

No More Mushrooms

Eric Laursen

2021

a review of

No More Mushrooms: Thoughts About Life Without Government by Kirkpatrick Sale. Autonomedia 2021

Kirkpatrick Sale has been an activist, author, and promoter of decentralism and bioregionalism for more than 50 years. *No More Mushrooms* stitches together material from two of his best-known books, *Human Scale* (1980) and *Human Scale Revisited* (2017), to give a quick summary of his thinking about government and the potential for creating new societies based on community, interdependence, and mutual obligation.

The title comes from an anecdote that opens the book and illuminates Sale's basic point, which is that the State (or government—he tends to use the words interchangeably) has failed to give us economic security, social justice, and freedom from violence—yet, people stick with it hoping, irrationally, for a better outcome.

Deep down, Sale argues, we're not compatible with the State. If we want to address climate change, pandemics, racism, and other critical challenges we need to adopt decentralized alternatives.

No argument here. Often, however, Sale's small-is-beautiful philosophy oversimplifies complex problems that run deeper than the scale on which human society is organized. Small towns can be "narrow-minded and cruel, inhospitable and downright vicious to people and opinions and customs they don't happen to like," he acknowledges. But "they can be very receptive to minorities that they do not think of as threatening."

Not addressed is the enormous question of how we get the first rather than the second. Human-scale communities have a way of balancing and adjusting themselves to create "internal harmony," he argues—but are the values that harmony expresses necessarily good ones? Sale thinks, dubiously, that Black Liberation in the U.S. could have been achieved without the Civil War and without those "shrill" abolitionists.

Sale is right that decentralism is part of the solution to avoid human society's express ride to self-destruction, but he leaves it to us to address the many devils in the details he glosses over.

Eric Laurson's latest book is *The Operating System: An Anarchist Theory of the Modern State*, reviewed in this issue.

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