

# Special Issue: The Commons and The Common

## Call for Papers

The Commons (or the common) is of interest to radicals on the left for many reasons. Most obvious at present is the condition of the earth we share—everyone's common. Global warming and environmental degradation threaten human existence and that of other living creatures and things. Yet agreement on how to better treat planet Earth has proven elusive. Another reason for interest in the commons is the left's fight against privatization, for decades now a hallmark of neoliberalism. Enclosure of common space and resources was part of the development of the capitalist system, and it continues today. Can this process be stopped; reversed?

The terms commons and common do not simply refer to open access resources (*res nullius*). This category of common resource is the air we breathe, or the ocean. Another category of the commons is *res communis*, a commonly held resource. It has figured prominently in projects and aspirations of socialists, anarchists, feminists, and communists. Privatization can be associated with a world of scarcity, and the common with abundance. In addition, more than property is held in common. Language, stories, images, humor, culture and other aspects of communal interaction share this root. How can a clearer sense of the commons help inform a renewal of left trajectories: a more egalitarian and sustainable world?

While advocated to overcome problems presumed to be inherent in managing the commons, privatization substitutes problems fundamental to an individualized world. One of the most obvious of these problems is inequality: of access, control, income, and resources. Inequality is reflected in class-riven societies, as well as those characterized by differential access to resources by race, gender, sexual orientation, and other means by which invidious distinctions are made. They are at the heart of schemes to deprive indigenous people of their rights to land, forests, and their control over their knowledge of medicinal and food plants. Can expanded use of commonly held resources help reverse growing inequality?

In recent decades privatization has been part of an agenda to strengthen individual property rights. Part of the ideological embrace of privatization was built on a limited understanding of Hardin's "the tragedy of the commons." Hardin later attempted to clarify the meaning of the essay—that tragedy occurred in the *unregulated* commons. Elinor Ostrom pioneered investigation of how commons can be effectively managed, and how alternate ways to manage the commons can lead to different outcomes with respect to inequality. More recently, the discussion has focused on areas of human need, environmental sustenance, social ecology, feminist ecology, and more.

In this call for papers we propose a broad heterodox inquiry into the world of the common. How is it to be understood; how do people engaged in common endeavors interact and manage themselves; how do gender, race, and other divisions intertwine with the commons; how do we protect and enlarge what we hold in common? Who benefits from the existence of different aspects of the commons, and who might be harmed by them?

Papers submitted for this special issue should be no longer than 10,000 words, and follow the regular guidelines for submission to the *RRPE* ([www.sagepub.com/journals/Journal201656#tabview=manuscriptSubmission](http://www.sagepub.com/journals/Journal201656#tabview=manuscriptSubmission)). They should not be under review with any other media. They will be read using standard practices of the *RRPE* by the collective of Editorial Board members and others assembled for this special issue. The deadline for submissions is December 31, 2013. Submissions should be sent to:

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