

## ENDNOTES

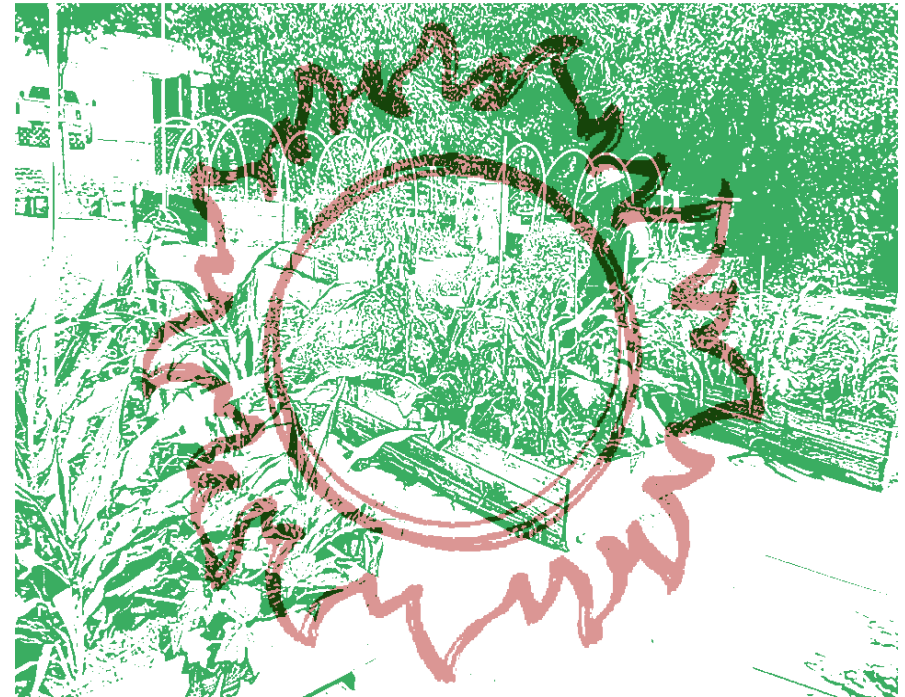
1. The term “Liberal” here refers to Classical Liberalism in the vein of John Locke and John Stuart Mill, a conception of society centered around “individualism” and a naive egocentric notion of “personal responsibility” which trivializes the significance of systems of oppression that impact the *material circumstances* of individuals. Liberalism is among the central premises which constitute the ideological basis of capitalist modernity and legitimize its domination.

2. Furthermore, as humans – as conscious beings capable of complex symbolic thought and technology which can deeply influence ecosystems – we have the unique capacity to pose the question: where are we Lifeforms *going*? The whole of human existence and our cumulative corpus of imagination and art can be seen as various answers to this question. The current hegemonic world order seems to believe the answer is omniscient self-immolation for the short-term shallow gratification of a few powerful men, but it’s my belief that together as communities, we can come up with continually more imaginative and beautiful answers than that – guided by the voice of freedom pervading our troubled past which refuses to be extinguished, informed by the wisdom other Lifeforms have to offer, and by our own creativity and uniqueness.

# (Re)Growing Communal Life

preparing the soil for social revolution

## Part I: Radical Care



*Cybele D. Reverie*

## Introduction

*“Nature is an elastic wall that multiplies the velocity of the stones we throw at it. Death doesn’t bounce back in the same proportion, but rather enforced. There is a war between the system and nature. This confrontation can’t take either nuances or cowardice. Either you are on the side of the system, or on that of nature. Either with death, or with life.”*

– Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano

## Growing the Soil

There is a phrase popular in organic gardening: *“Don’t grow the plant; grow the soil.”*

Injecting raw unmediated chemicals – synthetic fertilizers – into soil to expedite the growth of crops is a ubiquitous practice in industrial agriculture. It is highly destructive, and leads to a continual degradation of the soil quality with every crop cycle, dwindling the amount of arable land on our planet. This adversarial sensibility towards nature aims to sidestep all the natural cycles which encourage healthy plant growth by treating agriculture as an engineering problem, rather than a natural process driven by interlinking, interdependent communities of microbes, fungi, insects and other friends, which collectively have the effect of maintaining a stable, healthy chemical balance in the soil for plants to prosper in season after season, year after year, generation after generation. To “grow the soil”, we must instead be stewards of the cycles which maintain this balance, promoting the health of each component of

value in the ideas we’ve explored, discuss them with your comrades, your friends, your community, and develop these concepts further, *as a community*. Think of ways you can adapt and apply them to your own circumstances, and materially incorporate them into your efforts.

We are all the cartographers of this new psychic world we’re prefiguring. Let’s make it a truly *free* one – a world which liberates us from the bellicose and isolating psychological condition of capitalist modernity. A world in which we are motivated to take care of each other. A seductive world, which draws us and *keeps* us away from consumerism’s death traps. A world which accepts the Sun’s gift of limitless energy and channels it into actions which further the objective of Life.

I hope I’ve sparked something within you with the concepts we explored together. I leave it to you, in all your creativity, to turn that spark into a flame within your community, flickering resolutely in the face of the cold void surrounding us – of the toxic & despotic forces which threaten to snuff out Life entirely – as I hope to do with mine.

In Part II, we will endeavor to explore the passionate spirit of Communal Life – *radical desire*.

*the third planet under the Sun's fiery radiance, each composed of billions of copies of this ancient amorous convergence.*

*The Sun, the very heart of our Solar System, the Life-giving center around which all things revolve, brings warmth and light, a great teacher illuminating the way and sustaining our existence. She helps us remember who we are and why we are here. She brings us hope and reminds us that we are all connected by this infinite source of energy. She is the one source from which all things derive and depend – we are all children of the Light, and it is indeed our biologically constituted nature to shine radiantly in kind.*

### **Cooperative Cartography**

Maybe we've unearthed something of interest and value here, from our short foray. The soil we stand on is rich, and this is only one brief excavation. The question of how these ideas can best be incorporated into our political praxis is an exercise I feel is best left to the reader along with their community – for communal values come not from lone writers, but from the intimacy of diverse communities. I'll only reiterate that I believe that our project of reviving the Irreducible Minimum should endeavor to unite our material actions with the mythic and aesthetic, to crystallize not only a movement of mutual aid but a unified counterculture passionately committed in our fight to reestablish a society which centers Radical Care. We should find ways to develop the aesthetic dimension of our ethos, to extricate ourselves fully from the transactional, hollow mentality of capitalist modernity and strengthen our collective spirit in this harrowing struggle for Life.

I sense that maybe the most fruitful note on which I can end this exploration is a request to you, the reader: if you believe there to be

the community of Lifeforms comprising the soil.

This fundamental principle in gardening is a microcosm of an *ecological sensibility*, and can be viewed as a lens applicable to other spheres of Life as well. The soil for social revolution, too, must be cultivated. With impending ecological catastrophes looming over us all; with the myriad social crises we contend with today; with the condition of our collective psyches being drained by the present order of capitalist modernity, leaving so many of us wilted and unable to gather ourselves enough to fight back against our degradation, we need to examine the conditions that yield healthy, resilient communities prepared to stand up to the ravenous machine of global capital, which threatens to bleach the soil of this planet beyond all hope of redemption – both literally and figuratively.

We must grow the soil.

### **Our Blood / Impulse of Resistance**

An appropriate place to begin this examination may be an analysis of *Communal Life*.

Communal Life is central to what it means to be human. As Lifeforms, we seek and beget other Life. As social animals, we seek community bonds. Not only does it instill in us a sense of unity and purpose, it is also necessary for our stability and survival. It is what *makes* us human.

In short, Communal Life is the web of formal and informal social bonds and relations of mutual aid which act as a wellspring for material stability, collective prosperity, and a personal sense of purpose in Life. It is the natural inclination of humans and the foundation of our being. It is natural evolution's striving towards ever-elaborating complexity, creativity, autonomy and interdependence expressed in human association. It is the condition of indigenous societies and that of our ancestors of the Neolithic Era.

It is the impulse that has driven the continuous lineage of resistance against social hierarchy ever since its inception in gerontocracy and patriarchy many millennia ago. And it is the sacred fountain of hope and promise for our continued existence in a future worth living in, and fighting for. Central to it are democratic decision-making, a mutual sense of responsibility to ensure every community member's needs are met, and assertion of collective autonomy & community resilience in the face of adversity.

### **Synthetic Blood**

There is no more potent eviscerator of Communal Life than capitalist modernity: the hegemonic cultural climate of capitalism, founded on endless personal accumulation, thoughtless consumption and rugged individualism, it is its polar opposite. As opposed to -- indeed, in *opposition* to social bonds and communal responsibility, it erodes these ties and instills in society ever greater degrees of alienation, atomization, material insecurity, hopelessness and meaninglessness, projecting an empty world of solipsistic cogs in an absurd and futile machine.

A material and ideological system founded on limitless growth, greed, selfishness and ever-increasing economic stratification, capitalist modernity has been chipping away at this heart of society at breakneck pace for nearly two centuries, the climactic iteration of the long legacy of social hierarchy. The result is the current state of our society, where love is anathema, principles of mutual aid are forgotten and supplanted by exclusively transactional relations, and our very notion of meaning in Life has been replaced with a vapid ideal of incessant empty consumerism through the false images and deceit of advertisement.

The organic lifeblood of our society has gradually been substituted for a sort of synthetic blood, rendering us spiritually

### The Impulse of Matter

*The Sun shone ceaselessly over Hadean Earth, waiting for the conditions to be ripe for the matter in the Oceans to manifest into forms which would one day have the capacity to receive her gift. She could hardly abide, brimming with anticipation in this smoldering age where the planet bubbled and glowed effervescently with the potential for Life.*

*Finally, in the Archaean Era of the Earth, under the Eternal Light of the Sun, the Universal Dialectic of Becoming saw that Life should be its next manifestation. And so, at its hand, the Precursor of Volition began to flow throughout the darkest depths of the Earth's Primordial Seas, electrifying the strange particles hugging the hottest sections of the jagged seafloor.*

*In time, the organic molecules, nourished by her boundless luminosity, coalesced and autonomously assembled into a vibrant chorus of self-sustaining, self-regulating patterns. This new phenomenon, called Life, was a prism refracting this Solar radiation in a billion animated colors – kaleidoscopic blossoms gazing at the infinite light of the Sun which spawned them. Filled with determination and vigor, they reproduced amply and with each generation, continued to evolve towards ever greater degrees of Consciousness and Truth, intrepid little fluorescences flowering with immanent elation.*

*At the turn of the Proterozoic Era, an Archaeon and Bacterium crossed paths in the Ocean's depths, and seized by a fit of uncontrollable desire, kissed. Their kiss was so intense and so true that the Archaeon enveloped the entire Bacterium, and the two merged in a symbiotic fusion of love, becoming the Eukaryotic Cell. From this compact of lust all complex multicellular Life emerged, from the Plants to the Fungi to the Animals who today watch over*

cousins in the Tree of Life, in a way suitable for us all.

Seeded in the latent potentiality of the photon, carried across space and time by all the beautiful forms inhabiting this lovely planet – by recognizing our place in this process, we re-embed our identity as humans within the elegant legacy of natural evolution of which we are manifestations (and from which we have become alienated in the psychic invasion of capitalist modernity), while renewing our unequivocal commitment to provide Life-giving energy for one another, so that each may continue to unfold autonomously into ever more authentic and fully elaborated renditions of ourselves – because definitionally, that is what Lifeforms *do* – or perhaps, even, are *for*.<sup>2</sup>

So, in this rather mythopoetic recontextualization of our human identity, we sow the seeds of an aesthetic basis in which to root the principle of the Irreducible Minimum, and even a sense of cosmic significance and sacredness in our commitment to upholding it. If we're to explore and advance this poetic (yet ultimately grounded) interpretation of nature and our existence in relation to it, so that it can challenge and eventually supplant the pervasive hierarchical narrative of the callous “law of the jungle”, we would do well to carry this poetry in all of our actions and develop it through the communal creation of art.

If this speaks to you, reader, in any way; if it carries any meaning or appears to be of any value, I humbly ask that you create and share some art in any medium which embodies and explores this essence, to proliferate it and to evolve it, and to incorporate it into your Life as you see fit.

So, in the spirit of Life, and as a humble contribution to the process of Life, I offer here my own sketch; my own drop in our Well of Symbols.

...

anemic and unable to understand ourselves or each other, much less organize against the perpetrators of this monumental scheme. If we desire to survive, to defend the essence of our humanity, to reclaim both collective material well-being and a personal sense of meaning and purpose, we must protect, nurture, embody and regrow Communal Life from the ground up in the face of forces which aim to defile it completely.

### **Digging Up Revolution**

With each passing day, the consequences of capitalism's ravaging of the Earth become increasingly palpable, and in our alienated, soulless, overworked society drained of meaning, direction, care and hope, it is apparent now more than ever that we are also in a battleground which mirrors and intertwines with the struggle for a materially just and ecologically harmonious society: a personal and spiritual struggle to re-establish the cultures and modes of interpersonal relations of our ancestry in a new, regenerated form suitable for our own present-day contexts. In other words, to use Abdullah Öcalan's terminology, we must not only revolutionize the *material culture* of our society, we must also revolutionize its *ideological culture* – *not only its material basis, but its qualitative experience*.

This revolution is as necessary for our spiritual survival as it is for success in our material revolution -- as we prefigure the dual power structures of the society we're fighting to bring into existence, we must also prefigure the culture of this society, from its values to its customs, arts, aesthetic sensibilities, rituals, relationships, roles and institutions. It is concerned as much with drawing from our past and learning from the indigenous peoples who have held onto this ancestral knowledge as it is boldly forging something radically new; a future founded on the rediscovery of our past.

It's true. The topsoil of our society has become desertified. But we must not underestimate the land we are on. Deep down, beneath the arid and vacuous sands of capitalist modernity, lies our rich and elegant legacy: the Neolithic Era; Communal Life. Our assignment, then, is to dig up and reestablish what hierarchical civilization has spent millennia trying to bury.

### **Dancing Around Death**

All around us are consumerism's traps, synthetic will-o'-wispes which aim to seduce us into backsliding into comforting delusions and idle diversions which render us more like inert minerals than Lifeforms with agency, or things which might question and challenge power structures. We must dance around these pitfalls of consumerism engineered to distract us from the path of Life, so that we don't slide down the path of lifelessness and become its passive, uncritical co-perpetrators.

The tension between capitalist modernity and Communal Life is irreconcilable. Every action we perform and every choice we make is an affirmation and contribution to either one or the other, from the way we pass our time to the food we eat to the things we seek to the means of acquiring the items we need. As Zapatista Subcomandante Galeano says, "*Either you are on the side of the system, or on that of nature. Either with death, or with life.*"

So, how do we side with Life in capitalism's war on nature and, by extension, Communal Life? We must ask ourselves this question in every decision we make, however seemingly minute or grand, if we truly desire to cultivate a radical ecological counterculture of the ecological society we're building. It is an open-ended question with a plurality of valid answers in different material and social contexts, but here, we will explore it in some broader strokes and also discuss some specific examples and implementations, to set our sights on the

such as those of our ancestors and of indigenous peoples for whom communal values are central.

Let's go on a brief excursion, and see what we may find.

### **Children of the Light**

In the Neolithic Era, the archaeological record indicates that the acknowledgment of the Irreducible Minimum was rooted in a deference of the maternal characteristics of unconditional care and the capacity for Life-giving, values which were deeply revered in these matricentric communities. In many Neolithic cultures, commitment to the Irreducible Minimum was furthermore conceptualized as an *embodiment of the Sun* – the functionally infinite source of light and heat which provides the raw energy upon which all Life is ultimately dependent. The cultural and aesthetic basis for Radical Care and a gift economy can be viewed as a sacred commitment to epitomize the Sun above us; to reflect the very source of everlasting generosity which made possible our genesis four billion years ago and sustains our continued existence to this day.

To pursue and adapt this framing means reconnecting our self-conception as humans with our condition as *Lifeforms*; as dynamic expressions of nature by the same measure as the oak tree, the koi fish and the amoeba. As plants' foliage transmutes Sunlight into forms of energy which can be used by animals through photosynthesis, our inherited nature as humans is to further carry this transmutation of light and proliferate it in forms which continue to advance the objective of Life – to beget and unfold and *create the meaning of Life*. To continue what the proto-Lifeforms in subaquatic nuclear geysers, the archaea, the fungi and the plants started. To fulfill our role in the universal dialectic of *becoming* which spawned and connects us all. To co-create the universe with all our distant

which arouses a shift in core values. In our post-Enlightenment, largely secularized society, myths are generally not taken literally, but as allegories to learn from and archetypes to identify with or aspire to. Setting aside the question of their factual authenticity, they are not inherently irrational in nature, nor are they necessarily concerned with factual accounting; rather, they appeal to our *passion* and *notion of identity* and contextualize our own existence in relation to our communities, the land we inhabit, the Earth, and the Cosmos.

The shape and scope of our very thoughts are derived from this psychological well of our shared cultural consciousness – the sea of concepts and symbols comprised of all the narratives and works of art and media accumulated throughout the millennia – which we draw upon, mutate and recombine to form ideas, mental schemas and strategies. The stories we're told and the art we experience deeply influence the foundation and structure of our thoughts, and inform to a great degree the assumptions upon which they're based.

Under the ideological dominion of hierarchical civilization, our collective Well of Symbols has been polluted with stories of individual glory, massive personal accumulation and ruthless competition; of contrived scenarios where there can only be one winner and only the greatest will rise to the top. Consequently, our aspirations, dreams and corresponding actions reflect the antisocial patterns that these symbols exemplify. And as a grape vine irrigated with contaminated water will yield poisonous fruit, it seems apparent that we need to remediate our Well of Symbols so that the fruits of our actions will be nourishing rather than toxic.

To develop alternative ways of understanding our relationship with our communities and the broader natural world they are embedded in requires that we conceive new stories, new arts, new archetypes and new traditions – and of equal importance, to embrace, adapt or learn from old, forgotten or lesser-known ones,

elusive horizon of utopia and align ourselves with Life in this decisive struggle.

In Part I, we will begin our exploration of some of the potential elements and characteristics of this project by discussing the moral heart of Communal Life: *Radical Care*.

## Part I: Radical Care

*”What happens to one happens to us all. We can starve together or feast together. All flourishing is mutual.”*

– Robin Wall Kimmerer [*Braiding Sweetgrass*]

### The Irreducible Minimum

Perhaps the most central ethical pillar of Communal Life is the concept of the *Irreducible Minimum*. A term coined by anthropologist Paul Radin in his surveying of First Nations peoples, it represents the conviction that everybody, purely as a fact of being alive, has an unassailable right to the basic necessities of Life, from food and shelter to safety and healthcare. It also centers the recognition that different individuals have different baselines of material stability depending on their unique bodies and minds (such as neurodivergence or difficulty exercising common physical abilities). It is a community’s mutual commitment to provide each individual with any accommodations they need to survive, thrive, and participate in social Life in accordance with their volition. In the words of Radin, *”To deny anyone this Irreducible Minimum was equivalent to saying that a [person] no longer existed, that [they were] dead.”*

Further, he writes:

“If I were asked to state briefly and succinctly what are the outstanding features of aboriginal civilizations, I, for one, would have no hesitation in answering that there are three: the respect for the individual, irrespective of age or sex; the amazing degree of social and political integration achieved by

medicine to people who need it; to the weekly Food Not Bombs meal share; to the networking and confederating of all these efforts – is a reclamation of communal autonomy from the grasp of capital and a step towards reestablishing the Irreducible Minimum.

Against the hegemonic milieu of brutal competition, the seemingly simple and deceptively innocuous notion of *care for one’s community*, taken to its logical conclusion, is in fact inherently radical. The project of regrowing Communal Life thus requires us to renew our commitment to upholding the Irreducible Minimum – to care, *radically*.

### Our Well of Symbols

If it’s our desire to advance this objective, it would be beneficial to analyze what makes a society’s core values come into being and stick around. An insightful point of entry may be an inquiry into the relationship between a society’s values and its mythology. Societal values are to a large extent rooted in myths and archetypes which signal desirable and undesirable characteristics to embody or shun.

Even today, myths play an integral role in motivating our convictions and inclinations. For example, a prominent myth characterizing capitalist modernity (especially in the land currently known as the United States) is the enduring “rags to riches” story: the narrative of the hardworking *individual* lifting themselves up by their bootstraps and ascending from their shabby, drab existence in pursuit of the “American Dream”, living the Life of their fancy. The degree of influence this potent myth has on our society and how it’s reflected in our media and common aspirations is, I hope, abundantly clear.

The significance of mythology and the *aesthetic* dimension of ethics cannot be ignored in the development of a counterculture



maintenance and further development of the species, together with the greatest amount of welfare and enjoyment of life for the individual, with the least waste of energy.“

To amend this erosion of the Irreducible Minimum and reestablish the moral core of Communal Life, we must reject the atomizing ideology of Liberalism and embrace an understanding of the nature of humans and the moral bedrock of our society as being malleable, not fixed, with the very real potential to once again center mutual aid (as can be seen abundantly in the tapestry of nature), rather than the artificially imposed conventions of amoral competition and selfishness *cloaked* in the garbs of “nature” like a camouflaged sniper.

When we are committed to uplifting each other and ensuring a basic standard of living for all, we literally demonstrate that another world *is* possible, and the ideological justification of capitalism begins to crumble. Furthermore, as we become increasingly self-reliant as communities through the development of mutual aid networks, *rooted in the acknowledgment of the Irreducible Minimum*, we become less dependent on selling our labor to (or more precisely, having it exploited by) capitalists merely to obtain the most basic necessities of Life, and thus the material basis of its domination is weakened in tandem.

We are enslaved to this system only to the extent that it dominates our minds and controls our access to the means of our survival, and so this dual development of an alternative mentality (*ideological culture*) entwined with an alternative mutual-aid economic system (*material culture*) is an act of communal self-liberation, and a tangible declaration of the society we’re fighting to create. Each act of mutual aid – from the construction of a community garden in an abandoned lot to the opening of a free pantry; to the fixing of a friend’s bike; to the free distribution of

them; and the existence of a concept of personal security which transcends all governmental forms and all tribal and group interests and conflicts.”

We can also observe this principle in the archaeological record dating back at least to the Neolithic, suggesting that this ethic is ancient in origin. Skeletal remains dated back to this era have been discovered of fully grown adults with severe birth defects which would have otherwise resulted in a very early death if they were left on their own without support, indicating that they were a part of a communities which cared for them and provided their basic needs regardless of their physical ability or “productive output”. Many indigenous communities today including the Zapatistas, the Yanomami and the Hadza have held onto this important principle where hierarchical civilization has utterly abandoned and forgotten it, and work hard to uphold it.

By this unwavering conviction, one does not need to prove their “worthiness” through toiling for another in order to be granted access to basic necessities. Instead, it codifies a collectively held belief in the sacredness of personal autonomy and consciousness, as well as a deep sense of mutual responsibility for one’s community, which motivates those who acknowledge it to help ensure everyone’s needs are met. It is also not merely a simplistic notion of purely selfless and noble “altruism” that motivates this principle; it is that of *mutual aid*: of solidarity, not charity. It says: “*All flourishing is mutual.*”

In societies which acknowledge the Irreducible Minimum, there is a common tacit understanding that when a person is in need, the community will provide a safety net to prevent them from falling into material instability, and so each one is motivated to reciprocate this aid, as together each individual is stronger and more stable than if they cared only for themselves or their own immediate families. It’s the extension of such familial devotion and self-preservation

instinct to one's whole community for the benefit of all, including oneself. Some may have a more explicitly religious or spiritual drive to care for and support their community, feeling compelled by a higher power to provide aid for their neighbors, but what is important is that this patchwork of individual motivations manifests a strong network of mutual aid which ensures the Irreducible Minimum is upheld, and that it is *unconditional*.

### **Survival of the Superlatively Selfish**

This imperative is undermined by the Liberal<sup>1</sup> capitalist framing of society in terms of the so-called "free market", in which every "individual" is responsible solely for themselves, and achieving success and stability is a zero-sum game where any personal gain is necessarily at the expense of others in a brutal struggle for survival. This is sanctified in the religion of neoliberal economics in the concept of "Pareto efficiency", which brazenly asserts that our economic situation is inherently such that no individual can be made better off without making at least one individual worse off.

From this perspective, there is no Society for one to feel personal responsibility or even empathy for – as the Queen of Neoliberalism Margaret Thatcher put it, "There is no such thing [as society]. There are individual men and women and there are families." The logic of capitalist markets, legitimized by Darwinistic claims of merely reflecting the "inevitability of human nature" and the "survival of the fittest" (another term whose meaning has been misused and distorted by the hegemonic ideology of Liberalism to serve its ends), has bled into the collective psyche of our civilization and corroded the once inviolable conviction of the Irreducible Minimum. And so, with Liberalism's displacement of the communitarian sensibility, this aberrant and relatively new paradigm of "natural" selfishness came to assert itself as ancient and

immutable, erasing the voice of the past.

### **Another Factor in Evolution / Sharing Is Caring**

This naturalistic-posturing justification for selfishness conveniently ignores the overwhelming prevalence of symbiosis and mutual aid within and between species in the natural world, from mycorrhizal relationships amid plants and fungi to the very inner workings of each and every cell comprising our body, where the mitochondrion – a previously separate organism – has been absorbed into the eukaryotic cell and evolved to work in a mutually beneficial relationship with its host, becoming a powerhouse generating the chemical energy source ATP to fuel the cell's organelles, in turn receiving stable nutrition and protection. While conflict in the nature surely exists, a candid examination of the natural world suggests that the essential condition of nature is not endless brutal struggle and competition – as powers which aim to divide us would have us believe – but cooperation enabling ever more complex and creative expressions of evolution towards greater autonomy. Revolutionary and biologist Peter Kropotkin knew this well when he wrote:

“...if we resort to an indirect test, and ask Nature: ‘Who are the fittest: those who are continually at war with each other, or those who support one another?’ we at once see that those animals which acquire habits of mutual aid are undoubtedly the fittest. They have more chances to survive, and they attain [...] the highest development of intelligence and bodily organization. If the numberless facts which can be brought forward to support this view are taken into account, we may safely say that mutual aid is as much a law of animal life as mutual struggle, but that, as a factor of evolution, it most probably has a far greater importance, inasmuch as it favours the development of such habits and characters as insure the