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# KETTERING REVIEW

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A journal of ideas and activities dedicated to improving  
the quality of public life in the American democracy

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The *Review* welcomes manuscripts of 1000-3500 words and black-and-white line illustrations for themes appropriate to its interests. Submissions must be accompanied by self-addressed and stamped return envelopes. The editor assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts or artwork. The *Review* also welcomes news of activities, programs, and events relevant to its expressed interests but reserves the right to publish such information at its discretion.

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KETTERING  
**REVIEW**

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For more than three decades, this journal of democratic thought has been edited by Robert J. Kingston, a senior associate of the Kettering Foundation. Sadly, Bob passed away on August 20 of this year at the age of 87, leaving his wife, Carol Vollet Kingston, his children, colleagues, friends, and neighbors grieving his loss.

Bob left England for America in 1954 to teach Shakespeare; he stayed to work on democracy. He was an extraordinary person, raising the level of conversation wherever he went, curious about everything and everyone he met, and capable of discerning the course of democratic thought as it developed in a forum and in the country.

After teaching English literature at a number of colleges and universities in the United States, Bob joined the National Endowment for the Humanities as director of planning and analysis. He moved up to serve as deputy chairman and acting chairman during the administrations of former Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter. In the late 1970s, he left government service to become president of the College Board, then joined the Kettering Foundation's longtime research partner Public Agenda as executive director.

As a senior associate of the Kettering Foundation, in the 1980s Bob became the *Review's* editor and for many years, he also helped produce the tapes for A Public Voice, Kettering's annual meeting in Washington, DC.

In his tenure as editor of the *Kettering Review*, he explored some of the most important issues facing democracy of the past 30-some years. Our next issue of the *Review*, through essays and interviews, will follow and develop the arc of Bob's thought about democracy. With a heavy heart, this issue is dedicated to his memory.

In Memoriam  
Robert J. Kingston  
1929-2016

# Contents

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	7	Editor's Letter
Cornelius Castoriadis	11	The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary
Amartya Sen	18	Democracy as Public Reason
Merab Mamardashvili	26	On Civil Society
Elinor Ostrom	35	The Challenge of Self- Governance in Complex Contemporary Environments
Albena Azmanova	44	The Right to Politics
Asef Bayat	51	The Art of Presence
David Mathews	60	... afterthoughts

# Editor's Letter

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For more than 25 years, as the associate editor of this journal, I often told people that it was the only job I've ever had from which I never wanted to be promoted. And this was because the only reason to be promoted would be that something untoward had happened to the senior editor, Bob Kingston, for he surely was never going to retire. But time has its way, and it takes away all our best intentions. My beloved colleague began to fall ill last year, so I became co-editor, and this past summer he passed away, so very grievously I have become the editor of the *Kettering Review*.

Bob Kingston laid down all the essentials of this little magazine: we take our cue from the concerns of the Kettering Foundation's work, but we still go our own way; we ignore scholarly apparatus like footnotes but we don't shy away from deep thoughts; we excerpt heavily from people dead and living but the thoughts are always alive; we include art but never illustrations; we find great art for our covers; we make each issue a little compendium on a theme resonant with the democratic efforts of the day. Bob also liked commas, lots of commas, interspersed everywhere possible, and I did try to remove those. But I never wanted to remove his art of editing, of taking the green pen to paper, slashing away at the inessential to uncover the piece that said it all in just about 2500 words or less. As this issue will attest, I have not quite learned his lesson.

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The notion that the Greeks invented democracy is a powerful feature of our modern political tale. And, yes, it is true that in 500 BCE the Greek leader Cleisthenes formulated the first formal blueprint for democracy, with political representation emanating from *demes* (what we now call precincts) rather than clans. But it is not true that democracy is foreign to other peoples and cultures, even those that are currently caught up in authoritarian states. There are other histories and tales of self-rule that preceded Greek democracy or sprung up completely independent of it. The desire to shape one's own world has coursed through people all over the globe and throughout history. While the Greeks may have formalized it, the impulse can be found wherever people find themselves in need of deciding peacefully what to do in the midst of uncertainty and disagreement. This is not just a Western impulse; it is a human one.

As the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen recounts in this issue of the *Review*, "Democracy in its elaborate institutional form may be quite new in the world—

and yet, as Tocqueville remarked, it gives expression to a tendency in social living that has a much longer and more widespread history.” Contra those who say that democracy is a Greek and thus only a Western phenomenon, Sen points to the roots of democratic public-reasoning practices in societies throughout the world.

So in this issue of the *Review*, we are publishing old and new essays on the global origins and developments of democratic theory, including pieces by two Nobel laureates in economics (Sen and Elinor Ostrom); a political theorist from what was then the Soviet state of Georgia who spent several months during the Cold War visiting the Kettering Foundation (Merab Mamardashvili); a Marxist-turned-psychoanalytic theorist from Greece who emigrated to France (Cornelius Castoriadis); and two new theorists of democracy, Albena Azmanova who grew up in Bulgaria and now teaches in a British university and Asef Bayat, a scholar emanating from the Middle East who now teaches in the United States. And we are grateful to two other new scholars, the philosopher Julia Sushytska and the creative writing professor Alisa Slaughter, who are translating the works of Merab Mamardashvili, rightly seeing his work as speaking to the issues of our day.

Democracy may now seem mainstream, but at heart it is a radical idea: human beings can create self-governing practices out of nothing but their own aspirations and by their own lights. In other words, they do not need the authority of a god, a sacred text, or a tradition to create something new. The people can found democratic structures by fiat and they need only be accountable to themselves. In the mid-20th century, Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997) developed the idea that human beings have the power of imagination to institute something radically new, such as the founding of a country. “In a democracy,” he writes in the essay here, “society does not halt before a conception, given once and for all, of what is just, equal, or free, but rather institutes itself in such a way that the question of freedom, of justice, of equity, and of equality might always be posed anew.”

The Kettering Foundation was beginning to grapple with these fundamental questions of democracy while the Cold War was still ongoing, when to many there seemed to be a simple schism between Western capitalist democracy and communist state systems that were planned and not spontaneous. Yet through much of the Cold War the foundation was at the forefront of creating a new relationship with the Soviet Union through what was known as the Dartmouth Conferences. Even so, by the late 1980s, it was clear that something new was

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happening, a thaw was taking place, and the Kettering Foundation invited Merab Mamardashvili to spend some months in residence.

One of the most important Eastern European philosophers of the 20th century, though largely unknown to the West, Mamardashvili (1930-1990) spent a good part of a year with the Kettering Foundation. In his work he addressed some of the most urgent problems of our time: the meaning of democracy and civil society, European or Western responsibility, nationalism, and the problem of immigration. Mamardashvili, like Castoriadis, argues for the power that human beings have to make and use symbols to create new meanings and make sense of their world. In the lecture published here, thanks to the translation work of Sushytska and Slaughter, his concern is the constitution of civil society, something very much on his mind as the Eastern Bloc was radically changing. Mamardashvili noted something that few others had yet seen—change was emerging not from the state but from civil society. As Mamardashvili writes, there is power in civil society; it is “not a collection of objects but rather a dynamic living field sustained by movement and made of symbols, that is, things of reason or consciousness with which to formulate social problems, which are made meaningful by history itself.”

Where the power and intelligence of the public had previously been largely overlooked, by the last decade of the 20th century, social theorists were beginning to appreciate the ways that a public could in fact rule itself with some wisdom. One of these thinkers was the Nobel laureate Elinor Ostrom (1933-2012) who explored how communities can manage shared natural resources and their ecosystems without the need for external agencies. She identified the power of the people who are directly involved in managing their own resources to be able to learn and act beyond narrow self-interest. A few years before her passing, she was a special guest at one of the Kettering Foundation's research meetings. In the article published here she argues, “Once analysts perceive human beings as being trapped inside perverse situations, the subject to whom reform is addressed is external to those involved, overlooking the capacities of human beings.”

The political theorist Albena Azmanova, who grew up in Soviet Bulgaria, is now a trenchant observer and critic of how contemporary market solutions are being embraced by political leaders, especially in the European Union, rather than creating space for those in the public to decide politically what ought to be done. Recently she adopted the term, *the right to politics*, which she explores in this

essay. “The current breakdown of democracy has brought to light a right that we come to realize we’ve had at the very moment when we are about to lose it: the right to politics.” As she writes, “There is something amiss, not with democracy, but with the process of politicization—the process through which social grievances get translated into matters of political concern and become an object of policymaking.” So long as policy matters are translated into matters that can be administered through economic policy or managerial calculus, people are deprived of their right to deliberate and judge of their own accord, that is, their right to politics.

Many will agree; yet at the same time critics will say that there are certain exceptions—namely among some non-Western peoples who seem completely unable or uninterested in democratic self-governance, or too caught up in religious fervor, or too complacent about authoritarianism, to care much about any right to politics. In this issue, Amartya Sen takes issue with this idea, pointing to histories of the practice of democratic public reason in the Middle East and Asia.

And more pointedly, the Iranian scholar Asef Bayat points to the everyday ways that people in the Middle East are changing their societies. In the excerpt published here from the second edition of his book *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Can Change the Middle East*, Bayat points out that political Islam is not a concern of most of the urban poor in the Middle East; rather, their concern is making a life for themselves under authoritarian conditions, often using the street literally and figuratively as a space to enact change. “Ordinary people can change their societies through opportunities other than mass protests or revolutions; they can and do resort more widely to ‘nonmovements’—the collective endeavors of millions of noncollective actors, carried out in the main squares, back streets, courthouses, and communities.”

Our cover is graced by Vasily Kandinsky’s 1913 painting, *Improvisation No. 30*. Its vibrant mélange of color and images—including buildings, people, and instruments of war—speaks to the cacophony of forces with which democracy often has to contend—and also to the beauty and possibilities that might emerge. If we have learned anything from democratic experiments around the world, it is that while there may never be certainty, there is always promise.

**Noëlle McAfee**

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