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## Book Review

By **Brandon Bertram**

**After Occupy: Economic Democracy for the 21st Century. By Tom Malleson. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014. 274 pp. ISBN 9780199330102.**

Through *After Occupy: Economic Democracy for the 21st Century*, Tom Malleson puts forward economic democracy as a pragmatic vision of an achievable utopia. Responding to the Occupy movements' rallying cries of inequality in wealth and power, Malleson heralds democracy's equalizing potential, and interrogates the democratic integrity of three economic domains—the workplace, the market system, and finance and investment systems—offering adjustments that might facilitate more democratic economies, and a more free and equal world. The author believes in the inherent value of equality of freedom, and argues forcefully that economic democracy is the way to achieve it. Lamenting the non-democratic and unaccountable exercise of power that pervades within various economic and public domains, Malleson has written a book of “radical realism” (p. xxii). He envisions a tent large enough to contain the idealism of activists, but sturdy enough to satisfy the pragmatism of progressively inclined suits, in hopes of engendering a “Feasible Socialism for the 21st Century” (the title of the book's concluding chapter). Though his efforts seem unlikely to please everyone—perhaps most notably those in concerted alignment with neoliberalism, and those who might be quick to flatly reject any proposition that sustains so much of the basic form of society—Malleson argues compellingly for a thorough re-examination of economics through a “democracy” lens. His focus on non-revolutionary change, and his insistence on building up from already existing systems and processes, lends plausibility to his ideas.

Malleson, an assistant professor in the Social Justice and Peace Studies program at King's University College at Western University, has chosen “economic democracy” as a frame through which to critique and re-envision contemporary economic logic, systems, and processes. Indeed, this book is about economic democracy, and would perhaps have been more appropriately titled as such, as the ashes of the Occupy movement provide little more than a jumping-off point. At the heart of Malleson's “economic democracy” is equality of freedom, which he sees as contingent upon the distribution of decision-making power within firms, markets, and structures of investment and finance. The bulk of *After Occupy* is arranged in three sections. The first part of each section presents a critique of what exists in (1) Workplaces, (2) The Market System, and (3) Finance and Investment, asking how democracy is doing, and if more democracy is needed. The second part of each section explores current and plausible democratic alternatives in each of the three domains. Though each domain is explored in turn, Malleson notes that they exist interdependently. Achieving equality of freedom thus requires democratic interventions throughout various broadly defined areas of the economy.



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Capitalist workplaces—undemocratic by nature—are critiqued as hierarchies of decision-making power that, when viewed in the aggregate, place severe constraints on workers' freedom. In response to this inequity, Malleon offers a broad survey of alternative workplace arrangements, citing numerous improvements to social, political, and economic life that can be related to, for example, thriving worker cooperatives. Here, as elsewhere, Malleon is careful to give attention to objections and counterarguments, including historical, practical, and theoretical challenges to his arguments and ideas. Though he responds to such challenges with varying degrees of success, his core assertions about the need to look closely at the extent of democracy in the economy prove to be resilient. The market system provides a greater challenge for Malleon, as free-market orators so often herald the market as the epitome of freedom and democracy, and public interventions in the market are loudly condemned as inefficient and totalitarian. Malleon does not reject the democratic potential of markets, but highlights that under-regulated and poorly designed markets often fail to represent the needs of people. Envisioning market democracy is a stretch in a world of unequal wealth, but Malleon offers historical evidence to buttress his assertions that various adjustments—small and large—can improve market democracy and bring about equality of freedom. It seems audacious to run headfirst into the heart of neoliberal ideology, offering to “shape” the market, but Malleon gains some traction as he constructs his arguments patiently and incrementally upon some core tenets of capitalist thought, likely winning enough ground to convince at least some opponents that a measure of market intervention for “economic democracy” may be warranted. In the realms of finance and investment, the so-called 1% can use their sizable wealth to reward or punish those who support or threaten their power, often free from any kind of meaningful public accountability. Malleon accordingly proposes reforms aimed at engendering popular sovereignty within the halls of the moneyed. He affirms the relevance of finance and investment in building prosperous communities, but offers multiple points of intervention, from policy changes at high levels of government to grassroots community engagement and institution building, which might shift economic power to local communities.

Like the Occupy movement, *After Occupy* argues convincingly for a societal readjustment against inequality. The Occupy movement was chastised in the media for being better at criticizing than it was at articulating a coherent vision of a plausible alternative. With *After Occupy*, Tom Malleon sets out “to paint a picture of society that is at once plausible enough to seem worth talking about yet inspiring enough to warrant the risk, energy, and commitment that building such a society would require” (p. 198). Presented as a broadly applicable alternative to social, political, and economic arrangements that is nonetheless rooted in a universal longing (i.e., for freedom), economic democracy is offered up by the author as something of a compromise between capitalism on the right and socialism on the left. Like Occupy itself, *After Occupy* is confronted with a powerful, deeply entrenched, and increasingly all-encompassing hegemonic web of neoliberal hierarchy, which casts clouds of doubt, at least in mainstream media discourses, over any reforms substantive enough to be meaningful. *After Occupy* rises to this challenge with varying success, providing many examples of possible alternatives that have achieved democratic outcomes. Though his roadmap from status quo to economic democracy requires a few too many descents into utopia perhaps, Malleon's advocacy for a vastly more democratic economy has considerable merit.

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