habits of the post-1968 New Left, when the notion of "power" was divested of utopian or imaginative qualities, is to reduce radicalism to yet another subculture that will probably live more on heroic memories than on the hopes of a rational future.

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Cities: The Unfolding of Reason in History

Libertarian municipalism constitutes the politics of social ecology, a revolutionary effort in which freedom is given institutional form in public assemblies that become decision-making bodies. It depends upon libertarian leftists running candidates at the local municipal level, calling for the division of municipalities into wards, where popular assemblies can be created that bring people into full and direct participation in political life. Having democratized themselves, municipalities would confederate into a dual power to oppose the nation-state and ultimately dispense with it and with the economic forces that underpin statism as such. Libertarian municipalism is thus both a historical goal and a concordant means to achieve the revolutionary "Commune of communes."

Libertarian municipalism is above all a *politics* that seeks to create a vital democratic public sphere. In *From Urbanization to Cities*, as well as other works, I have made careful but crucial distinctions between three societal realms: the social, the political, and the state. What people do in their homes, what friendships they form, the communal lifestyles they practice, the way they make their living, their sexual behavior, the cultural artifacts they consume, and the rapture and ecstasy they experience on mountaintops—all these personal as well as materially necessary activities belong to what I

call the *social* sphere of life. Families, friends, and communal living arrangements are part of the social realm. Apart from matters of human rights, it is the business of no one to sit in judgment of what consenting adults freely engage in sexually, the hobbies they prefer, the kinds of friends they adopt, or the spiritual practices they may choose to perform. However much these aspects of life interact with one another, none of these *social* aspects of human life properly belongs to the *public* sphere, which I explicitly identify with *politics* in the Hellenic sense of the term. In creating a new politics based on social ecology, we are concerned with what people do in this public or political sphere.

Libertarian municipalism is not a substitute for the manifold dimensions of cultural or even private life. Yet, once individuals leave the social realm and enter the public sphere, it is precisely the municipality that they must deal with directly. Doubtless the municipality is usually the place where even a great deal of social life is existentially lived—school, work, entertainment, and simple pleasures like walking, bicycling, and disporting themselves—which does not efface its distinctiveness as a unique sphere of life. As a project for entering into the public sphere, libertarian municipalism calls for a radical presence in a community that addresses the question of who shall exercise power in a lived sense; indeed, it is truly a political culture that seeks to reempower the individual and sharpen his or her sensibility as a living citizen.

Today, the concept of citizenship has already undergone serious erosion through the reduction of citizens to "constituents" of statist jurisdictions, or to "taxpayers" who sustain statist institutions. To further reduce citizenship to "personhood"—or to etherealize the concept by speaking of an airy "earth citizenship"—is nothing short of reactionary. It took long millennia for history to create the concept of the citizen as a self-managing and competent agent in democratically shaping a polity. During the French Revolution, the term *citoyen* was used precisely to efface the status-generated relegation of individuals to mere "subjects" of the Bourbon kings. Moreover, revolutionaries of the last century, from Marx to Bakunin,

referred to themselves as "citizens" long before the appellation "comrade" replaced it.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the citizen culminates the transformation of ethnic tribal folk—societies structured around biological facts like kinship, gender differences, and age groups—into a secular, rational, and humane community. Indeed, much of the National Socialist war against "Jewish cosmopolitanism" was in fact an ethnically (*völkisch*) nationalistic war against the Enlightenment ideal of the *citoyen*. For it was precisely the depoliticized, indeed, animalized "loyal subject" rather than the citizen that the Nazis incorporated into their racial image of the German *Volk*, the abject, status-defined creature of Hitler's hierarchical *Führerprinzip*. Once citizenship becomes contentless through the deflation of its existential political reality or, equally treacherously, by the expansion of its historic development into a "planetary" metaphor, we have come a long way toward accepting the barbarism that the capitalist system is now fostering with certain Heideggerian versions of ecology.

To those who level the complaint against libertarian municipalism that the Greek polis was marred by "the exclusion of women, slaves, and foreigners," I would say that we must always remember that libertarian municipalists are also libertarian communists, who obviously oppose hierarchy, including patriarchy and chattel slavery. As it turns out, in fact, the "Greek polis" is neither an ideal nor a model for anything, except perhaps for Rousseau, who greatly admired Sparta. It is the Athenian polis whose democratic institutions I often describe that has the greatest significance for the democratic tradition. In the context of libertarian municipalism, its significance is to provide us with evidence that a people, for a time, could quite self-consciously establish and maintain a direct democracy, despite the existence of slavery, patriarchy, economic and class inequalities, agonistic behavior, and even imperialism, all of which existed throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. The fact is that we must look for what is new and innovative in a historical period, even as we acknowledge continuities with social structures that prevailed in the past.

In fact, short of the hazy Neolithic village traditions that Marija Gimbutas, Riane Eisler, and William Irwin Thompson hypostatize, we will have a hard time finding any tradition that was not patriarchal to one degree or another. Rejecting all patriarchal societies as sources of institutional study would mean that we must abandon not only the Athenian polis but the free medieval communes and their confederations, the *Comuñero* movement of sixteenth-century Spain, the revolutionary Parisian sections of 1793, the Paris Commune of 1871, and even the Spanish anarchist collectives of 1936–37. All of these institutional developments, be it noted, were marred to one degree or another by patriarchal values.

Libertarian municipalists are not ignorant of these very real historical limitations; nor is libertarian municipalism based on any historical "models." No libertarian municipalist believes that society and cities as they exist today can suddenly be transformed into a directly democratic and rational society. The revolutionary transformation we seek is one that requires education, the formation of a movement, and the patience to cope with defeats. As I have emphasized again and again, a libertarian municipalist practice begins, minimally, with an attempt to enlarge local freedom at the expense of state power. And it does this by example, by education, and by entering the public sphere (that is, into local elections or extralegal assemblies), where ideas can be raised among ordinary people that open the possibility of a lived practice. In short, libertarian municipalism involves a vibrant politics in the real world to change society and public consciousness alike. It tries to forge a movement that will enter into open confrontation with the state and the bourgeoisie, not cravenly sneak around them.

It is important to observe that this appeal to a new politics of citizenship is not in any way meant to gloss over very real social conflicts, nor is it an appeal to class neutrality. The fact is that "the People" I invoke does not include Chase Manhattan Bank, General Motors, or any class exploiters and economic bandits. The "People" I am addressing are an oppressed humanity, all of whom must—if

they are to eliminate their oppressions—try to remove the shared roots of oppression as such.

We cannot ignore class interests by completely absorbing them into transclass ones. But in our time, particularization is being overemphasized to the point where any shared struggle must now overcome not only differences in class, gender, ethnicity, "and other issues," but nationalism, religious zealotry, and identity based on even minor distinctions in status. The role of the revolutionary movement for over two centuries has been to emphasize our *shared* humanity precisely against ruling status groups and classes, which Marx, even in singling out the proletariat as hegemonic, viewed as a "universal class." Nor are all "images" that people have of themselves as classes, genders, races, nationalities, and cultural groups rational or humane, evidence of consciousness or desirable from a radical viewpoint. In principle, there is no reason why *différance* as such should not entangle and paralyze us completely in our multifarious and self-enclosed "particularity," in postmodernist Derridean fashion. Indeed, today, when parochial differences among the oppressed have been reduced to microscopic divisions, it is all the more important for a revolutionary movement to resolutely point out the common sources of oppression as such, and the extent to which commodification has universalized them—particularly global capitalism.

The deformations of the past were created largely by the famous "social question," notably by class exploitation, which in great measure could have been remedied by technological advances. In short, they were scarcity societies, albeit not that alone. A new social-ecological sensibility has to be created, as do new values and relationships; this will be done partly by overcoming economic need, however economic need is construed. Little doubt should exist that a call for an end to economic exploitation must be a central feature in any social ecology program and movement, which are part of the Enlightenment tradition and its revolutionary outcome.

The essence of dialectic is to always search out what is new in any development: specifically, for the purposes of this discussion,

the emergence of a transclass people, such as oppressed women, people of color, even the middle classes, as well as subcultures defined by sexual preferences and lifestyles. To particularize distinctions (largely created by the existing social order) to the point of reducing oppressed people to seemingly "diverse persons"—indeed, to mere "personhood"—is to feed into the current privatistic fads of our time and to remove all possibility for collective social action and revolutionary change.

To examine what is really at issue in the questions of municipalism, confederalism, and citizenship, as well as the distinction between the social and the political, we must ground these notions in a historical background where we can locate the meaning of the city (properly conceived in distinction to the megalopolis), the citizen, and the political sphere in the human condition.

Historical experience began to advance beyond a conception of mere cyclical time, trapped in the stasis of eternal recurrence, into a creative history insofar as intelligence and wisdom—more properly, reason—began to inform human affairs. Over the course of a hundred thousand years or so, *Homo sapiens* slowly overcame the sluggishness of their more animalistic cousins the Neanderthals and entered as an increasingly active agent into the surrounding world, both to meet their more complex needs (material as well as ideological), and to alter that environment by means of tools and, yes, instrumental rationality. Life became longer, more secure, increasingly acculturated aesthetically; and human communities, at different levels of their development, tried to define and resolve the problems of freedom and consciousness.

The necessary conditions for freedom and consciousness—or preconditions, as socialists of all kinds recognized in the last century and a half—involved technological advances that, in a rational society, *could* emancipate people from the immediate, animalistic concerns of self-maintenance, increase the realm of freedom from constrictions imposed upon it by preoccupations with material necessity, and place knowledge on a rational, systematic, and coherent basis to the extent that this was possible. These conditions

involved humanity's self-emancipation from the overpowering theistic creations of its own imagination (creations often formulated by shamans and priests for their own self-serving ends, as well as by apologists for hierarchy), notably, mythopoesis, mysticism, antirationalism, and fears of demons and deities, calculated to produce subservience and quietism in the face of the social powers that be.

That the necessary and sufficient conditions for this emancipation have never existed in a "one-to-one" relationship with each other has provided the fuel for Cornelius Castoriadis's essays on the omnipotence of "social imaginaries," Theodor Adorno's basic nihilism, and anarcho-chaotics who, in one way or another, have debased Enlightenment ideals and classical forms of socialism and anarchism. The discovery of the spear did not produce an automatic shift from "matriarchy" to "patriarchy," nor did the discovery of the plow produce an automatic shift from "primitive communism" to private property, as evolutionary anthropologists of the nineteenth century supposed. Indeed, it cheapens any discussion of history and social change to create "one-to-one" relations between technological and cultural developments, a tragic feature of Friedrich Engels's simplification of his mentor's ideas.

In fact, social evolution is very uneven and combined. No less significantly, social evolution, like natural evolution, is profligate in producing a vast diversity of social forms and cultures, which are often incommensurable in their details. If our goal is to emphasize the vast differences that separate one society from another rather than identify the important thread of similarities that bring humanity to the point of a highly creative development, "the Aztecs, Incas, Chinese, Japanese, Mongols, Hindus, Persians, Arabs, Byzantines, and Western Europeans, plus everything that could be enumerated from other cultures" do not resemble each other, to cite the obligations Castoriadis places on what he calls "a 'rational dialectic' of history" and, implicitly, on reason itself.[20] Indeed, it is

20 C. Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 63.

unpardonable to carelessly fling these civilizations together without regard for their place in time, their social pedigrees, the extent to which they can be educed dialectically from one another, or without an explanation of *why* as well as descriptions of how they differ from each other. By focusing entirely on the peculiarity of individual cultures, one reduces the development of civilizations in an eductive sequence to the narrow nominalism that Stephen Jay Gould applied to organic evolution, even to the point where the "autonomy" so prized by Castoriadis can be dismissed as a purely subjective "norm," of no greater value in a postmodernist world of interchangeable equivalences than authoritarian "norms" of hierarchy.

But if we explore very existential developments toward freedom from toil and freedom from oppression in all its forms, we find that there *is* a history to be told of rational advances, without presupposing teleologies that predetermine that history and its tendencies. If we can give material factors their due emphasis without reducing cultural changes to strictly automatic responses to technological changes and, without locating all highly variegated societies in a nearly mystical sequence of "stages of development," then we can speak intelligibly of definite advances made by humanity out of animality; out of the timeless "eternal recurrence" of relatively stagnant cultures; out of blood, gender, and age relationships as the basis for social organization; and out of the image of the "stranger," who was not kin to other members of a community, indeed, who was "inorganic," to use Marx's term, and hence subject to arbitrary treatment beyond the reach of customary rights and duties, defined as they were by tradition rather than reason.

Important as the development of agriculture, technology, and village life were in moving toward this moment in human emancipation, the emergence of the city was of the greatest importance in freeing people from mere ethnic ties of solidarity, in bringing reason and secularity, however rudimentarily, into human affairs. For it was only by this evolution that segments of humanity could replace the tyranny of mindless custom with a definable and rationally conditioned *nomos*, in which the idea of justice could begin to

replace tribalistic "blood vengeance," until later, when it was replaced by the idea of freedom. I speak of the *emergence* of the city, because although the development of the city has yet to be completed, its moments in history constitute a discernable dialectic that opened an emancipatory realm within which "strangers" and the "folk" could be reconstituted as citizens: secular and fully rational beings who in varying degrees approximate humanity's *potentiality* to become free, rational, fully individuated, and rounded.

Moreover, the city has been the originating and authentic sphere of politics in the Hellenic democratic sense of the term, and of civilization, not, as I have emphasized again and again, of the state. Which is not to say that city-states have not existed. But democracy, conceived as a face-to-face realm of policymaking, entails a commitment to the Enlightenment belief that all "ordinary" human beings are potentially competent to collectively manage their political affairs—a crucial concept in the thinking, all its limitations aside, of the Athenian democratic tradition and, more radically, of those Parisian sections of 1793 that gave equal voice to women as well as all men. At such high points of political development, in which subsequent advances often self-consciously built on and expanded more limited earlier ones, the city became more than a unique arena for human life and politics, while municipalism—*civicism*, which the French revolutionaries later identified with "patriotism"—became more than an expression of love of country. Even when Jacobin demagogues gave it chauvinistic connotations, "patriotism" in 1793 meant that the "national patrimony" was not the "property of the King of France" but that France, in effect, now belonged to *all* the people.

Over the long run, the city was conceived as the sociocultural destiny of humanity, a place where, by late Roman times, there were no "strangers" or ethnic "folk," and by the French Revolution, no custom or demonic irrationalities, but rather *citoyens* who lived in a free terrain, organized themselves into discursive assemblies, and advanced canons of secularity and *fraternité*, or more broadly, solidarity and *philia*, hopefully guided by reason. Moreover, the French

revolutionary tradition was strongly confederalist until the dictatorial Jacobin Republic came into being, wiping out the Parisian sections as well as the ideal of a *fête de la fédération*. One must read Jules Michelet's account of the Great Revolution to learn the extent to which civicism was identified with municipal liberty and *fraternité* with local confederations, indeed a "republic" of confederations, between 1790 and 1793. One must explore the endeavors of Jean Varlet and the Évêché militants of May 30–31, 1793, to understand how close the Revolution came in the insurrection of June 2 to constructing the cherished confederal Commune of communes that lingered in the historical memory of the Parisian *fédérés*, as they designated themselves, in 1871.

Hence, let me stress that a libertarian municipalist politics is not a mere strategy for human emancipation; it is a rigorous and ethical concordance of means and ends (of instrumentalities, so to speak) with historic goals, which implies a concept of history as more than mere chronicles or a scattered archipelago of self-enclosed "social imaginaries."

The *civitas*, humanly scaled and democratically structured, is the potential home of a universal *humanitas*. It is the initiating arena of rational reflection, discursive decision-making, and secularity in human affairs. It speaks to us from across the centuries in Pericles' magnificent funeral oration and in the earthy, amazingly familiar and eminently secular satires of Aristophanes, whose works demolish Castoriadis's emphasis on the *mysterium* and "closure" of the Athenian polis to the modern mind. No one who reads the chronicles of Western humanity can ignore the rational dialectic that underlies the accumulation of mere events and that reveals an unfolding of the human potentiality for universality, rationality, secularity, and freedom in an eductive relationship that alone should be called *History*. This history, to the extent that it has culminations at given moments of development on which later civilizations built, is anchored in the evolution of a secular public sphere, in *politics*, in the emergence of the rational city—the city that is rational institutionally, creatively, and communally. Nor can imagination be excluded from

History, but it is an imagination that must be elucidated by reason. For nothing can be more dangerous to a society, indeed to the world today, than the kind of unbridled imagination, unguided by reason, that so easily lent itself to Nuremberg rallies, fascist demonstrations, Stalinist idolatry, and death camps.

Instead of retreating to quietism, mysticism, and purely personalized appeals for change, we must together explore the kinds of institutions that would be required in a rational, ecological society, the kind of politics we should appropriately practice, and the political movement needed to achieve such a society. Social ecology and its politics—libertarian municipalism—seeks to do just this: to institutionalize freedom and guide us to a humane and ecological future—one that will fulfill the unfilled promise of the city in history.

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