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Editors:
Jahangeer Moini Alamdari , Hamid Malekzade

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Jahangir Moeini Alamdari
University of Tehran
Hamid Malekzadeh
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Life beyond the Sustainable City

Phenomenology, Post-Urban Politics, and the Environmental Crisis

H. Peter Steeves

Professor of Philosophy DePaul University
psteeves@depaul.edu

Abstract

Phenomenology provides us with a method for critiquing the tools and technologies we use to power our cultures, support our cities, and maintain our state institutions. The environmental crisis that we currently have is inextricably tied to various political crises as well; and how we envision the tools, media, and material structures of our world are tied to these crises. Informed by an Husserlian conception of personhood and consciousness, an anarchic communitarian politics gives us a moral grounding for a critique of liberalism, capitalism, neoliberal democracy, the State, an assumed urban future, and the concept of "sustainability" as it relates to the existential threat of climate change and global warming. Thinking "outside the city" and "outside civilization," we come to look to the anarchic communitarian leanings of Diogenes and indigenous peoples for a view of a future that does not sustain the status quo but instead radically re-envisions it.Phenomenology provides us with a method for critiquing the tools and technologies we use to power our cultures, support our cities, and maintain our state institutions. The environmental crisis that we currently have is inextricably tied to various political crises as well; and how we envision the tools, media, and material structures of our world are tied to these crises. Informed by an Husserlian conception of personhood and consciousness, an anarchic communitarian politics gives us a moral grounding for a critique of liberalism, capitalism, neoliberal democracy, the State, an assumed urban future, and the concept of "sustainability" as it relates to the existential threat of climate change and global warming. Thinking "outside the city" and "outside civilization," we come to look to the anarchic communitarian leanings of Diogenes and indigenous peoples for a view of a future that does not sustain the status quo but instead radically re-envisions it.

Keywords: phenomenology, Husserl, Heidegger, anarchy, Diogenes.

Greek philosophy begins with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—three bourgeois philosophers wandering, for the most part, within the confines of their city-state, constructing a politics that has, though different in its modern trappings, changed little in 2,500 years in terms of its conception of the human subject and the nature of the *polis*. But what if we looked to a figure *outside* of the city for our political thought? Diogenes lived, literally, outside the gates of Athens in a barrel, but he was also a thinker that demanded we think outside the confines of our inherited traditions in general. Using Diogenes as a touchstone, then, this essay seeks to argue for a phenomenologically informed anarchic communitarianism that questions the assumptions that go unacknowledged in contemporary political theory as well as environmental ethics and environmental public policy. Informed by an Husserlian conception of personhood and consciousness (in which the Ego and Other [and community of Others] are co-founded, even to the extent to which there is no conscious-life whatsoever without the community of other beings], I argue that an anarchic communitarian politics gives us a moral grounding for a critique of liberalism, capitalism, neoliberal democracy, the State, an assumed urban future, and the concept of "sustainability" in relation to the existential threat of climate change and global warming. Phenomenology will also provide us with a method for critiquing the tools and technologies we use to power our cultures, support our cities, and maintain our state institutions. If phenomenology can show us a path toward envisioning a political future in which we may pursue true justice, it does so precisely by both pointing to the failure of our contemporary institutions/ideologies and providing us with new ones to take their place. It is not merely the nation-state that has led us to our current political and environmental disasters, but rather the sort of thinking that can only imagine some better version of the nation-state as the cure—and some way of sustaining the status-quo that won't require major changes on the part of the ruling classes. Husserl—and Diogenes—offer ways of constructing alternative models, ones that are relevant for the world today (and not merely the United States). Along the way, I will thus take up such topics as the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, the origin of the city in history and religion, the figure of the Cynic from Sinope (a.k.a., Turkey), the phenomenology of tool-being, and the material conditions of urban life. In the end, I hope to have shown that the perspective of someone with no personal possessions, living in a barrel outside the walls of the

city, is relevant for today—and that a phenomenologically founded response to our contemporary political and environmental crises offers a way to envision a radically alternative path to a better collective future.

Greek philosophy begins with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—three bourgeois philosophers wandering, for the most part, within the confines of their city-state, constructing a worldview and ultimately a politics that has, though different in its modern trappings, changed little in 2,500 years in terms of its conception of the human subject and the nature of the polis. But outside the city there was Diogenes— a philosopher living, literally, beyond the gates of Athens in a barrel, heckling the status-quo, spitting in the face of the ruling class, and demanding we think outside the confines of our inherited traditions in general.

Philosophy continues today as part of academia—and thus as part of the military-industrial-academic complex. In cities across the globe, philosophers mostly do non-philosophy, producing essays and books like a corporation produces widgets, teaching students who don't really want to be there but are forced by economic forces to search out a university diploma. It is bourgeois non-philosophy masquerading as a love of wisdom. But outside the city, in the mountains, there was Sub comandante Insurgent Marcos, the "spokesman" for the Mexican Zapatista revolutionary force, who practiced a philosophy of resistance and revolution, and who reminded us that when the Mexican federal government emerged from the cities to wipe out the indigenous rebels fighting against globalism and neoliberalism and their own extermination, the "…Zapatistas resisted, they retreated to the mountains, and they began an exodus that today…has not ended."[1]

As we think about the problems that face us—from climate change threatening the world in general to the alienation of everyday life caused by capitalism, technologization, neoliberalism, and the specific ways in which the institutions of our States isolate, separate, and disempower us—we would be forgiven for feeling more cynicism than even the original Cynic himself. But we are not truly powerless. Answers are available to us, though they might not be in the places we imagine. They might lie outside of the city—in the mountains, in the towns, beyond the gates of all of the proverbial Athens's of our modern world. This, then, is where we must venture.

There are those today who hope that the various crises in which we are enmeshed can be solved by the same systems and institutions that created those crises in the first place. This is a form of madness. But there are arguments far richer than those that are ad hominem to be made. Let us begin, then, by investigating the nature of tools, technology, and the materiality of the institutions that we inhabit. These are huge categories, of course. They include everything from a hammer to a cell phone, from a tractor to a traffic light, from a city to a neoliberal democratic nation-state. We must begin small and work our way up.

The standard assumption is that tools are, themselves, value-neutral. The belief is that they operate in a way that is without any value in and of themselves: they might help us enact our projects—and those projects can be good or bad—but the tool itself cannot be good or bad. However, this is not the case at all. As phenomenology has been quite proficient at demonstrating, every tool has a value built-in to it—a value that we necessarily adopt when we pick up the tool. Every tool demands that we become the sort of people who appropriately use the tool and inhabit the lifeworld, thus adopting the ethos of the tool.

Consider the hammer. We think that the hammer is value-neutral: we can use it to build homes for the homeless or whack people on the head, thus doing good or bad things, but the hammer itself is neither good nor bad. This common assumption, however, is not true at all. The hammer has the necessary values that are attached to it. When we pick up a hammer, we see the world as "a hammer user." We are changed by the hammer. We must hold the hammer the way it demands; we move our arm the way it demands; we develop the skills that it values (e.g., eye-hand coordination); we see the world as divided into things that are hittable and not-hittable. To the hammer-user, everything is a potential nail. We change our way of looking at the world, our way of being-in-the-world because the hammer has these particular values built-in and we cannot help but adopt them when we use the hammer.

If we think of a cell phone versus a land-line phone, they are completely different tools and thus have completely different values. Cell phones created a new sense of private versus public space after they were introduced to the world. They constituted us as always available and so we have become always available. They have made

us feel as if we are safer than we really are—as if we are more attached to our loved ones than we really are. Cell phones have changed our way of being-in-the-world because they have values that are inherent to their tool-being.

When a new tool is introduced to a culture, is it possible to know before-hand what values that tool has built-in and thus how those values will change the people who use the tool? Usually, these values are well-known, in fact, and they are the values that benefit those who create and control the technology. It is always a good practice to ask: "Who benefits *the most* from this technology or tool? Whose values are these?" And the answer is that it is usually the ruling class, those who own the means of production, the upper 1%. A cell phone is sold to us as a device of convenience, and it is true that having one might save your life in some very particular and seldom-encountered circumstance. But day-to-day it is the ruling class that benefits from our owning cell phones—from our being available 24/7 when work calls, from our shopping with and consuming media from our phones without a break, from our false sense of being connected to each other (because that false sense of connection blinds us to our true alienation). This much is clear today, but could we have known it would be like this in the early 1990s when cell phones were just being introduced to the mass public?

Or to make the question even more difficult: could anyone have known more than a century ago how the telephone, *in general*, would change the world? Could anyone have predicted the values in the telephone and how those values would change the way we live and think and exist in general? It turns out, they could—and they did. [2] From 1880-1930, various thinkers shared their views concerning how the telephone would change society, publishing their predictions in such places as *The New York Times*, trade journals, FCC reports, and even popular magazines. When collated, their collective wisdom is astounding, their projections and forecasts staggeringly accurate. A few of those predictions include: the telephone will aid industrial/corporate centralization and thus management at a distance will become more likely; the telephone will foster the growth of suburbs as well as skyscrapers; the telephone will provide an (unfounded?) sense of security to farmers and lonely people; the telephone will reduce regional dialect differences; the quality of letter-writing will decline; the telephone ring will have an insistent and

demanding quality; the telephone will change people's sense of distance, and the telephone will foster impersonality in the culture. Clearly, one need not be a trained, academic phenomenologist to be able to think carefully and creatively about tool-being.

If we expand our analysis to include "larger" *techne* rather than mere pieces of mass-consumer technology we find that like tools, media and the institutions of our society also maintain and express inherent values.

We have known at least since the 1960s that "the medium is the message." Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman taught us that much. Smoke signals, for instance, are great at sending messages concerning impending invading forces, but you cannot write poetry with puffs of smoke. The telegraph is capable of transmitting a brief declaratory thought, but there cannot be political debate over a telegraph wire. Like Postman, I would also argue that television is incapable of transmitting political discourse or maintaining a democracy. And the same goes for the Internet as well: without face-to-face exchanges that employ actual conversations among neighbors who generally know each other, nothing like democratic discourse can take place.

Various media have various values inherent to their being. Let us turn, then, to look at the institution of the city—from the ground up—because the material structures that comprise and organize a city are also suffused with values. Building a house that has a porch, for instance, encourages the meeting of one's neighbors, but only if there is no large front yard and only if you also encourage walking in that neighborhood (because people rushing by in cars cannot, of course, stop and chat). Similarly, if an area is pedestrian-friendly, small shops will flourish (because you have to pass by them slowly and thus have a moment to look in the window). Small shops tend to be owned by an individual, local people rather than corporations. All true. But the built-in values go down even deeper—down to the level of transportation (which will ultimately help us think about how we power cities and power our society).

The width of a street is a deeply important value-commitment. Cars are, on average, six feet wide. The United States Interstate Highway System uses a 12-foot standard lane width. The average U.S. Street, in general, is 25 feet wide—more than twice the amount of space necessary for two cars. Having such wide streets leads drivers to assume that conditions are safer than they actually are. The

driver assumes that because s/he has more room, it is okay to drive faster, it is okay to text, it is okay to drive "a little drunk—all because there is so much buffer room should a swerve become necessary or the unexpected happen. But wider lanes are not actually safer. When lanes are wider, pedestrians are in traffic longer when they cross a street, meaning that there is more time that they can be struck by a car. And those cars are moving faster when lanes get wider, too. A pedestrian hit by a car traveling 30 m.p.h. at the time of impact is eight times more likely to be killed as one hit by a car traveling 20 m.p.h. [3] Narrow streets of 18-feet widths, such as those more typically found in European towns, mean slower cars. Winding, curving streets rather than straight ones mean slower cars—the driver is forced to drive more slowly due to the material condition of that narrow, winding street. Narrower lanes make more room for bike lanes, and bike lanes make it safer for pedestrians because there is an extra buffer between humans-on-foot and humans-in-cars.

As we can see, how wide we decide to make a traffic lane is itself, an ethical commitment to a conception of the Good, to a way of life. The width of a car lane creates a set of values that are conducive to a particular way of living and a particular set of principles and ideals in general. Of course, we all want to champion the value of safety, for instance. But "safety" is a relative concept. As Jeff Speck, a New Urbanist planner, argues: "If safety were the only goal of traffic planning, all streets would be one-lane wide—or better yet, zero lanes wide. The fact that they are not the means that we, as a society, are more than willing to sacrifice lives for automobility." [4] We don't want anyone to die, but we are willing to allow some death because we apparently value cars more than we value life as an *absolute* good. Let us note before moving on that this sort of calculus is only possible in a large, over-populated polis. In other words, we think that cars are more valuable than human life in the abstract because statistically speaking it is unlikely that we will personally know—or even known someone who knows—the next person to die in a car accident. In the U.S., someone dies in a car accident every sixteen minutes. [5] That is a frightening statistic. What is even more frightening, however, is to contemplate how many people there have to be in society for us *not* to feel worried or sad about one of us dying every sixteen minutes. It is the size of the polis that fosters this coldness and estrangement from

each other—and our willingness to abandon a shared commitment to life and good health.

These days there is much discussion about how we can have sustainable societies, which ultimately means sustainable cities, it would seem. Obviously, we need to approach this topic by looking at what values are built into so-called sustainable tools—and even whether or not it is possible to have a *city* that promotes our mutual flourishing. It turns out that the technology we use to power ourselves not only maintains and expresses values; it also forces a particular conception of energy on us. As we think about the politics of future energy use, then, we first have to begin with a historical—and a historically-informed phenomenological—analysis of how we have powered our communities in the past.

The modern version of the steam engine was invented by James Watt in 1775—a piece of technology that ushered in the Industrial Revolution of 1820-1870. The European Industrial Revolution changed the world in many ways, of course, but our very conception of what it means to use energy changed due to the technology of the steam engine. Energy before the steam engine was a question of muscle power—either human or animal. Muscle power is always in short supply: muscles need to rest; they need to be respected and nurtured. The horse on the farm needs care, nurturing, coaxing, negotiating, accommodation, acceptance. A draught animal demands a *relationship*. This relationship made demands on those who wanted the energy. With the introduction of the steam engine *energy* was re-conceptualized. Now, energy is seen as just something that is lying around, ready to be used without consequence. There is no need to respect the steam engine, to let it rest, to nurture it, to coax it, to give back to it in exchange for what it gives to us. Rather than working with the natural world, humans necessarily began seeing themselves as over and against the world such that energy is seen as something latent in nature, waiting to be used and harnessed, with no reciprocal demands placed on us—no relationship needed at all. As a result, we come to see the world as made-for-us and we see ourselves at the center of the universe. This worldview has not changed since the Industrial Revolution: from the steam engine to the internal combustion engine to nuclear, wind, hydro, and solar energy, all of this energy, labeled "sustainable" or not, is still seen as ours for the taking today. And perhaps it is this view that has led us to our current

problems. Perhaps it is this underlying conceptual assumption that energy is just waiting for us to collect it—with no demands on us—that needs to be abandoned as we search for a better future.

I can find no convincing argument to the contrary; but more than this, I believe *sustainability* in general to be a horrible goal. "Sustainability" is a term that was invented by the ruling class. It is about finding a way to keep the current way of life possible (which of course they want to do because they think that they are "winning"). Sustainability begins with the assumption that we more or less need to keep the values of dominant Western society today, but just find a way to make that lifestyle more stable so that it can spread, thrive, and last into the future. It wants to maintain the status quo on a fundamental level. This ignores the problem that it is precisely those values that have led to our current hellish state. The status quo should not be sustained! There is inevitably a bourgeois ideology at work in sustainability. As a result, *sustainability* is not addressing white privilege, patriarchy, class oppression, species oppression, the military-industrial-academic complex, etc., all of which are key ingredients in the overall ideology that makes us look at the world around us and think of everything that isn't "us" as a mere commodity/resource to be used. The word "sustainability" can trick us into thinking that we need a new way of life that is one that can last, but what it is truly about is finding a way to keep going as is. The "keep going" part is what "sustainability" addresses. But we should be talking about the "as is."

If there are children working for slave wages in sweatshop conditions literally chained to the machinery (as has been documented in the world today), we should not be having a discussion about how we can get those kids some air-conditioning in the room or "more comfortable" chains so we can somehow keep the factory open, business as usual. We should not ask how we can sustain such a practice. "Sustainability" should not even be part of our discussion here in any way: whether or not the practice is sustainable is completely irrelevant to ethics. And so, we must question why it is part of the discussion when it comes to environmental ethics.

Part of what sustainability wants to sustain is the urban structure of American and European life: the city. But even if we admit that our tools and structures have values, and we try to make those values good ones, and even if we find a better model and a more appropriate goal

than sustainability, it might be the case that cities *per se* are completely morally indefensible.

Where do cities come from? The answer to this, at least in the mythology of the west, is not a happy story. According to the Abrahamic (Judeo-Christian-Muslim) tradition, it was Cain who founded the very first city. Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, who committed the first murder and is generally seen as the first man ever to lead an immoral life in general: Cain, the cosmopolitan, also founded the first city. *The urban* thus begins with sin.

We would do well to move beyond the city for our philosophy— and we will—but on the way out, let us remember Aristotle who argues that civic virtues only become real when practiced, and they cannot be practiced when there is no trust. Trust requires face-to-face relations. Trust can never be found when one lives alongside too many people. The Greeks had city-states—a polis—but according to Aristotle (and Plato before him), even the polis of their times was already too large. Aristotle realized that growth was a major political and ethical problem, as did Plato who often referred to the polis as a horse (this is where Socrates gets the nickname "the gadfly," also known as a horse-fly, a fly that buzzes around and bothers a horse). Plato, through Socrates, points out that a horse grows from birth until adulthood, but a horse cannot grow forever. If a horse were to grow indefinitely, she would die—collapsing under her own weight. Aristotle thus tries to figure out how much a polis should appropriately grow:

[The] possibility of increase is not without limit, and what the limit of the state's expansion is can easily be seen from practical considerations…. [I]n order to decide questions of justice and in order to distribute offices according to merit it is necessary for the citizens to know each other's personal characters, since where this does not happen to be the case the business of electing officials and trying lawsuits is bound to go badly. A haphazard decision is unjust in both matters, and this must obviously prevail in an excessively numerous community. [6]

The problem is that if we don't know each other, we cannot truly live together justly. Alienation makes it possible to mistreat each other. We can dismiss each other as less-than-persons when we interact because we'll probably never see each other again after our initial encounter; injustice enters our lives. Athens probably had

around 175,000 people. Aristotle suggested that the cut-off for a just polis is around 5,000. At the limit of 5000, we can't quite know everyone, but we can at least know someone who knows the person we don't know. At this size, we will also be related to each other in multiple ways. That is, it is not just the case that you are my neighbor, but your sister is my nephew's school teacher, and your best friend is the person who provides the flour to the bakery where I buy my bread, etc. The size of the community allows us to be related in multiple ways in a rich interlocking intersubjective enmeshment. When the polis gets larger, I not only interact with strangers, but I interact with people who necessarily and always will be strangers. Phenomenologically, if I am intersubjectively constituted by my roles and relationships—if these relations ontologically make me what I am, make me into a subject—then the richer these relations are, the more robust and stable and diverse they are, the richer my own subjectivity will be. Indeed, it is the consciousness of others that makes my own consciousness possible. Furthermore, it allows us to live together in such a way that we can will a common life together in a meaningful way. As Husserl explains:

We do not only live next to one another but in one another. We determine one another personally...from one I to another I. And our wills do not merely work on Others as the components of our surroundings but in the Others: Our wills extend themselves onto the will of the Other, onto the Other's willing which at the same time is our willing so that the deed of the Other can become our deed, even if in a modified manner. [7]

The question of the size of the polis is paramount. If the city is too large, we cannot make decisions about our own lives ourselves. We cannot will together. We instead have to elect rulers to speak, and will, on our behalf. But representative democracy is an oxymoron. A representative cannot re-present us if we have never been present to him or her in the first place.   This is a basic Husserlian phenomenological truth. When I say "we," I am apperceiving you and your viewpoint. When I speak for *us,* you are presently-absent in what I am saying. But there are different levels of absences. If you have never been presently-present to me in the first place, then it is impossible for you to be presently-absent in any meaningful way. I literally cannot re-present without your prior present-presencing.

Consider, for example, the following phenomenological thought-experiment. Imagine that we are going out to dinner together as friends. At the end of the meal, you leave the table to use the restroom and, in your absence, the waiter comes to ask if we would like dessert. I say, "We'll both have coffee and we'll also split a slice of cake." In the "we" there is my own self (mostly presently-present) and there is your self (mostly presently-absent). In saying "we want"—in willing for *us*—I make a decision for our collective future based on a conception of the Good that is informed by my own notion of the common Good as well as your appresented vantage point. If I know you—if I share a life with you, have a history with you, have examples from the past on which to extrapolate your positions for the future—then the "we" in the "We want coffee and cake" is less likely to misfire and I am less likely to do wrong by you because your appresented vantage point on the common Good is at least somewhat known to me. Of course, I might still be wrong. You might return to the table and, upon hearing that I ordered coffee and cake to share, tell me that you are actually too full tonight and didn't want to have even half of a dessert this time. But if I know you and have tried to flesh out the horizon of our Common Good in the past (knowing, for instance, that you generally prefer coffee to tea, cake to pie, etc.), then there is less chance that this will take place—and less chance, even if I get it wrong this time, that you will be angry with me and feel that an *injustice* has taken place against you. Friendships are always navigating around these moments. However, if I were to say to the waiter, "The whole restaurant—everyone here having dinner now—we will all have coffee and cake, so please bring everyone here coffee and cake and add that cost to each of their bills," knowing that I have never even met most of the people in the restaurant and thus their present absence in the "we" is extremely absent, then I would clearly be doing something inappropriate. When our so-called political representatives vote on behalf of *us*, they are thus necessarily lying, engaging in a phenomenological contradiction of sorts, and committing an injustice.

For similar reasons, cities are immoral because they demand institutions that are alienating and oppressive. Such institutions take care of the most important parts of life on our behalf. By allowing them to do this we forfeit our humanity and any chance of being a moral person. We think: *I don't need to care for my child's mind*

because schools do that. I don't need to care for my parents in their old age because there is always a retirement complex and then a nursing home. I don't have to worry about being healthy because there are hospitals that will treat me when a crisis arises, and insurance companies that will pay for it. I don't have to care about justice because there are police and lawyers and judges who will take care of that for me (and when someone is found "guilty" of something, we can lock him away in a prison so I don't ever have to see him and deal with him and think about him as a person). All of the most important, the most basic, and fundamental parts of being a person—the parts that constitute a life lived together (and thus a life in general)—are forfeited in this way as we hand over the work of being with each other to institutions.

Cities, furthermore, operate on a morally bankrupt ethos of colonialism in order to perpetuate themselves. We can especially see this in terms of how they feed themselves. As cities grow larger and require more resources that they cannot produce for themselves, they turn to "importing" those goods from rural areas. Huge parts of the United States, for instance, are now just domestic colonies: they grow crops and prepare their natural resources for shipment out of the community. They become mere providers for others who are far away—others who are thought to be more sophisticated, more learned, more important, worthier in every way. Wealth and capital begin to accumulate in the cities. Rural areas, like all colonies, are driven into poverty. Soon, cultural divides mark themselves politically and in every other way. In the U.S. this means blue states, red states; blue counties, red counties; the liberal elites and the backward rural people; precious snowflakes, and the basket of deplorables. It doesn't have to be politically divided like this, but history tends toward this direction and this judgment under an ethos of colonialism. Everyone suffers, though rural people suffer more. Without the constant flow of resources from rural areas to urban areas, the city would collapse. In other words, the city cannot exist without colonialism. And colonialism is immoral.

When we look for true alternatives to these ways of thinking and this way of life, we necessarily find ourselves outside the gates of the city. We find ourselves with the marginalized, with those who occupy the liminal borderlands. This is the territory of Diogenes, of the poets rather than the politicians, of the indigenous people who aren't merely

history but are living and fighting for a new way of life even today. This is where we find ourselves and our salvation.

We have arrived at a point where it is clear that a new political theory is needed—or perhaps a complete rejection of politics and "the political" since the polis and the conceptions of politics that we have inherited are part of the problem. In order to bypass the evils of institutions, it must be anarchic in nature. In order to be sure that the neoliberal conception of the self is rejected, it must be communitarian. In order to ensure that we have the power to decide—to will collectively—the tools, technology, and media employed in our culture, it must not be compatible with capitalism. Phenomenology can lead us along the correct path, especially as we realize that experience is always in the dative plural case, that subjectivity is intersubjectivity, and that the Self and the Other always arise in unison and as co-constituting. [8] Consequently, all of the theories that are based on seeing us as inherently separate, monadic, competitive, and—ultimately—alienated can be critiqued by showing how they are founded on phenomenological contradictions. There's a story to be told about how we got into this mess. And there are alternatives.

Diogenes was, perhaps, the ultimate outsider—living outside the city gates as a literal foreigner in Greece. Born in Sinope sometime around 412 BCE, the reason that he traveled to Athens was that he had been banished from his home for defacing the local currency—most likely in collusion with his father, a minter of coins. "Defacing" is probably a code-word for "counterfeiting." And there is reason to believe that Diogenes was not counterfeiting in order to spend the fake money and get rich, but instead to destabilize the economy and the government, trying to take control back from the ruling class. What could be more anarchic in spirit? Unlike Plato, who came from a rich family, Diogenes was a critic of wealth, materialism, and power imbalances. Diogenes, after all, was once asked about where to spit in a rich man's house. His answer was that one has to find the dirtiest spot possible: "that's why I always spit in a rich man's face," he concluded. Diogenes was also a heckler of Socrates and Plato, chastising them for their other-worldly, essentially bourgeois, theories and commitments. A life spent in idle contemplation of Triangle and Love is the mark of someone who doesn't really have to worry about food, shelter, actual love, and the other basics of life. In many ways, once he arrived in Athens, Diogenes kept up his anarchic work of

defacing currency, though it was, perhaps, a *cultural* currency that he destroyed and upended as he forced the Greek philosophers and citizens to question their most basic assumptions concerning life in the city and thus the nature of the good life.

Diogenes was, essentially, anti-civilization. We think that things are bad today, but large-scale cities and societies, in general, had already alienated their citizens two-and-a-half millennia ago, creating needs rather than solving them. The cynic who lived outside the gates of Athens in a barrel had given up "civilized" clothing and shelter, and, as one story would have it, he even threw away his final possession—the bowl he owned (and used for drinking as well as eating)—when he saw a young boy scooping up and drinking water in his cupped hands. The bowl, Diogenes realized, was just another commodity and relic of civilization that he had been duped into believing was necessary when it was not. Civilization, for Diogenes, was a mask worn over nature and the truth. It is impossible to be a good and virtuous human being, announced Diogenes the Dog, given the politics of the civilized state, and so he held a lantern up in the *agora* in search of a virtuous man, and, unable to find one, crawled back into his barrel outside the city.

Half a world away, and twenty-five centuries later, the members of the Dark Mountain project concur. Composed of a group of scientists and activists, the Dark Mountain maintains that given the state of our climate crisis, it is time to admit that there are no scientific, technological, or political solutions to global warming—it is too late; it is all coming to an end. After all, technology and politics caused the *problem* in the first place; we were fools ever to believe that they could provide the *solution* as well. Consequently, the idea of progress must be rejected and, indeed, was always an element in our downfall: thinking that we are perpetually getting better and better blinded us to how worse and worse it was all getting. Obviously, sustainability isn't the right path. Human civilization is coming to an end and cannot—and should not—be sustained:

We do not believe that everything will be fine…. We are the first generations born into a new and unprecedented age—the age of ecocide…. [Yet] today's environmentalists are more likely to be found at corporate conferences hymning the virtues of 'sustainability' and 'ethical consumption' than doing anything as naive as questioning the intrinsic values of civilization. Capitalism has absorbed the greens,

as it absorbs so many challenges to its ascendancy. A radical challenge to the human-machine has been transformed into yet another opportunity for shopping. [9]

Because global capitalism is at the heart of our dying civilization, nearly the whole human world is ending. First, we need to accept this fact and mourn appropriately; then we need to act—not act to try to stop the end from coming but instead act to help out those who will be left (including nonhumans) after the crash.

Often, the most radical ways of thinking come to us from beyond academia. Diogenes and the members of Dark Mountain are not trained phenomenologists who came to an anarchic communitarian theory having been inspired by reading Husserl. But they have come to similar and compatible conclusions. Because academia is typically part of the status quo that wants only to be sustained (and thus doesn't want to be radically questioned), it is often easier to find political answers outside of the spaces where society deems political theory and action should take place. In the United States, "experts" are in charge of political theory. They do their work in universities and think-tanks. Sometimes they do their work in Washington, D.C. The practitioners of politics work for the government, for lobbying groups, or for big business (and the movement among these three "careers" is fluid). Everyday people cannot be political thinkers. The masses are told that the most political act that they will ever do is vote. Once or twice a year—or worse yet, once every four years—we thus get to "be political" by voting. [10] This system is incredibly destructive and alienating. It supports an oligarchy rather than a democracy. And so, we must look outside of these structures for spaces in which we can be truly radical. The Zapatistas of Mexico are one such enclave of resistance and revolution. To a certain extent, so are some of the Native Americans in the United States today who are fighting for a different worldview.

The language of sustainability cannot translate most indigenous conceptions of our relation to the world. Instead, it forces the conversation in a direction that will eventually guarantee the destruction of anything other than the dominant ideology of the ruling class. But if we consider the Water Protectors who recently occupied Standing Rock in the American west, fighting the installation of the Dakota Access Pipeline, we see that they, and a lot of native people, are helping to change the "political" conversation on a deep level.[11]

Indeed, it is not even correct to use the term "activists" here since that term assumes that we let the ruling class decide what the political infrastructure will be and thus how the political story will unfold and how we "react" to it. The activist doesn't even really act. The activist merely *reacts* to the dominant political power within the given political paradigm, never truly questioning the terms of the engagement. This is one reason that the Native Americans at Standing Rock refer to themselves as "protectors." The label orients them toward the land rather than toward the American government. As protectors, they are neither owners nor representatives of the land. They have a relationship with the land: they care for it and are cared for by it.

Anglo Americans and Europeans think of land in terms of property—of what can be owned and exchanged as a commodity. Politically, land cannot bear rights or have legal standing. Phenomenologically, however, when we speak of being-in-the-world we must learn to speak of the land as the world—as a specific place in the world. Heidegger is insistent that the "world" not be thought of in this way—not be thought of as the world (i.e., as the Earth)—but rather as something like the necessary precondition for there to be experience, for Dasein to be Dasein. But to fail to see that this does, indeed, still entail material, specific places is to think that consciousness might be untethered to flesh and to an actual place that that flesh might dwell. The land is not merely the background against which life unfolds (transcendental or otherwise) but that which co-constitutes our identities so that we might live. And the water protectors know this, calling on us to rethink what we mean by "belonging," too. They say, "I belong to this land" rather than, "This land belongs to me." This is not some linguistic trick—not merely a switching of the subject and direct object, keeping the verb the same. It is, instead, to change the meaning of "belong." True, the land gets agency; the land is suddenly a subject who matters. But "belong" also means something other than ownership when we say, "We belong to the land." "Belong" means a sense of belonging, a sense of fitting in, a way of finding meaning, an ontological establishing of identity, being a part of a community, and something larger.

Even when "belong" *seems* to mean ownership, the native way is to deconstruct the concept of ownership itself by appropriating the term and re-founding it. For instance, the natives at Standing Rock say that

the water doesn't belong to us but instead it belongs to future generations. This might seem like another appeal to private property, just one that is pushed off into the future; but it actually appropriates the word "belong" so that it loses its capitalist, market-value, private-property connotations. If the water doesn't belong to us but instead belongs to future generations, then that means that when those future generations are finally here, they will have to say the same thing. They will have to say that it doesn't really belong to them, either, but instead belongs to their children's children—to yet a future-future generation. The result is that the water never actually belongs to anyone, ever—it is always put off, always on the horizon, always "the belonging-to-come" that never arrives. Like Derrida's "democracy-to-come," [12] this belonging that never belongs, that never is fulfilled, is not counter to the meaning of "belonging" but is, instead, at the heart of the concept. What it means truly to belong is never truly to belong. The only way in which it makes sense to talk about possessing the water is if it is clear that the water will never be possessed. This is not some Kantian regulative ideal. We are not *striving* to own the water, getting asymptotically better at it all the time across generations even if we know we can never reach such a final perfect ideal. On the contrary, we never even *try* to own the water, never even think that we could or should own the water, and as a result, we are placed in a new relationship of belonging that transcends any conception of ownership in favor of having a *relationship* with the water. The apparent deferral of the ownership makes ownership impossible—but also gives it its true meaning.

This is a mad logic only to those who live within the walls of a stifling conception of logos—to those who have forgotten that logos must be instantiated in lived experience within a living community. It is here beyond the walls of the mega-polis that we see clearly. But the journey to get here is a difficult one. Sub comandante Marcos, before he was Sub comandante Marcos, went to the mountains of Chiapas in the early 1980s to help the indigenous people mount a Mexican Marxist revolution. But the people, and even the land itself, turned him away:

Imagine a person who comes from an urban culture. One of the world's biggest cities, with a university education, accustomed to city life. It's like landing on another planet. The language, the surroundings are new. You're seen as an alien from outer space.

Everything tells you: "Leave. This is a mistake. You don't belong in this place"; and it's said in a foreign tongue. But they let you know, the people, the way they act; the weather, the way it rains; the sunshine; the earth, the way it turns to mud; the diseases; the insects; homesickness. [13]

Marcos couldn't convince the indigenous people to revolt because they refused to believe that they were a "proletariat," that they were "urban workers" who should fight to own their stolen land again. These were still the categories of the ruling class, and though they were brought to the mountains in order to help the people there, the categories could do no real work. It took Marcos some time. Time living on the land and not just visiting it. Time to understand the rain and the mud and the communities. Time to realize that the indigenous people who were suffering did not have any concept of a job, a career, or a vocation. They did not consider themselves to be workers, and they did not consider the land *stolen* since they had never *owned* it. They knew that the Mexican government was harming them, but they were not ready to be pawns in a game they had never even agreed to play. In order to become "Sub comandante Marcos," Marcos had to abandon the dubious wisdom that his academic training had instilled in him and instead ask the simple question: how can we flourish together? And he had to learn to listen—to listen to what the land and the people said in response. It was then that a revolution was born.

Today from Mexico to the United States, from Iran to Iceland, from Germany to Ghana, from the smallest island to the largest continent, we need to ask the right questions and then learn how to listen. As the climate swings chaotically, the result of our hubris and disdain for the world; as capitalism, technologization, and neoliberalism rule our lives; and as institutions take over the work, we should be doing for each other every day, we must take to our barrels, give back the unnecessary bowls of civilization, climb our dark mountains, live what and where we preach and rethink our most basic political commitments even if we end up rejecting the very idea of *politics*. The fact that we are powerless against the authority is always the first and the final lie told by those who claim to be in authority.

Notes

[1] He continues in the next sentence: "Neoliberalism disguises itself as a defense of a sovereignty which has been sold in dollars on the international market." Sub comandante Marcos, *Professionals of Hope: The Selected Writings of Sub comandante Marcos* (Brooklyn, NY: The Song Cave, 2017): 41.

[2] Cf. Ithiel de Sola Pool, *Forecasting the Telephone: A Retrospective Technology Assessment of the Telephone* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1983).

[3] Cf. D.C. Richards, *Relationship between Speed and Risk of Fatal Injury: Pedestrians and Car Occupants*, Department for Transport, Great Minster House of London (Transport Research Laboratory, 2010). ISBN 978 1 906581 92 4.

[4] <https://www.citylab.com/design/2014/10/why-12-foot-traffic-lanes-are-disastrous-for-safety-and-must-be-replaced-now/381117/> Accessed on February 10, 2020.

[5] < https://www.schmidtkramer.com/faqs/how-often-do-car-accidents-occur.html > Accessed on February 20, 2020.

[7] Aristotle, *Politics* 1326b

[8] Edmund Husserl quoted in James Hart, *The Person and the Common Life* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992): 248.

[6] All of this is the conclusion Edmund Husserl reaches in the fifth of his *Cartesian Meditations* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977).

[9] The Dark Mountain Project Manifesto. <https://dark-mountain.net/about/manifesto/> Accessed on February 11, 2020.

[10] I argue that it is actually immoral to vote in the United States. Voting explicitly legitimizes the system and marks one as a participant who agrees that this ship should be sailing but just prefers, we have one captain and crew over another. It is the ship, and its voyage of oppression and destruction, though, that is the problem. Elections are part of the "bread and circuses" that make the public passive and resistant to true revolutionary change.

[11] Thousands of natives—and native allies—occupied territory at Standing Rock in North Dakota in order to protest the building of the 1,000+ mile Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). The DAPL was the focus of protest from 2016-17, especially, given the likely

environmental degradation, it would create as well as the fact that it was passing through tribal land that is sacred, especially to the local Sioux peoples.

[12] Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford U P, 2005).

[13] From the documentary, *A Place Called Chiapas*, dir. Nettie Wild (Zeitgeist Films, 1998).