Proleptic Leadership on the Commons

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Proleptic Leadership on the Commons: Ushering in a New Global Order

RANDAL JOY THOMPSON

Foreword by Devin Paul Singh

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To Atticus, Eleanor, Alissa, and Kirin
You carry my heart and soul into the future.

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About the Author

Randal Joy Thompson, PhD, is a scholar-practitioner who, for many decades, has lived and worked globally in international development. A former US Commissioned Foreign Service Officer, she serves as the principal and founder of the companies Dream Connect Global and Excellence, Equity, and Empowerment. She is currently a Fielding Graduate University Institute of Social Innovation Fellow. She was lead editor for the 2018 International Leadership Association (ILA) volume *Leadership and Power in International Development: Navigating the Intersections of Gender, Culture, Context, and Sustainability*, which won the Academy of Human Resource Development R. Wayne Pace HRD 2018 Book of the Year Award. She is co-editing the forthcoming 2021 ILA volume *Redefining Leadership on the Commons* and has published many book chapters on leadership and peer-reviewed articles on women, evaluation, foreign aid, and education.

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Foreword

Devin Paul Singh

Despite a fervent conversation for several decades now, a vision for the commons remains murky. Theoretical debates continue, as they should, while various piecemeal attempts at institutionalization and organization emerge, persist for a time, and tend to founder. Collective engagement and understanding also appear reserved for a devoted in-group, while popular appeal and communication of what commoning entails remains to be seen. Notably lacking are forms of broad-based support and momentum needed to establish society-wide let alone global forms of self-governance, with the shared resources necessary for meaningful and sustainable common life. Randal Joy Thompson's book enters into the fray with a crucial contribution and answer to these challenges: she offers a lucid historical retelling of debates and definitions around the commons, encapsulates its organizational challenges, and sets forth a framework for leadership to pave the way for meaningful implementation and transformation.

Thompson brings a unique skill set and collection of experiences and expertise to the conversation. As a scholar-practitioner, her multi-decade career in the US Foreign Service and NGO sector, combined with advanced training in philosophy, systems theory, and organizational development, position her to bridge the gap between theory and practice that continues to plague discussions of the commons. While commons theorists should continue to dream big in setting out bold visions of future possibilities of life together, and activists and practitioners must continue to establish partial and imperfect experiments in commoning, bridge-builders remain crucial in translating theory into practice and allowing the realities of institutional and organizational life, not to mention leadership and management challenges, to resonate back upon and sharpen theory. Thompson's vantage point and contribution here provides just such a mediation.

Thompson approaches the transformational power of the commons both historically and theoretically, before turning to practical matters. Focusing on the notion of the commons as a complex and adaptive social system, proposed by several commons scholars and activists, Thompson summarizes and then critiques their approaches to ushering in the transition to a commons-centric society. She complicates the shift by introducing overarching theories of social transition, consciousness, social imaginary, and liminality. She then interrogates the notion of leadership in the commons and in complex systems, given that leadership has become a troubling and troubled term for those interested in more substantive and communally based social change (e.g., Robinson, 1980).

Employing an action theory framework, which includes the co-evolution of the individual (micro), community (meso), social (macro), and universal (meta) levels, Thompson introduces proleptic leadership, by which possible and disruptive futures invade the present at each of these levels and challenge their predicted futures, pulling the leader(s), community, society, and global community forward. In her final chapter, supporting the recommendation of commons scholars and activities, Thompson describes implementing the principle of the commons and inculcating commons-based reasoning into society. She proposes the importance of commons for securing our basic needs of food, water, shelter, and medical care, initially in order to survive future crisis, as well as to establish the foundation for autonomously governing our lives. Her book contributes critically to the ongoing conversation about the commons and opens up new avenues for research and action.

Prolepticism is a key concept invoked by Thompson to address the inadequacies of leadership models in relation to commoning. Leadership as a term has come under fire for its association with hierarchical, centralized, and individualistic notions of authority, as well as suspicion for the ways it is celebrated by corporatists and neoliberal practitioners. Yet, Thompson rightly retains the concept, for it remains indispensable as a term to signal the sites of initiative, direction, service, and decision that exist even in collectives and under conditions of egalitarian self-governance. Whether we retain the term or not, something like leadership clearly remains necessary and persists under conditions of community organizing and shared life.

As Thompson explains, prolepsis is a term employed in literary studies as well as theology to denote anticipatory symbols, gestures, and practices that make a future reality manifest in the present. Proleptic postures and actions seek to embody realities that are not fully present, and in so doing help make them manifest partially. Through proleptic leadership, commoners can enact postures of leading that reflect the consensus and mutuality of the commons even now, in ways that disrupt and transform individualistic and anti-altruistic approaches.

By engaging prolepticism, Thompson's work also converges with a conversation within the social scientific literature around hope, optimism, and other future-oriented, anticipatory postures. A number of philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, and other theorists have attempted to complicate and transform the discourse around such affects in an effort to reclaim them from market logic (Berlant, 2011; Crapanzano, 2003; Harvey, 2000; Miyazaki, 2004; Singh 2008, 2016; Zournazi, 2003). Given the long recognition of the ways capitalism captures and disciplines our desires and dreams (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983), work remains to be done on how to refigure our conceptual, emotional, and relational labors of future-oriented anticipation and transformation. Thompson's proleptic leadership therefore takes its place alongside these various contributions and sets forth a new model for consideration: leadership that is prefigurative, partial, anticipatory, hopeful, humble, as well as bold and resistant to the limitations imposed by a system that thrives on scarcity, competition, and exploitation.

Leadership involved in common life and self-governance must also be a leadership of care, attuned to the mutualities, reciprocities, and obligations that emerge in life together, a common life that attends to and nurtures difference

and diversity with the community. As such, Thompson's contributions here also align with interventions around the ethics of care as a moral and ethical system that has great promise for the commons. The ethics of care is an ethical system that puts our relational existence at the starting point of inquiry and that assesses morality in terms of one's fulfillment of various relational obligations. A care ethic focuses on the needs and concerns of those with whom one is relationally connected, emphasizing the particularity of the needs of others in their specific social and historical contexts. It asserts that within the context of such relations emerge concrete and specific needs and obligations, as well as awareness of vulnerability, all of which should shape how philosophical and ethical reasoning might proceed.

American philosopher and political theorist Virginia Held (2006), whose work has most programmatically outlined an ethics of care, suggest that the care of a child can function as a paradigmatic instance to think through concerns of care. Acting morally and ethically in a scenario of care for a dependent creature reveals the vulnerability, affective bonds, relations of mutual dependence, and other senses of obligation that may precede and exceed universalized and abstract principles of moral virtue.

Despite utilizing the child as an exemplary case, an ethics of care is not to be relegated to the familial, personal, or private sphere, but has bearing on broader publics including the national and international level. If anything, it helps to re-center such ostensibly domestic and relational dynamics, reminding us that politics and economy are grounded on them. This perspective is an important corrective to models of the economy that exclude the relational and affective labor – namely, social reproduction – that make the economy possible in the first place (Fraser, 2016).

An ethics of care also bears on matters of justice. While care and justice cannot be collapsed together, they refine and shape one another in significant ways. Care and concern for the specificity of actors and contexts will emphasize restorative and redistributive forms of justice more than retributive. Beyond models of simple fairness or balance, it will emphasize corrective and ameliorative measures that may look imbalanced when contextual differences are ignored. The exasperating refrain today of "All Lives Matter" in response to the Black Lives Matter movement represents one example of the failure to understand or accept the contextual and restorative nature of justice, coupled with an insistence on abstract equality that ignores preexisting inequalities.

Brazilian philosopher and theologian Leonardo Boff extends the networks of care to a global dimension, asserting that human relatedness occurs within a broader context of reciprocal care with the entire earth. Such a view raises to prominence the ways that material existence, embodiment, and history remain relational factors that inform thinking. For Boff,

> care is a way of being; that is, it is the key way through which the human being structures itself and through which it interacts with others in the world. In other words: it is a way of being-in-the-world in which the relations that are established with all things are founded. (2008, p. 59)

Care grounds and orients relational existence, from which then proceed ways of thinking and knowing (see also Gebara, 1999).

An ethic of care therefore pays attention to our common life and our networked existence. Boff's global and all-encompassing perspective on care reminds us of the interlinking realities of existence, such that human life and economy cannot be adequately understood, let alone improved, without ecology. In their book *Common: On Revolution in the 21st Century*, French philosophers Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval (2019) challenge us to replace neoliberal reason with the reason of the common. Such reason is founded upon a relational rather than individualist ontology, viewing humankind as collaborative not competitive, community as the basic organizational form, and property in use rather than property purely as owned, and most importantly, based on a fundamental ethic of care. As they claim:

> Today, more than ever, every activity and every locale is interconnected: saving the world today it is not therefore so much a matter of isolating and protecting some natural "good" or "resource" considered fundamental to human survival, as it is a matter of profoundly transforming the economy and the society by overthrowing the system of norms that now directly threatens nature and humanity itself. (Dardot & Laval, 2019, pp. 6–7)

An ethic of care therefore offers itself as one element of commoning, as a principle for life together in ways that overcome the partitions of private property and the myths of scarcity that foster division and self-interest. Care and the commons should be thought together.

A dominant approach within Western philosophy and ethics attempts an objective, dispassionate, and removed position of analysis, with the claim that such a stance is the least biased and most accurate. One starts with bracketing out the self, its relations, affects, and emotional connections. Only after this can one apply a particular normative ethical framework and set of values. The assumption in this approach is that a more accurate description of reality can be reached through withdrawal from one's connections to others and their concrete, lived situations, and the affective and emotional bonds provoked by such connections.

The ethics of care challenges such assumptions by questioning the supposed neutrality of its starting point. It contests the belief that the disconnected, asocial, isolated individual is an adequate baseline for philosophical and ethical reasoning. Such a posture of existence is actually far from the human norm. Rather, life takes place under circumstances of embeddedness in social and relational networks, mutual dependencies, and the obligations and reciprocities that emerge from and in turn reaffirm these ties.

The virtues or moral principles that emerge from this approach, therefore, include a recognition of and commitment to one's concrete relational ties and the obligations of mutual care that arise. This approach suggests that some of the best forms of thinking in philosophy and ethics will emerge from living and reasoning through such concrete instances of encounter and bond, as opposed

to from efforts at distance, withdrawal, and objective views from nowhere. Such norms and values are thus as much about existence and experience as about claims of knowledge and truth. They issue the challenge and promise that excellence in thinking and analysis will emerge in full acceptance and embrace of the realities of lived existence, an existence that is always already relationally determined and conditioned by vulnerability, affective bonds, interdependence, and the needs of care that inevitably arise. The task of leadership on the commons, therefore, is to attend to the needs of care, while proleptically embodying in the present the future horizon of shared life and mutuality, as Thompson has so poignantly set forth in this book.

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Preface

Like many others I am extremely dismayed by what is happening in and to the world such as the inequality and extreme poverty, climate change and the deterioration of our environment, the intractability of the corporate sector and a colluding government, and the overall erosion of our lives by neoliberal capitalism. Having spent most of my adult life living in non-Western countries, and after a 40-year career in international development, I have seen first-hand the devastating effects of land grabbing; the human suffering caused by companies that siphon off scarce water to make bottled drinks while the majority of a society has no access to clean water; the environmental destruction, industrial pollution, and sweatshop working conditions; curable diseases killing millions; and dictatorial repressive governments who squeeze the freedom and creativity out of the people.

Each time I return to the United States, I am surprised by changes that do not exist in the non-Western world such as self-check-out, which requires me to work for corporations without being paid, work that displaces paid employees; the increasing stress of now unvalued workers as "at will employees" and the merging of work and leisure; speaking by telephone only to machines and the increasing impossibility of reaching humans; and having to fear getting caught in a mass-shooting when I go shopping or to a public event. Each time, I see things that increasingly are the same here as in the so-called "developing" world, like dramatic poverty and inequality, poor schools, low international educational test scores, human rights violations, a dysfunctional government, dictatorial practices, and a politicized judicial system. Each time, I experience an increasingly entrenched neoliberal archetype seemingly clinging to the remnants of capitalism in a last-ditch effort to save a dying system.

The sudden explosion of the coronavirus global pandemic and the subsequent suffering and even threatened starvation of millions of people around the world who lost their livelihood and lived without governments willing to help them survive, clearly showed us how vulnerable and fragile our systems are and how much our supply chains are at the mercy of other countries. The terrible irony was exposed of allowing our crops to wither in the fields and butchering our animals in the fields, instead of organizing to harvest our crops and transport our livestock, when food shortages around the world threatened to cause famine and calamity.

Journalists queried during the pandemic whether the United States is a failed state (Packer, 2020), whether the revolution was already underway (Spang, 2020), or whether coronavirus killed the revolution (Hamid, 2020). Even in the United States, those who lived by day jobs in the informal sector, including undocumented migrants, and those whose earnings were less than that required to file

income taxes and ineligible for social assistance, remained outside the small safety net the government provided. Numerous social organizations stepped in to help, illustrating the power of community and the need to organize locally in order to take the provision of our basic needs into our own hands. In querying whether coronavirus would mean the end of neoliberalism, Jeremy Lent (2020) posited that "this rediscovery of the value of community has the potential to be the most important factor of all in shaping the trajectory of the next era" (para. 33). The pandemic made it clear why people in crises historically have joined in commons in various parts of the world to stave off disaster. The crisis drove home the necessity to develop commons to control the necessities of life, including food, water, shelter, medical care, among others.

The public murder of African American George Floyd by a Minnesota police officer served as the straw that broke the camel's back just as the world was reeling from the pandemic. The grief of losing loved ones to the virus combined with the economic recession and the uncertainty of the future ignited the righteous anger and grief flamed by his murder and opened to the world the entrenched and vicious racist underpinning of American society. Fury and the determination to change the broken system spilled into the streets of cities around the world. The US President, who had failed to mobilize the government to effectively fight the coronavirus successfully, mobilized the government to repress the protests. Instead of listening to the claims of the protesters and working together for a new way forward, the government tried hard to silence them and push the broken system back to business as usual (Oprysco, 2020).

The Commons and Commoning

I stumbled upon the commons by chance in the early 2000s while researching the notion of a "global civil society." The "commons" began appearing in the articles I was reading. Intrigued by this seeming anomaly and the hopes that many scholars, activists, and practitioners had placed on the commons, either as a more beneficial way to govern common resources outside the state and private sector or as the path to a more generous and egalitarian post-capitalist society, I began seriously to study the phenomenon in 2013. I further explored the commons through grounded theory research. Grounded theory research asks "what's going on here?" and through data gathering from unstructured interviews and only afterward from literature opens the door for a theory to emerge (Glaser, 1998, 2007). Traditional grounded theories identify core variables that are expressed in gerunds – active verbs that perform as nouns – because such theories describe actions that are taking place, not static concepts or hypotheses (Glaser, 1998, 2007). The overall grounded theory is supported by "theoretical codes," also expressed in gerunds (Glaser, 1998, 2007).

Commoning, a gerund, emerged from the participant interviews as the core variable of commons and hence the grounded theory of "the commons," which is elaborated in Chapter 5 of this book. Three variables, also expressed as gerunds, emerged that interact to create the process of commoning, namely *supplanting a paradigm*, *self-protagonizing*, and *resonating self-and-society*. My study revealed

that commoning is a complex social, political, and psychological process that both creates and motivates the creation and governance of commons, at the same time providing commoners with a sense of self emancipated from the values that the market imposed on contemporary society.

Study participants expressed that commoning is a social production process as well as a constellation of subjectivities. They reported that commoning is an ethical and moral process that resonates with society such that society begins to reflect a value system based on communal well-being, social justice, harmony with nature, and sustainability. Commoning, to study participants, builds organizational forms, productive processes, and relationships with self, others, the environment, and society that emanate from the belief that humankind can live in harmony with each other and with nature and that people can fully participate in making the policies and taking the actions that impact their lives.

At the time I posed the question regarding whether the commons could lead to a new global order, I was skeptical. A commons frenzy was happening with scholars and activists calling almost everything commons without agreeing on what this apparently powerful and hopeful phenomenon was and whether it had the stamina to resist capitalist aggression and enclosure and emerge as dominant. Further, neoliberal capitalism was still taking over the world as more countries shifted their economic models to extensive privatization. I worked in Eastern Europe during the 1990s and early 2000s and experienced first-hand how the West's policy of dismantling and privatizing state-owned enterprises wreaked havoc on society, universalized poverty, and bred a pernicious class of oligarchs. I also remained hesitant because of Massimo De Angelis's (2012b) quote of Gramsci's cautionary tale. As he wrote:

> Writing in prison at a time of the consolidation of fascism in Italy, Antonio Gramsci wrote in an often quoted passage: "The old world is dying away, and the new world struggles to come forth: now is the time of monsters." A monster is an imaginary or legendary creature that combines parts from various animal or human forms. Fascism and Nazism were one type of this monster. Stalinism was another. Today, the articulation between capital, a system that recognizes no limit in its boundless accumulation, and a system that must recognize limits because it is only from within limits that it can reproduce life, love, affects, care, and sustainability, may well give way to another monstrous social construction … or not. Much will depend on us… (p. 300)

Renewed Interest in the Commons and a Path Forward

Somewhat dismayed although still involved in a food cooperative and an online commons, I only began to read commons literature again in 2018. I was happy to see that many commons scholars and activists had shifted from trying to agree on a definition of the commons to focusing on commoning as the unifying process

crossing all the various domains defined as commons. A more well-demarcated schism had emerged between those who studied commons by employing governance approaches delineated by 2009 Nobel Peace Prize winner Elinor Ostrom and those who focused on commoning as a radical way of being and acting within a human and non-human relational world, with the potential to lead to a post-capitalist order.

In even more recent writing, I noted that several of the most prolific commons scholars and activists had not only posited a framework for the commons but also had laid out the path for the transformation toward a commons-based world. Employing a complex adaptive systems construct to frame the commons and to explain how the commons will grow to dominance, their approaches have sketched out a path that can be followed to prevent that monster Gramsci cautioned against from dominating the emerging social order (Bauwens, Kostakis, & Pazaitis, 2019; Bollier & Helfrich, 2019; De Angelis, 2017b). I became interested in exploring the implications of following this path and better understanding the changes that would have to take place in human worldviews, consciousness, and value systems and in state and private sector values, structures, and processes in order for a commons-centric society to emerge as dominant. This desire served as the initial impetus to write this book.

Leadership (Or Not) on the Commons

I was a bit surprised, however, that a discussion of leadership was noticeably absent from most of the articles and books I read about the commons. Indeed, Bollier and Helfrich (2019) added leadership to their list of banned words that represent the authoritarian structures of the repressive world we are struggling to transform. They proposed "peer governance" instead, words that they recommended should also replace "governance" and "organization." As they wrote (2019):

> Leadership is a term that implies a single leader – bold, courageous, insightful – who mobilizes followers to achieve collective goals that might otherwise be unattainable. There is no question that some individuals are inspiring and catalytic. But understanding "leadership" as it happens in most organizational contexts switches on and validates a hierarchical structure in our minds. Leadership is then associated with gaining power over processes and people. It obscures the potential of commoning to actualize change and organize our lives – or, as Miki Kashtan puts it, "to inhabit an intentionality of leadership without having power." (p. 25)

De Angelis (2017a) avoided the word leadership yet alluded to certain individuals who, because of their knowledge or skills or "due to their contingent know-how" may come to the fore through "shifting authority" for specific activities (p. 228). Bauwens et al. (2019) asserted that leadership "is a function and

responsibility that can be assumed *ad hoc* and permissionlessly by those most capable and motivated in a given situation" (p. 18). Frederici (2019) wrote that leadership is distributed and taken up by different people as needs arise.

Having studied leadership for many years and knowing that leadership theory had extended far beyond an authoritarian model as evidenced by "the devolution of power from those up top to those below" (Kellerman, 2012, n.p.), I was interested in exploring leading in the commons. Even if commons are complex adaptive systems characterized by emergent change and subject to an evolutionary process by interacting with their environment, the need for agency in commons and for commoners to make decisions regarding adapting to their environment remains – whether fending off enclosure or creating and/or adapting new technologies or linking with specific commons systems or making deals with the government, private sector, or other commons. Hence, I wondered whether leadership remained relevant and if so, how it manifests in the commons. I thought that perhaps a more distributed or inclusive type of leadership might be relevant. Or if not leadership, I wanted to find out how the sparks of new ideas arise and how the commons as a system within which commoners act creates the necessary change without leaders. More so, I was curious to discover whether leading will disappear in future societies.

In fact, the etymology of the word "leadership" is modern, appearing only in the 19th Century (Kelly, 2020). "Leader" is older, derived from the old English *laedere* "one who leads," the verb being *laedan* meaning "to guide, bring forth." A related word in Indo-European Germanic *laidjan*, means "to travel" or *leith*, means "to step across a threshold – and to let go of whatever might limit stepping forward" (Senge, Hamilton, & Kania, 2015, para. 4). The Latin word *ducere*, "to lead, consider, and regard" is the closest word in antiquity to leadership, a word still used today in Romanian, *conducere* (Kelly, 2020). According to Marxists and autonomists, leadership is a function of the hegemonic capitalist system and if a commons-centric society is post-capitalist, then leadership, like class structures, will disappear or emerge only when necessary (Cawthorn, 2001). Indeed, the search for a universally accepted meaning of leadership has been as challenging and often as elusive as the search for a universally accepted meaning of "the commons." Leadership is generally considered as the process of motivating or inspiring a group to achieve a common goal. Taking group leadership into account, a more recent definition highlighted leadership "as both individual agency and the process by which many social actors align their efforts to take action on a common social purpose" (Meehan, Reinelt, & Liederman, 2015, p. 3).

Further, I wanted to explore what would be our individual responsibility to "lead" (or whatever the new term should be) if we decided to join the commons movement and help to bring about a new society. These questions in addition to the initial impetus to explore further the implications of the systems model of change were the bases for writing this book. To reflect on our individual responsibility to lead becomes all the more important now during the global coronavirus pandemic and the "Black Lives Matter" global protests which are tearing apart so-called "social normalcy" and laying bare the destructiveness of bad leadership, making it inescapable that we as individuals need to take more control of

our society and have far more influence on designing the future road to be taken, revolution or not.

Proleptic Leadership

My exploration of leadership on the commons led me to the conclusion that leadership is indeed required and that leadership still will be required in the foreseeable future. I conceived of "proleptic leadership" as the most suitable leadership to be practiced on the commons, following on Senge's definition of leadership as "the capacity of a human community to shape its future" (2015, n.p.). "Prolepsis" is a literary, rhetorical, and theological term, etymologically derived from the Latin *prolepsis* and the Greek *prolepsis*, meaning "an anticipating," a "taking beforehand," from *prolambanein* "to take before," from *pro* "before."

American Heritage Dictionary defines prolepsis as "the representation of a thing as existing before it actually does." Prolepsis is "the representation of a future act or development as if presently existing or accomplished" according to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. Prolepticism conveys the "fundamental idea that the future has priority over the past and present, and that we can see some of the future in the *prolepsis*, where the future invades the present in advance of itself" (Jantti, 2017, p. 17). Prolepticism "understands reality as defined by the future rather than by the past" (Hofstad, 2019, p. 350). Another definition of prolepsis refers to the anticipatory nature of reality understood ontologically and noetically (Pasquariello, 1976). Theologically, it has been claimed that "the eschatological future reveals itself beforehand in the prolepsis – a foretaste of the future kingdom" (Jantti, 2017, p. 5).

In literature, prolepsis is employed to describe or evoke in the present an event that will happen in the future. An example is found in Garcia Marquez's novel *A Hundred Years of Solitude* where Marquez begins his story with the future defining event: "Many years later as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice" (Bresco de Luna, 2017, p. 283). Psychologists often describe the manner in which parents raise a child to realize their future vision of their child's life as proleptic (Bresco de Luna, 2017).

A number of scholars and activists claim that commons are prefigurative of a post-capitalist, commons-centric social order. Many scholars have predicted and conceived of the characteristics of that commons-centric order as summarized in Chapter 7. Chapter 5 explains the social and psychological intentions and manifestations of the commoners that create and inhabit prefiguratively the commons-centric order. Developmental psychologists and integral theorists have shown that people traverse a pre-established path of increasing cognitive and sense-making abilities. Consciousness, together with its various facets, also follows a predetermined path of levels of expanding awareness and diminishing ego. Communities, organizations, and societies also reflect these evolving levels of consciousness. Glimpses of the far-off future are hence partially visible and the path leading to that future is at least sketchily laid out. Further, disruptive futures,

shattering the *status quo*, result from new technologies, several of which may be created by commoners, radical visions of social change, or crises which demand a sudden shift in direction. *Leading proleptically* is allowing that future to pull one forward, to guide one's path, and to be reflected in leading oneself, leading others, and leading society. This means that proleptic leadership reflects the values and beliefs inherent in the commons. Further, leading proleptically occurs in *liminal space*, in that threshold between the old and the new, and opens up possibilities for creating a commons-centric society that reflects the values most of us share.

The Book's Audience

The book is primarily aimed at university students and politically and socially aware readers interested in emerging trends in the commons and in leadership and in considering whether the commons constitutes a realistic phenomenon to usher in a new global order and the possibility that the concept of and need for leadership may in fact disappear in a commons-centric society. I have assumed that the reader would not have an extensive knowledge of the commons, but would be interested in engaging in a conversation about this phenomenon and who may want to reflect upon their own interest in, cynicism about, or commitment to and leadership within the commons movement toward a kinder, more generous, and equitable society. For, as Kirwan, Dawney, and Brigstock (2016) wrote:

> The idea of the commons offers a romance, and through this romance, a way forward, a way to think out of the despondent political narratives of ecological destruction, polarisation and dispossession, and a counter-narrative to that of the inevitable and uncontrollable force of neoliberalism. Above all else, it offers a glimmer of possibility that change can occur incrementally, and that small acts matter. (pp. 3–4)

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Introduction to the Commons

> The common day and night – the common earth and waters, Your farm – your work, trade, occupation, The democratic wisdom underneath, like solid ground for all. (Walt Whitman, "The common place" Leaves of Grass)

Commons have existed since antiquity and many ancient practices of communal management of resources have extended even to the present. New commons are emerging in contemporary society almost on a daily basis.* The village of Torbel in the Swiss Alps established an association to communally manage the village's grazing land and forests in the 15th Century, an association which continues to function today. The communal Spanish *huerta* system of irrigation has lasted for over a thousand years. The iconic Boston Common initially served as a common grazing ground for cattle and now serves as a symbol of the community. The *Bisse de Saviesse* in the canton of Valais, Switzerland, managed since the first half of the 20th Century, is a communal irrigation system in the Swiss mountains that collects melting water directly from glaciers and takes it into villages and the farms in the valley down below. For many decades, lobster fishermen in Maine have communally managed their businesses to ensure the sustainability of the lobster catch. The Great Lakes Commons, a cross-border community, works to save the water in the Great Lakes.

The *hackerspace*, *FabLab*, and *Maker* movements are pioneering spaces to develop collaborative innovations in software, customized fabrication, and open hardware design and manufacturing. Examples include the Embassy of the Commons in Poland, the Hack of Good Initiative in Spain, Fabulous St. Pauli in Germany, and Move Commons, a tagging system for commons-based Internet projects (Helfrich, 2013).

Software such as the Linux open-source operating system has created a global commons of users who access Linux for free. Peer-to-peer and open-source production of houses, automobiles, 3D printers, and many other products have created global commons of individuals anxious to work together, share, and take control of more aspects of their own lives outside of the market. Openly sourced and distributed knowledge such as through Wikipedia and available as through Creative Commons licenses and open-sourced media products through

*See Bollier & Helfrich, 2015, 2019 for discussions by and about a variety of commons. See Bollier & Helfrich, 2015 for a list of movies and presentations about the commons.

Wikimedia have allowed the free sharing of information, photos, music, and other creations that used to cost to access. Wikispeed has created a milieu for open-access automobile manufacturing. Other commons such as community gardens, time banks, coops, community-run innovation centers, solidarity networks, and so on, are expanding throughout the world. Commons are increasingly using alternative currencies to establish themselves as separate from mainstream financial systems and capitalist logics.

Despite the apparent existence of the commons for eons, defining exactly what the commons is and what makes it so special and potentially powerful as a transformational agent has been debated since the revival of its study in response to Garrett Hardin's now classic article "Tragedy of the Commons" (Hardin, 1968).

Contemporary Study of the Commons

The contemporary study of the commons, since Garrett Hardin's article and the elegant and far-reaching rebuttal by Nobel Prize winner Eleanor Ostrom (1990, 2005a, 2005b, 2009), has traversed an evolution that has expanded the notion of the commons from common pool natural resources to the New Commons that includes seven different categories of commons, such as knowledge, the Internet, urban spaces, culture, genes, among others (Hess, 2000, 2008, 2013). The dialogue has evolved from focusing on common property to mixed property regimes (Turner, 2017) and to resources not considered property at all. Debate still ensues regarding whether the commons are generated by and required for capitalism (Caffentzis, 2004, 2010; De Angelis, 2012b) or whether the commons are inherently anti-capitalist and have the potential to catalyze a post-capitalist society (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012, 2015, 2019; De Angelis, 2002, 2010, 2017a, 2017b; Hardt, 2013, 2014; Hardt & Negri, 2009, 2012; Helfrich, 2010, 2013).

Disagreement still exists regarding whether commons are necessary because the state has withdrawn support to social benefits and imposed "austerity" and hence spawned community-led social venture creation (Haugh, 2007); and, because the state, along with the private sector, have failed to effectively manage resources and the environment, thus threatening our very survival, or because commons resuscitates the human need for community and collaboration and our identity as *homo cooperantus* instead of *homo economicus*. Whether commons are merely interstitial organizations (Ryan, 2013) interspersed between the state and private sector or a third civil society sector, whether they are organizations beyond this duopoly, or whether they are not organizations at all remains an open question; as does the question of whether the commons is a "faint echo of the moral economy of the world we have lost" (Amin and Howell, 2016, p. 2), or whether the commons harkens a new morality that can finally realize the ideals that we embrace in our shared values of the common good (Mele, 2009, p. 236) remain unresolved.

These questions have marked the contemporary history of the commons since Hardin's article and this period can be conceived of as a time of seeking to define the commons, capture its unique qualities and interrogate it in order to determine its significance, where it should be placed in terms of the broad sweep of socio-economic evolution, and whether it is the catalyst of a post-capitalist

society. In his historic article "The Tragedy of the Commons" (1968), Hardin employed commons to refer to land to which the population had open access without any sense of ownership or responsibility or community. Hardin argued that people would be "forced" to overuse and degrade the land because of their desire to maximize their gain and minimize their responsibility, making it necessary for either the state or the private sector to manage the land by some form of "coercion."

Nobel Prize-winning economist Elinor Ostrom countered Hardin's argument by describing commons as common pool resources (CPRs) and proposing design principles and forms of governance that would prove that CPRs could be managed by groups of people rather than the private sector or state without degrading the environment. At the same time, the environmental movement peaked interest in the commons as natural resources and encouraged people to take responsibility for managing these resources. It became increasingly clear that neither the state nor the private sector were caring for the resources, but in fact, exploiting them for profit and leading the world to possible destruction.

Climate change emerged as a major challenge and stimulated local groups to take action to lobby for remediation actions to a reticent government. The 1990s expansion of the Internet and the recognition of knowledge and information as a human creation belonging to all, spurred the identification of the knowledge and digital commons. Commons during this time were still referred to largely as a noun, although increasing emphasis was placed on the type of community and governance structures, processes, and values that distinguished commons from the state and private sector, as well as the foundational process of the commons, namely commoning.

Protests against the privatization of common resources for profit and increasing social inequalities caused by neoliberalism escalated during the 1990s and 2000s and these movements became intimately associated with the commons. These included the anti-globalization movement and protests against the trade, privatization, and restructuring policies of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank.

Beginning in 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Mexico started protesting against neoliberalism and the North American Free Trade Agreement which had a devastating impact on their livelihood. They took over a large portion of land in Chiapas, Mexico, and through protests that lasted well into the 2000s, obtained the status of an autonomist region. The Bolivian water wars in Cochabamba in 1999–2000 against the privatization of water succeeded in forcing the government to break their contract with a multinational water corporation.

Dardot and Laval (2019) argued that the 1990s was the decade during which many scholars and activists recognized that the commons was not a shared resource *per se*, but rather a political principle that had the potential to shift the socio-economic system from capitalism to a commons-centric society. Autonomists, in particular, linked social movements with the commons as partners in the struggle against the stronghold of the neoliberal paradigm. Callahan (2019) claimed that a new social paradigm of conviviality and the collective subject was emerging aimed at regenerating community. The commons became identified as a

way of living in egalitarian communities with values that contrasted sharply with those proffered by the market society and which offered the opportunity for a far more life-enhancing way of living.

At the same time, legal scholars recognized that neoliberalism promoted increasingly restrictive copyright laws that resulted in the "enclosure" of knowledge which, these scholars argued, risked the advance of science and human creativity by locking away knowledge that had the potential to expand our understanding and efforts to improve the world. Other scholars highlighted other human characteristics and creations that were being enclosed for profit such as genes, language, and culture, among many others. Hess (2008) categorized all these emerging "commons" into seven categories and coined the term "the new commons," still employing commons generally as a noun. She identified commons as those resources which caused a "social dilemma" and raised the question whether they would better be managed by the state, the private sector, or by the people in order to maximize benefits to the group of users.

The Great Recession of 2008 catalyzed a number of social movements against the corruption of Wall Street, neoliberalism, the lack of true democracy, and the austerity measures imposed by IMF, the World and European Banks, and the European Council. The Occupy Wall Street, Indignados in Spain, the anti-austerity movement in Greece, movements against genetically modified foods and sterile and expensive genetically modified seeds, as well as movements against corrupt governments and companies around the world were organized like commons and further shifted the discussion of the commons to the unique practice of commoning and its power to change society. Further, mainstream commons scholars and activists began to define a commons movement during this period (Tomasevic, Horvat, Midzic, Dragsic, & Dakic 2018). The German Henrich Boll Stiftung helped move the discussion of the commons forward and co-organized a conference in 2010 with the Commons Strategies Group entitled "Constructing a Commons-based Policy." Critical scholars joined the discussion along with more traditional institutionalists who followed the tradition of Ostrom (Tomasevic et al., 2018).

Scholars and activists attempted to carve a generally accepted meaning of the commons without great success. A plethora of definitions emerged during the 2000s. Hess argued (2008) that these definitions shared two characteristics, namely, that the commons referred to a shared heritage of all global citizens and that the commons and commoners held "a commitment to future generations, to communities beyond our local sphere, to working for both the local and the global common good" (Hess, 2008, p. 34). Uzelman (2008) contended that the various uses of the term *commons* were separated by differing and even conflicting underlying paradigms and consequent applications. Confusion arose as to whether the commons was a resource, a social space, a movement, a community, an approach to governance, all of these, or something else. Too numerous to list all, some of the definitions of *commons* that were posited during this time included the following, most of which were quoted by Hess (2008).

Commons as a Place or Resource[1]

> The commons is "the public cultural terrain where we dream, create, and pass it on." (Quinn, Hotchritt, & Ploof, 2012, p. 5)

> The commons: There's a part of our world, here and now, that we all get to enjoy without the permission of any (Lessig, 1999).

> Commons is a resource shared by a group where the resource is vulnerable to enclosure, overuse, and social dilemmas. Unlike a public good, it requires management and protection in order to sustain it (Hess, 2008).

> The commons is more basic than both government and market. It is the vast realm that is the shared heritage of all of us that we typically use without toll or price. The atmosphere and oceans, languages and cultures, the stores of human knowledge and wisdom, the informal support systems of community, the peace and quiet that we crave, the genetic building blocks of life – these are all aspects of the commons (Rowe, 2001).

> The commons was where people could share common stories, common experiences, common aspirations, and common problems. In earlier American history, it also served as a "the learning center of that day" for civic practices and values (Friedland & Boyte, 2000).

Commons as a Resource and a Community Governing in a Particular Way

The discourse of the commons is at once descriptive, constitutive, and expressive. It is

> descriptive because it identifies models of community governance that would otherwise go unexamined. It is constitutive because, by giving us a new language, it helps us to build new communities based on principles of the commons. And it is expressive because

[1]The term "resource" in terms of commons is troubling, especially when considering the liberating potential of the commons. It is a human-centric, value-laden word that identifies nature and human creations as providing something that can be used by humans, generally to prosper humans economically. Resource is an economic term that feeds into economic model, generally based on *homo economicus*, the self-maximizing individual. A better term might be "nature's bounty," "human creations," "commonwealth." "Common goods" is sometimes used, but again, this implies a value judgment and does not refer to the "raw thing."

> the language of the commons is a way for people to assert a personal connection to a set of resources and a social solidarity with each other (Bollier, 2001, p. 29).

> The language of the commons provides a coherent alternative model for bringing economic, social, and ethical concerns into greater alignment. It is able to talk about the inalienability of certain resources and the value of protecting community interests. The commons fills a theoretical void by explaining how significant value can be created and sustained outside the market system (Bollier, 2007, p. 29).

Commons as Social Relationships

> People must exhibit mutual trust, habits and skills of collaboration, and public spirit in order to sustain such a common resource against the tendency of individuals to abuse it (Levine, 2001, p. 206).

> A social regime for managing shared resources and forging a community of shared values and purpose. Unlike markets, which rely upon price as the sole dimension of value, a commons is organized around a richer blend of human needs – for identity, community, fame, and honor – which are indivisible and inalienable, as well as more "tangible" rewards (Clippinger & Bollier, 2005).

> Commons can even be thought of as the social bonds shared by a community and can include the need for trust, cooperation, and human relationships. These are the very foundation of what makes a "community" rather than merely a group of individuals living in close proximity to each other (Arvanitakis, 2006).

> The commons is not "a particular kind of thing" but an unstable and malleable social relation between a particular self-defined social group and those aspects of its actually existing or yet-to-be-created social and/or physical environment deemed crucial to its life and livelihood. (Harvey, 2012)

Commons as a Resource, A Community, and an Emancipatory Way of Operating

De Angelis (2010, 2017b) posited a tri-partite definition of the commons which includes *common goods*, or commonwealth, the natural, human, or intellectual resources shared, the *community* that creates and/or governs these resources, and the process of *common-ing*, that is the institutionalized process of coming together to pool and govern resources.

Bollier's (2014) definition of the commons has been widely accepted by a number of scholars and activists as encompassing the unique elements of the commons. As he contended:

> Commons certainly include physical and intangible resources of all sorts, but they are more accurately defined as paradigms that combine a distinct community with a set of social practices, values and norms that are used to manage a resource. Put another way, a commons is a resource + a community + a set of social protocols. The three are an integrated, interdependent whole.

Mattei (2014) claimed that "the commons radically oppose both the State and private property as shaped by market forces, and are powerful sources of emancipation and social justice" (p. 37).

Saidel (2018) defined commons

> not by a good in itself, but by the system of reciprocal rights and obligations between participants and their capacity of enforcement … it is collective action that defines the commons, the rights attached to it, and their forms of management and conservation. (p. 69)

Cangelosi (2019) obtained information from Remix the Commons regarding individuals connected to the commons in 35 countries and conducted an extensive survey of how respondents in 18 of those countries[2] defined the commons. She organized responses into four categories: (1) resilience/resistance; (2) reciprocity; (3) human rights; and (4) democracy. The first category included such answers as the sovereignty over community resources and livelihood, political validity, alternative to market relationship, desire for a fair society, and a change in the social imaginary. Reciprocity included sharing, community relations and management, co-creation, and network perspective and collaborative process.

Human rights and socio-economic justice were common themes that ran through various definitions that respondents proposed, in addition to the more commonly asserted environmental justice (Cangelosi, 2019). Respondents emphasized human rights of future generations and of marginalized groups such as women, the indigenous, and the poor, along with resistance and social change. Respondents also viewed better democratic models based on community as essential aspects of commons. Cangelosi (2019) concluded that human rights claims, resistance, and social change were core issues that emerged from the respondents. Interesting is the fact that respondents did not provide static answers about what the commons are as a "thing," but rather provided definitions regarding the power of the commons to act, to resist, and to create.

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[2]Countries included Belgium, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Greece, Spain, Poland, Germany, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Peru, Brazil, Columbia, India, Senegal, the United States, and Australia.

Peter Linebaugh (2019) aptly summarized the complexity of the commons from his perspective:

> The commons is an omnibus term carrying a lot of freight and covering a lot of territory. The commons refers to both an idea and to a practice. As a general idea the commons means equality of economic conditions. As a particular practice the commons refers to forms of both collective labor and communal distribution. The terms suggests alternatives to patriarchy, to private property, to capitalism, and to competition. (p. 4)

As is apparent, definitions were reaching beyond commons as a "thing" to commons as relationships, values, and dreams. The commons increasingly became a space of hope and escape from the stranglehold of neoliberalism and its mushrooming injustices. Inherent in several of the above definitions lies a distinctive value system that sets commons apart from the state or the private sector. The values of mutual care and obligation, self-governance, cooperation, and autonomy are some of the values that thread through the commons discourse.

Governance processes in commons defined the type of goods they governed as "common goods," as opposed to private goods managed by the private sector and public goods managed by the state. Common goods are, by definition, co-governed by their user communities that establish their own rules and norms (Bollier, 2014, Papadimitropoulos, 2018). They are categorized into the material, such as natural resources and the immaterial such as knowledge, culture, digital informational resources, etc.

However, some commons such as urban commons, digital commons, or open-source commons did not fit neatly into the commons definitions nor categories proposed, because often there were no definable communities who made rules but rather ever-changing networks. They were not limited-access commons, but rather open-access commons and either semi-regulated or unregulated.

Commoning as the Critical Creative Force of the Commons

The inability of commons scholars and activists to agree on the definition of the commons, led scholars such as Amin and Howell (2016) to emphasize the importance of *commoning* rather than focusing on the commons as a noun. As they contended,

> the commons remain central to the material struggles and imaginaries of collective well-being, now and into the near future… If we think of the commons as a practice or process, the future looks less dismal, as is also increasingly recognized. (Amin & Howell, 2016, p. 2)

Commoning is the process of creating and sustaining commons and is the process that differentiates commons from the private sector and the state. Commoning, thus, is based on a different set of values than those of either the private

sector or state, as will be explored in depth in Chapter 5, and it is these values, above all that are the source of transforming society.

Many other commons scholars and activists also refocused their study on the process of commoning as revelatory of the unique contribution of this phenomenon (Bollier & Helfrich, 2015, 2019; De Angelis, 2017b; Euler, 2018; Ferreri, 2017; Fournier, 2013; Linebaugh, 2009, 2014; Por, 2012b; Ryan, 2013; Singh, 2017; Stavrides, 2016; Turner, 2017; Weber, 2015; Zhang & Barr, 2018). Although studying the governance of the commons through Ostrom's Institutional Analysis remained important, the focus on governance structures and organizational forms needed to be subsumed under the study of the processes of commoning, according to many of these commons scholar and activists. It is these constitutive social and relational processes that commoning builds (Ferrari, 2017), which create governance and organizational forms and that also possess the mystery of what happens when a community decides to join together to realize a common purpose.

Many commons scholars and activists conceptualized commons as the tangible or intangible social form of matter that is determined by commoning, a way of being and becoming comprised of certain social practices (Euler, 2018). To Dardot and Laval (2019), commoning, which they call "the common," is a political principle that applies "the reason of the common" to society through eight principles which will be discussed in Chapter 7 of this volume. As Dardot and Laval (2019) contended,

> the common (singular) is a political principle through which we are able to build the commons, maintain the commons, and sustain the commons. It is, as such, a political principle that defines a new system of struggles on a global scale… The common is about coming together and creating, equally and collectively, a new world from the old. (p. 44)

As Indian physicist and activist Vandana Shiva wrote (2020):

> Whilst, initially, the commons were seen merely as resources or things that needed to be managed and protected, they are now widely being embraced as a relational politics, embedded in fluidity and our mutual vulnerability. From being viewed as a "mere technical management of resources (in space)" they are now seen as part of the "struggle to perform common livable relations (in time)." (p. 253)

Bollier (2007) asserted that

> the commons is an active, living process. It is less a noun than a verb because it is primarily about the social act of commoning – acts of mutual support, conflict, negotiation, communication, and experimentation that are needed to create systems to manage shared resources. This process blends production (self-provisioning), governance, culture and personal interests in one system. (n.p.)

Whereas the focus on commoning greatly helped to distinguish commons from the market and the state, it fell short by not constructing a framework within which the commons could create a new commons-centric social order. Part of the problem of defining the commons stemmed from antedated analytical frameworks. As Bresnihan (2016) pointed out:

> While the "commons" has received much attention in recent years from academics, activists, and policy makers, it is far from clear what it consists of or how we are supposed to identify and describe it when the intellectual and analytic tools available are so insufficient – unsurprising when they are largely inherited from an epistemology and aesthetic tradition that is literally unable to see these worlds. As Rowe (2001) rightly points out, '[before] we can reclaim the commons, we have to remember how to see it. (p. 96)

More recently, Bollier and Helfrich (2019) and De Angelis (2017a, 2017b) viewed the commons through a new lens, a new analytical framework based on an interconnected and relational universe. As Bollier and Helfrich (2019) wrote,

> commons are a pervasive, generative, and neglected social life-form. They are complex, adaptive, living processes that generate wealth (both tangible and intangible) through which people address their shared needs with minimal or no reliance on markets or states. (n.p.)

To talk about the commons, Bollier and Helfrich (2019) emphasized, is "to talk about freedom-in-connectedness – as social space in which we can rediscover and remake ourselves as whole human beings and enjoy some serious measure of self-determination" (n.p.). With this perspective, they presented a path upon which the commons can catalyze a socio-economic transformation.

Schism of Commons Scholars and Activists

As the commons movement grew, a schism among commons scholars and activists manifested. Many common scholars, including the majority who are members of the International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC) generally employ Bollier's above-summarized 2014 definition of the commons and focus on studying social dilemmas, collective action, and commons governance arrangements from an institutionalist perspective. These scholars generally employ Ostrom's Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) and Social-Ecological Systems (SES) Frameworks and the Institutions of Sustainability Framework (IOS), which includes human–nature interactions and interdependence between actors (Hagedorn, Grundmann, & Thiel, 2019). These scholars largely conceive of commons as CPRs, goods whose characteristics make it costly to exclude people from obtaining benefits from them.

Most members of this commons school conceive of the commons as a viable third sector that can co-exist with the state and the private sector, rather than a radical transformational phenomenon. Nonetheless, some scholars and activists in this school protest against neoliberal enclosure. Some, especially from Latin America, promote seed cooperatives which share natural and reproducible seeds to protect farmers against the sterile genetically modified seeds of companies such as Monsanto, which are copyrighted, expensive, and require chemicals to produce. Others promote open-access knowledge as a protest against copyright and enclosure. Further, indigenous wisdom, justice, and community values are increasingly important among this group of commoners, as indigenous groups seek to protect their ancestral lands and commoners turn to them to better understand how to live in common.

On the other hand, more radical commons scholars and activists, including many autonomists, conceive of commons as a radical transformational force that could lead the transition to a post-capitalist commons-centric society, although they differ in their conceptions of how this transition will occur and whether it will be evolutionary or revolutionary. Practices of everyday commoning (Bresnihan & Byrne, 2014) create forms of egalitarian sociality that may be "anti (against), despite (in) and post (beyond) capitalist" (Chatterton et al., 2013).

Papadimitropoulos (2017a, 2017b) categorized the various camps of commons scholars and activists as: (1) liberal, (2) reformist, and (3) anti-capitalist. The liberal advocates favor the coexistence of the commons with the state and market and include most of the members of the IASC as well as scholars who comprise commons studies, and most of the scholars and practitioners who employ Ostrom's IAD and SES Frameworks. Reformists contend that commons can replace capitalism from within by a progressive process of building more commons and federations of commons. Anti-capitalists argue that commons can ultimately overturn capitalism but do not offer a transition plan. Papadimitropoulos (2017a, 2017b) argued that the reformist scholars and activists show the most promise because only they understand the overarching change in production occurring in society as the result of technology which will make large-scale production obsolete and more commons-oriented. The majority of the approaches discussed in this book posited the reformist approach.

Framework for the Transition

In order to build a framework for the commons to serve as a force of social transformation, several scholars and scholar-practitioners who belong to the reformist and anti-capitalist category described above have developed the notion that commons are complex adaptive social systems (Bauwens, Kostakis, & Pazaitis, 2019; Bollier & Helfrich, 2019; De Angelis, 2017b). According to these authors, transition to a commons-centric society will occur as the commons join together in a federalist structure, expand to a tipping point, and eventually become the dominant form of production with their values permeating the social imaginary of society. The authors propose differing relationships of the commons to the state and private sector but agree that capitalism will be transformed into a commons-centric society.

It is this systems view of the commons that will be interrogated in the chapters that follow in order to determine whether it holds the promise of the transition and whether leadership has a role in the emerging commons-centric society.

These authors view the social transformation from a commons-level system perspective. I argue that this systems perspective is insufficient to explain the complexity of the transformation. Rather, this perspective needs to be expanded to include the individual, community, societal, and universal levels. In order to incorporate all these levels, I employ a human action perspective. Human action theory includes the importance of the micro (individual), meso (community), macro (societel), and meta (universal) levels as intimately involved and co-evolving in social transformation. Hence, by employing a human action perspective, the commons-level systems perspective can be placed in the context of overall socio-economic transformation. This perspective also includes the necessary transformations that individuals would have to traverse in terms of their values and beliefs and actions in order to support a commons-centric society. It also allows for the context within which proleptic leadership is practiced. Thus, the work of several authors who have written at the higher and lower levels will be summarized in order to better understand the complexity of the proposed transformation and to question whether federalizing commons is all that is necessary to catalyze the dominance of the commons.

Organization and Leadership Theories

During the decades in which scholars and activists were exploring and defining the commons, both organization and leadership theories were undergoing changes in response to the information age. Beginning with theories of bureaucracy and scientific management from Max Weber and Charles Taylor during the 19th-Century industrial revolution, organization theory in the 20th Century began to grapple with systems theory and several other paradigms which depicted organizations in more vibrant and living terms than the mechanical models of the early industrial revolution. These more recent organization theories posited horizontal and flexible structures and processes appropriate to the era where organizations needed to be agile and conducive to rapid and creative knowledge generation. Margaret Wheatley's now-classic *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (2006), first published in 1992, applied quantum physics, a self-organizing system model, and chaos theory to depict organizations as living systems thriving by the creative free-flow of information in a relational universe and characterized by emergent change. Morgan's *Organization Images* (2006), originally published in 1986 laid out the various metaphors through which scholars and practitioners viewed organizations, including machine, organism, brain, culture, political, psychic prison, flux and transformation, and domination. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (Senge, 2010) revolutionized the field by tracing the mind of evolutionary organizations through five key practices, including (1) personal mastery; (2) awareness of our biases and mental models; (3) shared understanding of the vision; (4) team learning; and (5) and systems thinking.

Laloux harkened the emergence of an organization with a higher level of consciousness that mirrored the emergence of an integral consciousness in *Reinventing Organizations* (2014).

Leadership theory also underwent rapid change during this period. From the "great man" theory of leadership, theory moved to trait, skills, behavioral, and situational approaches, path–goal and leader–member exchange, transformational, authentic, adaptive leadership theories, followership, and team leadership (Northouse, 2018). Also explored were system, collaborative, participative, distributive, servant, ethical, leadership approaches among many others, progressively flattening the relationship between leader and follower. Leadership scholars turned to the East and to Buddhism and Hinduism to seek guidance on the ideal inner world of the leader through "U Theory" (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004). Jaworski (2011, 2012) emphasized the creation of collective intelligence by awareness enhancing practices such as meditation. With the rise of globalization, global leadership emerged, requiring leaders to have a broad systems view and make decisions across borders for the benefit of their multinational corporations. The proliferation of relational leadership theories in which leaders and followers were both essential marked the end, at least in theory, of the great man, authoritarian leaders. As Kellerman (2012) wrote:

> We know that the old order is over because people in positions of power and authority seem similar to, as opposed to far more imposing than, those who are not; because they are routinely derided, ignored, or circumvented by those who are not; and because they find it increasingly difficult to exercise either the one (power) or the other (authority). (n.p.)

Global reality does not reflect this finale, although as Kellerman pointed out (2012), people all around the world feel more entitled to express their political perspectives. The online world has made this all the more possible.

Structure of the Book

In order to explore the possibility or not of a transition to a commons-centric society and the role of leadership in the commons in contemporary society as well as in a commons-centric society, I first take stock of the history of the commons and its evolution to the current time. Although this has been done by many other authors, examining this evolution and the contentions within it will help illuminate the way forward. The driving force of commoning is examined in more depth to ascertain the vision and values that the commons-centric society may have. How the transition to a commons-centric society will occur is discussed through theories of social change and then through the complex adaptive system approach proposed by key commons scholars and activists. Challenges to such a transition are then elaborated. Leadership is then explored to determine how it is practiced on the commons, if at all, whether it plays an important role in the

transition, and whether the concept as we know it will wither and fade away in a commons-centric society. I take the position that leadership is necessary and will continue to be so and posit Proleptic Leadership. Finally, I consider whether commons is simply a utopian idea in this time of the seeming collapse of many socio-economic systems or whether it has the potential to usher in a new global order, and if so, how we can join in the movement.

Part I provides a "Brief History of the Commons from Antiquity to Today." Part II explores "Commoning and the Transition to a Commons-Centric Society." Part III investigates "Leading (or Not) on the Commons." Finally, the conclusion summarizes the book and proposes a way forward for "leaders" who are or would like to be involved in the commons movement, and perspectives regarding the possibility or not that the commons indeed provides the vehicle to transform the socio-economic and political system.

Part I

A Brief History of the Commons from Antiquity to Today

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Chapter 1

Evolution of the Idea of the Commons and the First Enclosure Movement

> The concept of the 'commons' is related to the dream, the gothic, the surreal, the hidden, and the mythic. (Linebaugh, 2019, p. 87)

Extending back into antiquity, the phenomenon of the commons has undergone tremendous conceptual reframing in recent years. From commons-based laws in ancient Egypt and Rome to common land during feudal times to natural resources, knowledge, culture, Internet, and other commons in contemporary times, the phenomenon of commons has been infused with significant meaning and power to change society. A starting point to think about the meaning of the commons is to consider them as *social systems comprised of self-organized communities of commoners who create and/or use and/or protect and/or share natural, human-made, or abstract commonwealth governed and sustained by the practice of commoning which infuses the community with distinctive values, processes, and actions that differ from those of the state and private sector*. Commoners generally also share the belief that the private sector does not have the right to take and "enclose" such commonwealth to make it profit-generating, nor does the state have the right to manage it and determine its access and use, especially within a culture of privatization. Rather, commoners believe that the shared commonwealth belongs to everyone by virtue of it being provided by nature or as a manifestation of general human creativity.

The term *commons* has a wide range of meanings and uses in English (Williams, 1983). Its Latin root word, *communis* is derived from *com*, meaning "together" and *munis*, meaning "under obligation" and from *com*, meaning "and" and *unis*, meaning "one." French political activist Alain Lipietz traced the word *commun* back to the Norman, William the Conquerer. *Commun*, according to Lipietz, derives from *munis*, which means "gift" and "duty," a dualism that describes the two sides of the concept in its contemporary usage (Bollier, 2014). As Dardot and Laval (2019) explained:

> What we find in the term's etymological meaning is thus the Janus-face of the debt and the gift, of obligation and recognition. The term is thus bound up with the fundamental social fact known

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> as symbolic exchange, which – at least since the work of Marcel Mauss – ethnological and sociological literature has documented in almost every form of human society. (n.p.)

Dardot and Laval (2019) also argued that *munis* does not refer only to the formal requirement for reciprocity but that this duty is collective and often political.

The term "commons" has often been inextricably related to the term *community*, referring to a group or to all humankind, a place where the public meets, or to a shared resource. Also derived from the Latin root *communis*, the related term *community* generally refers to a group having direct, even intimate relationships in contrast to terms such as *society* or *state*, where relationships are organized and instrumental (Williams, 1983).

Historical Sketch of the Commons

> The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying, this is mine and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society … beware of listening to this imposter; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all and the earth itself to nobody. (Jean-Jacques Rousseau)

The idea of the commons as a public space and as a shared resource accessible by the community has existed since antiquity. Hunting-and-gathering societies had open access to animals and plants on lands belonging to the community. Ancient Egypt and the Roman Empire had common-based laws. In 535 AD, Emperor Justinian recognized the commons in law as he included *res communes* in his Institutes of Justinian body of law (Bollier, 2014). As Bollier pointed out, the Emperor declared that

> by the law of nature these things are common to mankind – the air, running water, the seas and consequently the shores of the sea … Also all rivers and ports are public so that the right of fishing in a port and in rivers is common to all. And by the law of nations the use of the shore is also public, and in the same manner, the sea itself. The right of fishing in the sea from the shore belongs to all men. (p. 10)

"The public trust doctrine" is a legacy of Justinian's law. In the United States, this doctrine dictates that the state has the duty to protect natural resources and that it cannot sell or give away land, water, or wildlife to any private party (Bollier, 2014; Rose, 1986). *Res communes* differs from *res publicus*. The former refers to things common to all and incapable of private appropriation and existing beyond the power of the state, whereas the latter refers to that which belongs to or is administered by the state.

Wall (2014) pointed out that the commons historically had cultural and social connotations beyond their economic value. Commons often held mythical or

religious meanings and were celebrated by intimate relations with the people who depended upon them. As Wall (2014) wrote, regarding one such example, "indigenous people in Australian who sing to the land or Mongolian herders who believe that dragons own the soil provide beautiful examples of commoning beyond cost-benefit analysis and class struggle" (p. 107).

The Commons in Feudal Europe

> Commoning was a particular way of weaving the threads of daily life, the how of things with the why to give meaning and a sense of what's real and relevant, and it lasted for centuries, with the blessing of church and state including the Tudor kings and the early Stuarts. (Heather Menzies, 2014)

Drafted in 1215, the Magna Carta and its companion Charter of the Forest, initially issued in 1217, established legal principles that greatly impacted Western law. The Charter granted access of commoners to the royal forest resources (Bollier, 2014; Linebaugh, 2009). At the time, the forests were the most important source of fuel and pasture and also an important source of meat. Hence, they were critical for the subsistence of the commoners. Interestingly, the Magna Carta marked the end of the absolute authority and arbitrary exercise of the will of the king. The Magna Carta marked a turning point in the history of leadership and followership in that the king was forced to listen to the council of his noblemen (Kellerman, 2012).

In Europe, during the feudal system, open-access agriculture was accepted practice. Although the land and forests were owned by nobles, peasant tenants enjoyed the use of their land and forests according to the notion of *usufruct*, a concept derived from Roman law that afforded individuals the use of other's property, as long as they did not destroy it (Wall, 2014). Common land was provided to peasants for *estover*, a concept that means "it is necessary," derived from the Latin phrase *est opus* (Wall, 2014). The Law of the Commons and Commoners of 1720 explained that *estover* was necessary for tenants to have access to land and forests for their sustenance, and to generate money to pay rent and provide services (Wall, 2014).

Rifkin (2014) explained that the notion of property during feudal times was quite different from that in contemporary times. Creation was considered to belong to God who had ultimate decision-making authority within a *Great Chain Being*, a "rigidly constructed hierarchy of responsibilities that ascended upward from the lowest creatures to the angels in heaven" (Rifkin, 2014, p. 30). Rifkin (2014) recounted that

> within this theological framework, property was conceptualized as a series of trusts administered pyramidally from the celestial throne down to the peasants working the communal fields. In this schema, property was never exclusively owned, but rather divvied up into spheres of responsibility conforming to a fixed code of

> proprietary obligations. For example, when the king granted land to a lord or vassal, his rights over the land remained, except for the particular interest he had parted with. (p. 30)

Peasants grazed their animals and raised their crops and foraged their pigs on common lands and in common forests. *Pannage* referred to the peasants' right to forage their pigs for beech mast and acorns. The right to dig peat or turf for fuel was called *turbary* whereas the right to catch fish was called *piscary*. Peasants could also take bracken to provide animal bedding and sand, gravel, and stone for building or paths (Wall, 2014).

The village or town controlled and divided into strips the common fields comprised of arable land and pasture that peasant families cultivated. The village or town designated and managed the strips to equalize the distribution of rich soils and to reduce risks. Fields would be opened to allow the grazing of livestock after the harvest or during fallow periods. The community of users regulated the common fields to ensure that rules were followed and to discipline violators. Manorial courts served as the regulators of the commons during the medieval period. Wastelands and forests were also subject to common use for firewood, building materials, fuel, meat, and pasture, and were likewise regulated (Bollier, 2014; Linebaugh, 2009; Uzelman, 2008).

During this period, the commons did not merely refer to the land, forests, or wasteland, but also the relationship of individuals to these resources and to each other. This relationship was an economic, political, and social relationship and was enacted in a constellation of subjective values typically captured by the title of *commoner*. Peasants possessed a "common right" to possess the land without owning it (Linebaugh, 2009; Neeson, 1993), a right conferred by law and custom. This right was granted not to everyone for every resource, but only to a defined community based on negotiation and agreement. Rifkin (2014) wrote that the commons

> became the first primitive exercise in democratic decision making in Europe. Peasant councils were responsible for overseeing economic activity, including planting and harvesting, crop rotation, the use of forest and water resources, and the number of animals that could graze on the common pastures. (p. 30)

However, beginning in the 15th Century and continuing to the 19th Century, the landed gentry began a process of enclosure that dramatically altered the system of agriculture. Lands, forests, and wastelands previously considered common were fenced off, preventing peasants from growing their crops, grazing their livestock, and hunting for food and medicinal plants. Enclosure became and continues to be a key concept to which contemporary scholars, activists, and commoners refer. Enclosure of land was also accompanied by the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536, which privatized their land and made land a commodity in England (Linebaugh, 2009).

The Enclosure Movement in England

They hang the man and flog the woman
That steal the goose from off the common
But let the greater villain loose
That steals the common from the goose.

The Law demands that we atone
When we take things we do not own
But leaves the lords and ladies fine
Who take things that are yours and mine.

The poor and wretched dont escape
If they conspire the law to break;
This must be so but they endure
Those who conspire to make the law.

The law locks up the man or woman
Who steals the goose from off the common
And geese will still a common lack
Till they go and steal it back.

(English folk poem, circa 1764)

Marking the transition from feudalism to capitalism and the birth of modernity, the concept of enclosure is generally traced back to the fencing of land in England that occurred from the 1400s through the 1800s. Prior to enclosure, peasants employed open-field farming. Farmers collectively owned rights to large portions of land on which they grew crops and grazed livestock. Open-field farming was appropriate for subsistence farming, but with the advent of capitalism and eventually the industrial revolution, agriculture became a profitable industry capable of generating excess capital on larger, commercially oriented, and commodified plots of land. Land, the capitalist farmers argued, had to be enclosed to be productive and profitable.

Enclosure took several forms. During the population decline caused by the Black Death between 1450 and 1550, landlords further depopulated areas by turning arable land to pasture for sheep whose wool was used to make wool clothing for export. The burgeoning textile industry meant increased market prices for wool, motivating landlords to increase their grazing lands. Urban populations grew and increased food production was required in order to feed them. This caused inflation which put "hardships on feudal landlords whose land rents were fixed at pre-inflationary rates" (Rifkin, 2014, p. 30).

A second form of enclosure, occurring in the 17th Century, involved the draining of the wetlands and converting them into cropland and pastures, thus destroying the Fenland way of life, founded on fishing, in East Anglia. Enclosure also included engrossing smaller plots of land and enclosing wasteland, those lands not under cultivation but serving to provide sustenance for the peasants. Finally,

enclosure through formal, legal means served to put the nail in the coffin of common rights in England (Uzelman, 2008). Recognizing the profits they could make in the burgeoning capitalist system, the landed gentry in England lobbied Parliament to pass laws allowing them to fence in lands and raise livestock and grow crops themselves. The Industrial Revolution and increasing urban populations made food production highly profitable for landlords. Between 1750 and 1860, Parliament passed 5,000 enclosure acts.

In order to preserve their private hunting grounds, the nobles enclosed the forests, an action called *emparkment*. This closure caused depopulation and hardship for the peasants. Peasants who hunted for food on these lands became "poachers" and were severely punished, often shipped off to penal colonies in Australia. Technological advances, as well as the formalization of the market, also resulted in enclosure because agricultural machinery allowed for large production, which required large plots of land, and improved transportation allowed for the extension of the market. By 1886, 0.6% of the English population owned 98.5% of the land in England.

Further, the concept of absolute individual rights replaced the concept of common rights (Uzelman, 2008). Now unable to subsist on common land, agrarian peasants moved to the cities to become wage laborers in the growing industrial sector, ushering in the era of urban sweatshops and urban poverty. Interestingly also, enclosure of land led to the establishment of prisons (Fairlie, 2017; Linebaugh, 2009; Uzelman, 2008).

In essence, enclosure, the burgeoning industrial sector, and capitalism gave birth to a new social and economic system, based on privatization and the market (Bollier, 2003). Karl Polanyi (1944) identified this shift as "the Great Transformation," and characterized it as a reversal of the role of the market in society. Instead of the market being embedded in the community kinship, moral codes, or religion, these would henceforth become embedded in the market. No longer would an autonomous community control the economy. Instead, the "ideal of an autonomous, self-regulating market" became "the dominant ideal of social governance" (Bollier, 2003, p. 46). Enclosure, Polanyi declared, "was the revolution of the rich against the poor" (1944, p. 36).

Embedding social relations in the market had enormous consequences on these relations as well as on subjective values (Uzelman, 2008). Competition replaced sharing and mutual help as fundamental values; individualism replaced community; and dependency replaced autonomy. Forced into the cities to work for wages, rather than being allowed to eke out their living on the land, the lives of peasants became precarious because their survival relied on the trustworthiness of their employers rather than on themselves. No longer could they provide their own subsistence on the land but rather had to rely on their wages and the market.

Society became characterized by the monetization of social relations such that all transactions were turned into money transactions (Polanyi, 1944; Uzelman, 2008). The relationship to time and leisure was also transformed as time became something that could not be wasted and must be devoted to productive labor, whereas leisure became a threat to productivity. Capitalist society assigned moral values to wasting of time. This emerging society considered the engagement in non-productive activities immoral. Further, the consumer culture emerged as