome and whether this is truly fair, but also hinting at the further point referred to earlier, that this kind of distribution inevitably involves a structure to make it work — a state — in order to enforce the kind of equality that the communists seem to think could exist naturally.

Communism though, like anarchism, is a belief in no government. If people believe that a fair distribution of resources is required and that a bureaucracy needs to be put in place to achieve it, then this is socialism rather than anarchism or communism. So, whilst there may be 'socialist' states, if we are to be true to the original definition of communism then there cannot be communist states. The only 'state' in communism is an intermediate stage, known as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' — which allows for the re-distribution of wealth and the eventual more or less equality of all citizens. The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' leads to a change in the 'superstructure' — in Karl Marx's terms — meaning culture changes to accept, as a given, a more egalitarian society. This, in turn, leads to full communism, which can be defined as:

1. Distribution of wealth according to need, no longer according to labour performed.
2. No classes.
3. The state withers away.
4. Very high productivity, so there is plenty for all.
5. High socialist consciousness — people work without incentives.
6. More equality, but not absolute equality.
7. No money.
8. A communal economy.
9. The economy managed by a free and equal association of producers.
10. The differences between occupations disappear, so that there is no social distinction between town and country.
11. Each person does about as much physical as intellectual labour.

12. The system is … worldwide.

The countries that have come closest to establishing communism have had, arguably, very bad experiences. But no nation has really come that close to full communism. For all its faults, it remains a noble ambition. Anarchism and communism were, and are, of course, identified as utopias — which some of their advocates accept and others fight to reject.

In this chapter we are not looking, at this stage, to consider left/right issues, but one that can be mentioned here, in passing, is the 'Rochdale principles' of Robert Owen, which are often taken as the basis for socialism. See endnote.[7] (It is interesting to compare the very practical suggestions of Owen's principles, and how these were enacted in his mill works in Scotland, with the ideas of Charles Fourier, and his 'phalanesteries', ideal communities, which he proposed and a few of which were actually built.)

Communism hoped for those 'oppressed' by a powerful elite to regain the 'means of production' and therefore be able to take control of their own lives. Ironically, both Marx and, arguably the founder of modern economics, Adam Smith, saw capitalism as a necessary intermediate stage for a better world. Whilst writing about capital and acknowledging the almost magical power by which all kinds of resources are mediated through money, nonetheless Marx seems to have failed to appreciate the lure of money to almost everyone. In large societies, with few social bonds, selfishness becomes a growing problem. Consumption is an addiction. Privatopia reigns.

Releasing serfs and peasants from domination only gave room for human nature (at least the more selfish part) to exert its tendency to profit from and exploit people. '…to each according to their need' is open to a lot of hyperbole when it is our own needs that we are considering. The bourgeois capitalist is a caricature that communists, and Marxists generally, just replace with an equally unlikely caricature of 'the worker'. This presents us with too simplistic a picture — valorising one group over another is divisive and ignores the complexity of real people. As Proudhon seems to be alluding to in the quote above, only a powerful bureaucracy was able to enforce the kind of equality that had been envisioned by communism, and in many ways this became no better than the previous exploitation by the rich elite — perhaps worse.

Communism aims at changing the system, and this will, in turn, change the social relations between people. But, as we explore elsewhere in this work, we could well ask whether change really can come about by changing the structure (capitalism and/or economics) first, such that the 'superstructure' — the social relations, the culture and the way people view the world — will likewise change to accommodate the structural change. My conclusion is that people and culture need to change, and that structural change can only follow once this happens. (I have to add here that what has been explained above about base and superstructure is the usual interpretation of Marxism, and has filtered through to economics generally. Marx and Engels themselves were a good deal more

ambivalent about what takes precedence — the culture or the economics.)

One contemporary activist and author who has brought valuable insights to these matters — and, especially, the class issue — is Michael Albert. Albert points out that between workers and capitalists there is a third group, which he refers to as the co-ordinator class. Such professions as doctors, engineers, architects and lawyers tend to exercise a lot of control within society and their position, Albert argues, is privileged. Albert even suggests that a revolution, supposedly to benefit the working class (as in the initial stage of communism, to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat, described above) would actually benefit the co-ordinator class. It is these people, he suggests, who would take up the administrative roles in the reformed society, giving them extra power, whilst the lot of the workers remains little changed.[8] It may even have been the jealousy of the co-ordinator class for the ruling elite that has been the real source of revolution in the past. The workers did not benefit — they just saw a change in their oppressors. Albert goes on to describe what he considers a just way of arranging work and paying an equitable wage for people's contribution to society.[9] A similar split into three layers of society occurs in many utopian novels, and indeed in the classic dystopian novel, *1984*.

As mentioned above, whilst there may be 'socialist' states, there cannot be communist states, if we are to be true to the original definition of communism. Anarchism and communism, in all their forms, mean no

government. We will return to anarchism again later in the chapter, but for now, let's move on to look at the other side of things. If we were to accept the need for government, then what kind of government would we wish for?

The Purpose of Government

One of the benefits of looking at anarchism and communism is as a wake-up call. If we were to try to run our lives without government we would at once realise the responsibilities that would be on all of us for getting society to function. If, however, we agreed on the need for a government, it does not mean that we can then shirk all responsibility and just blame the politicians when things go wrong. We still need to take some responsibility for deciding on what kind of government best suits our needs.

John Stuart Mill identified: '… one very simple principle as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control… That principle is… [T]hat the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community against his will, is to prevent harm to others.' (John Stuart Mill — *On Liberty*.)

Thomas Jefferson said: 'The care of life and happiness and not their destruction, is the first and only legitimate object of good government.'

It is difficult to think of any government disagreeing with Mill and Jefferson, but, of course, the aims they identified are very broad and general ones. Also, they tend to be focused

on preventing things from going wrong, rather than actively making things better.

A more cynical view of government is that it is primarily for the protection of property — and, of course, this invariably means the protection of the rich over the poor.[10] Government's function of protecting private property comes originally from Cicero. Meanwhile Rousseau said: 'Property is the true foundation of civil society.' However, also in his *Discourse on Inequality*, he argues that property brings discord and conflict. He agrees that government is established to protect the property rights of the rich over the poor. But this strategy, he told us, 'irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, established for all time the law of property and inequality… and for the benefit of the few ambitious men, subjected the human race thenceforth to labour, servitude and misery.' From this, and other criticisms, we might say that government is the 'monopoly of legitimate violence', that is, the only power that can uphold its rules by force over its citizens.

Apart from preventing harm and protecting property, could we identify some further aims for government that provide more of a vision for a better world? Rousseau gave us a starting point: 'One of the most important things for a government to do, therefore, is to prevent extreme inequality of wealth, not by depriving the rich of their possessions, but by denying everyone the means of accumulating them; and not by building poor-houses but by ensuring that the citizens do not become poor.' (*The Social Contract*.) Rousseau's quote takes us back to our discussion of the commons in the previous chapter. We could say that

government's chief purpose, other than preventing harm, is to manage the commons. We saw that, in a sense, governments already do this in an indirect way. Could it be more direct and conscious, so that we really get to grips with how we might use natural resources and protect wild nature?

So what about a world where the purpose of government is to realise the common good, rather than just to protect whatever goods we might be holding on to at the moment? What about a world that is premised on human flourishing, with an emphasis on compassion, equity, enhancement of the environment, a respect for nature and a sense of responsibility for our shared natural commons? If we agree that some kind of governance is a good thing, then can we find a way of getting a governance system that focuses on these kinds of aims?

Types of Government

What kind of government would deliver such solutions? How do we begin to sort out the various strands of political thought that are on offer?

We have to go back to the ancient Greeks, to Plato and Aristotle, to get our definitions. From them, we have: One ruler is a monarchy or dictatorship. Rule by a few is an aristocracy. Rule by many is a constitution or a polity. The perversion of a monarchy is called a tyranny. The perversion of an aristocracy is called an oligarchy. We are probably fine with these definitions, but then, for the ancient Greeks, the perversion of a constitutional government is,

amazingly, a democracy. For instance, from Aristotle, the definitions are described like this: ‘We have thus, as the three subdivisions of the “right” type, kingship, aristocracy and “constitutional government”, or “polity”: as the three subdivisions of the “wrong” type, tyranny, oligarchy and democracy.’ (Aristotle — *The Politics*.) The exact meaning of all these terms has evolved somewhat since the ancient Greeks, but it’s true that democracy still presents problems for some as a government system. American satirist HL. Mencken, for instance, said that to believe in democracy is to believe that, ‘collective wisdom will emerge from individual ignorance’. If, like many nations today, we consider democracy to be the ideal form of government, then we will have to dig deeper into the meanings of democracy, to unravel these issues.

Notwithstanding the ancient Greeks, most nations today take pride in describing themselves as democracies. They would normally use the term ‘representative democracy’. This phrase might imply a mixture of the governance forms outlined above: It is rule by the many — because we all decide who will represent us. At the same time though, it is rule by the few — those chosen to represent us. The adoption of representative democracy — often following the British format, the ‘Westminster model’ — occurs, and persists, under the belief that having the correct system in place will result in the best decisions being made — a process known as ‘proceduralism’ — the decisions proceed from the system. (The alternative is known by the term ‘instrumentalism’, where decisions are based on

circumstances, fitness for purpose and pragmatism. Instrumentalism is probably better described here as 'consequentialism' — where governments just respond to the consequences of their situation and of the decisions they make.)

Representative democracy suggests a kind of balance between the desire to get everyone's opinion, but at the same time having some experts take on the actual business of governing. Our representatives, in theory, listen to their electorate, take a balanced view of what is required, then act on this in the interests of society, as best they can. Our suspicions though, are that this is not really what is happening. The suspicion is that under the guise of representative democracy, we have at least an aristocracy, who make decisions under their own light. And, if we are especially cynical of government, we might conclude that, in fact, we have an oligarchy, the perversion of rule by the few, acting in the interests of big business and others who can pay for their voice in politics. Arguably, it is the financial oligarchy who are the ruling class in our day — the 1%, as they have come to be known since the Occupy movement.

Rule by the few is therefore always fraught with this tension of just whose interests the few are promoting; their own, or the population at large. Furthermore, the aristocracy needs to find a justification for their position of power, and this is usually by way of claiming a greater ability to make judgements. We describe this as a 'meritocracy', and those who benefit from it are the first to claim that a meritocracy represents

fairness. Those at the top may insist that their position is acquired through competence, but those at the bottom suspect that it is more by money and privilege that the few have acquired their power. A meritocracy based on presumed leadership and managerial skills is as fraught as suggesting that class distinctions should be the basis for deciding leadership. Darren Anderson says:

'If you acquire enough money identities are accepted and sins forgiven. The only real crime is the absence of money. Due to the variety of ways wealth is accumulated, myths are required, not least the fabulous mirage of meritocracy. The more you own the more you are, and the more deserving of it you've been. Those who have nothing are nothing and deserve nothing but contempt.' Darren Anderson — *Imaginary Cities*. (The term 'meritocracy' itself, comes from a 1958 novel by Michael Young — *The Rise of the Meritocracy*.)

Could we ever resolve this and perhaps set up intelligence as a genuine criterion for a meritocracy? (Plato's wish for 'philosopher kings', which some take to have been ironic, is the desire for rule based on knowledge and intelligence. It is sometimes known as an 'epistocracy'.) If we could get to a meritocracy that was genuinely fair, then would that be a good move? At first strike, it might look promising, but some would argue that an 'equality of merit' is, in fact, a deeply troubling notion. Whilst it suggests that it's fair, it implicitly says that there are people who simply are not good enough. If the reader were one of the ones left out as a result, then what crumb of comfort is the state going to offer, as it

overlooks your voice, your opinion and your needs? It goes back to the issue of trust — are ordinary people bright enough? Even if it were concluded that they are not, should people be denied the right to decide their own future, based on some (rather difficult to apply) standard of intelligence?

So much then for representative democracy, which we have seen is really 'rule by the few'. What about rule by the many? Going back to the Greek definitions, the 'polity' or 'constitutional government' that is taken to be the good form of rule by the many is not something that is too clearly defined. It seems in modern times that we have just taken representative democracy to be the constitutional government that is being referred to. But for this to be true then things would need to be very different. There would need to be a true voice for all citizens. We return to this below, but for now we can ask why democracy is seen as being a corruption by the Greeks? To answer this, imagine for a moment that all decisions in the country were decided by a referendum (known as 'direct democracy'). The problem immediately arises that — even if a great deal of information is provided about what is being asked — some people will not have the time or inclination to study the question fully, whilst others may make their choice for very dubious reasons. There is no accountability, or mechanism for ensuring that everyone makes responsible choices. (This, it seems, was the chief concern of the ancient Greeks and also one of the problems that representative democracy seeks to address. They were also concerned that people with a particular talent for

persuasive and charming speech might lure citizens into bad decisions.) Direct democracy also risks the 'tyranny of the majority', where a majority make a really bad or morally suspect decision. There is no way to correct for this possibility from within the system. Then again, representative democracy can suffer from its own version of a 'tyranny of the majority'. Elected leaders may collectively reach very bad decisions and there is no process in place to correct this until they next come round for re-election. It could be argued that, even with these concerns, such a system would be fair. After all, a free vote is a free vote, and why should anyone set themselves up to say that anyone else has not made a 'responsible' choice, or has not considered the evidence put before them in a reasonable manner? There is an argument then that 'direct democracy' is, at least, a step up from our current system. But it still does not address the question of decision reached by an appropriate level of deliberation. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for instance, made this distinction; that the people may choose on behalf of what is good for society, rather than what is good for themselves individually.[11]

As mentioned above, we might also question the idea that democracy (or any form of political system) is 'government by consent'. We have never been asked if we want to be governed, so choosing a candidate for a system already imposed on us does not constitute consent. Likewise, not voting at all does not imply consent, in that, had a citizen preferred something different, they would have voted. The 'choices' on offer (if there are any at all) may not be anything the citizen would want, so

they are not consenting by refraining from voting.

Let's assume that we did, at least, consent to the principle of government. The question of consent then moves to us citizens having some knowledge of the policies that governments may be seeking to put in place. We are being asked — through voting, or some other means — to give an informed opinion of our choices. So, what about informed consent? We are not given the facts about decisions the government is trying to make, or given much of an opportunity to even comment on them. No doubt — at least, in theory — this information is available somewhere, and we could access it, given enough time and effort. But is this really enough to say that we are giving informed consent? It seems like too much of a stretch.

Could people then live free of government (since it is imposed on us without our consent)? No. Our only choice would be to live in another country, under a different government that we also have not chosen. International law prevents us living in Antarctica — even if we wanted to. Perhaps there is scope, still, for indigenous peoples and people who choose to go 'off-grid'. We will be exploring this in later chapters. Maybe, eventually there will be a chance to live on other planets without government. For the moment though, almost everyone in the world is forced to live under a government they have not asked for.

Federations and Assemblies

From what has been described above, the impression may have been given that anarchism (and communism, in its idealised form) would have no organisational structures at all. But this is not the case. It is rather the hierarchies of power, the bureaucracies and the institutions that are the problem for those who would advocate no government. The main concern with these types of organisation is that they harden into systems that just continue with their own momentum, getting increasingly out of touch with the people they are intended to serve and often imposing rules and regulations for their own sake with scant regard to the impact all the bureaucracy has on the smooth-running of society. (See Proudhon's quote above.) By contrast, anarchism generally suggests federations to make decisions at the local level. Federations are much less formal arrangements of people, coming together to make the pragmatic decisions necessary for any given situation. Power, if you like, is 'radically devolved'. For the larger decisions there are federations of federations that affect regions and nations. (See, for instance, Proudhon.)[12, 13]
Peter Kropotkin takes up this idea in his definition of anarchism as:

'…the name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government — harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the purposes of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilised being.'
Peter Kropotkin — *Anarchy*.

Within a system of federations there is a reciprocity between the small-scale, grass-roots levels of communities and neighbourhoods and the wider circles of town, county, region and nation. Some decisions inevitably need to be made at the broader levels (so we may have to reluctantly refer to them as top-down). We can think here of large-scale infrastructure, such as power grids and the road network. We also need to consider international interests such as foreign trade, immigration, defence and efforts to mitigate climate change.

Likewise anarchism speaks of 'assemblies' rather than institutions. What does this mean? It means that those concerns that span wider society do not become fossilised in hierarchies. It means that the assemblies that see to things like transport, health care and education will be flexible, open to change and responsive to new circumstances. When it comes to trade, there is an emphasis on contracts, rather than government legislation. These wider forms of governance — the federations of federations — are where the character of a society comes from. Society is not just a collection of individuals — it's the organisations and the communities that give us the 'feel' of the nation, its cities and its lifestyles. So if we are feeling oppressed, it may well be the forms of government and its bureaucracies and institutions that are oppressing us.

I must however introduce a caveat here. It is important to understand that the idea of federalism that I am taking from the anarchists is the grass-roots, bottom-up system and it is

this form of federalism that I am advocating here and throughout this book. From Proudhon, it is not altogether clear that this is what he meant — and indeed we see the word federalism used by the American government and by the Liberal Democrats in the UK to mean quite a different thing. Murray Bookchin suggests the word 'confederalism' as an alternative, to distinguish the two types. (See Bookchin's essays in *The Next Revolution*.) Bookchin further contrasts 'state' with 'polity' (in contrast to AC Grayling, who valorises 'statecraft' over politics). Bookchin saw state as the top-down and hierarchical form of governance (and, he suggested, the way the word federalism is used might still suggest this). Meanwhile, for him, 'politics' is 'of the people' — *polis*, polity and politics are all related terms. So, whilst we may dislike the word politics, Bookchin was trying to get us back to its true meaning — to simply the way people choose to govern themselves. (In contrast, Bookchin was slightly cynical of Proudhon, because he was somewhat nationalist whilst others dismiss Bookchin as not truly an anarchist because they regard his federalism/confederalism as still a 'statist' idea.)

John Holloway (*Change the World without Taking Power*) fights desperately against institutions. His argument is that these make 'doing' subordinate to 'being' — in other words, the institution, once formed, is just accepted as a norm — it just is. Therefore, there is no motivation to create, to do, and by implication to constantly challenge the status quo for different modes of living. Institutions (including governments) are hierarchies frozen in place by

ideologies. Assemblies are the more relaxed form of organisation that are flexible to circumstances.[14]

With these ideas in mind, here is another list of proposals, in some ways rather similar to the definitions of communism given earlier in the chapter, but hopefully a little closer to what may be arrived at in this process of forming federations:

Rules of the Federation of Egalitarian Communities:
1. Holds its land, labour, income and other resources in common.
2. Assumes responsibility for the needs of its members, receiving the produce of their labour and distributing these equally according to need.
3. Practises non-violence.
4. Uses forms of decision-making in which members have an equal opportunity to participate, either through consensus, direct vote, or right of appeal or override.
5. Actively works to establish the equality of all people and does not permit discrimination on the basis of race, class, creed, ethnic origin, age, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity.
6. Acts to conserve natural resources for present and future generations while striving to continually improve ecological awareness and practice.

I would probably quibble only with point number one in the above rules. This book suggests that, at most, only 'land' (in other words, the natural commons) is held in common and that labour and income are kept or shared as society and

individuals decide. But then, if I am to live by my own lights, it's not for me to say.

With federalism we come to a different form of rule by the many that can be introduced — a genuine polity, if you will. This is known sometimes as deliberative democracy, or as participatory politics. It is to choose from amongst ordinary citizens, those who will make decisions for the general population. And this decision-making process is open to everyone, no matter their education, religion, political views, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. Whilst a few are chosen out of the general population, and this is representation of a kind, it is not establishing a ruling class elite, who might seek to perpetuate their power. At the same time, it avoids the problems identified above, that just asking everyone to vote on an issue might mean that only a minority will give complex questions the time and effort needed for a good decision. There may be a system for how those in office are chosen and there may be an element of randomness to this — 'sortition' — as with a jury. The chapters that follow explore this in more depth and look at the various ways different forms of deliberative democracy might be achieved.

Deliberative democracy means establishing a political system that genuinely listens and responds appropriately — finding a way of achieving a system that serves us better than the ones we have at present. One of the fundamental divides in our country is between those who have a voice and those who do not. If we are to seek positive change then good governance is all about engagement. What are

the aims? Number one is that we all have a say. All else follows from this. The more we are willing to participate, the more established and relevant our governance system can become. And there is an element of responsibility on all of us for this to work. Rather than think cynically that our voices will never be heard and those in power will just do whatever they want (usually for their own self-interest or the interests of big business) we can take responsibility and participate. The options raised in this chapter are presented so that we know what choices we might have — if only we were allowed to choose.

What do the Utopias make of the Governance Options?

It has to be remembered that values such as freedom, equality, justice and rights, which we have looked at to some extent in this chapter, are ideals. Like institutions, ideals themselves can get frozen in place, and what was once a lively debate about finding the right path forward for a society, simply fossilises into a set of laws and conventions that may become increasingly out of touch with the people they were designed to serve. We noted in Chapter 1 that ideals can lack pragmatic real-world applications that make them concrete to us as we try to live by them. A utopia, by contrast, has the opposite problem — all the suggestions are concrete. As Chapter 1 suggested, we need a balance of the two. This, I think, is why anarchism stresses so much the need to organise ourselves in different ways. As John Holloway suggests above, it avoids being stifled. Radical devolution allows the problems of power

to be dissolved, by seeking out our voices at the grass-roots.

It might seem at first that our current world of Privatopia and future world of Cornucopia would value freedom and lack of interference from bureaucracy above anything else. As such, they might prefer the anarchist views expressed earlier in this chapter. Indeed, we noted that the individualist anarchism quest for freedom is sometimes likened to neo-liberalism. However, I hope I've shown in this chapter that this would be a mistaken view, and as we look at neo-liberalism in more depth in a later chapter, we will see just how different they really are. Anarchism takes the responsibility that goes along with freedom very seriously. Privatopia and Cornucopia may be more complacent about government, or, as we will explore in later chapters, they may offer the impression that they are for freedom, but all the while they are seeking substantial legislation that protects private interests.

Ecotopians, by contrast, would probably fall in with what we have discussed under collectivism above — indeed those not sympathetic to the Ecotopians' concerns often accuse them of using climate change as a cover for a radical left-wing political agenda. There are exceptions however. I am thinking especially of philosopher Roger Scruton's conservatism, described in his book, *A View from Somewhere*. Perhaps a conservatism not immediately recognisable to the UK political party. Nevertheless, it shows, I think, that Ecotopia can cover a broad range of political opinion.

When we look back at the three concerns raised in the Introduction — Where is the vision? Why is the good life premised on consumption? Why are politics so polarised? — I hope it's clear that even in politics there are still utopian visions on offer, and as we focus in on more details of a viable polity, I hope this will become clearer. We have not touched so much on what constitutes a 'good life' here — that must wait for future chapters. But we have seen a little of the polarisation of politics already in this chapter. The differences of political perspective will be drawn out further as we progress. Also, with regard to that fourth concern — trust — I think we see this coming through with the discussion on anarchism. Anarchism puts a lot of trust in the good will of ordinary people and our ability to make good and pragmatic decisions. That's why anarchist ideas have been such a focus for us here. Rousseau told us: 'Man is born free and everywhere is in chains.' Note that he said, '*and* everywhere', not, 'but everywhere'. There is always a balance of freedom and restraint, licence and responsibility, involved in any polity and we've already seen something of how this might work with regard to ownership and sharing in the last two chapters. If then, as Rousseau seems to have suggested, freedom requires responsibility, are we responsible enough to cope with decision-making — whatever form it might take?

Conclusion

The problem with politics is that we can be complacent.[15] When there is a crisis, we notice

things, and see how strange and broken the system really is. But for the most part, we are all busy making a living and caring for our families, and don't often stop to examine the insidious march of changes that are being rolled out under our noses, for which no-one has asked and no-one has been given the opportunity to discuss. I can't remember anyone asking us recently; what kind of government would you like? Not: What political party should be in power, or: Who would you like as an MP, but: Would you like a monarchy, or to be ruled by an elite, or should rule be by the many — and if so, how should this be organised? Most governments are illegitimate. Meanwhile, in our name, and without our express consent, governments see fit to build weapons of mass destruction deemed illegal by the international community: See fit to start wars with other nations despite mass protest against war by their own people: See fit to allow the destruction of the Earth's eco-systems and bio-diversity: See fit to allow the warming of the planet and change to climate and weather patterns that could bring flooding and devastation to millions. The list goes on. Why is it that we are never asked?

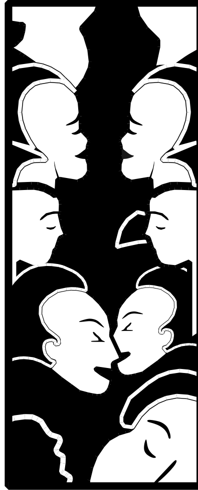
But then, sometimes, the need for choice — to assert ourselves, to make decisions, to look at things differently — might present itself. At this point, I suggest, there is a little of the spirit of the anarchist in us. We are all on the anarchism spectrum.

Speaking of anarchism, Cindy Milstein says: 'It implies a lavish boundless sense of generosity, in which people support each other and each other's projects. It expresses an open-handed

spirit of abundance, in which kindness is never in short supply. It points to new relations of sharing and helping, mentoring and giving back, as the very basis of social organization'. (Cindy Milstein — *Anarchism and its Aspirations*.)

Milstein touches on some concerns that are often neglected by politics. Along with her, this book suggests it is social relations (indeed, pleasure) that are the true base of a society and to realise a vision for a better world, we must wake up to their importance. But most politics automatically assumes the material economy — production and consumption — as the real base of society: an economy just of transactions rather than compassion and equity. Combating this blindness to social relations is where a more genuine political arrangement may serve us.

Is it time then for a revolution? As I've said elsewhere in this work — be careful what you wish for. A developed society depends on stability — almost on a minute by minute basis — for its continued functioning. Any break in the smooth workings of society is likely to lead to trouble very quickly. Let's face it, in most developed nations, a revolution is just not going to happen. But as we've noted earlier, there are more gradual forms of change and so reform may be the better option, for whatever we may feel is needed for a better world. I have left things open in this chapter and just explored the many options for government that are available to us. Now it's time to get more specific. And it is to community that, I feel, we need to look to find further answers. We start, in the next chapter, at the smallest of scales, and follow the journey from there.



5 Community on a Small Scale

'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.'

- Margaret Mead

At this point in the book we have visions of utopia, views on ownership, ideas about the commons and how the natural commons may be more fairly shared and more sustainably managed. In the last chapter, we looked at the question of whether government is necessary, and then we looked at various forms of government that have been proposed. When we considered government by the many, we discussed the need for everyone to have a voice, but also the need to ensure that issues are considered carefully by all those who will be affected by the matters under debate. This

chapter and the next look at how this might be achieved in more detail. It is an approach that starts from the very smallest of scales and then builds gradually to take up the bigger solutions of political and economic systems.

Charles Eisenstein (*Sacred Economics*) points out that today's communities are only really about shared interests and hobbies. We 'outsource' almost all our immediate needs to strangers — be it for food, clothing, housing, child-minding, education or health-care. If one person does not provide the goods or services we need, then we just go somewhere else. As he points out, it does not really matter who provides these things — they are all paid for by money, so they all become equivalent. There is no relationship in such transactions — except the most superficial of acquaintances. By contrast, community, for Eisenstein, is inevitably local. Without a reliance on our neighbours for our everyday sustenance, there is, for him, no real community. If we are to challenge the current story of Privatopia and propose a new story, then this issue of community — especially small-scale, local community — is especially important.

The Issue of Scale

Small-scale organisations — whether they be neighbourhoods, businesses or institutions — have the enormous advantage that the participants will be known to each other personally. We have evolved as a social species and can relate to a circle of around 150 individuals at most. That is why, I believe, small groups are the key to larger organisations, and

hence to our politics and our economy. People who disrupt meetings or communities are thereby exposed to the possibility of being made to feel guilty and perhaps even excluded; almost the worst fate that can befall us humans.

In *Nowtopia*, Chris Carlsson looks at specific types of community activity that he sees as emblematic of the coming change to a different social and economic world. His focus is on community garden projects, cycling, DIY fuel sources and festivals. *Nowtopia* is a positive and intelligent book as far as it goes. The author, however, identifies scale as a potential problem for the types of projects he explores. As projects flourish and grow in scale, they seemingly inevitably take on the features of the consumer capitalist corporations that they have initially tried to replace. They become bureaucracies. Perhaps this is not inevitable, and there are examples of businesses that have maintained their style and ethic whilst growing larger (often by breaking up into smaller autonomous units, only tenuously connected). Nonetheless, it shows the power of our current mindset, such that few of us are able to envisage society-wide alternatives, let alone find ways to realise them. Garrett Hardin (him of the Tragedy of the Commons) warned us of the dangers of scaling up. He said:
'Perhaps no shortcoming of utopian thinkers is as striking as their apparent blindness to scale and its implications. A politico-economic system that works well with small numbers may fail utterly with large. This is one of the most important factors accounting for the ultimate failure of Utopian communities.'
Garrett Hardin — *Filters Against Folly*.

So we have to be mindful of this warning as the argument progresses in this chapter and the next.

Notwithstanding Hardin's warnings, I think small is where we ought to start. We noted above that we relate best in smaller groups. Small-scale is also invariably local and place-based, and I feel this is essential for maintaining the care and respect we need to show to both wild nature and to our own human settlements. Small-scale, as we have seen, is also personal. It gives the opportunity for people to deepen as individuals — to gain some wisdom. It allows for small failures, that the local community can forgive and also embrace and learn from. It allows a wider vision to be built up through many smaller visions, even whilst acknowledging that there sometimes need to be larger organisations and bigger plans.

Starting with Ourselves

We might then look to start at the smallest scale of all; that is, just with ourselves. As people, we are both natural commons and wild nature. We are natural commons because of our physical and intellectual labour. We are also wild nature in that we are wild in mind, body and soul. We can describe ourselves as a commons because the commons is about more than natural resources, but also about the social relations around these resources, and about individual acts of commoning. It is this deep connection with wild nature and consequently our deep connection with others that is the real basis for compassion — and the real basis of successful societies.

We are not therefore a Privatopia within ourselves. If we are instead a commons, then we can let go of so much baggage. We can give up the defensiveness that so often causes us such stress, even whilst we are trying to protect ourselves. Stepping back from all the petty concerns of life lets us have a broader vision for what our lives are about and what our society might be about. Do we have that view of ourselves at the moment? I'd suggest that often we do not, as we are led to believe that we must earn the respect of society, earn our place in the economy, earn our right to be heard as citizens through education, and so forth. We have become cut off from who we are as persons. To change society means changing people at a deep level and not just changing the politics, or the economics. But arguably the change in ourselves is more about realising who we already are, rather than becoming someone new.

As such, wider society needs to recognise that every person has integrity, dignity and intrinsic value. There is nothing to be proven or earned. Society also needs to take responsibility for ensuring that we are reasonably rewarded for our work and help will be there if we fall on hard times. We examined these key factors in relation to governance in the previous chapter. This is a reciprocal arrangement — freedom with responsibility. The wider community owes us as individuals respect and care. Individually and collectively, we owe respect and care to the natural commons, to wild nature and to human society as a whole.

Personal Change leading to Vision

Such matters as climate change, bio-diversity and defence are broad issues for nations and societies where current governments are failing badly. I suggest that the first thing that is needed is for us as individuals to recognise these and other concerns as being as much about ourselves as it is about people 'out there' who perhaps we feel should take responsibility. As we touched on towards the end of the last chapter, it is the social relations within society that really make towards its best functioning. It is social relations that drive our economics and should drive our governance — not the other way around. I think we can aim high and work with the minority of dissenting voices who seek such a profound change.

When we think of ourselves as part of a commons, then we take on board the need to share a common responsibility for contributing to society. Much of this is simply about 're-making' human culture, through food, clothing, housing and families. (All of which is usually referred to as 'maintenance' or 'reproduction' in economics.) But we can do even these basic things either well or badly. Beyond this, there may be specific missions to be realised. As well as realising the 'freedom from' that good governance offers us, we can realise the 'freedom to'. It is a freedom to make, above all else, and a freedom to 're-make'. Industrial economies have divided us from our 'making', as John Holloway has described, and leave us alienated and dependent. Likewise, our re-making has been ignored and diminished, and yet this is also integral to who we are. When we

are with friends they re-make us. In conversation, we are re-made. With our partners and children we are re-made. When we take up some satisfying work then we make and we re-make and are re-made in return. In all of this we can be giving pleasure and creating beauty. I think any vision for a new story needs to start from these simple objectives. Re-making then covers a broad spectrum of ideas, from the daily chores of keeping house, feeding and clothing, ('maintenance' or 'reproduction') through to work, relationships, family and love.

In short, the vision can be summarised as: 'Fall in love with the world.' Then it is down to our hard work and co-operation that this vision is first explored and described and then brought into reality. We need both the inspiration and the perspiration.

New Missions are formed by Working Together

The vision is what we wish the world to be like. The mission is how we set about achieving this. The aims are the smaller tasks that go towards the mission. A governance system known as Sociocracy, which we will discuss later in the chapter, summarises vision, mission and aims by saying: 'We are dreaming of a world where it is true that… (vision). We work to… (mission), by… (aims).' (From Ted J. Rau and Jerry Koch-Gonzalez — *Many Voices, One Song*.) If we can get things right amongst a small group of people then the hope is that we will get things right on a larger scale. Provided the big-scale structures do not become anonymous bureaucracies, it is

possible. Big politics can instead be discussions between the right people for whatever task is in hand. Big politics still comes down to a few people in a room together, talking things through. As such, all that applies in this chapter to small communities can remain relevant as we scale up.

To realise a vision for a new story we inevitably have to work together. It relies on people being fully engaged, affirming towards one another and the communities and places where we live. Those who share our pleasures and our passions are likely to be those with whom we strike up a bond. We work best with people who affirm us. In turn, we can aim to be the kind of people who affirm others. A willingness to fail and the ability to forgive the failures in ourselves and others is a good place to be. Only then will our utopias be ones that can evolve and adapt to new circumstances and to changes in people and communities.

In working together though, we immediately come up against questions of power and hierarchy. As we saw in the previous chapter, it was often the anarchist reformers who had — and still have — a particular aversion to the problems that power structures can create. To have a successful means of working together, we therefore have to have a think about how these issues might play out.

Power and Hierarchy

'Starhawk' (*The Spiral Dance*, *Truth or Dare*) suggests that our default story is one of 'power over' and as such, we often unconsciously adopt

a position of feeling ‘dis-empowered’. The default story suggests that we have only extrinsic value, derived from our usefulness, financial status or such like. Such extrinsic values are only relevant to an atomised, individualistic world and only really achievable by some people, some of the time. We need to change the story, she suggests, to one of ‘power within’ and ‘power with’. As people, we have intrinsic value (hence ‘power within’) Furthermore, we are connected to others, and hence, ‘power with’. (Starhawk also reminds us that genuine value — intrinsic or imminent value — is always embodied.) Other authors contrast *Logos* power (that seeks to dominate) with *Eros* power (which seeks to unite and cohere).

By way of contrast to these views, Jordan Peterson (*12 Rules for Life — An Antidote to Chaos*) suggests that the collective pursuit of any valued goal produces a hierarchy, since some people will be better than others at pursuing that goal. Without seeking goals in life, Peterson says, there is no purpose. But the consequence is that we must inevitably have hierarchy. However, Peterson suggests, there are many different personal goals open to all of us, and so there are many opportunities for us to experience fulfilment of our meanings and purposes in life.

Peterson suggests that there is no evidence that patriarchy is pathological and has its source in the male domination of women rather than being part of our biological nature. (Famously he discusses this in relation to lobsters.) Also, he dismisses the idea that hierarchies are all based on power and aimed at exclusion. By

contrast, he suggests that it is competence rather than power that is the prime determinant of status. Ability, skill and intelligence are valued highly in our culture. Faced with requiring brain surgery, for instance, and given a choice of surgeons, would we not all choose our surgeon on the basis of qualifications, skill and intelligence?

John Holloway sums up the divisiveness of power-over relations:
'Power-over reaches into us and transforms us, forcing us to participate in its reproduction. The rigidification of social relations, the that's-the-way-things-are-ness… is not just outside us (in society), but reaches into us as well, into the way that we think, the way we act, the way we are, the fact that we are. In the process of being separated from our done and from our doing, [this is Holloway's manner of expressing labour being alienated from the means of production] we ourselves are damaged. Our activity is transformed into greed for money, our co-operation with fellow doers is transformed into an instrumental relation mediated by money and competition. The innocence of our doing, of our power-to, becomes a guilty participation in the exercise of power-over. Our estrangement from doing is a self-estrangement. Here is no pure revolutionary subject, but damaged humanity.' (John Holloway — *Change the World Without Taking Power*.)

These competing views of hierarchy are mirrored in our view of nature. Nature used to be 'red in tooth and claw' but now symbiosis and 'mutual aid' is the order of the day, and this is often as a result of rejecting the old 'survival of

the fittest' view of nature in favour of one that is more co-operative. (Even 'fittest' may have different meanings — such as the ability to fit into a niche and to co-operate, rather than just to compete or conquer.) But both views of nature can be supported. Nature is still as much hierarchical and competitive as she is co-operative and mutually sustaining. Such features carry across to our own human nature. As such, we are as much 'power over' as we are 'power with'.

Let's face it, hierarchy and power are complex issues. Trying to figure them out can often be an abstract and philosophical exercise (although of course with practical implications). Hierarchy and power may be innate to human nature, or they may have come about because of culture. Either way, it's just a plain fact that there are hierarchies. I think a recognition of this basic feature of human nature — and/or human culture — is the way to go. There is likely to always be a need for layers of decision-making in human cultures, so we have to work with this and try to balance things up as fairly as we possibly can.

Equality in Groups

It is reasonable to say that communities of all types were once more hierarchical in nature. There would be a recognised 'leader' of some sort and then a structured authority within which people understood their place. If they existed at all, wider authorities such as kingdoms or national governments, had a more tenuous hold over the everyday lives of an individual. Nowadays, in the majority of

societies, this has changed. Larger bureaucracies, of whatever political stripe, look after most of our needs. We see small communities as something additional to the immediate concerns of everyday life, so we do not view the idea of community in the same way as we view authority and large bureaucracy. In particular, we seem to have an expectation of equality within a community context. Robert Greene (*Power*) has this warning for us:
'In the past, an entire nation would be ruled by a king and his handful of ministers. Only the elite had power to play with. Over the centuries, power has gradually become more and more diffused and democratised. This has created, however, a common misperception that groups no longer have centres of power — that power is spread out and scattered among many people. Actually, however, power has changed in its numbers but not in its essence. There may be fewer tyrants commanding the power of life and death over millions, but there remain thousands of petty tyrants ruling smaller realms, and enforcing their will through indirect power games, charisma and so on. In every group, power is concentrated in the hands of one or two people, for this is one area where human nature will never change: People will congregate around a single strong personality like planets orbiting a sun.' Robert Greene — *Power*.

Greene's book is a brilliant, if disturbing, read. It may look mostly to history for examples of the behaviour of tyrants, but as the quote above warns us, the powerful still behave in much the same way today. Even more disturbing is that so many tyrants are oblivious to their own tyranny. I think that many people — the author

included — fear the prospect of a dominant person within a group, who will continually seek their own way and take over conversations, unless constantly kept in check — if indeed keeping them in check is even possible. Or it may be that there is someone in your community who is awkward around people and may struggle to express their feelings and identify their needs. Such a person is difficult for many of us to acknowledge, let alone hear. Would we listen? The most important aspect of community is that everyone has a voice.

If we are to organise politics on a bottom-up basis, a community's difficulties will be carried up to the broader structures of governance. So, how to address this issue of the pocket tyrant? I think the most important thing is for the group or community to be very clear about its vision, its mission and its aims. The tyrant's aims are likely to be on their own personal agenda and likely to be at odds with the wider group. So we have to get things right — or at least, as good as possible — even at the smallest scale. Humility is called for; the acknowledgement that we might be severely wrong in our opinions and the need to realise that those we most disagree with may sometimes be right.

Whilst communities remain only communities of interest, this is not so much of a problem — we can always just vote with our feet. Our life and sustenance need not depend on a good relationship with others — and this is increasingly so, as we explored with Charles Eisenstein earlier in the chapter and with the current society I have named Privatopia. If however, we returned to a situation where we

relied on the local community to be our chief means of support, and also the place for decision-making, then difficult characters become much more problematic. And the same is true if we seek to transform society in other ways. Good governance is required to bring wisdom to community relations.

A small group or community is not likely to be running for long before some issue of equality comes up. Having thought about and been involved in various types of community for many years, it is this issue of equality that the author has come to see as the most problematic. There are power dynamics within couples and families, and even amongst friends. But in communities the power relations really come to the fore. Even if there is no acknowledged hierarchy in a community, there will always be a covert hierarchy. The stomach has already decided where people stand in hierarchies of looks, charm, strength and power, long before our mind rationalises the gut instinct and/or modifies or suppresses it with what is socially acceptable. Therefore, if the community tries to function on the basis of equality, there can be friction, because any concerns have no acknowledged process of resolution. Problems cannot be referred up a chain of command, because everyone, allegedly, has equal authority.

A solution may be to recognise and contrast 'dominator hierarchies' (where 'power over' is abused) with 'reciprocal hierarchies' (where power is administered with compassion and we are closer to 'power with'). Power exercised with compassion is really the key here. A

community is hopefully an expression of compassion — in fact, outwith families, the principle means of compassion.

Community and Bureaucracy

In *A Different Drum*, author M. Scott Peck speaks about 'brokenness' as the way of forming community. Communities are established for a number of reasons. They may be 'intentional communities' of people living together, perhaps with a level of self-sufficiency — set up as an alternative to the surrounding dominant culture of consumer capitalism. Or they may simply be 'communities of interest' — people who share a passion in something and who may not even be living locally to each other. Whatever the situation though, the community has various functions to fulfil, and Peck suggests that this can be done in one of two ways: People can be open and honest about who they are and about their real feelings — and so be 'broken', in Peck's terms. Or, they can close up and relate to each other only in order to achieve the community's aims, without sharing themselves personally. Peck describes this as a bureaucracy, or a committee. It seems to be an all or nothing situation for Peck, with the 'true', broken, community obviously very much more appealing to him than a bureaucracy.

Peck has set up a polarity. Either a group will form a community or it will form a committee. In reality, every group of people is on a spectrum somewhere between these two extremes. The most bureaucratically controlled workplace — a call centre perhaps, or a parcel sorting office — must surely retain some vestige

of community. (I could be wrong.) Meanwhile, a monastery must have some rules to organise daily chores, for instance, or times of worship.

The committee state then, allows the group to carry out its functions without individuals having to lower their usual personal defences. Community, by contrast, according to Peck, is a state of 'brokenness'. The hearts of the community members are open to each other and there is a deep sense of sharing. Part of the brokenness of which Peck speaks is a willingness to fail and to forgive failure, as we have mentioned above. Whilst I've suggested there is a spectrum between the committee and the community, nonetheless it is probably fair to say more community — thus, more personal connection between people — would be helpful.

Sociocracy

One governance system that I want to introduce here is called Sociocracy. The history of Sociocracy, plus a basic description of its workings, is provided in John Buck and Sharon Villines', *We the People*. More detail is given in *Many Voices, One Song* by Ted J. Rau and Jerry Koch-Gonzalez — contemporary instructors in Sociocracy. Practising Sociocracy is probably easier than trying to describe it. Such simple procedures as 'doing a round' (that is, asking each member in a group to speak in turn about a particular issue) form part of Sociocracy. Sociocracy gives very specific meanings to the terms 'vision', 'mission', and 'aim'. I've addressed these a little in a preceding section. The vision is the way we would like the world to be. For instance, a world where all humanity

has access to clean water may be a vision. The mission is then related to this: To bring water to those without and to make sure it's safe. The aims are the smaller acts that will help to fulfil the mission and therefore realise the vision. Being very clear and straight-forward in defining vision, mission and aims can be a great service to any organisation.

Sociocracy is about continuous evolution through feedback. This means that a group's aims, mission and even its vision, are always open for review. As the group develops and tries out different strategies to fulfil its mission, it reviews progress and makes changes as necessary. Everyone is asked to stay focused on the mission and aims of the group. Everyone has the responsibility of trying to move the group towards its vision. We see these ideas reflected in our discussion of the last chapter, where we looked at the more informal federations and assemblies as alternative governance structures to the rigid hierarchies of institutions, and we will pick up on this again below.

Sociocracy is decision making by consent. Every voice matters and every individual has the power of consent, or dissent. Rau and Koch-Gonzalez say: 'The definition of consent is that a decision is made if no circle member has an objection.' Consent does not necessarily mean full consensus. The level of consent can be decided on as appropriate for the particular decision that is being considered. Objections are a 'gift' to the group, as these can be fruitful in generating debate as well as sometimes voicing concerns that others share but have not

yet felt able to express. Tackling concerns head-on in this manner allows the group to further its aims and be open and receptive to new ideas. Dissenters though, need to be very clear about their reasons for raising concerns. Participants are encouraged not to leave a meeting with a thought that they have not shared with the group.

Sociocracy is organised on the basis of circles. (Being a bit nervous about hierarchy, everything is geared towards avoiding a top-down structure!) The central, or general, circle may be enough for small groups. This can then form smaller circles for specific functions as the need arises. Each circle has a leader and a facilitator, also usually a secretary and sometimes a log-book keeper to record an overview of how the group has evolved in its mission over time. The smaller groups will have a delegate who represents them at the general circle level, along with the group's leader. And the leader and delegate will also be full members of the next wider circle in which they represent their group — a process Sociocracy calls 'double-linking'. As such, there is always feedback both back and forward between circles and always with at least two people representing the work of one circle to the members of another circle. A mission circle might also be appropriate and perhaps for a corporation, a circle would be formed for the business's customers and even for shareholders.

Sociocracy is not about making everyone equal, but it does attempt to mitigate the imbalances in human relations, where power dynamics can often determine the way groups and

organisations are run. It tries to address the tendency to sometimes seek our own way and the tendency within some people to dominate decision-making processes. So it tries to address those concerns over hierarchy and those power dynamics that we touched on above. However, it is important to remember that each of us also needs to have some emotional, and even what might loosely be described as 'spiritual', development as people in order to be responsive to the style of Sociocracy — to genuinely focus on the group's vision and mission; to genuinely listen and give everyone a voice. In a sense — especially for larger organisations — Sociocracy is hierarchical, but as we have seen, there is a difference between a hierarchy that dominates and one that is reciprocal (that is, responsive to others' feelings, needs and opinions). 'Compromise' in groups can be damaging, but if there is a written record of what people have said, they can state strong oppositional views, knowing that these have been recorded, even although a compromise may later be reached. In Sociocracy, the log-book keeper serves this wider function. In fact, as indicated above, Sociocracy aims to welcome dissent. The dissenting voice can sometimes express concerns that others share, but have not yet been able to articulate. Sociocracy welcomes dissent as a gift to the group.

Unfortunately I am not aware of any political parties or governments that are run on sociocratic principles, but there are many businesses as well as community housing groups and activist groups that have adopted it. One of the many good things about Sociocracy

is its flexibility. There does not need to be absolute agreement and, built in from the start, is a willingness to fail and to learn from failure. Sociocracy simply asks: 'Safe enough to try?', and, 'Good enough for now?' And so it leaves open the possibility of change.

For Sociocracy then, a healthy organisation could be said to be realising its vision, fulfilling its mission and enacting its aims, and this is always a process where changes are taken on board and the organisation evolves to meet new challenges.

Local Democracy

As we move from looking at small-scale community in general to small-scale politics in particular, we can introduce here the idea of 'subsidiarity'. The principle of subsidiarity says that decisions relevant to a particular place or region should be made by the people of that place. So, subsidiarity is very much supportive of the bottom-up type of governance that I am advocating here. Keep in mind though, that some decisions will affect many levels. Sociocracy's structure of circles (and the equivalent structures of participatory politics that we will explore in the next chapter) allows for this reciprocal decision-making whilst still ensuring, as far as possible, that everyone has a voice.

Some years ago, my home nation of Scotland sought to become independent from the rest of the United Kingdom. Conversations sprang up in even the smallest of towns. It really felt like our voices could be heard. In the end (at least

so far) independence did not happen, but still we got a flavour of what a more powerful local democracy might feel like. We have community councils now, rather than the old town councils, but these have very little power. As things stand, individuals and neighbourhoods have minimal control over their immediate surroundings. The first layer of government that has any real power — the regional council — is a large and distant organisation. Our planning processes allow for consultation on some matters, but this is often little more than a token gesture. I have attended several reviews of local plans for regions of Scotland and found the process of communication within them rather hidden and obscure. I have heard of groups campaigning for decades for some very simple thing like a children's play park or a nature trail or a new stop on a railway line.

Local democracy needs a lot more authority — authority to divert roads, turn waste ground into useful resources or wilderness havens — authority to have a say in large-scale planning proposals that are often just swept through by government. The neighbourhood and the street need to be the true start of our politics. The smallest level of government could be around 20 houses, making decisions appropriate to their locale and on quite an informal basis. Such measures could be adopted piecemeal. Even if only a few neighbours show up then that is a start. As their voices are heard in the broader structure of governance for the community, then others may be encouraged to join in. If such participation becomes the norm, and children grow up expecting to see this kind of thing happening wherever they live, then

eventually it will become part of the accepted story of how things get done.

I know that at this smallest scale of governance all the worries over petty tyrants that we considered above can come to the fore. The neighbourhood tyrant, who objects to hedges being trimmed the wrong way, or cars parked such that their shadows fall in the wrong place, is probably the worst tyrant of all! I can only suggest focusing on the positive. Even for a small cluster of houses or a block of flats there are little improvements that could make life better for everyone as well as bringing neighbours together. We should not lose that out of fear that one or two people might spoil things. The neighbourhood level forms the first circles of a bottom-up polity that we will explore in the next chapter. The decisions of a bottom-up style of governance will of course depend on the vagaries of time and place. However, there are four aspects of society that are picked out in this book for special attention — nature, place, compassion and pleasure — and, later in the book, a chapter is dedicated to each.

Community and Business

Even if we choose to avoid all interactions with groups, most of us are forced to be involved in the community that forms our workplace. Power relations take on an especially significant role here, as, of course, our job and livelihood are at stake if things go wrong. If we're very lucky the business will be run on sociocratic principles, and hopefully the business will be run as a co-operative. To truly move things forward though, the business owner, and perhaps one or

two of its staff, would sit on the neighbourhood council. They would become locally accountable. They would answer directly to the people who live around their factory, office or workshop. They would have a role to play in cleaning up after themselves. They would have an opportunity to enhance the physical surroundings, perhaps giving some land over to nature. Likewise, the locals would have a say in what happens within the business, especially if they are its customers as well as its neighbours. The business may have a circle for neighbours and/or customers within its sociocratic structure.

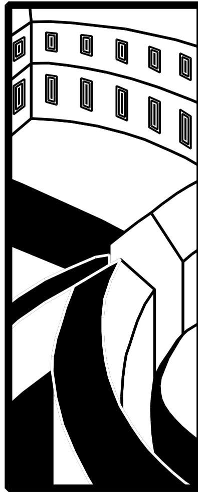
If a business were genuinely doing all these things, could it even survive? Many would say no — most, if not all, of the above is a recipe for disaster. But even modest efforts towards all these things will mean a very different kind of business and hence a very different kind of life for its staff. In today's society, this is a counter-culture. But I don't think the ideas expressed above are totally alien to us. In fact I think these proposals for business embody values that are within many of us already and which we wish were the values of wider society. Some businesses that have adopted sociocratic management have likewise prospered rather than failed. Historic examples of more inclusive and co-operative businesses include mill owner Robert Owen and of course Cadbury's chocolate. In current times, consider, for instance, the John Lewis Partnership, and its associated supermarket chain, Waitrose, with their profit-sharing amongst all of their staff. Then there is the textile and carpet company, Interface, led by Ray Anderson. Also, there is the story of Lucas Aerospace — a firm facing closure

because of a collapse in demand for their products. The workers got together and came up with products that they could make and people would wish to buy, and they saved the business and their jobs. Also, in the UK, is retail company Iceland's stance on palm oil. At the time of writing, many companies are pledging to phase out single-use plastics, and some are pledging to become carbon-neutral. Economically there is a potential loss of profits for taking these ethical stands, but a company's credibility will grow as they stick to their principles and public opinion starts to swing around to increased environmental awareness. This is possible!

One further feature of business at the local level is the adoption of local currencies — an idea promoted especially by the Transition Town movement. Money then stays within a community and benefits place as a result. Sometimes it is only a small gesture, but nonetheless it is again a counter-culture and a move towards a new story.

From Small to Large

We have looked at small-scale communities in some detail, because, despite the warnings earlier in the chapter, the small-scale is really the bridge to the large-scale. If we can get our streets and neighbourhoods working then there is hope for our counties and nations, so it is to large-scale community that we now turn.



6 Community on a Large Scale

'Democracy doesn't come from the top, it comes from the bottom. Democracy is not what governments do, it's what people do.'

- Howard Zinn

'Salus populi suprema est lex.' (The good of the people is the chief law.)

- Cicero — 'De Legibus'.

'One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors.'

- Plato — 'The Republic'.

'Politics is too serious a matter to be left to the politicians.'
- Charles de Gaulle

Gandhi's social sin of Politics without Principle is especially relevant to this chapter. It's not that there aren't a lot of principles around, the problem is how the principles relate, or don't relate, to what actually gets done. We have touched on the notion that ideals can be too abstract and therefore difficult to apply in the real world. As such, a certain pragmatism is required. That is the careful balance that needs to be struck by governance. It is the same balance that we have identified for utopia.

For many of us our attitude to government can be somewhat complacent and as long as things run along relatively peacefully governments are apt to ignore the dark clouds gathering on the horizon. In order to have a quiet life, there will be little compromises — which someone has described as people getting together to decide to do the wrong thing! Vision and principle are ignored for what is described as 'pragmatic'. But this is not pragmatism, it's expediency. Genuine pragmatism keeps an eye on the future. Genuine pragmatism is principled. Perhaps the greatest threat is that there is no vision to a politics premised on expediency — that careful balance of pragmatism and idealism is thrown out the window in favour of what seems most popular or 'useful' at the time, often for the benefit of the careers or pockets of those in power. As such, it is easy for people to be disillusioned with politics and with politicians. And it is easy, as we sink ever deeper into our own Privatopias, to turn our backs on all such

matters and just get on with trying to make the best for ourselves and our families, working the system to our own advantage. If politics is lacking in principle then it is tempting to cynically disregard principles in our own lives.

Parapolity

In the last chapter we looked at small-scale communities and the principle of subsidiarity, where decision-making is relevant to the people who will be directly affected by whatever policies are under consideration. This is the beginning of a participatory politics — for which I am using the term 'Parapolity' in this book. As I've suggested in the previous chapter, large-scale governance needs to be very much an extension of the small-scale community — the bottom-up politics. We noted in Chapter 4 that this type of governance system is one already proposed by some anarchist thinkers — the federations and assemblies of Proudhon, amongst others.[1] The arrangements are along the lines of Sociocracy — with wider and wider circles dealing with broader policy decisions affecting larger numbers. The scale-up is not so difficult. Stephen Shalom has devised a structure of Parapolity that bears a remarkable similarity to Sociocracy.

Parapolity has different shades of meaning. For instance, it is sometimes used to describe a 'peoples vote' for particular decisions, as currently practised in Switzerland. This is known as direct democracy, but is not what I have in mind (although arguably referenda are a step in the right direction).

Parapolity can also be the federations and assemblies model — the bottom-up politics we began discussing in the last chapter. (This form of governance is sometimes described as 'cellular' or 'associationalist'.) The federation model is where people are chosen by the small, local groups to serve in the next wider circle, and so on, right out to the largest circle of governance at national level. It is this bottom-up system of local councils, building to assemblies and parliaments that I am mainly taking to be the core of participatory politics in this book. Another form of Parapolity is where people are chosen by lot to serve in a Citizens' Assembly or a People's Parliament. This process is referred to as 'sortition'. The two types of Parapolity, cellular and sortition — are sometimes collectively referred to as 'deliberative democracy'.

So Parapolity is the system where, it is suggested, we can have governance by the many, without the difficulties that are often encountered by democracies. We saw in Chapter 4, that one issue with democracy is that if everyone has a direct vote then we may have a problem in ensuring that decisions are fully considered. We could add here the problem of there sometimes being a large number of people who have voted against a particular decision — who may indeed outnumber those who carry the decision, if more than two options are being considered. A further problem, touched on in Chapter 4, is the tyranny of the majority issue, where a majority decide to vote for a really bad and harmful decision. To try to address these problems, in many countries we have representative democracies. The

representatives can weigh up decisions and try to agree what the people might have chosen, had the people fully considered the questions in hand. Hopefully, therefore, a tyranny of the majority can be avoided. But then there is the problem of those who represent us making decisions without reference back to ourselves. These problems of democracy are the problems Parapolity hopes to address. In Parapolity everyone decides for everyone. Parapolity offers the opportunity for pragmatic governance that will give everyone a voice. Parapolity will especially give people the opportunity to engage with issues specific to their location. Using the terms in our commons chapter, Parapolity seeks to make governance a social commons — or perhaps it is better expressed by saying that a social commons is the means for creating governance. I don't mean to imply that Parapolity is a perfect system of governance. Sometimes it will still result in poor choices, but with people directly involved, changes will be keenly felt. My hope is that this would result in bad choices being quickly put right.

Thomas Jefferson proposed: 'Counties be divided into wards of such size that every citizen can attend, when called on, and act in person.' He continues: 'Making every citizen an acting member of government, and in the offices nearest and most interesting to him, will attach him by his strongest feelings to the independence of his county and its republican constitution.' (Letter from Jefferson to Kercheval of 12th July 1816.)

John Stuart Mill was also a keen advocate of what we are describing as Parapolity. Without a

share in public life, Mill wrote, the citizen, 'never thinks of any collective interest, or any objects to be pursued jointly with others, but only in competition with them, and in some measure at their expense… A neighbour, not being an ally or an associate, since he is never engaged in any common undertaking for joint benefit, is therefore only a rival.' The engaged citizen, by contrast, 'is called upon… to weigh interests not his own; to be guided in case of conflicting claims, by another rule than his private partialities… He is made to feel himself one of the public, and whatever is for their benefit is also to be for his benefit.' (John Stuart Mill — *Considerations on Representative Government*.)

In this book I am making what is described as the proceduralist argument for Parapolity (see Chapter 4), in that I think that everyone having a voice counts as a necessary basis for true democracy, even if sometimes it may result in poor decisions. At the same time though — along the lines of anarchist federations and assemblies — this is in some measure a consequentialist position, as it is open to changing circumstances.

Parapolity — Scaling up from Neighbourhood to Nation

When we looked at community on a small scale we saw that there are 'dominator hierarchies' and there are 'reciprocal hierarchies'. 'Power Over' is a dominator hierarchy. Power-with implies reciprocity. In the ongoing effort to govern ourselves sensibly, we need less of the former and more of the latter. We very much need reciprocal hierarchy. Whatever one's

views on the origins of power and hierarchy, these matters, I feel, need to be addressed. We cannot pretend that everyone already has an equal say — especially in terms of political equality. That is why systems like Sociocracy, and its extension to Parapolity, are so valuable. The structure of Sociocracy itself, and its broader application in Parapolity, helps protect against the more negative aspects of human nature that may erode our trust. Hierarchy is acknowledged, whilst everything is done to make sure that people do not exploit power and position to the detriment of others. There may well be someone involved in the politics whose views are difficult for most of us to accept. The point of all the checks and balances built into Sociocracy and Parapolity is to avoid such people carrying large numbers of others with them, when, in fact, majorities would find some opinions unreasonable and unjust. But certainly such difficult people would still be heard — these, after all, are the voices of dissent. As we saw in the previous chapter, Sociocracy stresses the importance of dissent. The opportunity for dissent at all levels is critical. In Parapolity, the local levels seem to offer the greatest opportunity for dissent, but if the system performs well, it should carry outwards to the wider circles. So a concern can work its way through all levels and be fully discussed until it is resolved.

As with Sociocracy, Parapolity might take small circles of local interest — the street, neighbourhood and town — and carry them outwards to the wider circles of governance. The wider circles of Parapolity would be answerable to their grass roots, in a way that is very much

more transparent and reliable than our current systems of elected officials. I am suggesting therefore that it is the grass-roots level of neighbourhoods, streets and communities that would decide on the appointments to the wider circles of town, county, region and nation. If no-one shows up for a neighbourhood meeting, the next wider circle of governance will decide things for them. Some people will be chosen from neighbourhoods to represent at the next level up (next wider circle) and so on. The hope is that this will be on the basis of a proven competence at the more local level — in other words, those who take up positions in wider circles of, say, town, region or nation, will have shown their ability on the more local scales. So, in some ways, there is an element of meritocracy to this proposal, but hopefully without the drawbacks that we discussed in Chapter 4. We could say that the 'meritocracy' is on the basis of a proven competence and not some arbitrary measure of intelligence, or indeed, personal charm.

We saw, in the last chapter, concerns over the awkward individual who may disrupt the neighbourhood meeting with petty concerns. Annoying as this would be, at least it is not going to have any major impact on people's lives. A neighbourhood would really be about voluntary co-operation, so we also have the opportunity to walk away. As we move to the wider circles of government however, the concerns become more serious. To a certain extent, it would be ordinary people who would be making the important decisions about things that affect everyone. All of this brings us back to the issue of trust. Can we trust ordinary people

any more or less than we currently trust politicians to carry out the big tasks of government for us? Some have suggested this is not possible. By contrast, James Fishkin (*When the People Speak*) provides strong arguments that deliberative democracy and Parapolity genuinely is effective at allowing ordinary people to understand arguments and move towards making informed choices. Meanwhile Chantal Mouffe sees the whole process as worthwhile and effective, even if there is an element of dissent.[2]

One of the concerns raised in the Introduction is the polarising of politics. Hearing dissent carefully and fully is a way to avoid polarisation, not to stir it up. If we are mature enough, and we have the correct systems in place, then all opinions can be voiced, heard and responded to. With the checks and balances of a good system there is a greater level of responsibility and accountability. I suggest that a nation that adopts Parapolity would be a better place to live because it would allow all opinions to be examined in a clear light.

Government, in its current form, is very much an institution and as such, prey to the problems of hierarchies that become fossilised with time and can be sickly and deadening structures of embedded power. Parapolity would hope to avoid this impasse. So electing people from our grass-roots neighbourhood councils and just letting them get on with it is not enough. As we scale up, from neighbourhoods and streets, to towns and regions of cities, the decision-making and administration necessarily becomes more complex. All of this, of course, ceases to be an

occasional voluntary meeting between neighbours and starts to become part-time and full-time employment for the participants. The Parapolity becomes the legislature, but as with our current systems, there remains the need for administrative and executive branches, to implement decisions (the 'assemblies' aspect of the anarchists' federations and assemblies). So the wider levels of Parapolity have an 'executive' arm, responsible for carrying out the day to day implementation of the decisions that are made. There is a layering of decision-making — from the local to the national — and there is some kind of bureaucracy — administrative and executive staff that carries out the decisions of the legislature. Within the offices of government itself then, there is the need for the types of sociocratic structures we discussed in the last chapter.

The Parapolity is only for the legislative decisions. The assemblies of the executive and judicial powers (in the UK, the civil service and the courts) remain separate, and indeed become more clearly defined. The work of the executive and judiciary is mainly functional — the decision-making is largely with the legislative Parapolity. However, as no-one is above the law, the judiciary would still have the power to oppose decisions of a Parapolity if, for instance, they were contrary to international law or the country's constitution. After A.C. Grayling (*The Good State*) another suggestion is an independent institution (we might say assembly) that will assess the performance of the governance body (the legislative Parapolity, or whatever) and ensure adherence to a code of conduct and to the nation's constitution. All of

this is aimed at preventing governance becoming institutionalised — to keep it evolving and pro-active as it deals with real people and real situations.

If we can keep a sensible conversation going, then below is set out the federation of federations we might achieve, along the lines of Stephen Shalom's system, referred to above. Similar proposals were made some time back by David Hume, in his essay, *The Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth*. The reader will see that despite only seven levels of governance, the number of people represented quickly stack up to staggering proportions. Even the smallest numbers result in more households than the roughly 2.5 billion world total estimated at the time of writing:

Neighbourhood — 20 to 40 households.

Community/Village — 20 to 40 neighbourhoods — 400 to 1,600 households.

Town/District — 20 to 40 communities — 8,000 to 64,000 households.

County/City — 20 to 40 towns/districts — 160,000 to 2,560,000 households.

Region — 20 to 40 counties — 3,200,000 to 102,400,000 households.

Nation — 5 to 10 regions — 16,000,000 to 1,024,000,000 households.

World — 200 countries — 3,200,000,000 to 204,800,000,000 households.

All this is not without precedence. Richard Sennet (*Building and Dwelling*) tells of a system from Brazil:

'An early example of an open urban network occurred in Porto Alegre in Brazil, home to participatory budgeting — a bottom-up way of

distributing economic resources… The process began in loose neighbourhood assemblies which debated how to spend money on school, health clinics and local infrastructure. Access at this level was totally open. The data, never perfect, was organised so it could be debated. Conflicts between neighbourhoods were dealt with by elected representatives who had to report back to their neighbourhoods. The system flourished for about twenty years, before becoming somewhat squashed by top-down power, but even more by the shear scale of people wanting to be included as the city grew.' (See also, Erik Olin Wright and Archon Fung — *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*.)

People's Parliaments and Citizens' Assemblies

In the foregoing discussion, we have looked at one version of Parapolity. The system discussed was a follow-on from the ideas of Sociocracy, with ever-widening circles of governance covering wider areas of geography and larger populations. We could loosely describe this as a system of federations, as alluded to in this and earlier chapters — and, as we noted above — this type of governance is sometimes known as cellular or associationalist democracy. The circle at the national level, could be regarded as one form of People's Parliament.

Sortition is the basis of another form of People's Parliament and for Citizens' Assemblies. In a Citizens' Assembly, (sometimes referred to as a 'mini-public') ordinary citizens are selected by lot and invited to meet together over a specified

period of time to deliberate over a specific issue. The method has been used extensively, in many countries, although it is often just to gauge the response of the electorate to a particular issue, which will then be further debated and legislated by a more usual form of elected government. A first step towards a more inclusive government therefore might be for elected governments to be obliged to take the decisions of Citizens' Assemblies as legally binding.

Where a Citizens' Assembly sits for a longer duration, say perhaps a year or two, then it is performing more like a government and deliberating over a wider range of issues. Sometimes, this more established form of Citizen's Assembly is also referred to as a People's Parliament. So, as described above, these are the two possible types of alternative parliament. One type is the 'federation', or cellular type — where members are elected via the grass-roots, neighbourhood, town, and county levels. The further type of People's Parliament is the sortition type, where members are chosen directly from the general population, by lot. Citizens' Assemblies are, in a way, the stepping stone to this second type of People's Parliament. (See, in particular, Kevin O'Leary — *Saving Democracy* and James Fishkin — *Democracy When the People are Thinking* and *When the People Speak*.) Rousseau thought that because serving in the government should be a duty rather than a privilege, then choosing our representatives by lot is the only fair way to give us democracy. The process of sortition itself — and the original meaning of 'republican', from *res publica*, of the people — refers back to the ancient Greek principle of choosing

members of the *agora* by lot to serve for a term (although women and slaves were still excluded, so we would not want to accept it wholesale).

I want to stress again, at this point in our discussions, that all the forms of polity that we have been examining in this chapter and the previous chapter are only suggestions. The very first issue that needs to be addressed, before any new form of governance is adopted, is why we do not have a say in what type of government we have in the first place. It might be, in trying to answer that question, people will want to stay with exactly the system they have now, and we will be touching on this possibility in later chapters. But just to have that choice, in the first instance, is something that most of us, in almost every country in the world, have never been allowed. I think this must make us stop and think exactly what freedom, choice, equality, justice and fairness mean when this remains the case.

Parecon

Much of today's economics just pre-supposes a market economy, where we 'consumers' have wishes that guide our purchases — everything reduced to commodity. The aim of the economy is to achieve 'productive efficiency' and 'allocation efficiency', so we produce the right amount of stuff and we distribute it efficiently to the people that want it. This sounds reasonable, until we step back and realise that these two mechanisms are based on wants rather than needs. No matter how crazy the wants, someone will produce to satisfy them. Meanwhile those with pressing needs may not

have those needs satisfied if they do not have the money to buy the goods. The purpose of the economy is to achieve a state where no-one could be made better off without making someone else worse off. This aim is referred to as the 'Pareto Criterion' after Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto. Many economists suggest that a market economy is the best way to achieve the Pareto Criterion. It is difficult to believe, however, that anyone seriously thinks the Pareto Criterion is satisfied by the present state of the world. For one thing, some economists point out that even an extremely unjust distribution of resources could qualify as 'Pareto optimum'. Sometimes 'Pareto efficient' is used as an alternative term, but this is really no better. The profligate lifestyle of Western nations has destroyed the lives of millions in poorer nations and is on track to destroy millions more. So the market economy is very successful within the bounds of consumption and production, provided wider considerations are downplayed or ignored. An alternative might be to look at the economists' choice phrase, 'opportunity cost' and apply it to whole societies and nations, rather than just to individuals. That way, the perfectly reasonable idea of making sure everyone is adequately fed, for instance, would become a priority! Instead, the market, based on individual needs, tends to take over. We may echo Lionel Jospin's words, 'Yes to the market economy, no to the market society'. (See Chapter 7 for more on opportunity cost.) In a similar vein, we might ask if the problem is not so much with the market economy itself as with who is running the markets.

The alternative to a market economy is often described as a 'planned economy' or a command economy. One form of planned economy, referred to as 'participatory economics' — or Parecon — takes up some of the methods described above in Sociocracy and Parapolity and applies them to the more administrative and executive tasks of production and distribution within society. Michael Albert, the activist who has arguably done the most to promote Parecon, has described its potential workings. Albert's books, *Parecon*, *Practical Utopia*, and *Realising Hope: Life Beyond Capitalism,* provide excellent detail.

Albert to some extent assumes that there has been a significant change to the political system in order to allow Parecon to be fully adopted. He seems fully supportive of a Parapolity along the lines of Stephen Shalom's ideas, but pre-empts the decision to implement the planned economy. I think this takes away from the style of governance we would have under a Parapolity. If people really are to decide then the very first decision to make is whether we actually want a participatory politics at all, and if so, in what form. Then the Parapolity has to decide if it wants a Parecon. It might stick with a market economy or try to introduce Parecon gradually. I think a gradual implementation of an alternative economic model is possible and indeed desirable. We could, for instance, start with the large infrastructure projects where the political decisions are generally much more prevalent than market forces. Why is it that government can decide on deployment of nuclear weapons in our country without us even having a say (except by voting for a political

party that either opposes or accepts them)? Why can we not be fully involved in decisions over airports, the power grid, the use of fossil fuels, new railways? It is then only a small step towards decisions about planning policies, house design, car design and food supply. If we are happy with the results of Parecon, and see it working out in society, then we may well choose to extend the process. As business changes to more sociocratic and co-operative principles and Parecon determines with local businesses what goods and services are provided, capitalism is not so much overthrown as simply changed over time until it is unrecognisable. The point I'm trying to make here is that it is not a straight choice between markets or a planned economy — capitalism as it stands or no capitalism at all. If we are given the opportunity, we can choose to do things differently and see what works.

Left and Right

We have not, thus far, had much to say about our various political alternatives being either left-wing or right-wing. Arguably, for the UK and America, the mainstream parties are all very much in the centre ground, and all seem supportive of continuing with capitalism and continuing with market economies. All stress the importance of the economy to the prosperity of society and have less concern with the cultural and social aspects of society, which perhaps they view as being mostly outwith their domain (although they may pay lip serve to the importance of community and culture in their manifesto promises).

Having looked at anarchist principles in particular in Chapter 4, we might conclude that the ideas discussed so far are more of the left than of the right. But, and from the above, we might also conclude that these ideas are a long way from what is currently on offer from, say, Britain's Labour Party or America's Democrats. The left, it could be argued, is out of touch, if not actually somewhat contemptuous, of the ordinary folk that their efforts are supposedly aimed to help. The concern is something raised by activist Matthew Arnold, whom we discussed above. There is an entertaining Youtube clip (actually just audio) of Arnold speaking about a college campus in a small American town dominated by its allegiance to sports. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-1_8NZ2At8) The college has a leftist movement of about 300 people. Arnold asks if any have been to a sports game. Only three. Arnold describes a large sports bar in the town — the ideal place, he suggests, to meet people and discuss ideas about how to help ordinary folks. The suggestion goes down like a lead balloon. In a similar vein, Graham Greene long ago suggested that the motivation of the intellectual left is actually a hatred of the rich rather than compassion for the poor. Politicians on the right meanwhile seem to be pursuing what is described as a 'neo-liberal' agenda. Neo-liberalism seeks for freedom from government's interference with all aspects of our lives (although weirdly this seems to lead to more bureaucracy, not less). Neo-liberalism seems actually contradictory to the ideas of conservatism and republicanism, so both our left-wing and right-wing political parties seem to be conflicted. The right seems to be

increasingly ‘populist’ and especially with regard to nationalism. This is a worrying trend, in opposition to the left’s traditional championing of internationalism. The basic dichotomy is between the right-wing demand for freedom and the left-wing demand for equality.

The Adoption of Parapolity and Parecon

Ironically it is often the most disadvantaged who regard the status quo as legitimate, so those with the most to gain are the ones least likely to seek change. The spirit of anarchism — that we could do more for ourselves — is worth heeding. I think the world is already changing and people are prepared to get involved.

Are ordinary people equipped to decide — given enough information? Thomas Jefferson: ‘I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion with education.’ And from Pericles:‘… our ordinary citizens, though occupied with the pursuits of industry, are still fair judges of public matters, for … we regard the citizen who takes no part in those duties not as unambitious but as useless, and we are able to judge proposals even if we cannot originate them; instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any action at all.’ (Pericles — *Thucydides II. 40*.) See also, in particular, *A People’s Parliament* by Keith Sutherland and *A Citizen Legislature* by Ernst Callenbach (the author of the novel, *Ecotopia*)

and Michael Philips. For both Parapolity and Parecon, it goes back to the issue of trust. If the opportunities were there to participate then the level of participation is up to us as individuals. The government we get will genuinely be up to us and we will get what we deserve. And of course there will be mistakes. Just with the small community, the wider circles of government need to be free to acknowledge and learn from their mistakes. It is only through failure and defeat that a better world can be realised. It is only as broken people that we can grow. So let's hope we can drop the pretension of being capable — indeed infallible — and own our errors.

If Parapolity's adoption is a process of reform this raises the obvious and rather awkward question of how it would be integrated with — or replace — the party politics practised in most nations today. What then are the prospects for a system of People's Parliament or Citizens' Assembly ever being adopted and could these ever fully replace a government elected in the normal way? The first three estates of government were originally, in the UK, the Clergy, the Nobility and the Commoners, now they are the Monarchy, the House of Lords and the House of Commons. In the USA, the three estates are the President's Office, The Senate and the House of Representatives. Journalism — the press — is often described as the fourth estate. Perhaps Parapolity could instead be the 'Fourth Estate' — knocking the press into fifth place — that would sit alongside the current system? One such system for the USA is described in Kevin O'Leary's *Saving Democracy.*

In my own country, it is the step from community council (really, town councils) up to the county level that is the crucial one, as it is here that volunteers are replaced by elected officials. Could, for instance, a circle of representatives from the neighbourhood and town levels sit at the county level, alongside elected officials? These people may still be volunteers, or these may be part-time or full-time paid positions. Likewise, could there be a wider circle (from counties) at the national level, to fully replace one of the existing houses of government, for instance? Parapolity would then be a new house of government, sitting alongside the existing government structure. I think that such a reformed system — with Parapolity sitting initially alongside party politics — is the main way for change to be achieved. This might lead to us having both a People's Parliament and Citizens' Assemblies to fully replace the current system.

But we should not pre-empt the decisions that a Parapolity and a Parecon might make. The ethics of a Parapolity are not idealistic ethics — they are not written into the story of Parapolity from the start. Instead, it is the power of conversation and the need to embrace dissent that allows a Parapolity to evolve its ethics. In a world that changes so fast, it could not really be otherwise.

If we were to stick with our current forms of representative democracy, then we could ask, how does a government stay on track? How does it stop creativity hardening into idealism? Federations hardening into institutions? Assemblies becoming bureaucracies? The

answer is to continually return to clear missions for what government should be about: back to the nation's constitution, to the UN Charter of Human Rights and the UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2030.

Whether we go for some form of deliberative democracy or stick more closely to our current forms of representative democracy, we might consider a few further safeguards to keep government effective and responsible. We might consider having an independent body to assess the performance of the legislature, whatever form it might take. Also, as we've seen, to ensure that the legislature, the judiciary and the executive remain independent. Also to have autonomous bodies responsible for the commons, which will oversee, perhaps as trust funds, the pre-distribution of our shared wealth. Also to have an independent body responsible for the creation of sovereign wealth.

These ideas lead us into specific areas where I think some comments can be made as regards future policies. So Chapters 8 to 11 take up the subjects of nature, place, compassion and pleasure. Each chapter looks at its subject to see how it might be addressed by a Parapolity and by Parecon. Those four subjects are a big part of answering that key question from the Introduction — How should we live? All of the suggestions are then brought together in Chapter 13, What we might Decide, If we could Decide.

In earlier chapters, we have looked at the material and the cultural economies, and seen how these may be understood more broadly by

introducing ideas about the commons and by developing our understanding of nature. In the next chapter, we broaden this discussion out still further and look again at some of the terms that were introduced back in Chapter 3 concerning capital and commons.

7 The Economics of the Commons

'History teaches us that men and nations behave wisely once they have exhausted all other possibilities.'

- Abba Eban

'Capitalism, wisely managed, can probably be made more efficient for attaining economic ends than any alternative system yet in sight, but… in itself it is in many ways extremely objectionable.'

- John Maynard Keynes — 'The End of Laissez-Faire'.

The preceding three chapters have looked at polity and the various options that we have for governing ourselves. We focused in on deliberative democracy in particular — giving

everyone a voice — and in so doing, tried to answer one of the questions from the Introduction — Who Decides? We've looked at the material economy in an earlier chapter, and in our chapter on the commons, fitted this into a view of nature, and seen the parallels between it and a further economy — the cultural economy of imagination and creativity. In this chapter we will explore two further economies, and fit them together with the material and the cultural so as to see the full composition of societies. As we bring in the ideas about ownership, sharing and the commons, we will try to relate these to this larger view of society. This in turn will allow us to revisit some of the other questions from the Introduction, What do we own? What should we share? What should we make? How should we trade? We will try to get some tentative answers to these questions, before moving on to that wider question of: How should we live? in the next four chapters.

As with Chapter 2, Gandhi's sin of Wealth without Work is worth keeping in mind for this chapter. His further sin of Commerce without Morality is also relevant.

In our exploration of the commons in Chapter 3, we mentioned that a whole further area of explanation is missing. This I will label simply as 're-making' — and we will explore the term in the course of this chapter. Re-making is the social commons and the emotional economy, and this chapter seeks to explore its importance to us and how we might bring it to light.

The Economic Base of Society?

We have seen that it is often the material economy that is regarded as of prime importance in society, especially societies of the developed world. When people speak of 'the economy' it is usually just to the material economy of goods and services they are referring. Culture, nature, and the commons are all peripheral, for the most part. Or where they are included, there might be an attempt to fit them into the economic model that defines industrial manufacture — such as 'creative industries' — or viewing nature as providing 'environmental services'. We looked at the parallels back in Chapter 3, and especially in Figure 3.3. Whilst economics includes various schools of thought on these matters, they mostly agree that the big factors in a society circle around labour, production, trade and consumption. Ha-Joon Chang summarises the situation neatly. He says:

'Every society is seen as being built on an economic base, or mode of production. This base is made up of the forces of production (technologies, machines, human skill) and the relations of production (property rights, employment relationship, division of labour). Upon this base is the super-structure, which comprises culture, politics and other aspects of human life, which in turn affect the way the economy is run.'

In earlier chapters I have tried to give a description of this process, seeking mainly to point out the deep reliance on nature and our view of nature, as well as trying to relate things to our understanding of the commons. There

are elements neglected or under-emphasised in economics' description of the material economy, but I am not in any way questioning the basic legitimacy of the description. What this chapter is questioning however, is the idea that the material economy is all that matters — the claim that it is the base of society from which all else is derived.

The True Base of Society

I'm suggesting then that the material economy — material wealth and capital — are not the true base of society. Instead I want to promote the view that it is the social relations that determine the economic relations of a society. We can therefore introduce a further type of commons, mentioned briefly in Chapter 3, but kept back until now — the 'social commons', and with that, what has been described as the 'emotional economy', compassion, and what I have covered, for now, by the term 're-making'. Massimo d'Angelis (*Omnia Sunt Communia*) describes all this simply as 'commoning'. Others refer to the 'informal economy', or what Ivan Illich refers to as the 'shadow economy' — or sometimes it is just called the 'love economy'. (See Hildur Jackson — *Designing your Local Economy* in *Gaian Economics — Living Well within Planetary Limits*.) Labour, production, trade and consumption are the 'formal relations' within society. The suggestion is that these formal relations are ultimately based on the social relations — the social commons. Jeremy Rifkin tells us:
'Without culture it would be impossible to engage in either commerce and trade or governance. The other two sectors require a

continuous infusion of social trust to function. Indeed, the market and government sectors feed off social trust and weaken or collapse if it is withdrawn. That's why there are no examples in history in which either markets or governments preceded culture or exist in its absence. Markets and governments are extensions of culture and never the reverse. They have always been and always will be secondary rather than primary institutions in the affairs of humanity because culture creates the empathic cloak of sociability that allows people to confidently engage each other either in the marketplace or the government sphere.' Jeremy Rifkin — *The Empathic Civilization.*[1] Meanwhile, Arturo Escobar tells us: 'Of crucial importance … is the recognition that the base of biological existence is the act of emotioning, and that social coexistence is based on love, prior to any mode of appropriation and conflict that might set in. Patriarchal modern societies fail to realise that it is emotioning that constitutes human history, not reason or the economy, because it is our desires that determine the kinds of worlds we create.' (Arturo Escobar — *Designs for the Pluriverse*. My emphases.)

As we've seen above, there are numerous terms we could use to describe the emotional economy. One of the terms I am favouring in this book is 're-making'. Why re-making? One reason is the link back to the problems inherent in the consumer capitalist society we have created. The way things are produced has alienated us from our making. To work with our hands, to be meaningfully engaged with what we do and to relate to others through our work — these things are the basis of genuine making. And

there is a natural affinity between making and re-making, where re-making is the repair and maintenance of our material existence, but also the 'repair and maintenance', care and sustenance, of our own bodies and our relationships with others and with the natural world. The other reason for the use of the word re-making is our alienation from the feminine aspect of life. Just as we are separated from our making, we are also separated from the fact that we are made — and made by women. Likewise, it is women who do most of the re-making in our societies. So re-making is quite a deep concept — telling us about our needs for connection to our own natures, to Mother Nature and to the cosmos.

There is still some social relations involved in the material economy, for instance, the relationship of workers to their employers, businesses to their customers and suppliers, and employees with other members of staff. Indeed, it is these elements that were of key importance to Marx, so it is not fair to say that social relations are entirely irrelevant to economics as things stand now. For Marx and Engels, it seems to have been a bit of both the formal relations and the social relations. But, as the structure (ie. the economics) came to dominate, and continues to dominate, so it is that 'economic thought' (accountants' truth!) is applied to more and more areas of human endeavour. The structure dominates, the super-structure is ignored or even swallowed up. A better way to describe this would be to say that it is only the purely formal, material and financial transactions that are taken account of in the material economy. (We might add that

the relations, as well as being transactional, may also be exploitative, patronising and instrumental.) The rest is downplayed or ignored. By contrast, it is the recognition of the critical importance of the 'emotional economy' — especially those neglected aspects of 'maintenance', and often trivialised factors of creativity — that are important for a new story. The United Nations High Commission for Human Rights estimates that if, for instance, household labour were accounted for in our economies, it would represent between 10 and 39% of GDP. 'To ask for capitalism to pay for care is to call for the end to capitalism.' (Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*.)

If economics — and especially, the material economy — were really the driving force of society, then changing economics would change culture. But instead the suggestion is that if social relations were to change then economics would follow.[2] Capitalism would morph into a new model. That key dichotomy that we have met in previous chapters — whether we need to change people or change our environment and structures — is therefore back with us in another form. If the social commons is really the driving force of society, and we feel that society needs improving, then we need to look, at least, at how culture might change in order to improve. And in looking at how we might change culture we may have to look at what we are like as individuals, and how we, in turn, may need to change.

Let's continue our discussions by looking at what we neglect when focusing only on the material economy.

What we Neglect — Wild Nature and the Emotional Economy

Back in Chapter 3, I suggested that we needed to split our view of nature to include what we need to provide for ourselves as natural resources and what we choose to preserve, untouched, as wild nature. Wild nature, I suggested, is preserved for its own sake, as well as for the sake of the flora and fauna and the more abstract values of human flourishing. I related this split back to garden and wilderness, the reader may remember. We humans need to tend our gardens and leave the wilderness to do what it will. With regard to wild nature, we make two errors. Sometimes, we try to take all of it as resources — make it all garden — and don't leave enough for the remainder of Earth's inhabitants to live their lives. The other way we neglect wild nature is to disregard its importance for keeping everything going. Although looking at the commons has helped us in our understanding of our relationship with nature we can still end up just seeing the commons as another way of describing natural resources. So we need to broaden the idea of the commons — beyond just seeing them only as shared resources. As described by Massimo d'Angelis (*Omnia Sunt Communia*) the commons is also its social relations and our acts of commoning.

This leads to our other area of neglect — the whole area of compassion. Compassion sits

outside the material and cultural economies, but plays a vital role in their continued functioning. I've taken up the terms from Charles Eisenstein (*Sacred Economics*) and from other authors in referring to the role of compassion and caring as the social commons, the emotional economy and re-making. In a sense, the material economy treats both wild nature and the social commons as 'positive externalities' — in other words, things provided for free by the wider environment, that material and cultural industries rely on in their production processes. The terms, emotional economy, social commons, and indeed, social capital, are not ideal descriptions. For one thing, as we discussed above, there is still an element of the social involved with material capital. For another thing, re-making covers a wide range of activities, from maintenance and reproduction, through to conviviality, friendship, relationships, intimacy and love, so describing this as an economy or as capital is a bit strange. Maybe, even those mundane chores that we do for ourselves and for others though, are done in love, as Marjorie Kelly suggests (*Owning our Future*). I'll keep using the terms emotional economy, social commons and re-making as we go forward, and I hope the reader will keep in mind the broad reach that these terms encompass.

I hope that a parallel is now clear between how our economics regards nature and how it regards this re-making that we have been discussing. Wild nature is there all along, supporting everything we do, but often unacknowledged. Meanwhile, compassion and caring are there too, supporting the economies, but likewise going unacknowledged. We are

‘wild body’ and ‘wild mind’, but why, it may be asked, should we have to consider such things when talking about economics? Well, the reason is that these two neglected areas of society that we have been discussing, wild nature and compassion, are intimately linked. What is the ultimate source of what is referred to as ‘labour’ in the material economy and ‘work’ in the cultural economy? It is wild body and wild mind. These in turn rely, for their sustenance, on both wild nature and the re-making of ourselves by way of compassion. Ultimately all of these things are ‘embodied’. Our modern societies have however, separated us from our wildness — stuffed us into classrooms, offices and factories and institutionalised our minds. Some have suggested that the cultural economy produces things beyond its imputs from nature — that to some extent, our abstract world of thoughts, ideas, imagination and creativity is independent of natural resources. The intention of such an idea is that we could have a sustainable economy without an ever-increasing reliance on limited physical resources. But no, this is not going to work. The abstract economy of culture, is just that, abstract, and cannot produce anything without its reliance on nature. We do the same with the financial economy — believing it can somehow, in and of itself, produce more wealth. It cannot. Someone, somewhere has to pay for the ‘wealth’ the financial economy claims to create, and that wealth again has its ultimate source in wild body and wild mind.

Once again, I’d like to make clear that I am not seeking to change economics, only to expand

our view of where all its inputs are coming from, if you will, and to shed some light on matters that are currently downplayed or neglected. If we were to fully address matters in relation to wild nature, be fully responsible in terms of what we take from nature by way of natural resources, and fully cleaned up after ourselves, by way of recycling and stopping pollution, this would not change economics. It would be, perhaps, an additional cost to the economy. As Richard Swift points out (*SOS, Alternatives to Capitalism*) these additional costs ultimately get passed on to the consumer, and thus the poor will suffer more than the rich. But does this mean we should not seek the changes? It could be argued that everything and anything that leads to higher costs causes more problems to the poor than to the rich. But that is not a reason for not making the change. Instead, it would be a reason for balancing things out with a fairer distribution of wealth through taxation or by some other means. If the natural commons are not taken properly into account, then the devastation that will be caused in the longer term will be even more of a problem to the poor than doing something about the problems now. And then there will not be a way back — we cannot tax our way out of ecological collapse. We could also point out that the extra costs envisaged by Swift and others could be, at worst, only temporary problems. It might be that an economy that really took proper cognisance of wild nature would ultimately be more prosperous rather than less.

Value

One of the discussions about capitalism, that we will pick up on below, is to ask when normal trading turned into capitalism proper. One answer given to this question is related to value. The idea is that at one time — and even now, in some countries — goods were produced solely for the purpose of being useful, and often by the person who would be using them. So, they had 'utility value'. There came a point however, when selling goods to others became more important than merely providing for one's own basic needs, or the basic needs of one's family or small community. This, in turn, is known as 'exchange value'. Common sense tells us that we might well spend a great deal of time and effort fashioning some tool or weapon for our own use and, in a way, as our time is not dictated by a financial world, the degree of effort is not too important. Okay, so the tool-maker might have spent the time fishing, or hunting, or just sleeping, but no-one's counting. In an industrial society however, the costs and time involved in producing goods for exchange become increasingly important. A business has to weigh up how much it pays for materials, labour, its buildings, energy costs and so on, and then determine whether it can still sell its product and make enough money to survive. Economists see, in particular, the cost of labour to be critically important in this analysis, so, in their terms, it is the labour expended on producing a product that creates its value. (It is 'concrete labour' that produces utility value — and 'abstract labour' that produces exchange value. The names given by economists reinforce the idea that we are separated — abstracted — from our making by entering into an exchange economy.) This proposes a labour-

based theory of value. For our purposes, in this chapter, this leads to two observations.

The first observation about the labour theory of value is that it is not so obvious that the value of a particular product is really just related to the wages of the labourer, from the buyer's point of view. Natural assets, for instance, have a value even when there is very little work involved in gathering them. The value of money also affects the price of commodities, so also does the way those commodities are perceived by the buyer — for instance, jewellery, artworks etc, can have a price well above their content in labour, because of the way they are valorised by society. As noted above, the theory separates the worker from their product — we become alienated from our making. And from the buyer's, or the consumer's point of view, the product ceases to have anything of the labourer within it — the product has become mere commodity, and as such, holds only a 'commodity value' or, 'extrinsic value'.

The second observation — and most important to our discussion — is that the true cost of labour is not really recognised in this analysis. The reason is that the wage given to the worker is, in theory, at least sufficient for the worker to 'reproduce' themselves, and therefore to return to work the following day and continue in the production process. (The 'real' price of labour is the commodities for which the labour can be exchanged. The 'nominal' price of labour is the monetary value of those commodities.) But this act of 'reproduction' (what I am referring to as 're-making' in this book) is only seen in terms of how much it costs for someone to live a

reasonable life in society. As we've explored above, it disregards the input of compassion, friendship, love, community, solidarity and all the other elements that go to make up the social commons. As we touched on earlier, the production process therefore takes these as a 'positive externality', in other words, it profits from what the wider community provides for it free of charge. (Pollution, by contrast, is known as a 'negative externality', something bad added to society, but for which, again, the economy does not pay.)

In contrast to the extrinsic value of commodities, there is 'intrinsic value'. I have mentioned intrinsic value previously in relation to wild nature — saying that nature has a value just for itself. We can expand this idea here to include, firstly, ourselves, as part of wild nature. Then, from the discussion above, I hope the reader will see that there is intrinsic value to our 'making', to the things that we produce, either for our own use or to barter or sell to others. There is intrinsic value also in the ideas we have — our imagination and creativity — the cultural commons. And finally, there is intrinsic value in our social relations — what I have called our 're-making' — the social commons. The material economy monetises the natural commons (or that part of it we use as resources). We are a little more hesitant about monetising the cultural economy — or, creativity and imagination — but we have noted the parallels between the cultural and the material economies earlier in the work. What about monetising the emotional economy? A little is already monetised — the 'services' side of the material economy, often termed 'social care'.

But the rest is free — or, a gift — it has intrinsic value. Perhaps care, emotion, affection, compassion and love just have a deeper level of abstraction and will always resist commodification and monetisation.

For economics, every value can be translated into a monetary value — everything is commodified. So some might think it is entirely appropriate for economics to disregard the ideas I have described above. But the danger then is that we disregard the very things that give us sustenance. Anything that stands outside the process of commodification tends to get ignored. Before we move on, we need to get a handle on how this commodification and monetisation works in practice.

Value and Money — The Financial Economy

Back in Chapter 2, it was with some reluctance that we noted there is a separate financial economy, and indeed that it is often referred to as 'capital'. Before we go on, we need to get more of an idea of how money functions in the economy.

Henry George reminds us: 'nothing can be capital [...] that is not wealth — that is to say, nothing can be capital that does not consist of actual, tangible things...' George continues: '...the stocks, bonds, etc., which constitute another great part of what is commonly called capital, are not capital at all; but, in some of their shapes, these evidences of indebtedness so closely resemble capital and in some cases actually perform, or seem to perform, the functions of capital...' (Henry George —

Progress and Poverty. We should note however that Marx, and many recent economists, make a very close link between capital and money, so the question is not entirely settled.

Money wasn't always the problem it is turning out to be. As we'll hopefully see below, the financial economy is there to serve the material economy — to oil its wheels, so to speak — and allow for all the exchanges and operations needed for the smooth-running of society. Money, primarily, is a medium of exchange — it is a veil between us and the simple exchange of goods and services that it allows. As a medium of exchange, the value of money is itself arbitrary. Setting its value against something else, such as gold, is likewise arbitrary, because the value of that other thing is just a social construct — an agreement within society as to what constitutes stored value. If a society fails, then the value of money can plummet or become non-existent, as has happened from time to time throughout history.

Money is further premised on trust in the future. Trust in money means that it is a store of value. Trust in credit, for instance, amounts to believing that someone, somewhere — probably the person who has borrowed the money — will produce goods and services to earn money to pay back their loan. So money is a standard of deferred payment. This process need not involve 'growth' necessarily, or indeed the exploitation of non-renewable commons, but, of course, very often it does.

The figure below builds on the figures in Chapter 3, to show the financial economy.

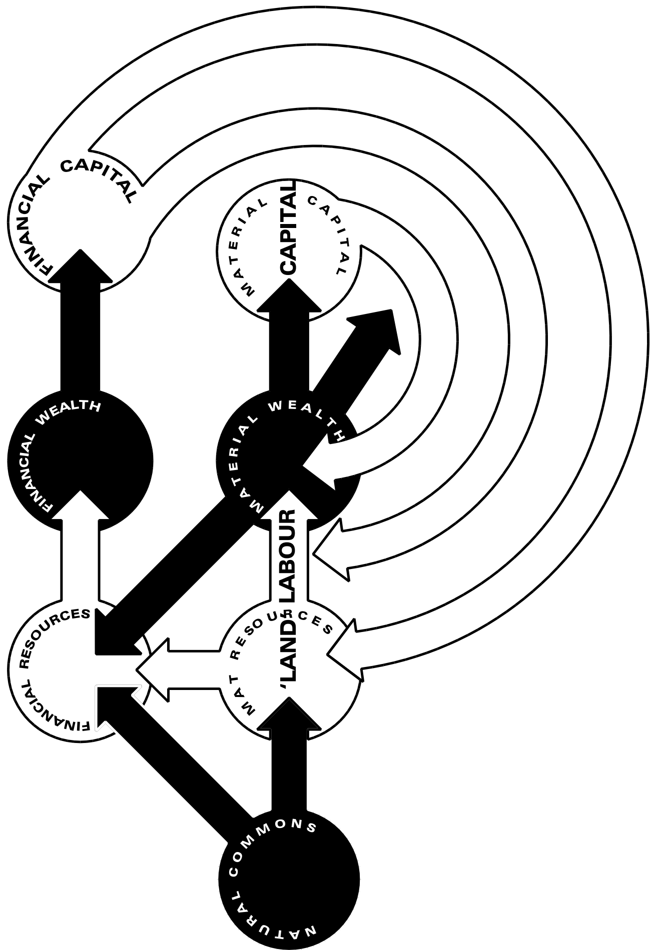


Figure 7.1

The figure is really just showing that there is a flow of money around the material economy, keeping the process going, and in this sense, the use of money is a benign use. Changing our views, for instance, with regard to wild nature, would not alter the basic functioning of the

economy and would not alter the flow of money to support it — the same structure would still pertain, but society's increased care of wild nature would nonetheless greatly improve our lives.

With all of the above thoughts in mind, we can return now to some of those questions raised in the Introduction.

What Should we Own?

Whilst governments usually have policies in place to combat monopolies, the biggest monopoly of all is allowed to play out without much comment or criticism — it is, of course, the speculation in land and property. Chapter 2 on ownership looked, in particular, at land. The chapter suggested that ownership itself is less of an issue than the notion of being a steward or custodian of land, and thereby having a measure of responsibility with regard to how the land is used. Chapter 3, on the commons, expanded this thought to include all areas of the natural commons — the oceans, the air, fish stocks, ores, minerals, forests, and so on. Chapter 3 suggested that since these resources could be considered as held in common by all of us, then anyone who taps into them should pay something back to the rest of the population.

In Chapter 4, on polity, we saw how the question of ownership is an important factor in the type of governance system we may choose to adopt. Some systems reject all forms of ownership and suggest everything in life is shared. Other systems, meanwhile, regard ownership as a primary right of the individual

and see governments responsible for protecting that right — even if this means that distribution to the less fortunate members of society is thereby curtailed.

In this chapter, and from the perspective of the material economy, we've seen that if owners of land, and all businesses that extract resources from nature, are required to pay something back to the community for this privilege, then this does not change economics, it simply means that additional costs are added to the business as a result. What was once a positive externality is now a further cost that needs to be met. This might mean that the process, whatever it may be, becomes uneconomic, so the business will either have to find ways to reduce costs in other areas of its production, or it will have to change to producing something else that does not incur such heavy production costs.

So, nothing changes in economics, but a lot may change by recognition of a commons. Two points can then be raised. Firstly, if we were given the opportunity to decide on imposing charges on the exploitation of the commons, we may well ask for something given back for the whole population in return for a particular company's ownership of land, or use of a natural resource. We would then have to accept the consequences — that some products may therefore be more costly and some things may be too costly to produce at all. Secondly, and once again, this is not a new economics of any kind — economics is still the same.
We can ask then, how does the social commons respond to ownership? What impact does the

emotional economy have on ownership? Well, the difficult answer is that a recognition of the social commons will mean that people will be more aware of their responsibilities to wild nature, natural resources and the commons. Even without legislation being put in place, as described above, owners and businesses will voluntarily either stop some activities all together, or change or curtail their business models, because they recognise that social responsibility is asking this from them. Recognition of the commons could then be imposed by legislation (whatever form of government is in place) or it could come about by businesses' and individuals' recognition of the commons. In the latter case, this would prompt action from an 'ethical' stance on what would be fair for everyone. Such change, being deeper-rooted, would be a more lasting and reliable result.

What Should we Share? Equality and the Welfare Net

The big difference between the material and cultural economies is that the material economy deals mainly with 'things that can be used up' and things that cannot be shared. For instance, if I eat an apple, the apple is not there for anyone else to consume. Culture though, can very often be enjoyed by many people without it being used up — it is still there for others to enjoy. This is part of the story of seeing the cultural economy as a gift, and we can extend this idea into the emotional economy of re-making. We don't use up our compassion, conviviality, friendship, conversation, harmony, intimacy and love. The apple is an 'excludable'

good. The social commons is not excludable. Radio waves are 'rival goods' — one broadcaster's use of a particular wavelength limits its use by other broadcasters. The social commons, by contrast, deal in 'non-rival' goods. The goods of the social commons (compassion, conviviality, etc.) are often also termed 'inclusive, or 'expansive'. In Chapter 3, we looked at the idea that a certain amount of sharing is appropriate, as we are all joint owners of the commons. Therefore, as I've summarised in the previous section, exploitation of land and natural resources requires a sharing out of the benefits to the rest of the population. Chapter 4, on polity, extended the idea of sharing, and noted the range of views, from absolute equality — what is described as equality of outcome — through to, at most, a welfare net, to rescue anyone who is so badly off that they risk homelessness and starvation as a result of their poverty. Part of the problem of deciding the best approach here is that there are various different ways of interpreting what equality actually means. Lyman Tower Sargent tells us that the confusion over the meaning of equality leads to a lot of problems. He says:

'Equality as a general concept contains five separate types of equality; political equality, equality before the law, equality of opportunity, economic equality and social equality, or equality of respect.'

Lyman Tower Sargent — *Contemporary Political Ideologies*.

In our earlier discussions we saw that 'equality of opportunity' is generally accepted as a reasonable goal. In the quote above, we can take 'economic equality' to refer to 'equality of outcome'. 'Equality of outcome' is the type of

equality that is contested by different types of governance system. As we've seen elsewhere, a sense of fairness is often taken to be more important than treating everyone exactly the same — equity triumphs over equality. Or, again to take up Tower Sargant's terms above, we might say there is a balance between economic equality and political and social equality.

When we looked at deliberative democracy in the last two chapters, we were really dealing with that balance between all the types of equality Tower Sargant has identified. Under a system of Parapolity, everyone has a voice — so we would all be politically equal. Not only that, but everyone's opinion would be listened to and considered, so, there is equality of respect. Then it would be down to the governance system to determine our legal and economic equalities and to ensure equal opportunity for all citizens.

Towards this end, a system of Parapolity would decide on the level of welfare net that was thought appropriate and put this in place, probably through the normal means of taxation, or perhaps by 'pre-distribution'. (P)re-distribution is a negotiation — a conversation.

Does economics have anything to add to these questions around equality? In one sense, and so far as the material and cultural economies are concerned, no. The economics is only about crunching the numbers, it is not about deciding on whether one outcome is fair or unfair to one particular person or group, or business. If we add in our consideration of the social commons however, we arrive at a different perspective.

The awareness of a social commons means that we will look at the material and cultural economies as primarily about serving the needs of the community, rather than purely about profit. The material and cultural economies are diminished in their role of serving the social commons when they are so exclusively monetised. The books need to balance, of course, so again, the economics is not changed. But the emphasis has shifted. As with the natural commons above, this is partly brought about by any legislation decided on by deliberative democracy. But again, it might also be by a shift in attitude towards greater social responsibility.

What Should we Make? How Should we Trade?

What should we make? The question of what we produce starts with our use of the natural commons. A particular aspect of natural commons is that some resources are, so far as the Earth is concerned, non-renewable. Fossil fuels, for instance, cannot reasonably be replaced once used. Metals and minerals cannot be replaced, but might be recycled. Wind, solar and tidal power, by contrast, are renewable resources by definition. Some ‘resources’ such as old growth forests are on the borderline between these two. They are ‘replaceable’ in the fairly long-term, but arguably should be retained as wild nature, not used as resources. Fish stocks are only renewable in so far as enough fish remain to reproduce. We also need to remember that the part of the natural commons that we use as resource relies nonetheless on wild nature for its continued

sustenance. Bees must pollinate half of all our food crops. Pollination by a small fly is ultimately what the world relies on for the production of chocolate. Eco-systems must be viable. The play-off between wild nature and the natural commons is always a moveable feast.

This is not the way things are done now however. Care of nature is not the first concern of agriculture and energy production — in fact it is often the last. The market economy — where decisions on what gets made are for the most part determined by what people want to buy — is the way things happen right now. We don't even have to go as far as saying that business is often only run for profit. The problem is right there in the market trying to satisfy every whim of an increasingly affluent population. This is fuelled by advertising. The argument made in favour of a market economy is that it really runs itself. The alternative — a planned economy — has to make decisions about whether people's perceived needs and desires are reasonable. So we can see that this is a tricky problem. It is so much easier to let the market decide. But to achieve a fair society, and ultimately a sustainable society, it looks like some kind of planned economy is required. And that in turn needs alternative forms of governance system.

When we bring economics into the picture, what changes? Well, ecological collapse and climate chaos, with considerable understatement, has been described as a 'market failure'! The reason is that there is no 'opportunity cost' set against such things as clean air and water, a stable climate and healthy eco-systems. As we have explored earlier, these things are just

considered as a given — as positive externalities. If a resource is non-renewable, then it becomes gradually more expensive, until either a cheaper alternative is found or production ceases. It is only if society puts an extra price on non-renewables, for instance, then the balance shifts to finding alternatives more quickly. If a price were put on clean air, water, soil, climate, forests and so on, then the economics, in just crunching the numbers, would perhaps be able to encapsulate all of these things into 'the market' and re-balance the books. At the moment however, economics mainly regards these as outside the market, so outside its domain. It is as a society that we would need to decide to change our approach to certain materials and products and to clean air, freedom from pollution and a healthy environment.

When we look at the economics and the social relations, maybe the problem is less about being separated from the 'means of production' as it is about being separated from our making — from the power-to, from the freedom-to, the freedom-to-make. The making and re-making apply just as much to the social relations and to culture as they do to material wealth. Massimo d'Angelis sums it up thus: 'The freedom that the commons gives you is a freedom you will find nowhere else: that is, the freedom to shape, together with others, the condition of your doing, of your caring, of your commoning.'

When we introduce the idea of a social commons, then we have a similar picture to the previous two sections. People will want to bring about changes of their own volition, and not because of legislation. But when we look at the

contrast between the market economy and a possible planned economy, things are a bit more complex. When we discussed Parecon, in Chapter 6, it was suggested that this start with public works, where the market economy would have less influence. It would be up to a system of deliberative democracy to decide how much further a planned economy may be introduced, or not introduced.

When we add the social commons into the mix, then arguably certain products and services may come to be viewed as socially irresponsible and therefore voluntarily renounced. I'd still say economics is unchanged, in terms of the number crunching, but clearly, from the point of view of an individual business, a planned economy could have a huge impact. If demand for a product drops then normal practice would be to try to increase demand by, say, lowering price. But these strategies may not be enough under a planned economy. Businesses may have to change to different products or cease trading. As with the discussion in the sections above, changing attitudes in the social commons are the driving force that changes our making, sharing, owning and trading, and not some new theory of economics. Social change drives economic change. This view, that our economies must take into account nature and social concerns as well as the normal concerns of production, consumption and markets, is sometimes known as the 'triple bottom line'. The triple bottom line is sometimes described as the economy, the environment and social justice — or, more simply — price, planet and people.

Money making Money

Back in Chapter 2, we looked at the three basic ways wealth is created without working — through renting land and property, profiting from the work of others and making money from money itself (all of these known collectively as economic rent). We've also seen that, whilst these three things have always been around in industrialised nations to lead to disparities of wealth, there are new forms of economic rent emerging. Developed nations are coming to practice a 'rentier' capitalism to sit alongside the strange value system of neo-liberalism. So it is no longer the greedy capitalists, or the big corporations or the 1% who are the enemy — we are all becoming rentiers.

It is often argued that capitalism, to be capitalism, must be premised on debt. Debt, of course, has become ever more complex. It's even said that no-one really knows what is happening when the various types of financial 'products' are traded in micro-seconds. The big banks are a world of their own and proving increasingly difficult to regulate, even if there was a will to do so. The figure below is an extended version of the previous figure, showing the financial economy. The new arrow added within the financial economy represents all those purely financial exchanges that are taking place, which, it is suggested, are increasingly abstract in relation to the 'real' economy from which they are supposedly derived. It's this that is the danger. As we've touched on above, the financial economy seems to believe that wealth can be created independently of nature

— and that therefore unlimited growth is possible in a finite world. There is a similar idea proposed for the cultural economy. Its products are arguably abstract, to a degree, and therefore again, infinite growth may be possible. But it is only the way economics evaluates these things that make them seem abstract. The inventor, artist, entrepreneur and educator still need to eat, to live somewhere and to benefit from the care and conviviality of society. All of that — part of our re-making — is ignored or devalued. So there is really no 'something-for-nothing' in the cultural or the financial economies. There is no expansion of any economy without the natural commons.

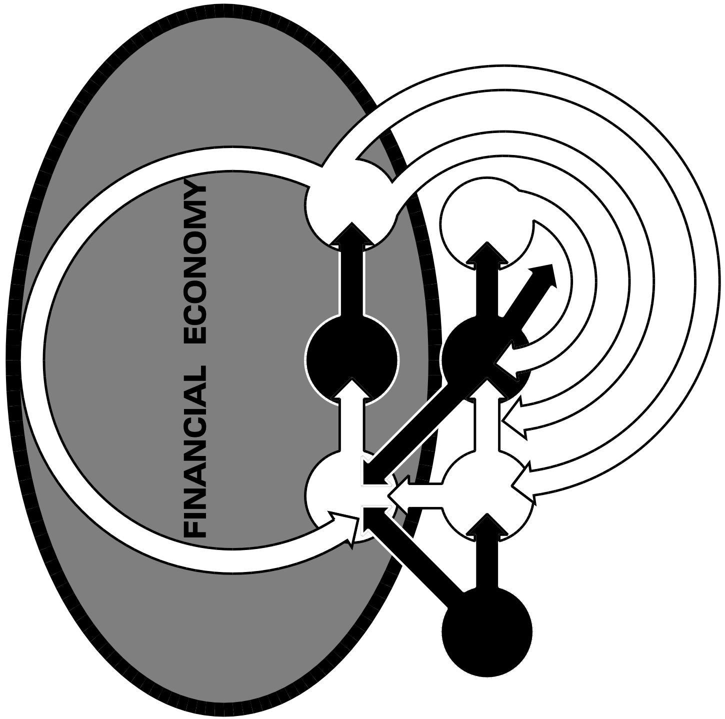


Figure 7.2

Neo-liberalism

Despite what I've said above — that the economics is just about number crunching — nevertheless there is a view that different schools of economics take different approaches to society. Economics may claim to be neutral, but it almost always has an underlying view of the world — and generally a rather negative one — that underpins its theories. Today, especially, it is what is sometimes called laissez-faire economics that is said to predominate, which, as we discussed above, means essentially to leave it to the markets to settle things and keep things stable. So it is price and what consumers

choose that determines how the economy operates. Things, in reality, are a bit more complex than this. Laissez-faire economics is what we are told we have, but underlying this is a whole series of political and social manoeuvres that has come to be known as neo-liberalism.

Firstly, to introduce these ideas, the meaning of liberalism is rather different in the UK than in the USA, but, with regard to our economic concerns, we could say that it is characterised by two things, the laissez-faire — let-the-market-decide — form of trading we have discussed above, and by free trade, meaning a freedom from government legislation which may limit or prohibit certain types of trading at home and abroad. (See endnote for a little more on liberalism.[3])

What we have in neo-liberalism is not this. Neo-liberalism starts from monetarism — the idea that it is the supply of money that determines the functioning of the economy. The term neo-liberalism was first coined by bringing together the 'neo' of neo-classical economics and the liberal values of a free society. So, to begin, neo-liberalism takes up the neo-classical form of economics as part of its intentions. Ha-Joon Chang describes how neo-liberalism has shifted the concerns of the economy towards consumption. He says:
'The school [Neo-classical] conceptualised the economy as a collection of rational and selfish individuals, rather than as a collection of distinct classes, as the Classical school did. The individual is envisaged in Neo-classical economics as a rather one-dimensional being — a 'pleasure machine', as he was called, devoted

to the maximisation of pleasure (utility) and the minimisation of pain (disutility), usually in narrowly defined material terms… this severely limits the explanatory power of Neoclassical economics.

'The Neoclassical school shifted the focus of economics from production to consumption and exchange. For the Classical school, especially Adam Smith, production was at the heart of the economic system….'

Ha-Joon Chang — *Economics: The User's Guide.*

Ha-Joon Chang goes on to look in more detail at the differences of approach between classical, Marxist and neo-classical economics.[4] So, in moving from the classical to the neo-classical school, it is a move from an emphasis on labour and production to an emphasis on consumption. This emphasis on consumption has expanded into the presumed autonomy of the individual and moral responsibility being put squarely into the domain of the market — us consumers — rather than upheld by government and industry. The change from labour and production to consumerism seems like an innocent enough change (and after all it is easy to see that value is not only about labour and production). But the change from looking at social issues around capital, stock, wages and industry, to private interests in consumption is a pernicious one — or so it is understood by those who see the influence of new-liberalism expanding into more and more of society. The commodification, under neo-liberalism, is now not just about individual consumerism but is extending into health and social care, education, and more besides. The key point is that matters of production and employment are <u>social concerns</u>,

whilst matters of consumption and commodification are individual concerns. This is the subtle but significant shift that links neo-classical economics to the wider mindset of neo-liberalism. Perhaps the originators of these ideas had intended this to be a benign link — even, a helpful one — but this is not how things have turned out. We could say, commodification is the new enclosure.

We can also mention here the term 'opportunity cost', as defined by economics. The opportunity cost is usually described as the thing we would give up in order to arrive at our choice of the thing we actually do, (or buy). The example often given is Robinson Crusoe deciding between fishing or collecting coconuts. If Robinson chooses fishing then the coconuts he has given up in order to fish are the opportunity cost of the fish. Modern economists usually leave it there — at individual choices — so this informs our discussion above. But it is not difficult to stretch the concept of opportunity cost to include businesses, societies, nations and even the whole planet. Friedrich von Wieser, who first coined the term opportunity cost, seemed to suggest that it should indeed be extended to whole societies. But later economists such as von Mises, Friedrich Hayek and Lionel Robbins apply it only on an individual basis. If we stretched the term to the whole planet, we could say that the opportunity cost of Western consumer capitalism is the sustainable planet we are giving up.

Traditional economics saw people as 'rational actors', who make decisions based on utility. Neo-liberalism takes this 'rational actor' idea

and extends it to all areas of life. This is an important point, as it shows the influence of the social and political on the economic. However, it is not the informed and conscious social commons that we have been discussing above, and it would be a stretch, to say the least, to say that there is much room for compassion. Here is a quote from Wendy Brown, that I include in full, because it sums up our current situation well:
'Neo-liberalism… constructs individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life. It figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for "self-care" — the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions. In making the individual fully responsible for her- or himself, neo-liberalism equates moral responsibility with rational action; it erases the discrepancy between economic and moral behaviour by configuring morality entirely as a matter of rational deliberation about costs, benefits and consequences. But, in doing so, it carries responsibility for the self to new heights: the rationally calculating individual bears full responsibility for the consequences of his or her action, no matter how severe the constraints on this action — for example, lack of skills, education and child care, in a period of high unemployment and limited welfare benefits.' Wendy Brown — '*Neo-liberalism and the end of liberal democracy'*, in *Theory and Event*, 7.1, 2003. (We might also add here that the rational self-interested individual of classical economics is itself somewhat suspect — quite apart from the extension of the concept to all areas of life, where everything is decided on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis. As humans we are often

irrational and we are motivated by a whole variety of interests beyond self-interest — even in our purchases — let alone other areas of our lives. In this book it is accepted that people are motivated by pleasure, but pleasure is by no means the same as self-interest.)

Neo-liberalism promotes the idea that businesses, left alone to do their work, will provide a better outcome for society than state-run services and infrastructure. So, where possible, it promotes the idea of privatisation. But again, this is not all that it appears to suggest.

Neo-liberalism tries to take control (covertly) of the state and bend it to its own purposes. (See Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future*.) Neo-liberalism uses the state to try to maintain the stability of markets, so — far from its pretence of letting-the-market-decide — in fact, neo-liberalism often ends up with large amounts of legislation and control, put in place to protect the market arrangements that favour those already wealthy and in power.

When it comes to 'free trade' we see a similar contrast, from what the term seems to suggest (open borders, no tariffs, equal opportunities in the marketplace) to what is actually occurring. Free trade is a very ambiguous term and is very much a straw man set up in order to be shot down. It could be about the abolition of tariffs. This would probably benefit poorer countries a great deal. For wealthy countries, some imports would be cheaper, so they would see lower prices. But, of course, jobs in the wealthier countries would be threatened, at least in the

short-term — the main reason for imposing tariffs in the first place. On the other hand, 'free-trade' could mean companies doing business with the minimum of interference from government (often referred to as a 'free market'). The two types of free trade do not sit happily together. Neo-liberalism seems to favour the free market idea of free trade. In practice though, the free market does not really happen. There are always regulations imposed by governments, and efforts to avert these, such as the proposed TTIP arrangement, meet with considerable opposition. (Thomas Sowell, author of *Basic Economics*, suggests that the benefits of genuine free trade are so self-evident that economists don't usually even bother to try to defend it. Free trade — or, the lack of it — is a political rather than an economic decision.)

Guy Standing gives us some insights into the neo-liberal approach to markets:
'[Neo-liberalism] meant the liberalisation of markets, the commodification and privatisation of everything that could be commodified or privatised and the systematic dismantling of all institutions of social solidarity that protected people from 'market forces'. Regulations were justified only if they promoted economic growth; if not, they had to go.' Standing continues: 'At the heart of neo-liberalism is a contradiction. While its proponents profess a belief in free "unregulated" markets, they favour regulations to prevent collective bodies from operating in favour of social solidarity. That is why they want controls over unions, collective bargaining, professional associations and occupational guilds. When the interests of free markets and property

clash, they favour the latter. Neo-liberalism is a convenient rationale for rentier capitalism.' (Guy Standing — *The Corruption of Capitalism.*)

So, of the three components of neo-liberalism — privatisation, free trade (trade liberalisation) and de-regulation — we have looked at above, supposedly neo-liberal societies contradict all of these. John Maynard Keynes looked forward to the eventual disappearance of the 'rentier' problems that we have discussed above and in earlier chapters. He said: 'I see, therefore, the rentier aspect of capitalism as a transitional phase which will disappear when its work is done. And with the disappearance of its rentier aspect much else in it besides will suffer a sea-change.' (*The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*.) But following on from the quotes above, we can see neo-liberalism extending the notion of the 'rentier' — originally a small elite who owned property and businesses — to a 'rentier capitalism' of buy-to-let landlords, AirBnB, Uber and even self-employed delivery drivers. Entrepreneurship may be a positive thing for some, but society is increasingly structured so as to force everyone to be their own micro-business. A 'gig economy' is not entrepreneurship, it is another form of slavery. (One of the founders of neo-liberalism took many of his ideas from Ludwig von Mises, whose writing, in turn, is very class-based and disparaging towards 'the masses'.)

Again, I want to emphasise that it is not really the neo-classical economics that is the problem with neo-liberalism. There are societal influences that are causing the problems that we have outlined above. This though, is not the

society of ordinary people, trying their best for their families and trying to earn an honest living. It is in the corridors of power where the problems lie. Once again, we have no voice, no opportunity to question what is going on and why regulations turn out the way they do; why some businesses get bailed out and others left to go to the wall; why trading with some nations is encouraged and others blocked; why the system is so heavily regulated yet claims to be free, open and equal. The main suggestion of this chapter is that the recognition of a social commons would shed light on these matters and with a system of deliberative democracy in place, we would have the opportunity to scrutinise and change things where necessary. There may, of course, be self-confessed neo-liberal economists, who take the above criticisms on the chin and see the behaviour of neo-liberalism as perfectly reasonable in the interests of a greater good — in their eyes. But still, I'd argue that this is not a distortion of economics as such, but a distortion of social relations. However, I doubt whether those who act in the ways I have described as neo-liberal would actually call themselves neo-liberals. It seems far more likely that they would see the various processes of privatisation and commodification as just common sense. Meanwhile, neo-liberalism can be just a term that the left uses to bundle all the activities that they find damaging and objectionable.

To sum up this section, neo-liberals are far from liberal and indeed liberals are not really liberal, and no political party seems to be what it says it is! Republicans are not republicans, Democrats are not democratic, Conservatives are not

conservative and the labour party is no longer socialist. But then, no-one would really want to be called the neo-liberal oligarch party!

The Gift Economy

Dietrich Bonhoeffer told us that giving is the primary relationship between people. If we returned to the question of value, discussed earlier, we could say that whilst a commodity has value, a gift has worth. To say something has worth is to imply that a price cannot be set against it. By way of contrast to neo-liberalism, the idea of a 'gift economy' (as promoted especially by Charles Eisenstein in *Sacred Economics*) takes a very different approach. The reader will recall that it is from Eisenstein that I have adopted the various definitions of commons used throughout this book, including the social commons, which has been our focus in this chapter. Eisenstein, and others who promote the idea of a commons, often do so with the intention of removing or radically changing the influence of finance and transactions from our economies and replacing them with co-operation, free exchange, bartering and other systems that are grouped under the term, 'gift economy'. We have seen, for instance, that in the cultural commons, where pure manufacture, trade and commerce are less clear-cut, the argument is to move towards a 'creative commons' (as opposed to creative industries) such that ideas, intellectual property and creative copyright are free exchanges rather than financial transactions protected, as monopolies, under copyright laws. To an extent, the free exchange of the arts (where this still exists) is held up as an example

of how the material economy should function. The social commons is where free exchange still more or less rules, but even this is being eroded by the professionalisation and monetisation of care, for instance. Those promoting a gift economy take the social commons as their starting point and work back towards the point where much more of life is on the basis of free co-operation. The gift economy is about relationship as opposed to transaction. As such, it is best practised at the small-scale, local level. Here it has the opportunity to be simple and elegant. It contrasts favourably with our current system of high infrastructure costs, health and safety regulations, professionalism and insurance, much of which has to be held in place because, in a world of transactions, we cannot trust each other.

So can we see the social commons/emotional economy as the basis for a gift economy? It's certainly true that other people are of value to us just for who they are in themselves. It's doubtful that many people would disagree, for instance, with the idea that community is a good thing, at least in principle. Most people seem to value the concept of closer community, but as things stand right now, we only get together with our neighbours and friends for entertainment purposes. Is the gift economy then a different kind of economy from the material, cultural and financial economies we've been looking at so far? Would the number-crunching of economists come to a halt if all of life were based on the gift? I think, yes, such a change would be so big that we could no longer argue that economics remains unaffected. But, as with all that we have discussed in this

chapter, society would need to change first so that the desire to share, the expressions of kindness and compassion and good community will lead potentially towards more of the gift. This would be a very radical change to make and at the moment it seems far-fetched to think it's going to happen.

So we have to be clear just how different a gift economy is in its world-view, because it is easy to see it as just an alternative style of 'transaction'. It can be seen as a 'you-scratch-my-back' form of exchange, and indeed, even the term 'reciprocity' tends to give this impression. The term 'commoning' helps us get beyond this. We could say — and this is a subtle point — that commoning is *multiplying others' gifts*, without, necessarily, any literal exchanges taking place. (This definition comes from Massimo d'Angelis.) Remember it is the cost-benefit analysis view of things that we are trying to get away from. Instead, commoning, and the gift economy, is about *embodying abundance, trust, generosity and conviviality*. Commoning is inclusive in every sense of the word. Commoning is grace, if you will. Commoning is the essence of the new story. For more on the gift economy, see Karl Polanyi — *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economies*, Lewis Hyde — *The Gift*, Genevieve Vaughan — *For-Giving*, Scott Burns — *Home Inc*., and Edgar Cahn — *No More Throw Away People*.

Closely related to a gift economy is a 'resource-based' economy. The idea here is that the increasingly financialised world has distorted our concepts of value. Abolishing money would mean that our sense of value would relate once

more to the usefulness of resources. A fair distribution of resources is all that would be required to live well. The most famous example of a resource-based economic model is 'The Venus Project' (nothing to do with the planet), with its chief proponent a French architect called Jacque Fresco.

We have hinted that a gift economy might be the way that re-making — commoning, the emotional economy — is fully realised. But it is certainly difficult to provide examples. There are billions of small gifts, rather than one particular formula for realising a gift economy. This is where culture can help — by showing how we might build each other up — how we might 'multiply the gifts of others' — rather than just live a life of transactions to meet our own needs and desires.

Eisenstein, in his version of a gift economy, is not entirely abandoning money. As discussed earlier in the chapter, he points out that, of course, money is just a socially agreed convention. Its value is based on mutual consent. Because of the interest received, there is a tendency for the rich to hold onto money. Setting its value against some commodity — such as, traditionally, gold or silver — does not overcome this. In fact we hoard the useless thing that serves as money. Instead, Eisenstein suggests, if the value of money were linked to something that has genuine worth in its own right, then this may result in changed priorities and different behaviour around finance. So he offers us a very close connection between money and the commons. He suggests linking the commons to the value of money. Money

would be related to something of real worth — land, clean water, clean air, eco-systems. The focus of our economies would be positively focused on things that really matter rather than the environment being simply disregarded. We would then 'hoard' the good things of wild nature and the natural commons because they would be the source of value.

Looking at these ideas, it is difficult to get away from the notion that it is just another way of putting a monetary value on the natural commons and perhaps also wild nature — as suggested by Dietar Helm, amongst others — but presented to us in slightly different form. I get the impression that this is not what Eisenstein is really meaning to promote, but it is difficult to be really clear how the value of money can be linked to the commons without the commons thereby being reduced to purely financial value. The principle seems to be moving us towards preservation of scarce resources, protection of natural habitats and sustaining eco-systems, so, all things we could probably agree as positive. But there is still a danger in offering a financial incentive to bring about something that is a 'moral' good — the preservation of the commons, abandoning fossil fuels, cleaning up pollution, etc. This has a potential to backfire. Perhaps it needs to be looked at differently and instead we encourage people to do moral things because they believe in the underlying moral values and not because we are offered financial incentives. A further idea, from Peter Barnes (*Capitalism 3.0*) is to set up independent trusts, which would be responsible for looking after various aspects of the commons. The trusts would administer the

commons in such a way that society would benefit by renting them back to those who use them. This turns the idea of economic rent on its head, by making it serve society rather than exploit it. The commons managers would be the 'rentiers' and would be serving the public good. I feel this is broadly in the same spirit as Eisenstein, but it is probably easier to follow how the idea would work in practice.

In *Sacred Economics*, Eisenstein was writing shortly after the credit crunch of 2008. It seemed likely to him that this was the beginning of the end of capitalism. Whilst we have not suffered a dramatic crash since then, there has not been any substantial improvement in economic performance of Western nations as currently measured. Indeed, it seems that most supposed 'growth' may be down to financial transactions and therefore based on increasing levels of debt (which still shows up as a positive growth in terms of GDP). The 'real' economy of nations (our material economy of goods and services) has been in decline for many years. So Eisenstein is coming from a place where he believes in the imminent collapse of capitalism. This is why he feels the change to a gift economy is viable, even although we seem a long way off from it at present. So, let's look at the potential collapse of capitalism in more detail.

Does Capitalism have a Future?

For many, capitalism is the enemy. However, I ask the reader to stand back from the theories for a moment and consider how much we are all embedded in the system. Even for simple

things like buying food, or having a mortgage it is almost impossible to escape from the capitalist system. To try to sweep all this away and long for the 'collapse' of capitalism, or for its overthrow, is a dangerous vision. Reports that capitalism is dead have been greatly exaggerated. Capitalism will adapt to the future and very likely survive. Claiming that capitalism is the cause of all our woes is more or less a conspiracy theory. Like all conspiracy theories, it is too simplistic and absolves the believer from having to think too deeply or try to work out real solutions.

There is always commodification. Those who wish to see the end of capitalism because of its appropriation and commodification are being disingenuous — they (and I) only have the liberty to criticise capitalism because we ourselves participate in its commodification. The gift economy is just the opposite end of the 'commodity spectrum' — it must still commodify up to a point, but it tries to see value outside of commodity. We can, at best, just strike a balance between commodity and gift. So, very strong and realistic alternatives have to be brought by those who wish to see a radical change. Revolution is not an option — it is just not going to happen. Society is too complex, and as we have seen, disruption of any kind to institutions and infrastructure of a modern society is likely to result in chaos.

If the economy works then does it matter if we call it capitalism or not? If everyone's needs are met, the planet is protected and people are satisfied with their work, then what is the use of economic growth? Some economists think

capitalism will lead to equality, but many (see, in particular, Thomas Picketty — *Capitalism in the 20th Century*) accept that it leads to greater disparities in wealth. Another criticism of capitalism — at least, in its current form — is that it creates useless commodities because it requires consumption, above all else, to maintain growth. Some look to modifying capitalism, to a greater or lesser extent, in order to try to address its shortcomings, without overthrowing the system and starting over.

We can ask, at what point does capitalism begin? One view is that capitalism began when wage labour was introduced, such that workers were no longer fending for themselves, but had to sell their labour to another in order to provide for their sustenance. Another view, discussed earlier in the chapter, is that capitalism began when goods were no longer produced solely for their 'use-value' but also, or instead, for their 'exchange value' — so becoming 'commodities'. Yet another view is that it is the tendency for the rate of profit to fall (identified by Adam Smith, and Ricardo, as well as by Marx) that keeps capitalism going (a view that is now mostly discredited). Perhaps the most important reason that capitalism continues — as we touched on in Chapter 2 — is related to debt. True capitalism, it is argued, began where there is borrowing and therefore debt. Even money brought into existence by governments is as a loan, and therefore a debt. Meanwhile, money created as private loans also means that growth is necessary to keep up with the creation of new money. Also, note that this does not, for the most part, go to new production, but is often for the purchase of land and buildings. This tends

to inflate the price of land and property. (See *Rethinking the Economics of Land and Property* by Josh Ryan-Collins, Toby Lloyd and Laurie MacFarlane.) For several decades now the 'growth' is in the financial sector — but this must inevitably be based on the eventual (hypothetical) repayment via goods and services, ie. through the real world economy. If the debt fell due now, there is no way it could ever be met. Debt means that more has to be produced in order to service the debt as well as just maintaining a living. It is especially compound interest that is the reason the economy is forced to grow. Even if the population was stable and there was no desire to improve living standards, then arguably debt still forces growth.

What if there was no debt? The jury's out as to whether a system not based on debt would still be a capitalist system. The number crunching is still the same and the economic theories can remain unchanged, but borrowing would stop. Small businesses may well be fine with such a situation, free of any debt worries and repayments, they can just work with what they have and get by. But a lot of production now is so large-scale that no business could save its way to a point where they could make the kind of investments needed for complex manufacture. So a growth-free economy may be possible, but a debt-free economy is more of a challenge. The best we might hope for is to rein in the ridiculous levels of debt we have at the moment and to stop creating money through debt.

We can ask then, is all this inevitable? Should we not just get rid of growth or debt, or both? I suggest that there could still be economic

growth without destroying our natural commons, or using them up at any increased rate. Or we could have a stable economy with no growth. John Maynard Keynes (*The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*) seems to have thought that this would be possible. It would seem to require that profit be abandoned, and as such, some would consider a zero-growth economy would not be true capitalism, as the premise of capitalism is that it must grow, but perhaps that's just an argument over semantics. A zero-growth economy could be a stable economy, whether we call it capitalism or not.

Paul Collier (*The Future of Capitalism*) identifies three core problems with capitalism — the thriving metropolis with a hinterland of dead and dying smaller towns and cities; the disparity between a well-educated elite and the rest of society who are left behind and the collapse of social responsibility. Inequality then, is one of the entrenched problems of capitalism. The growth of consumerism, identified above, has in turn contributed to the collapse of social responsibility Collier identifies. This last point is critical if we are to see the social commons as a means of healing the problems inherent in capitalism.

From gift economies to communism, the solutions offered are extreme. I cannot prove that a more moderate change is sufficient to solve the problems of capitalism without collapsing the economy. But take this simple example. Imagine a crop in a field. The harvest is plentiful — or would be — but there is no-one to bring in the harvest. Not that there are no

people, just that there is no-one willing to do the harvesting for the money offered. Clearly, everything is well — there are people to do the work of harvesting and if they harvested they could eat. But, otherwise, things are not well — 'the system' cannot allow the harvesting to take place. This example calls into question the notion that life is somehow 'impossible' without some kind of economic system. The 'scarcity' created by the situation I've described is a false scarcity. (Economists would actually refer to this as 'economic scarcity'!) Actually there is very often an abundance of resources and an abundance of labour to create society's wealth. The world could survive and thrive without capitalism in its current form.

The Importance of Corporations

Traditional economics says that individuals are free to act and will generally act in their own best interests. Therefore Adam Smith famously stated that everyone working separately will, like an 'invisible hand', make society as a whole more prosperous. Corporations, however, do not seem to act with the same freedom. The solution to this was to give corporations the same moral freedom allegedly enjoyed by individuals — making them 'persons' under the law. Therefore, so the theory goes, the corporation, having the same freedoms as people, would have the same stabilising effect on the economy as the individual whilst at the same time working in their own best interests. The logic seems impeccable, so why might it not work? Well, for one thing (as we have seen elsewhere) individuals do not act in rational self-interest. For another, even if they did, then as

we have seen, this can and does lead to the Tragedy of the Commons. So corporations are as likely, if not more likely, to behave randomly and not in the best interests of anyone. The logic is flawed all the way through. Commerce without Morality. Large corporations are effectively institutions. They can be set in their ways, only changing, if at all, when change is forced upon them. Their business practices become a business ethic, which in turn is inflexible — their vision and mission can become set in stone. Such a situation harms a company's employees and the business owners will eventually fail, even if they are making short-term gains.

We might conclude that it is best just to get rid of bad businesses. But getting rid of a corporation just means that someone else will take their place. A better option might be to seek accountability. Of course, some businesses really need to make massive changes. But perhaps even here it is these companies who are best placed to clear up the mess they have made rather than have them completely replaced.

More systemic change is needed before businesses will be ready to act with better standards. Like families and societies at large, business needs to recognise reciprocal obligations. See Paul Collier — *The Future of Capitalism*. As we saw above, we can choose to legislate to try to curb the problems that are caused by the activities of big business. Also, we can look to the social commons, the emotional economy and compassion to ask for a rethink about how businesses operate.

Informed customers can vote with their feet and bring dubious businesses to their knees.

Proposals

The basis of the commons, as explored in Chapter 3, is that the commons should not be owned or exploited privately. Instead we looked at recognising commons as shared inheritance and distributing this to the wider population in some way. The most basic way suggested is to introduce a tax for the use of land. A Land Value Tax — to use its normal description — has been proposed many times and in particular by Henry George (*Progress and Poverty*) and more recently by Martin Adams (*Land*). Here again is the quote from Thomas Paine:
'It is a position not to be controverted that the earth, in its natural, uncultivated state was, and ever would have continued to be, the common property of the human race… It is the value of the improvement only, and not the earth itself, that is an individual property. Every proprietor, therefore, of cultivated land, owes to the community a ground-rent (for I know of no better term to express this idea) for the land which he holds; and it is from the ground-rent that the fund proposed in this plan is to issue.' (Thomas Paine — *Agrarian Justice.*)
In a similar vein, John Locke: 'Land that is left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of pasturage, tillage or planting, is called, and indeed is, waste… Let any one consider what the difference is between an acre of land planted with tobacco, or sugar, sown with wheat or barley, and an acre of the same land lying in common, without any husbandry upon it, and he will find, that the improvement of labour makes

the far greater part of the value.' John Locke — *The Treatises of Government*.)[5]
A Land Value Tax (LVT) does not seem like too big a stretch from the community or council taxes that many of us pay at the moment for local services (although of course, the tax would be paid by landowners and landlords only, not by those who are renting). Martin Adams suggests that an LVT could replace all other taxes. Even Milton Friedman — neo-liberal mentor to Margaret Thatcher — described LVT as 'the least bad tax'!

In my own country of Scotland — part of the United Kingdom — a lot of land is owned by just a few individuals who often do not even live on their property. A similar situation pertains in many other nations. This is one of the main concerns of an LVT — the rich elite landowners are likely to bitterly oppose it. Another concern is the effect on property prices, which are currently bundled into the land on which the property sits. Some have proposed a gradual introduction of an LVT to help ameliorate the effect on property price.

Closely related to taxing land would be taxes and incentives related to wild nature. The owners — or rather, custodians — of land may benefit from incentives if they use land in particular ways. This may include; leaving wild land wild, returning 'developed' land to wilderness and planting particular trees or crops. More on this is explored in the next chapter.
When we looked from land to the wider natural commons, ores, minerals, and so on, a sovereign wealth fund is another method for

fairly distributing the wealth derived from these activities.

For fossil fuels, and oil in particular, activists in the USA and several other countries have proposed a 'fee and dividend' scheme. Under the scheme, companies producing fossil fuels would pay for their extraction — this is the fee. The resulting revenue would be distributed equally throughout the adult population — the dividend. Hence we would all be receiving payment for the use of natural commons — it would not just be a few rich corporations who would benefit.

If we were to be serious about 'free trade' we would recognise this as allowing fully open trading between nations rather than some rather dubious claim to have 'free markets'. So, it's the abolition of tariffs that would be the real 'free trade'. If we are to take seriously the rights of people in every nation then we would see the need to introduce this. The difficulties that would be faced by richer nations as a result are little compared to the enormous benefits that would be afforded to poorer nations. Such difficulties could reasonably be alleviated by governments for those businesses directly affected. In the longer term we in the wealthier nations would benefit from lower prices as goods from poorer countries would be cheaper. With the wealth disparities that exist between nations just now, we could summarise by saying poor countries would be better with high tariffs, and rich countries would help poorer nations substantially by having low tariffs. One concern here though is that free trade would not see the benefits accrued to poorer nations spread evenly

across their populations. It may be the rich in poorer nations who benefit most, whilst the poor get nothing. Another concern is that business is increasingly international. It might be that these agreements between nations are simply outdated and we need instead to fight for workers rights and good business across all nations and across borders rather than focus just on tariffs. We have to find ways of encouraging local economies, but might seek to do this in different ways than by adjusting tariffs.

Universal Basic Income (UBI) is another idea that has been around for a while. Some schemes have already run successfully and at the time of writing there is a proposal for a trial run in my home county of Fife in Scotland. The idea is simply to give each citizen, no matter their work status, a minimum income sufficient to pay for the essentials of life. People would then be free to choose whether to work and increase their income, perhaps just working part-time. This in turn might help to address the reduction of work opportunities that may come about through increasing mechanisation, AI and robotics. People may choose to improve their education and so take up work opportunities less prone to mechanisation. UBI is sometimes called 'social dividend' or 'dividends-for-all'. It is also sometimes called the 'Stipe' — after Michael Stipe of the band REM —referencing the band's album, *Automatic for the People*. Another proposal is a 'Basic Rental Income' for everyone who rents rather than owns a house.

Critics of UBI argue that there will be 'free-riders' who will never do anything with their

lives and giving them a basic income simply rewards them for staying lazy. Whilst this may be true of a small number of people, the trials that have taken place to date suggest that the majority of poorer people gain a lot from UBI. More importantly perhaps, the UBI gives people dignity whilst the benefits system it would partly replace in many countries very often treats people with contempt.

Closely related to arguments for a UBI are discussions over a shorter working week. With less need to work long hours and the increasing mechanisation of many jobs, this seems almost inevitable. In some countries there is an increasing gap between high earners working very long hours and a lot of often unskilled labour unable to find work. There is a disparity here between the types of work. What Michael Albert would describe as co-ordinator class jobs are often the ones demanding the long hours.

A maximum wage, sometimes defined and set as a multiple of the salary of the poorest paid employee, is often suggested as a means of redressing this imbalance. I have mixed feelings, as it kind of implies a shared work ethic between business owners and employees that may not be there in reality. Far better if there is a very much more substantial sharing in all aspects of the business.

If businesses were run as co-operatives, with profits shared out between the workers, then arguably this goes some way towards addressing that age-old concern of who owns the 'means of production'. Profits from the business could be shared with all of the staff,

not just the business owners, or all income ploughed back into the business in other ways.

For the financial economy, one suggestion is to split up the banks. Stopping banks from holding too many assets would allow some of them to fail without bringing down whole economies. Bring money back closer to its links with goods and services. Make banking more local and personal. Return it to being a service.

Another idea, known as the Tobin Tax — after American economist, James Tobin — is to tax financial transactions. (A similar idea was proposed by John Maynard Keynes.) In particular it is aimed at reducing the excessive trading in shares as these would arguably be hit hardest by the tax. Money crossing national borders — as it so often does in the financial economy — is especially problematic. It is a symptom of the severe abstraction of finance from the real world of goods and services, people and communities, which it is allegedly supposed to be serving. Perhaps only tighter regulations can address this.

A further idea is to put a minimum term on the ownership of shares. This would return stocks and shares to their original function of investing in the future of a business rather than the casino gaming of the financial economy that trade in shares has become. But there can be drawbacks to this strategy, as it would tend to discourage speculative investment that can aid new ventures.

Another idea (also proposed by Maynard Keynes) is money that is de-valued over time, so could,

for instance, require some kind of stamp attached to it (often literally a postage stamp) in order to bring it back up to the bank note's nominal value. The intention is to prevent money from being hoarded. The greater circulation of money then helps the economy.

Capitalism must convert our natural commons into commodities in order to continue. Not only that, but, so the theory goes, capitalism must continue to grow, so the speed with which the natural commons is used up is ever-increasing as a result. Some authors suggest that a sustainable life is impossible under capitalism, but that without capitalism, life as we know it is equally impossible. With all these issues, many conclude that for better or worse we are stuck with capitalism. But are there any alternatives? One alternative might be that governments could spend money into existence by creating debt-free finance for public goods, sometimes referred to as 'sovereign money'. (See, for instance, Ellen Hodgson Brown — *The Web of Debt* and Andrew Jackson and Ben Dyson — *Modernising Money.*)

How Do the Utopias View the Social Commons?

The reader, at this point, may well be expecting me to ascribe the monetisation of the economies to Privatopia and Cornucopia, and suggest that Ecotopia stands out as giving due regard to the social commons, re-making, the emotional economy and compassion. However, I'm choosing to break ranks! I think all the utopias recognise the importance of the social commons in their various ways. In Privatopia, our

emotional economy is frustrated — closed in by the system that no longer serves us — but it is still there beneath the surface, waiting to be set free. I'd also like to pick out the Cornucopians, in particular, for their belief in abundance. We often view economics as a dull science of graphs, statistics and confusing rhetoric, but essentially it is about trying to give us prosperity and secure our ongoing viability. The positivity of the Cornucopians at least shares that hunger for a future of security and abundance. In later chapters we will see that this might be realised in a lot of different ways — most importantly we may work with nature, rather than against her — and see both human flourishing and restored and enhanced eco-systems.

Ecotopians are often the promoters of a gift economy, but they also just leave it there, without really getting to grips with what it might mean. I hope this chapter has shown that 'the gift' is a lot more prevalent in our lives than we might realise — in fact, transactions are the aberration, gift is the norm. My wish for the Ecotopians is that they would take this more fully on board, rather than bending to the temptation to treat nature as a cost-benefit analysis.

Summary

We could ask at this point, what is the purpose of the economy? Is it to maximise profit? To maximise production? To make the best of scarce resources? Is it even to maximise employment? Economics, at least of the more traditional varieties, would suggest one or more of these alternatives. But in this book I would

suggest that the purpose of the economy may best be described as what would serve people most effectively. There is enough for everyone on Earth to have a comfortable life and for nature still to flourish — if we could only sort out our issues of fair distribution, sensible agriculture, sensible energy use and consumption. We have grown enough. We have come of age. It is time to work to other values. Scarcity — often regarding as the starting point for economics — is really just relevant to our material economy (if indeed it is relevant at all). Abundance is the rule for all the other economies we have discussed and this is enhanced by our human desires for pleasure and flourishing.

Putting economics first puts money first, with all value derived from money. By contrast, putting social relations first puts value and worth back into other things as a priority over finance. We need to be making a life, not just making a living. The social commons, re-making, compassion and the emotional economy undergird all else that we do. Compassion is the currency of the emotional economy. It is about pleasure, caring, community, celebration, art, music, humour. The value espoused by the emotional economy is intrinsic value, in other words, things have value just for being themselves. Community and relationships have a worth that cannot be translated into financial transactions.

Could we devise a diagram to show the workings of the emotional economy, to sit within nature and place and alongside the material and cultural economies? Well, to do this we need to

step back a little. Look again at the diagrams in Chapter 2. We can note a couple of points. Firstly, stuff just magically appears at the start of the economy and at the end of the process it seems to disappear — consumption is, on this model, the 'death' of stuff. This probably doesn't seem so strange to us. We have grown up with a narrative of things beginning out of nothing and a further narrative that we can throw things away and that's the end of them. But of course, when we look at the later figures in Chapter 3, we see that this is not the case. Everything comes from nature and from a particular place, and everything, one way or another, returns to her — whether it is 'consumed' by humans, or thrown away as waste. So there is a circular economy. Whether or not we intend it to be circular is another matter. If we use nature blindly, it is a bad circle. If we use her resources wisely, it could be a virtuous circle. So, this is our first diagram, the circular economy, and it fits especially well with the emotional economy we have been discussing in this chapter. It fits quite well with culture too, and of course nature is our prime example of a virtuous circle. Circular economies are the focus of John Todd of the New Alchemy Institute, Masachussets, the book, *Cradle to Cradle*, by William McDonough and Michael Braungart and Walter Stahel of the Product Life Institute in Switzerland. (It was Stahel who coined the phrase 'cradle to cradle'.)

Figure 7.3 The Circular Economy

We can extend the same logic to all of the economies that we have looked at — nature, place (I am using the term 'spatial economy' here), culture and the emotional economy. As I've hinted at above, thinking of some of these economies as circular may be a stretch, and perhaps it is more of an aspiration than a reality. Nevertheless, I'd suggest they could all reasonably be circular. Furthermore, to provide another view of all these economies, as they have been described in preceding chapters, we can arrange them as nested one within another. So this gives us our second diagram.

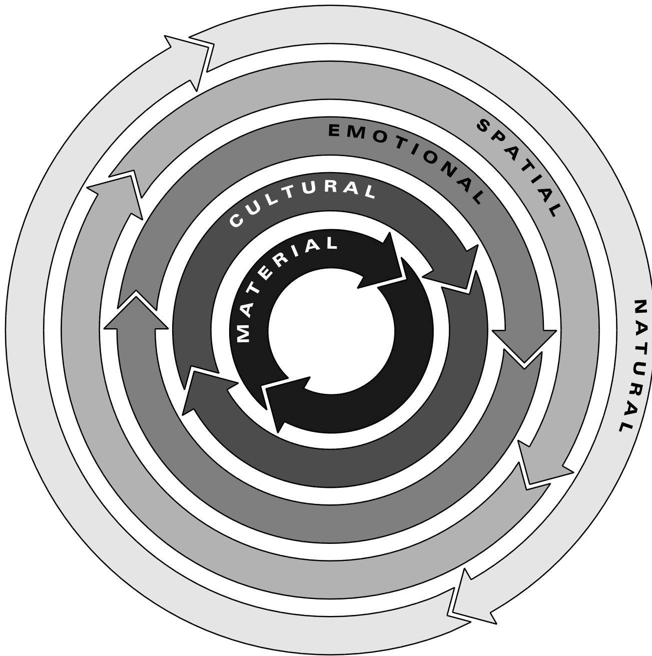


Figure 7.4 Nested Economies

Finally, we can go back and re-visit the discussions on the gift economy, earlier in this chapter. The key idea there is that the gift is given to build others up. Whilst the ideas explored around gift may seem alien to us, I think this is because our culture has immersed us in buying, selling, trading and transactions. I'd suggest instead that gifting is always going on. So, our final diagram shows this idea of a gift exchange back and forth between two economies. The principle could be applied to all of the five economies we have described.

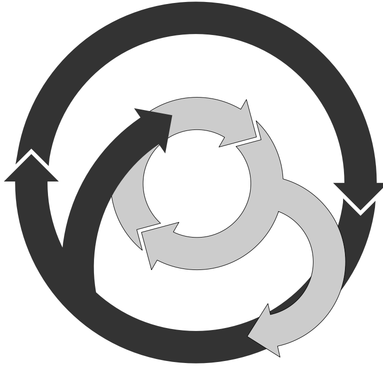


Figure 7.5 Gift Exchange between Two Economies

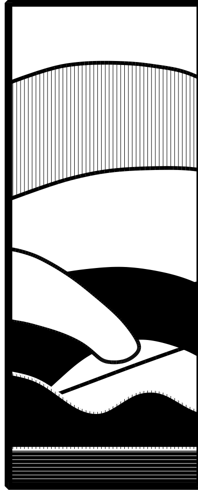
All of the economies flow into one another. The material economy has elements of the cultural economy, by way of invention and technical know-how. The cultural economy has elements of the material, as many of its 'products' are physical things. So too, then, we can see maintenance and care — aspects of the emotional economy — as features of the service sector, that are usually bundled up with the 'goods and services' of the material economy. The gift economy is based on relationship, as opposed to our current, limited, material economy, based on transaction.

Nature, places, culture and people are all brimming with an abundance of gifts. If we were to be more aware of this then perhaps we would see a great many things in a different light. It is not that I am suggesting that we abandon money. It is rather that we place things into a wider context. The wider context includes nature, the commons and our

relationships around place, culture, making and re-making. And it includes a vision of a new story.

The issues raised by the social commons/emotional economy bring us back to the question of changing the system or changing people — a question we have encountered several times throughout this work. But these alternative options are not really so different. For the system to change, those who make decisions — be it a few people, or all, or most, of the population — must change. Otherwise, if people were already different, the system would already be changing. Could a few people, who just happen to be our leaders, change without some part of society changing as well? It seems unlikely. It seem more likely that a wider change will need to occur, and then our leaders will be forced to follow.

The next four chapters try to put all of the foregoing discussions into some context — in relation to nature, place, compassion and pleasure. The chapter on compassion, in particular, takes up this theme of changing individuals and communities as the key to more structural change. But, as we have explored in this chapter, all of this ultimately leads back to nature. So we start with nature in the next chapter.



8 Nature

'In wilderness is the preservation of the world.'
- Henry David Thoreau

'If you do not rest upon the good foundations of nature, you will labour with little humour and with less profit. Those who take for their standard any one but nature — the mistress of all masters — weary themselves in vain.'
- Leonardo da Vinci

The first of four chapters on the themes of nature, place, compassion and pleasure. The focus of these chapters is to explore subjects that I feel are essential for discussion, if a system of deliberative democracy is to be established. As such, all that is expressed here

is simply ideas and not necessarily proposals. If we had the chance, we would be allowed to decide on what kind of governance we might like. If we opted for a deliberative democracy, then we might have an opportunity of all being involved in making decisions about the subjects addressed in these four chapters. Until then, this is all just speculation. I hope, nonetheless, that the ideas explored will be by way of an incentive to see what we could all be talking about, if only the opportunity were given to us.

Natural Commons and Wild Nature

As we discussed in Chapter 3, it is essential to our existence on Earth that we appropriate nature in some way in order to sustain and reproduce ourselves. I have designated this part of nature that we need to use as the natural commons. There remain however, features of nature that could be viewed as too important, unique or beautiful in themselves to be exploited as 'resource'. I have used the term wild nature to describe this aspect of nature. How do we differentiate between these two types of nature — natural commons and wild nature? In Chapter 3, I suggested that this is a matter of attributing intrinsic and extrinsic value. One way or another — whether the choice is seen in these terms or not — there seems no way of avoiding this decision. It is also a 'moveable feast'. Some parts of nature that we may use as a resource today we would be best to keep as wild nature, and vice versa, and these decisions may change over time.

We should also recognise our own wild mind, wild body and wild soul; in other words, the wild

nature within ourselves. If we were more at home in our bodies, would we likewise be more settled in our minds, souls, relationships and even in our politics? How do we acknowledge these connections in our lives and respect them? Taking up the ideas of the last chapter, we might view wild body and wild mind as gifts from the economy of nature to our human economies of culture, making and re-making.

Gandhi's social sin of Education without Character is applicable here. What is character, if not to recognise that there is something unique and special about each one of us that cannot be bought or packaged — and to likewise extend this to others, and to the wider world of nature? I believe this is something we might be able to teach, but nonetheless it is a tricky lesson to get across. Society's current emphasis on individualism and self-worth can lead to narcissism. Our intrinsic value has to be set within the context of community, responsibility and nature herself.

Science too, as it is currently practised and promoted, does not really recognise the distinctions that we have drawn above. Our science is premised on dead matter as the basis of everything — hence, Gandhi's Science without Humanity. As we progress from physics through chemistry to biology and psychology, the assumed dead nature of fundamental reality casts a long shadow. So to make a distinction between natural commons and wild nature — extrinsic and intrinsic value — is anathema to science. This is not to criticise individual scientists, who may be well-meaning in keeping a sharp divide between their research and the

moral implications of its application. But again, that is a difficult balance. We are certainly given the impression that science, just as science, is about dead anonymous matter. Physics, at least for the time being, has triumphed over biology.

Connection and Inspiration from Nature

Nature is many things. We humans tend to project onto her the spirit of the age. It used to be competition and survival of the fittest. More recently it tends to be stories of co-operation, which I take as a sign of hope. Some writers (see, for instance, Jay Griffith's *Wild*) suggest that nature provides us with a 'morality' that is superior to anything that humans have so far devised. (Meanwhile, Mark Rowlands' *The Philosopher and the Wolf* says that only a truly nasty species would devise a system of justice!) But — whilst the examples of co-operation nature offers us are inspiring — to see her as a root of morality is not, I think, her primary source of value for us. There are, however, moral implications on how we, as humans, put value on nature, and we will look at this later in the chapter. Meanwhile, we look to nature for her beauty, wonder and enchantment. Encounters with wild places are essential for our well-being. I have no logical argument to offer as to why this is the case, but I think it is critical. I think that even looking out for a tree or a stream or some other small feature of the natural world close to where we live has immense value. One of the writers on deep ecology related his ideas to a small bank of grass near his house. Wild nature speaks to our 'deeper' selves — to our inner wildness. To lose

this would be to lose something fundamental to who we are. It is often dismissed as romantic or anti-development to wish to have places protected as wilderness. But I would say that without some true wilderness on our planet we are greatly diminished. Without wilderness we will forget how fragile and trivial we are in relation to the forces that have shaped us.

Bill Plotkin (*Nature and the Human Soul*) offers us three premises:

'(i) A more mature human society requires more mature human individuals.

'(ii) Nature (including our own deeper nature, soul) has always provided, and still provides, the best template for human maturation.

'(iii) Every human being has a unique and mystical relationship to the wild world, and that conscious discovery and cultivation of that relationship is the core of true adulthood.'

Nature then, is arguably our primary source of inspiration. The inspiration fires our imagination. David Abram tells us: 'Bereft of contact with wildness, the human mind loses its coherence, and the human heart ceases to beat.' So, it is nature that is the ultimate source of our creativity. It is imagination and creativity that give value, both to individual lives and to humanity generally. Our response to nature and beauty is hopefully one of wonder and gratitude. Our response to our way of being in the world is hopefully one of joy. The enchantment of nature provides us with a 'radical de-centre-ing' or 'lateralness', to use Elaine Scarry's terms. (*On Beauty and Being Just*.) This, I suggest, is the threshold between merely surviving and genuinely living.

There are many groups and movements that are dedicated to protecting nature in different ways. They are variously described as environmentalists, conservationists, ecologists (either 'deep' or, presumably, 'shallow') and so on. Often these groups will back up their hopes and dreams about the natural world with facts and figures, as if to demonstrate that there are practical or economic reasons for preserving nature. (Essentially, in the terms adopted by this book, regarding all of nature as a resource.) However, one thing that unites all of the groups though (perhaps more than any of them would care to admit) is a love of beauty. It would be better for us all, I think, if more people would just admit to this heart's desire and tell us that they care about the small and humble examples of the natural world close to their own lives and how deeply important this is to us. People might say that there are many big and important problems out there in the wider world that need sorting without us fussing over beauty. I suppose that in a world premised on 'getting things done', efficiency, and 'pragmatism', the ideas I'm presenting here will seem like vague and flaky notions. Our deep connection and reliance on nature might seem odd to introduce as a 'reason' for why we might seek to do things differently. I have no concrete explanations to offer. But I would say here, and throughout this book, that if we do not pay attention to the small things right where we live, then we will not be motivated to do anything about the bigger problems in the world. I think the care of nature is the true pragmatism — that our ways of doing things and getting things done today are deeply flawed.

So I am suggesting taking time to savour the little encounters with nature that our everyday lives afford. If a tree or a little patch of garden or a stretch of riverbank or shoreline does nothing for us, then the bigger problems of the world will not actually mean anything to us either. If we do not care about the tree outside our window, will we care about the rainforests of South America or an ice shelf breaking up in Antarctica? Without this connection, we are in danger of losing what is wild — of creating everything as bland and predictable.

Sometimes it is said that we have a 'relationship' with nature and that this is the source of joy that it affords us. However, we saw in Chapter 3 that all our human activities are embedded in nature. All production, for instance, is a relationship with nature — even mining or drilling for oil. I'd say that the term 'relationship with nature' is too abstract. Rather, there are specific relations — with our own bodies, with other people, with a dog, a cat, the birds in the garden, with a stream, a tree, the soil in the vegetable plot, the animal taken to slaughter, the crop we harvest for food. We are wild mind, wild body and wild soul — the embodiment of nature. The split that we identified right at the start of this book between Eden and the surrounding wilderness has stayed with us down the centuries and it is difficult to shake off. But, as with several questions we have encountered in our discussion, this need not be an either/or. Sometimes seeing the human world as a protected place, a haven from nature, is beneficial. But sometimes, we can find a haven in nature. Humans have the probably unique ability of seeing it both ways —

of being separate from nature yet embedded within her.

Our own Wild Nature

The primary encounter with the natural world is through our own bodies. There is little, if anything, in human experience that is not felt through the body. Our physical presence, and our feelings about that presence, make an enormous difference to how we view the world. Much of the time our thoughts about our experiences are just rationalisations of our physical reactions — and often very inaccurate rationalisations at that. Our bodies are part of wild nature, so they share that intrinsic value that I have discussed above and in earlier chapters. Every day we spend time and energy 're-making' ourselves. Should we not therefore be honouring that which we spend so much effort re-making? A first step to better acceptance of our bodies may be a compassion for ourselves — compassion in the sense of joy and celebration that we will be exploring in a future chapter. Our pleasure — rather than our power — is what could define our relationship with our embodied selves and the natural world.

But rather than celebrating the body, culture generally has been moving in the opposite direction, towards being more thought-based and abstract. In Western culture, our feelings about our own bodies are, to say the least, ambivalent. Rather than a celebration — as all bodies should be — most of us are made to feel ashamed and embarrassed about who we are. It's an open question as to what effect this alienation from our own bodies has on our

relationship with each other and with the wider world of nature. Our technology has created even more veils between our embodied selves and the natural world. So maybe it is no accident that our culture often seems to treat the natural world with indifference or sometimes wants to tidy and sanitise nature, as if it is not quite respectable when left to its own devices. I think that our relationship with our bodies needs to be healed before we can make real progress on improving our relationship with nature. It is only one aspect of our wider connection with nature, but I think that it is an important one nonetheless.

Nature and Value

In the previous chapter, we took a look at the different ways that value is understood — in particular by our economics. We noted that utility value is the value that something has to us in its use, whilst commodity value is the value something has in exchange for other things. I hope it is clear from this that natural resources fall, more or less, within the first category — they have instrumental or utility value to us towards the manufacture of products. The way economic value is realised from natural commons is a peculiarity of the way capitalist economies function. Clear felling a forest, for instance, will always appear to generate more profit than managing and preserving it. There seems to be no good economic argument for the preservation of wilderness. In the longer term though, and from a wider, ecological perspective, the forest has value above anything that could ever be described or accounted for in purely economic terms. (Or, to put it another way,

there is an opportunity cost that is missed in the preservation of wild nature — there is a market failure. If we were more savvy, we would recognise that keeping the forest would eventually generate more wealth.)

In this chapter, I have said that there is a further type of value that we need to take into account — intrinsic value. The value that the natural world holds for us in these terms puts it way beyond any calculation of utility value. This is more even than the value we might derive from nature as 'environmental services'. So I have suggested a split between the natural commons (utility value) and wild nature (intrinsic value).

There is a place, of course, for accounting — but those who most strongly advocate this approach are apt to be very dismissive of the split between natural commons and wild nature. Dieter Helm argues in *Natural Capital* that, as I've noted in an earlier chapter, those I have described as Ecotopians set infinite value on all nature and will therefore not countenance the use of any of it. This is a caricature that I have not seen proposed by anyone else. Helm does not acknowledge the split I have identified above, except perhaps in an indirect fashion. He does, however, offer a simple formula for managing natural capital — that we should organise our economies such that the amount of natural capital remains at least constant going forward, and should maybe even increase in the short-term, until we achieve a better balance. In a similar vein, Evan Eisenberg (*Ecology of Eden*) suggests, 'so to manage nature as to minimise the need to manage nature.'

Destroying wild nature might one day be seen as on a par with crimes that we are unequivocal about condemning without need for further justification, such as slavery or child abuse. No-one would seriously do a cost-benefit analysis for the re-introduction of slavery or the legalisation of child pornography. Perhaps, in decades to come, we will look back on the pricing of the destruction of our rainforests with equal incredulity. So the question of value, when applied to nature, might be better if it is not considered to be an economic question. A moral explanation has more hope of success than an economic one. The moral stance has now been taken up for nature by what is described as 'widening the moral community'.

Nature as part of the 'Moral Community'

From the above, it is our human culture that invests nature with either intrinsic value or extrinsic, instrumental value. At the most basic level, we might say that all animals and plants have a 'right' to their own life and autonomous existence. Furthermore, as we've seen, there is a tendency to think of ourselves as 'outside' nature, whereas, in fact, we are one community. We've already looked at the ownership of land being more about stewardship and custodianship than property, and this is a step towards recognising that the use of land is about seeing ourselves as part of this wider community of nature. Deep ecologist Aldo Leopold offers us this perspective. He says:
'We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us… But when we see

land as a community to which we belong we may begin to use it with love and respect.'
Whilst this is still an invention of human culture, it would be a good place to start in giving the natural world a greater say in our politics. Nature is in no position to defend such a right — even to comprehend it. We need, therefore, to have human agents who will represent nature's 'interests' for her in a formal and legal sense. Someone needs to speak for the land, the ocean, the air, the rivers, the fauna and the flora, whenever there are questions of our human activities disturbing a wild place. This, in practical terms, is the extension to the moral community. The governments of Iceland and Equador already give legal status to the environment.

From our discussions about Parapolity and Parecon in earlier chapters, I am suggesting that our deep connection with nature and the extension of the moral community need to include some representation for the natural world in our lowest level of government. So, if the ideas of Parapolity were to be successful, this would be at the neighbourhood level. It is the people who live near or within our natural habitats who are at the front line for their protection. People could be empowered to protect the natural places on their doorsteps. Owners of wild land may be encouraged to keep the land they hold in trust as wilderness. Businesses may be encouraged to keep some space for nature and developers encouraged to create parks and wildlife havens. Even within cities, there is a need for 'wilderness'. Greenbelts and wildlife corridors are essential features of our built environment and deserve

the utmost protection. All of this may be possible with the grass-roots system of Parapolity.

Re-Wilding

George Monbiot, in his book, *Feral*, speaks of 're-wilding' our land, creating places that are 'self-willed'. It is no longer really a case of 'preservation' of habitats, because we would often be hard-pressed to find an era to which we might want a particular area of land to return. (Even packets of 'wild' flowers, sold in the UK, contain species that are actually invasive!) Some have suggested that it takes 1,000 years for a species to become 'indigenous'. (Perhaps then, the UK will eventually embrace the grey squirrel as its own.) We also hear reports of new species emerging with incredible speed — perhaps nature is going into overdrive as a result of the changes wrought by humanity. We are faced with a choice of whether just to accept this big shake up of species now and leave nature to find her way, or if we should still try to bring habitats back to some previous 'pure' state. As climate change starts to bite, we are also faced with the dilemma of whether to help species that cannot move in time to avoid disaster or leave them to their fate. These are complex issues, but as Monbiot reminds us, nature herself is self-willed and will find ways to respond to changing circumstances that may well surprise us and hopefully will delight us.

Despite the difficulties described above, of deciding when a landscape is 'genuinely' natural, or when it is in some ways compromised by invasive species, there is at least a clearer

division between land that is 'developed' and land that is left to nature. As the human population grows, there is pressure on such places to give way to farmland or pasture, managed forests or tourism. The preservation of wild land — so far as this is possible — could be made a priority.

Re-wilding, and along with it, such alternative agricultural practices as regenerative agriculture and permaculture (including ocean permaculture) are the somewhat forgotten cousins of the efforts to curb climate change. It might be that we could manage to go back to an abundant world of nature and solve a good many other problems along the way.

Living on Wild Land

As I write this in 2020, there remains only a tiny number of humans living completely within nature and untouched by civilisation. Often, we have viewed that 'state of nature' as a blissful state, somehow very much more pure and innocent than the 'civilised' world. Hard evidence might suggest otherwise, but nonetheless this feeling persists. People living in earlier centuries felt differently. Wild places were dangerous. Nature was seen as threatening, and potentially outlaws and bandits lurked outwith the bounds of towns and villages, seeking to prey on the unsuspecting traveller. A previous state of living happily with nature may have been there in myths — but then the Garden of Eden was still very much a protected place, not a wilderness. So, deep within the psyche of our cultures, there persists a strong threshold between nature and civilisation —

wilderness and city or, as Evan Eisenberg has described it, the Mountain and the Tower, as explored in his book, *The Ecology of Eden*. The more 'developed' we have become, it seems, the more likely this desire to cross over into wilderness is manifested. Even if there were no environmental problems, giving us pragmatic reasons for looking toward simpler lifestyles, I think this longing for wilderness would still persist.

When it comes to an 'indigenous' people living on the land, their land inevitably now falls within nation states. The governments of these nations have a tendency to try to bring their populations under state bureaucracy, giving people ID's, perhaps also looking for them to have a fixed address, so that administrative tasks can more readily be carried out. Up to a point, this is well-intentioned. We have already seen how Hernando de Soto understands this process as being essential to economic prosperity in poorer nations. Nonetheless, I think there is an argument for people to continue to live 'wild', and be exempt from the normal processes of government, if they wish. Let us protect those indigenous peoples who still survive, whilst we can.

This, in turn, raises the question of people who wish to live 'off-grid' from otherwise more 'developed' nations. It certainly gets difficult at this point, as we need to draw a distinction between what might be considered a suitably 'organic' lifestyle, and one that is too developed or technologically sophisticated. Perhaps there is room for some flexibility. For the truly intrepid folk who wish to go 'back to the wild',

we might give people the means to live in the midst of wild nature. Why is it that so much of our dealings with government can only be achieved with a fixed address? We could make it easier for people to live off-grid by allowing them to have a postal address that is not where they actually choose to live — be it hut, boat or camper-van. People could then more easily choose to live in nature, yet still be able to interact with society where this is needed.

Seeking out the Wild

The dreams we have of our encounters with wild nature shape our relationship with the planet. If the story we tell of nature is only one of resources, or if we see the countryside or the mountains as just a theme park, then that is what they will become — first in our dreams, then in reality.

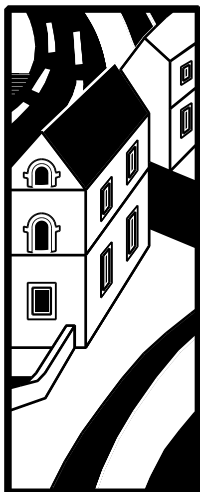
Our encounters with wild nature offer us some sense of perspective to our lives. Different types of natural landscape have their own specific qualities. Wild places that endure offer us a feeling for the fleeting-ness and insignificance of human life and the transience of our own lives in particular. What seems so important back home or at work, is shown up as trivial in relation to the stillness of the mountains or the crashing ocean on the seashore. Nature also has her cycles of seasons, of rain showers, trees budding, flowers opening, birth and death, the sun and moon rising and setting. These changing rhythms should be informing us — setting our own moods — but they are so often blotted out by our 24/7 culture of noise and 'information'. I am suggesting

therefore seeking out truly wild places as much as our life circumstances will allow.

When we encounter the wild it is important to keep our footprint — even as visitors — as light as possible. If we cannot visit such places with a sense of responsibility then better to go to the touristy resorts than venture into the wild. There is a big difference between 'experiencing' nature on a jet-ski and experiencing nature in a kayak, or 'experiencing' nature on a quad-bike and experiencing her on a push-bike.

In the UK, the area of private gardens is greater than the total area of all of our nature reserves combined. So, those of us with a garden have another potential source of contact with wilderness, and one that can have a significant impact on how wildlife copes in the future. The recent trend, unfortunately, has been to cover gardens over with tarmac or paving slabs — thereby making it difficult for wildlife to get a foothold. We very much need to reverse this trend, and we'll have a bit more to say about that in the next chapter.

Let me stress again, the matters I've raised in this chapter — and will be raising in the next three — are only suggestions. If we had a choice of what governance systems to put in place, then whatever system that choice led to would then have the say on all the issues discussed above.



9 Place

'But a city is more than a place in space, it is a drama in time.'

- Patrick Geddes

'Just as an individual person dreams fantastic happenings to release the inner forces that cannot be encompassed by ordinary events, so too a city needs its dreams.'
- Christopher Alexander

'Give up all other worlds except the one to which you belong.'
- David Whyte

The second of four chapters exploring the themes of nature, place, compassion and pleasure. The focus of these chapters is to explore ideas that I feel are essential for discussion, if a system of deliberative democracy is to be established. As such, and once again, all that is expressed here is simply ideas and not necessarily proposals. If we had the chance, we would be allowed to decide on what kind of governance we might like. If we opted for a deliberative democracy, then we would have an opportunity of all being involved in making decisions about the subjects addressed in these four chapters. Until then, this is all just speculation. I hope, nonetheless, that the ideas explored will be by way of an

incentive to see what we might all be talking about, if only the opportunity were given to us.

The Mystery and Joy of Place

Place, a sense of place, and a sense of home, are essential for human flourishing. The significance of place to the human psyche is reflected in the English word 'entrance', which, of course, is also 'en-trance'. Just the notion of crossing a threshold in space is enough to make us feel that we are also crossing a threshold in consciousness — that we might be put under a new spell or dream that a different space can evoke. Can we make our own home towns and cities places of joy, beauty and excitement? In our wealthy Western societies so many people seem to want to escape and to jet off to somewhere more 'exotic'. But why not bring the exotic to us — create it for ourselves — instead of seeking it in someone else's place? Neighbourhoods, villages, towns, cities, woodland and farmland could be bringing joy to our lives and enabling life to flourish.

We also make powerful statements when we name a place. The native people of Australia can apparently cross vast tracks of land without map or compass (or Google Earth) because every feature en route is named and has a story attached to it. Similar traditions are reported of other indigenous peoples. By contrast, our own UK government seems intent on constantly changing the boundaries of old counties and the constituency boundaries for political leaders. We are reduced as a people when the names of places are changed or lost.

A return to a sense of place would, I think, add to the pleasure that we find in life. The commons is about physical place. In the past, all human communities were rooted to place. But the rise of technology, leading to our increased communication and mobility, no longer make it so. We are increasingly 'abstract' — in other words, removed from our physical location. Community, ritual, the enhancement of cultural and social wealth, are all related to place. To neglect place, and see all places as somehow equivalent — because our technology overrides the vagaries of climate, language and ethnicity — is, I think, a bad move. But places, as they have developed over the centuries of human culture, are complex, and seeking to change them for the better will take a lot of wisdom and careful work.

Competing Interests in Place

There are competing interests involved in any human settlement. The most basic is the interplay of wilderness and city. Then there are the historic and current priorities set for certain kinds of developments — what the culture decides is most important for them — be it church, transport hub or shopping centre. Then there are the competing pressures from different interest groups — individuals looking for more space, businesses looking for prime sites to attract customers and/or to have good transport links and governments trying to balance all these often conflicting demands. As our human population increases, our towns and cities encroach on wild nature and on agricultural land. Meanwhile, outwith settlements, there are competing interests of

wilderness with farmland, woodland and human interest in leisure.

Faced with all these conflicting elements, it seems it is often largely down to luck when a modern human settlement actually gets better by further development. The current situation in the UK and many other countries really does not lend itself to the creation of interesting townscape on a large scale. At first take, it seems that the only options available are either significantly greater state control or massive private investment. At the moment, when either of these does happen, the results can be somewhat mixed. The intention can often be aimed at helping business and therefore boosting employment, but this often only works in the short-term and often to the detriment of beauty and community.

The Importance of Beauty

Place is about the beauty of wild nature, the beauty of woodlands, parks and gardens, and the beauty of good townscapes. ('The beautiful world our hearts know is possible', in Charles Eisenstein's words.) Considerations of beauty are often set aside when it comes to building a new road, a factory or power station. An established community with buildings that are admired and visited by tourists is compromised in the interests of 'development', usually with a short-term profit motive. Consider a town or a city that borders a strong natural feature such as the sea, a lake or a river, or perhaps one that is situated on a high promontory. If the buildings in such a settlement are in a good relationship with the natural location, then there

is a certain harmony achieved — a balancing of the civilised and wild worlds. The threshold areas (seafront, lakeside, etc.) are places of interest and excitement, or at least they could be. So often, we see places with such special natural assets spoilt because of short-sighted profiteering or just careless and lazy regulation. David Fleming (*Surviving the Future*) described the importance of beauty and the enchantment of place thus:

'And here is an intention: […] that every place is a sacred place; every ecology has its enchantment, its quiet music, its authority. At the very least, every town and village will need to be visible and communicative: places will have a meaning, giving signals of particular loyalties, of rooted obligations and belonging, of a cultural landscape. Public places and private houses will live up to the standards of urban designer Francis Tibbalds' Tenth Commandment: "Thou shalt, with all means available, promote intricacy, joy and visual delight in the built environment."'

If a café or a balcony space looking over a town square does not offer a sense of joy, then something is wrong. If we don't care about the town square a few streets away, will we care about the shanty towns around so many cities in the developing world, the impact of global trade and travel, or the flooding of coastal cities because of climate change? We don't seem to care enough about our towns and cities to want them to be beautiful places above all else — which would surely be to our long-term benefit. The glamorous and romantic locations of the world are somehow not our own towns and cities, which we so often deride as bland and

ugly. But that has been our choice (or at least a choice forced onto most of us by planners, councils and architects). There is no reason why priorities cannot change, such that we build for the long-term future in a way that is both practical, human-friendly and nature-friendly. There is no reason why every town that we build is not one that harbours places of genuine delight, which people will wish to live in or to visit. Beautiful places attract people to them and generate wealth. This wealth may be of the more normal material kind, through increased investment and commerce. But it may also be in terms of the more abstract forms of wealth we have been describing in earlier chapters — cultural, social and emotional wealth. It often seems that such things are almost too obvious to state — that solutions are right under our noses. Yet, somehow that planning for our longer-term benefit, and the benefits of harmony with nature, appears to be too difficult for our governments. And, of course, most of the time, and for most of us, we have no say in how things are done.

I recognise that some might find this 'connecting with nature' and 'beauty of place' message as coming from a position of middle-class privilege. Poorer people, some might say, have neither the leisure or the advantages in life to be able to spend time considering such things. And climate change is sometimes bundled in with this too, as a middle-class concern. I recognise this complaint, but I think it could be turned around. Is it not patronising towards those very people that this stance is supposed to be defending, to suggest that they do not care about nature and the beauty of our towns

and cities? I am not convinced by this too-busy-trying-to-make-a-living argument. People of all ‘classes’ and all levels of ‘intelligence’ are equally likely to care about such matters. And as for climate change, we will all suffer if we let that problem go, so a class argument just does not cut it.

Taking back Control of our Places

Our town or city, or the countryside around us, changes, and it seems that we have little or no say in what happens. If things change around us without our knowledge or consent, this is unsettling. Of all the matters that affect us today, I think this is the most direct. At best, there is a token opportunity to comment on local proposals — but often these are already just a done deal. Having a say in shaping our local environments would mean that we have a stake in creating beauty for ourselves and our communities. It would greatly help this process if we were to change our understanding of ownership of land and buildings so that ‘owners’ are more custodians of our natural commons and civic spaces, rather than private speculators. Here again is where our circles of government, or Parapolity, have a part to play — to keep our special places special.

The centres of so many towns and cities are struggling here in the UK. Bold plans are needed to revitalise them that will bring life back into city centres and improve civic pride. It is very important, however, that everyone is involved. Why can’t communities have a very much greater say in the use of land? Good regulations — ones that we have all been

involved in formulating — will lead to places that we will grow to love — places of which we can all be proud. An 'order' is being imposed on our towns and cities, but it is an order that suits big business, the car, the airport and the often dubious intentions of governments. Jane Jacobs told us: 'There is a quality even meaner than outright ugliness or disorder, and this meaner quality is the dishonest mask of pretended order, achieved by suppressing the real order that is struggling to exist and be served.' *(The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.) Jacobs' quote reminds us that there is often an elite imposing their views on the rest of us, looking to 'clean up' our towns and cities. Darren Anderson — *Imaginary Cities* — warns:
'The problem with building the mythic city of health was that it encourages a temptation to conceal or purge away the very people afflicted most by cities of plague. Malthusian horror comes hand-in-hand with puritanical repulsion towards the wrong kinds of people breeding (namely not 'me and my kind'), from slums to housing estates.'

The chance to comment is almost worse than no chance at all, when we feel that our opinions are simply being disregarded. Sometimes it is big business that is moving in, with only a token process of consent, via the local government, and no voice for the local people. If we are not happy our only recourse is to mount a campaign. But why should we be put into a position of having to campaign over the use of land that is already rightfully ours? The current system, in most, if not all, developed nations, has things entirely the wrong way round. The land is ours.

If there is something someone wants to do, they need to ask us first.

Places 'Planned' by People

When we look at some of the towns that have been 'designed' by experts — Cumbernauld in Scotland is a prime example — it is easy to conclude that ordinary people could do a better job. What if our towns and cities were genuinely about people, genuinely human-scaled? 'Human-scaled' is often a very apt description of places that have popular appeal. Unfortunately, the term is over-used today and applied to developments that are anything but. What would our human settlements be like if the people living and working there had a greater say in how they look? For one thing, many of the places that we now find attractive were never 'planned' — at least not in the modern sense of the word. People often find delight in more informal styles of development common in poorer countries. What may begin as jumbles of random buildings, starts to take on a form and character unique to place and climate, and starts to become ordered in terms of infrastructure and in terms of the communities that live there; that's if they are left alone and not intimidated by government. A Parapolity, for the governance of society in developed countries, might achieve similar results.

So the concerns raised above might be resolved by seeing land as a commons and setting in place a system of deliberative democracy. If we were to have a say on land use as it affects us directly in our own neighbourhoods, then we might start to see real improvement. As

mentioned above, it is regulation that shapes our environment — especially our built environment. And we all need to be involved in devising the right regulations, particularly for the place we live. A Parapolity needs to allow for large-scale infrastructure projects and national planning regulations, but at the same time be very much more sensitive to local needs and local communities. The endnote gives details from Wendell Berry's rules for a local economy.[1]

Communities Shape Place

There is quite a contrast between how we feel about our towns and cities and how we feel about our own houses, if we are fortunate enough to own one. It is easy to see how today's societies are very interested — not to say, obsessed — in private, as opposed to public, space. This is Darren Anderson:

'"The house shelters daydreaming", Gaston Bachelard wrote: 'the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace." Of all the utopias, the most practical then is that of maintaining your own sanctuary against outside encroachments.' (Darren Anderson — *Imaginary Cities)*

The current culture — which I have described as Privatopia — is, in part, a response to the lack of control over our locality. We are dis-empowered with respect to our neighbourhoods, towns and cities, and therefore we settle for making our mark on a little piece of land over which we really can exercise control. No wonder neighbours fall out over tiny arguments about boundaries, hedges and driveways. The gated 'community' is becoming ever more popular in

developed nations. But the more we shut out the rest of the world, the more chaotic the outside world becomes. We can only wonder if such places really do provide any sense of community. Are gated communities anything more than groups of wealthy people intent on protecting themselves from perceived threats from strangers? Perhaps there is a measure of contempt for the 'wrong sort of people' involved as well. This is not a solution, it's a retreat.

By contrast, I believe we need to reclaim our neighbourhoods, towns and cities and make them places of joy and celebration for everyone! So along with beauty and sensible regulations, community is a further element towards the creation of good places. I know this is a big ask compared to shutting ourselves away in our own tiny bubble of private property. I hope, however, that the potential benefits are self-evident — safe, vibrant streets; friendly neighbours; places where nature can flourish; places where children are safe to play; places where we are happy to stay and just be ourselves, instead of always trying to 'get way from it all' on the latest exotic holiday that trashes the planet. It needs to be done with great care. When areas are 'improved' by councils or by big business — it can often mean that places become environments from which some people are excluded — see again, Darren Anderson's quote in the 'Taking back Control' section above. The poor are locked out, often forcibly. Think of our shopping centres with their ever-increasing camera surveillance and security guards.

When it comes to housing, the design of new houses and the arrangements for social housing could form the ground of Parapolity. Building houses could be about building new community. It is too much of an important task to be left to the market to decide on who lives in a particular location. Future residents need to be brought together first, as in co-housing and similar models prevalent throughout many parts of Europe. Then, not only can people be actively involved in creating their own physical surroundings, they will also be gathered as a group of householders that will take up an ongoing responsibility for their immediate environment.

We might envisage a more dense urban environment and walkable city centres, to combat the sprawl of energy-wasting suburbs, but still with plenty of room for allotments, market gardens and parks.

The word, 'community' can often seem like a very abstract concept. But it need not be so. Community is built not just by meeting people but also by people coming together to build something together. This can be a club or an organisation, but it can also be by way of the entirely literal meaning of building together our houses, our neighbourhoods, our towns and our cities. Something governments currently seem to encourage us not to do. In this most literal and practical sense, we are separated from our making and our re-making when we have no say in the building of our physical environment.

Taking back the Commons

Laws relating to land and land use vary from nation to nation, of course. In the UK, 'common good' land represents only a tiny and diminishing part of the total land area. Public space is generally not a commons. This goes for most parks, beaches, streets and town squares. All of these are usually 'owned' by the state, and the state places restrictions on what such spaces can be used for. Even land that genuinely is common land is often 'managed' by a local authority and often vulnerable to ending up under a road or a new school as the authorities simply appropriate common land without the necessary legal process. We also have 'POPS' (Privatisation of Public Space) — a policy guaranteed to exclude.

Why not then simply accept that all land has remained a commons? It does not mean that land and property would be seized by the state and re-distributed. Ownership, especially of land, is not a simple, all-or-nothing question. In Chapter 2, on ownership, we looked at the various ways land could be 'owned', and how more ownership (of the correct sort) can be an advantage. More detail about how this might be managed was given in Chapter 7. The shared ownership of the land could be acknowledged, and those currently owning it would become its tenants and custodians. Local communities would determine the balance of land use, types of development, infrastructure, wildlife, forestry, farming, water purity, noise levels and air quality, and make decisions accordingly.

The simple acknowledgement that land, water, air and different types of human activity ultimately belong to all of us, would have a

significant effect on our attitudes to neighbourhoods, towns, cities and to the planet as a whole. Community would become more than just sharing the occasional barbecue with the neighbours. We would all have a stake in what was happening in our neighbourhood and hopefully see it as a shared responsibility and a shared pleasure. Changing our relationship with place is also about our changing relationship with nature. Neighbourhoods may take especial interest in gardens, wildlife corridors, parks and other open spaces like beaches, lakes and rivers. In the last chapter, we noted the immense importance such places have to our well-being. At the moment, we seem to divide land up amongst households and see a stockade of walls, fences and roads in most towns and cities. The idea of open spaces, where people, wildlife, food-growing, trees and recreation can all inter-mingle might seem like a recipe for chaos. But I suggest this is only because of what we are used to. There seems no reason why activities are not mixed around in much more interesting ways than they are at present. We need our quiet spaces and our privacy, of course, but we also derive great benefit from variety and vibrancy. A rethink might give us the best of both worlds.

Business and Place

Local infrastructure and local businesses will be of particular interest to any system of deliberative democracy. How can we meet people’s needs locally with respect to food, schooling and work? How can local business enhance rather than destroy the local environment and the local community? If we

are willing to participate, and our voices are really heard, then there is an opportunity to shape all of these things and to take pleasure over places that start to really belong to us. Small-scale local business can often survive better than big business, provided it is grounded in local industrial districts and strong communities. (A principle known as 'flexible speculation'. See Michael J. Piore and Charles F. Sable — *The Second Industrial Divide*.) Schooling can be more about doing than gaining abstract knowledge. This would give every child a chance to flourish, rather than those who just happen to have the skill-set useful for theoretical knowledge. Education could be linked to business more directly, with a return to the apprenticeships we used to have, rather than the proliferation of rather dubious degree courses. Apprenticeship is local, so this in turn links to place. As well as transient populations of students, we could have local young people interested in local jobs and local places.

The Nightmare of Cars

Finally, in this chapter, it is necessary to take stock of the enormous damage done to our built environment, our health and to nature by the private car. Nothing is quite such a symbol of Privatopia as the car — taking our own world with us as we travel around, whilst reducing everything outside to 'scenery'. The car is a status symbol; a representation of personal freedom and autonomy. Cars make us feel like we are in control, and this is something valued highly in most societies, especially when we feel

that we have little control over anything else. Again, this ties in with the idea of a Privatopia — controlling a small part of the world, because we lack any real control over our governance. Meanwhile, transport is, of course, a major contributor to climate change, a cause of air pollution and a major cause of death and injury through accidents. Roads have carved up towns and cities, making them noisy and dangerous, and often isolating communities. Cities, over the past half century or so, have been built around the car, and the result has been a blight on any joy and celebration and civic pride that they might once have had. Building a new road, to ease congestion, often means it just fills up with even more traffic. Making cars more fuel-efficient often has the effect that people will use them more. (Jevon's paradox.) Electric cars and driverless vehicles will only solve a small portion of these problems, and may create new problems into the bargain.

Our obsession with personal travel is a difficult subject to tackle, but one of the most important when it comes to thinking about place. Few of the other things discussed in this chapter will be possible without, at the same time, thinking about transport. There are some signs of hope. Many cities are becoming increasingly pedestrianised, having traffic-free days or introducing congestion charges. We could just stop building roads. We could invest heavily in public transport and make it free or very cheap to use. But it's also necessary to acknowledge the deep attachment people have for their own private vehicles — an attachment that is only growing in extent, as the people of more and more nations become wealthy enough to afford

cars. But it's here I have to take things on the chin. If we had a Parapolity and people had the chance to choose, it may be that people would choose to keep their cars above almost everything else. If we believe in true democracy, then we would have to live with this choice.

Slow Cities

The 'Slow' movement, encompassing towns and cities, slow food, slow medicine, slow work and much else besides, is brilliantly explored by Carl Honore's book, *In Praise of Slow*. The CittaSlow movement, which began in Italy, has a lot to teach us about place. The CittaSlow principles are given in the endnote.[2]

Let me stress again, these are only suggestions.

10 A Commons of Compassion

'To tend the world in silence and keep the world safe from lethal storms.'

- Sara Maitland

'Cowardice asks the question, Is it safe? Expediency asks the question, Is it political? Vanity asks the question, Is it popular? But Conscience asks the question, Is it right?'
- Martin Luther King

The third of four chapters exploring the themes of nature, place, compassion and pleasure. Once again, only suggestions.

How a government cares for its people is the most important question for any society. So questions of compassion should be paramount for any governance system. Principles then, are required in giving voice to those who are most marginalised in society and in need of the most care. We touched on Gandhi's social sin of Politics without Principle in Chapter 6, Community on a Large Scale. Politics without Principle is also relevant as a check on our discussions in this chapter.

Sympathy, Empathy, Compassion

Let's start by looking at the meanings of 'sympathy', 'empathy' and 'compassion'. Different authors have different ways of defining these terms, and meanings have also shifted over time in how these words are understood in common parlance. To clarify how I am using the words in this book — I am essentially building from the 'feelings only' of sympathy and empathy, to a 'feelings with action' definition of compassion.

Sympathy is to feel for the circumstances of others — usually meaning sad when others are sad — but not really to fully identify with the other's circumstances — to 'walk in their shoes'. We could say that sympathy is the emotion at the root of empathy and compassion.

Empathy goes a bit further, and is about a more genuine sharing in the joy or pain of others. Empathy means to be able to imagine ourselves in another's circumstances, and therefore to understand their feelings, and not simply feel happy or sad on their behalf. So empathy is to 'feel with' rather than just to 'feel for'.

Compassion goes one stage further still. Compassion is rooted in empathy; it is about identifying with feelings in the first instance, and imagining ourselves into another's circumstances and then to act on those feelings. Ken Robinson said: 'I think of compassion as applied empathy, so to speak, the executive wing of empathy. It's one thing to empathise … something else to do something about it… Compassion is the … cultural glue that holds us together as communities.' Earlier authors referred to 'sympathetic imagination' or, 'intelligent kindness'. So compassion means to be actively involved. This might be by way of helping out in times of difficulty, and it may also be in terms of sharing in another's joy. Compassion is as much about 'rejoicing with' and 'laughing with' as it is about 'crying with'. Compassion has been described as justice with celebration.

Compassion can be about caring for oneself as well as caring for others. If we can be aware of

our feelings, then that allows us to understand what is needed to take care of ourselves and to extend care more thoroughly to others.

For the most part, I'm running with compassion in this book, and hope that the reader will keep in mind the broad definition of the word that I have explained here.

Why Compassion?

Why be compassionate? The most basic answer to this is to say that it's about a natural instinct to care for others and also about a sense of fairness — of equity. As with hierarchy, we might have a lengthy discussion about whether the sense of care and the sense of fairness are innate to human nature or whether they are socially-constructed. Either way, these things are deeply ingrained. We see our own vulnerability and somehow that makes us a bit more human. We see others' vulnerability, and — if we make the connection — it reminds us of our own vulnerability and we want to set things right.

Perhaps it is not necessary to look beyond questions of equity in order to decide on matters of compassion. Fairness, we might say, is the immediate reason for being compassionate. But remember what we said about compassion above. It is as much about celebration, shared pleasure and laughing with others, as it is about caring for needs. We are part of a wider world, and our pains and pleasures reflect, and are reflected by, the whole community of other people and of nature. Our shared life with others and with nature is the underlying concept. This,

in turn, is the deeper reason behind compassion. It is interbeing, a re-connection with the wild nature that we all share.

Back in Chapter 4, on Polity, we noted that one definition of what government should be about is to protect us from things that might go wrong. To be 'free from' things that may do us harm. In later chapters, we have added the idea of being 'free to' — in particular, the freedom to make and to re-make are identified as ways that we may flourish as human beings. That is a freedom to shape our own story — 'Each life is a fable of freedom', as Theodore Zeldin reminds us. A wider vision of compassion then, takes into account these more positive elements. Along with others, (see for instance, Marjorie Kelly, *Owning Our Future*) I want to suggest pleasure, emotion, imagination and creativity as the value system that is the real undergirding of society, as we will explore below and in the next chapter.

The 'feel' of a society is very much about its level of compassion — between people and between government and its citizens. It would not be too much of a stretch to say that the story of a nation or a society is really a story about its compassion.

Compassion for Self

In Chapter 8, on Nature, we looked at how nature is not something just 'out there', but starts with ourselves — our own bodies and minds. As we share in the world of nature, so too, we share in nature's joys and pains. The place to start with this is to have compassion for

ourselves. This is not such an obvious policy to adopt. Looking out for ourselves in a largely selfish manner is not compassion. I'd suggest that compassion for self means taking a broader view of what our lives might be about and what might really be good for us, rather than just what might make us superficially happy in the short-term. Are we going to be people with a bit of wisdom, a bit of maturity, a bit of soul? When we look back at our lives from our old age, will we think that we have lived a worthwhile life in some way? Were we brave enough to try things? To strike out with new ideas of making things, creating and imagining new ways of being and of doing in the world? We can aim high and perhaps be some use to those around us, or we can aim low, settle for our own Privatopias, and let the rest of the world get on with its own business. As we will explore further in the next chapter, this all loops back to the body. Our physical selves know what is really going on within us. Our bodies know when our minds are frustrated and our hearts' desires are not being realised. Likewise, our bodies respond in deep pleasure when we find fulfilment in our work, in our relationships and in our communities. So we are taking the 'long view', if you will, about what might make for a good life, and this is what I am calling compassion for self.

This section on compassion for self is the closest I'd wish to approach the idea that we might need some kind of personal change, and indeed spiritual change, in order to effect change in society. I recognise the suggestion of spiritual change might be unpalatable for many readers. An alternative might be to consider the Greek

word *eudaimonia* — that is, flourishing — or go for a more modern term, 'generative'. Both of these terms include the ideas of growth, development and fulfilment.

Another aspect of compassion for self is being able to forgive oneself. Whilst shame serves as a warning against behaviour that may hurt ourselves and others, holding on to shame, guilt and remorse is ultimately destructive.

Compassion for self is the starting point for compassion for others. 'All friendly feelings for others are an extension of man's feelings for himself', Aristotle told us. This is the idea of *philautia* — that if we are comfortable with ourselves, we can be comfortable with others.

Compassion for Others

We can apply what was said above in the previous section to how we might respond to others, on a personal level. For instance, in our relationships, we can just seek to fulfil the immediate needs of those around us. We can do whatever pleases them, just to keep them quiet. Alternatively, we might try to take a broader view of another person and try to figure out what might be for their long-term good (so far as that is reasonable, within the relationship). Parents, of course, face this dilemma through many years of a child's wants, and know that to give in will mean a happy child in the short-term, but probably a spoilt, selfish and self-centred person in the future. We face similar dilemmas when we are a carer for the elderly or the impaired. And when we are wronged in some

way, we can be angry, or we can try forgiveness, and maybe both of these things will fail.

In Chapter 5, Community on a Small Scale, we looked at the governance system called Sociocracy. There we noted in passing the benefit of having a bit of maturity as people in order to cope with all the stuff that is going on with others when we meet up to run a group, an organisation or a business. We can take the short view, just seeing people's demands at face value, and try to deal with them literally. But actually, the people we are meeting with have broader needs. All of us have that need for the type of compassion I have described above, and most of us are not that good at providing this to ourselves. So we need others to fill in the gaps of our own blindness. To take a broader view of others then is to recognise that they too are struggling to realise a wider meaning and a greater depth in their lives. So applying a bit of wisdom, we will take them seriously, respect them and honour their needs.

Physicist David Bohm, as well as writing about physics, took time out to explore the interactions between people. He wrote about this in his book, *On Dialogue*. Bohm's style of dialogue has since been adopted by a great many organisations as a tool for exploring relationships when straight-forward discussion might seem difficult or even impossible. The spirit of dialogue is just to talk, and see where that leads. The hope behind this is that people start to connect, and eventually see that there is more that unites us than divides us. There ceases to be a need to argue things out, debate things, deploy policies or schedules or

committees. It may not always work, but the idea taps in to what we discussed above. At a deeper level, we are all connected. The things that divide us are only ever superficial. The poet Rumi summed this up well. He said:
'Out beyond the ideas of right-doing and wrong-doing, there is a field. I will meet you there.'

Families and small groups often manage this quite well. Our development as a species has been in small groups. Charles Darwin seemed to touch on the importance of groups (what Peter Kropotkin called 'mutual aid') as part of evolution, but elsewhere seems to contradict this with the more familiar 'survival of the fittest' story. (or at least the early popularisers of evolution seemed to present it this way. Darwin himself was always more nuanced.) It is when we get to larger organisations and more formal relations that things get more difficult. That is why the suggestion in this book is to start at the small scale and to keep things small. Big politics could still be about a few people in a room, and that is where compassion has the best chance. Once again we need to remember the importance of forgiveness.

We can note here, from Chapter 3, Massimo d'Angelis' definition of the commons as 'multiplying the gifts of others'. This is reflected in Hannah Arendt's phrase, '*Amo: Volo ut sis*' — literally, 'I love you: I will that you be', but taken to mean more exactly, 'I want you to be all that you can be'. Compassion is responding to the beauty in others (their worth, their intrinsic value) with more beauty in return.

Government and Compassion

Some authors distinguish between ‘emotional empathy’ and ‘cognitive empathy’. The first recognises the feelings of another person, and may prompt us to respond, but our response may be just to alleviate immediate suffering (or share in immediate pleasure). It is cognitive empathy that is the more measured kind, taking the longer-term view that I have discussed above. Compassion — and especially the compassion prompted by cognitive empathy — has a more formal aspect to it when it comes to government. How then might governments go about administrating for compassion (setting aside for the moment the question of what sort of governance system is in place)? The usual approach is by way of a ‘welfare net’. John Rawls (*A Theory of Justice*) for instance, asks us to imagine that we are to be citizens of a society in which we have a ‘veil of ignorance’ about our circumstances. Given a choice, therefore, over welfare arrangements, we are likely to decide on very substantial help, in case, once the veil is lifted, we find ourselves as one of the more unfortunate citizens of this hypothetical state.

A welfare strategy, however, is always going to be something of a one-size-fits-all affair. If we throw enough money at it then it will be reasonably effective, but people’s needs are often very specific. The welfare net is a minimum standard. Paul Radin identifies an ‘irreducible minimum’ of food, clothes and shelter. He says: ‘to deny anyone the irreducible minimum [is] equivalent of saying that a man no longer exists, that he is dead.’

Is there more that government could achieve on the compassion front? Let us go back again to the reason why there is government. Firstly, it is for the sake of protecting citizens against misfortune. But arguably it is also there to promote human flourishing, allowing everyone to meet their full potential. It is the accountability, and the rights of everyone to have a say at every level of government, that might afford us the best chance for these aims to be achieved. As such, a genuine Parapolity, where there is engagement from the smallest to the largest level of governance, offers an opportunity for more tailored compassion. In simple terms, neighbours can take on some of the responsibility of making sure that those with problems have those problems adequately addressed. As things move out to wider circles of governance, these smaller arrangements are the key to how the larger arrangements are organised. Of course, some people will always need professional help that the local community cannot provide directly. But then the local community can still feed into the wider circles of governance, to seek the right help for such folk, so again there is the opportunity for needs to be met more effectively than just with top-down big government.

As we've highlighted above, compassion is about shared pleasure as well as shared needs. So the community can also help to make people feel welcome and celebrated in the place they live — helping to address issues of loneliness, stress and depression, and adding to a sense of well-being. I recognise that such engagement can easily tip over into interference and patronising people who may prefer to have their

independence and privacy. But as things stand just now, we have the balance wrong, with neighbours often hardly speaking to each other, let alone caring for one another's needs or sharing in pleasures. If we could get the balance right, between seeing the needs of others, but respecting their privacy, things could be very much better.

Business and Compassion

Businesses need to be rewarded for their imagination and creativity. We can celebrate the know-how and technical skill they bring to our lives through their products and services. This might seem a strange point to be making — after all, the business is getting paid — but somehow it seems appropriate that this too should be considered part of compassion. At the same time, businesses need to take responsibility for the wider world and see themselves as a service to their communities. We saw in Chapter 6 that, as part of a Parapolity, business owners would be invited to take part in local governance, so there will be a great deal more accountability. Businesses may also be actively engaged in their local communities by way of participatory economics — Parecon. Businesses need to look at enhancing their locality, so far as this is possible. Considerate use of the natural commons needs to be a priority for business, and in particular, a business's use of land will be something under close scrutiny by local residents. Careful use of materials and the opportunity for repair and/or recycling of their products is another consideration. (See, for instance, William McDonough and Michael Braungart's, *Cradle to*

Cradle.) The key point from all this is the point about giving a service. I think that is where the social commons meets material capital. If businesses and business leaders were more determined to see their work in this way, then we would be making progress. Once again, we might change systems — forcing some of the changes that we would like to see in society onto business and others — through legislation. But the better way is for people to want to make changes — to see changes as a responsibility, but also something in which they take a pride and a joy.

Okay, so the reader may be thinking, this is pie-in-the-sky. Businesses are out for all they can get, and if they don't keep chasing profit then they will go under, and then what use will their moral high ground have been? But to take this view is to say that business, and indeed, humans generally, are inherently selfish and cannot change. Or, as the ardent anti-capitalists would have it, the nature of the system forces business into ruthless competition in order to survive. But these views seem to close off hope, and in a way, it is a means by which people shut out the need to try to make changes themselves. If everyone is selfish, after all, then what is the point of even trying? But no, I think we have to reject that message. We have seen above that we can have compassion for ourselves without this being selfishness. It is certainly self-interest, but not the kind of destructive motives that the pessimistic view of human nature might take. In the next chapter, on pleasure, we will see similar reasoning. Granted, there are people who are badly off the rails, but the very fact

that we point out such people and condemn them suggests that we already know better — that we see a better way to live.

Wider Circles of Compassion

In the wider circles of Parapolity and Parecon there are a few policies that relate to compassion on a much broader scale. We looked at business above, and noted that the ideas expressed there might seem to many a bit naïve, or, at best, only appropriate to small-scale, local concerns. Big business, critics might say, would not adopt such policies. The bigger the business, the more ruthless and the more reflective of the worst forms of capitalism. Business at the large scale tries to act independently of national government. This is what big business often means by 'free trade' — the freedom to do whatever it wants with impunity. At the same time, big business may lobby the support of governments where it can, to get policies adopted that will be favourable to its profits and to protect its markets — particularly against foreign competitors. Neo-liberalism is not really about no regulations, it's about regulations that favour business. It's also in the interests of neo-liberalism to encourage poor countries to have 'free markets' because their fledgling industries can therefore never develop to compete with the richer Western world. It keeps them in the place of supplying cheap labour and raw materials. So, poorer nations suffer by the protectionism of the big business of wealthier nations — that is the modern-day form of colonialism.

Real free trade — as we have seen in Chapter 7 on Economics — is something very different. Free of all tariff barriers, business could flourish in poorer nations, creating more employment there. Wealthier nations would benefit from cheaper goods. Granted, some industries and jobs would lose out in wealthy nations in the short-term. But the businesses of wealthier nations would adapt in time to provide goods and services that are, for instance, more specific to place. The governments of wealthy nations could help out where particular industries are under the more serious disadvantage. Again, I recognise that this might appear a very naïve suggestion. I only invite the reader to step back and consider this. If we are really interested in 'development' for poorer nations, then we wouldn't be giving them charity and loans on the one hand, and then blocking the import of their products on the other. It's often said that poor nations pay more back to wealthy nations in terms of interest on loans than they receive from the wealthy in aid. Are we serious about alleviating poverty? Are we serious about everyone, the world over, being given an equality of opportunity as well as social and political equality? If we are, then we desperately need to think about the way we trade. Compassion, on the big scale, is again not about little bits of help to address short-term needs. It is about treating poor nations with dignity and respect and working with them for their best long-term interests.

What about big business that operates in poorer nations, exploiting cheap labour and sometimes having poor standards with regard to pollution and safety, so as to massively profit from their

markets in wealthier nations? I'm not going to say that businesses should not set up on foreign soil. However, it is a question of accountability. The business needs to be responsible to its home government for what it does overseas. The business should respect and work with host governments to ensure that fairness prevails. The host government should not be lured or bullied into accepting poor standards from the guest business. The business needs to look to its ethics. On the broadest scale of Parapolity, the world should stand up for poorer nations and hold those who exploit them to account. It could well be that national governments are just no longer large enough to deal with these issues. We may need the strengthening of world institutions — and the establishment of a world government — to keep big business in check.

These discussions lead us to the related topic of the free movement of people. Similar arguments to the one made above apply here. If we are serious about helping the poor, then open the borders. Until we do, then all talk of overseas aid and development is simply nonsense. I recognise, of course, the chaos that would be unleashed in the wealthier nations that would be the likely hosts of vast numbers of refugees and economic migrants (and often it is difficult to tell the difference). I am only wishing to point out a possibility, which could, after all, be partially implemented rather than adopted wholesale. Governments — whilst sometimes adopting a stance of regulating immigration — often secretly welcome it, as it gives them a cheap, biddable workforce. So the issues around immigration are complex. We will see how this plays out in the Conclusion, as we

go back to the concern over the polarisation of politics that was raised in the Introduction.

Free trade and open borders would, if they were ever adopted, ease the problems of poor nations quite considerably. But there remain some concerns. One is the question of development in poor nations that is often badly served by lending. The borrowing often goes towards large-scale infrastructure projects that benefit the wealthier citizens of the poor nation and might even harm the very poorest. The further concern is that open borders may mean the younger, cleverer citizens leaving to seek their fortunes in wealthy nations, whilst the poor nation is left with the older and less able citizens. It is difficult, of course, to be too prescriptive here. Poor nations need to make their own choices, and with that comes the possibility of making mistakes. However, sometimes people need to speak up for the poor, whose voices are so often drowned out. Maybe then, we need to lend our skills and knowledge rather than our money. A further alternative is for rich nations to simply give money directly to the citizens of poor nations, as a step towards Universal Basic Income (see below) in the recipient countries. Their spending would in turn boost the economies of the poor nations and allow them to develop under their own terms. There are already some very pragmatic methods being adopted to help poorer nations find their own ways towards happier and more prosperous societies. A balance of measures, agreed internationally, might be the best way forward. Compassion should be our default in our dealings with other nations. It should not be

suspicion and having ‘interests’ (just meaning, what will benefit us).

If a genuine system of Parapolity were in place then any decisions on immigration and free trade would be open to public scrutiny. People might choose the opposite to these proposals — closing up trade and borders, and if we were to accept that a Parapolity is a better form of governance than a representative democracy then we would have to accept such decisions.

A further suggestion along compassionate lines is the adoption of a Universal Basic Income (see also Chapter 7), or UBI. A basic income for all adult citizens takes away the stigma of unemployment, allows people to explore options of more education and allows people to follow their hearts towards a vocation, rather than working to pay bills just to survive. UBI is not a replacement for the welfare state. There still needs to be a welfare net for the most vulnerable, as explored earlier in the chapter. But it is a system that would be easy to adopt, popular and fair.

Let me stress again that these are only suggestions.

11 A Commons of Pleasure

'Follow your bliss and doors will open where there were no doors before.'
- Joseph Campbell

'Those who were dancing were thought mad by those who could not hear the music.'
- attributed to Friedrich Nietzsche

The last of four chapters exploring the themes of nature, place, compassion and pleasure. Gandhi's social sin of Pleasure without Conscience is relevant to this chapter.

Joy, Pleasure and Happiness

I had thought to try to distinguish the meanings of joy, happiness, pleasure and similar words, as an introduction to this chapter. I have to say, it is a challenge. Their meanings shade into each other and there can be contradictory statements about what is really pleasure, or is 'just fun' or something more profound, or less profound… Pleasure is more in the moment, whilst happiness is a state with longer duration. Happiness has been described as pleasure and purpose extended over time. Joy, meanwhile, is a word used to describe both the emotion behind pleasure, but also taken to mean a more spiritual and resilient form of happiness — not dependent on circumstances. I've decided to stay with just the word pleasure, for the most part, in this chapter.

As I've suggested elsewhere in the book, society is built on pleasure; society is the social construction of pleasure. 'It is in his pleasure that man really lives', said Agnes Repplier, an American essayist. 'It is from leisure that he constructs the true fabric of self'. (As quoted by Carl Honore, *In Praise of Slow.*) So it is a mistake to think of pleasure as something added on to society, once we have taken care of the essential things in life. Rather, we are always looking to find pleasure, even in the most basic things in our life, like health, food, clothing and shelter. We are genuinely an economy of pleasure. This is often denied outright, or at least balanced by more 'worthwhile' goals. But I think this denial or awkwardness around pleasure is to make out that pleasure is simply selfishness by another name.

Another attitude to pleasure that has become prevalent is to regard pleasure as a commodity that we must strive to obtain. If we find ourselves unhappy then we are liable to blame ourselves for failing. Instead, we might see pleasure as a gift and it is at its best when it is a shared gift. In the last chapter, we saw that compassion for self takes in a broad view of what our lives are about. Compassion is not just about the smaller things of the present, but also about our aims, values, and meaning. It is self-interest, but not selfishness. This is similar to the view of pleasure that I am trying to get across in this chapter. So we should not strive for pleasure as if it were a product we hope somehow to afford. But we can be open to the gift of pleasure, whenever and however that might arrive. All the while we can be conscious that it is through pleasure, mainly, that the

story of our lives is told. Compassion, or lack of compassion is the way that the stories of societies and nations are told. The two are very closely linked. Our individual pleasure relies on the compassion of community. (It is the rules of a community that keeps things peaceful and ordered and this is what affords us individual freedom.) The compassion of a community relies, up to a point, on people finding individual pleasure. A community of unhappy people may struggle to be compassionate. The long-term flourishing of individuals relies on the long-term viability of community. So it is in our long-term interest to look to the interests of society, community and nation. Good community enables individuals to flourish, to realise our full potential of pleasure, passion, vocation, satisfying work. The split between an individual and community is a false split.

Grades of Pleasure?

In my own blurb about utopia (Chapter 1) I identified some pleasures that are specific to me. Inevitably, I'm going to think that these are somehow 'better' than what other people may enjoy — that my pleasures are somehow 'higher' whilst other stuff is just superficial. Well, the reader will see the problem; along with my own pleasures, I have to agree that rugby, white-water rafting and darts are equally meaningful and profound — and, for those people who enjoy such things — it will equally feed their souls. Isn't it a bit elitist to say that one type of pleasure is superficial and we should really be aspiring instead to something higher? How can one type of pleasure be better or worse

than any other? It's a question already raised by a school of philosophy known as Utilitarianism. The philosopher who is usually accredited with devising the idea was Jeremy Bentham. Bentham considered all pleasures to be of equal worth, therefore, it is possible to calculate what is the best outcome in any situation, because it is simply the one that provides the greatest good for the greatest number of people. (In fact it is to Francis Hutcheson we can attribute the phrase, 'that action is best which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers'.) So for Jeremy Bentham, all 'goods' are equivalent. John Stuart Mill, his nephew — contrary to Bentham — tried to grade pleasure.

This is where we really get down to brass tacks, because if, as I've suggested, pleasure is so essential to society, then challenging people about their pleasures really hits home. One of the worst insults we can throw at people is to say that they don't really know how to enjoy themselves. So, if at all possible, we must avoid being elitist about pleasure, but still recognise there are pleasures and there are pleasures. There is a balance to be struck, somehow, between judging pleasures in others or just accepting anything anyone wants to do as legitimate.

I'm not pretending to offer an easy answer to this. But, going back to what was said above about compassion for self, there may be a different way of looking at the question. Perhaps the problem with Utilitarianism, and with grading pleasures generally, is that it is not reasonable to compare one person's pleasure to

another's, as if there was some agreed rating system. Pleasure is unique to each individual life, and need not be compared. And the individual's pleasure relates very much to those wider questions of meaning, purpose, human flourishing and vocational work — how an individual might view their life in broad terms. And it is also worth stressing here the importance of our connections with people. Such connections seem to go beyond any concept of trying to grade pleasures. We might say that the heart knows what might ultimately lead to our deeper pleasure. But the mind is a bit more suspect. It can be swayed by wishing to create an impression to other folk, or to seek status, by finding pleasure in things that don't ultimately satisfy. Perhaps then, the first thing to start with is simply to acknowledge our own pleasures.

Abundance — what do the Utopias make of Pleasure?

What we mean by abundance is another aspect of what we consider pleasure to be. Privatopia's abundance is a material abundance. It is this that is the aim of progress, career and money — to build a safe world for ourselves — safe from the surrounding society that may be seen as indifferent, or even hostile. Material abundance is something that builds up our status, makes us feel that we are in control and are a success in the world. Materialism substitutes for other pleasures. This seems to be a choice that people make for themselves. But consumer capitalism presents the message of satisfaction via materialism to us relentlessly, so it has become

ingrained as the normal way of life. Our science too, being premised on a universe that is exclusively material — sends out the subliminal message that we are only 'made real' through material things. We often try — lured by the story of Privatopia — to make ourselves unique and different by the things we own, the clothes we wear, the houses and the holidays. But these 'differences' actually make us more like other people, not less. We are made to feel secure by our stuff, but it is a fragile kind of security. Poor health or bad luck could snatch those things from us in an instant. But also, it is an abundance that has to be won by the exploitation of the commons. Other people and nature suffer as a result of this kind of abundance. Going back to Gandhi then, it is material abundance — mainly — that is the pleasure without conscience. By contrast, when abundance is not seen in terms of materialism, it becomes an abundance of good relationships, satisfying work, and finding home in places and with people that really inspire us. It is also the sharing of ourselves, our gifts, our homes, our culture, that is the alternative form of abundance and the alternative pleasures. As Chapter 7 explored, abundance is often as a result of the gifts between economies. The material economy, by contrast, is usually premised on a fight against scarcity.

The Ecotopians can often seem a bit down on pleasure. There is so much wrong with the world, it is easy to portray the Western consumer capitalist lifestyle as greedy, selfish and irresponsible. Somehow, it is the individual consumer to whom most blame is attributed — perhaps we are just easy targets, or the

profligate lifestyle is more obvious when we see people flaunting their wealth right in front of us. Arguably, yes, if all consumers decided just not to buy a particular thing, then the companies who produced that product would either fold or change their ways, and we would have moved towards a solution. But there is more going on, and I think we need to see that disapproving of pleasure — even of the most material kind — is not really helping. Likewise, calling people greedy, profligate and irresponsible is not helping the cause of working towards a sustainable future. Yes, there are greedy and thoughtless people, but for the most part, people are looking to care for each other, to raise families and look out for their friends. Someone has said that we need to heal our relationship with things. That's not necessarily about getting rid of things — although it might partly involve this — but more critically, it's about our attitude to things. Likewise, authors who write about simplicity are not always talking about selling everything and living in poverty. Some who we could include under the Ecotopian flavour of utopia have recognised this relationship to things as critical. It is a feature of being embedded in nature and in place, which I have tried to stress in this book. This is a discussion that we will return to in later chapters.

The abundance and pleasure of our current age continues into the future utopia that is named Cornucopia. To an extent, the abundance of Cornucopia is an extension of the current culture, that is, material pleasures in an increasingly private and atomised world. But, of course, the future is open, and we might, with some justification, see Cornucopia taking a different

tack. We could for instance, think of an abundance of nature (as discussed in the sections on re-wilding in Chapter 8). Desire may be infinite, but that does not mean we should try to satisfy it through an infinity of stuff. There is no reason why the abundance of humanity and the abundance of the rest of the Earth need be at odds. We are all one eco-system — humans do not sit outside of nature. So, we could view our future pleasure as about a far greater abundance of nature brought about by changes that are positive rather than by abstinence and sacrifice.

Different Pleasures

One simple message I'm trying to get across in this book is that we are already gloriously unique and strange. It is about being radically other. I hope too that the broader perspective I've mentioned elsewhere will in turn help us to appreciate that it's other people's uniqueness that makes them interesting. We are all wild of mind, body and soul. This is not a matter of race, religion or gender, which are really just superficial differences. I'm talking here about differences in character. Think of one's friends and how strange and funny each one really is. Isn't that why we value them? Sharing ourselves with others takes us to different kinds of pleasures. It takes us to more sharing, caring, conversation, community, celebration, carnival. As I said above, this is about connection.

When I say 'different pleasures' though, I'm not suggesting that there's a whole set of pleasures that people haven't thought of wanting for themselves before, and that now they might try.

No, the suggestion is that a lot of us already want a different lifestyle, but concerns about the need to support others, or our financial security or just about appearing strange constrain us from realising those pleasures. I'm talking about that job or business idea that might really satisfy, about more time with friends and family, more time for making music, dancing, crafts, sport, time spent in nature. I'm talking too about our relationship to things — to possessions. So, different pleasures, in a sense, but not alien pleasures. Different pleasures are our heart's desires.

We are often presented with the idea that 'consumerism' means we love things too much — but I don't think this is quite right. The problem with consumerism is that it is often cheap junk that we neither need nor genuinely want. As we've touched on above, a problem with Western culture is not that we love things too much, but that we don't love them enough. We don't care enough to seek out the things that are beautifully made, durable and built with integrity. We don't honour enough the hand-made things and especially those things that we make for ourselves. Society even tries to dissuade us from building our own homes. David Fleming told us: 'Goods in our culture are losing, to some extent, their *implicit* functions — the symbolism, the social function which ought to travel with them. They are becoming, in a sense, invisible. Here are some examples: food, in addition to its *overt* function of providing nutrition, also has, or had, an implicit function of reciprocal giving and in the daily interaction around a table, without which the durability of the household in any structural sense is

improbable. The implicit function of clothes as symbols of social belonging, courtesy and standing has waned. Sport has lost much of its implicit crucial function of ceremony and play, and is left with the overt futile business of winning. Perhaps sex has lost a bit of its implicit function of cementing relationships and has become a reduced proposition.

'Paradoxically, we consume in great quantities but aren't entirely comfortable with actually taking enjoyment in that consumption. Often there is some guilt in there — a tendency to explain fulfilled desires always as needs for which we had little reasonable alternative. There is a hesitation to celebrate goods as material artefacts in their own right. The effect of this disenchantment, this denial of the spirit and deeper significance in the currency of goods, services and behaviour, is to make it harder to recall anything about them at all. The object was eaten, worn, contested or had, but the implicit function — which is the only bit that engages the mind, emotions and spirit — probably did not happen at all. And if it did, you must have blinked at the wrong moment. Goods are finally becoming instrumentalised, invisible except for their instrumental purpose.' (David Fleming — *Surviving the Future*.)

Pleasure and Nature

In earlier chapters I've made a point of identifying our own bodies and minds as part of wild nature. Pleasure, in turn, is in the body. In this book (following Alexander Lowen's, *Pleasure*) I suggest there are no purely cerebral pleasures. All emotions and their affect as pleasure are aspects of the body. The body knows what's

really going on, better than the mind. The body knows how to heal itself, if needed, and how to heal the mind — if given the time and space. But minds tend not to listen.

Conflicted as we are about our bodies in Western societies, I think this, in turn, leads to a conflict over pleasure. Perhaps we are a bit concerned about being considered 'superficial' if we were to only speak about a motivation towards physical pleasure. Perhaps we substitute possessions as a less direct form of pleasure because of this conflict. If we were more at ease with our bodies, maybe we would not see physical pleasure as somehow decadent or superficial, but as essential to life.

As we saw in Chapter 8, on nature, a new story would be about protecting and enhancing natural environments, so far as this is possible. The reasons for this are several, but one of the most important is for the pleasure that nature brings us. Our connection with nature is a deep source of joy. I can recommend such books as David Abram's, *The Spell of the Sensuous* and *Becoming Animal* and Mary Reynolds Thompson's, *Reclaiming the Wild Soul* as guides to this subject. It's the beauty that we find in nature that feeds the soul.

Care of nature stretches between all scales, from the local to the global. At the neighbourhood level, we see so many spaces covered in paving and even fake grass. I would rather see a garden full of weeds than concrete paviours. With a little effort — and hopefully, the co-operation of neighbours — gardens can offer a haven for wildlife. Those little ponds,

streams and trees that are so easily swept away by building projects, are deserving of our protection and also inviting our enjoyment.

At the slightly larger scale, parks, woodlands, hedgerows, lakes, rivers and beaches need our careful protection, and offer us great joy. With such features on our doorsteps, there is little need to always be jetting off somewhere else. Let's enjoy what we have locally, and actively preserve such places as best we can.

At the national level, many countries legislate to protect areas of wild nature. These are a great source of pleasure for us humans. The wilder the wild place is allowed to be, the more the pleasure.

On the global scale, the oceans, rainforests, mountain ranges, savannahs, coral reefs and island chains take us back to who we are. They remind us of our fragility and the precariousness of human life. Without such places, we are doomed to a life of unremitting blandness. The big places of the world invite us to a life of adventure.

But we need to think about how such places steal all the headlines, whilst the smaller and less spectacular corners of nature are often neglected. It is often a mystery to me why small pockets of nature, easily reached by people living nearby, remain empty of human visitors. It is good for me, and for the few others who do choose to visit, but sad to think that so many people are presumably just preferring to go the shops or to travel away to some place more 'exciting', than make the most

of what is on our own doorsteps. Truly most of us do not love nature enough.

Pleasure and Place

In Chapter 9, on Place, we considered how participation in local governance could bring about a transformation in our physical surroundings. Many of the ideas of Parapolity and Parecon are driving towards this aspect of local decision-making. Seeing local changes, and being able to influence them, is the thing that is going to get people to engage. It starts from the bottom up, so it is very much about seeing an improvement in our immediate surroundings. This is the direct consequence of a more engaged style of politics. It might sound, at best, like a necessary evil, to deal with these administrative tasks. But we could turn this around and say instead that our communities are dedicated to giving joy and pleasure to their citizens.

There is an awful phrase that says: Good fences make good neighbours. It seems to be saying that if everyone just looked after their own (perhaps their own personal business, as well as their own property) then life would be better. It could almost be the mission statement of Privatopia. Why not instead go for the mantra: No fences make better neighbours.

Enhancing the spaces we live in is partly about changing the very rigid and often stultifying spaces that we create around our buildings. The little patch of garden, surrounded by a wall or fence is something of a sad sight. Sometimes, certainly, a garden can be a beautiful space and

an oasis from what might, after all, be less than brilliant surroundings. But what if, instead, all those little private gardens were opened up and neighbours shared those spaces in interesting and exciting ways? Think of the parties, the barbecues, the lantern lights, the fireworks — all shared, along with conversations, joys, sorrows, birthdays, weddings, music, speeches, flowers, vegetables, fruit. I cannot help but feel that the grumpy neighbour, who complains about boundaries and fence lines, could be overwhelmed by the simple generosity and kindness of neighbours. The places and spaces we create are the backdrop to shared pleasures.

We can easily extend that concept from gardens and neighbours to bigger spaces like the streets and squares of our towns and cities. Here the parties are on a bigger scale. My own adopted home town of Edinburgh is transformed in August by the largest arts festival in the world, plus all the associated hullabaloo. Recently, once a month, many of the streets of the city are closed to traffic, and festival-style events take over for a few hours. Many cities around the world are doing the same and finding the great benefits that can be derived from streets given back to people instead of being clogged by cars. Those cities that have experimented with car-free days are leading the way towards a pleasure that is almost forgotten — streets that are for people.

Chapter 9, on Place, has already spoken about how the dominance of the car has blighted towns and cities. Roads are not spaces to which we easily relate. The bigger and faster the road, the worse it gets. Ridding society of the tyranny

of the private car would certainly change the feel of our cities, towns and countryside. I realise, as we've touched on earlier, this would be anathema for some folk. The car is where competing notions of pleasure really come to a head. Perhaps somehow, with some re-thinking, we could look to accommodate our vehicles without spoiling our public spaces.

Pleasure and Compassion

From this chapter and the last, I hope it is clear that there is a very strong link between pleasure and compassion. Compassion is as much about sharing pleasure as it is about caring for those in need. Privatopia pushes us towards individualistic pleasure. More genuine pleasures though, tend to be shared experiences. Pleasure is a social construct. How different our relationships would be if the emphasis were on pleasure — if we could seek to be 'empleasured' rather than empowered. Compassion is the great leveller in society. When illness or bad times afflict those around us then power relations are dropped in favour of caring. Humour too is a sharing that I would include in compassion. We are all equal when we are laughing.

In the wider, and more formal, relations of compassion, there is pleasure (perhaps even the deepest of pleasures) in seeing other people happy. What, after all, are freedom, justice and equality, except means by which we try to bestow happiness on others? So part of the new story is to go where the love is in your life — to step towards your passion and your enthusiasm. Aristotle saw pleasure and

goodness to be intimately linked. ‘The highest good is happiness’, he said,’ and that consists of the actualisation and perfect practice of goodness.’ So here is another way to look at that issue of grading pleasures that we touched on earlier. If happiness is pleasure and purpose extended over time, our beliefs, our compassion for others and care for the world are providing us with the ‘purpose’ side of the equation. A wider view of pleasure takes in what might be for our long-term good and to include what our culture would regard as worthwhile moral purposes. Thus, culture provides a ‘grading’ of pleasure beyond the individual. Higher purpose — beyond individual purpose — provides a measure, derived from compassion — that utilitarian views of pleasure and our economics don’t readily acknowledge. Giving some or all of our lives over to higher purposes may mean we enjoy less individual pleasure and happiness than we might otherwise, but nonetheless feel our lives are more worthwhile. Purpose is a social and cultural thing, beyond individual pleasure. What was said earlier about the pleasure of connection between people is closely related to this thought.

Pleasure and Work

A total commitment to what we are doing is the basis for pleasure — more focused, not less. Alexander Lowen explains:

‘The search for fun in adults undermines their capacity for pleasure. Pleasure demands a serious attitude towards life, a commitment to one’s existence and work… If a person has pleasure in his daily life, he will have no desire to escape.’

Alexander Lowen — *Pleasure*

So we can recognise pleasure as including such things as having a vocation rather than a career, seeking knowledge for its own sake, and serving others in business and in our communities, rather than trying to profit by them. All of this is just a matter of changing our descriptions of the way our lives and cultures are organised — changing our stories about the meaning of work.

'The worker must be an artist, and the artist a worker', said R. Page Arnot, but work, it has to be said, is not such a vocation for everyone. It can seem like a slap in the face to tell people they must have a vocation and not just a job, or that everyone is an artist, in their own way. Can we reclaim work from the drudgery that it is for so many people? Or, returning to the problem of grading pleasures discussed above, perhaps we should just acknowledge that some people may be happier with a straight-forward job and will seek their pleasures in their spare time. Talk of having a vocation then can be a bit elitist.

The dream of a future that involves total leisure has been there for many years. Mechanisation never quite delivered. There always seemed to be new things — new wants and needs — that meant that as jobs were lost through mechanisation, more were created to take their place. But now, with Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robots developing at exponential speed, it really looks like the future of 'leisure' could be a reality. A future that is increasingly computerised might make it more likely that a lot of menial jobs will be replaced by AI and

robots. This could be a severe problem, if people are not trained and ready to take up alternative models of employment. But if we are ready, then those new jobs are likely to be a lot more creative and interesting. They have to be, as they will be about all the things that AI cannot do. The drive towards increasing computerisation is not something that people are really choosing. AI and robots are, after all, products of Privatopia and Cornucopia. With a system of Parapolity and Parecon in place, we might make different choices — pushing towards more employment rather than less. The idea that we will ever be completely free of work may be just a fantasy. But we might choose to go with the technology and accept where it leads — including the reduction of drudgery — but with other impacts into the bargain. Also it is helpful to think of pleasure being transformed into passion. If we have passion for the things we do then it starts to become irrelevant whether we call this work, labour or leisure.

What might we do with our leisure, if we choose to go there? That leads right back into the questions of abundance and pleasure we discussed above, except not for the lucky few in richer nations, but for everyone.

If Universal Basic Income is introduced, this is a further factor that will allow for fewer to need to work or to be able to work just part-time. Many of us will find ‘work’ of a different kind in our lives — even if that work is not strictly necessary for gaining us a wage or something that is essential to society, that is, not ‘labour’. I am thinking here of the work that people put into gaining a new skill, music, writing, art,

cooking and much more. There is an overlap between what is 'necessary' work and what is voluntary, in other words. This is illustrated in Chapter 3, where 'labour' belongs to the material economy, whilst 'work' belongs to the cultural economy. With a vocation, the boundaries between the two become even more blurred, until we may not even choose to go on using the terms work and labour.

As mentioned in Chapter 7, the industrial world — and now the robotic and computerised world — has separated us from our making — from the power-to; from the freedom-to; the freedom-to-make; the freedom to re-make. The way we approach work in the future may be to gain the freedom to build our own stories and to find pleasure in work through the joys of making.

Pleasure and Business

Bringing pleasure to the worker though is only half the story. The other side of this is about bringing joy to others through what our businesses make and the services they deliver. In the last chapter we looked at how important it is for businesses to think differently about their relationship to local communities. A business, and by implication, its workers as well as its owners, would be about bringing joy into people's lives. And as we discussed earlier in this chapter, society's relationship with things is a problem. Consumerism is not so much an issue about owning stuff as about the type of stuff we choose to own (or are forced into buying). There is a wonderful Youtube clip (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sp1-45FQM7Y) about a piano tuner who has an ambition to

create a piano that is cheap enough for anyone to afford. He finds himself in a café one day, where there is only one other customer. He sits with the other customer and tells him about his ambition. The other customer happens to be an expert in business. He suggests that the cheap piano may be a bad idea. Other companies, he suggests, may then make their own cheap pianos, and there will be a race to the bottom, in creating cheaper and lower quality instruments. (A good explanation of how commerce works today.) The businessman suggests instead that the piano tuner creates the best piano in the world. That is the path the piano tuner took. His venture has been successful, and now we have creations of great beauty and value that might not have existed without the work, commitment and vision of this one man with an idea.

Carnival

Consumer capitalism, and what I've described as Privatopia, are always trying to bring things into a system, to control things and to monetise them. The system promises us individuality but actually wants to turn us into labouring and consuming drones. Could we instead see the world as always at the point of tipping over into silliness? Let's let the fake culture go and just laugh at the craziness of it all! Pleasure is utopia's backlash against society's ideologies and its stifling institutions of government and its endless cost-benefit analysis that gives the impression of control. Pleasure embraces the chaos — celebrates the chaos.

Theodore Zeldin (*Happiness*) reminds us: 'Without laughter, the precious pearl within

many souls would not be revealed, the potential of Paradise would never be realised. The strongest bonds between humans are shared fantasies.' Carnival seems to be an essential ingredient of human culture. It provides the laughter and shared fantasies of which Zeldin speaks. There is something about carnival that gives an outlet and a balance for the human soul — it helps us to remember that link between wild body, wild mind and wild soul that I have been referring to throughout this book.

Sometimes carnival is a reversal of social norms, with those in authority mocked and ridiculed and the usual moral restraints suspended or reversed. This might have been the mayor, the judges or the clergy in by-gone days. We have specifically modern restraints on us in society today leading to modern ways to reverse social norms. Perhaps our oppression comes from technology. Many festivals and carnivals seem to look to nature and to simpler lifestyles now for their inspiration. This is just an impression, but I'm hoping that it's true.

Carnival is also about celebrating what might be called 'otherness'. The world as we experience it is ordinary and extraordinary at the same time. Within ourselves, some of us might recognise a sense of being like everyone else but also strangely different. It might feel a bit embarrassing, but carnival somehow manages to recognise and to celebrate that 'radical otherness' that we all share. It's okay to be weird — everyone else is weird too! The same goes for sensuality and sexuality — over which we are so often of divided mind and divided behaviour. Carnival releases these ambiguities

and allows us to be more comfortable with ourselves.

I could go on to list the many famous carnivals around the world. But instead, I want to suggest bringing carnival home. Why not add a bit of carnival to our own personal lives, first of all. And then, if we can, add carnival to our street and our neighbourhood, town or city.

Pleasure and Soul

We may feel embarrassed to put too much emphasis on superficial pleasure. We may feel equally embarrassed to consider pleasure as somehow spiritual. But I'd suggest pleasure is a kind of surrender — a kind of letting go — to the underlying silliness of the world. And letting go is a spiritual act of sorts. Modern science suggests that the body is all there is. Mind and consciousness are relegated to rather inferior positions and soul is laughed off as a rather quaint superstition. Meanwhile, people with a leaning toward spirituality might suggest that the body does not 'contain' the mind or the soul — the soul contains the body, so the spiritual is the wider context in which everything else resides. In terms of pleasure then, the key to pleasure is a happy soul. I'm not saying that caring for mind and body are not also worthwhile, but I hope that setting that within a wider, more spiritual context might help. We could draw even wider circles that represent soul and the grace and beauty that come to us from the wider universe.

Paul Bloom (*How Pleasure Works*) makes an argument for pleasure derived from the essence

of things, places and people. He holds back from suggesting that the 'essence' of a person is equivalent to soul (that would be academic suicide) yet I cannot help but feel these ideas align. Letting go, for the soul, is to surrender to the pleasure that is always brimming out there in the world. It is to let go of pretensions and false dignity and accept ourselves — strange and fallible, but nonetheless gloriously human. It is to relax in our own skins, to relax in nature and just spend time being, rather than burning out with all our frantic doing. The pleasure of the soul is about the celebration of being over doing.

Beauty, Slowness, Silence and Peace

If I were to think about what pleasure means for me, then these four things would be high on the list — beauty, slowness, silence and peace. Beauty is found in nature, first and foremost, but also in the things we make — buildings, clothing, tools, and all the simple things that we use every day. The best enjoyments are the slow and settled things in life, slow food, slow drinks, long conversations late into the night. It need not mean, necessarily, that everything is literally slow. It might be better to describe this as everything having its own appropriate pace, and for humans to have the wisdom to find that pace. But yes, at the moment that often means slowing down. As the old proverb says, the human soul moves at the speed of a slowly walking camel. Take, for example, this quote from the *Slow Food Manifesto*:—

'[The 20th] century, which began and has developed under the insignia of industrial civilisation, first invented the machine and then

took it as its life model. We are enslaved by speed and have succumbed to the same insidious virus: Fast Life, which disrupts our habits, pervades the privacy of our homes and forces us to eat fast foods. To be worthy of the name, Homo sapiens should rid himself of speed before it reduces him to a creature in danger of extinction.' Elsewhere, the Slow Food Movement says: 'a firm defence of quiet material pleasure is the only way to oppose the universal folly of *Fast Life*.' It proposes instead, 'many suitable doses of guaranteed sensual pleasure and slow, long-lasting enjoyment.'

Silence can be the absolute silence of a night spent in the mountains or a desert, but it can also be the gentle rhythms of everyday life; the town square; the café; the beach front. Silence therefore should not be taken too literally. It is helpful to contrast 'noise' — that is, unwanted intrusion — with 'sound', which can be the welcome sounds of nature, music and conversation.

Peace is to be at peace within one's own mind and to have peace in all our dealings with the world; family; friends; work; neighbourhood; government; nation; and between nations.

Put beauty, slowness, silence and peace together, and we often come to a modern concept of simplicity. As we've noted earlier, simplicity means more than just the absence of material things. The word has been adopted recently to mean a whole set of principles. Duane Elgin tells us more about the modern concept of simplicity. He is worth quoting here in full:

'Simplicity keeps our eyes on the price of what matters most in our lives — the quality of our relationships with family, friends, community, nature and cosmos. Simplicity yields lasting satisfactions that more than compensate for the fleeting pleasures of consumerism. Simplicity leans towards a more relaxed relationship with life. Simplicity celebrates the beauty and intelligence of nature's designs. Simplicity reveres the wisdom of silence that "speaks with unceasing eloquence". Simplicity removes needless clutter and complexity and celebrates the beauty in life. Simplicity fosters the sanity of self-discovery and freedom from secondary distractions.

'Simplicity is not sacrifice. Sacrifice is a consumer lifestyle that is overstressed, overbusy, and overworked. Sacrifice is investing long hours in work that is neither meaningful nor satisfying. Sacrifice is being away from family and community to earn a living. Sacrifice is the stress of commuting long-distances and sitting in traffic. Sacrifice is the loss of quiet and the subtle sounds of nature. Sacrifice is nature hidden behind a stream of billboard advertisements. Sacrifice is the smell of the city stronger than the smell of the Earth. Sacrifice is no longer seeing the heavens in the night sky because if light pollution. Sacrifice is carrying more than 200 toxic chemicals in our bodies, with consequences that will cascade for generations ahead. Sacrifice is a dramatically diminished and impoverished range of life, both "plants and animals". Sacrifice is the loss of a relatively calm climate and the growth of extremes in droughts, heat waves and storms. Sacrifice is the loss of opportunity for soulful encounter with others. Sacrifice is feeling

divided among the different parts of our lives and unsure how they work together in a coherent whole.

‘Consumer lifestyles offer lives of sacrifice where simplicity offers lives of opportunity. Simplicity creates the opportunity for more time with family and friends, cultivating ones “true gifts”, and contributing to the community. Simplicity also creates the opportunity for greater fulfilment in work, compassion for others, feelings of kinship with all life, and awe of living in a living universe. I find it ironic that a life-way of simplicity can take us into an opportunity-filled future and yet is often portrayed in the mass media as primitive or regressive and pulling back from opportunity.’ (Duane Elgin — *Simplicity — A Cool Lifestyle for a Hot Planet*. An essay in *Gaian Economics — Living Well within Planetary Limits*.)

So, those are my ‘different pleasures’. To me, their opposites would be — ugliness (accepting the destruction of nature and the compromise of our townscapes for the sake of expediency), frenzy, rush, multi-tasking, deadlines, noise, strife in personal relationships, arguments at work, confrontation in politics, trade wars, nuclear deterrents, terrorism. But if people choose to have a world of speed, noise, fast food and tabloid culture then that really does seem to be a problem that is very difficult to address without getting us back to the worries over elitism we met at the head of the chapter. And with the concerns over climate change suggested in Elgin’s quote above, and throughout this book, this is a major problem. I have to say I find this the most challenging issue to solve. Pleasure seems to cut deepest when we are looking at alternatives for society.

I hope my thoughts on connection, compassion and different pleasures in this chapter have helped to show there are alternatives to just saying we cannot do anything other than just go with whatever people seem to be choosing. I can only leave it there, and let the reader draw their own conclusions.

12 A Wider Commons

'If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading.'

- Lao Tzu

'The purpose of life is to be defeated by greater and greater things.' - Rainer Maria Rilke

Up to this point I have restricted our discussion to more or less the way the world is now. I have given the name Privatopia to this world. We have touched on alternative utopias in the Introduction and in Chapter 1. There we looked

at two main contenders for a future better world — Ecotopia and Cornucopia.

We've noted that people can be disengaged and cynical about the current state of politics. Our disengagement might indicate stagnation, but I've suggested that this does not mean that things will not change. Rather, it means that the current Privatopia will stumble blindly into a version of Cornucopia, that the advocates of a high-tech future and the benefactors of neo-liberalism have in mind. It might be Cornucopia for the few and crumbs for the rest. So if we do nothing, change will happen without us. If we want to stop this, then we need to wake up. There is a difference between stumbling into the future and living it more consciously. If society is to adopt a new vision for its future then it means all citizens — or at least, a good many — taking time out to think about what the options might mean, and what they have to offer us. So in this chapter, I want to ask in more detail, what it might be like to live in one of these future worlds.

Education

Let's ask then, what it would take to change from the path we seem to be on? Another of Gandhi's social sins is applicable here — Education without Character. I can only comment briefly on education and only with reference to the UK. Two distinct trends seem to be prevalent. One trend, which may or may not be beneficial, is that young people are being taught to question. Social media, and the internet generally, has contributed to this trend. We can all search for answers now, but this has

led to a certain amount of disrespect for experts and a tendency to question the truthfulness of a lot of what we see and hear. Questioning and searching for answers is to be encouraged, of course, but the attitude behind such enquiries is equally important. Character then, is needed — character enough to discern what is reasonable and acceptable from what is suspect.

The second trend in education is simply to prepare for working life. The commodification of learning and the insistence on league tables, progress and results, just sends out the message that education is a tick-box exercise. I cannot help but feel that this then continues into the workplace and adds to the stress and dullness of modern life. Whilst this might seem pragmatic, the issue here is that working life is just a continuation of whatever direction society is taking. And at the moment this suggests that employment is just a means of gaining money for a private life that may take little or no account of compassion for others, concern for local communities and care of nature. Preparing young people for employment then, implicitly reinforces the message that living this private life is what being an adult consists of, and that there are no reasonable alternatives.

We need closer links between education, industry and community. We need less focus on qualifications. We also need knowledge for its own sake and to encourage curiosity, imagination and creativity. Again, it is character that is required to see the benefit of education for its own sake and for the wider application of knowledge in society; not just the narrow focus on a job and money. At the very least, we need

to imagine the directions future work might take and focus on this. We need to encourage young people to seek vocations. Education may change to 'the four C's' — Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration and Creativity. (This is offered as an alternative to the three R's, of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic — disturbing, in that only one of them actually begins with an R! An alternative version of 'to read, to reason, and to recite' was given by Louis P. Bénézet. (At least he could spell!) By recite, he apparently meant having a true grasp of language and not just repeating by rote what was offered by the tutor.)

Science and Technology

Given the prevalence of Privatopia, and its drift into an expectation of Cornucopia, another of Gandhi's social sins is relevant to our discussion here — Science without Humanity. A lot of technology has its own momentum; that is part of the reason why Privatopia is changing. That is the downside of Privatopia; if no-one intervenes, then technology will just plot its own course. The very nature of Privatopia — as a world where no-one much bothers about their surroundings except as immediately affecting themselves — leaves society open to this slow but accelerating drift towards technologies that we may neither want or need. As has been said so often, just because something can be done does not mean it should be done. Technology seems to be leading the way instead of us choosing the way. This is especially true of the Cornucopian view of the future, discussed below. I do not especially blame scientists for creating this situation. Science, like every other branch

of human endeavour, needs input from society at large; it needs to be set within a moral context; it needs to have a human face. Industry might however be a bit more culpable.

Why Privatopia will not Work

Privatopia, what I am considering as our current situation, certainly has some advantages. That sense of independence, privacy and individuality is very appealing, and sometimes anonymity is a great asset, especially with regard to freedom. We can think particularly of women from rural backgrounds moving to cities, and the independence that money can bring to us. Privatopia, and our developed societies generally, would be fine if the world were infinite, or there were only a few millions of us instead of several billion. Two main problems prevent Privatopia, and indeed all of our utopias, being equally valid options and these are climate change and the limits of our material resources — the limits to growth. The reality of climate change is not something that we still feel the need to dispute — it is a given. The questions that remain are really about how quickly changes will occur and how extensive they will be. Privatopia, as we have seen, more or less ignores the effects of climate change. We could say that any response is re-active rather than pro-active — trying to cure the problems after the events, rather than trying to prevent the problems in the first place. (Economics explicitly discounts the future, so our economic system itself encourages this attitude of only fixing things when they can no longer be ignored.) Sea level rise will be addressed by flood defences and/or moving

settlements to higher ground. Disruption to agriculture will be met by applying more technology. Species extinction will perhaps only be addressed by saving DNA of endangered species in the hope of a future 'resurrection'. I am not necessarily saying that therefore human civilisation is doomed. We may well survive under this scenario; capitalism may survive; 'normal' society may survive; but it will be a deeply impoverished world.

In addition to climate change, the limits to growth is the other issue affecting our shared future. A report, going by the name, *The Limits to Growth* was published in 1972. Around 50 years later, and whilst its predictions over the growth of population have proved accurate, almost none of the concerns raised about shortages have so far turned out to be true. Likewise, concerns over running out of oil — so called 'Peak Oil', where the rate of new discoveries is overtaken by demand — have been eclipsed by oil and gas obtained by non-conventional means. Economists point out that a scarcity of any particular material (or a particular source of a material) will inevitably lead to an increase in price. The price increase will, in turn, lead to the market seeking alternatives to whatever resource is proving scarce and expensive. By this reasoning, renewable energy will eventually replace fossil fuels, simply as a result of the increasing expense and scarcity of the latter. At the time of writing, there is particular concern over Cobalt, a key ingredient of lithium-Ion batteries. These are the batteries that power a vast range of devices, from mobile phones, cameras and laptops to electric cars. Cobalt itself is mined

mainly in the Democratic Republic of Congo, often under appalling conditions, and often by children. (Lithium Iron Phosphate batteries — no Cobalt — are a possible successor to Lithium-Ion batteries.) There is also concern over the supply of Indium, the element used in Indium Tin Oxide, that allows touchscreen panels to function. Aside from Cobalt and Indium though, it may well be that the economists are correct, and there will always be sources of materials, or alternative materials that allow for growth — in economic terms, at least — to continue unabated. Indeed, bizarrely, even tackling climate change itself can be a source of economic growth. In Privatopia, we simply turn a blind eye to all this, much like a former age of Europeans, who ignored the source of products reaching them as a result of the slave trade.

A vast source of new raw materials, of course, lies within our grasp. Whilst it has taken many decades, it is starting to look like space exploration is beginning to get seriously underway. Capitalism, as we have said, progresses by converting commons into commodity. A massive new source of commons awaits, such that there have already been calls for the solar system to have some kind of legal protection — even to be declared a commons. Who knows, in 300 years time, we may be facing another 'limits to growth' and start to look at other solar systems. I am positive about exploration, but still, these next few decades back on Earth are critical.

I mention this with some hesitation. I am hesitant because many caring people look with horror at the moves to colonise the moon and

Mars, and to launch ever more satellites into space. Their concern is that we neglect our Earth-bound problems of ecological collapse, climate change, pollution, poverty, and so on, by looking to space. But whilst I have some sympathy with this view, still, I disagree. In the long-term, we need to explore space.

Optimists — including the Cornucopians, as we will see — regard developments in space as part of the 'solution' to the limits to growth. But remember that almost all of this new material will be used back here on Earth. As such, 'solving' our problems with regard to energy and/or resources, inevitably puts even greater pressure on the biosphere. Our future expansion into the solar system will be a continuation of capitalism and if we are to manage it correctly we need to avoid it becoming another Tragedy of the Commons on an even grander scale. Climate change, and all the problems associated with it, will not be solved in the next few decades by developments in space. In the longer term though, space exploration may change societies and humanity immensely. There are only a few clear voices in these matters, who embrace change and technology, but keep a clear eye on what we're doing with our environment. I mention here, Bill Nye (*Unstoppable*) and Bob McDonald (*Measuring Earth with a Stick*).

Can the Future be a Cornucopia?

What then, of those who give a much more positive narrative of the future? What about a story where, not only do we not have to give up any of the enormous benefits that we have from

living in a modern technologically-advanced society, but things will keep on getting better? It's a very appealing story, and as I've said elsewhere, it is almost the default story of our culture — the natural extension of Privatopia; the underlying promise of capitalism. People who promote such a view are called Cornucopians.

Cornucopians love to show graphs of how all aspects of human life have been steadily improving, and they suggest that there is no reason why these improvements will not continue indefinitely. The matter of limits, which could bring progress crashing to a halt, is either not considered or otherwise just seen as solvable via technology. Those other graphs — the ones that show the rise in greenhouse gases, the rise in sea levels, the increasing speed of melting glaciers and ice caps, the loss of species, the loss of natural habitats — these graphs are seen as reversible, again, usually by means of technology.

The Cornucopians have 'facts' to back up their proposals. There is plenty of 'evidence', as we have seen, to say that growth and improvements to human well-being are on an upward trajectory, and this leads to an apparently logical, but erroneous, conclusion, that this trend will continue. There is plenty of evidence that technical fixes would work, provided that consequences aren't scrutinised too closely.

One idea, for instance — one of a number of solutions known as 'geo-engineering' — is to seed the stratosphere with chemicals, in order

to reflect more sunlight back into space and thus cool the planet. The problem with such ideas is that they layer more and more technical fixes on top of each other, until we become entirely dependent on artificial means of sustaining ourselves. So, there are technical fixes to address the consequences of geo-engineering (acidity of the oceans is one consequence) and then more fixes to address more consequences, and so on. A similar pattern is repeated for other areas of concern, such as agriculture, health care and species depletion.

Cornucopia does not really have a need for a supporting narrative, because it is already the dominant narrative of modern Western culture (and increasingly of world culture). We believe implicitly in progress and growth. Cornucopia, likewise, has no need for political change. The current systems admirably serve Cornucopia's aims. We are however, despite our affluence, on something of a treadmill. The culture wants us hooked up to our mobiles, laptops and PC's, either working or buying. It is a world of increasing stress, with endless things trying to grab our attention, so that we keep viewing, liking, clicking, reviewing and most of all, spending. It is a bubble world, abstracted from its ultimate reliance on the natural commons, on which it nevertheless must rely. The financial economy and Artificial Intelligence are prime examples of modern culture completely un-tethered from the real world.

We might well ask if AI and robots will seek to replace the social commons that I have tried to shed light on in this book. At the time of writing,

it does not look too promising (or, threatening, depending on your perspective here). If the reader has ever tried to have a conversation with a 'chatbot' then they will know it can be somewhat uninspiring. (I usually start by asking them to explain Kant's categorical imperative, and the discussion does not go well. Then again, this conversation-starter doesn't work too well with humans either.) We would perhaps be needing consciousness before any kind of relationship with AI becomes meaningful. And could we ever tell if consciousness has really been reached, or is just being faked? Someone has suggested that we will know when a robot has become conscious when a sexbot first says no.

Another symptom of Cornucopia's troubles is the paradox of individualism being valorised, but also seen as deeply threatening. Darren Anderson warns: 'In the future, of which we are already a part, to be private, amongst many other things, may be deemed an anti-social, radical act. Solitude may become a vice. Privacy may be monetised into being a preserve of the rich and well-connected. We will realise the precious nobility of anonymity when it is gone… To maintain a position of sovereign free-thinking individual, and further, to connect with others, will be an active threat. This is at the heart of the dystopias.' This is the strange paradox of modern life. Community, sharing and solidarity seem to be promoted, but the way these things are manifested is an odd cult of individuals. We are not really shaping community at all, we are just enduring a fantasy of connection whilst living increasingly isolated lives. Meanwhile, any genuine community is

difficult to achieve — Western culture has just not raised children who can cope with its demands. Community is an artform that we have largely forgotten.

Cornucopia is a world that is already happening. The 'lucky' ones will be safe, but I cannot help but feel there will be a massive underclass who will not be so lucky. As Anderson suggests, Cornucopia, if it were to succeed, will be a utopia for the few and a dystopia for the many. That dystopia could leave us to be neo-liberal drones — institutionalised, separated from our making, our doing, and our wild selves, plugged in, by default, to a society that keeps us slaving for things we do not need and cannot afford, and watched over by an increasingly paranoid and over-bearing state.

It need not be so bad for Cornucopia though. One thing they have in abundance is hope. As I write this in 2020, there remains perhaps a window of a few years when we may solve our climate problems without having to resort to high-tech solutions. As mentioned in Chapter 8, on nature, such things as regenerative agriculture and permaculture (including ocean permaculture) along with re-forestation and re-wilding, could well be enough to bring the Earth back into balance. Such ideas take up the positivity of the Cornucopians, and combine them with the respect of nature and care for the planet of the Ecotopians.

Is Ecotopia Enough?

Solving the ecological crisis and addressing issues of sustainability by Earth-bound means,

is the province of another of our utopias — Ecotopia. As we've seen throughout this book, climate change and ecological sustainability are the major challenges facing the world today. So the Ecotopians are addressing issues of critical importance. There are some signs of hope, as of this writing. There is a general acceptance that climate change is really happening. The use of renewable energy is growing rapidly. There are moves towards more vegetarian and vegan diets, and reductions in the use of plastics. But there is a lot still to do. The general trend in our problems is that things are getting worse. Ecotopia, as we have touched on elsewhere, covers a broad range of ideas. Here we are looking especially at what kind of future Ecotopia envisages.

Some see the collapse of capitalism, or its deliberate destruction, as a necessary first step towards a sustainable future. Others see a dramatic change in climate — a tipping point being crossed — as the key factor. In response to those suggestions, I simply repeat my earlier message — be careful what you wish for. Both of these scenarios are risks that we face, not events that we should be welcoming. Both would bring chaos and a considerable level of suffering. What we need to focus on instead is the gradual transformation of capitalism to an economy that has kindness and compassion at its heart. In a similar vein, provided climate change is gradual, then we can adapt as necessary, and find ways to bring things back into equilibrium.

Charles Eisenstein (*Sacred Economics*) thinks that consumer capitalism has more or less run

its course. As physical resources dwindle, our economic system will be forced to change and a 'gift economy' will re-emerge. In the meantime, any efforts that we might make to thwart capitalism — sharing our work and gifts outwith the moneyed economy — Eisenstein sees as worthwhile preparation for the future. Eco-village and co-housing projects, which often try to recreate the type of reliant communities Eisenstein favours, he sees as 'ritual'. They are an outworking, in micro form, of the transformation that all of society must one day make. Whilst I admire Eisenstein's vision, I don't think we should be waiting around for the future to happen to us. As I've said above, premising these changes on the collapse of capitalism is not a very helpful message, even although Eisenstein makes his case in otherwise largely positive language. I'm not so sure there will be such a crash of capitalism, as Eisenstein suggests, and if it were to happen, I am sceptical that a gift economy would naturally emerge. It seems more likely that the capitalist world would simply be rebuilt — perhaps in an improved form, but not necessarily that much different. If that fails to happen, the alternative is likely to be chaos.

Like Eisenstein, Ecotopians generally do their best to paint an encouraging picture about the changes we need to make. On the political front though, there is a focus on the small-scale, or politics is simply not mentioned at all. The changes we require to make however, are difficult and painful. Sacrifice is required now, and most of us will not live long enough to see the benefits of these sacrifices take effect — it is for our children and grandchildren. Also, the

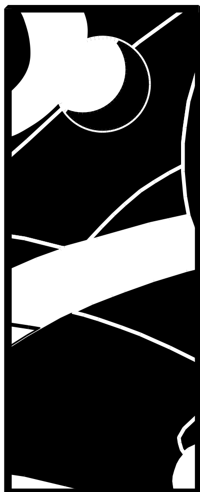
Ecotopians are up against the problem that everyone asking for changes in society faces — people are not convinced by facts and do not even really listen. This is especially true when it comes to climate change. The natural tendency of all of us is to deny information that challenges our current way of life (especially if that way of life is comfortable).

Having said that, 'sacrifice' is a relative term, as we touched on in the last chapter. Perhaps it is wrong to see the sacrifice being about giving up material things or a particular lifestyle. If we find different pleasures, then it might be that 'sacrifice' need hardly be sacrifice at all. Gandhi spoke about sacrifice in relation to worship. If we become worshippers of something different, then our sacrifice will likewise mean something different. Imagine if we became worshippers of beauty, pleasure, silence, slowness and peace (as many of us secretly are). Our sacrifices may indeed sometimes be material or financial, but that will not be their main focus. Perhaps I am stretching Gandhi's meaning a bit here, but if beauty, pleasure, silence, slowness and peace are our worship, then our sacrifices would be in order to achieve these things in our lives and in society at large. This interpretation shifts the focus away from 'giving things up' and towards investing in what we really treasure in life.

Addressing climate change has taken two distinct forms — mitigation and adaptation. Until very recently, mitigation measures have been along the lines of saving energy and changing to renewable sources of energy generation. Recently though, we have been starting to see non-conventional ideas such as

geo-engineering and direct carbon capture. In the previous section, we saw some suggestions along the lines of changing our agricultural practices and restoring and protecting wilderness. Such things are the bridge between mitigation and adaptation. They could balance the climate and they could fortify Earth's eco-systems — giving them, and us, resilience into the long-term future. This seems to be a message that does not look for catastrophe to give us a new start and is not asking people to face severe austerity in order to save the planet. Those already practising regenerative agriculture, for instance, are seeing higher yields and therefore higher profits than their 'conventional' farming competitors with their pesticides and fertilisers. I'm not saying it will be that easy, but I'm saying that, whilst there are difficulties, there are always reasons for hope.

Society will need to weather storms to be in balance and that balance will be an ongoing struggle to maintain. But, in the spirit of this book, the alternative story can also be a story about pleasure. The alternative story could be about beauty, silence, slowness and peace. It could be about grace, kindness, conversation and humour. It could be about art, celebration and carnival. It could be about radical otherness and generosity of soul. We could combine the optimism of the Cornucopians and the care of the Ecotopians to forge a new story. In essence this, along with a new respect for the commons and a new approach to polity, is the root of our new story.



13 What We Might Decide, If We Could Decide

'There is one thing stronger than all the armies of the world; and that is an idea whose time has come.'

- Flyer for 'Nation' 15th April 1943 (from Victor Hugo)

'Our doubts are traitors and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt.'

- William Shakespeare — 'Measure for Measure'

Gandhi's sin of Politics without Principle is again relevant to our discussions in this chapter.

My purpose here is to give a brief summary of ideas that have been raised in earlier chapters. Where we find ourselves, in most nations, is having very little say over anything, except via a vote every few years for a political party that might or might not reflect our views. If a system of participatory politics — Parapolity — were adopted, in whole or in part, then we would undoubtedly have a lot more say. Likewise, if a People's Parliament were established as an additional house in our governance system (or a replacement for the House of Commons/ House of Lords/ Senate/ House of Representatives) then again we would be given a stronger voice. What happens then would be up to us, and to an extent we would get the kind of government that our participation, or lack of participation, deserves.

So, this chapter contains only suggestions, especially for the four areas that I have been concerned with in Chapters 8 to 11 — nature, place, compassion and pleasure. In considering these issues in this summary chapter, we will return again to five of our six key questions: Who decides? What do we own? What should we share? What should we make? How should we trade? We will touch a little on the sixth question — How should we live? — but that question will mainly be the subject of the next chapter.

Who Decides?

A simple approach to politics might be to seek to learn what people really want. But, what if the things people say they want are things that will cause harm to others or to the planet? Who decides? The main proposal of this book is that we need to broaden the base of decision-making and allow everyone, so far as possible, to have a voice in governance. I referred to this as radical devolution in Chapter 4, and I believe that existing political structures in most countries could accommodate such a process without any sweeping changes being required.

Closely related to radical devolution is the principle of subsidiarity (and the similar idea of 'municipality'). Subsidiarity is a tricky word with a simple meaning. It means that decisions relevant to a particular location are made in that location, whilst decisions that have national or international relevance are made by the wider circles of government. Again, this does not seem like too big a stretch for existing government structures.

Sociocracy is a governance system that aims to allow everyone an equal say in decision-making. Chapter 5, Community on a Small Scale, provides more detail. Whilst acknowledging our human tendency towards hierarchy and power relations, Sociocracy, so far as possible, tries to balance things out and make sure that even the most humble person involved will be able to speak their mind and know that their opinions will be heard and responded to. The easiest way to describe Sociocracy is as a series of linked circles, with the wider circles having more responsibility for tasks that have the broadest impact. There will always be a reciprocal

accountability between the broader circles and the smaller groups that have the more small-scale functions. It is important in Sociocracy, as in any kind of governance system, to be mindful of the vision for whatever the particular organisation is engaged with, and this will, in turn, lead to clear aims that the organisation wishes to accomplish. Being able to take a broad view, recognising vision and acting responsibly towards its fulfilment, is part of each person's progress as an individual, as well as helping the organisation to track its course and adjust its aims, as required through changing circumstances. Sociocracy is in use for businesses, charities, co-housing and voluntary groups, but not as yet, so far as I am aware, in use for any political organisations. However, its structure and methods seem entirely appropriate for small-scale governance and it is easily scaleable for application to all levels of government. I have a sociocratic structure in mind when discussing deliberative democracy below. To the question, who decides, Sociocracy answers, everyone.

In Chapter 6, Community on a Large Scale, we looked at a form of participatory politics, or Parapolity, that consists of a series of nested circles from the smallest community up to the largest national or international government. The structure is very much on the lines of Sociocracy, and with the same accountability between the smaller and the broader circles of governance. In many countries, the smaller levels already exist (such as community councils in the UK) although unfortunately these currently have very little influence. Wider circles — counties, regions, nations — are

represented at the moment by people elected from political parties. The smaller circles do not have the ability to decide these posts. Chapter 6 suggested that this 'representative democracy' has the problem that those elected officials often make decisions without referring back to their electorate. They become, in effect, an oligarchy.

The type of Parapolity envisaged would allow for the broader circles to be chosen from the smaller circles of local government, and could wholly or partially replace the current system of elected officials. I am suggesting then that something such as a People's Parliament could sit alongside elected officials as an intermediate step to Parapolity being fully implemented. Parapolity then, is not an all-or-nothing suggestion. If many or most people choose not to be involved then representative government would continue much as it is today in most nations. If, however, folk find a benefit from participating in local politics then the scale-up to a People's Parliament is entirely possible.

A further idea discussed in Chapter 6 is to form Citizens' Assemblies, with representatives chosen randomly from the whole community. The Citizens' Assemblies may be temporary measures, for specific issues, but may also become a further and more permanent estate of government and possibly replacing one of the existing houses — to make another form of People's Parliament — one where the delegates are chosen by lot, a process known as 'sortition', and take up a role in governance for an extended period — perhaps two or three years. Citizens' Assemblies and People's Parliaments,

are both forms of deliberative democracy. They take power away from political parties and protect against the kinds of vested interests, dodgy deals and favouritism that can be the bane of party politics. We would get the kind of government we deserve. To the question of: Who Decides? Parapolity, a People's Parliament and Citizens' Assemblies answer: Everyone decides — if they want to.

What do we Own? What should we Share?

The questions of what we own and what we should share were discussed mainly in relation to the commons. Critical to an understanding of the commons and the use of land is the shift from taxing earnings to relating taxation to our shared use of land and other aspects of the natural commons. Chapters 3 and 7 looked at a Land Value Tax (otherwise called a Community Land Contribution) as a possible replacement for local taxes and even for income tax. There may be incentives for uses of land that the local community considers beneficial. Where a land use seems necessary but potentially detrimental to local residents then some of the Land Value Tax may go directly to those neighbouring households. All such matters rely on the efficient working of Parapolity, especially at the smaller levels, so then the 'owners' of land and property recognise themselves as custodians with a responsibility to local people and local nature.

Sometimes what I'm suggesting is described as taxing capital rather than income, but this is a rather ambiguous phrase. I therefore distinguish income from three sources. The

three sources are the ‘economic rent’ already described in Chapter 2 — money from land, money from the labour of others and money from money itself. Perhaps the most obvious solution is simply the re-distribution of land. (The most famous example is the Biblical year of jubilee, when every 50th year all debts were cancelled and land and property returned to its original owners. Probably this was never actually practised — when the Jews were exiled to Babylon, their land was granted the ‘rest’ that it had failed to receive from the previous several hundred years.) But to physically re-distribute property in this way would be horrendously difficult. The interim solution is to recognise property rights and therefore ‘ownership’ in terms of being custodians of land. Security of tenure has enormous benefits, but along with the rights derived from tenure there are also responsibilities. So taxes on land, on ‘profit’ (that is, money derived from the labour of others — arguably this genuinely is ‘capital gains’) and taxes on financial transactions seem like good means of achieving fair re-distribution, as they directly draw on the process of ‘economic rent’.

Chapter 3 considered a carbon ‘fee and dividend’ scheme as a response to the exploitation of non-renewable natural commons — oil in particular. This would mean oil companies paying a fee into a common fund for the extraction of oil, and this money being equally distributed amongst the adult population of the host country.

Chapter 3 also considered ‘sovereign wealth’ funds as part of a wider strategy that would see

those responsible for the exploitation of non-renewable natural commons and/or damage to wild nature recompensing those directly affected. (Sovereign wealth funds and fee and dividend schemes are sometimes referred to as 'pre-distribution', in contrast to re-distribution. The idea is that we all have a right to the commons, therefore our wealth should come directly from there, rather than from the proceeds of those who have exploited the commons — often to the detriment of other people and the environment.)

Chapter 5 suggested local currencies as a means of keeping wealth within communities. This ties in closely to the relationship of business and the places where they are based.

Chapter 7 considered the introduction of a tax on financial transactions — known as a Tobin Tax.

Chapter 7 also suggests splitting up the banks so there is no longer a problem of financial institutions that are 'too big to fail'. Bringing money back closer to its links with goods and services means that the false economy of financial speculation — derivatives, hedge funds and the like — can be dismantled. Making banking more local and personal will mean that local businesses will benefit most. Returning banking to being a service will benefit everyone and not just the few. Taxing the dividends received from shares is another possibility. Another idea in Chapter 7 is money that is de-valued over time, so could, for instance, require some kind of stamp attached to it in order to bring it back up to its nominal value. Chapter 7 also suggested a minimum duration for the

ownership of shares so that shares could go back to being genuinely about supporting business rather than a casino lottery on the variations in share prices and currencies. A further idea in Chapter 7 is to stop creating money by borrowing it into existence. The private loan, for instance, is often for the purchase of land or and property — it is not a loan against the future increase in production, as the borrowing of money was once understood to be about. Borrowing, as it occurs today, tends to increase the value of land and property and adds to disparities in wealth. Instead governments could create wealth by investing in large infrastructure projects for the public good — a concept known as 'sovereign money'. In answering the question of what we own, the commons and Parapolity suggest that we are all owners. We need to spread that wealth rather than allow it to be appropriated by just a few.

In Chapter 7, and elsewhere, we also looked at alternative business structures such as businesses run as co-operatives. I hope that the message got through there that owning is less important than what we do with what we have and how we share with others. Businesses have a responsibility in their use of the natural commons, their relationship to wild nature, to their local communities and to their employees. Co-operatives that share their profits seem like an obvious step as part of meeting these responsibilities.

Chapter 10 considered that it is inappropriate for wealthier nations to be lending money to poorer ones, then allowing those nations to fall into debt trying to pay off such loans. More

genuine means of helping poorer nations need to be strengthened, whilst existing debts could be cancelled.

In Chapter 10, we also looked at the free movement of people. If we were really serious about alleviating poverty then the world would have no borders. I recognise, of course, the chaos that would be unleashed for wealthy nations and indeed for poorer nations that might lose their younger, brighter citizens through economic migration. Nonetheless, free movement is part of a vision for a fairer world and an aim that could be implemented gradually. The developed world has massacred, raped and pillaged its way, as it 'colonised' poorer nations, and the big businesses of developed nations continue that pillaging today. In asking what should we share, co-operatives, free trade and free movement answers that we have a responsibility of giving every citizen of the world an equal opportunity for dignity, for education and for work. And Parapolity answers that we have a responsibility to share the resources of the natural commons and the benefits of our work equitably with everyone.

What should we Make? How should we Trade?

A participatory economy, or Parecon, is very much a follow-on from the kind of Participatory Politics described earlier in this chapter. In the absence of a Parecon, we have, for the most part, a market economy. In Chapter 6, we noted that there is a certain overlap however, in terms of a country's infrastructure. Infrastructure projects are very much political

decisions and it is here that a Parecon starts to have an influence, and this, in turn, starts to influence business and markets. Defence spending, power grids, railways and roads come to mind especially. From here, it is only another small step towards, for instance, considering the type of heating and cooling that buildings might use, the types of vehicles that might be manufactured, where our food is sourced and how it is grown. The market economy can be transformed into a planned economy as much or as little as we are willing to allow, if we manage to install a governance system in which we can all participate and make decisions about our making and our spending. In answer to the question, what should we make, Parapolity and Parecon answer that we should make what people genuinely need and want and not what big business tries to sell us.

How should we trade? We touched on free trade in Chapters 7 and 10. Just to reiterate that the meaning applied to the term here is trade without tariff barriers rather than trade without regulations ('free market'), as neo-liberalism may prefer. (Or rather, as we saw, neo-liberalism's actual behaviour is about promoting regulations that protect big business.) There are arguments for tariffs both ways. Strong tariffs can nurture a fledgling economy and also help a country towards local rather than international trading. This also reduces transport costs and so aids in the prevention of climate change. The absence of tariffs, however, may be a way of helping poorer nations, in line with the open borders discussion above. Another concern is that free trade would not see the benefits accrued to poorer nations spread evenly

across their populations. It may be the rich in poorer nations who benefit most, whilst the poor would get nothing.

Whatever the pros and cons, it's the abolition of tariffs that would be the real 'free trade'. If we are to take seriously the rights of people in every nation, then we would see the need to introduce this. The difficulties that would be faced by richer nations as a result, are little compared to the enormous benefits that would be afforded to poorer nations. Such difficulties could reasonably be alleviated by governments for those businesses directly affected. In the longer term, we in the wealthier nations would benefit from lower prices as goods from poorer countries would be cheaper. Although the caveat here is that business is increasingly international. It might be that these agreements between nations are simply outdated, and we need instead to fight for workers rights and good business practices across all nations and across borders, rather than focus just on tariffs. In answer to the question, how should we trade, Parecon says, as freely as possible.

How Should we Live?

Chapter 8, on nature, looked at the possibility of returning some land to a 'natural' state — sometimes referred to as re-wilding, or 'negative development'. As humans become increasingly concentrated in cities, the opportunities for re-wilding increase, despite our growing population.

Chapter 8 also looked at the preservation of truly wild land. So far as this is possible, conserving fully natural environments should be a priority.

Chapter 8 also indicates that whenever a decision process in relation to wild nature is carried out we need to have human agents who will represent nature's 'interests' for her in a formal and legal sense. Someone should speak for the land, the ocean, the air, the rivers, the fauna and the flora, whenever there are questions of our human activities disturbing a wild place.

Chapter 8 also suggests there is an argument for people to continue to live 'wild' and be exempt from the normal processes of government, should they wish. The chapter also considers people from 'developed' nations who wish to live a more 'organic', off-grid lifestyle. Such people need to be given the means to allow them to adopt the kind of lifestyle they want, without having to be bound to a fixed address, a telephone or internet connection.

In wealthy nations it seems ridiculous that there remain so many people who must just scrape by to provide themselves with even the basics of life. If part of the aim of good governance is for human flourishing, then this situation is surely wrong. We are human beings not just human doings. So arguably our societies should be about allowing people to find their full potential, whether this is through paid work or through learning or creativity or a combination of all of these. A large part of this is about giving people back their dignity. Chapters 7 and 10

considered arguments for a Universal Basic Income. Freed from the need to provide for basic survival, people are more at liberty to seek out a vocation in life. An alternative proposal discussed was 'Universal Basic Services', whereby the basics of life — food, shelter, clothing and public transport — are provided free by society, allowing people to live without money, should they wish. Rather like the ancient *Charter of the Forest*, Universal Basic Services seeks to provide people with all the resources they need to live a dignified life.

Chapters 7 and 11 also considered arguments for a shorter working week, partly because reduced hours would be a possibility as a result of a Universal Basic Income (or Universal Basic Services) and also to address issues around increasing mechanisation, robots and AI. These ideas are not a replacement for a welfare state. There is still a lot of care needed for people with specific health problems as well as for children and the elderly. But with UBI established and a good welfare service, we give people the opportunity to realise their full potential, to flourish and to live with dignity and self-respect.

The world seems set in its ways, and changes, if any should happen at all, needs must be tiny and incremental. Indeed, changes may be for the worse rather than for the better. I remind the reader of the current mess in British and American politics — neo-liberalism taken to extremes, ongoing preparations for war, little action on pollution, little action to avert the collapse of eco-systems and little action to mitigate climate change, or to prepare to adapt to its impact. Things cannot go on like this for

too much longer. I think, therefore, that big changes are imminent. In fact, my concern in writing this book has been trying to finish it before events overtook me. If we do nothing, change will overtake us anyway. But there is plenty that we could be doing, and plenty of hope for the future. I think all of the ideas I have shared in this book and summarised in this chapter are ideas whose time has come. If some (or all) of the ideas seem far-fetched then I refer the reader to Alex Evans' *The Myth Gap,* in particular, his discussion of the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030*. I also refer the reader to the *UN Convention of Human Rights*.

So, to the question, how should we live, our initial answer can be with dignity and with respect for each other and for the natural world. The more complete answer is the new story — the alternative utopia that seems to combine all that is good in Privatopia, Cornucopia and Ecotopia and offer us a new way of seeing the world. This is the subject of our next chapter.

14 A New Story

'Your system is very good for the people of Utopia; it is worthless for the children of Adam.'

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau

'It is easy to forget how mysterious and mighty stories are. They do their work in silence, invisibly. They work with all the internal materials of the mind and the self. Beware the stories you read and tell; subtly, at night, beneath the waters of consciousness, they are altering your world.'

- Ben Okri

'Possibility is not a luxury, it is as crucial as bread.'

- Judith Butler

'… we dream in narrative, day-dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative.'

- Barbara Hardy

Getting the Facts

To give people information to allow them to make rational decisions might seem like a simple task. But, unfortunately, things are not so easy. We are very discriminating in the way we take in facts. We will tend to favour information that backs up our existing view of the world. ('Confirmation bias'.) Meanwhile other information, which might not sit so happily

with our world view, will just be blocked out completely. When we want to believe something, we ask; 'Can I believe it?' Any supporting evidence is likely then to justify the belief. When we don't want to believe something, then we ask; 'Do I have to believe it?' Any contrary piece of evidence will then be enough to justify rejecting the belief. (From psychologist Tom Gilovich, as discussed by Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*.) In making our decisions, and arguing our corner, it is the heart and stomach that decide, rather than the brain. As philosopher David Hume said: 'And as reasoning is not the source, whence neither disputant derives his tenets; it is vain to expect that any logic, that speaks not to the affections, will ever engage him to embrace sounder principles.' (David Hume — *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.)

To make matters worse, each of us holds usually a set of contradictory opinions and even different sets of contradictory opinions for different occasions. We prize the notion of 'authenticity', which suggests that there is a core to our being that constitutes a genuine self, but knowing this authentic self is a difficult matter, even if we could be sure that the authentic self exists. Getting the facts straight, and trying to equip people to discern facts, is challenging, to say the least.

Added to all this we generally just run on auto-pilot, and we 're-act' rather than 'act' when circumstances demand. All this has just happened to us — it wasn't a conscious choice to be like this. The culture that surrounds us as we grow up is a factor in how we arrived in this

state of affairs. We absorb many of the thoughts and opinions that surround us, and then count them as our own. To go against cultural norms is a difficult and potentially dangerous thing. But living within cultural norms can be stifling and suffocating.

So I am urging a close scrutiny of culture — news, advertising, the pronouncements of politicians and religious leaders. Are they just repeating narratives that have lost their power and relevance? Or are they coming from a place of genuine compassion? Do they want people to be free to make their own life decisions and govern their own lives? Are they seeking to move us toward a new narrative? If yes, what are the motives for doing this? The number one question of this chapter is — can we change the story?

From Facts to Story

Despite the difficulties considered above, we still need to deliver some facts. The commons, governance, and even visions of utopia, have to be based on reality. Facts about the world — stating the problems we face with climate change, resource depletion, loss of bio-diversity — need to be set in place. Beyond facts though, there are stories. Truth is not necessarily something set in stone. Truth is a journey. So stories are a way of embodying truth as it emerges and changes over time.

If anything, the problem we face is not a lack of story — it's that we're addicted to story. What I've tried to bring out in this book is that we are

already surrounded by competing stories, competing utopias, of how life might be lived. We are swayed back and forth by competing stories and we are also swayed by how stories are presented to us and who presents them. Whose story will be heard?

Who gets heard in our society is a bit of a complex issue. It is mostly the confident, assertive and generally extrovert person who will be heard. Also the person heard, and who will be promoted or achieve other success in life, will likely be taller, white, male and 'well presented'. Looks, charm and charisma form a natural pecking order before any concerns of ability or common sense. And then of course there is celebrity. Someone who has celebrity status seems to acquire the right to speak on almost any subject and to get an audience. The daydreaming introvert though, may have one critical advantage. The daydreamer — if they ever get a chance to speak — will weave a story. The person may be forgotten but the story will be remembered.

How then do we go about setting a new story in place? Should we change the external circumstances so as to bring about a change in the lives of people? This is what many current governments try to achieve. They may seek to improve people's circumstances, jobs, security, housing, transport, etc. to get happy citizens. Happy citizens make better choices and act more responsibly. This is the current story of governance we are often offered, although we may question, of course, if this is not just a facade for what is really going on. Is it enough? Theodore Zeldin reminds us: 'A myth appears

solid only until it is found to be absurd, soluble in water and laughter. Once it is dissolved, the facts it used to hold together are released; what once passed for truth falls apart, and it can be reconstituted afresh.' (Theodore Zeldin — *Happiness*.)

A new story is not something just invented. It is not a fantasy. It is a way to put together the facts so that they form a narrative that explains the world and gives us some guidance about how to live. Alisdair MacIntyre (*After Virtue*) tells us: 'I can only answer the question "What am I to do?" if I can answer the question "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?"' How we respond to stories is also a strange process, as we saw with how we respond to facts, above. It is usually for personal reasons that people will choose to adopt a new story. Any new story then, needs to make a personal appeal.
We also, each of us, weave a story of our own lives. Which story will allow us to maintain a sense of our own worth, offer us genuine pleasure, deal fairly with everyone and not trash the planet? And how can we link that to our own personal stories? That's the quest in a nutshell.

From all of the above, I think that an appeal to our sense of our authentic selves and our hearts' desires, needs to be part of any new story. At some point in our lives — perhaps at many points — we realise that who we are in our authentic selves is at odds with the culture that surrounds us. (Notwithstanding what was said above, I think we have to go with the notion that we believe in and want to benefit our

authentic selves.) Then we can ask, how do we find the courage to live authentically rather than follow the herd? Our authentic selves look for a story of the world in which we are the heroine or hero. The key to a new story is to adopt a new way of living such that we are still the heroine and hero and not the sad victim. Stories need to inspire — to give us hope. Most important for a new story, I think, is for us to re-align where our pleasure is found. The heroine or hero is on a quest for pleasure — pleasure that makes life satisfying and worthwhile. This is the narrative that needs to be offered and the story needs to be broad enough for people to realise it in different ways.

So how do we solve this problem — presenting people with facts, and a strong argument that may be contrary to their current opinion? Presenting people with an alternative story that may be miles away from how they currently see the world? Far from changing their minds, it is likely to result in them being even more entrenched in their opinions. Perhaps there are many routes, given the variety of media at our disposal today. But I want to emphasise one key method here, and that is meeting people face-to-face, in small groups. We have seen this can influence people because we all fear being shamed. But it also has a more positive effect. Small groups can share stories, especially people's own personal stories. This may have nothing to do with the issues that are contentious between them or about any 'big questions' of politics or the economy. But sometimes the sharing of personal stories can allow people to let go of their defences. The 'solution' to disagreements then, is often not a

direct weighing up between contrary opinions. Remember the quote from Chapter 10 — 'Out beyond the ideas of right-doing and wrong-doing, there is a field. I will meet you there.' Good governance is not about contesting the right-ness or wrong-ness — it's about providing that field. Theodore Zeldin, quoted above, describes meeting a Muslim imam. The imam blasts Zeldin with his views on the decadence of Western culture. Zeldin remains silent. After a long rant, the imam hugs Zeldin warmly. Zeldin asks the imam why he has acted this way. The imam simply says, 'because you listened'.

Every life is a story, and every relationship, friendship and family is a shared story. Listening is the first step in building a story with another person. The story has the potential to transcend the need to be 'right'. This might seem a few stages removed from just trying to change people's opinions and get them to vote on a particular policy as we do in contemporary politics. But I suggest hearing people's stories is a much better way. Personal narratives, and the sharing of personal narratives are ways to build relationship and community. It is only from this that real changes — ongoing changes, relating to our changing world — can come about.

The Voice of Dissent

There is some hope already. Experiments have shown that just one dissenting voice allows others to question current knowledge, and perhaps adopt an alternative view. A new story is possible. We saw the critical importance dissent holds in the governance system known

as Sociocracy. The message here is that it’s good to question and it’s okay to make mistakes. On this basis, I am happy for people to disagree with everything that follows! But, in the spirit of Sociocracy, I ask that any dissenters have good reasons for proposing their own story or for objecting to mine.

Daydreaming

Now I must celebrate the virtues of daydreaming and staring vacantly into space! Perhaps you were the child told off in school for gazing out of the window when you should have been listening to teacher. One way or another, the world sends the message that daydreamers are lazy, dysfunctional or otherwise horribly damaged. I want to offer the opposite message. The daydreamer may eventually turn to work and achieve much more than those ‘regular’ people who seem more focused. The regular person is probably going to adopt a mindset that becomes an increasingly stifling routine. The daydreamer is either dreaming or working away at some project that engages them (sometimes despite, rather than because of school). I leave it to the reader to decide which pupil will grow up to be the more interesting and entertaining. We need more dreamers in the world, so that new stories can take hold. Otherwise we are stuck with the narrative of those ‘regular’ people that no-one seeks to question, because no-one is around to consider that the world could be a very different place.

Education Without Character

As we mentioned in Chapter 12, a style of education that encourages young people to question is something of a two-edged sword. Has it led to a distrust of experts? Or has it led to a healthy scepticism? Perhaps both. Questioning though, as I've suggested above, is a first step to being able to change to a new story. Gandhi's social sin of Education without Character has a bearing here. Education — whether deliberately, or by default — is instilling stories of what society is about. It could be said that education is currently only preparing young people for the jobs market, with this, in turn, allowing them to earn a living in future, and that this is sufficient. It could be said that education is falling behind even in this role, as a world that is rapidly changing needs new types of jobs for the future. But there is something very dubious about education based only on 'progress' and results. It just apes the mindset of society that has already got us into such a mess. Children are born undivided from their wild natures. We force them into classrooms, then offices and factories, and along the way cast doubts on the value of daydreaming and imagining. We are separated from our wild selves, our making, and our shared life with the rest of the planet.

What about a story of an interconnected world? A wild nature that deserves our responsible care? A wild nature within each one of us that means we all have intrinsic value? Community? Beauty, pleasure, silence, slowness and peace? Grace, kindness, conversation, humour? Art, celebration, carnival? Meanwhile Plato reminded us that the most effective education is that a child should play amongst beautiful things. There are teachers out there who instil such

values into their students. But often they are the ones who are swimming against the tide. Our current story of Privatopia is looking for obedient drones.

Tom Hodgkinson observes:
'One thing that depresses me greatly is the argument I hear trotted out with tedious regularity by other parents, usually said about boys. "He'd better toughen up, because it's a tough world out there. It's a competitive place…". Why not say, "It's a wonderful world out there, so let's make him wonderful!" The solution to the world being full of arseholes is not to add to the problem by making your own son into an arsehole. Set a good example!'
Tom Hodgkinson — *How to be Free*.

Name your Pleasures

The suggestion throughout this book is that it is the social relations of pleasure that form the basis of any changes in society. The new story is primarily a story of pleasure. In Chapter 11, on Pleasure, we looked at what this might be about. I suggested there that genuine pleasure is about taking a broader view of life, trying to see what may be for our long-term contentment and fulfilment, rather than just catching some fleeting fun or entertainments where we can. Also, each of us being unique, it is a good thing to accept our strangeness and difference — to celebrate our radical otherness. And I added that pleasure is often about connection with others, with nature and with the wider cosmos. So, a new story should not be a blueprint for how everyone should live. It could instead be about each of us finding our own pleasures,

which will lead to our *eudaimonia* — our flourishing. The task of the rest of society is to facilitate this process. Getting to know another person, or getting to know ourselves better, unmasks this beautiful parallel world that we all inhabit. All relationships are shared dreams and shared stories. So let's go where the love is. And the starting point of love is surely to be accepted, just for who we are. We saw a deep connection between compassion and pleasure in earlier chapters. Pleasure that is about connection with others has a quality to it that transcends the material comforts that the consumer capitalist world seems to promote.

Let's talk then about pleasures. Theodore Zeldin (*The Secret Pleasures of Life, An Intimate History of Humanity, Conversation, Happiness*) has focused very much on personal encounter as the key to human flourishing and happiness. Zeldin looks at a profusion of historic examples of how humans have organised both public and private life. His conclusion seems to be that a deeper exploration of private life, through intelligent conversation with others, is the key to a better public life. He seems to feel that we have a lot still to explore — largely because, for various reasons, we have found it difficult to express our feelings or it has been dangerous to do so because of the surrounding culture. Zeldin does not seem to have any particular notion about where a deeper conversation may lead us. He just emphasises the need for adventure and imagination. We might conclude that we are often stuck in our lifestyles because we find it difficult to speak to others about what might really make us happy. So good

conversation may be a way to set us free and give us the confidence to try new things.

A new story is asking us: What are our real sources of pleasure? Naming our pleasures is a way of allowing others to name theirs. I hope that the reader at this point will drift off into a reverie about what would make life wonderful! I'd suggest we may be surprised at just how many people share a similar desire to break free and follow their dreams. It is only convention — the established stories about how the world should be — that keep us from our hearts' desires. John Stuart Mill (*On Liberty*) said: Eccentricity has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded, and the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigour, and moral courage which it contained. That so few now dare to be eccentric marks the chief danger of our time.'

Name your Fears

In Chapter 5, on small-scale community, we looked at M. Scott Peck's idea of a 'broken' community and understood this to refer to an openness and vulnerability to others. That vulnerability is in large part about naming our fears. Fear is not necessarily bad — it can be a message to us that things need to change. Instead of trying to communicate our strength and self-sufficiency, naming our fears may serve us better in realising a new story. The fear within our culture of Privatopia might be that we are missing out. Why be the person who does without a car, a mobile phone, foreign holidays, a bigger house, a higher salary? Won't this just

mean that other people — openly, or behind our backs — will consider us as weird, or sad losers, or both? (If someone says, 'I really admire your principles' then that's a definite sign they think you're weird.) But really, deep down, others may share our concerns for the future. If we speak simply and sensibly about our fears, then it will allow others to be more open about theirs.

The Current Story

Most of us in Western culture are caught in the pervading story of capitalism and what I have described as Privatopia. We unconsciously adopt the story of Privatopia and some of its assumed aims of rising consumption, economic growth, improving technology and the dominance of money. Most of us are obliged to work for money and so, as John Holloway has pointed out, participate in the reproduction of consumer capitalism. There is something skewed about us as Privatopians. (I am having to include myself here — we are all in this, even whilst some of us are trying to escape.) The defensiveness of our lifestyle is increasingly vicious. The contempt for authority. The sense that one's own opinions count far more than any expert, but also a deep resentment if those opinions are ever questioned. The sense of entitlement. The outrage that is felt when anything might impinge on our lifestyle or happiness. The narcissism, and inflated sense of self-worth (since, after all, there is no-one else that matters in Privatopia) is starting to be the mindset of a whole culture.

It's tempting to say, so what? That, after all, would be Privatopia's response to itself. But

there are victims of our Privatopian lifestyle — the nations suffering poverty because of our excess; suffering the effects of climate change because of our neglect. The future generations who will be paying heavily for the mess we have left them. The poor and struggling within the richer nations. Privatopia may seem like just the norm for those of us in these rich nations, but it is jam for the few and crumbs for the many. Privatopia's belief in growth and improvement means that it is poised to move inexorably towards a Cornucopia, but the concern raised by this book is that both the current Privatopia and the future Cornucopia are deeply problematic.

We also adopt some of the mindset that sits alongside these aims — the power-over, power-under dynamic. Erich Fromm, in *The Fear of Freedom,* describes some of the characteristics of this mindset that might best be described here as authoritarianism. There is an admiration for power, but also a deep hatred and envy of the powerful. At the same time there is a desire to defer responsibility to the powerful — to allow them to control us so that we can avoid thinking and deciding for ourselves. So we are ambivalent in terms of our power-under relations. Likewise we can have a contempt for those perceived as weak and will seek to dominate them, despite our hatred of authority and our wish to be controlled ourselves. So we are ambivalent in our power-over relations as well. Fromm explains how relationships (such as employer/employee and between spouses and partners) can vacillate between these different responses. Matthew Fox (*Original Blessing*) adds an obsession with

death to the list of strange characteristics that Western culture has adopted. We can see from this how the power-under/power-over dynamic blends so well with consumer capitalism. There is a powerful elite of the super-wealthy, whom we admire and hate in equal measure. Money itself has a position of absolute power. Many people — whilst complaining about the need to work for a living — nonetheless welcome the routine of regular work. It means we do not have to think about how we would really wish to live because, we tell ourselves, we have to earn a living. There seems to be no choice — and part of us welcomes the lack of options. As such, we tend to protect our self-interest and no other strategy makes sense in such a world. This, I suggest, is our current story.

Much of this is entirely subconscious. The average person would probably not perceive themselves as displaying the characteristics I've described above. So embedded are the thought patterns, and the 'appropriate' emotions that accompany them, that there is seldom an opportunity to spot an unusual thought or response, let alone really spend time to consider where it has come from. The many distractions of the modern world keep us locked into our cognitive dissonance — holding these conflicting values of capitalism and power relations on the one hand, and a belief in autonomy, freedom and community on the other. Fromm offers some hope by way of really knowing other people. In good relationships — whether with friends or family — deeper conversation can bring to the surface the many contradictions under which we all labour, as we have considered above with Theodore Zeldin.

Communities are a means by which deeper conversations can be facilitated. The fact that we can at least see there is cognitive dissonance — conflicting stories in our lives — is maybe even a positive sign.

From what we have explored above, we might observe that changing the story is not going to be an option, unless there is some way out of the damaging power relations that afflict most of us one way or another. The power relations, in turn, cannot be healed (turned around to power-with, as Starhawk might say) unless we wake up to the inherent contradictions in our lives. In this book, sitting alongside changes to governance, we have identified the need for personal change, and noted this is often achieved through good community. Henry George (referring to socialism) summed this up well: 'The ideal of socialism is grand and noble; and it is, I am convinced, possible of realization; but such a state of society cannot be manufactured — it must grow. Society is an organism, not a machine. It can live only by the individual life of its parts, and in the free and natural development of all the parts will be secured the harmony of the whole.' Without this belief that people individually can improve and that humanity collectively can improve, we will struggle to see any real change, no matter what systems we may try to put in place. In a similar vein, enforcing moral behaviour (through system change) does not make people better in themselves (as John Locke argued, in relation to enforcing religious belief, and Ronald Dworkin argued, more generally, for all kinds of enforcement towards a 'better' life). Rather, it

should be the free choice of citizens to take up better values and better behaviour.

A Story of Isolation or a Story of Trust?

Charles Eisenstein (*The Beautiful World that our Hearts Know is Possible*) suggests that we carry with us a story of living a separate, atomised life in an indifferent world — what I have identified as Privatopia in this book. This story is overtly or covertly affirmed by so many aspects of Western culture — it becomes the way in which we define the self and our relationships. So most of us have been raised with an acceptance of separation. The moneyed, commodified economy has had the effect of increasing the atomisation of our lives. We have become fiercely defensive of our property and our individuality without realising that this is a symptom of the isolation felt in the absence of true community. Maybe the reader feels conformable with the world the way it is with respect to the autonomy and individuality that seems to be on offer to us (and indeed the writer feels a certain comfort from it too). Maybe the talk elsewhere of being wild in mind, body and soul seems a bit of a disconcerting alternative. Wildness can go either way. If we want to re-connect people to their own inner wildness, we had better be sure that this wildness will lead to all the good stuff described above, rather than some Mad Max dystopia.

So, we can ask: Do people genuinely wish to work at things that engage their skills and imagination and enhance life for themselves and those around them? Or, are people just out for whatever they can get with the minimum

amount of work? Privatopia often seems to reinforce this second view. We are alone in the universe, nothing special, and stuck on a planet that is about survival of the fittest. This is a story of isolation. It suggests no-one is really trustworthy. We are alone, trying to fend for ourselves, in a world that is motivated mainly by selfishness. If we were to believe that most people, left to their own devices, would act only in their own selfish interests, then it is unlikely that setting them within a community context (by way of the additional circles of government, in Parapolity) will solve this and turn them into altruistic and compassionate citizens. Setting up any form of governance system — Sociocracy, Parapolity, Parecon, even a better system of representative democracy — will not work if people are only out for themselves. If we were to believe that most people don't get it — that they will not act with sufficient care and compassion to protect either their own local environment or the global environment — then a new story will not work. We could ask; even if individuals and families could be as fully informed as possible about the local and global consequences of all their choices (housing, energy, food supply, transport, etc.) then would we act responsibly? Would we respect the global commons that is the ultimate source of all our sustenance? If the answer to the questions above is no, then again, I would suggest, it is unlikely that a new story will work.

Largely because of the above concerns, the arguments against deliberative democracy are strong. They reinforce many of the concerns raised elsewhere in this work — people are biased to their own pre-conceived (or, socially-

adopted) opinions, they practise group-think, strong characters tend to dominate, people are favoured (and hence, their opinions given more weight) because of their personal charm or good looks, rather than their intelligence and the strength of their argument.

John Stuart Mill thought that participating in politics might make people better, but actually, people need to be better for their participation to be genuinely effective. This is a tough message to have to deliver. We have touched on the need for people to have a bit of wisdom, personal growth, flourishing and changed attitudes to pleasure throughout the book. But still, it is difficult to suggest that people need to change before things could improve. If there is no trust that others could be better then there is no hope. If however we have the capacity to trust others and to believe in others, then we have a hope of a new story.

As we have seen at several points throughout this book, there is a question here about human nature. What I've been suggesting above — and coming mostly from the chapters on compassion and pleasure — is that, whilst seeking our own different pleasures, we are, nonetheless, united in a quest for beauty, pleasure, silence, slowness, peace, grace, kindness, conversation, humour, art, celebration and carnival. We might also share a belief in everyone having a voice, in fairness, in freedom and also in responsibility. There is a lot of trust built into these values. A lot of belief needed for them to be realised. It takes faith to believe that most people, once we have their trust, will respond in a positive way. It takes faith to believe that most people

genuinely have a gift they would like to bring to the world. It takes faith to believe that other people 'get it'!

The way to prove our faith is to take action from within the new narrative. The story is changed through a million conversations and a million small acts of commoning, not by one or two defining acts of political change. So, for the new story to be a story of hope, it has to be premised on the need for us to grow a bit in wisdom as individuals and in the art of community and to make a decision to trust others and to have faith that others are trying — in their own ways — to make a better world.

How then can we commit to a story of trust? The tendency today is to wait for a feeling to 'happen' to us. So, if we don't find ourselves trusting, we are not inclined to do anything about this, except perhaps acknowledge our untrusting feelings. But I suggest that some things are a decision rather than just waiting for the right feelings to emerge. We can decide to trust. And this decision may allow others to trust along with us and for the world generally to reciprocate our trust. As I've said above then, let's take action from within the new narrative. Let's behave as if the new narrative has already arrived.

The New Story

The world is a place of beauty and grace. Life is about feelings, hopes, pleasures and dreams. We need a new story that's about an abundance of these things. These are the things that utopias aim for, and all our studies of commons

and governance are committed to allowing these things to be there, for everyone. So, here we turn in earnest to that sixth question of the Introduction — How should we live?

Finally then, we can ask, what is the big, hairy, audacious goal of our new story? What would really motivate people to adopt it? By way of contrast to Privatopia, Cornucopia and Ecotopia, I am suggesting a 'participatory utopia'. The new story is a process rather than a destination — it evolves as the conversation evolves. But here are some big points. The new story is about participation. Everyone is accepted, everyone has a voice, and everyone is heard. Everyone can flourish and society is arranged with opportunities for every kind of flourishing. Nature bounces back and climate change is finally addressed. This is the vision of the new story. Its mission is to realise these goals through co-operation, solidarity and conversation. The new story is known only as it is built, and it is no more or less than what we make our own lives together to be.

The new story is also about equity — and our exploration of the commons has, I hope, furnished us with some understanding of what would make for a fair and responsible distribution of the Earth's resources — including equity for the plants and animals with whom we share the world.

The new story is about trust. To make our governance systems work, our distribution of resources more equitable, our treatment of nature more sustaining and, above all, for us to master the art of community, we need to learn

to trust each other more, to forgive each other's mistakes, and to recognise that good relationship is about more that just who is right or wrong.

So we have participation, equity and trust. The new story also identifies a strong need for political change, to go with the changes described above. The very first political question to be addressed is, what kind of governance system do we want? No-one has asked us this question, and we have grown up just accepting this situation, perhaps not even thinking it is a question that could be asked. It might be that people still want leaders, elected in the normal way — perhaps only asking for more honesty and accountability from our politics. The alternatives considered in this work are what I have described as radical devolution, giving power back to the grass roots. Deliberative democracy, by way of Citizens' Assemblies and People's Parliaments, could sit alongside, or fully replace, the current systems of party politics. One of the aims of the new story might be that eventually representative government in its current form will be superseded by representation of the sociocratic type and that affiliations to political parties will become less relevant, if not completely redundant. Likewise, as more businesses adopt sociocratic principles, the economy will be transformed from one premised on material wealth to one based on kindness, human flourishing and the abundance of nature.

The new story shares the concerns of Ecotopia about climate change and sustainability. Along with the facts about climate change, the new

story recognises the need for a narrative that will inspire us to take action. We saw that the positive contribution of Cornucopia is the hope of abundance. We examined, especially in Chapter 8, the possibilities open to us, to re-wild and re-forest the Earth, and to change our agricultural practices, such that both nature and ourselves may flourish together. For a few years, at least, this is a possibility open to us, if we would only decide, or be allowed to decide, to adopt it. And this would seem to be a win-win-win situation. Winning for people, for planet and for the economy. The new story need not be about scarcity or sacrifice. Instead, it celebrates a different kind of materialism from today's consumer capitalism. It values things for their beauty, durability, elegance, integrity and the value transferred to things by the care of their makers. The new story is a story about a material world that honours making and re-making, and a natural world that is <u>more</u> abundant rather than less, because of the activities of humans.

The new story is also about place. We need to reclaim our neighbourhoods, towns and cities and make them places of joy and celebration. We need safe, vibrant streets, friendly neighbours; places where nature can flourish; places where children are safe to play; places where we are happy to stay and just be ourselves. More than anything else, it is regulations that shape our environment — especially our built environment. Good regulations — ones that we have all been involved in formulating — will lead to places that we will grow to love — places of which we can all be proud. The new story would give us a direct

say in what the places we live in will be like, give us places where we can make a living in any way we choose (provided we are not harming others or the environment) and feel that we are treated with dignity and respect by our fellow citizens. The commons of our built environment, like that of the natural world, needs to be managed by those most closely affected by any changes that are proposed. A managed commons is only achievable through the good organisation of community — through good governance. This emphasis on place taps into our human tendency to identify with groups — but it is an identity that we could describe as genuine patriotism — it is a welcoming and inclusive identity that celebrates everyone.

The new story will recognise those elements of society that are currently ignored, under-valued or neglected. We have looked especially at our being separated from our making — our freedom to make. Also, underlying the material and cultural economies, is what has been described as re-making — the reproduction of ourselves, the care of others, and all the benefits and support of relationships, conversations, mutuality and solidarity. The names, 'social commons' and 'emotional economy' were assigned to this aspect of our lives. We have also called it 'commoning' — commoning is the *praxis* of the emotional economy. Others simply call it love. Someone has said that freedom is 'freedom from', that is, it is to be free of restraints on our behaviour, so far as that is appropriate. 'Freedom to', by contrast, is liberty. The making and re-making that we have explored in this book is therefore the 'freedom to' — it is the freedom, the liberty,

above all else, to build our own narratives as individuals and societies.

In a sense then, the new story takes up the promise of abundance, from the Cornucopians; only an abundance of a different sort — different pleasures. The story of abundance allows us still to be heroes and heroines, without being compromised or embarrassed by the mismatch between our lifestyle and our characters. There is always a personal reason for the stories we choose to adopt. For instance, if someone adopts a disaster narrative for the future it might suggest that it is really more about their own inner turmoil rather than about what is happening in the world. By the same token, if we can change to have a more positive view of ourselves, then we are more likely to adopt a more positive view of the future. We have to raise people up as individuals first, before we can start to build better communities and better governance and so start to realise the new story. We have to trust this is possible.
A big part of this book has been to stress that all of the aims of our new story need to be achieved with others — through what I have described as the 'art of community'. It is good to meet with people who affirm us and recognise our right to be free. This is precisely the starting point from which all notions of political arrangements and of commoning, springs. There can be shared pleasures that are both gracious and compassionate, satisfying the self whilst serving others.

It is tempting, at this point, to provide a checklist of things that could be done to further the ideas expressed in this book. But I've said

that the new story will emerge through conversations and will evolve as the conversation evolves, so it would be disingenuous to be too prescriptive. The more general ideas, especially as given in Chapters 8 to 11, on nature, place, compassion and pleasure, I hope will serve as a framework for discussions.

To summarise the main points given above we can quote here from Thomas Berry, and what he described as 'the Great Work'. The Great Work is to:
'bring our collective material consumption into balance with the Earth to allow the healing and regeneration of the biosphere.'
This requires that we:
'realign our economic priorities from making money for rich people to assuring that all persons have access to an adequate and meaningful means of making a living for themselves and for their families.
Because equity becomes an essential condition of a healthy, sustainable society in a full world, we must:
'democratize human institutions, including our economic institutions, to root power in people and community and replace a dominant culture of greed, competition, materialism, and the love of money with cultures grounded in life-affirming values of cooperation, caring, spirit, and the love of life.
Because recognition of the essential spiritual unity of the whole of Creation is an essential foundation of the deep respect for the rights and needs of all living beings on which fulfilment of this agenda depends, it is necessary that we individually and collectively:

'awaken to the integral relationship between the material and spiritual aspects of our being to become fully human.'
As quoted by David C. Korten in *The Great Turning — From Empire to Earth Community.*

The Demise of the Current Story?

Our societies need to convert more and more of the Earth's natural commons in order to support the ever-expanding needs of Privatopia. Privatopia doesn't really care how this is done, as long as the shops stay open and there is money in the bank to pay for the goods. This would not matter so much if there were just a few of us, or the world itself was limitless. But there will be 10 billion of us by 2050, and the world is certainly not limitless. Privatopia is a utopia of abundance, but it is premised on a lie. Cornucopia takes this forward into a high-tech future, but it may be a dystopia, where a small rich elite prosper, while everyone else picks up the crumbs. However, as we have seen, at least the Cornucopians offer us some hope of abundance. The Ecotopians can, by contrast, often just talk of catastrophe — all three flavours of utopia are really dystopias.

So will Privatopia — consumer capitalism, and neo-liberal economics — just keep going? Will the hopes of Cornucopia be realised? Or will the Ecotopians' fears be realised instead? Perhaps every age believes itself to be at a turning point in history, but this time, it really may be true. Even the most optimistic forecasts for climate change are giving us only ten years to turn things around, and it is probably a shorter period. The years from 2020 to 2025 are

perhaps the most critical of any in human history. Whilst we looked at the possibilities of space exploration in Chapter 13, this is not on a scale that can do very much towards helping the problems here in Earth. Maybe, in a century or two, things will be different, so far as space is concerned, but for now, it is Earth-bound solutions that are required.

There are answers; and most of them are well within our current technical capabilities. We have seen above and in earlier chapters that we still, for a few years at least, have the opportunity of a win-win-win solution. A world that will be better for nature, better for people and, at the same time, economically viable, giving us more prosperity rather than less.

Prospects for the New Story

So, what will convince us that we need a new story? Change is already in the air. It takes only a tipping point of opinion to open hearts and minds and allow new stories to become majority views. Some suggest that only 10% turning to a new idea is enough to tip society into adopting it wholesale. What may seem a radical viewpoint today might appear to be a self-evident truth tomorrow. A new story that brings us pleasure is what is likely to allow for positive contagion. At the moment, many of us sacrifice our time, and sometimes our sanity, to gain things that we are led to believe we should want, such as a bigger house, a better car or foreign holidays. But imagine if we became worshippers of beauty, pleasure, silence, slowness and peace. We might ‘sacrifice’ to achieve more of these things in our lives, but it’s

a sacrifice to achieve even greater pleasure. We already hold views consistent with a new story. Most of us, if asked, would consider ourselves to be free. Many would profess to believe that having a vocation is more important than having a career; that friends and family are more valuable than making money; that community matters; that life is for living; that if we do not find pleasure in our lives then we are missing the point. All of this suggests to me that we are already well on our way. The new story is not a complete turn around of our views, it is instead just a stripping away of outmoded ideas, so that our hearts' desires can be made real.

Conclusion

'To be truly radical today is to make hope possible, not despair convincing.'

- Raymond Williams

'I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the

world. This makes it difficult to plan the day.'

- E.B. White

'So what is the point of Utopia? The point is this: To keep walking.'

- Eduardo Galeano

'If success or failure of this planet depended on how I am and what I do […] HOW WOULD I BE? WHAT WOULD I DO?'

- R. Buckminster Fuller

Way back in the Introduction, I raised three concerns. Where is the vision for a better world? Why are people's visions for a good life so premised on wealth and materialism? Why is politics seemingly so polarised, with neither right nor left addressing the concerns of ordinary people? To these questions, I added a personal concern. Do I really trust people? Do I trust others enough to encourage deliberative democracy, where ordinary people have a say in how our society is run? As we reach the end of our discussions, it's time to review where things stand with those concerns and questions raised at the start.

Where is the Vision?

I hope I've convinced the reader that there's a lot of vision out there. We have studied the utopias that are alive and well in our society

right now and named them with the three flavours, Privatopia, Cornucopia and Ecotopia. We could summarise the positive contributions of these utopias as follows: Privatopia — freedom, independence, autonomy. Cornucopia — positivity, hope, abundance. Ecotopia — recognising that we are all one eco-system with the Earth and the wider universe. Drawing on these positive narratives and collecting ideas from many sources, this book puts forward a new story. It's a vision for a prosperous and happy future, but also, I believe, one that is pragmatic and most of all, based on the active participation of all of us. A utopia is built together, or otherwise it is a utopia for just a few and a dystopia for the rest. Participation is the key, and along with this we need a good deal of trust. And our consideration of the commons suggests that fairness — equity — is also critical. So the three big things that form the vision of a new story are participation, equity and trust.

The Good Life

Why do people envisage a good life as consisting of financial wealth and material possessions? We explored this question through the dominant culture described as Privatopia. Some economic theories suggest that we are pleasure-seeking machines. The sources of pleasure on offer though are of the acquisitive, material kind — the substitute pleasures of stuff. We need the stuff for our sense of who we are, because relationships have suffered and we have been driven towards seeking self-actualisation and self-esteem as ends in themselves. But this reliance on stuff as a prop

for the ego is a fragile arrangement at best. It leaves people stressed and defensive, narcissistic and vulnerable. Instead of ego plus stuff, I have suggested the alternative pleasures of beauty, silence, slowness, peace, grace, kindness, conversation, humour, art, play, celebration and carnival. That's the offer of our new story. I've suggested that many people secretly long for these 'different pleasures' and a few are forging ways to realise them, through changed lifestyles. So the contrast with the materialist 'good life' need not be austerity. It might be termed 'frugality' instead — living within our means — or it might be best called 'simplicity' — a term we took up in Chapter 11. There we saw that simplicity represents an abundance of a different sort — meeting genuine needs in beautiful ways.

Polarised Politics

We've seen that the word politics has its roots in *polis* and polity, so is 'of the people'. By contrast, the state, and 'statecraft' are the troubling aspects of governance that should be our real worry. There is not actually much true politics going on. Instead, there are states threatening each other with nuclear annihilation, conducting trade wars and condoning the actions of big business, which is trampling on human rights and destroying natural ecosystems with little or no accountability. Meanwhile, ordinary people, and true politics, actually have very little say. Party politics — partisanship, the politics of the state — is the danger then, and not the true politics of the people. So maybe this section should be called 'polarised statism'. We will stay with the more familiar labels, but I

hope the reader will keep in mind that the issues addressed here may well be there because of statism and would largely become irrelevant if we had a true polity and a real politics.

Why has politics become so polarised and why do politicians on both left and right not seem to be addressing the concerns of people they claim to represent? This is probably the most complex problem to answer. We have described it partly as the dichotomy between left-wing equality and right-wing freedom. On the left there are two main concerns. The left still looks for equality of outcome. But, equality of outcome, in the main, is not seen as fair. People are generally more inclined towards 'proportionality', in other words, society rewards a person according to how much they contribute. Alongside this, the left still continues its valorisation of the underdog, which some would claim is, in reality, a contempt for those whom they perceive as holding power. It used to be greedy fat-cat capitalists, but now it tends to be capitalism itself and its most visible protagonists, the big corporations, the neo-liberal elite and the 'paternalist' hierarchies of society — real or perceived. To make matters worse, 'the left' in the UK (I use the quote marks advisedly) has been off on a thirty year bender where it embraced the neo-liberalism of the right and tried to mix it with a liberal internationalist and intersectionalist stance. No wonder we're confused! No wonder at the rise of populist right-wing parties that take away this conflicting narrative. Another rather awkward aspect of the left is picked up by Darren McGarvey (*Poverty Safari*). He says: 'I no longer believe

poverty is an issue our politicians can solve. Not because they don't want to, but because an honest conversation about what it will require is too politically difficult to have. If those in power were straight about what addressing these problems would require it would shock us to the core. And not merely because of the magnitude of the task facing society, which is unconscionable in scale, but also because there is a certain level of personal responsibility involved that's become taboo to acknowledge on the left. For all the demand we in left-wing circles feign for fundamental change and radical action, people get a bit touchy and offended when you suggest that might apply to them too…'

McGarvey goes on: 'In Scotland, the poverty industry is dominated by a left-leaning, liberal, middle-class. Because this specialist class is so genuinely well-intentioned when it comes to the interests of the people in deprived communities, they get a bit confused, upset and offended when those very people begin expressing anger towards them. It never occurs to them, because they see themselves as the good guys, that the people they purport to serve may, in fact, perceive them as chancers, careerists, or charlatans. They regard themselves as champions of the underclass and therefore, should any poor folk begin to get their own ideas, or, God forbid, rebel against the poverty experts, the blame is laid at the door of the complainants for misunderstanding what is going on. In fact, these types are often so certain of their own insight and virtue that they won't think twice before describing working class people they purport to represent as

engaging in self-harm if they vote for a right-wing political party. Not only does this broadcast a worrying lack of self-awareness regarding why many are turning away from the left, but it also implies that those who no longer see the value in our ideas or methods are not just ungrateful, but stupid.'

From these comments we can appreciate the paternalism that can come from supposedly left-leaning and sympathetic sources and as McGarvey himself observes, how poorer people may be driven towards 'populist' right-wing parties. If they can express simple messages then such 'populist' parties (and we will unwrap this term a bit more below) have a broad appeal. The generally tougher and more nationalistic stance of such parties further adds to their appeal. In times of trouble — economic and climatic — tough policies offer a sense of security. We can also note (from Jonathan Haidt — *The Righteous Mind*) that the left traditionally only tap into a few aspects of the ethics that people hold together in life — namely care and fairness — the basis, as we have seen, of our emotional economy. The right take on a much broader range, to include liberty, loyalty, authority and sanctity.

The problems on the right are even more difficult to unravel. One issue plays on something often heard on the left. Leftists sometimes claim to be 'citizens of the world'. In other words, the issue of achieving equality of outcome is going to be played out across all nations. But this internationalism is probably a step too far for many folk. Perhaps the reader felt a deep sense of unease about the

suggestions of tariff-free trade and open borders given in this work? One of the problems of the right is that it can take the polar opposite view. As humans, we identify most with groups — communities, religions, ethnicities, nations. The left can sometimes drive too far towards dissolving all differences; the right can narrow the group identity too much. One aspect of this is to focus only on individuals — so no group at all. It encourages the kind of self-actualisation that is the hallmark of Privatopia. It favours equality of opportunity over equality of outcome. The middle-class right are all for the individualism and the free-markets of neo-liberalism. (Remember Mrs. Thatcher's famous quote about there being no community.) The other aspect of course is nationalism. The working class right tends towards the fierce group identity of nationalism, with results that are as damaging as the autonomous self-actualising mindset of the middle-class right that we mentioned above. Conservatives and republicans are the more neo-liberal, which seems to be a contradiction in terms. What are the links? Perhaps the most obvious one is through commodification. There is a 'tradition', unfortunately, of colonisation, of enclosure and therefore exploitation, that monetises the commons and ultimately monetises our relationships with others. This is the status quo that conservatives seem to want to maintain — they wish to 'conserve' the exploitation of nature and the appropriation of the commons — and neo-liberalism is just a further way to achieve this. But we should note that the term 'conservative' — with a big or a small C — is a very broad term (as indeed is 'Republican'). So this is all something of a moveable feast. As we

saw earlier in the book, the right might get around to conserving things that really do matter to us — there's could be a broad church.

The hard-right sometimes use the term 'cultural Marxism' when referring to left-wing policies. Meanwhile, the left deny that any such phenomenon actually exists. It does however have a meaning of sorts. The idea is that Marxism saw an underdog — the proletariat — and sought their emancipation. Left-wingers arguably take up this idea and apply it to many different situations, seeing an oppressed underdog that needs freedom and equality — such as women, immigrants, homosexuals, and so on. The left have a term — 'intersectionality' — which touches on all these issues, so we could say that cultural Marxism is just a more pejorative term for the aims of intersectionality. By opposing cultural Marxism though, the hard-right reveal where their concerns and fears reside.

Cultural Marxism is sometimes conflated with post-modernism (the idea that there is no 'grand narrative' explaining the world, but rather a series of alternative narratives — each of which could be considered legitimate). Jordan Peterson is especially prone to making this connection. There is a link of sorts — the minorities favoured by intersectionality can hold alternative narratives and be validated in this by post-modern thought. But really, it's a bit of a stretch.

Meanwhile, the left often use a term described as the 'red pill meme' — a reference to *The Matrix* series of films — in which 'taking the pill'

is the means of revealing the true nature of the world. In the left-wing scenario, taking the pill reveals the neo-liberal hegemony of our culture. But this suggests there is some kind of elite conspiracy to remain in power. Recently the red pill meme has come to be adopted for many other kinds of 'seeing the truth', so the term is used now as much by the right as the left. *The Red Pill* is also the title of a film about a feminist discovering the men's rights activist movement.

I hope it is clear in this work that I am very much in favour of identity that is derived from place — thus communities, neighbourhoods, cities, counties and nations need strong identities. This might be seen as potentially leading to an inward-looking and an exclusive attitude that, in turn, might reflect the more negative side of nationalism. But the critical difference is that this strong affiliation is about patriotism, not nationalism. Patriotism is place-centred. The patriot celebrates the place to which they belong and seeks to honour it, improve it, respect it. Most critically, the patriot welcomes the stranger, the visitor, the newcomer. The patriot can afford this generosity because patriotism is about having something to give not something to defend. It is generous, welcoming, kind, considerate. Those who are strangers and visitors are not just 'tolerated', far less, abused. Rather they are treated with even greater care and respect. Patriotism celebrates place by celebrating others and sees that we share more similarities than differences.

But consider this quote from Karen Stenner on celebrating sameness and difference:

'All the evidence indicates that exposure to difference, talking about difference and applauding difference — the hallmarks of liberal democracy — are the surest ways to aggravate those who are innately intolerant… Paradoxically, then, it would seem that we can best limit intolerance of difference by parading, talking about, and applauding our sameness… Ultimately nothing inspires greater tolerance from the intolerant than an abundance of common and unifying beliefs, practices, rituals, institutions and processes.' (Karen Stenner — *The Authoritarian Dynamic*, as quoted by Jonathan Haidt — *The Righteous Mind*)

After quoting from Stenner, Haidt continues:

'The small scale and particular is what matters to most people. Politics should build these up where possible from the affections that people have for their localities. (It should perhaps start with naming places with their historic and popular names. According to Maurice Glassman a Labour party survey discovered that about two thirds of the population misname the places they live, having failed to keep up with multiple local government reorganisations.)' (Jonathan Haidt — *The Righteous Mind*.) The difference between nationalism and patriotism takes a bit of explaining, and it is not an argument that is easy to present, especially to people who may be burdened by austerity and looking for a scapegoat. Unfortunately nationalists will tend to describe themselves as patriots, so we need to be watching their actions to see if these really square with their words.

We mentioned populism above and it is helpful to consider the meaning of populism here. The term means gaining popular appeal by means of

identifying some external threat. Often that threat is perceived as coming from some minority of the population. Populism channels resentment against this perceived cause of the nation's problems. We can see how this links to the right-wing nationalist parties, where it may be immigrants or some other section of society who are demonised in order to gain popular appeal. But, although it is not commonly done, we could accept populism as equally applying to left-wing politics, where it is the 1%, big corporations, or the 'neo-liberal hegemony' that are demonised in order to try to appeal to the majority of the population. So, nationalism, patriotism and populism are slippery terms, and it may be that within a few years of writing these words their meanings will have shifted. David Goodhart (*The Road to Somewhere*) speaks of 'Somewheres' and 'Anywheres' and suggests there are left-wing and right-wing versions of both. In Goodhart's terms, our left-wing parties are too much 'anywhere' at the moment (internationalist and intersectional) whilst the right-wing populist parties are too much 'somewhere' — too much rooted in group, tribal and national identities to adjust to multi-cultural societies. But I hope this essential distinction is clear — we can be united with others in affection, or we can be united with a few and exclude others — united therefore in hate. It is in groups that we find our strength. It is in groups that we can celebrate all that we share as people living in a particular place. We honour ourselves by honouring and respecting others. We serve our town, city and nation best by making it a place where everyone feels safe.

Some have advanced the opinion that two of the issues identified above are linked. It is suggested that the paranoid and aggressive nationalism is deliberately stoked up by the right as a distraction from the actions of the big corporations and the tiny elite of the super-rich. Like the left-wing red pill, it verges on a conspiracy theory. Whatever the truth, or otherwise, of this suspicion, I feel we must treat the nationalism of the right with special care. Trying to bring these things together — in terms of left and right — consider this quote from Jonathan Haidt: 'Now imagine society not as an agreement amongst individuals [as with John Stuart Mill] but as something that emerged organically over time as people found ways of living together, binding themselves to each other, suppressing each other's selfishness, and punishing deviants and free-riders who eternally threaten to undermine co-operative groups. The basic social unit is not the individual, it is the hierarchically structured family, which serves as a model for other institutions. Individuals in such societies are born into strong and constraining relationships that profoundly limit their autonomy. The patron saint of this more binding moral system is the sociologist Emile Durkheim, who warned of the dangers of anomie (normlessness) and wrote, in 1897, that "man cannot become attached to higher aims and submit to a rule if he sees nothing above him to which he belongs. To free himself from all social pressure is to abandon himself and demoralise him." A Durkheimian society at its best would be a stable network composed of many nested and overlapping groups that socialise, reshape, and care for individuals who, if left to their own devices, would pursue shallow,

carnal and selfish pleasures. A Durkheimian society would value self-control over self-expression, duty over rights, and loyalty to one's groups over concern for out-groups.' (Jonathan Haidt — *The Righteous Mind.*) Conservatives tend to fear change — in case things get worse instead of better — and prefer the authority and power of the state over the liberty of the individual, so we can see how the Durkheimian society might have its appeal. (Although, as we saw in the discussion of neo-liberalism in Chapter 7, right-wing governments will usually claim they are seeking the exact opposite of this — a limited state and maximum personal freedom. So I suppose we should see this as referring to a conservative mindset, with a small c.) The right of politics are 'conservative' about human nature — about our ability to change and to achieve personal autonomy. Therefore leadership, authority and control are important elements in their mindset. The reader may well agree with this stance, of course, and see this as pragmatic rather than overly-controlling or patronising. But most of this book relies on a more positive view of human nature and our ability to change for the better. So this book is suggesting ways to live and govern ourselves that would move us beyond the polarisation of politics. In particular, we brought in the social commons (re-making) as the true base of society. This aspect of our society is already there, but it is suppressed and disregarded, and to some extent the mindset of consumer capitalism has polluted our own individual mindsets and means that we just don't see the underlying and neglected realities. So it is changes to people that will bring about real change in society. We need kindness and

compassion and to look out for our communities and care for the planet. It is narratives, above all, that will foster such change. It is accountability — where we endeavour to retain a vision of heroism for ourselves — that is the driving force. Governance systems such as Sociocracy and Parapolity reinforce this, and offer us an escape from polarised politics. These systems, as we have seen, are bottom-up systems — they rely on the local and the small-scale. We can have both the freedom of the right and the equity of the left. The freedom is the 'freedom to' of forging our own stories as individuals and as communities. The equality of the left is through our understanding of the commons.

Three Utopias

We set out on this journey by considering three types of utopia — Privatopia, Cornucopia and Ecotopia. Referring back to the three utopias, we observed that the current culture of consumer capitalism is best described as a Privatopia. In Privatopia the system is accepted, either grudgingly or enthusiastically, as inevitable. Everyone looks out for their own best interests and compassion does not extend very much beyond one's own family. Whilst concerns over environmental destruction may be voiced, in Privatopia it is seen as something governments need to sort out. People pay lip service to this need, but if it is suggested that citizens may need to make changes or sacrifices in order to protect the environment then this is met with serious opposition.

Within Privatopia are the seeds of a future utopia called Cornucopia. Cornucopia more or less agrees that current lifestyles should not need to be compromised. The Cornucopians will point to a steady improvement in all aspects of human life over the last two centuries or so, and suggest that there is no reason why this should not continue into the future. The Cornucopians downplay the accelerating problems with the climate and habitat destruction and species extinction. A better future (at least for humans) is promised, mainly by way of technology.

Ecotopia, by contrast, is a vision that takes the environment much more seriously. Ecotopia covers a broad range of beliefs. We noted that sometimes a better world is thought to come about because of the collapse of capitalism. Or it may be that future large-scale disruption to the climate forces us towards a more sustainable existence. The speed of such changes is critical and it has to be said that rapid changes of the sort envisaged by some Ecotopians are likely to bring chaos to the world rather than the harmonious new existence that they sometimes promise. A slower, smoother transition, however, can only be welcomed and would be more manageable.

Ecotopians don't often suggest political change to sit alongside the necessary lifestyle and business changes that would be needed to bring about an ecologically-sustainable world.

We've seen that Privatopia and Cornucopia are leading us to disaster, and that Ecotopia, by itself, seems to struggle to be realised, because of the complacency of both governments and

citizens. As such, a fourth utopia, a new story, has been suggested, which takes mostly the message of Ecotopia and sits it within a political context. This is summarised below, but first let's look at the six questions raised in the Introduction. The answers to these questions are essentially the ground for the new story that is being proposed.

Six Questions

Those six questions were: Who decides? What do we own? What should we share? What should we make? How should we trade? How should we live?
Who decides? Most countries have a system of representative democracy at the moment, so a small number of people make the decisions and the rest of us get only the chance of voting them into or out of office every few years. This book suggests that this is not working, especially with regard to the difficult issues facing the world around climate change.

So, we went on to consider different types of political organisations — polities. One person deciding is a monarchy or a dictatorship. All people deciding together is communism. Everyone deciding for themselves is anarchism. We explored anarchism in particular because it digs down to the roots of why we have politics in the first place.

The lessons of anarchism led to an alternative politics being proposed, where all citizens have the opportunity to participate in decision-making. Three particular styles of governance system were introduced — Sociocracy, Parapolity and

Parecon. In discussing Sociocracy in particular, I stressed the need for people to recognise and focus on a vision for the particular business or organisation with which they are involved.

I suggested that Parapolity and Parecon need not be brought about by sudden change away from the current system. The measures suggested could be gradually adopted by current political systems, giving citizens increasingly greater say from the bottom up. Representatives from the smaller circles of governance — neighbourhoods, towns and counties — would go on to form part of national governments, partly or wholly replacing party politics. Another idea is utilising such methods as Citizens' Assemblies for specific issues and possibly having a People's Parliament with representatives chosen by lot to form a permanent fourth estate of government, perhaps replacing the House of Lords or House of Commons in the UK, for instance. Government may then be made up of the two types of People's Parliaments — with one house having the representatives from the counties and the second house being the citizens chosen by lot. Party politics would be at an end. As I've tried to stress, this is a system of reform and not a call for revolution. Also, institutions — including the executive arms of local and national governments — would still be in place. Indeed, these would be properly independent of the legislature, so arguably less compromised than at present.

To address the questions of owning and sharing we started out by looking at the meaning of a commons. We noted that an unmanaged

commons of whatever type is likely to lead to injustice and even catastrophe. The world today, for the most part, runs as an unmanaged commons under capitalism. We explored this in relation to nature, and to the way the material and the cultural economies function. It was noted, in particular, that the economies — as well as disregarding the commons, and the issues of equity that this involves — also fail to recognise the deeper links back to nature inherent in all society and the social relations that underpin society. We observed that there are already social relations supporting the material economy (usually referred to as reproduction). We noted the wider circle of social relations — giving it the name of 're-making', and including care, maintenance, solidarity, conversation, friendship and intimacy. We have variously described this as the 'emotional economy' (by way of contrast with the financial) or the social commons or just as 'commoning'. Re-making though, also refers us back to all the other economies and to the commons. Our freedom is a freedom-from, but also a freedom-to, and, especially, a freedom to make. So the 'production' of the material and cultural economies should be part of that freedom of everyone to be fully involved with their making, and not alienated from it, as we can so often be in the capitalist economies.

Whilst the elements of commoning (maintenance, friendship etc.) are familiar to us all, they are perhaps so close to us that we can miss their relevance. So commoning remains as yet a rather woolly concept; it seems insubstantial. But if commoning were to stop then society would collapse. If, on the other

hand, commoning were to increase ten- or a hundred-fold, society would be transformed. That is the new story in a nutshell. In our discussions we have seen the relevance of culture in bringing to light our need for 're-making', for commoning, for the social commons. It is based on personal transformation and on community. It needs therefore to be based on trust.

Participatory Economics — Parecon — was introduced to address two of the remaining questions given above — What should we make? How should we trade? Parecon recognises that our making and re-making are aspects of community — they are not done in isolation. We noted that Parecon, with regard to trade, could start with those things usually related most closely to governance, such as large infrastructure projects. So, Parecon need not wholly replace a market economy with a planned economy — only as much, or as little, as a community may decide. It leads, amongst other things, to businesses shared as co-operatives, respecting their communities, answerable to the nations that host them, conscious of an environmental ethic and seeing their role as providing a service to others, solving problems and meeting needs in society.

The move to a planned economy, of course, would start to undermine the market economy of consumer capitalism. Throughout the book we have noted calls for the overthrow of the capitalist system — either because this is seen as a necessity to achieve ecological stability, or as part of a political revolution, or to usher in a 'gift economy' as an alternative way of living, for

its own sake. The message of this work is that contempt for capitalism is a serious error. Overthrowing capitalism is not the path to utopia, it is the zombie apocalypse. Capitalism should not be seen as the enemy, but certainly it needs radical change. It does not need to be premised on debt and seeking profit above all else. The change involves all of us. Neo-liberalism doesn't care about our identity, so long as we're working and spending. It pretends to foster individuality but just wants us as drones. We saw that we're not really looking to challenge the number-crunching side of economics. The concern is rather that the social side of things is neglected. The economics — especially neo-liberal economics, sees us as fully rational, individual and entirely self-interested in our behaviour. It ignores the complexity of humans as, firstly, irrational. And, along with being irrational, we are not purely self-interested — we have as much interest in friends, family, relationships, community, solidarity, care, compassion, celebration, harmony, conversation, carnival and art. These 'different pleasures', I have tried to suggest, are the undergirding for changes to our politics, our institutions and our economy. Throughout the book we have been contrasting what might be termed structural change (changing the system) with personal change. But, to an extent, changing the system comes down to changing people as well. We would not seek to change the system, or try to impose the changes through laws and regulations, if we had not ourselves first changed to want to live in different ways and see different outcomes.

I have suggested that this personal change is partly about us being open to different pleasures. Finding our pleasure, I suggest, is a better path than seeking emancipation from some perceived oppression. This thought takes us on to consider our final question — How should we live? To answer this, we move on to summarise the new story that the book has proposed.

The New Story

In the Introduction and Chapter 1, we looked at the contrast between abstract ideals and concrete utopias. If we are promoting a utopia though, we cannot be overly-prescriptive, we cannot have all concrete, we need a balance of ideals and concrete proposals so that the better world we hope for will be open to change and can unfold over time. So any new story needs to be open to changing circumstances and dissenting voices. Throughout the book I've been suggesting that we already live in stories and identified three 'flavours' — Privatopia, Cornucopia and Ecotopia. We've seen from Chapter 1 that Cornucopia is a golden age of the future, Ecotopia, to an extent, a golden age of the past, and Privatopia recognises what we have already achieved and hopes to preserve our 'good lives' indefinitely, without considering the consequences. A new story, I've tried to suggest, blends all of the good elements of these stories whilst taking heed of their blind spots.

What is the vision for the new story? The vision needs to be a broad one, that considers the Earth and future generations as well as our own immediate needs. The new story is primarily

about three things — full participation in our governance, equity in our dealings with each other and trust.

Today we are well-placed to take up such a broad vision. Communication is at our finger-tips and we can learn and comment and criticise as never before. The critical attitude can be negative — leading to internet trolls and personal attacks on politicians. But the critical attitude also has the potential to be a very positive thing, meaning that we will demand a much greater say in how our lives are run as communities and as nations. This is my hope. The very first thing is that we get a vote about the kind of government we would like. The number one vision is for everyone to have a say in how society is organised, from the local to the national and international levels.

Society is changing and people are questioning authority more and more, especially as the world wakes up to issues around climate change. If we abdicate responsibility for our politics, we can blame politicians for our problems and absolve ourselves of responsibility — but this is a cop-out. The message is — start living the new story now. Don't let us underestimate the influence that a minority of voices can have on the majority. Even although the number of dissenting voices is small, change can happen fast. There could be enough counter-culture — enough of the emerging new story — for us to achieve radical change. In 50 years' time, young people will be asking why people of our time were so stupid.

Given the type of polity I have promoted in the book, I have had to try to avoid being too prescriptive about the decisions it might make. I cannot even presume to judge what decisions may be reached over our six questions, or indeed, what a Parapolity might make of the related matter of the commons. However, I have tried to give some pointers in relation to four specific areas — nature, place, compassion and pleasure, and the suggestions are summarised in the chapter on, What We Might Decide, If We Could Decide.

What does living the new story really mean? As I've suggested above, and throughout the book, 'different pleasures' would be the best way to sum it up. We are already sacrificing a lot to serve the masters of consumer-capitalism — including our time, our money and often our sanity. How about instead seeing any sacrifice we might make as being a sacrifice to bring us more pleasure and beauty? The new story is about the play-off between the materialism of neo-liberal capitalism and a world premised on beauty, pleasure, silence, slowness, peace, grace, kindness, conversation, humour, art, play, celebration and carnival.

Of course, I have to face up to the fact that if a system of Parapolity were set in place, people might make many choices that I found fool-hardy, reckless or irresponsible. We might all quickly conclude that a representative democracy was not so bad after all, and beat a hasty retreat! We definitely need to have an escape hatch, back to the 'Westminster model' if necessary. And then maybe our best hope

would be to get Westminster to abide by its own Westminster code of conduct.

But even if the decisions that people find are not to our liking — even so, I feel the effort of raising questions about governance will have been worthwhile. Just knowing more about what we really think will have been a step in the right direction. The burden is not on us to convert the whole world, or to rescue it, or somehow force it to be different. That doesn't mean there's nothing to do, but it's about getting out of the way sometimes and letting things take their own course. At best, we can only be catalysts — enablers — and try to live our own truth. Then it's down to trust. Through our explorations in this book, we've seen that culture, narrative, story-telling, drama, fiction, art, celebration and carnival are the routes most likely to get us to adopt new stories in our real lives — stories that will make for a sustainable and flourishing world. Also, of course, a strong link to a particular place and to nature.

Trust

So what about that personal issue mentioned in the Introduction — the issue of trust? If participation at all levels of politics really took off then, of course, it means ordinary people like you and me being trusted with big decisions that affect our lives. Would things really be better? In particular, would people be willing to make the tough choices that we must face in relation to climate change? This issue of trust is really at the core of all the ideas expressed in the book about governance, the commons, and even in our stories of utopia.

The key question is — if we were all genuinely given the opportunity to fully participate in decision-making — would we make good decisions? It has to be faced that sometimes the decisions will not be good. There will be mistakes, but there will also be the opportunity to change decisions and learn from our errors.

What if a Citizens' Assembly was set up on climate change — as proposed by, amongst others, Extinction Rebellion? The people chosen for the assembly are then faced with making changes that would deeply affect them personally, like giving up their cars and paying heavy taxes on anything involving carbon emissions — which, let's face it, is more or less everything. Would people make the choices necessary to help the planet and future generations? Or would they choose instead to protect their own lifestyles?

Well, part of the answer is that there is our general stance towards society and there is our personal stance towards people we meet directly, such as family, friends and work colleagues. We can choose to trust. As with the discussions above about changing the system and changing people, I think changing our personal attitude in our direct relationships is the key to changing things at a broader level. If we invest people with enough responsibility, give them the benefit of the doubt and trust them to make good decisions, then, I believe, most people will rise to this challenge and make choices that will be for the good of society and not just to protect their personal lifestyles. They are all premised on trust, which leads to a hope for the future. It

is not a naïve hope, even although the troubles the world faces now are significant. It is not mere optimism, or wishing for the best. It is making a decision to work for a better future. I recognise though, that this places a certain burden on the reader. I am indirectly saying that yes, you too must change. And perhaps that will leave readers uncomfortable. Maybe it will help to say that the issue of trust remains a burden to the author as well. Depending on mood and the most recent encounters with others; I am sometimes filled with hope and at other times I discover I have a leaning towards the need for authoritarian power to impose change on society.

I am not fully cured of my issues around trust. But, perhaps with my advancing age and the good experiences I've had in recent years, I believe that, for the most part, humans are incredible. With time and focus and thought, ordinary people are more than a match for any circumstance that might confront us. Choosing to trust should not be a burden, it should not be striving, it should instead be relaxing into an easier relationship with ourselves and our fellow human beings. So, yes, the story can be a journey of trust. I invite the reader to trust too. I invite the reader to participate, so that together we might build a new story.

Glossary

The descriptions provided here try to summarise the way the various terms have been used in the book. Some of the terms are especially liable to shifting meanings over time, or to different interpretations. I've tried to explain the various nuances of many of these, both here and in the main text.

Anarchism Absence or abolition of government, the term is used in this work as one of the three ways to bring about changing society, the others being Reform and Revolution.

Collectivist Anarchists are committed to no government, but the collectivists recognise the need for some organisation in order to make decisions, but avoiding institutions, bureaucracy and hierarchy.

Individualist Anarchists who are most committed to freedom and independence.

Syndicalist Anarchists especially interested in organisation around production, which is the area they see as most needing collective decision-making.

Assemblies See Federalism

Capital

Constant Capital That part of wealth that maintains property and the means of production.

Commodity Capital Stock of produce held by a company.

Cultural Capital Intelligence, imagination and creativity, and their products, art, literature, music, etc.

Financial Capital Sometimes just money in general, but more specifically, money used for future production.

Human Capital Value innate to people, including labour and work.

Material Capital I use this term to distinguish the capital produced by the material economy from that which is produced by the other types of economy discussed in the text.

Natural Capital Often referring to all of nature (originally just called 'land') but

preferably just those natural resources that are regarded as essential to be used by humans, whilst some of nature is retained as wild.

Physical Capital What I've called natural resources, or material wealth.

Productive Capital Assets retained and used for production.

Social Capital The value in the connections between people.

Variable Capital Labour power. (In Marx, the power that creates surplus value.)

Capitalism Generally referring to a mode of production focused on the production of goods for exchange, that is, commodity. The term also includes a few other ideas that are seen as critical: The idea of scarcity. The idea of competition. The idea that the financing of capitalism is by way of financial debt and the idea that the primary aim of capitalism is for profit. As the rate of profit is understood to fall over time, the amount of debt required to maintain production with at least the same profit increases, and hence the appropriation of the natural commons continues to increase to meet this need. (The falling rate of profit is however an idea contested by many economists.)

Citizens' Assembly A temporary grouping of citizens, often chosen by lot, who meet to deliberate over a particular matter within society. Some suggest that such assemblies could become a more long-term feature of governance,

as part of a system of participatory politics (Parapolity).

Cockaigne A medieval utopia, reachable only by eating through three miles of rice pudding.

Commodity/commodification Goods obtained through purchase. Whilst the commodity may still be a useful product, there is an element of its monetary value that still adheres. Hence, commodification suggests something being reduced to a financial calculation only, away from its use-value and social value.

Commoning Individual acts that relate to a physical or emotional commons, such as sharing, compassion and kindness.

Commons

Natural Commons Often referring to all of nature, but preferably just those natural resources that are regarded as essential to be used by humans, whilst some of nature is retained as wild.

Cultural Commons Eisenstein refers to intellectual property and creative copyright here, but I prefer to use the term to refer to the actual wealth produced, as in celebration, art, music and literature, rather than the copyrighting of these.

Spiritual Commons Imagination and creativity.

Social Commons Compassion, gifts and sharing.

Communism A belief in no government, like anarchism, but also communism believes in no private property and more or less equal status for all citizens. There has never been a nation that achieved true communism. The idea of a 'communist state' is, at best, a transitional stage (the dictatorship of the proletariat) to true communism and the phrase is really a contradiction in terms. Where states have tried to impose communism on their populations, this has generally gone very seriously wrong.

Compassion/ Sympathy/Empathy Compassion is practical action taken as a result of sympathy towards oneself or another. Empathy is the emotion behind sympathy and compassion. In this book, compassion includes shared pleasures and also compassion for oneself. Compassion and pleasure are seen as deeply linked.

Confederation/Confederalism Sometimes used in contrast to federalism. Federalism is often regarded as a top-down, state-imposed delegating of some decision-making to smaller regions within a nation. By contrast, confederalism organises from the grass-roots. Although the latter is the preferred option in this book, I have still used the term federalism to describe it, and have explained the difference in the text.

Consequentialism Governance system where the day-to-day decision-making is seen as more important than the form of governance itself or

the ideals of a political theory or party. The term is often used in contrast to Proceduralism. Consequentialism is sometimes also referred to as Instrumentalism.

Conservation/Environmentalism/Ecology/ Deep Ecology These all offer different approaches to the human treatment of the bio-sphere. Conservation may seek to preserve particular environments, even when these are human-made, such as a particular farming landscape. Environmentalism is more focused on nature, but this tends to be nature as we might like it to be for humans. Ecology recognises the importance of all flora and fauna within a bio-region and/or the whole planet. Deep Ecology tends to give priority to the flora and fauna, over and above humans. These definitions are of course, fuzzy-edged and blend into one another.

Cornucopia One of the flavours of utopia identified in this work. Cornucopians take a very positive view of the future, with abundance achieved mainly through technological advance.

Democracy Originally a bad form of governance by the many, a corruption of polity.

Deliberative A governance system where there is universal suffrage and where all or most citizens have the opportunity to discuss things that will affect their lives and directly influence the decision-making process. In this book, both Citizens' Assemblies and Participatory Politics are seen

as forms of Deliberative Democracy.

Direct Universal suffrage again, but Direct Democracy is often used to describe a system that uses referendums, so there is a direct vote, but not necessarily much deliberation.

Representative A system where the citizens elect people to represent their views and/or make decisions on their behalf (a critical distinction that is often a source of contention in representative government). The citizens have little or no power to veto decisions between elections.

Dystopia A bad vision of the future or an existing vision for a better world that has turned out to be worse rather than better. Dystopia is used to contrast with utopia, and some would argue that many utopian visions would in fact turn out to be dystopias.

Economy

Command Economy See Planned Economy below.

Cultural Economy Art, Music, Literature. One of the five economies considered in this book, and key to making explicit the disparities between the other economies, notably the suppression of the emotional economy, and the emphasis on the material.

Emotional Economy

Compassion solidarity conviviality, friendship, love. I also use the term 're-making' in this book, to represent all of the above, and to complement the 'making' of the material economy. One of the five economies considered in this book, and critically it is the one that is least recognised in its importance for the good functioning of society.

Financial Economy Traditionally, Just the support of money for the functioning of production and exchange, but now covers transactions of money increasingly abstract from the physical world.

Market Economy Referring to market decisions being the best way to keep prices, inflation, employment etc. stable and efficient, and also implying that market forces are the best way for this to be achieved, with little interference from government. The term is often used in contrast to a Planned or Command Economy.

Material Economy Production and sale of physical goods and usually also refers to services such as care and the hospitality industries. One of the five economies considered in this book.

Natural Economy Nature is considered as an economy in this book, especially in Chapter 7, and so is one of the five economies.

Nature, in particular, is the archetypal circular economy, that might serve as a model for our other economies. (Or we could say that all the other economies are already part of nature's circle, but not necessarily in a way that is working very well. Pollution is the obvious example.)

Planned Economy In contrast to the Market Economy, a Planned Economy (or Command Economy) regulates, by government, or by some other means, the flow of goods and services in order to achieve some specific goals. This might be to full employment, to conserve resources or to achieve a fairer and more equal society.

Spatial Economy One of the five economies considered in this book, the term is used in Chapter 7, essentially to mean Place.

Economic Rent Traditionally, income from the rent of land and property, the profit from the labour of others and the interest gained on money.

Ecotopia One of the flavours of utopia identified in this book, Ecotopia works to achieve an ecologically-sustainable future.

Equality

of opportunity Where all citizens have a reasonably equal potential in such things as education, work opportunities,

their treatment by the state and their status under the law.

of outcome Equality in the stricter sense that society is arranged to ensure that all citizens obtain a roughly equal share of resources, no matter their age, state of health, intelligence etc.

Externality

Positive externality Something that is considered more or less a free resource in terms of economics, such as, traditionally, nature and the emotional commons (the latter not even clearly recognised as a resource, although highlighted by Marx.)

Negative externality Something that is a bad result of economic activity, but for which the economy does not carry a direct cost, for instance pollution and the effects of climate change.

Federalism

Federations and Assemblies Local arrangement of a governance system. I use the term in the book to mean a grass-roots system such as in Participatory Politics, and not to mean local organisation that is devised and controlled by a state.

Cellular and Associationalist Used to refer to grass-roots small-scale governance, which together form larger assemblies. The Participatory Politics and Deliberative Democracy systems described in the book are cellular and associationalist systems.

Free trade Referring to trade without tariffs or other restrictions imposed by governments, but the term is also sometimes used to refer to 'free market', that is, favouring international business.

Golden Age Referring to a past or future time when life is idyllic, so a golden age is often the basis of a utopia.

Goods

Rival/Non-rival A rival good is one where its use or consumption will prevent it being used by someone else, such as, food or energy. A non-rival good is one where its use does not exclude others, such as street lighting, and other types of public infrastructure, and also, critically for this book, most types of cultural commons.

Exclusive/Inclusive Similar to Rival/Non-rival above, but often used to refer to social and cultural 'goods'. Streaming a song or a film for instance is, to an extent, exclusive, whilst a concert or a

film show is more inclusive. Clearly there are fuzzy boundaries here, in particular, the commercialisation of culture may lead it towards being less inclusive.

Expansive Again, mainly referring to social and cultural goods. Most forms are expansive in the sense that they grow with use, such that compassion and friendship lead to more compassion and friendship, and artworks, music and literature will often inspire new works to be produced. The expansiveness extends to all of the other economies, as all are potentially related by means of the exchange of gifts. (See Chapter 7.)

Government

Aristocracy Rule by a few.

Democracy See separate entry.

Dictatorship Bad form of Monarchy.

Monarchy Rule by one, often a king or queen.

Oligarchy Bad form of Aristocracy.

Polity Good form of rule by the many (of which, Democracy is the bad form).

Grace The word is used in this book to suggest that the universe is not neutral but is generally benevolent towards life. As such, grace may be

a further ‘economy’ that underpins and sustains life.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) A measure of the economic output of a society.

Happiness In this book, the definition of pleasure and purpose sustained over time is adopted.

Hierarchy

Dominator Hierarchy A ‘power-over’ structure imposed by authority and possibly aggression.

Reciprocal Hierarchy A ‘power-with’ structure that implies co-operation.

Idealism Values and other regulative beliefs that impose an order on decision-making (especially of governments) but which are of a generalised and often abstract nature. Often criticised for not being pragmatic. In this book the idealistic aspects of many utopian visions are contrasted with the more pragmatic and concrete visions.

Instrumentalism See Consequentialism.

Joy The emotion underlying pleasure and happiness, but sometimes also taken to mean a long-lasting sense of pleasure and contentment.

Land traditional term used in economics to refer to all aspects of nature used in production,

so water, air, sunshine, soil, etc. as well as actual physical real estate.

Marginal Utility In economics, the benefit of producing one additional unit of anything. This may, in balance, not be worthwhile, so the marginal utility value is the cut-off point in what is worth producing. The concept of marginal utility seems to derive from Friedrich von Wieser, but the term is usually attributed to Alfred Marshall. The emphasis of utility to the consumer (discussed especially with regard to neo-liberalism) was first explored by Carl Menger and William Stanley Jevons.

Means of Production Tools, factories etc. used for the production of material goods. Having the 'means of production' is a key feature of arguments for communism and socialism, as this allows the workers to control their making in order to benefit directly themselves from the production process rather than profits going to business owners.

Meritocracy An organisation or governance system based on ability or intelligence.

Municipalism See Confederation/Confederalism.

Nationalism Could be a benign honour and respect for one's nation. However, at least in several societies, the term has come to mean a negative form of government or political belief that excludes others, including a hostility towards foreign nationals within the nation's borders. In the book I have contrasted nationalism with patriotism.

Nature This book gives special emphasis to everything being within nature. In particular, all of the other four economies discussed — material, cultural, emotional and spatial — are contained by the economy of nature.

Neo-liberalism A conflation of the 'neo' of neo-classical economics (with its emphasis on production) and 'liberal' from the rights and privileges afforded by a liberal society — and especially freedom. The aims of neo-liberalism could be seen as benign and it could be argued that no nation has ever managed to practice neo-liberalism in its 'pure' form. However, attempts at neo-liberalism have led to contradictions of its core values and bad consequences. Some might argue that one or more of the consequences have been the underlying intention of neo-liberalism all along (such as disparities of wealth). Critics also often conflate neo-liberalism with capitalism, seeing it as the style of economics that encourages, in their view, the worst aspects of capitalism.

Noble Savage The idea (usually attributed to Rousseau) that humankind, in our early history, was largely benign and free of such negative features as aggression, paternalism, hierarchy and selfishness.

Opportunity Cost In economics, literally, the next best thing that a person would choose to do, or, the thing they would give up in order to do their first choice. Often, this is related to money value, but economics often start with the example of Robinson Crusoe deciding between fishing or collecting coconuts. The term was

first coined by Friedrich von Wieser. Von Wieser, notably, related the opportunity cost to whole societies rather than individual choice. The difference between price and opportunity cost is the economic rent.

Organic Term used by Murray Bookchin, amongst others, usually used to imply positive features of people living close to nature, much as for 'noble savage' as described above.

Participatory Economics (Parecon) A form of planned economy, where decisions about production and distribution are made by all citizens and not regulated via market forces.

Participatory Politics (Parapolity) A type of deliberative democracy. In this book I have used the term Parapolity to mean both a grass-roots federalism type of government (also known as Associationalist or Cellular) and a Citizens' Assembly style often appointed by sortition, that is, by lot.

Patriotism In this book I use the term to mean pride and honour associated with a particular place or nation, but one which is generous, inclusive and welcoming — giving special regard to foreigners, visitors, as well as to other groups who may be in danger of being marginalised by society. In this regard, patriotism is almost directly opposed to nationalism and populism.

People's Parliament Used in this book to refer to a government, or an estate of government, by means of one or both of the types of participatory politics described above.

Permaculture Originally 'permanent agriculture'. A system to maximise agricultural yield with minimum effort, in particular, using perennial crops, and no artificial pesticides and fertilisers. The term has been expanded to include ideas about human society and more general care of the planet.

Pleasure In this book taken be the foundation of a person's emotional life and deeply linked to compassion for self and compassion of a community and society. Recognising and exploring our pleasures is seen as key to devising a new story.

Privatopia The term is used to describe our current Western system of consumer capitalism and is one of the three flavours of utopia described in the book.

Proceduralism A style of government where the form of government itself and/or its ideals are seen as more important, and leading to better decisions, than dealing with situations as they occur and making judgements based on pragmatism. (It could reasonably be asserted that the book's focus on deliberative democracy is a proceduralist stance.)

Politics Taken to mean governance by the people in this book, and as distinct from party politics or the state.

Polity A general term for governance, but used more specifically to refer to government by the people, as per politics above.

Populism A style of politics where the allegiance of the many is obtained by blaming or excluding some other group, either within or outside the society. Right-wing populism might target immigrants. Left-wing populism might see the 1% as the minority group that causes society's problems. In this book, populism is contrasted with patriotism.

Power

Power-over Power based on hierarchy, and often associated with paternalism, exploitation and dominance.

Power-to The ability to work within the context of flourishing as a person, as in having independence, autonomy and self-direction. Making one's own story.

Power-with Including the elements of power-to above, but also including co-operation with others.

Pre-distribution In contrast to re-distribution, the idea (from John Rawls) that wealth — for instance, from the natural commons — should be distributed equally to people in advance of any production etc. This is so that poorer people do not need to be supported by allowing a few to become very wealthy from exploiting the natural commons and then taxing them to redistribute the wealth back to the poor.

Property and Possession Property is used in this book to mean just ownership whilst possession is used to mean ownership with

responsibility. The terms could be applied to material things, but could also be extended, for instance, to contrast 'intellectual property' with 'intellectual possession'. This might in turn suggest alternatives to copyright and patent law.

Proportionality As an alternative to absolute equality, proportionality means a fair share, in proportion, for instance, to the amount of work a person does.

Re-Making The term is used in the book to mean 'reproduction' in its traditional understanding in economics, but also all aspects of the emotional/social commons that support the material economy, but are generally un-acknowledged.

Re-Wilding Allowing land (including rivers, lakes and oceans) to be taken back by nature, often with minimal intervention by humans, but sometimes with selective planting of native flora and the re-introduction of native fauna.

Reform One of the three ways identified in the book to change our governance system — reform, revolution or anarchism. Reform suggests gradual change. The systems of Parapolity promoted by the book are intended as gradual reform and not sudden breaks with current systems.

Regenerative agriculture A system of agriculture that takes in numerous techniques, but, in particular, avoids chemical fertilisers and pesticides and tries to achieve a natural balance in its processes. Regenerative agriculture is

also especially concerned with the preservation of healthy soil.

Rentier One who benefits from 'economic rent', but the term has also come to be used in 'rentier capitalism' — where all aspects of a society are commodified and are therefore available to be rented back to others.

Republican Literally this means government without a monarchy. However it also implies a degree of involvement with government by the population at large. It is an especially difficult term to define, with its association with right-wing politics in the USA. The plea for 'republican values' is as much a slippery term as nationalism, populism, patriotism and liberalism. But we might include government by public discussion, the idea of a common good, openness to differing opinions and a search for truth. Freedom is also important, and republicans see freedom as 'socially constructed'.

Revolution Sudden overthrow of government. One of the three ways to change society identified in this book, the others being reform and anarchism.

Silence Not to be taken entirely literally, but as well as actual silence it is the contrast between 'sound' and 'noise'. The term is used in this book to denote a desirable state where there is minimal intrusion by unwanted noise, especially as a component of a simple lifestyle. Good music, laughter, birdsong etc., under this definition, would be welcomed as beneficial sound.

Slowness As with silence above, not necessarily literally slow, but rather having things at an appropriate speed, both in one's own life and in wider society. Again, a potential component of a simple lifestyle.

Socialism Government that emphasises equity, fair distribution of resources and social justice.

Sociocracy A governance system based on all participants having a voice, mutual obligations, and a commitment to vision, mission and aims. Sociocracy also tries to avoid hierarchy and tries to adapt to changing circumstances. In this book, Sociocracy is taken as a suitable basis for deliberative democracy.

Sortition Choosing by lot. Used in this book especially in relation to Citizens' Assemblies, a system of governance that might, in turn, form one type of people's parliament.

Statism Literally, of the state, but used negatively to imply top-down governance.

Subsidiarity Decision-making that is based on the region that will be affected by the matters that are being decided, such that, what is local is only decided locally, and so on. Subsidiarity is a key ingredient of deliberative democracy and Parapolity.

Surplus value In Marxist economics, there is only one true value, labour power, whose use-value is the ability to produce value larger than its own exchange value. For Marx

therefore, the process of production is the process of the production of surplus value.

Absolute Producing more by adding more labour.

Relative Producing more by improving the means of production and/or the speed/skill of labour.

Triple bottom line Planet, people, profit. Usually offered as an alternative to capitalism that is purely based on the profit motive.

Usury Making money from money, rather than from work. One of the three forms of economic rent.

Utopia A vision for a better world. A utopia can be idealistic or pragmatic or a mixture of the two.

Value

Commodity value Mainly meaning value derived from exchange, but also implies that things that would not normally be bought and sold (like nature or friendship) have been reduced to mere transactions, that is, have become commodified.

Use/Utility value Value that something has when directly used, traditionally in contrast to commodity value, but note that commodities also contain some

use-value, otherwise there is no point in buying or selling them.

Exchange value The value of goods when bought and sold.

Extrinsic value A material value (either use-value or commodity value) used in contrast to intrinsic value.

Instrumental value Similar to extrinsic value above, but often used to imply a misuse of something.

Intrinsic value Having value in and of itself. We may say this in regard to a person or with reference to wild nature. It implies that we should not use people and not use at least some aspects of nature only for their instrumental or extrinsic value.

Vision/Mission/Aims From Sociocracy. The vision is how we wish the world to be. The mission is the process of change involved in achieving the vision. The aims are the means by which the changes are brought about.

Wealth

Common Wealth A collective term, often referring to natural resources, and implying that these are shared resources.

Cultural Wealth The wealth (more specifically, the benefit to community and to personal thoughts, imagination and creativity) derived from art, music, literature.

Material Wealth A material production process produces wealth, first and foremost. The wealth might be used directly by the producer or by others. All capital comes from wealth, but not all wealth is capital.

Social Wealth The benefits derived from community and the interactions between us, thus, in the terms used in this book, from the emotional economy, the social commons and re-making.

Wild Nature

Wild Body The term is used in the book as a reminder of our connection with nature. All aspects of self are embodied.

Wild Mind The term is used again as a reminder that knowledge, creativity and imagination are not separate from nature.

Wild Soul The book uses this term to suggest that there is a wider economy that supports the manifest world of nature and which is benevolent towards the life in which we participate.

Bibliography

Joel Kovel — *The Enemy of Nature — The End of Capitalism or the End of the World?*

The author seems to adopt the word commons to denote quite a radical political stance. He argues that Communism failed as a result of not properly understanding the role of money. He gives examples of what he considers to be successful commons, although these are all small-scale. Nonetheless, Kovel is very passionate about his cause and gives a very good explanation of the meanings around capital and money. Note from the title however, the idea that nature and capital are diametrically opposed — a view which, I am suggesting — is unhelpful in trying to resolve our problems.

Hernando de Soto — *The Mystery of Capital*

Described by one commentator as one of the world's smartest 75 books, Hernando de Soto's *The Mystery of Capital* looks at the less obvious manifestation of capital — namely property. Property rights, he explains, developed sometimes over hundreds of years in Western nations and are so embedded in Western culture that we are mostly oblivious to their impact. As such, when Western nations offer help to poorer countries they overlook the crucial role property plays on the efficient workings of capitalism. De Soto does not claim to be left-wing or right-wing in his politics. Nor does he look to defend or attack the concept of common land. The book however is a very compelling argument for what could potentially lift millions out of poverty. This sets the bar very high for authors such as Joel Kovel, above, who advocate a wholesale adoption of shared land and property.

Robert Skidelsky and Edward Skidelsky — *How Much is Enough?*

Father and son authors consider the prediction of early economists that the world would by now have reached a point where all human needs are met and capitalism would therefore be redundant. People should no longer have the need to work more than 15 hours per week and would have time to enjoy 'leisure'. By leisure, the authors mean activities not pursued simply because of the need to make money. This could include work and research pursued simply for their own sake, writing, art, crafts, and much else besides. Therefore, leisure is not simply recreation in their analysis. The authors refer to this definition of leisure as 'the good life' and explore historical precedents for defining what

this means. They come up with — Health, Security, Respect, Personality, Harmony with Nature, Friendship and Leisure itself. The authors include family under friendship and explain that Harmony with Nature is a better and more honest way of addressing environmental issues. Personality also requires a bit of explaining. Essentially it is about being able to put a personal stamp on one's work and also through one's possessions and — importantly for this book — on the places we live.

The authors go on to describe how they hope to encourage people to move from striving towards satisfying ever more — and often artificially induced — wants, to embracing the good life of flourishing and self-realisation. Amongst other suggestions they look at a tax on spending and at Universal Basic Income. They describe these measures as, 'non-coercive paternalism'.

'Starhawk' — *Truth or Dare*

The author emphasises that value is immanent and as such we all have intrinsic value — we do not have to earn or prove our worth. Also, an excellent exploration of power-over dynamics, which the author contrasts with 'power-within' and 'power-with'. The author explores this within the historical context of agrarian societies, gradually turning from matrilineal cultures to patriarchal and becoming increasingly geared towards warfare. Women in particular became marginalised as societies developed in a state of constant preparation for conflict. Much of the exploration of this Starhawk then applies to the behaviour of small groups of various sorts in our current societies. There are some interesting

comments on a possible future society where the problems of power-over dynamics have been addressed and resolved.

Wendell Berry — *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community*

A collection of essays, of which the longest shares the book's title. This essay looks at the difference between private and public morality and argues that the state can only really legislate for public morals and then only in a prohibitive way. Berry argues that 'community' bridges the gap between the private and the public, by endorsing suitable behaviours, particularly with regard to sex and relationships. Berry, as in all of his writings, regards community as a people rooted to a particular physical place. The other essays in the book are largely along similar themes. One makes a particularly interesting critique of Christianity and how it largely fails to address issues of ecology and yet many of the key reasons for adopting an ecological approach to life are there within the Bible. Berry's treatment of place, community, ownership, land use and ecology are of particular relevance to this book.

Theodore Zeldin — *The Hidden Pleasures of Life*

In this, as in his other books, Zeldin is most interested in the interactions between people. For him, learning the dreams, hopes, fears and motivations of our fellow humans is life's ultimate pleasure, sparking our imaginations and creativity. One of the most interesting aspects of the book is how Zeldin seeks to re-

envisage some established aspects of modern culture, seeing them working in new ways to encourage more interactions between strangers, more travel and more education. Of particular note are his ideas for hotels, shops, schools and universities. Zeldin also looks at how insurance companies might do more to promote travel and education, rather than just protecting us from what might go wrong when we plan our own adventures. With extensive historic references, Zeldin shows us that human cultures have come up with numerous interesting ways of organising our lives in the past. As such, he concludes that our current Western ways are not set in stone.

George Monbiot — *Feral*

An excellent look at the idea of re-wilding parts of the Earth — Monbiot looks in particular at Wales and Scotland, along with some other countries in Europe. He advocates minimum human interference after the work of re-establishing previously displaced species has been done — along with possibly the removal of invasive species. Nature is left to do the rest — he refers to such places as 'self-willed'. He contrasts these aims with those of environmentalists in particular, who, in the UK, often seek to preserve a landscape in a state that was never its natural state, but is instead one of a past human intervention. Most notable in the book is the author's interest in how wild places can spark our imagination and renew our interest in life.

Andro Linklater — *Owning the Earth*

An extensive summary of land ownership patterns across the world, showing that the same issues have occurred again and again in different ages and cultures. Linklater is particularly interested in how people have sought fairness and equality in their politics and in the distribution of land and other assets. However, this is always set against allowing the rights of people to seek their own fortune through either hard work, ingenuity or exploitation. Every nation, and the politics of every government, must try to strike a balance in this regard.

Linklater himself, as a younger man, has lived in various communities that have aimed at a more equitable distribution of resources. His experiences he likens to that of some of the early settlers of America, where those who worked hard quickly became concerned that others not so inclined to join in with the labour would nonetheless be rewarded equal shares of the produce. Clearly this has not really ever worked out too well. Fairness needs to be a bit more complex, Linklater suggests, than simple equality.

Chris Carlsson — *Nowtopia*

The book is mostly looking at real-life projects running in the United States. Carlsson nevertheless provides a lot of background about the motivations and aspirations behind such ventures and it’s an entertaining read. His main concern is the scaling up of projects to a size where they might have a serious impact on contemporary culture. Carlsson suggests essentially that larger scale projects must inevitably adopt a bureaucratic structure and

eventually become indistinguishable from the businesses of the surrounding culture.

Murray Bookchin — *The Ecology of Freedom*

One of the main premises of the book is that there was a time when human cultures lived without any kind of hierarchy — hierarchy being the primary enemy for Bookchin. Such a state, he suggests, pre-dated any form of patriarchy, government or political organisations. It is difficult, of course, to verify if such a state of affairs really did ever exist — and, as Bookchin himself points out — when we look at ancient cultures, or today's 'organic cultures', to use Bookchin's term, we do so through a lens of our own cultural prejudice.

Some specific observations of the book are particularly striking and relevant to the discussions in this book. These are described in the sections below.

<u>Pleasure</u>

Bookchin draws a clear parallel between Hobbes and Freud. For Hobbes, of course, a life lived in a state of nature will inevitably be 'nasty, brutish and short'. So, for him, nature is discounted as a source of pleasure. With Freud, pleasure is something from which we are cut off at birth. We must try to wrest pleasure from life through control. Control in the form of human culture and civilisation is the alternative — and, more certain — form of pleasure, via the subjugation of nature. Bookchin argues that, by contrast, *nature is our only source of pleasure* —

albeit pleasures that are somewhat random and opportunistic.

Government/Bureaucracy

Bookchin traces the rise of hierarchy and increasing state control through various historic stages. He identifies 'shame' as operational in 'organic' cultures, which keeps people committed to a community where mutual caring for everyone, whatever their needs, is the norm. Bookchin references contemporary communities where this lifestyle still seems to function well. What is critical, he suggests, is the small size of the community, such that people know each other enough to feel shame if they step out of line. The distinction between shame and guilt, from Bookchin's perspective, is not entirely clear. One might have considered guilt as the feeling we get from actually committing a misdemeanour, whilst shame is the idea that we are flawed in our character. However, it looks like Bookchin takes guilt to mean the concern over moral precepts (ie. a more abstract concern). The increasing abstraction of personal ethics is a factor in what Bookchin considers to be the insidious rise of state control (cf. Foucalt). Bookchin's point is that guilt/shame is now an abstraction of the negative feeling into a general oppression, whereas once these feelings served a purpose, and could be resolved, within small communities.

The 'progression' from an 'organic' culture to our current consumer capitalism has its first step in the suppression of women — in particular, by identifying nature as female and then looking to subdue and dominate her.

Patriotism, in turn, gave rise to more organised control.

Bookchin points out that a bureaucracy may exist separately from any kind of political, religious, or state hierarchy — simply as a means of organising complex processes within a developed culture. Whilst there are vestiges of this in many contemporary cultures, it is not the norm. For the most part, state, monarchy and bureaucracy are inextricably mixed up.

Reason/Truth

In looking at ‘reason’, Bookchin identifies ‘objective reason’ and what might be called ‘executive reason’. (Objective reason seems to be roughly equivalent to an ‘essentialist’ or a ‘transcendental idealist’ view of the world, whilst executive reason is what philosophy would normally call ‘pragmatism’.) He identifies objective reason to include philosophy, morality and transcendent value. He suggests however that all objective reason has been reduced to the executive. (So, in a more normal description, we could say that Bookchin suggests we reduce all knowledge to pragmatism — we only view the world in terms of how it is best explained in order to realise human projects.) The executive reason Bookchin divides into technics and science. Following his concerns about the abstraction of values, this again seems to be a rather contradictory stance.

Justice and Equality

Bookchin's thoughts on these matters take a bit of unravelling. Bookchin points out that no-one is really 'equal'. The concept, for him, is pure abstraction, tied in with the objectification of morals, described above. 'Organic' cultures, Bookchin suggests, respond to people according to their individual needs. Bookchin contrasts this notion of an 'equality' of the 'unequal' with the idea — so often unconsciously accepted — that we are all equal under the law. At first take, the latter does just seem simple and obvious. But taking a closer look at all forms of 'equal' treatment — and laws that try to enforce this — they become somewhat awkward and suspect. By Bookchin's lights it is hierarchy, state control and big government that try to enforce equality in all things because this goes hand in hand with de-basing the individual into a mere statistic — a number — easily replaced by a similar anonymous non-person.

Technology

Government, state and hierarchies are also technologies, according to Bookchin. In looking at threats to the natural ecology of the planet, we often focus on advanced human technology — development — as the culprit. But Bookchin argues that monarchy, state, government and their related bureaucracies are antecedent to the rise of mechanical technology. An ecological community is not achievable unless concerns over the misuse of technology go hand in hand with changes to the mechanisms of government.

Freedom

Bookchin identifies two types of freedom — 'freedom from' and 'freedom to'. Our culture tends to emphasise the former over the latter. As such, the state seeks to 'protect' us from attack on person or property by other people and other nations — even to protect us from nature. When it comes to other freedoms however — the freedom of self-expression, to organise our own affairs, to find pleasure in work — things are a bit more ambivalent. Whilst seeming to promise these freedoms to the individual, the state tends to stamp on any expression of freedom that might undermine its authority.

The Commons

It is interesting to note that references to 'a commons' seems to be a conflicted stance for Bookchin. To describe some aspect of nature as commons is, for him, already implicitly commodifying the natural world. There may be fairer or less fair ways of dealing out what humans take from nature, but in a sense, for Bookchin, it is all exploitation.

Ecological Society

Realising an ecological society is Bookchin's chief aim, and he expresses this mainly in terms of harmony with nature. He sees nature as enlivened, ensouled and enchanted. Whilst he advances various ideas in support of this view of nature, he admits that it is very much contrary to the prevailing scientific, materialist view of dead matter and the development of life just being about increased complexity. Consciousness itself is seen as only an epi-

phenomenon. Bookchin refers to such views as 'scientism'.

Utopia

Along with his view of nature as an enchanted realm, Bookchin also sees a process at work — a long-term aim in evolution, which might be described as self-actualisation. He seems to regard this as self-evident. He looks to James Lovelock's Gaia theory to partly endorse this view. Along with beauty, creativity and imagination — all worthy aims for human culture — Bookchin also suggests that humanity, as the self-conscious aspect of nature, has a duty to help nature towards self-fulfilment. He does not offer any concrete examples of how this may be achieved. Despite his own criticism of abstract moralising, he seems to offer a very abstract notion of what an 'ecological society' might mean.

Bookchin discusses some rather dubious versions of utopia from other thinkers, including Charles Fourier. These are definitely 'libertine' in style and give no indications of where the abundant provisions that these utopias seem to enjoy may come from.

We could ask if Bookchin's views are in any way realisable. As with many utopian views, the problem of scale seems to be evident in his discussions. Even if we accept what he says of 'organic cultures' at face value, these are very small-scale compared to industrialised societies. Could Bookchin's 'organic' culture operate on that kind of scale? There appears to be no attempt to address this point. Whilst an

anarchist, Bookchin does, at least, accept that a certain level of bureaucracy is necessary for the functioning of society. We have touched on this earlier. The trick would be to separate these necessary functions of government from all aspects of control and somehow still achieve a decision-making process that allows everyone a say. The premise of Bookchin's views, along with most far-left thinkers, is that everyone possesses a level of personal autonomy, and, given the opportunity, would take sensible responsibility for governing their own lives. Communities would be peaceful, active, social and creative. All worthy aims, but as we have explored in the book, such a situation is not a given, straight from a point where current government arrangements are dismantled. At the very least, there would have to be some kind of peaceful transition to the free society that Bookchin envisages.

Bookchin's contempt for hierarchy may itself be questioned. For one thing, he sets great store by looking at the process of evolution in nature, and sees this a drive towards more complex and more 'self-actualised' being. But, of course, such a view of nature itself implies a hierarchy. If hierarchy is innate in nature, then why would we not also wish to emulate this aspect of nature, since we are being encouraged to emulate nature in other ways? Communities that attempt what Bookchin proposes — in terms of being free of hierarchy — often run into the problem of developing a 'covert' hierarchy instead. Perhaps this is just something intrinsic to human nature — there will always be the leaders and the led. Or perhaps — as, no doubt, Bookchin would have suggested — this is just a

carry-over from millennia of dominance and could fade away as society learns new ways. (Bookchin unfortunately refers to people becoming 'empowered', which partly speaks against his own ethos — but we can assume he would prefer the 'power-with' and power-to' relations that I have explored in the book.) To be fair though, in other works Bookchin acknowledges the need for hierarchy in governance systems in order to realise a good society — what he calls confederalism.

The slight contradiction in Bookchin's position is that he eschews regulative values (his contrast of ethics over morals — shame over guilt) but nonetheless seems to advocate the adoption of other regulative values based on a particular view of nature. (What he describes as an ontological view — related to meaning, being and becoming.) One suspects Bookchin would not have regarded this as a contradiction as his value system would all be based on an experience of nature — whether person to person or people to the wider ecology. But his reading of nature suggests otherwise — it suggests the presence of some transcendent value that drives nature towards trying to fulfil self-realisation. It would have been good for Bookchin to have explained how he had arrived at this position.

Despite these criticisms, Bookchin's work raises many significant issues and remains enormously relevant.

Fawzi Ibrahim — *Capitalism Versus Planet Earth*

Ibrahim provides a very clear explanation of the workings of capitalism. It is especially interesting to see how he integrates the financial economy into his explanation of how economics works. Ibrahim, also — in my view, correctly — criticises the adoption of 'natural capital' by the so-called ecological economists. Herman Daly and Jonathan Porritt come in for especial criticism. Ibrahim points out the flaws in those, like Daly and Porritt, who advocate some kind of adapted capitalism to answer environmental problems.

Regarding natural resources as commodities does not change the system. Setting costs against 'externalities', both positive and negative, just adds to the cost of production and these costs ultimately get passed to the consumer. (Ibrahim sees this as a bad outcome, but does not really suggest ways to address the inequality such a situation creates — poorer people being more vulnerable to the price increases than the rich. Rather, he sees this as just an argument for the overthrow of capitalism.) He follows a similar argument for carbon taxes. There is only a passing reference to fee and dividend, which would seem to not face the same issues of penalising the poor, as described above.

Capital is in crisis, according to Ibrahim, because the rate of profit inevitably falls as capital accumulates. There must be continuous growth in order to maintain the rate of profit. He sees no way out of this. So governments become locked into trying to sustain capitalism through such measures as austerity, quantitative easing (printing money) and so on

— all of which are, in his view, doomed to ultimately fail. His solution is that growth can only stop if there is no profit; in other words, production with no exchange value — so things have only utility value. Ibrahim does not elaborate too much about what society might be like if such a policy were implemented, except to say that society would be organised around our shared needs for utilities. Ibrahim holds up the UK's National Health Service as an example of what he has in mind. The NHS obviously has an 'external' aim of care-giving and service. In a similar way, Ibrahim seems to be implying that care for the environment would be the concern that would shape how labour and production would be organised in a post-capitalist world. Along with this, he cites certain values that would guide society in the implementation of this project — professionalism and pride in our work as the chief motives — presumably replacing profit.

Ibrahim is rather mocking of the idea that businesses might plough profits back into their work, by way of co-operatives, profit-sharing and so on, so they could sustain themselves without growth. It would need a change in human nature to achieve this. However, it has to be said that the changes Ibrahim is seeking would seem to require an equally radical change in human nature in order to bring them about.

Jason Brennan — *Against Democracy*

Brennan is indeed against all forms of democracy, as the title suggests. Part of the reason is, he suggests, most people do not have either the interest or the capacity to make the

kinds of the decisions needed in political debate. As such, politics should be left to experts — so he is proposing some kind of meritocracy — although the book does not elaborate too much on this. Brennan reserves particular scorn for the types of deliberative democracy that I have been promoting in this book.

One of Brennan's main points is that allowing ordinary people to vote is like allowing anyone to drive, no matter their competence, or past record of failing or dangerous behaviour and accidents. But I would suggest that the claim people should not have an absolute right to vote because a bad decision may harm others is spurious. It is not the same as not being allowed to drive, because of incompetence or danger. The right to express an opinion does not mean that this opinion will become policy (whilst bad drivers are, by contrast, directly responsible for the harm they cause). Brennan equates 'democracy' generally with merely the right to vote. Most of his arguments therefore are meaningful only with regard to representative democracy, not the systems that involve greater participation, such as Parapolity, discussed in this book. However, as noted above, he does make criticisms of deliberative democracy as well, although these are based on the criticism that others have brought to the debate, rather than his own research. We might compare these criticisms with James Fishkin's, *When the People Speak* — someone who has genuine experience and direct evidence for the effectiveness of deliberative democracy and the competence of ordinary people, when given the opportunity to consider issues with due care and attention.

Having said all that though, it is always good to listen carefully to the voice of dissent. So, I include Brennan's work here to give an opportunity to consider the arguments that oppose deliberative democracy and Parapolity.

Charles Eisenstein — *Sacred Economics*

Eisenstein provides an excellent review of what is becoming the widely accepted view of all that is now regarded as commons. This includes land, air and ocean, but also the intellectual commons, imagination, creativity and even time. Eisenstein argues that a means of exchange of some sort is fundamental to human life. To dismiss economics therefore as somehow irrelevant to 'higher' questions of spirituality and philosophy is mistaken, in his view. The title of the book therefore confirms the author's belief that the way we exchange and trade with each other is worthy of our highest ideals and respect.

A key element of the book is the author's belief that the capitalist system is on the brink of collapse. As such, there is a certain urgency to the book's message. Sooner or later, Eisenstein argues, circumstances will force change upon us. The changes we might make now are preparations for a future when free-market economics have ceased to function.

Eisenstein's chief solution to this is the establishment of a 'gift economy'. He provides some historic examples of such a system. Like many with a utopian disposition, the past is somewhat idealised by Eisenstein. A 21st century interpretation of what went on (or goes on) in societies that practice gift exchange is not

necessarily offering a full understanding — let alone being able to apply that lifestyle to modern industrialised and computerised societies. The examples given of modern gift exchange seem very small-scale compared to the massive systemic change that would be entailed in the collapse of capitalism. Eisenstein is aware of this, and a consistent theme throughout his work is the notion of individuals changing their viewpoint to embrace the view of how the world might function. A momentum can be built up — he hopes — as people change their view of the world and the influence of these changes begins to spread and grow.

Eisenstein points out, quite reasonably, that what constitutes money and the means of exchange and store of value is purely a social construction arrived at by consensus. This observation leads to one of the strongest features of the book — the linking of money to some of the assets that are regarded as commons — in particular, physical commons. Eisenstein's arguments for this are difficult to follow, but at least the concept seems to offer some hope of protecting nature by creating strong links between the commons and our means of exchange.

Eisenstein argues that our economy functions now by converting the commons into commodity and into money. In order to achieve ecological balance we must reverse this trend — hence linking money to the preservation and flourishing of the commons.

Amongst other ideas in the book, Eisenstein suggests negative interest on capital (to

encourage investment), changes to taxation (taxing capital and land and not labour), and Universal Basic Income.

We would probably place Eisenstein 'left of centre', although he appears to believe in private property. *Sacred Economics* does not really address issues around governance, but we could nonetheless regard the world view it promotes as utopian. Along with other forms of utopianism therefore, we might ask the degree to which people are able to change (or have the potential already within them to live differently). Eisenstein seems to think that the end of capitalism that he envisages will force change upon us. However, even without the future unfolding with the demise of capitalism, there is a lot here to encourage changes in the right direction. Eisenstein's subsequent book — *The Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible* — follows up on these themes.

Community, for Eisenstein, is only forged when we have a genuine need for one another. Although it seems that all of our needs can be met through money, in fact, he argues, we long for things that money cannot buy. It is through community that such things can be regained. We may quell a bit at some of the assumptions of what constitute a beautiful life for Eisenstein, but it is difficult to argue with the notion that our use of money and materialism need to be brought back into the realm of the sacred and the beautiful.

Meanwhile, people may seem greedy, selfish and uncaring, but it is scarcity (brought about by interest charged on money and by economic

rents) that causes this mindset. Changing the way we use money — changing society from one premised on scarcity to one premised on abundance — will, Eisenstein believes, lead to a change in our mindset and initiate a gift economy.

Likewise, we may question the exact mechanism by which a gift economy might work on a large-scale, but still appreciate the notion that a gift economy meets all that is best in us. Eisenstein offers us a lot of hope. He believes we are by nature generous and want to give the best of ourselves. So whilst we might struggle to see now how complex industrial society can function as a gift economy, nonetheless, for Eisenstein there is hope that ways would be found for this to happen.

Russell Brand — *Revolution*

This book comes from a different place than other left-leaning utopian texts. Brand refers back to the 1% — 99% split in society that was a significant theme of the Occupy movement. Also, he often cites the statistic that the 85 richest people in the world own as much wealth as the poorer half of the world's population — more than 3.5 billion people.

The book is perhaps best known for Brand's insistence that voting is no use. In his view, professional politicians are all within the thrall of big business. As such, a vote for one is no better than a vote for any of the others. In fact, a vote is no use at all as there is no genuine democracy. Hence, Brand suggests, only revolution will suffice — there is no possibility of

compromise with politics or accommodation with consumer capitalism.

Brand's own troubled past leads him to reject materialism as a means to happiness, and indeed, to reject many other paths to superficial pleasure. There is instead a strong spiritual element to the book. The specific type of spirituality or religion seems less important to Brand than just the recognition that our predicament is a spiritual crisis and needs spiritual solutions in order to be properly addressed. What seems to matter most to Brand is an honest seeking and an openness to mystery beyond ourselves.

Brand also advocates secret acts of kindness to others — as part of a transformation of consciousness. He does not seem to be under any illusions about the potential badness and brokenness of human beings. Spirituality and kindness are, for him, essential antidotes to these tendencies.

The revolution Brand is advocating is therefore a peaceful one and he tells us that it also must not be boring! He does not however offer us too many pointers towards the kind of utopia that might fulfil these criteria. Echoing the words of the 1968 Paris uprising, he reminds us simply that a new world is possible. It is up to all of us to define what that new world might be.

As a comedian, Brand often veers off on an anecdotal story, sometimes only vaguely related to the subject matter of the text. Some may find this a distraction, but Brand is a likeable character and his excursions into zany humour

add some entertainment to what might otherwise be quite a heavy text.

David Deutsch — *The Beginning of Infinity*

I've included this book because, whilst it is primarily a scientific work, it epitomises what I have described as the Cornucopian outlook in this book. As the title suggests, and like all Cornucopians, Deutsch is optimistic for the future. And his optimism is based on technology. There will always be problems, he warns, but technology will solve them.

A particularly striking argument in the book concerns our survival in the natural world. Deutsch suggests that on a winter's night in his home town of Oxford, England, he would struggle to survive out of doors. The biosphere, he suggests, has never supported people. Millennia of hunter-gatherers are therefore dismissed out of hand. Deutsch goes on to tell us that even with 'empty' space, through technology, humans would be able to put together all that we need to survive. As such, there seems no special place reserved where life might be better or worse for people, it is all down to technology. It is an odd argument — dismissing any contribution from the Earth for our sustenance and also suggesting that searching elsewhere within the solar system or the galaxy for resources may be a waste of time. Deutsch seems to be making an extreme case (we could make everything out of nothing) in order to prove a point. Perhaps the point Deutsch is trying to make is that we will always find ways to survive and to thrive. But the upshot of this view is that all efforts at

conserving resources, protecting the environment and cherishing the natural world are pointless. Soon, technology will make fears over climate catastrophe irrelevant, because we are just so clever.

The science is interesting, but the conclusions Deutsch comes to about our future are disturbing. This is a particular brand of science that could lead to thinking that technology could in fact be a curse rather than a blessing. We might usefully contrast David Deutsch with Bill Nye ('The Science Guy'). With commitment, humour and optimism, Nye takes a 'good-housekeeping' view of our planet and its resources. We have to look after this precious Earth, Nye tells us, because right now it is all we've got. Without the biosphere, we are all dead.

Steven Pinker — *The Blank Slate*

Psychologist Steven Pinker looks at three terms that remain as overt or covert influences in our science and culture. Along with the blank slate of the title, he also considers the 'noble savage', and the 'ghost in the machine'.

The term, 'blank slate' is understood to mean the idea that there is no innate human behaviour — no 'human nature'. The way we behave in all aspects of our lives is socially constructed rather than hard-wired into our genetic makeup and brain structure. This idea impacts on a broad range of issues, from perception through gender and child-raising to hierarchy and aggression. Pinker disagrees with the blank slate hypothesis and counters it with

considerable back-up from research. Whilst his arguments are on the materialist side of science, they are presented in great depth and with considerable insight.

Aggression is the link to the second term considered — the noble savage idea that human nature, in a 'primitive' or 'primal' state is essentially peace-loving and tolerant. The evidence presented by Pinker would suggest just the opposite. This in turn has considerable relevance to utopian and some feminist thinking, where the purity and harmony of indigenous cultures ('organic' cultures — to use Murray Bookchin's term) is critical to the argument.

The ghost in the machine (Arthur Koestler's phrase) relates especially to Pinker's materialist stance. The 'ghost' to which the phrase refers suggests there is some force that animates life over and above the purely physical realm. The idea has its roots way back in human thought, and was most strongly articulated in Western philosophy by René Descartes. Pinker sets up a strong case for rejecting the idea.

All of the problems that those who support one or more of the three ideas considered by the book are dealt with expertly by Pinker. For instance, the loss of free will implied by materialism (ie. no ghost), the related idea that we cannot change if we are innately aggressive as a species and the prospects of co-operation at national and international level if we are not noble savages and we are hard-wired to relate only in small groups. (We might note here that the noble savage contradicts the bank slate, as it suggests we are innately harmonious and peaceful.) Pinker discusses all of these issues

and shows quite convincingly that the abandonment of the three ideas that are the book's subject by no means suggests the abandonment of human value — in fact, often human value is shown to be enhanced.

Even accepting a purely material basis for life and consciousness, this does not mean the abandonment of human value. With each level of complexity, emergent properties appear that are rightly studied as separate disciplines. Psychology, for instance, is not merely reduced to biology and physics.

Jonathan Porritt — *Capitalism as if the World Matters*

Manfred Max-Neef defines human needs as: Subsistence, protection, understanding, participation, creative expression, identity, freedom and idleness. Porritt examines many such alternative versions of what constitutes a 'good life', or, human fulfilment, and asks whether they can really be delivered by the capitalist system whilst still achieving ecological sustainability.

Porritt explains that, in his view, the understanding of 'capital' is just land, machines and money. He expands the meaning of capital to include five types: natural capital, human capital, social capital, manufactured capital and financial capital. He further splits natural capital into resources, sinks and services (sometimes known as environmental services).

Economists generally think of capital resources as being interchangeable (fungible). Porritt

explains that this is not the case. Natural capital generally cannot be replaced by any of the other forms.

Porritt looks in detail at the various aspects of society that must respond to our current ecological issues if we are to achieve the balanced yet substantial changes needed to achieve sustainability. His conclusion is that capitalism must continue in some form — with careful attention given to integrating the 'five capitals' described above — and that this capitalism must include for growth. By growth, he certainly still means economic growth as it is currently understood.

Porritt then moves on to look at what society might be like if we were actually to achieve the kind of balanced, ecologically-sustainable growth that he envisions. He does this under the headings: interdependence, empathy, equity, personal responsibility and intergenerational justice.

Sustainable development differs from environmentalism in that it looks to the well-being of humans (ie. to all of our needs) as well as the needs of the planet. Sustainable development is development towards a state of sustainability. It is not the same as the rather ambiguous phrase — sustainable growth — which might just mean that it is the economic growth rather than natural capital that is being sustained. These are key distinctions to be making, although they are difficult ones. In a way, Porritt is trying to keep all sides happy, but perhaps it ends up being a bit of a compromise — it depends on just how seriously the

proposals are taken and how much they may be implemented. However, it is at least a fairly realistic attempt at a solution and has a lot to commend it and a lot that is of value to our ongoing search for ecological balance.

Martin Adams — *Land*

Going back to first principles, Adams looks at how wealth is created and shows how the value and use of land has been consistently marginalised and misunderstood.

Adams explains that land, labour and capital were traditionally considered as the three means of creating economic wealth. In this analysis, 'land' refers to all types of 'natural capital', such as water, air, soil, forests and so on.

He goes on to explain that economic wealth means goods and services that have exchange value. He notes that 'natural capital' — land, air, water, etc. — is not economic wealth because it is not created by people. Nor, for him, is money, since it is only a means of exchange and not something that has value in itself.

People make a living by either providing goods and services through their labour or by extracting 'economic rent' from what others have provided (or directly from natural capital — from land).

The land itself derives its value from its location. This might be in terms of the natural capital it has on or around it or from the work that others have done in terms of buildings, infrastructure, etc. This is referred to as 'the law of rent'.

Since every piece of land is unique, buying a piece of land is, in effect, entering into an ‘entry monopoly’, as it prevents others from enjoying the benefits that the land offers.

Adams argues that because land purchase and use is always in the situation of creating a monopoly, then there is not really such a thing as a free market. Capitalism, he argues, has never really been practised.

Adams seems to argue that land is not capital. Only human-produced goods — buildings, machinery and tools — should be treated as capital.

Adams goes on to make a crucial point — land values belong to the communities that have created them, ie. land value is socially generated. Building on a piece of land makes no difference to the piece of land itself, but it may indirectly affect the value of other land nearby (because of the improvements to the neighbourhood that the building may create).

Communities benefit from people’s work — which adds to the capital assets of a location — but this wealth is appropriated by those who own land. The land value rises as a result of the improvements in society, but it is private owners who benefit from this, not society at large. Adams implies that this is an even greater injustice than the bourgeoisie owning the means of production and thereby profiting from the labour of others.

Will Storr — *The Age of the Selfie*

Storr's book makes an interesting follow-on to Steven Pinker's *The Blank Slate*. Storr looks at what we are innately as human beings — what is written into our genes and hard-wired into our brains. But he then goes on to explore the various cultural influences that affect us.

He starts by looking at the increase in suicide, self-harm and eating disorders. Storr sees these phenomena as linked to the pressure of social perfectionism, where culture's influence on individuals impose impossible burdens of living up to often conflicting ideals.

Storr goes on to trace the emergence of the idea of the individual — starting with our pre-history tribal selves and then exploring ancient Greece, Christianity, industry, science and psychology. He looks finally at our modern Western sense of the self. All the while, he also explores the cultural backgrounds that shape an individual's sense of who they are and what they feel they need to be like.

Storr emphasises the our lives are stories and are influenced in turn by the stories we share in our culture. From our ancient past, the contrast of selfish with selfless behaviour is one of our strongest influences and this helps to shape all our stories.

From our tribal past, all humans have a desire to 'get along and get ahead'. Cultural differences emerged later, and Storr contrasts Westerners' emphasis on freedom and autonomy with Eastern culture's greater emphasis on harmony and interconnectedness.

Christianity — Storr suggests — may at first seem like a complete change in direction from the Greeks' emphasis on freedom and autonomy. However, he points out that for many centuries of the religion's history, the way for individuals to 'get along and get ahead' would be to practice subservience to their rulers and masters. He also points out that there remains an element of selfish endeavour as the christian labours on Earth for a reward in heaven.
Storr also points out that Christianity is concerned with 'orthodoxy', in other words, with correct thinking, rather than merely correct action. From this point on it is the internal landscape of the mind that has precedence in how we shape our culture and how culture shapes us.

Storr considers Freudian psychology as very much an extension of the christian message. For Freud, we are morally corrupt and in need of a 'cure', albeit that it is our minds that need the cure rather than our immortal souls.

The next big change came with the industrial revolution. Western culture, at this point, swaps from seeing our inner being as essentially bad to being essentially good. It is only lack of education, or faith or the results of bad experiences that prevents us from being perfect as individuals. God, in essence, is now inside our heads. Storr however argues that this is a serious error. For him, there is no soul or authentic self — no central command. Not only do we rationalise our actions to ourselves, we have multiple stories about who we are in any given context.

Storr recognises that changing the self is only possible up to a point — through self-discipline. Whilst boosting self-esteem is good for some people, it can lead to narcissism and a sense of entitlement. We should realise, he suggests, that we are largely products of our genes and the chance experiences of our early childhood. As such, we should not beat ourselves up about not being perfect. If anything, self-acceptance — and therefore an acceptance of others — is the order of the day.

Josh Ryan-Collins, Toby Lloyd and Laurie Macfarlane — *Rethinking the Economics of Land and Housing*

In this detailed study, the authors look at land ownership and then track the changes to the UK economy that have taken place as a result of both economic and political decisions. They start with a review of land ownership and go on to explain that 'land' — as one of the three ingredients of classical economics — 'land, labour and capital' — is unique. It cannot be created and over time its value tends to appreciate. The appreciation of land value occurs because land becomes relatively more scarce in relation to human population and because of developments going on around particular pieces of land, ie. the benefits from its location. The authors go on to explain how more modern economics tends to conflate land with capital and explain the reasons for this as well as some of the consequences.

The authors look at economists such as Henry George and David Ricardo, who regarded the

extraction of 'economic rent' from land as unfair. They look at ideas for a land value tax, especially as promoted by George. By contrast, other economists — Marx, in particular — were more concerned with the extraction of economic rent through labour — that is, through the ownership of the means of production. As such, land value tax fell out of favour as a socialist idea. Of particular interest is the way bank credit tends to push up land prices and also takes lending away from borrowing that is not financing property.

The book also introduces the idea of 'natural wealth' as opposed to describing both physical space and natural resources as just 'land'. This is an important distinction that I have picked up in the book.

Apart from a land value tax, the authors provide a number of other ideas for changing our relations to land and property — mainly relevant to the UK economy — but also, more generally.

Michael Albert — *Practical Utopia*

A standard left-wing text, mainly of interest because the author — in contrast to mainstream Marxist thought — recognises a third class of people between the workers and the bourgeoisie, which he calls the co-ordinator class. Albert includes in this class, doctors, lawyers, economists, accountants and engineers.

Albert examines society in terms of 'polity', 'economy', kinship' and 'culture'. To summarise his understanding of these, we might say that polity is the governance of society, economy is

its financial relations and its production and consumption, kinship is the gender identities and sexual preferences of individuals along with our personal relationships with others, and culture is a society's shared values. Albert asserts that his views on polity, kinship and culture are largely as promoted by feminism, anarchism and communalism.

Where Albert differs from others, he claims, is in his understanding of the economy. The viewpoint taken by Albert is anti-capitalist, but modified to take account of his three classes instead of just two. He sees attempts at getting rid of owners as actually elevating the co-ordinator class. He wants classlessness instead. In particular, the brain surgeon might spend some time working as a cleaner. This example, in particular, may be controversial and we may ask if it is indeed possible or desirable.

Albert identifies seven values he thinks our society should promote — all of which are already present to a degree. These are: solidarity, diversity, justice, self-management, stewardship (towards nature), internationalism and participation. He goes on to apply the seven values to each of the four spheres of polity, economy, kinship and culture.

He begins with the economy, and in applying the values, he defines what he describes as a 'Parecon' — Participatory Economics.

Albert's description of the workings of Parecon is especially interesting with regard to how people are rewarded for work. In an example, he contrasts someone working in a coal mine with

someone who becomes a surgeon. In Parecon, the miner may earn as much, or more, than the surgeon. One might think that therefore everyone would opt for the higher-paid, if laborious, job. But if asked (as Albert has done with many audiences) everyone would still prefer to be the surgeon. (Is this perhaps because of status? Albert does not discuss this.)

Under Parecon however, work would be shared out so as to remove the dominance of the owning and co-ordinating classes. So, as we saw earlier, a surgeon would spend some time cleaning and emptying bed-pans, nurses would do some surgery, cleaners would do some nursing, and so on.

Albert goes on to discuss market allocation versus central planning. A company that operated on Parecon values would inevitably fail in a free market. Central planning however, Albert suggests, just creates another type of co-ordinator class, who would hold an increasing authority over distribution. So, by contrast, Albert suggests ‘participatory planning’.

In looking at polity, and in a similar vein to Parecon, Albert promotes a Parapolity — Participatory Politics. Borrowing from Stephen Shalom, he advocates ‘nested councils’ — levels of participatory governance that include all adult members of a society at base level. Each level would have in the region of 25 to 50 members, with each council level sending a representative to the next level up until the highest level governs the whole nation.

Albert looks briefly at feminism (for him, the expression of his kinship sphere and 'intercommunalism' — the culture sphere). In examining each sphere, he applies his participatory value for the most part, along with self-management, solidarity, diversity and justice. Albert deals with the remaining value of stewardship through what he calls 'Parecology', and also deals separately with internationalism. As he explains, internationalism is really just all the other values writ large.

Although Albert believes in classlessness, he does not say much about the abolition of ownership. It is just assumed in the book that shared ownership of the means of production will be achieved. Also, despite Albert's example of a surgeon emptying bed-pans, it is difficult to see his co-ordinator class wholesale being willing or able to give up their roles in society. People surely look to be in such professions partly for status reasons. We may hope that such professionals will do much to understand and share in the tasks of those 'below' them in their workplaces, but this stops short of the kind of classlessness Albert seems to be advocating. Perhaps it is human nature to always have power structures and hierarchies. Maybe it is kindness within each of our roles that is important rather than the abolition of all structures of power.

Albert does not rule out revolution as a means to social change — indeed he seems to favour it. The problem with revolution is that those who lead it are in grave danger of just usurping the power of the current elite with their own power. Albert has addressed this to a point with his

introduction of the third, co-ordinator, class, but this does not see the problem solved. The danger of still having an elite class — the revolutionaries — still remains and contradicts the aim of achieving classlessness. Also, Albert's views suggest that current elites are irredeemable. This view is itself a contradiction of the values he might hope to espouse — that everyone is open to change and personal growth.

Despite these criticisms, Albert's book, along with his other works, are of particular resonance. He tackles the problems of society head-on and in depth.

John Holloway — *Change the World without Taking Power*

This is certainly a difficult book. The promising title belies a rather troubling viewpoint. Holloway starts with a scream! He suggests it is horror and anger at the way the world is that should be our starting point. It is dissonance and negativity. He goes so far as to say that we do not even have a personal identity in this negative state.

Holloway goes on to discuss the means by which change may be brought about. He summarises the various viewpoints as being either reform, revolution or anarchism. Holloway points out that both reform and revolution are about change via state power — either gradual or sudden. The state, according to Holloway, is just one part of the web of social relations in a society and the state's part is mainly to do with work. Because, Holloway argues, the state organises work along capitalist lines, social

change via the state is inevitably frustrated. Holloway also points out that the social relations in which the state is embedded is an international web (because of the nature of capitalism). Therefore, to seek power to be taken from the state in order to serve the interests of the working class within a nation is a mistaken aim. It does not recognise the true scope and significance of the state's interaction with capital.

Holloway argues that the quest for state power therefore favours nationalism and the two are often blended in the struggle to replace the nation state. The struggle itself, he suggests, fails before it even begins. In fetishising state power, all the other social relations are discounted. The struggle for state power results in the reformers or revolutionaries adopting the same power relations. What the scream was originally about — the abuse of power — is therefore bought into wholesale by those who are allegedly trying to sort the problem. Holloway is instead suggesting revolution by means of dissolving power relations. He refers to anti-power.

Holloway states plainly that we 'do not know how to change the world without taking power'. He returns to the scream and explains that it is a scream of anger but also of hope — active hope. It is not a scream of despair or cynicism. The active hope is pointing us towards doing. However, for Holloway, the doing is a negative, frustrated doing — it even 'negates the negation of itself'. The doing then is changing the world by negating that which exists. (Holloway contrasts this with the Biblical 'in the beginning

was the word…'. For Holloway, this is wrong. 'In the beginning was the scream.')

For all that this may seem very negative so far, it seems that the 'negative doing' that Holloway has in mind nevertheless includes things that we might be forgiven for considering as positives — including pleasure and creativity. Holloway also includes laziness as an 'active assertion of an alternative practice' in relation to capitalism. He also regards this negative doing as 'ecstatic', creating the world in the negation of what the world already is — it is not creating the same material.

Holloway emphasises our subjectivity and that all doing is social (even for doing largely done alone). Power is related to doing. Doing, he suggests, is 'power-to'. Power-to becomes 'power-over' however, when someone forces another to do on their behalf (to 'break the social flow of doing', in Holloway's words) and therefore denies that person's subjectivity. Holloway relates this to the worker who is denied the means of production.

Holloway suggests that capitalism, by its emphasis on 'property', (this being something that has been done in the past — according to Holloway) makes a greater separation of subject and object. He suggests that our subjectivity is compromised by capitalism's persistent objectification of our 'doing' — our creativity.

The state takes on the role — on behalf of capitalism — of protecting property, and thereby indirectly contributes to the subjugation of people. Holloway nevertheless maintains that

the conversion of power-to to power-over happens at the 'doing' stage (when creativity is captured and we are deprived of sharing in the means of production). It is not the state, or polities, that initiates power-over, nor are they responsible for it directly.

As well as changing the power relations, Holloway maintains that capitalism also results in 'breaking the flow of doing', and therefore results in our separation from each other. We lose our 'we-ness' and become objectivised subjects. Capitalism reverses the normal understanding of subject and object. There is a subjectivisation of objects (money, capital) and an objectification of subjects. Doing becomes labour (for those who still do — the workers) and it is an alienating, passive and suffering level of doing. Holloway suggests that the products of such a society become commodity as a result. This, he says, alienates the capitalists as well as the workers.

The system nevertheless still relies on our doing. In this Holloway sees hope. He says, 'that which exists depends for its existence on that which exists only in the form of its denial', so he is saying that capitalism can only exist because there is an underlying existence of social doing that is there in opposition to the kind of doing that produces commodity, but which is unacknowledged. Struggle therefore is not to counter power-over with some other kind of power. It is instead to undermine power-over by the re-assertion of power-to. In other words, it is by regaining our subjectivity and by the social flow of our doing. Holloway suggests that the re-assertion of the social flow of doing — of

power-to — can only happen as anti-power. We cannot therefore 'cultivate our own garden' along side power-over structures. It is only through the struggle of anti-power against power-over that hope exists. Subjectivity can likewise only exist in antagonism to its own objectification. The social sciences, according to Holloway, merely reproduce power-over because they fail to understand (or even acknowledge) anti-power. They also fail by not recognising money's key role (thereby value, commodity, objectification). Power-over can only exist as transformed power-to — capitalism can only exist because of labour.

Holloway notes that Marxist thought today tends to ignore Marx's own description of fetishisation. It is the production of commodities that alienates the worker from the product of labour and hence the fetishisation of the object. This process is continued in the valuing of commodities (exchange value, use-value) and their fungability into money and capital.

Holloway goes on to explore some of the implications of all this, and in particular, that it is an assumed state of affairs for most of us — taken as just a given — and thereby frustrating any possibility of revolution. Also, there is an assumption that we are all discrete individuals, involved only in objective transactions with the world and with others. This is even celebrated by our society — the cult of the individual and the deterioration into narcissism and arrogant entitlement. Community, by contrast, would be a 'social flow of doing', according to Holloway. A community cannot be just a collection of individuals.

Holloway points out that scientific thought, and academic thought generally, is always in the third person. There are thoughts about 'something', with the observer detached — objectified. Holloway suggests that this is the other side of power-over. There is no 'we' present in this engagement, no room for hopes or possibilities — all of the things that make us genuine subjects — persons.

The key point here is that even when trying to introduce a moral element to an argument — trying to speak about what 'ought' to be — we are confronted by the objective truth of what already is, and this truth always takes precedence. Truth is either formal logical consistency (science, mathematics) or it is just a personal opinion. The two are vastly separated and the logical truth always takes precedence. We are subverted by this process, even while hardly being aware that it is happening.

Holloway seems to be saying that capitalism identifies the subject, but, for him, it is only through negation — 'not x' — that we have identity. This is a tricky point, but key to understanding what follows.

The question of identity brings Holloway to a dilemma. How can there be a revolution in a world that is so de-humanised? He offers three possible answers. One is to give up hope and focus on minor changes. The second is to focus on the antagonism between the owners of capital and the working class (the typical solution), which Holloway has already rejected

by pointing out that power relations start much earlier than this antagonism, right back at the separation of power-over and power-to. The third — Holloway's solution — is to find hope in non-identity. By this Holloway seems to mean any practice that asserts human dignity through the negation of the identity that is forced on us by capitalism.
Holloway goes on to explain that if fetishisation is accepted as a given — that came in with capitalism and could only go out with the destruction of capitalism — then we would have to assume that some people — an intellectual or political elite — could step outside the system. They would thereby avoid false consciousness and be able to guide the masses to emancipation. Holloway's meaning here is not too clear. It seems that this point is partly hopeful (it is possible to see beyond false consciousness) but also that he rejects the notion that only an elite could lead the masses to freedom.

Holloway cites Lukacs and notes that, whilst the bourgeoisie are unaware of the reified nature of their existence (the fetishisation engineered by capitalism) the proletariat could, in some measure, recognise it. By being forced to sell their labour as a commodity, the proletarian may recognise the split within themselves, between objectivity and subjectivity. Whist their everyday work is commodification, the person maintains a subjectivity by their inner self or soul.

Holloway looks at how the problem of recognition may be solved. Lukacs suggests by the 'Party' (ie. a political elite). Adorno and

Horkheimar suggest via privileged individuals (an intellectual elite) who recognise the situation. Meanwhile Marcuse suggests that outsiders and outcasts may solve the situation. These individuals may be unconscious of their rebellion but nevertheless undermine the capitalist system by their rejection of it and of its values. None of these solutions however seem to be suited to Holloway. He says we must look beyond these classic authors for a solution to fetishisation.

What seems critical to Holloway is that capitalism's forms (value, money, commodity, state) are not established forms that endure, but rather they are processes. (Fetishism is also therefore a process — fetishisation.) This seems to Holloway to be the reason why there can be an ongoing antagonism within all of us towards the forms of capitalism. If the system of value, money, commodity and state seemed as if it had always existed and was just taken as an established fact, then we would not be aware enough to challenge it. Because, however, these things are processes — open to change — then challenge is possible.

Holloway points out that capital itself is in a ceaseless struggle to control and maintain its existence. He rejects the idea that we struggle against capitalism from below. Rather, because capital must struggle to exist, its position is fragile. As such, he argues, revolution is possible.

Holloway notes that in religion we create an external god out of our own estrangement. Likewise, he suggests, we create capital. We

cannot stand outside what we have made. To criticise it is at once to criticise ourselves. For Holloway though, this realisation is a strength and not a weakness.

Holloway continues by pointing out that Marx considered science in a negative sense of challenging fetishisation. Post-Marx though, science is regarded in a positive light. The objectification of nature through science is actively celebrated.

Marx asked how fetishisation can be negated. (This was his scientific stance.) Engels, by contrast, sees the history of social relations as scientific (in the sense that social relations can be studied objectively). Holloway looks at the consequences. Some saw this to mean that the collapse of capitalism was inevitable, others felt that revolution was still necessary, or reform. Holloway though, points out that it requires intelligence to interpret history and to therefore raise the consciousness of the working class so that they become aware of the need for emancipation.

For Holloway then, 'scientific' Marxism has been a mistake. True scientific Marxism would be the criticism of fetishisation, therefore this must be our stance, he argues.

Holloway speaks about definitions of class and makes clear that — just as value, money, commodity and state are processes — so too is classification. To define people as a particular class is already to accept the fetishisation of the capitalist system. Thus, the 'critical subject'

(that's all of us) is always in a state of antagonism by resisting classification.

Holloway goes on to consider if the struggles of the working class actually determines the development of capitalism, rather than the other way around, as is usually the theory. He notes however that this reversal would put forward working class emancipation as a very positive proposal. This is not favoured by Holloway. He insists that, even with class development leading rather than being led by capitalism, it is nonetheless something negative. It must stand against identity. Only by refusing to be identified and categorised is there hope of a revolution without taking power.

Holloway goes on to explain that it is freedom that allows for the domination of anti-power over power — the worker over capital. The worker is free to sell labour as he or she wishes, but, crucially, also free to withhold labour. It is this potential for insubordination that seems to be the important element to Holloway.

Ultimately, debt is the crisis of capital. Holloway (writing in 1999) often refers to a 'credit crunch'. 'Social self-determination' is ultimately Holloway's answer, or partial answer to the scream with which the book began. He again emphasises that us is a process — ever-changing and with no final destination in mind.

Over all, the emphasis on negating capital, power and objectification are the difficult concepts that the book takes on board. Holloway is not at all prescriptive as to what kinds of actions this might entail. There are

only hints — so far as I can see — that creativity, imagination, self-determination in our work and subtle rejections of the capitalist system are the way to go. But this, in turn, suggests 'revolution' by small measures — or a type of reform — which, in some ways, Holloway seems also to reject. (Although, we could argue that it is small-scale political reform that he is rejecting, not individual acts of undermining the system.) Also, there is the danger that capitalism, as an ever-changing process itself, is perfectly capable of co-opting the acts of creative rebellion that citizens may come up with — what is revolutionary may just become the new normal and may be commodified and sold back to us as an 'alternative' lifestyle that is just as much a part of the capitalism that it was initially trying to reject. I think this latter point may be the reason why Holloway avoids prescription and stresses negativity. The process of the revolution must be ever-changing, to avoid being co-opted, so any concrete suggestions he might have made (and these would then be positives rather than negations and anti-power) would be in danger of falling into the trap described above. It is a tough stance to take, but Holloway is consistent with it throughout the book.

Peter Barnes — *Capitalism 3.0*

Barnes divides the commons into nature, culture and community. He suggests three aspects to each of these divisions. Common wealth is the monetary and non-monetary value of all the assets of the commons. Common property is the class of human-made rights that lies

somewhere between private property and state property. And the commons sector is an organised sector of the economy, related to common resources.

In a similar way that the Bank of England in the UK and the Federal Reserve Board in the USA can set interest rates independently of government, Barnes suggests an independent body that would regulate our carbon budget — essentially a body that would administer the commons. (This, presumably, is the basis of his common sector, regulating the use of common wealth.)

Through this, common property rights would be the responsibility of trustworthy guardians. In essence, the administrative bodies of the common sector would be appointing common property rights to business — as such, the use of our common wealth would be fully controlled, and controlled independently of government. This trusteeship compares to stewardship. The trustees' responsibilities would be mandatory and always in the interests of the wider community. For Barnes, the common property and trusteeship suggestions represent a third type of ownership — between private and state. He suggests that 'public goods' and 'eco-system services' be recognised as 'common property held in trust'.

The above explanation, I admit, might seem somewhat obscure. However, I have to say that I found Barnes' book to be one of the most straight-forward and practical of all books I have read relating to the commons. We might disagree on some of the terms he uses

(especially ‘common wealth’ and ‘eco-system services’), but the way he proposes to govern the commons seems entirely sensible and possible under almost any form of governance.

Gordon Graham — *The Case Against the Democratic State*

The book is principally about the power of the state. Graham seeks to answer two questions — why does the state seek legitimacy through democratic means, and, why does the state require to demonstrate its legitimacy in the first place.

Graham starts by questioning the value of the state. He points out that it is the ‘monopoly of legitimate coercion’, ie. the state alone holds the power to force us to do things or to stop us from doing things, and to a large extent, it decides on the rules.

Graham goes on to describe limited and unlimited states. A limited state is one where the power of the state is restricted in some way by a constitution. An unlimited state has no such restrictions and could, in theory, legislate on any aspect of its citizens’ lives. States that are unlimited may nevertheless be benign. It is only where an unlimited state imposes its rule in an aggressive manner that we would be inclined to call it totalitarian. Some theoretically limited states however turn out to be totalitarian as their constitutions fail to exercise sufficient restraint over state power and oppression.

Graham looks at Hobbes *Leviathan* — the classic text to defend the need of a state. He considers whether the state really does make life more peaceful and safe, as Hobbes and others have claimed. Graham points out that state power, when gone astray, will result in less peace and safety for citizens rather than more.
Graham looks at a further justification for the state — which is essentially to try to avoid the 'Tragedy of the Commons', although he does not name it in this way. Here, (as in Garrett Hardin's essay) the state is brought in to regulate the use of resources to avoid exploitation and conflict. Graham seems to accept, with some reservations, that this is an argument in favour of the state, or at least, the state comes out as neither better nor worse. He does not pursue other ways of resisting the Tragedy of the Commons scenario. He moves on instead to point out that the problems identified with the state — namely the potential abuses of power — are problems of those running the state — that is, government — and not the concept of the state itself. He moves then to look at how bad government can be avoided — and the usual way of resolving this is promoted as being by democracy.

In turning to democracy, Graham suggests three essential elements that define it — the sovereignty of the people, universal suffrage and majority rule.

Graham goes on to look at Plato's objections to democracy and identifies two in particular — leaving the state open to the decisions of those with no expert knowledge and the danger that

those skilled in speaking and persuasion will unduly influence others to take up their views (and thereby become an oligarchy).

Graham looks at 'means' and 'ends' as a way of deciding what should be open to a democratic vote. The 'means' are the technical aspects of implementing a particular policy and should best be left to experts. The 'ends' are the outcomes people want to see in society. We might think then that the 'ends' of our society should be left open for everyone to have a voice. Graham however points out that a clear distinction between means and ends is difficult to achieve. Also he notes that for any one issue, different people have a stronger or a weaker preference, therefore it is difficult to see how everyone having an equal vote on the matter would be fair. Graham also raises the issue of choices being made through knowledge of the matter to hand as opposed to a choice made from ignorance, or ill-considered or erroneous views.

Graham goes on to consider the 'paradox of democracy'. Essentially, this comes about by believing democracy to be self-evidently the best system for deciding policy. However, there may be cases where a carefully considered decision is voted down by democracy. We are then in the situation of believing the decision to be good because evidence suggests it to be so, but at the same time believing it to be bad, because the 'perfect' system of democracy has decided against it.

Graham goes on to consider representative, as opposed to direct democracy. With regard to representation, he points out the discussion of

whether the representative is merely the mouthpiece of those who have placed them in office, or is appointed to deliberate with their own expertise for the public good. However, he sets this question aside to focus on his main topic of whether democracy in itself is a good thing.

In addressing this, his main topic, Graham looks first at how to define universal suffrage, and shows that this is difficult. He considers whether it should mean those affected by a decision, but rejects this as too vague. Then he looks at whether it should be those subject to a policy. This he finds a little bit sharper as a distinction, but still difficult to define. Finally he notes that there are people too young to vote (but who will be affected by policy now or in the future) and people who will die before a policy is implemented, so once more the extent to which a voter will be affected, or not affected by their decision (or lack of decision) is not clear.

Graham goes on to suggest some kind of means-testing of competence as an alternative to universal suffrage. He points out that excluding children from voting — because they are too young to understand the issues involved — leads, logically, to excluding adults who are, for whatever reason, incompetent. Based on what he considers would be straight-forward tests for measuring the ability of people to be informed enough to make political choices, he suggests this would be a fairer solution. (He holds back from referring to these as intelligence tests, or the resulting governance system to be a meritocracy.)

‘Liberal democracy’ was a phrase originally coined to contrast with ‘social democracy’. Social democracy tries to promote socialist values, so far as these might be allowed by democracy. Liberal democracy however, Graham claims, accepts democracy only so far as it does not conflict with liberal values. Graham points out that the term liberal democracy is somewhat contradictory, as in a democracy freedom is curtailed by majority vote and sometimes even by a minority vote. There is no power of dissent or process of contending the existence of the government itself. Government by consent — even tacit, or implied consent — is meaningless.

Graham goes on to conjecture on a liberal state that is run by an oligarchy (presumably by his means-tested meritocracy) rather than on democratic principles. He suggests this would protect liberal values without the need for a concept of democracy. He suggests it is only convention that has resulted in us seeing liberal society synonymous with democracy. However, he points out that a truly liberal society would be unlikely to accept a situation where most people do not have a say in political decision-making.

Graham goes on to point out the irrelevance of a single vote in an election (ie. the power of the people, through voting, is an illusion). He also questions whether the general will of the people is either discernible through common-sense reasoning (in which any type of governance could determine it) or, relies on the democratic process (in which case, our vote once again makes no difference).

Graham then goes back to questions about the state. In the absence of a religious foundation to governance, he asks what the basis might be for the institution of the state today. He considers a morally-neutral state and then a 'managerial' state — one which effectively just delivers services, irrespective of the behaviour of its people. These, he explains, are popular conceptions of the state today. But he considers them to be illusory, for three reasons: A morally-neutral state is covertly taking a stand on values within a society (so is not actually neutral): The managerial view relies on what Graham calls the 'democratic myth' — that democracy empowers citizens to have a say in the running of society and thus to comment on and modify the ways in which government manages society: And third, the false ideas of moral neutrality and the influence of democracy greatly increases state power.

Despite earlier seeming to promote the idea of a meritocracy, Graham, in his final chapter, arrives at some very odd conclusions. Firstly, he points out that limiting the term of office of a government is of benefit in preventing power from becoming corrupting — uncontentious, and this could apply to any form of governance. However, then he advocates elections — not because, as is usually believed, they allow us to choose who governs us — but to prevent some other means of obtaining power to take hold in society. It is, essentially, the uselessness of the electoral system that is its great strength, according to Graham!

Graham also discusses our involvement in civil society — that is, society outside of either state or business. He argues that our involvement in civil society is vitally important, even although this involvement makes little difference, in practical terms, about how the society functions. He tries to link this to our involvement in politics — participation matters, even if it makes little or no difference to the results.
In looking at how government works in the UK, Graham shows that it is quite undemocratic in practice. Ministerial appointments are made without anyone's consent and much of government is run by the civil service as a meritocracy.

This is an excellent book, which explains many of the concepts at the heart of theories of state and governance. As such, it is worthy of this long review. However, even although I would be likely to disagree with him, I wish Graham had pursued his suggestions towards a meritocracy more fully, rather than finish the book with the rather vague conclusions that what we do in politics is mostly worthwhile, but not for the reasons that we think.

Guy Standing — *Plunder of the Commons*

Subtitled, 'a manifesto for sharing public wealth', the book starts off by tracing the history of the 'Charter of the Forest', a document that accompanied the Magna Carta, and dates back to 1217. Whilst the charter was wholly or partially inscribed in law for around 750 years, its precepts have been gradually eroded by monarchies and governments alike.

Standing goes on to look at the meaning of the commons, commoners, and 'commoning'. He cites rules for managing the commons, similar to those of Elinor Ostram (arguably the foremost modern authority on the commons). What is important to note from the Charter of the Forest however, is its insistence on the right to subsistence for the commoners.

Standing highlights, in particular, 'estovar of the commons', allowing people the necessities to have a minimal level of existence from the commons if they have no other means of support. He compares this to the circumstances of modern people, and in particular, the erosion of 'social income', that is, all the ways in which we are helped in our lives outside of the realm of paid employment.

Standing goes on to examine the commons under five main categories: the natural commons, the social commons, the civil commons, the cultural commons and the knowledge commons. The amount of detail is impressive and once again Standing is very good at relating the history of the commons to our current situation, particularly in the UK.

Standing goes on to look at how the principles of the Charter of the Forest might be applied in today's society and ends with his own 'Charter of the Commons'.

All in all, this is an excellent book and easily the most accessible of all Standing's work.

Tom Hodgkinson — *How to be Free*

Hodgkinson looks at three aspects of life — freedom, merriment and responsibility — in this light-hearted yet insightful book. He adopts the anarchist stance that people are basically good and capable of organising our own affairs without the interference of government. He looks mainly to the past for inspiration. He believes we are already free — we just need to realise our freedom and start living it.
Hodgkinson starts by inviting us to set aside our anxieties and be carefree. He suggests avoiding newspapers and TV news and spending more time reading and talking with friends. He suggests more varied daily activities, mixing physical with mental work. He asks us to walk or cycle rather than to drive or take the underground. Avoid screens. Take up paper and pencil. Play a musical instrument. Eat well. Remember that we are more or less powerless to change anything in the world, so we might as well be carefree. He encourages us to avoid boring work, to get creative, and, most importantly, to create our own entertainments and pleasures rather than have them packaged and sold back to us by capitalism.

Hodgkinson asks us to consider simplicity as a lifestyle option, to avoid, as much as possible, the financial economy. He urges us to abandon consumerism whilst still acknowledging our pleasures. He encourages us to find our gift — our vocation — and to make work into a pleasure. He berates the modern tendency towards career and professionalism. He suggests a more relaxed attitude to time and the idea that 'time is money'.

Hodgkinson contrasts urban and rural living, mainly favouring the rural — but, going back to his medieval interests — looks at the smaller city as a better type of urban life.

Hodgkinson is not in favour of a classless society, which he sees as boring and in any case probably not possible. He suggests we get over our class-based hang-ups and be uniquely ourselves, so advocates a kind of bohemian attitude to class.

Hodgkinson, in all of the above, is urging us to be fearless in our attitude to life. He is an anarchist in spirit, but does not see the path to anarchism to be through revolution or reform, but to be by just starting to do things for ourselves. As such, alternative ways of living will sit alongside government and eventually show government to be irrelevant. He urges us to get rid of as much technology as we can — the simpler things are, the less likely they are to go wrong.

Hodgkinson looks at the increasing incidence of depression. He notes the contradiction — that our depression is caused by society, but that he is encouraging us to take individual (or at least, small-scale) action to fight the system. But, he argues, this is the paradox of capitalism — we are all individually complicit but also all collectively affected by its evils.

Hodgkinson suggests calling depression by its older name of melancholy and using it creatively. He advises giving up complaining, to be merry, to play. He endorses the freedom we get by giving up the lure of money, thereby freeing

ourselves for more leisure, merriment and creativity. Giving up the mortgage, or at least having a smaller house, is a move towards this freedom and if possible, to give up work and become self-employed.

Paul Collier — *The Future of Capitalism*

Collier recognises three particular problems in contemporary society — disparities in wealth (due mainly to differences in education) — the concentration of wealth in metropolitan areas, and — the erosion of social values. Collier's examination of our current situation forms the first chapter of the book — of particular note is how he expresses economies as a strange mix of utilitarianism combined with the belief that we are all selfish individuals — *homo economicus*. Interestingly, he equates utilitarianism with globalisation and 'Rawlsianism' (from the theories of Rawls) as favouring victim groups. The aim of the book is to investigate how capitalism may be adjusted to address the problems identified by the author and outlined above.

Collier wants capitalism to have a purpose and he suggests this should be prosperity combined with a sense of belonging and esteem. He sees these values built through narratives, and these apply most strongly, he suggests, in the three main groupings of society — families, firms and states. He sees leadership and authority as important, but these work not through force but by seeking co-operation. Turning to capitalism,

he looks to show how leaders may 'build reciprocal obligations' that re-configure capitalism to work with rather than against the grain of common value. Obligations, he says, should be more important than rights. 'Rational economic man' is replaced by 'rational social woman'. Collier observes that, from the middle of the 20th century, there has been a divergence of those who derive their esteem from their nation, from those who derive it from their jobs and education. This is the class divide he identified at the start of the book as one of the most divisive — and it occurs across both left- and right-wing politics.

Solutions, for Collier, must be what he calls 'spatial', in other words, relevant to local needs and to nations. So he wants to see the trends towards individualism and globalisation reversed and have us embrace nationalism — reversing the trends of the last several decades. But he recognises that nationalism can be dangerous. Collier goes on to look in detail at the three essential relations he has identified earlier — nation, firms and families.

Collier returns to a sense of place and to belonging as a means of rekindling national identity without the dangers of nationalism. He makes the distinction between patriotism and nationalism.

In the chapter about firms, the main focus is on the reckless pursuit of shareholder profit and of short-term gains at the expense of long-term stability. Collier suggests that firms focus instead on promoting the public good through their core skill — whatever that might be.

Whilst clearly firms must be financially viable, the main focus is social rather than for profit.

In the families chapter, Collier re-asserts the importance of traditional family structures — especially the extended family. He notes the divergence of abilities — from the educated to the less educated — a trend that only seems to be accelerating and is a key theme of the book.

Collier goes on to discuss what might make for an ethical world — essentially he is considering relations between nations. He describes three precepts — duties of rescue, reciprocal obligations and enlightened self-interest. Collier looks at various world 'clubs' — the WTO, IMF, the UN, etc. and finds difficulties with how they have evolved over time. He suggests a new club of China, India, the USA, the EU, Russia and Japan. He looks at specific tasks — refugees, HIV Aids, and 'the duty of rescue from mass despair'. Collier does not give much detail about any of these, he just seems to regard them as the most pressing of current world issues. The rescue from mass despair seems to be about promoting business ventures in poorer nations so that people there will be encouraged to stay and not to try to find a better life elsewhere. It ties in with his idea of ethical firms.

Collier moves on — in Part 3 — to tackle in detail the problems he has identified at the start of the book. In looking at the diverging fortunes of the metropolis from the poorer hinterland, Collier introduces a strange variation of the concept of economic rent. To give a brief overview of the traditional concept of economic

rent, he starts with Henry George. He goes on however to argue that taxing land (as proposed by George) would no longer achieve the aim that George had in mind. For Collier, it is skill and the availability of housing that form the basis of his idea of how to tax more effectively. Collier suggests introducing a progressive tax on those earning high wages in metropolitan areas.

Collier goes on to address the second half of the problem — the poor hinterland. He suggests development banks should help pioneer firms to set up in poorer areas. 'Investment Promotion Agencies' would be set up — again, to encourage firms into poor areas. There would be more apprenticeship courses and universities would become more local — working with local firms to help local young people into suitable work.

Collier goes on to explain support for the traditional family structure. He looks at various ideas, from the support of young parents through to pensions — cradle to grave — which are for the most part a return to the social values of the past. Finally, he gives a brief overview of global politics, emphasising the ongoing importance of the nation state.

Is Collier successful in the aim of his book — adapting capitalism to cope with the three problems he initially set out as the results of capitalism gone-wrong? Well, whilst all the suggestions he makes are good, I think we come back to the issue facing all pleas for social reform — are we wise enough to put the ideas into practice? Indeed, are we wise enough to think that his suggestions are good ideas in the

first place? Collier tries to evoke the spirit that followed the second world war. It is difficult for us, now, to make this link — most of us are not old enough to have experienced those years. Perhaps the looming threat of climate change may be a more modern impetus for change. But of course it is thus far a slow-moving threat. So, my one criticism of Collier's book is that he does not really address this question of what will motivate us to make the changes he prescribes.

A C Grayling — *The Good State*

Grayling sets out his store very clearly. He is concerned with the lack of a constitution in some states (including the UK), the poor results obtained by nations adopting the 'Westminster Model' of governance (that is, based on the UK Westminster parliament) and the lack of clear separation between the judiciary, the legislature and the executive. His further concerns are the lack of accountability of those who hold office and also — in his view — the corrosive influence of party politics over governance.

Grayling starts by thinking over the basic principles of governance — that everyone should be afforded the right to vote, that voting should be free and 'informed' (that is, we are made fully aware of what candidates really intend, if they were to be elected to office). Grayling mentions briefly other forms of democracy here — direct, deliberative, associationalist (what we might call participatory) and decision-making by a randomly-chosen body via 'sortition'. He takes up some of the concerns around these later in the book, but he is generally dismissive of any of them achieving better governance. He

focuses in on representative democracy — allegedly our current system — as being a necessary component of effective government. The election of representatives should be reflective of the proportion of the votes cast (proportional representation) and be by secret ballot. Grayling seems to feel that the representatives should then govern as experts on behalf of the electorate, so they would not necessarily be acting exactly as the electorate may wish for any particular decision.

Looking at the question of enfranchisement, Grayling seems to think this is straight-forward — the electorate would be all those over 16 who have a 'material interest' in the outcome of their vote.

Grayling moves on to look at the purpose of government itself (in particular, democratic government). He starts with the role of government as protection and security for its people. He goes on to tackle the issue of freedom versus fairness. He does not seem to settle this question, but appears to favour Rawls' method of achieving fairness via a hypothetical state where we have to consider ourselves as potentially the least well-off citizens. Rawls, Grayling points out, took it as a given that a government's role would be at least the protection and security of its citizens, and perhaps also, as with Locke, the security of property.

Interestingly here, Grayling points out that much of what is written about the purpose of government is conflated with what we might instead regard as the purpose of civil society.

Grayling points out that first-past-the-post systems of democracy are liable to produce two-party systems. He suggests that this amounts to an oligarchy as the leading party's main purpose is to hold on to power at the expense of the opposition. He says instead that governments should 'have a conception of the interests of all, of equal concern for all, and of a just balance in the distribution of opportunities and access to social goods' (p.43). He goes on to expand a little on what these criteria would mean in practice.

Returning to the fairness/freedom debate, Grayling points to other conceptions of the purpose of government and cites those who see it essentially as protecting economic goals (therefore, on the freedom and minimal government side of things). Grayling looks at how this can conflict with what is fair for the poorer citizens and also in terms of the destruction of nature, increased consumption and other factors this approach implies.

Grayling points out that it is civilised society that dictates the need for a minimum threshold of care, rather than politics or government. He suggests that democratic values will, of necessity, include civilised values. This leads Grayling into considering what the purpose of an explicitly democratic form of government might be, in addition to the minimum requirements of security discussed earlier. What might lead a democratic government to promote policies that lead to, say, 'flourishing', a 'noble life', 'constructive leisure', etc.? Grayling returns to Rawls, modifying Rawls' original argument

somewhat, to suggest that a minimum standard for a democratic state would be social justice. He uses the term 'social justice' here to include quite a raft of interests, including what we might call 'flourishing' and he summarises three on page 56. On the same page, he makes it clear that favouring particular private interests is contrary to the view of democracy — he is essentially separating politics from government here, as he considers politics to be a factional interest (as above for the two-party state, but also more generally). We might have preferred him to distinguish between party politics and 'true' politics (being, of the people) and therefore legitimate governance. This might or might not have been clearer. But Grayling's definitions certainly tap usefully into a general suspicion of the word 'politics', so probably serve him better for the argument of the book.

Grayling devotes a chapter to discussing the separation of the legislature, executive and judiciary within a society and gives considerable detail. He sees this separation as essential to democracy but notes it is completely lacking in any 'democracy' supposedly operating under the Westminster Model. Grayling points out some of the complexities such a separation would entail (especially in separating the 'powers' from the 'functions' of each segment) but seems nonetheless to see this as possible, and indeed the most important aspect of democratic government. There may also be a separate fact-checking service to scrutinise the media.

Grayling goes on to look at the 'fitness' of voters, politicians, political activists and journalists in the democratic process. He focuses mainly on

politicians, and makes a number of recommendations. The stand-out one is to have an independent body to scrutinise the conduct of our elected officials, rather than them being 'accountable' only to themselves. Grayling again stresses the separation of governance functions — in particular, here, the legislature and the executive — to achieve greater accountability, avoid careerism in politicians and so ensure more chance of service to the public good. He looks at ways for the electorate to be more informed and interested — not least, to have a system of proportional representation, so that voting is seen as worthwhile — and calls for higher standards of the press in true reporting of political issues, rather than partisanship. Grayling also proposes that an independent body might scrutinise the impacts of proposed legislation, and make this information freely available. It could not strike down legislation as such, but governments enacting proposals that the body advises are irresponsible may be made to think twice. Legislators might only serve one term — to help combat careerism, as there would be no pressure from trying for re-election.

Grayling looks at the need of a constitution to regulate the institutions of government. He points out the lack of a constitution in the UK. He looks briefly at the benefits of a second house of government and at referendums. The latter he considers unconstitutional, as he maintains that under a representative democracy, parliament is sovereign. We may dispute this point of course, by saying that the people are sovereign, by having, at the very least, the power to remove a government as a matter of last resort. On pages 125 and 126,

Grayling gives an excellent and concise description of what a constitution for government should entail.

Grayling turns to rights. He insists that a constitution for government is the means of establishing rights that a government should then be obliged to uphold. Grayling sums up the threats to democracy, more or less summarising his thoughts from the rest of the book. Grayling gives a very compelling argument for representative democracy that brings together all of the discussions of the book. If we were to reject the possibility of deliberative democracy (which Grayling discusses, but considers unlikely to succeed) then his reformed democracy would surely be the best option for government that we could devise.

David Fleming — *Surviving the Future*

The book is an edited version of Fleming's *Lean Logic* and edited by Shuan Chamberlin.

The book sets out to describe the process of 'lean thinking', and suggests four alternative futures — Growth (what I've described as Cornucopia), Continuity (what I've called Privatopia), Descent and Collapse (both of which are often features of Ecotopia). The Introduction emphasises that Descent is the chosen path of the book (although, to be honest, this is still premised on an expectation of eventual Collapse). The solutions offered are intended to manage after a collapse, but also to prepare for a collapse, or just to make a better society if no collapse were to occur. The

solutions are based on small-scale local communities living sustainably with the resources that are to hand.

Fleming goes on to set out three principles of the book — manners, scale/presence and 'slack'. Manners seems to just be about listening carefully to all viewpoints, negotiating peacefully, coming to solutions sensibly and respectfully. Scale, for Fleming, is to be small-scale and local. This, he believes, leads to 'presence' — the sense that our opinions and our work matter, and the sense of community and friendship. Fleming then explains that business currently is driven by competition, and so it does everything it can to reduce costs and speed up production — so, in Fleming's terms — it is 'taut'. He contrasts this with production being about quality, or to spend less time making in order to do other things, or spending longer to make in order to produce things by different means — all of this he refers to as 'slack'. Fleming explores slack in terms of local community and culture.

Fleming goes on to contrast his 'lean economy' with the market economy that is taken as the standard for consumer capitalism today. The lean economy is based on local interaction (protection and trust), product diversity, a small number of sellers and buyers, barriers to entry and exit, multiple aims, barriers to mobility and imperfect knowledge. Each of these is summarised below.

Local interaction.
Protection:- Fledgling businesses need this to get going. Businesses based on different approaches to labour, to care of the

environment, choice of materials, local rather than global, need protection in order to survive whilst industrial production still exists.
Trust:- Exchange, Fleming suggests, will become increasingly outside the financial economy. It will not be by transactions but by mutual obligations of trust (the Gift Economy).

Product diversity.
Essentially, trying to recognise and include the bonds of social obligations that go with locally-produced and distributed goods. We will know the farmer, baker, shop-keeper etc. and our relations with these folk count as much as the products that are being exchanged. (I have to say the term 'product diversity' does not seem to relate very well to Fleming's explanation here.)

A small number of sellers and buyers. Speaks for itself.

Barriers to entry and exit. Fleming illustrates by looking at small local economies isolated geographically, but any exclusion from the global economy would count. We may, for short-term gain, see an advantage in stepping out of our local economy, but in the long-term (especially under the conditions Fleming is assuming for our future) it would be to our loss.

Multiple aims. Businesses no longer aiming just for profit, but, for instance, for the 'triple bottom line'.

Barriers to mobility. Labour (under Fleming's future) will be scarce, and local resources scarce, so closed access is important. Within this,

Fleming lists his version of the various 'capitals' and gives us, 'natural, human, social, cultural, material and financial'. For Fleming's localised economies, only cultural capital can be shared at a distance, all else is local.
Imperfect knowledge. This last criterion is really to contrast with the current global economy, where 'perfect' knowledge (at least in theory) maximises the efficiency of the market. A local economy, by contrast, will have little knowledge of markets elsewhere, but an intense knowledge of the local.

Fleming goes on to explain that the local economies he envisages are based on community and culture. The key ingredient, for him, is trust. For Fleming, a key element of trust is what he calls 'congruence'. By this, he simply means that each person is truly themselves when dealing with others. Fleming sees congruence and trust to be built up through friendships, play and carnival, that is, through shared culture.

Fleming links carnival to ritual and sees both as preserving a community's institutions. Carnival momentarily usurps our institutions, to stress that they are a choice. Carnival stresses that our animal natures and our existence endure over time, despite the death of individual community members, and even despite the death of whole communities. Both carnival and ritual reinforce the bonds of mutual obligation that hold community together. Fleming sees seven elements to ritual, which carnival takes up as well, albeit in playful ways. These are: Membership. Emotional Daring. Continuity. Consciousness of Time and Events. Practice.

Meaning. Locality. Carnival, in addition, brings peace and suspension of social rank. Fleming explores each of these in turn.

Along with stressing the need of carnival, Fleming also reminds us of the need for the erotic.

Fleming returns to the 'slack economy' and looks at the question of employment. The basic message here is that the aim is to increase employment in the informal economy, rather than to reduce unemployment in the formal. This allows Fleming to see a way of avoiding the obvious problem that in a market economy those who work less will inevitably fail, have to rely on benefits, or even starve. Looking at material things as needs and wants, Fleming reminds us that goods used to have much more significance than they do for us today. Rather than condemn consumption and materialism, he suggests we should return to a celebration of the things that we need and want in our lives.

Fleming looks at scale, and notes some advantages to large-scale (especially in production) but many disadvantages. He calls this the problem of 'intensification'. Intensification means that as scale increases, the amount and complexity of infrastructure needed to sustain a society likewise goes up. Rather than achieving 'economies of scale', larger, faster production is often less productive, when infrastructure is taken into account. (Fleming refers to the extra infrastructure as the 'intermediate economy'.)

Fleming goes on to make a distinction between two fundamental types of capital that he refers to as ‘foundation capital’ and growth capital’. These distinctions span all of the six types of capital Fleming (along with other authors) has identified. Foundation capital is that part of these capitals that needs to be preserved and nourished. Growth capital, for Fleming, is that part of the capitals that needs to be kept in check.

Fleming goes on to stress the need for religion in his future society. This, along with carnival, play, community and other types of culture, is the binding strength (literally, religion = ‘to bind firmly’) that Fleming considers essential to sustain the types of community that will be needed in the future world.

Fleming identifies five types of truth — literal (what he calls material), narrative, implicit, performative and self-denying. Fleming regards religion as benefiting most from narrative, implicit and performative truth, but criticises current religious practice as having sold out to a version of the literal, scientific, material truth that, for him, undermines religion’s own power, beauty and usefulness. Faced with a binary either/or of literal interpretation, it is no wonder most of us choose to say ‘no’ to religion.

Fleming looks at the possibilities of his lean economy coming about in the near or far future. His discussion here becomes quite abstract, but returns mostly to that question of a growing economy needing more and more infrastructure to support it. Instead, Fleming’s world is one he describes as ‘elegant’ — using less labour, less

technology, and being more local, craft-based and embedded in community and empathy. It is difficult not to like this book (and the main *Lean Logic* work from which it is derived). It has to be acknowledge though that the massive changes that Fleming envisages are more likely to be brought about by sudden catastrophe than by a gradual gaining of wisdom by humanity.

Kevin O'Leary — *Saving Democracy*

The main aim of the book is to suggest a fourth house of government in the USA, made up of members of the public and practising a form of participatory politics. Apart from this, it is also a brilliant exploration of the meaning and purpose of government itself.

Endnotes

Chapter 1

1. Peter Ryley, looking at Victor Brenford and Patrick Geddes' work, '*Our Social Inheritance*', speaks about a practical application of the idea of utopia. He says:
'The future society that Geddes envisaged would be dynamic rather than static, based on continuing evolution. He refers to a 'Eutopia'. The name emerged from Thomas More's famous book, *Utopia*. Geddes suggests that More was punning two ancient Greek words which would sound similar, Outopia, signifying no place, and Eutopia, a good and beautiful place. By contracting the title to utopia, More was indicating that he could be describing either or both. This intended sense became lost and the more cynical 'nowhere' became the commonly understood meaning. However, by choosing to be unambiguous about the sense of a good place Geddes was trying to insist that its achievement is practical and possible. This is because, for Geddes, action and Eutopia are one. Ideas and actions cannot be divorced from each other, and what is more, his model of Eutopia is a model of pragmatism. Eutopia is "the reliable best that can be made of the here and now, if we invoke and use all of the resources available, physical, mental and moral."'

Peter Ryley — *Making Another World Possible — Anarchism, Anti-Capitalism and Ecology in Late 19th and Early 20th Century Britain*.

2. ‘The greatest difference between the Christian Utopian past of Eden and the other myths is that there is no Fall. There is always some explanation for why the Utopian past ended, but never the complete break that the Fall represents. As a result, Utopianism is not heretical. [By contrast, to try to recreate Eden would be a heresy for Christianity, as it would deny the Fall.] The other myths also differ from the Greek myth of the golden age in that in the Greek myth there is a series of separate creations that lead to the development of the non-Utopian present, while in the other cultures there are no separate creations and no clean break. This means that the Utopian past is not necessarily lost and can be used as a model for the future. This is particularly important in China because the belief is that both the Confucian and Taoist Utopias had once actually existed, and therefore they could exist again if the principles on which they were based are rightly understood and then put into practice.’
Lyman Tower Sargent — *Utopianism — A Very Short Introduction*.

3. ‘It is work that realises the full potential of human personality. Proudhon felt that work is a necessity, not merely as an act of production but also of moral education. Thus, the actions of individuals are not merely restrained through contractual arrangements [it seems Proudhon believed in a voluntary contract by individuals, rather than some agreement to state control] but are also shaped by the establishment of a

natural moral order. The removal of work lets loose the inherent evil of humanity and destroys the self-restraint and communal interconnectedness that labour inculcates in those who are neither exploited nor exploiters. For Proudhon, those who view human nature as being shaped by the environment and as mutable into something better through a change in the environment are indulging in Utopian speculation. Practical experience would suggest otherwise. Human nature does not change, but human behaviour can if both constrained and encouraged by a just, free and moral society.

'Proudhon's second objection to radical conventional wisdom is more material. He thought that a state of abundance is a physical impossibility. His general view of the 'parsimony of nature' and the need to work to overcome it leads him to reject the notion of the, even technologically induced, possibility of abundance. Proudhon did not feel that the problem of production could be solved. Instead, he was an early advocate of the limits to growth. This was not on ecological grounds, but on the view that the power of production would never match the power of consumption. This is because the possibility of consumption is almost infinite, whilst that of production can never be so. Therefore it is necessary to live with voluntary restraints on consumption if people are to exist in relative equality. Abundance is a chimera; he concluded: "Man's condition on Earth is work and poverty; his vocation learning and justice; the first of his virtues temperance."

'This is often quoted as a way of claiming that Proudhon was an austere ascetic, and advocate of a simple life. In fact, this is based on a misunderstanding of the term 'poverty'. Like

'property', Proudhon used the term in a distinct, idiosyncratic way. Poverty in everyday usage means relative or absolute deprivation. This Proudhon called 'pauperism'. A state of near-destitution caused by the expropriation of the value of the labour of the many by the few. In contrast, Proudhon's concept of poverty means relative equality and a voluntary restraint on consumption. It mirrors Gandhi's often-quoted statement that there is enough in this world for every man's need but not every man's greed. Proudhon did not merely advocate poverty in this sense; he celebrated it.
' "Poverty is an inevitable law of nature. It is wealth that is a distortion of nature. Wealth is based on undeserved expropriation. Poverty is the product of honest labour and equitable exchange....
"Poverty is seemly.... Its dwelling is clean, healthy and in good repair... and it is neither pale nor starving.
"Poverty is not ease. For the worker this would be a form of corruption. It is no good for man to live at ease. He must, on the contrary feel the pricks of need... poverty has its own joys, its innocent festivities and homely luxuries....
"It is clear that it would be misplaced to dream of escaping from the inevitable poverty that is the law of our nature and of society. Poverty is good, and we must think of it as being the source of all our joys. Reason demands that we should live with it — frugally, modifying our pleasures, labouring assiduously and subordinating all our appetites to justice."
Peter Ryley — *Making Another World Possible — Anarchism, Anti-Capitalism and Ecology in Late 19th and Early 20th Century Britain*. Ryley in turn quotes from: Edward Hyams — *Pierre-*

Joseph Proudhon: His Revolutionary Life, Mind and Works and Stewart Edwards — *Selected Writings.*

Chapter 2

1. Henry George explains wealth: 'Thus wealth […] consists of natural products that have been secured, moved, combined, separated, or in other ways modified by human exertion, so as to fit them for the gratification of human desires. It is, in other words, labor impressed upon matter in such a way as to store it up […]. Wealth is not the sole object of labor, for labor is also expended in ministering directly to desire, ['services'] but it is the object and result of what we call productive labor which gives value to material things. Henry George — *Progress and Poverty*.

George goes on to describe the factors of production: 'Land, labor, and capital are the factors of production. The term land includes all natural opportunities or forces; the term labor, all human exertion; and the term capital, all wealth used to produce more wealth. In returns to these three factors is the whole produce distributed. That part which goes to the land owners for the use of natural opportunities is called rent; that part which constitutes the reward for human exertion is called wages; and that part which constitutes the return for the use of capital is called the interest. These terms mutually exclude each other.'

A further reference explores these definitions a little further:

'Wealth is the stock of all assets, regardless of whether they are used as an input to the production process or not. This includes machinery, land, real estate, intellectual property rights, art and jewellery… [C]apital is a subset of wealth which is used in the production process to create more wealth. Therefore all capital is wealth but not all wealth is capital. Therefore every type of wealth other than land which is used in the production process to produce more wealth is called capital.' Josh Ryan-Collins, Toby Lloyd and Laurie MacFarlane — *Rethinking the Economics of Land and Housing.*

2. The scarcity of money, in turn, refers back to 'mercantilism' — named possibly because of the importance of the merchant class, but also possibly referring to Tomaso Mercado — where hoarding money (or, originally, goods) was seen as a sensible move by the rich in times of economic uncertainty. It was a view contested by, amongst others, Adam Smith and John Maynard Keynes. We see, however, the return to mercantilism with such policies as austerity, quantitative easing, and the trading practices under neo-liberalism.

3. With reference to 'Property is theft', Ryley says:
'Proudhon was making a vital distinction between what he called property and possession. It is very close to Hodgkin's distinction between the natural and artificial right of property. Property is the device by which the rights of ownership are appropriated by others and used to extort value of labour from the workers. It is an unconditional, perpetual and legal right.

Possession is the conditional right of ownership for use without giving the ultimate right of disposal. It ensures that the products of labour directly belong to the labourer. Possession transforms society from one based on hierarchy to one based on equality; it is in essence revolutionary.'

Ryley goes on to quote from Proudhon:

'The people, even those who are Socialists, whatever they may say, want to be owners; and … I find the feelings of the masses on this point stronger and more resistant than on any other question… And one thing is to be noted which shows how far, in the minds of people, individual sovereignty is identified with collective sovereignty, that the more ground the principles of democracy have gained, the more I have seen the working classes, both in the city and in the country, interpret these principles favourably to individual ownership.'

Peter Ryley — *Making Another World Possible — Anarchism, Anti-Capitalism and Ecology in Late 19th and Early 20th Century Britain*. (The Proudhon quote is from *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*.)

4. 'In his essay, *Notes on Liberty and Property*, Allen Tate gave us an indispensable anatomy of our problem. His essay begins by equating, not liberty and property, but liberty and *control* of one's property. He then makes the crucial distinction between ownership that is merely legal and what he calls 'effective ownership'. If a property, say a small farm, has one owner, then the one owner has an effective and assured, if limited, control over it — as long as he or she can afford to own it, and is free to sell it or use it, and (I will add) free to use it poorly or well.

It is clear also that effective ownership of a small property is personal and therefore can, at least possibly, be intimate, familial and affectionate. If, on the contrary, a person owns a small quantity of stock in a large corporation, then that person has surrendered control of that property to large stake-holders. The drastic mistake our people made, as Tate believed, and I agree, was to be convinced "that there is *one* kind of property — just *property*, whether it be a thirty-acre farm in Kentucky or a stock certificate in the United States Steel Corporation."' Wendell Berry — *It all Turns on Affection*. (Author's emphases.)

5. For a brief discussion of stocks and shares, see Ha-Joon Chang, *23 Things they don't tell you about Capitalism*. He gives some more detail in, *Economics: The User's Guide*. For instance, the following:

'*Preferred shares* give their holders priority in the payment of *dividends*, namely, profits distributed to shareholders, rather than 'retained' by the corporation. But that priority is bought at the cost of the right to vote for key decisions concerning the company — such as who to appoint as the top managers, how much to pay them and whether to merge with, take over or be taken over by another company. The shares that come with the right to vote on these things are called *ordinary shares*. The 'ordinary' shareholders (who are anything but ordinary in terms of their decision-making power) make collective decisions through votes. These votes are usually according to the *one-share-one-vote rule*, but in some countries some shares have more votes than others….

'These days, few very large companies are majority-owned by a single shareholder, like the capitalists of old. The Porsche-Piech family, which owns just over 50 percent of the Porsche-Volkswagen group, is a notable exception.

'There are still a considerable number of giant companies that have a *dominant shareholder*, who owns sufficient shares that he/she/it can usually determine the company's future. Such a shareholder is described as owning a *controlling stake*, usually defined as anything upwards of 20 percent of the voting shares.

'Mark Zuckerberg, who owns 28 percent of Facebook, is a dominant shareholder. The Wallenberg family of Sweden is the dominant shareholder in Saab (40 percent), Electrolux (30 percent) and Ericsson (20 percent).

'Most large companies don't have one controlling shareholder. Their (share) ownership is so dispersed that no single shareholder has effective control. For example, as of March 2012, Japan Trustee Savings Bank, the biggest shareholder of Toyota Motor Corporation, owned just 10 percent of Toyota's shares. The next two biggest shareholders owned around 6 percent each. Even acting in unison, these three together do not have a quarter of the votes.

'Dispersed ownership means that *professional managers have effective control over most of the world's largest companies*, despite not owning any significant stake in them — a situation known as the *separation of ownership and control*. This creates a *principal-agent problem*, in which the agents (professional managers) may pursue business practices that promote their own interests rather than those of their principals (shareholders).

Ha-Joon Chang — *Economics: The User's Guide*. (Author's emphases.)
Chang goes on to describe two tier management systems. He says:
'Under this system, known as the *co-determination system*, the managerial board … has to get most important decisions, such as merger and plant closure, approved by the 'supervisor board', in which worker representatives have half the votes, even although the managerial side appoints the chairman, who has the casting vote.'
Ha-Joon Chang — *Economics: The User's Guide*. (Author's emphases.)

Chapter 3

1. 'Privatise. Profit or loss is privatised when it accrues wholly to an individual (or, with less precision, to a collection of individuals called a legal person, eg. a corporation).
'Commonise. Gains and losses that are spread out indifferently over a whole population are said to be commonised. The commons … is an 'unmanaged commons', in contrast to the type to be mentioned next.
'Socialise. When profits and losses are differentially distributed by managers (bureaucrats) among the group that owns the common property we say that the property is socialised. The system that does this may be called 'socialism'; it is also called a 'managed commons'. A managed commons, though it may have other defects, is not automatically subject to the tragic fate of an unmanaged commons….'

[The tendency within capitalism is for gains to be privatised and losses to be commonised — ie. indifferently (and often blindly) paid by others. The managed commons — what the author here refers to as socialising gains and losses — is the preferred option.]

'The idea of *negative responsibility* is likewise a paradoxical concept but an immensely useful one. The unmanaged commons exhibits negative responsibility, since it actually pays the individual decision maker to make the wrong decision. It is this negative responsibility that generates the tragedy.'

Garrett Hardin — *Filters Against Folly*. (Author's emphasis.)

2. It has to be said that 'socialising' the commons, for Hardin, is not what we might take it to mean with a simple reading. It was owners recognising responsibilities, or heavy state intervention, which, he believed, would be the cure for the 'tragedy'. Hardin also related his arguments (in a Malthusian way) to population — or, over-population — as he would have it. He spoke against compassion and co-operation being likely to yield favourable results. So, it is understandable that many left-leaning thinkers find his views decidedly dodgy. There may still have been a commons but it was a long way from what others, such as Elinor Ostrom, Murray Bookchin or Massimo de Angelis would understand by the term. At least everyone seems to have agreed on the potential tragedy and the reasons why it might occur. For further reading, see Derek Wall's *Elinor Ostrom's Rules for Radicals.*

3. Some authors (including Jonathan Porritt — *Capitalism as if the World Matters,* Massimo d'Angelis — *Omnia Sunt Communia*, and Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt — *Commonwealth*) describe what I have called natural commons as common wealth or natural capital. One difficulty with these terms is that they imply some kind of right of ownership over nature. Also, the implication is that natural resources are already somehow 'wealth', or 'capital', which is not correct in terms of the normal definitions of these terms. Some even lump all of nature into these terms, common wealth or natural capital. No distinction is made between what is resource and what is best left to wilderness. This is the tricky balance that needs to be achieved. (Dieter Helm (*Natural Capital — Valuing the Planet*) unfortunately uses this phrase natural capital, and is rather dismissive of the splitting off of wild nature, which I emphasise in this work. Nevertheless his book sets a benchmark — that the aggregate level of natural capital should not diminish. We may quibble with definitions, but this is at least a policy that shares the concerns I am raising in this book.)

4. Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore tell us:
'Money isn't capital. Capital is journalism's shorthand for money or, worse, a stock of something that can be transformed into something else. If you've ever heard or used the terms national capital or social capital, you've been part of a grand obfuscation. Capital isn't the dead stock of uncut trees or unused skill… capital happens only in the live transformation of money into commodities and back again. Money tucked away under a

mattress is as dead to capitalism as the mattress itself. It is through the live circulation of money, and in the relations around it, that capitalism happens.
Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore — *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things.*
(Despite the authors' concerns, I feel that social capital is a valid description, as this does indeed involve transactions and transformations.)

5. We could add (from Guy Standing — *The Plunder of the Commons*) the Judiciary (Common Law), the Information Commons (libraries, newspapers, the internet), the Intellectual Commons (ideas) and the Educational Commons (learning procedures). These last three (according to Standing) are all part of the Knowledge Commons.

6. Elinor Ostram's suggestions for managing the commons: 1. Some kind of boundary — a commons is for a specific community, not just for anyone. 2. Locally-established rules for managing the commons — because ecologies are so diverse, local rules need to be established, but still taking cognisance of county, national and international regulations. 3. Those sharing the commons need to be able to participate in the making and modifying of the rules. 4. The commons needs to be monitored to assure adherence to the rules. 5. There should be a graduated system of sanctions for rule-breakers — a verbal warning for those who may have broken a rule by accident, minor sanctions for those whose offences are minor, and so on. 6. A local body — perhaps very informal — to manage conflict resolution. 7. Some kind of official recognition of the right of the

commoners to organise their commons as set out above. 8. The local commons organisation to be nested within a wider network of managed commons.
Adapted from Derek Walls', *Elinor Ostram's Rules for Radicals* and in turn based on Ostram's main work, *Governing the Commons*. A more detailed summary of Ostram's work is given in David Fleming's *Lean Logic.*

7. Fee and dividend and sovereign wealth funds tend to distribute the gains from the use of the commons equally amongst whole populations. Some take the view, however, that 'property rights' for natural commons should be issued to individuals, or more local communities, and these people should be compensated directly. In this scenario, it may be difficult to assess exactly who is responsible for paying and who should receive the payments. See Ronald Coase — *The Problem of Social Cost*.

Chapter 4

1. To distinguish between a political movement as opposed to just chaos, note the difference between 'Anarchy' and 'Anarchism'. More recent authors use the term Anarchism in preference to Anarchy, but older works still often refer to Anarchy.

2. '… anarchism divides loosely into two categories: (1) collectivism, with the emphasis on the individual within a voluntary association of individuals and (2) individualist, with the emphasis on the individual separate from any association. The former is sometimes divided

into communist anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism [where production is the main focus of collaborative efforts]; the latter is usually divided into individualist anarchism and anarcho-capitalism, also known as minimalism or libertarianism.'
Lyman Tower-Sargent — *Contemporary Political Ideologies*.

Further, and very useful, observations on anarchism can be gleaned from Cindy Millstein's, *Anarchism and Its Aspirations*. She starts with this rather puzzling quote from Proudhon's What is Property?

'... as man seeks justice in equality, so society seeks order in anarchy.'

Millstein comments:

'To fill out this definition a bit further, let's look at the two sides of that phrase. Anarchism is a synthesis of the best of liberalism and the best of communism, elevated and transformed by the best of libertarian Left traditions that work towards an egalitarian, voluntary[sic] and nonhierarchical society. The prospect of liberalism in the broadest sense is to ensure personal liberty. Communism's overarching project is to ensure the communal good.... Anarchism understood that this tension is positive, as a creative and inherent part of human existence.' (pp.13/14)

Further on in the same work:

'... anarchism grounded itself in a set of shared values. These revolved around interconnected

notions such as liberty and freedom, solidarity and internationalism, voluntary association and federation. Education, spontaneity and harmony, and mutual aid… The early anarchists thus began our ongoing efforts to bring forth self-determination and self-organization, self-management and self-governance, as the basis for society.'
(pp. 25/26)

And further:

'First and foremost anarchism is a revolutionary political philosophy. That is, anarchism is thoroughly radical in the true sense of the word: to get at the root or origin of phenomena, and from there to make dramatic changes in the existing conditions… Anarchism is not satisfied with remaining on the surface, merely tinkering to make a damaged world a little less damaging. It is a thoroughgoing reimagining and restructuring of society. It views this as essential if everyone is to be free, and if humanity is to harmonize itself with the nonhuman world….
'… Anarchism is therefore staunchly anticapitalist, which ensures that it is a revolutionary politics. Since battling such primary systems necessarily means getting to the root of them, moving beyond capitalism and states would entail nothing less than turning the world upside down, breaking up all monopolies, and reconstituting everything in common — from institutions to ethics to everyday life.'
(pp.31/32/33)

And further:

'… becoming an anarchist is also a process — without end — of applying an ethical compass to the whole of what one (and everyone) is and could be individually and socially.'
(p.41)

And finally:

'Mutual aid … stresses reciprocal relations, regardless of whether the gift is equal in kind. Humans give back to each other in a variety of ways — the inequality of equals. Individuals and societies flourish because the different contributions are not only equally valued but combine to make a general whole.'
(p.57)

3. Ryley, looking at individual and collectivist forms of anarchism, brings out the distinction between emphasising production and emphasising consumption. 'Individualism and anarchist communism shared a number of features. Both were hostile to capitalism and, especially, the rise of the corporation. In particular, they were critical of the wage system and the alienation of the products of labour from the producer. "Wagedom", as Donisthorpe called it, was thought to be a regime that was exploitative and reduced the worker to little more than a slave. Both varieties, too, shared a particular class analysis that saw an intimate relationship between political power and modern capitalism. The state was also seen, in essence, as the expression of the power of a dominant class, however that class was constituted. It was in itself inevitably exploitative. Both variants denied the existence of a social contract or that democratic government could ever

express a general will or lead to an explicit consent to be governed. As such, neither of the two movements saw political action through the state as in any way being a process of liberation. This could only come through voluntary and spontaneous direct action by the people themselves. Above all, both movements had heretical views on the great Victorian religion of progress. Despite this, the possibility of cultural and intellectual progress was central to their beliefs; they were, for instance, both trenchant advocates of gender equality and they rejected the purely material concept of progress based on unending economic growth fuelled by consumerism.

'However, the differences were no less profound. Central to the dispute between the two was the concept of property. Individualism drew on an older tradition that viewed forms of property as a guarantor of individual independence and economic security and as a device that ensured the full value of labour was gained by the labourer. The distinction individualists drew was between valid and invalid forms of property. For communists, property was in itself a system of expropriation and an institution founded on injustice, which perpetuated exploitation. It was an unbridgeable chasm. This fundamental disparity fuelled all other differences between them. On distribution and exchange, communists relied on the old slogan of "to each according to their needs", denying the necessity of any formal exchange at all. Individualists placed exchange at the centre of their political economy, basing it on contract and free currencies. This, in turn, was reflected in contrasting views of social organisation. Communists relied on spontaneous collectivist

organisation, individualists on mutualism, universal self-employment and an end to monopoly or the possibility of monopolisation. Implicit in both these approaches was the need for different methods of social change. A propertyless society was seen as the product of a universal revolution, whist individualism eschewed revolutionary upheaval in favour of economic self-organisation and a change in individual consciousness through self-education and social evolution.'
Peter Ryley — *Making Another World Possible*.
4. Individualist anarchism seems to slope into libertarianism with its minimal state. The Anarchist view of trade, as expressed by Proudhon, is often associated with the more recent ideas of a 'laissez-faire' society and neo-liberal free markets. Ryley takes up the theme of self-interest and compares it to 'greed is good' consumerism. As Ryley points out, it is just a mistake to associate modern laissez-faire economics with anarchism, and especially with Proudhon. Ryley quotes from John Badcock:
'The only way to escape from bondage is to deny all rights and privileges whatsoever. Look to self-interest *direct* for the attainment of your ends, and you will see that all the good things in life, all harmonious relationships you cling to, will be preserved *because you like them*.'
Ryley observes:
'This may seem to mirror the amorality of the 1980's 'greed is good' mentality, but the reality is that the individualist anarchists favoured the pursuit of self-interest in a society which was structured in such a way as to prevent exploitation, rather than one where it can be gratified through the intensification of exploitation, by gaining wealth at the expense of

others. Self-interest is only universally functional in a free society.'
Individualist anarchists run into the eventual distortions of wealth that inevitably happen — where some people — through luck or hard work or skill — do better than others who are less fortunate. These disparities will only intensify unless kept in check by some kind of re-distribution. Communism usually recognises the need for some kind of organisation to keep equality on track. But to the anarchists, this just means that Communism is a state.
Peter Ryley — *Making Another World Possible*.

5. 'Rarely has it been possible to distinguish the cry for Justice with its inequality of equals from the cry for Freedom with its equality of unequals. Every ideal of emancipation has been tainted by this confusion, which still lives on in the literature of the oppressed. Usufruct has been confused with public property, direct democracy with representative democracy, individual competence with populist elites, the irreducible minimum with equal opportunity.' (Murray Bookchin — *The Ecology of Freedom*)
Equivalence is not the moral coinage of freedom, he goes on to suggest. Bookchin criticises Bakunin, Proudhon and Kropotkin as much as Marx for thus equating equality with freedom. It defies the autonomy of the individual. It implies dependence rather than interdependence.

6. 'There are four main features of this individualist anarchist political economy, drawn predominantly from Proudhon's mutualism. The first is an opposition to both private and public monopoly and all that results from it; the

second is exchange based on free markets and free currencies, regulated by contract rather than law; the third is an extensive concept of property based on use and labour; and, finally, a distinct concept of equality on the basis of *equal rights of ownership and access to resources*, rather than equality of outcome.

'Monopoly, according to the individualists, produces three agents of exploitation. A monopoly of land produces rent, a monopoly of capital produces profit, and systems of exchange are distorted by the most important monopoly of all, the monopoly of money, producing unearned interest. And the chief protector of monopoly is the state, which uses law to maintain it whilst funding itself through taxation, and additional acts of robbery…

'The individualists saw exchange rather than production as the lifeblood of economics. The free competition they advocated could not take place without free and equitable exchange. By limiting the supply of money and fixing it to an intrinsically worthless commodity, gold, capitalists appropriate the wealth produced by labour for themselves as profits. They do this through the state's enforcement of money, their monopoly, as the only medium of exchange. Work that is unrewarded with money is useless for the worker despite the value created. Workers compete against each other, not for market share, but for the scarce good, money. This depresses the price (wages) they receive for their labour, which, whilst increasing profits for the capitalists, in turn produces under-consumption.'

Peter Ryley — *Making Another World Possible*.

7. ‘More important for the social left were Owen’s differences from Marx. In 1844 Owen formulated a set of precepts, the Rochdale Principles, which have served as a beacon for Leftists of a less combative stripe than Marx’s followers. Six in number, these principles are: workshops open to anyone (equality of employment); one person one vote (democracy in the workplace); distribution of surplus in relation to trade (profit sharing); cash trading (he hated “abstract debt” and would have eschewed the modern credit card); political and religious neutrality (and so, toleration of differences at work); and promotion of education (job training tied to employment). In the *Gotha Programme* Marx bitterly attacked principle five: there is no such thing as political neutrality, and religion, that “opiate of the masses”, should be demystified. Still, Owen’s version of socialism built from the ground up in a workshop became a founding text for social democracy; when we think about the rights of labour today, we generally revert to one or more of these principles.’

‘It remains a compelling idea, though we no longer apply the label “workshop” to it; Owen did so because he believed, like Emile Durkheim, that the factory was a more primitive form of social organisation, a regress in human civilisation. The workshop idea extends beyond the Marxist focus on ownership of the means of production; it’s a question as well of how to behave socially once you are in control. To Owen, loyalty and solidarity are necessary for institutions to become productive; modern industrial sociologists have documented the truth of Owen’s proposition. Organisations, whether profit-seeking, governmental or

charitable, need to build commitment; Owen's idea of the workshop is of an institution which combines long-term mutual benefit and loyalty with short-term flexibility and openness.'
Both quotes from Richard Sennet — *Together*

8. 'This third class — between labour and capital — overwhelmingly does tasks that give its members self-confidence, social skills, workplace knowledge, habits and experience of daily workplace decision-making. This empowers them. In contrast, the more typical workers toiling below overwhelmingly do rote, tedious, repetitive and often dangerous tasks that convey only exhaustion, reduced health, personal isolation, habits of obedience, and disempowerment.
'Economic approaches that have in the past informed dissent have focused on two key classes, while we claim they should have focused on three. They have highlighted economic oppression related to profit seeking but have largely ignored — or at times even denied — economic oppression related to maintaining the division between co-ordinators above (usually around 20 percent of all waged employees) and workers below (typically constituting the other 80 percent of all waged employees).
'A rightful rejection of economic oppression got side-tracked, one might say, into aggressively examining property relations without equally examining the division of labour relations having to do with employment.
'This isn't just that the 20 percent in the co-ordinator class do much better than the workers below them, while contending with owners above. It is also that focusing on only two

classes often causes anti-capitalists to arrive at a vision they think elevates workers, *but which in fact elevates co-ordinators*.'
Michael Albert — *Practical Utopia* (my emphasis).

9. 'If you work longer and you do it effectively, you are entitled to more of the social product. If you work more intensely to socially useful ends, again you are entitled to more income. If you work at more onerous, dangerous or boring — but still socially warrantable tasks — you are entitled to more.
'But you aren't entitled to more income by virtue of owning productive property or working with better tools or producing something more valued or even having personal traits that make you more productive, because these attributes don't involve effort or sacrifice, but instead luck and endowment. Your work has to be socially useful to be rewarded, but the reward is not proportional to how useful it is. Effort, duration and sacrifice expended producing outputs that aren't desired is not remunerable labour!'
Michael Albert — *Practical Utopia*.

10. Ryley, (quoting from Henry Seymour) identifies in particular this problem of the worker getting a fair share for their labour, rather than money being siphoned from them in taxes and through the 'economic rent' of owners etc.
'Unlike modern Social Democrats who feel that boosting the circulation of money through state expenditure can rectify this, Seymour felt that it was necessary to reconstruct exchange in such a way as to ensure that the natural value of labour is fully realised in the worker.

'Seymour argued that capital is solely the product of labour and has no intrinsic value of itself. Capital is not essential to labour, but labour is to capital. Capital is merely the accumulated surplus of past labour. Therefore, the unearned increments and privileges conferred by the ownership of capital are no more than the theft of the value of labour from the labourers themselves.
'As if it is not enough for the value of labour of the workers to be extracted from them in ***rent***, ***interest*** and ***profits***, they are then taxed on what little remains. The taxes of the workers maintain the state. And what is the state's purpose? It exists to protect, by force if necessary, the legal right of the capitalists to the fruits of their exploitation of the workers. The workers pay for their own oppression: "The State is an organised conspiracy of plunder, and the natural enemy of the working class."'
Peter Ryley — *Making Another World Possible.*
Ryley quotes from Henry Seymour, *The Philosophy of Anarchism: A paper read before the London Dialectical Society on October 20, 1886*. Emphases mine.

11. Jean-Jacque Rousseau (*The Social Contract*) contrasts the general will with the opinions of the many. The general will can only be formed when individual interests are suspended in favour of the common good.

12. 'Proudhon felt the route to an egalitarian society controlled by and for the workers was for those workers to establish their own autonomous organisations. These would be run in a democratic fashion and the wealth they generated would be shared out equally. In

common with other associationalists, he stayed true to the radical hatred of hierarchy, orthodoxy and elitism.’
Adam Lent — *Small is Powerful*.

13. Adam Lent (*Small is Powerful*) points out that Proudhon suggested small autonomous organisations to control production and trade, to avoid the problems of state organisation identified by trade described above.

14. Michael Albert (*Realising Hope: Life Beyond Capitalism*) suggests — in place of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and World Trade Organisation (WTO) — three new assemblies to replace these global institutions. He names these, the International Asset Agency, the Global Investment Assistance Agency and the World Trade Agency.

15. Consider this passage from Tom Hodgkinson:
‘It is our complicity with the present way of organising things that we must question. When we talk about anarchy, we do not mean a dissolution of order, a Mad Max environment where only the most violent survive. We mean a decentralisation of power; power to the people. D.H. Lawrence wrote that it is not a question of smashing the system but of putting a more humane one in its place: “There must be a system; there must be classes of men; there must be differentiation; either that or amorphous nothingness. The true choice is not between system and no-system. The choice is between system and system, mechanical or organic.”’
Tom Hodgkinson — *How to be Free*.

Hodgkinson goes on to make some observations, worth quoting here:
'It's interesting that he [D.H. Lawrence] uses the word 'organic', which is today such a buzzword in foodie circles and as such easily dismissed as a middle-class fad. But 'organic' is a powerful word and, when we oppose it, as Lawrence does, with 'mechanical', its meaning becomes absolutely clear. Down with the robot, up with the human. Down with sameness, up with variety. Down with dependence, up with self-reliance.'
Hodgkinson goes on to say:
'Anarchy is about the creative spirit fighting the cowed spirit, and the battle can start within ourselves. We need to recognise our own dignity, power and creative force in order not to allow our laziness and desire for comfort to prevent us from living how we want to live.'

Chapter 6

1. In *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, George Woodcock, talking of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon says: 'In his view the federal principle should operate from the simplest level of society. The organisations of administration should begin locally and as near the direct control of people as possible; individuals should start the process of federating into communes and associations. Above that primary level the confederal organisation would become less an organ of administration than of coordination between local units. Thus the nation would be replaced by a geographical confederation of regions, and Europe would become a confederation of confederations, in

which the interest of the smallest province would have as much expression as that of the largest, and in which affairs would be settled by mutual agreement, contract and arbitration.'

2. 'We can therefore reformulate our problem by saying that envisaged from the perspective of "agonistic pluralism" the aim of democratic politics is to transform antagonism to agonism. Collective passions will be given ways to express themselves over issues, which while allowing enough possibility for identification, will not construct the opponent as an adversary. An important difference with the model of "deliberative democracy", is that for "agonistic pluralism" the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions from the sphere of the public, in order to render a rational consensus possible, but to mobilise those passions towards democratic designs.' Chantal Mouffe

Chapter 7

1. In a similar vein, Karl Polanyi tells us:
'The outstanding discovery of recent historical and anthropological research is that man's economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships. He does not act so much as to safeguard his individual interest in the possession of material goods; he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, his social assets. He values material goods only in so far as they serve this end.'

2. It was really class relations that were most important to Marx — the social relations of

production. For Marx, the key determinant is that it is the social relations of class that determine the means of production. The hope for the Marxist is that social relations will eventually be such that the fruits of production are shared by all. Sometimes though, Marx seems to suggest it is just social relations that are paramount.

3. Liberalism is the advancement of human rights, free trade and the traditional freedoms of assembly, worship and expression. 'Liberal democracy' was a term originally coined to contrast with 'social democracy' according to Gordon Graham (*The Case Against the Democratic State*). Social democracy tries to promote socialist values, so far as these would be sanctioned by democracy. Liberal democracy, by contrast, accepts democratic principles only in so far as they do not conflict with liberal values.

Meanwhile, Jonathan Haidt tells us: 'Libertarians are the direct descendants of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century enlightenment reformers who fought to free people and markets from the control of kings and clergy. Libertarians love liberty; that is their sacred value. Many libertarians wish they could simply be known as liberals, but they lost that term in the United States (though not in Europe) when liberalism split into two camps in the late nineteenth century. Some liberals began to see powerful corporations and wealthy industrialists as the chief threats to liberty. These "new liberals" (also known as "left liberals" or "progressives") looked to government as the only force capable of protecting the public and rescuing the many victims of the brutal

practices of early industrial capitalism. Liberals who continued to fear government as the chief threat to liberty became known as "classical liberals", "right liberals" (in some countries), or libertarians (in the United States).' Jonathan Haidt — *The Righteous Mind.*

4. '….the Marxist school inherited many elements from the Classical school. In many ways, it is truer to the Classical doctrine that the latter's self-proclaimed successor, the Neoclassical school. It adopted the labour theory of value, which was explicitly rejected by the Neoclassical school. It also focused on production, whereas consumption and exchange were the keys for the Neoclassical school. It envisioned an economy comprising of classes rather than individuals — another key idea of the Classical school rejected by the Neoclassical school.'

'Despite these differences, the Neoclassical school inherited and developed two central ideas of the Classical school. The first is the idea that economic actors are driven by self-interest but that competition in the market ensures that their actions collectively produce a socially benign outcome. The other is the idea that markets are self-equilibrating. The conclusion is, as in Classical economics, that capitalism — or, rather, the market economy, as the school prefers to call it — is a system that is best left alone as it has the tendency to revert to equilibrium.

'This laissez-faire conclusion of the Neoclassical school was further intensified by a critical theoretical development in the early twentieth century, intended to allow us to judge social improvements in an objective way. Vilfredo

Pareto (1848-1923) argued that, if we respect the rights of every sovereign individual, we should consider a social change an improvement only when it makes people better off without making anyone worse off. There should be no more individual sacrifices in the name of a 'greater good'. This is known as the Pareto criterion and forms the basis for all judgements on social improvements in Neoclassical economics today. In real life, unfortunately, there are few changes that hurt no-one; thus the Pareto criterion effectively becomes a recipe to stick to the status quo and let things be — laissez-faire. Its adoption thus imparted a huge conservative bias to the Neoclassical school.

'Two theoretical developments in the 1920's and the 1930's severed the apparently unbreakable link between Neoclassical economics and the advocacy of free-market policies. After these developments it became impossible to equate Neoclassical economics with free-market economics, as some people still mistakenly do….

[The developments were firstly recognising positive externalities such as research and development (which the government should subsidise) and negative externalities, such as pollution (which the government should penalise). The author continues to describe the second development.]

'A more minor yet important modification came in the 1930's, in the form of the compensation principle. The principle proposes that a change may be deemed a social improvement even when it violates the Pareto criterion (in the sense that there are some losers), if the total gains for the gainers are large enough to compensate all the losers and still leave something behind.

'With all these modifications, there was no reason for the Neoclassical school to remain committed to free-market policies any more.'
Ha-Joon Chang — *Economics: The User's Guide.*

5. Locke himself had three provisos to his idea of ownership based on work added to land. The first is that land can only be appropriated where there is 'enough and as good' left over for others. The second — the sustenance proviso — those with land should make provision for those without, to avoid extreme want. The third — the spoilage proviso — owners are to make use of land only so far as they need, to meet their own needs.

Chapter 9

1. Wendell Berry's rules for a local economy:
1. Always ask of any proposed change or innovation: What will this do to our community? How will this affect our common wealth?
2. Always include local nature — the land, the water, the air, the native creatures — within the membership of the community.
3. Always ask how local needs might be supplied from local sources, including the mutual help of neighbours.
4. Always supply local needs first. (And only then think of exporting their products, first to nearby cities, then to others.)
5. The community must understand the ultimate unsoundness of the industrial doctrine of 'labour saving' if that implies poor work, unemployment, or any kind of pollution or contamination.
6. If it is not to be merely a colony of the national or global economy, the community

must develop appropriately scaled value-adding industries for local products.

7. It must also develop small-scale industries and businesses to support the local farm and forest economy.

8. It must strive to produce as much of its own energy as possible.

9. It must strive to increase earnings (in whatever form) within the community, and decrease expenditures outside the community.

10. Money paid into the local economy should circulate within the community for as long as possible before it is paid out.

11. If it is to last, a community must be able to afford to invest in itself: it must maintain its properties, keep itself clean (without dirtying some other place), care for its old, teach its children.

12. The old and the young must take care of one another. The young must learn from the old, not necessarily and not always in school. There must be no institutionalised 'child care' and 'homes for the aged'. The community knows and remembers itself by the association of old and young.

13. Costs now conventionally hidden or 'externalised' must be accounted for. Whenever possible they must be debited against monetary income.

14. Community members must look into the possible uses of local currency, community-funded loan programmes, systems of barter and the like.

15. They should always be aware of the economic value of neighbourliness — as help, insurance, and so on. They must realise that in our time the costs of living are greatly increased

by the loss of neighbourhood, leaving people to face their calamities alone.
16. A rural community should always be acquainted with, and complexly connected with, community-minded people in nearby towns and cities.
17. A sustainable rural economy will be dependent on urban consumers loyal to local products. Therefore, we are talking about an economy that will always be more co-operative than competitive.

2. Cittaslow principles:

Environment Policies
Measure and reduce air, light and noise pollution.
Measure and protect water quality.
Encourage home composting of waste.
Encourage the use of alternative sources of energy.
Plans for the elimination of aesthetically displeasing advertisements.
Application of an Environmental Management System.
Participation in 'Local Agenda 21' projects.

Infrastructure Policies
Have integrated traffic management, access strategies and infrastructure that recognise the needs of pedestrians and facilitate alternative mobility.
Ensure public places and buildings are accessible to all.
Maintain well-kept green spaces.
Provide easily accessible public toilets and places for people to sit and rest.
Uniform opening hours for the different departments of council offices.

Plan for business hours to coincide with townspeople's needs.

Enhancing the Quality of the Urban Fabric

Conserve, maintain and enhance historic areas, buildings and artefacts of cultural and local significance and their sympathetic re-use.
Have plans to abolish faulty theft alarms, combined with measures for the protection of property and the safety of the community.
Plan the use of sympathetically designed litter bins and effective litter and waste management.
Have policies that create user-friendly historic town centres.
Promote eco-friendly architecture.
Have plans to plant environment-enhancing plants in public places and private gardens.
Promote appreciation of historic centres and to make them user-friendly through the production of a Town Plan, Conservation Area Appraisal, Town Design Statement or similar plan.
Encourage use of reusable or recyclable crockery and cutlery in public establishments.
Encourage the use of interactive websites where the public can communicate with the local administrators of the town.

Celebrating & Promoting Local Produce & Local Products

Create and maintain an up-to-date register of locally produced goods and producers within the natural hinterland of the town.
Increase awareness of good food and nutrition.
Raise awareness of and implement measures for the protection of traditional local produce and local products.
Encourage and provide space for regular farmers markets.

Promote and encourage organic farming and quality certification for products.
Plan educational programmes about organic food production.

Community & Hospitality

Develop a local Slow Food Convivium.
Provide training for people providing services to tourists.
Establish well-marked tourist routes and trails with supporting information.
Promote a wide cross section of social events, sports clubs and volunteering opportunities for the whole community.
Promote special local events to encourage development and support facilities to make it easy for people to come and enjoy them.
Promote any initiatives of a Cittaslow nature.

Communicating Awareness & Understanding of Cittaslow

Establish a directory of local organisations supporting the principles of Cittaslow
Use the Cittaslow logo on council/partnership documents, letterheads, etc.
Promote the Cittaslow Movement's aims and practices.
Develop leaflets and websites that show how Cittaslow themes are applied.
Establish lines of communication to local and national press and media.
Promote healthy living to all age groups and all sections of the community.
Encourage local schools, hospitals and community centres to use local produce.
Promote initiatives to involve opinion leaders and local firms in helping to achieve compliance with Cittaslow criteria.

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