

# Individuals Within Society: Human Vocation, Civil Commons and Social Justice

## Part V

By [Prof. John McMurtry](#)

Global Research, January 22, 2012

22 January 2012

Theme: [History](#)

### RECOVERING THE BASES OF OUR LIVES FROM SILENCE AND OCCUPATION:

### THE HUMAN VOCATION, THE CIVIL COMMONS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

by **John McMurtry**

A human vocation comes in as many forms as there are ways of contributing one's share to society by expressing one's own capabilities as a human being. It enables and obliges the provision of universal life necessities for others, and realizes oneself as human. It is the ultimate human life good and necessity because it links the rights of people to universal human goods to their obligation to contribute to them – the bridge from individual to society, is to ought, and humanity's development to better. It bonds from within and calls from without as the human vocation linking the individual and society rather than dividing them.

No need and capacity so defines human being, and yet no universal life good is more alienated from us within the money capitalist system. Work is a “disutility” to all ruling economic doctrine since Adam Smith, and only its selling for a price counts as work. It is here most fundamentally that humanity's meaning is turned upside down. Grotesque consequences of economic organisation follow such as disqualifying the most basic economic contributions such as homecare and child upbringing as *not* work because it has not been bought and sold.

The obligation of contributory work for the society and world which host one's life is not coercive for life-value understanding. It is grounded in humanity's deepest need – *to do what is of value to others and meaningful to oneself*. This is in truth what makes human beings different from two-legged animals. Two-legged animals are identical with their self-desires in the individual, and are unconnected to each other by rules for mutual life-good provision within herd and peck-orders. This non-human state admits of degrees, but almost all societies we know today are bound in this direction by the ruling system of all competing against one another for means of existence and private profit.

While almost anyone can recognise the human vocation to produce life-value for others beyond self as undeniable – what drives every self-realising occupation – this human vocation has long been conditioned out of conscious recognition. It gets lost in atomic

concepts of “self-respect”, or is directly reversed by market doctrine that conceives real work as only what others buy. This onto-axiology thus presupposes a kind of enslavement – one’s vital hours are sold to another as a commodity with no human rights in trade treaties which regulate the world’s ‘economies’.

Constructive activity to produce life-value for others – what we are impelled to do if we are healthy human beings – is thus erased as a form of life and motivation in the market order. While it remains in teaching, health-care and other professions not yet subverted by private money-sequence subjugation, it grows ever scarcer in the macro global system. Revealingly all the while, global-market corporations never stop telling us that they do what they do is *for us*. They obliquely recognise this condition of human being, but it has been driven into the *life-unconscious* at the theoretical level.

### **Being Human: Why We Must Work for Our Own Life Good and Others’ at the Same Time**

We already intuitively know that no-one can flourish who does nothing of objective value for others – the meaning of work in the life-value onto-ethic. That is *must* be done to enable others’ means and ranges of life as well as one’s own is what distinguishes it from play, although it may be experienced as more interesting and uplifting than play.

This is why why deadbeats wither on the vine, why unemployment causes disease, and why *both* left and right have long recognised that a large percentage of people without work is a social disaster. On the other hand, the insistent reduction of human beings to bipedal desiring machines is the onto-axiology of neo-economic doctrine. In his paradigm-setting work, *Mathematical Psychics*, Frances Edgeworth crystallises the onto-axiology at work (italics added): “The conception of *man as a pleasure machine* may justify the employment of *mechanical terms and mathematical reasoning* in social science”.<sup>[6]</sup> This concept of humanity as a mechanical desiring machine has become a fatal reduction built into the ruling money-sequence and commodity system at a global level, with the limitless desires for more of its two-legged atomic mechanisms set to perfect indifference to all beyond them. The global corporate system is the mega-mechanism of these atoms interacting to produce ever more money demand and exchange – not product (consider the ever dominant financial system which produces nothing) and certainly not life goods (consider rising junk foods, violence entertainments, and homicidal armaments).

Because the money-sequence system serving the one percent at the top of the me-feeding cycle extends the inhuman mechanism into every corner of life, the human vocation and life goods themselves are cumulatively poisoned and deformed. While purporting to serve people’s self-interests in a systematic way, this disorder has in fact hollowed out planetary life support systems and human-life identity itself while leaving an increasing great majority of the world’s individual persons without the life necessities and goods they require to be human. In contrast, a society is *life-value efficient* only so far as its rule system is structured to provide for access of its members to life goods through generational time. This structure of provision for the life capacities of its members to be fully alive rather than deprived is, in turn, what life-value theory designates as *the civil commons*.

### **The Civil Commons: Real Economic Base and Social Correlative of the Human Vocation**

The civil commons may be amnesiac in even left theory, but it is the social basis of valid

human rights and social justice as well as economic reproduction at the same time. The civil commons is defined as *any and all social constructs which enable universal access to human life goods without which people's capacities are always reduced*. Thus defined in logico-scientific principle, the civil commons can be recognised as the unseen *differentia* of the species which first emerges in language itself and distinguishes all subsequent supra-genetic evolution.

Lest this moving line of social development continue to be blocked out by submergence in the reigning disorder which everywhere dismantles the civil commons that have been built, the reality still remains that civil commons functions sustain the human condition remaining everywhere we look beneath the surface of corporate occupation and commodification for profit.

As I sit in my home, there is nothing I experience and need that is possible *without* the civil-commons infrastructures enabling it. The electricity flow to my word-processor, lamp and space-heater are built and guaranteed by publicly built public hydro sources, lines and safety regulations including the standard-plug structure and sustained currents whose failure at any point might destroy my machine as well as my projects. Yet even this fundamental necessity of my human vocation, of my light, of my warmth, of my cooking and refrigeration – and everyone else's in the wider community – could not occur without long civil planning, contribution and struggle to develop and retain every moment of it against privatization-for-profit forces. If Enron had not collapsed from its private money-sequencing in place of public energy provision, we would still be hearing how its method leads the future – as indeed it does without the brand.

### **The Corporate-Rich War on Civil Commons to Expropriate and Degrade Them for Profit**

Here and elsewhere corporate money-sequence forces dismantle the civil commons bases of society without identification of their causal mechanism of destruction – as the example of New Orleans still shows the world, but does not teach anyone in the privatizing culture. New Orleans could not withstand an offshore hurricane with its stripped civil commons leaving nothing intact in its natural and built sea-delta infrastructures or community resources of rescue, health and housing to protect human life through natural time. The hurricane Katrina was not a natural disaster. It was a man-made one from the destabilization of hydrological cycles behind these events through thousands of stranded, terrorised and drowned people to the masses of New Orleans people still homeless and ruined today.

Back to the simple problem of retaining public electricity generation and distribution which has been one of humanity's great advances in life goods provision by civil commons structure. Privatization for profit has threatened the regular cost-effective flow and the source of electricity for citizens everywhere it has been regressed to. In California private-profit control bankrupted the wealthiest state of the U.S. in the short and long term, and treated its citizens to endless blackouts and extortionate prices up to *200 times* the normal. This is the cancer money sequencing with no function multiplying out of control, but it made market far more profitable, and therefore great good to this value metric. For this reason, the money-sequence managers and sales personnel were ebullient at every blackout in anticipation of the spiked-up returns of commissions from the scarcity prices they could then impose for future supplies. Before the Enron black hole started, however, it was

regaled by the corporate press as ahead of the world with its “asset light free market in *more efficient* private energy management and supply”. Higher efficiency in this system means more money for private money-sequencers than what they put in, the higher the ratio of self-take the more “efficient”.

The civil commons infrastructure of society which is thus raided for money-sequence profit everywhere it can be is thus destroyed beneath notice. It so deeply grounds our conscious lives that it is invisible as the air we breathe – whose breathability is itself a civil commons achievement in an industrialized world. Consider for more substantial example the sidewalks we walk on and our common travel lanes for vehicles – especially bicycles which have themselves become a civil commons good as not only lanes but as endogenous-energy mechanisms publicly provided in more advanced cities like Montreal. These are civil-commons constructions still advance against the corporate world war to expropriate or annihilate them, but remain unseen as what they are – the already existing alternative to the global corporate occupation beneath and around them.

While no-one is permitted to charge a price for profit to use public pathways, but corporate money-sequence forces have already succeeded here at the level of private-toll highways appropriating enormous public wealth by the for-profit privatization. Now they are pushing to privatize the re-building of Canada’s infrastructure for profit and toll now it has been so badly run down by continuous corporate rich tax cuts, off-shore evasion with impunity, and corporate vehicle loading. The corporate raiders who assault the civil commons will continue to succeed as long as the civil commons remain invisible and unprotected with even more highly paid private corporate consultants hired by governments to tell them what to do next.

I can still breathe the air outside my inner-city home because there are public regulations, also hard-won, on exhaust fumes from private and private-profit automobiles and from corporate-factory pollutions – still poisonous in the big cities, and dangerous even in a small town for citizens with bronchial and respiratory illnesses from their poisonous emissions. The right of citizens to clean air is sometimes talked about, but only instituted by enforced public regulations which are intensely -lobbied against by the corporate money-sequencing lobby controlling governments.

### **From Commons-Blind Theory on Both Sides of Class Division to Life-Goods Economy and Justice.**

The war of private corporate rights against the civil commons and human rights to life goods is waged across society without a received theoretical literature identifying the life-and-death forces at work. This is the empty theoretical and critical space which life-value analysis maps. Its critical application makes clear that not even the most developed societies yet recognise or protect some of the most basic life-spaces – for example, the life field of hearing whose cumulative occupation and violation by private corporate commodity-machines has effectively despoiled a whole sentient field of human life across the rural-urban divide.

Yet not even this ruin of the primary sentient fields of human and fellow life registers as a social injustice to commentators. The walled estates of the rich may trigger angry reaction, but not to protect the shared sentient life-field that is everywhere destroyed – including in newly marketizing Cuba. Here as elsewhere, the deeper structure of injustice *and* economic incompetence in protecting common life goods is unseen. And here as well, system response is to commodify the new scarcity of life good to sell to those with money in new private markets and profits of enclosures. The circle of life-value destruction thus feeds on

itself.

Without life-value understanding which recognises that only common-life structures or 'civil commons' can block against the multiplying life-field invasions – in this case, by laws and mandatory corporate-machine silencers to protect public life space. Yet here too any such resolution is condemned as “big government”, “an impediment to growth”, “nanny-state interference with people’s freedom”, and anything else corporate propagandists can manage to indoctrinate people by in their mass media and ruling parties. Now at new margins of the invasive totalizing life-space occupation, industrial corporate wind-turbines whose vast and state-subsidized machines occupy horizons and relentlessly destroy birds and their flight paths while propagating subsonic wave-propagation which disequilibrate the autonomic system are mass-built for private corporate profit while requiring almost as much fossil fuel to build and to sustain power outputs as the fossil fuels they are supposed to replace. Until the underlying war of life-world occupation is laid bare by life-value analysis, hoops of the mind stupefy the acquiescent. This is why even as official responses to wider oil and carbon crises transparently fail, the primary civil commons solution which has worked so well in past crises of collective life threat, *public rations*, cannot enter the group-mind. The group-mind phenomenon is as old as herd behaviour, but is now managed by pervasive corporate ‘public relations’.[\[7\]](#)

When life-value analysis examines the infrastructures of the civil commons which *have* developed, one can see everyday rights of life protected around the clock whose non-violation makes them invisible. Citizens can trust the food and drink they need is not deprived because their refrigerators, the energy flows to it and the stoves to prepare it are all protected by still further civil commons infrastructures which are not yet conscious or connected – not only the electricity or gas systems which are publicly regulated, but every item to eat or drink anywhere is safe-guarded by the same unseen social agency whose food and beverage regulations – so far as they are not undermined by the same private for-profit forces – protect citizens from toxins, disease bearing biota, unknown spoilage dates, hidden contents, and so on. Here again, the civil commons are put at risk by corporate interests whose sole goal is to sell more for private money-profit without limit, their sole binding obligation under corporate law and charter and international trade regulation.

The moving line of the transnational corporate takeover of our long evolved common safeguards of life invades everywhere – the independent government testing of food and beverage products replaced by corporation control, smuggled in genetically-engineered contents which governments will not even label, sabotaged public efforts to flag junk foods and drinks from local to UN levels over decades, uploaded sugar, caffeine and salt contents to disease levels in even children’s drinks, and so on. Where does it stop even as people come to know? It does not. d Humanity’s food supply itself has, in a word, been contaminated and debased beneath and around hard-won civil regulations, while simultaneously macro life support systems and biodiversity collapse under the same global corporate-state misrule.

No theory or practise can decode the life-value parameters of destruction, its cause or the civil commons logic of resolution without life-value principles to guide analysis. Otherwise the connecting life-attack pattern cannot be seen. This is why global war of private money-sequence growth to marketise everything for a price for private profit is still absurdly named “*economic development*” and “*economic growth*” by even opponents as the system’s anti-economic *wastes* grow – the inverting group-mind at work in the most unexpected places. At the same time, the historical social agency that really stands for universal human life



requirements is not recognised by even those who see a system disorder. Competing partialities miss the civil commons infrastructures in a meta preoccupation with divisions *within* the capitalist market.

Karl Polanyi's classic work, *The Great Transformation* (1944), is a compelling exception, but his emphasis is on *pre-market* community and stop-gap social measures since. Polanyi refers to the "natural and social life substance" that is market-attacked, but recognises *no* through-line of development of society's common life bases of reproduction and advance. Marx and Marxism focus on class divisions and technological powers with no civil commons recognition anywhere. The substitute notion of "communism", now unusable, is confined to a long superannuated past or a utopian future without even life goods yet defined and the entire evolution of their common ground beneath classes unconceived.

The ancient idea of the "commons" is itself inadequate because it applies only to natural forests and the immediate natural resources characterising medieval and remaining village commons. It does not recognize the social construction of their protection and reproduction, nor their more important cumulative modern form of civil commons infrastructures and services for all citizens. In short, no received literature, however progressive, has recognised the onto-ethical nature and evolutionary ground of civil commons that from the beginning distinguish human society from aggregates of two-legged beasts. Not even a common life-value principle is understood. This is not from stupidity, but from long cultural disconnection from the life-ground on which all depend and from the very roots of humanity in rule-governed common possession whose first form is language.

### **Regaining the Lost Bearings of Civil Commons as First Premise of Human Evolution**

"The commons" which has re-emerged as a concept in recent years has itself been stripped of universal life-value meaning by social progressives and private corporations at the same time. Neither recognise its civil meaning of rule-governed access of all to life goods.

Multinational corporations see only a natural resource which can be exploited rent-free. On the other hand, those who affirm the "commons" either have no criterion of what they affirm, or assume a badly mistaken one (e.g., excluding the state as funder, as American concepts usually do). The civil commons remain thus open to any distortion at all at the level of meaning itself.

Without any principled comprehension of humanity's evolving social life support systems, disconnection from them follows. Who is the *historical subject*? What can replace the industrial proletariat now removed to the non-industrialized world? What concept of collective agency can we have? The now established box of formal analysis is that economic and political science cannot think beyond aggregates of atomic selves. At the same time, philosophers are stuck within an agent-relative ontology where social agency disappears a-priori.<sup>[8]</sup> Thus confined to market, electoral and moral aggregates of private individuals, the private-profitization of the civil commons proceeds apace for more self commodities, corporate rule and systems wastes. This debasement and reversal of human evolution is then absurdly called "more freedom for the individual" and "more prosperity for all".

With no social subject left or life-value grounds, common life support systems can collapse all around with none responsible or accountable – "impersonal market competition". Here lies the ultimate abdication of the human vocation and economic sovereignty at once. The

rules of the monstrous construction run by themselves with no human agency responsible for the man-made system or allowed to change it for the better. Societies around the world are thus condemned to suffer mounting “sacrifices” to the corporate system’s growth. They must tear down their civil commons developments to pay the system’s private banks, and to reassure more profits to come in propitiation of the life-blind mechanism which “must grow again” as the ruling end in itself. The god-system thus reverses human and planetary evolution as its feeding cycle.

### **From Corporate State versus Social State to Life-Coherent Rationality**

The state itself is step-by-step reduced to two ruling functions – armed defence of global corporations’ interests at home and abroad and unconditional hand-outs to ensure their competitive growth. If money-sequence overreaching bankrupts both, the corporate-market state re-finances them with public money and strips back social sectors to pay. With no common life interest conceived or guiding across generational time, the world and its peoples are hollowed out for still more of the same with mounting cumulative harms to human and ecological life.

The sovereign demand to be “more competitive in the global market” is, decoded, an attack on the human vocation itself with new jobs for the younger generations increasingly only in private private money-sequencing functions – from fast-food services to telemarketing of unneeded commodities to management service. Received theories structure out this level of human immiserisation as we have seen. In response, life-coherent understanding must re-ground in universal human life requirements and the common life interest to meet the void of theory and practise which lack any clear conception of inherited social agency standing for the public good.

The civil commons principle, in contrast, bridges from the universal human life necessities and goods to the civil-commons constructions that have long provided for progressive access to them. Human evolution from common fires, shared water sources and human language is recognised as a civil commons throughline whose universal life goods increase the more all can access them – the inner life code of every social development that has been achieved to the knowledge commons and shareware of the contemporary internet system.

Along with life-value and civil-commons principles, *rationality itself* is reclaimed as the life-coherence principle – consistency with and realisation of common life requirements through time as the test of validity across domains. Social justice follows in normative meaning, and civil commons rights and obligations enable universal access to universal human life goods towards sufficiency of all – the human vocation in collective form. The essence of the world disorder, conversely, is disconnection from and destruction of this underlying structure of human meaning and advance – the meta evil of our era. The ultimate war of the contemporary world is between knowledge and misrepresentation of the process.

The original source of this article is Global Research  
Copyright © [Prof. John McMurtry](#), Global Research, 2012

---

**[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)**

## **Become a Member of Global Research**

Articles by: Prof. John  
McMurtry

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)

[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)