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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
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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 apparati 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.

*   *   *

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
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*
Democracy as Public Reason

By Amartya Sen

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.

The belief that democracy has not flourished anywhere in the world other than in the West is widely held and often expressed. And it is also used to explain contemporary events; for example, the blame for the immense difficulties and problems faced in post-intervention Iraq is sometimes put not so much on the peculiar nature of the underinformed and badly reasoned military intervention of 2003, but attributed instead to some imagined difficulty that sees democracy and public reasoning as being unsuitable for the cultures and traditions of non-Western countries like Iraq.

The subject of democracy has become severely muddled because of the way the rhetoric surrounding it has been used in recent years. There is, increasingly, an oddly confused dichotomy between those who want to “impose” democracy on countries in the non-Western world (in these countries’ “own interest,” of course) and those who are opposed to such “imposition” (because of the respect for the countries’ “own ways”). But the entire language of “imposition,” used by both sides, is extraordinarily inappropriate since it makes the implicit assumption that democracy belongs exclusively to the West, taking it to be a quintessentially “Western” idea which has originated and flourished only in the West.

But that thesis and the pessimism it generates about the possibility of democratic practice in the world would be extremely hard to justify. Indeed, in understanding the roots of democracy in the world, we have to take an interest in the history of people’s participation and public reasoning in different parts of the world. We have to look beyond thinking of democracy
irresistible force, but it has persistently challenged the unscrutinized belief that authoritarianism is an immovable object in most parts of the world. Democracy in its elaborate institutional form may be quite new in the world—its practice is hardly more than a couple of centuries old—and yet, as Tocqueville remarked, it gives expression to a tendency in social living that has a much longer and more widespread history. The critics of democracy—no matter how vigorous they may be in their rejection—must find some way of addressing the deep attraction of participatory governance, which is of continuing relevance today and is hard to eradicate.

There is, of course, the older—and more formal—view of democracy which characterizes it mainly in terms of elections and ballots, rather than in broader perspective of government by discussion. And yet, in contemporary political
Despite the general transformation in the conceptual understanding of democracy in political philosophy, the history of democracy is often recounted, even now, in rather narrowly organizational terms, focusing particularly on the procedure of balloting and elections.

Ballots do, of course, have a very important role even for the expression and effectiveness of the process of public reasoning, but they are not the only thing that matters, and they can be seen just as one part—admittedly a very important part—of the way public reason operates in a democratic society. Indeed, the effectiveness of ballots themselves depends crucially on what goes with balloting, such as free speech, access to information, and freedom of dissent. Balloting alone can be thoroughly inadequate on its own, as is abundantly illustrated by the astounding electoral victories of ruling tyrannies in authoritarian regimes in the past as well as those in the present, for example in today’s North Korea. The difficulty lies not just in the political and punitive pressure that is brought to bear on voters in the balloting itself, but in the way expressions of public views are thwarted by censorship, informational exclusion, and a climate of fear, along with the suppression of political opposition and the independence of the media, and the absence of basic civil rights and political liberties. All this makes it largely redundant for the ruling powers to use much force to ensure conformism in the act of voting itself. Indeed, a great many dictators in the world have achieved gigantic electoral victories even without any overt coercion in the process of voting, mainly through suppressing public discussion and freedom of

philosophy, the understanding of democracy has broadened vastly, so that democracy is no longer seen just in terms of the demands for public balloting but, much more capaciously, in terms of what John Rawls calls “the exercise of public reason.”

The critique of democracy as a purely regional phenomenon fails altogether.

There are many differences in the distinct ways in which the role of public reasoning in politics and discursive ethics can be viewed. However, the main thesis that I am trying to explore here is not threatened by the existence of these differences. What is more important to note is that the totality of these new contributions has helped to bring about the general recognition that the central issues in a broader understanding of democracy are political participation, dialogue, and public interaction.
When democracy is seen in the broader perspective of public reasoning, going well beyond the specific institutional features that have emerged particularly strongly in Europe and America over the last few centuries, we have to reassess the intellectual history of participatory governance in different countries in many parts of the world—not just those in Europe and North America. Cultural separatists, who criticize the claim of democracy to be a universal value, often point to the unique role of ancient Greece, particularly that of ancient Athens, where balloting emerged in a particular form in the sixth century BC.

Ancient Greece was indeed quite unique. Its contribution to both the form and the understanding of the content of democracy cannot be overemphasized. But to see that experience as clear evidence that democracy is a quintessentially “European” or “Western” idea deserves much more critical scrutiny than it tends to get. It is, for one thing, particularly important to understand that even the success of Athenian democracy turned on the climate of open public discussion, rather than just balloting, and while balloting certainly began in Greece, the tradition of public discussion (very strong in Athens and ancient Greece) has had a much more widespread history.

Even as far as balloting is concerned, the tendency to seek backing for a culturally segregationist view of the origins of elections in Europe calls for some further examination. First, there is an elementary difficulty in trying to define civilizations not in terms of the exact history of ideas and actions but in terms of broad regionality, for instance, being “European” or “Western,” with a grossly aggregative attribution. In this way of looking at civilization categories, no great difficulty is seen in considering the descendants of, say, Vikings and Visigoths as proper inheritors of the electoral tradition of ancient Greece (since they are part of “the European stock”), even though ancient Greeks, who were very involved in intellectual interchange with other ancient civilizations to the east or south of Greece (in particular Iran, India, and Egypt), seem to have taken little interest in chatting up the lively Goths and Visigoths.

The second problem relates to what actually followed the early Greek experience of balloting. While Athens certainly was the pioneer in getting balloting started, many Asian regions used balloting in the centuries that followed, largely under Greek influence. There is no evidence that the Greek experience in electoral governance had much immediate impact in the countries to the west of Greece and Rome, in, say, what is now France or Germany or Britain. In contrast, some of the cities in Asia
— in Iran, Bactria, and India—incorporated elements of democracy in municipal governance in the centuries following the flowering of Athenian democracy; for example, for several centuries the city of Shushan, or Susa, in southwest Iran, had an elected council, a popular assembly, and magistrates who were elected by the assembly.

The practice of municipal democracy in ancient India is also well recorded. B. R. Ambedkar, who chaired the drafting committee that wrote up the new Indian constitution for adoption by the Constituent Assembly shortly after Indian independence in 1947, wrote fairly extensively on the relevance, if any, of India's ancient experiences in local democracy for the design of a large democracy for the whole of modern India.

The practice of elections, in fact, has had a considerable history in non-Western societies, but it is the broader view of democracy in terms of public reasoning that makes it abundantly clear that the cultural critique of democracy as a purely regional phenomenon fails altogether. While Athens certainly has an excellent record in public discussion, open deliberation also flourished in several other ancient civilizations, sometimes spectacularly so; for example, some of the earliest open general meetings aimed specifically at settling disputes between different points of view, on social and religious matters, took place in India in the so-called Buddhist “councils,” where adherents of different points of view got together to argue out their differences, beginning in the sixth century BC. The first of these councils met in Rajagriha (modern Rajgir) shortly after Gautama Buddha’s death, and the second was held, about 100 years later, in Vaisali. The last one happened in the second century AD in Kashmir.

Emperor Ashoka, who hosted the third and the largest Buddhist council in the third century BC in Patna (then called Pataliputra), the capital city of the Indian empire, also tried to codify and propagate what were among the earliest formulations of rules for public discussion (some kind of an early version of the 19th-century “Robert’s rules of order”). To choose another historical example, in early seventh-century Japan the Buddhist Prince Shotoku, who was regent to his mother, Empress Suiko, produced the so-called Constitution of 17 Articles, in 604 AD. The constitution insisted, much in the spirit of the Magna Carta, signed six centuries later in 1215 AD: “Decisions on important matters should not be made by one person alone. They should be discussed with many.” Some commentators have seen in this seventh-century Buddhism-inspired constitution, Japan’s “first step of gradual development toward democracy.” The Constitution of 17 Articles went on to explain: “Nor let us be resentful when others differ from us. For all men have hearts, and each heart has its own leanings. Their right is our wrong, and our right is their wrong.” Indeed, the importance of public discussion
is a recurrent theme in the history of many countries in the non-Western world.

The relevance of this global history does not, however, lie in any implicit presumption that we cannot break from history, cannot initiate a departure. Indeed, departures from the past are always needed in different ways across the world. We do not have to be born in a country with a long democratic history to choose that path today. The significance of history in this respect lies rather in the more general understanding that established traditions continue to exert some influence on people’s ideas, that they can inspire or deter, and they have to be taken into account whether we are moved by them, or wish to resist and transcend them, or (as the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore discussed with compelling clarity) want to examine and scrutinize what we should take from the past and what we must reject, in the light of our contemporary concerns and priorities.

It is not, therefore, surprising—that in the fight for democracy led by visionary and fearless political leaders across the world (such as Sun Yat-sen, Jawaharlal Nehru, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., or Aung San Suu Kyi), an awareness of local as well as world history has played an importantly constructive part. In his autobiography, Long Walk to Freedom, Nelson Mandela describes how impressed and influenced he was, as a young boy, by seeing the democratic nature of the proceedings of the local meetings that were held in the regent’s house in Mqhekezweni:

Everyone who wanted to speak did so. It was democracy in its purest form. There may have been a hierarchy of importance among the speakers, but everyone was heard, chief and subject, warrior and medicine man, shopkeeper and farmer, landowner and laborer... The foundation of self-government was that all men were free to voice their opinions and equal in their value as citizens.

Mandela’s understanding of democracy was hardly aided by the political practice that he saw around him in the apartheid state run by people of European origin, who, it is perhaps worth recollecting in this context, used to call themselves by the cultural term European rather than just white. In fact, Pretoria had little to contribute to Mandela’s comprehension

We do not have to be born in a country with a long democratic history to choose that path today.
of democracy. His discernment of democracy came, as we see from his autobiography, from his general ideas about political and social equality, which had global roots, and from his observations of the practice of participatory public discussion that he found in his local town.

In reexamining the historical background of democratic features in the past, we also have to reassess the history of the Middle East, since there is an often-articulated belief that this block of countries has always been hostile to democracy. That constantly repeated conviction is exasperating for fighters for democracy in the Arab world, but as a piece of historical generalization it is basically nonsense. It is of course true that democracy as an institutional system has not been prominent in the past of the Middle East, but institutional democracy is in fact a very new phenomenon in most parts of the world.

If we look instead for public reasoning and tolerance of different points of view, in line with the broader understanding of democracy that I have been discussing, then the Middle East does have quite a distinguished past. We must not confuse the narrow history of Islamic militancy with the capacious history of the Muslim people and the tradition of political governance by Muslim rulers. When the Jewish philosopher Maimonides was forced to emigrate from Spain in the 12th century (when more tolerant Muslim regimes had given way to a far less tolerant Islamic regime), he sought shelter not in Europe but in a tolerant Muslim kingdom in the Arab world and was given an honored and influential position at the court of Emperor Saladin in Cairo. Saladin was certainly a strong Muslim; indeed, he fought hard for Islam in the Crusades and Richard the Lionheart was one of his distinguished opponents. But it was in Saladin’s kingdom where Maimonides found his new base and a renewed voice. Tolerance of dissent is, of course, central to the opportunity to exercise public reasoning, and the tolerant Muslim regimes in their heyday offered a freedom that Inquisition-ridden Europe sometimes withheld.

Maimonides’ experience was not, however, exceptional. Indeed, even though the contemporary world is full of examples of conflicts between Muslims and Jews, Muslim rule in the Arab world and in medieval Spain had a long history of integrating Jews as secure members of the social community whose liberties—and sometimes leadership roles—were respected. For instance, as Maria Rosa Menocal has noted in her book, *The Ornament of the World*, by the 10th century the achievement of Cordoba in Muslim-ruled Spain as being “as serious a contender as Baghdad, perhaps more so, for the title of most civilized place on earth” was due to the joint influence of Caliph Abd al-Rahman III and his Jewish vizier, Hasdai ibn Shaprut.
The thesis that democracy is a Western intellectual inheritance derived from a long and unique past (unmatched anywhere else in the world) does not, therefore, work. It would not survive very well even if we took the rather limited public balloting view of democracy, and it does particularly badly when the history of democracy is seen in terms of public reasoning.

Middle Eastern history and the history of Muslim people also include a great many accounts of public discussion and political participation through dialogues. In Muslim kingdoms centered around Cairo, Baghdad, and Istanbul, or in Iran, India, or for that matter Spain, there were many champions of public discussion. The extent of toleration of diversity of views was often exceptional in comparison with Europe. For example, when in the 1590s the great Mughal emperor Akbar was making his pronouncements in India on the need for religious and political toleration, and when he was busy arranging organized dialogues between holders of different faiths (including Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsees, Jains, Jews, and even atheists), the Inquisitions were still very active in Europe. Giordano Bruno was burnt at the stake in Rome for heresy in 1600, even when Akbar was lecturing in Agra on toleration and the need for dialogue across the borders of religions and ethnicities.

The present-day problems of the Middle East and what is called, somewhat oversimply, “the Muslim world,” may well be immense, but a probing assessment of the causation of these problems requires, as I have argued in my book Identity and Violence (2006), a fuller understanding of the nature and dynamics of identity politics. This calls for the recognition of the multiple affiliations that people have other than that of their religion, and the fact that these loyalties can vary from secular priorities to political interest in exploiting religious differences. We have to take note also of the dialectical encounters of the Middle East with its own imperial past and the subjugation that followed from the dominance of an imperial West—a dominance that still has many remaining influences. The illusion of an inescapably nondemocratic destiny of the Middle East is both confused and very seriously misleading—perniciously so—as a way of thinking about either world politics or global justice today.

Civil society 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.

To create is to create the act of thought and not its content. The task of art, then, is to generate the act of thought, and not just any particular thought. The task for constructions of this sort is not to think but to allow to think. Such constructions operate in society in relation, for instance, to what we call human rights. The rights that came to be called natural are natural only in one sense: not that there are some inherent rights in nature; instead, the theory of natural right shifts naturalness to another domain, raises it to the second power; this is natural. Here in topology there is the action of those forces that cannot be constituted by human beings themselves (in that case they could have been constituted differently). Instead, these are the forces that surpass the human being, amplify her capabilities and allow her for the first time to know something through some form, but to know it in the sense of our postulates, which is different from knowing the meanings of language and the meanings in language. In this respect, sense and presence—or existence—of rights coincides with consciousness of rights in their creation, if by creation one understands creation of what is already present. In other words, rights presuppose maturity of consciousness. Here a tautology is possible: meaning and presence of rights is a condition of becoming conscious of them, it's a condition of consciousness. The consciousness of them is a way into these rights and into this existence of rights.

When it comes to civil society, we mean rights only as rights that can be actualized, executed, that possess the force for their own execution.
Reason establishes, in the form of a plan, a society’s aim to lift up the human being through society in a given program. How does this happen? Through a social connection or that which people could not do separately, and which augments the joining of their efforts. The primary social form, then, is something that happens in the world incrementally from the joining of efforts. It turns out, then (I am returning to civil society, as I already introduced the notion of effort), that civil society is not a collection of objects, but instead the state that is a complex figure traced out by a movement. I will give a simple example. Take a chessboard. On it objects—chess figures—are assigned; certain qualities are ascribed to them. In the chess field, or on the chessboard, there is always a figure, there is a whirlwind, and the idea of a combination creates a configuration in which figures have a different meaning, or a meaning nonderivable from that of a pawn, or of a bishop. This is a dynamic living field sustained by movement; that is, by effort; and a figure traced out by movement and effort that is different from the one we hold themselves at the crest of the wave of this human effort—the effort of recognizing oneself, the effort of self-mastery, the effort to liberate oneself, the effort to transform oneself, and the effort to rise above oneself.

Rights presuppose maturity of consciousness.

as rights. I said [earlier] that knowledge is force. Knowledge is that which possesses the power to realize its potential capabilities. The same is true of rights. We always operate with words on two levels. We say the word justice: this is simultaneously the feeling of justice, which is certainly invariant in any society, however its scale of values, or differentiation between good and evil might vary. This feeling is invariant (in the sense in which it can be and is a product of a test of form) and dual: it is the referent of the meaning of the word justice, and an event of justice, i.e., justice sought by a subject who has the power to realize as a real state in the world the possibility of justice as a concept or a feeling.

All the states that we ordinarily designate as objects (for instance, the states that have to do with rights, and detailed structures in the form of institutions are [ordinarily considered to be] simply objects that naturally exist, even if we also have in mind a certain dynamic, such as their alteration in time, or their movement)—all such states are more complex things; civil society is a complex figure, circumscribed by a movement originating within itself. I established that events and objects exist in the world only to the extent that the human being makes a certain effort and to the extent that these objects and states
possible for people (unrepresentable in the same way as an empirically possible selfless love). If we were to assume that this once existed, and if there were people who proceed from this ideal as from an example of something that once was, we would run up against fundamental impossibilities.

I discussed figures and forms. These would be impossible figures, impossible forms, such as in the drawings of Escher where there are figures that cannot be traced out by a single movement . . . in no dimension (that is, in three dimensions). Nevertheless, the social life of European society functions, organizes itself, and generates events because at any given moment people decide something regarding this social agreement, while keeping it in mind and thinking it. This agreement is named by a word that has as its referent an object and that has an empirical analogy in the possible empirical agreements between people, even though the symbol itself has a different, empirically unrealizable, meaning. Moreover, it is not necessary, as Kant put it, that it was at any point realized by predecessors and passed on as a covenant or testament. The agreement has some reality in our own reality but as though across it or in a different dimension.

These symbols or meanings, apart from providing one with the possibilities of experiences and recognitions (one experiences and recognizes something only through them; she recognizes in such a way that she can say the word recognized, or experienced), are also the reserve and the background from which one draws the terms with which to formulate social problems, i.e., the problems made meaningful.
prohibits naturalizing absolute notions. All chiliastic or gnostic movements that have existed for a long time (all of them come along with Christianity) accompany a European civil society that crystallizes the Christianity of the Gospels in secularized social and civic institutions. These movements take the form of a naturalistic heresy and—how should I put it?—an abyss of solemn nonbeing. It is as though the being of forms is always accompanied by the abyss of nonbeing, on the edge of which one constantly experiences temptation. One can fall into this abyss, drawn by the temptation of imparting a natural meaning to absolute, symbolic notions, if insufficiently civically educated, i.e., disciplined, or forged.

Everything that the human being is must be represented in society in structural form through this symbolic reality. These are, of course, motile representations because one cannot represent to oneself in advance that something somewhere at some point is accomplished immediately. They are fluid in the sense that this representability can be obtained only historically. History is, in fact, an attempt to represent all that is in the

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Maxims that require publicity to be realized agree with politics.

or is conscious at the level of muscles and skills of subjects that make it up, that some phenomena and events are symbolic “givers” of meaning, not the models of the real organization of society and society’s objectives.

Aiming without a target [or purposiveness without a purpose]: this is very important. The citizen of a civil society keeps as a symbol something that prohibits its natural fulfillment, i.e.,
human being outside of her: any of her impulses, potentialities, capabilities—those thinkable now and those yet unthinkable. The distinctive feature of civil society is that if there is something in the human being in which she feels fulfilled, fully present and alive, and this something is sensual, then sensuality must exist in the public space as an institution. Somebody has to make sensual movies, somebody has to write sensual novels, etc.

Kant said that maxims (one could substitute maxims with ideals or moral and reflective intentions) that require publicity for their realization accord with politics, i.e., are consistent with right [Recht] and ethics. I repeat: maxims that require publicity to be realized agree with politics. This is terribly interesting.

We know that experiencing some live feeling, such as love or awareness, requires public exposure for its realization. Something is realized and fulfilled only through constructions (including a sensual construction, and in this case by such a construction one simply understands sensual feature films, sensual books, etc.). If a phenomenon can allow itself publicity and also realizes itself through it, then it is consistent with right [Recht] and ethics. And vice versa: in civil society everything that is consistent with right and ethics must be public, since the meaning of all this, its content and essence, is its realization through publicity. Otherwise, it is nonexistence, shadows, a realm of shadows.

The other side of this (the verbal material of this other side already flashed by in the form of the words shadows and nonexistence) is that in the space of objectification a gap is being filled—the gap between intention of thought and thought, between the impulse to right [Recht] and right as a state of the human being. This space of objectification is the space of the objectifications that allow one to be born or to be fully born; to become entirely fulfilled. Such fulfillment doesn’t leave behind the archaic, doesn’t leave our human feeling—the human in the human—in the womb or in the limbo of an archaic chthonic mass, shot through with the ligaments of myth, the archetypes of the unconscious, etc.

These objectifications never leave us face-to-face with the chthonic abyss that breathes destruction, including the abyss of human instincts, but always allows one to master them, having transferred them onto a screen.

Thinking consciousness is simultaneously a screening that allows the human being not to find herself face-to-face with that which she cannot master in principle, and cannot in principle understand; that which is in principle incommensurable with her, and with which she can be only overwhelmed, in the same way as a living being—which has a living consciousness—is overwhelmed by the Saint Vitus dance. You are inside a gnashing machine of entirely mechanical and relentless sequences of gestures.
and bodily positions (like a human being jumping in a monkey skin). And these are not at all your intentions. You can only observe, helpless to intervene, the developing action, yet it is your own body that is acting: your own hands, and nose, etc. This image is very clear if you ever observed a human being suffering from Saint Vitus dance. We now understand the principle

In a republic, all are citizens to the extent to which they can represent themselves publicly.

of objectification, and through it we understand the meaning and content that the institutional organization of society, the so-called democratic organization, possesses. The public space is constituted from the instruments by means of which one is fulfilled, and publicity is the condition of my recognizing what I think, what I want, of my recognizing my right, not in the sense of right's meaning, but of its power, which is simultaneously the power of realizing myself as a state of being, the state of right. If there are such tools by means of which we are fulfilled, then these are civic things in the strict sense.

First, I assumed that there are things of consciousness in a symbolic reality that casts semantic light on all that we can do in this reality, and I said that the things of consciousness, the things of reason, are in that same sense social things. Let's say a social contract is a social thing; let's call this differently: connection. I discussed constructive connection. (Social ligaments . . .

religio. The primary connection.) It—for I ascribed to it a symbolic character—is the connecting representation of an infinite manifold, i.e., the representation connects this infinite manifold, representing it locally. The infinite variety is infinite, and this is its representation: not in itself, but its connecting representation here and now, a representative not in the sense of a mental representation, but in the sense of representing.

If we are talking about such things, then we are dealing with what the Greeks invented and the Romans concerned themselves, and for which the Romans found a word, because they in general found all the words for the state of right (we did not get far from Roman right [право/Recht/ius], and, I hope, will never get far from it, but, to the contrary, will return to it). This is res publica, i.e., a public thing that belongs to all in the sense that all are citizens to the extent to which they can represent themselves publicly and then, by the light reflected from public deliberation, articulate in themselves their own wishes, aspirations, states and thoughts; inform themselves, recognize, and teach themselves. Before what? Before acting, as it turns
out. For then the plan of reason is read there. In other words, if I inform myself, then also on the second and third steps I can preserve the imprint of freedom in my actions, I can be free again, and also retain my freedom. There are constructions for reviving feelings. I work in them, in their terms, and then tomorrow and the day after there is an articulation of my feelings, it preserves the possibility of iteration, i.e., realization in potential infinity. Recall that infinity is built into these formations and differentiates them from a machine. Tomorrow, then, I will not simply react to something mechanically, but will be able to think again (in the sense of the definition I gave at the beginning); that is, think freely what is and cannot be otherwise, i.e., see reality. My feeling of reality is eternally new. To the extent it is new I will never be a captive of irreality, that is, in this context the novelty will always be a mark of reality.

Returning to the republic . . . it is the primary reality and the primary basis of all democratic transformations, of all democratic societies. It is higher, broader, and more primary than democracy. In what sense? Republic means the independence of res publica, i.e., a public thing, both from the minority and any mercenary advantage in general, and from the majority. The collection of rights that exist and make up the life of a republic emerge from the force for right [Recht], i.e., the power to actualize in the form of a real state in the world one’s capability and impulse to right.

I need to remind you of the plan of reason. The plan of reason is like a sign of freedom on the next step or after several steps, a guarantee that there I will turn out once again capable and free. This plan ascribes to a society the goal to raise the human being, i.e., of civilization as the human ability to rise above herself, above her natural or animal nature. The possibility of this elevation is measured from the next step, if it is at the next step. Let’s put it this way (as I already once defined consciousness): consciousness is the possibility of greater consciousness, and, in fact, from the greater we can measure to the lesser, i.e., to consciousness, to the possibility of greater consciousness. And thought is thought when it is the possibility of greater thought.

The space of objectification (if there is such a space) in which civil society is situated, i.e., transparently represented on the agora, where
citizenship is not a right, but a duty to participate in civic affairs, for only such participation crystalizes in your civic states, and for the first time you recognize what is it that you are pondering, wishing, thinking, etc.—to this space of objectification one can apply a notion of density.

This is a spatio-temporal density: the density of history, i.e., how many, how many more or fewer nodes and points, in which the human being can rise above herself through connecting representations of the infinite manifold. If these are constructions in the symbolic sense of this word, i.e., in the sense of historic points, interlinkages of simply historical motives, human motives, actions, etc., then their condensation (in which there is an impulse to a still greater or further elevation) is the intensive or dense space. In other words, there are many such points, and their multiplicity makes the space dense. Say, Russia’s space is empty; almost empty. European space is very dense, in the sense that one always finds oneself at the point at which there is a stimulus to rise above oneself.

Russia’s space is almost empty. European space is very dense, in the sense that one always finds oneself at the point at which there is a stimulus to rise above oneself.

There is always an active impulse to elevation. An *historial* so to speak, to realize the design of history, which is for the human being to fulfill herself, to become.

When it comes to humankind, the interval of this becoming is the entire history, the end of which is merely symbolic. It cannot be a point or a part of history. The immobile social connections, the connecting representations, trace out a very complicated curve of historical events, the curve of civil society itself, civil being itself, civil life, and civil history. These immobile connections are as though a motor and a motive of a still greater elevation of the human being (and not simply above animal life or above some squabble) also because they demand to be continuously “bound.” A human being binds [and sets] history through these historical acts. History doesn’t flow of itself. In order to flow it is continuously connected by human activity. We then observe this flow, but in reality history does not flow of itself, but is connected once again.

Different special entities or institutions can exist to summon the human being for a new connecting of history, which accomplishes two objectives. I mentioned that outside there must be everything that is inside. Here history is
fulfilled, knit together as externally flowing
objective history. So too on the side of the
human being, inside her, are deposited certain
abilities, including rights that passed the cru-
cible of the binding anew of history. In this
case they are natural rights, i.e., not the rights
distributed by the state, but natural rights, the
collection of which is the foundation of civil
society or the civil society itself. There are spe-
cial mechanisms for this: certain democratic
institutions are mechanisms that both incite
and provide defense and resources for these
new connections. The rite of initiation could
have been such a mechanism in antiquity.

I repeat, religio is the primary bond. It is
simultaneously religion and religio as connec-
tion. A simple mechanical or natural collection
or communal life of people turns into society
only through connection of this kind. Civil
society is, of course, not society in general,
and not a society separate from other societies,
but a certain quality of society. Society of high
quality is civil society. It is not the entire society,
but society brought to a certain state—the
state of the figure that exists while the move-
ment that traces it out exists, the movement
with human effort, or with the effort of many
individuals who are in a certain state of this
effort. Remove the effort and civil society
will disappear. Take the Greeks: the effort
disappeared and Greek society disappeared
even before it was crushed by the barbarians.
Therefore, if there is civil society, then it has
the actions or democratic institutions in which
the human being matures, through which she
masters herself; she is able to master herself
because there are always external equivalents for
all her possible states. Say there is aggression in
her. Here we go: there is something in which
the only possible humanly acceptable meaning
of this aggression can be explicated and realized
and thereby this natural passion can be resolved,
dissolved—but under the condition that the
figures or the forms that are in this social field,
in this social realm, are not themselves resolved
or dispersed.

One of the most important Eastern European philoso-
phers of the 20th century, Merab Mamardashvili
(1930-1990) addressed some of the most urgent prob-
lems of our time: the meaning of democracy and civil
society, European or Western responsibility, nationalism,
and the problem of immigration. This lecture was given
circa 1989, just before the collapse of the Soviet Union.
It is one of the first lectures to be published in English,
thanks to the ongoing translation work of the philoso-
pher Julia Sushytska and creative writing professor
Alisa Slaughter.
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 ideas used to view the world by academics, officials, and citizens affect what they see, the improvements they think are feasible, and the means they presume can be used to reform the world. Ideas seem to be ephemeral, but their results are the artifacts of the world: the cities, the monuments, the wars, the suffering, and all the activities of human beings as they go about their everyday world. Human conceptions can be emancipatory. They may include vistas of untapped capabilities and enable individuals to improve their own and others’ welfare. Or they may be conservative—closely guarding the achievements of the past and protecting the storehouse of acquired social knowledge from wanton destruction. Or worse, ideas may be restrictive or even retrogressive—limiting the horizon of what is possible, leading to a destruction of social infrastructure, and reducing the possibilities for human development.

At the current time, the presumptions underlying most modes of policy analysis restrict, far more than is necessary, our view of human capabilities for self-governance. In an era when human rationality is thought of in terms that involve almost superhuman capabilities in some domains, it is paradoxical that the human capacity for self-reflective thought and social artisanship is almost entirely ignored. In the policy sciences evolving from economics, game theory, political science, and decision theory, the individual is frequently modeled as possessing complete information about his or her environment, a clearly ordered set of goals, and the internal computational
In contrast with earlier organic concepts of human order, the individualistic perspective of modern choice theory is a liberating force. The presumption that there exists a social organism above the individual whose benefit must be served by all has led to much violence, bloodshed, and suffering. If the choice of perspectives were simply between the current, dominant conception of individual choice theories and an organic conception of society, no question exists in my mind which view is theoretically more powerful for explaining empirical phenomena as well as philosophically more liberating.

My feet are firmly planted in the terrain inhabited by theories that view the individual as a basic valuing entity. Once oriented in terms of that broad epistemological and metaphysical divide, however, we should recognize that the current analytical tools used in many individualistic theories were formed and adapted in the effort to explain human behavior in one particular arena—the competitive market related to strictly private goods. Here, the driving intellectual questions during the formative stages of economic theory related to whether individuals’ choices based on their own preferences were consistent and whether purely selfish individuals placed in a competitive market environment could produce social benefits for others. The resounding positive answer slowly led to a change in the political and social structure of most Western...
societies to allow broader entry into many aspects of economic life. This opening of opportunity for the pursuit of individual well-being has indeed produced substantial social benefits for those individuals who have participated in economic growth and the technological advance-

The contemporary analyst rarely asks what individuals could do.

ments stimulated by the competitive pressures of a market economy.

A closely related question being pursued by intellectuals such as those involved in the formation of the American federation, as exemplified in the Federalist, was whether it was possible for human beings to use self-reflection and choice to devise their own governance systems or whether they were forever condemned to be governed by force or accident. The recognition of the possibility that human beings could design political artifacts that would enhance their own welfare more than the political artifacts imposed on them by external rulers also led to a vast broadening of opportunities to enter and participate in the fashioning of political institutions.

Theorists of this era did not naively believe that all experiments in self-governance—large and small—would succeed. Recognition of the possibility of better regimes being designed by enlightened individuals was not equated to the presumption that such individuals would always overcome the difficulties involved in finding rules to mediate effectively among competitive interests. The conception of human nature shared by many of the economic and political theorists of the 18th and early 19th century was relatively similar. Human beings were perceived of as being driven by basically selfish motives but possessing capacities for self-reflection, self-restraint, innovation, and artisanship that could be enhanced by the education they received, the social norms they shared, and the reinforcing tendencies of interactions within particular types of institutions.

When these same tools have been applied to human interactions related to goods that are not strictly private in nature—such as common-pool resources and public goods—the tools have consistently predicted failure. Market failure is predicted for any situation in which individuals attempt to use a competitive market to produce and allocate goods that do not meet the strict requirements of private goods. Other forms of institutional failure are predicted for situations in which individuals attempt to gain collective benefits without
being forced by an external agent to adopt cooperative strategies.

At the core of each of these models is the problem of the free rider. Whenever one person cannot be excluded from the benefits that others could provide, each person is tempted not to contribute to the joint effort and to “free ride” on the efforts of others. If all participants choose to free ride, the collective benefit is not produced. If all value the collective benefit more than their individual costs, all prefer the outcome where everyone contributes and the benefit is produced. The temptation to free ride, however, may dominate the decision process, and thus all end up where no one wanted to be. These models are thus extremely useful for explaining how perfectly rational individuals can produce outcomes that are not “rational” when viewed from the perspective of all of those involved.

These models have been used to justify the presumption that those who are involved in a tragedy of the commons or a Prisoner’s Dilemma game will remain permanently entrapped in the situation, never to change the structure of the situation themselves. This analytical step is both unnecessary and clearly a retrogressive step in the theories used to analyze the human condition. Whether or not the individuals who are in a situation have capacities to transform their own situation varies dramatically from one situation to another. It is not a logical result of the application of these theories; it is an empirical condition that varies from situation to situation.

Once analysts perceive human beings as being trapped inside perverse situations, however, the subject to whom reform is addressed is external to those involved. Instead of viewing analysis as providing better insights to enable those who are affected by perverse situations to alter the incentive systems they are facing, the purpose of scholarly modeling and analysis is seen as providing advice to an external government or a “social planner” as to how to impose a new structure on those individuals. The momentum for change must come from outside the situation rather than from the self-reflection and creativity of those within a situation to restructure their own patterns of interaction. The fact that the literature on mechanism design has shown that there are games among citizens that a social planner could impose that do have efficient outcomes “leads to the common belief that such games require a social planner to impose and referee them.”

The repeated predictions of institutional failure, combined with the presumption that such failures could be remedied only by an external government, have assigned the agencies
of the modern state a preeminent responsibility for a wide variety of problems. At the same time, such a presumption removes any notion that the individuals involved in unproductive or perverse situations are in any way responsible for the structure of the situations they are in. Policies that have resulted from applying this type of analysis have been far from liberating, particularly as they have been implemented by colonial and postcolonial regimes in Third World countries.

For some analysts, neither citizens nor local governments have an important role in the governing of a commons. Since the publication of “The Tragedy of the Commons” by Garrett Hardin (1968), users of a common-pool resource—such as a fishery, a forest, or a water aqueduct—are perceived to be helpless perpetrators of resource destruction. Hardin presumed that individuals would always maximize their own immediate short-term, material benefits. This meant that they were helpless to do anything else but overharvest when they jointly used a resource system that was not privately owned or the property of a governmental unit. The prediction that individuals would destroy the very resources on which they depended was consistent with many economic models of one-shot or finitely repeated dilemma settings in which everyone pursuing their own short-term benefits ended up achieving far less individually and together than was feasible if they had found a way of cooperating with one another.

Hardin’s vivid portrayal of the helpless citizen opened up an important body of theoretical and empirical work that, in turn, disputed the universality of his work. Instead of finding only private or government ownership arrangements that helped users to sustain a common-pool resource, scholars from multiple disciplines found a diversity of mechanisms used in efforts to govern common-pool resources.

Hardin and the myriad of scholars and policymakers from multiple disciplines who accepted his theory were thus correct in identifying a challenging problem when open-access conditions prevailed. Their analysis was incomplete, however. They predicted the impossibility of self-organization and prescribed only two solutions—both of which had to be imposed on resource users.

Central Lessons

Multiple Interacting Factors Affect Outcomes

Factors work together to improve or reduce the likelihood that local communities, which have autonomy to create their own governance structures, will actually design effective institutions for managing resources. Merino studied forestry resources in six communities located in three states in Mexico (Michoacán, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo). Her study demonstrates that the population density of the users of a forest is not a key determinate of resource degradation. Consequently, she dug into a wide diversity of local, regional, and national factors that could potentially explain the different rates of deforestation observed among the six communities. Instead of finding a single factor as the primary cause of a community’s successful or unsuccessful effort to manage forest resources well, Merino found a complex of factors that together affect the incentives and behavior of citizen-users so as to lead to a better-quality forest.
The communities in her study were most likely to design well-working local institutions to manage local forests when effective social capital had been built over time within a community and when the interests of the more powerful members of the community were

State and national laws have simply overlooked the capacities of local users to develop and monitor effective rules.

aligned with the effective management of forest resources. Merino found that the regional and national regulatory systems have not encouraged community forestry in Mexico.

Effective rules and incentives passed at regional and national levels are more the exception than the rule in Mexico. If anything, government policies have generated more incentives against the effective management of forests than incentives encouraging sustainable development. When not an active negative factor adversely affecting responsible local management, state and national laws have simply overlooked the capacities of local users to develop effective rules, monitor them, and impose graduated sanctions.

The Need to Confront Complexity

What we have found from research related to resources is that the complexity of many natural resources does require a multitier or polycentric governance system rather than a reliance on only a single type or level of governance. Actors who try to govern a complex resource face a variety of incentives that often complicate collective efforts and subsequent outcomes. The more complex a resource is, in terms of the types of goods and services that it provides, the more perverse incentives tend to exist unless a well-tailored set of institutional arrangements offsets these incentives. Some actors may be tempted to shirk from their contributions to the governance arrangements by not attending meetings or not paying the membership fees. Others may actively try to weaken the rules so that they can use the resource with fewer constraints. A robust governance system recognizes the multiscale aspects of natural resource governance as well as the presence of individual incentives and seeks to correct them.

When citizens and their officials establish organizations with the authority to contribute resources toward the provision of a collective good, they constitute provision or collective consumption units. Many provision units have the formal status of a government established at a local, regional, or national scale and may be general-purpose units or organized as special districts or regimes. Private associations that sanction, or even expel, those who do not con-
tribute their share of resources to provide for a collective good may also serve as collective consumption units. Sports leagues and housing condominiums are two types of private associations that provide collective goods for their members.

Other forms of collective consumption units include farmers who organize themselves to manage an irrigation system or a common pasture; a national agency that monitors the investment or production processes of private firms to protect consumers against fraud or ecological damage; a local, national, or international government that provides services of diverse types; and even an illegal cartel of private corporations that decides on the amount of output they will jointly produce. Thus, provision units exist at all scales and in both public and private spheres. Participants can, and do, craft a diversity of rules that help them overcome the free rider problem by deciding who is included and must contribute resources, who is excluded, and how to exclude them. Further, if the provision system continues to develop, participants (or their representatives) are likely to devise rules that specify allowable forms of access and use, some methods for monitoring behavior and sanctioning violators of rules, and some ways of resolving conflict.

These systems often do not resemble the textbook versions of either a government or a strictly private for-profit firm, especially when participants have constituted their own self-governing units. Thus, scholars drawing on traditional conceptions of “the market” and “the state” have not recognized them as potentially viable forms of provision organization and have either called for their consolidation into a centralized government (as metropolitan reformers continue to do) or ignored their existence (as many resource economists have done). It is a bit ironic that many vibrant self-governed institutions have been misclassified or ignored in an era that many observers consider one of ever greater democratization.

Commonly Understood and Enforced Rules

Another key finding of empirical field research is the multiplicity of specific rules-in-use found in operational settings related to the provision and production of collective goods. One of the most important types of rules is boundary rules, which determine who and what are in and out of a provision organization. Provision units face considerable biophysical constraints when the good is a natural common-pool resource such as a groundwater basin, a river, or an airshed. Such resources do have their own geographic boundary, and creating a match between the boundary of those authorized to benefit and contribute and the boundary of the resource is a challenge and may be impossible in a highly centralized
regime. Further, common-pool resources may themselves be nested in an ever larger sequence of resource unit such as a micro watershed, which is nested in a system of ever larger watersheds that eventuates into a major river system such as the Rhine or the Mekong River.

Once basic boundary rules define who is a legitimate beneficiary and who must contribute to the provision of a collective good, provision units frequently create rules related to the information that must be made public, the actions that must or may be taken or are forbidden, and the outcomes (and resulting benefits and costs) to be achieved and distributed. An essential attribute of rules is that, to be effective, they must be generally known and understood, considered legitimate, and thus generally followed and enforced. Written legislation or contract provisions that are not common knowledge do not affect the structure of a particular situation unless someone involved in the situation invokes the rule and finds someone to enforce it. Thus, one of the problems in doing empirical research on the effects of diverse institutional arrangements is trying to sort out the rules that exist on paper and are not used by participants as contrasted to the rules that are common knowledge of the participants and enforced locally but not part of the formal legal structure.

Community Attributes

Many attributes of a community are also likely to affect provision activities, including the size of the group affected, the homogeneity or heterogeneity of interests, the patterns of migration into or out of a community, and the discount rate used by individuals in ongoing situations. The specific attributes of a community that might affect outcomes can be very large. For an institutional analyst, however, the important set of questions that needs to be addressed includes the following:

- Is there general agreement on the rules related to who is included as a member with both benefits and responsibilities?
- Do the members have a shared understanding of what their mutual responsibilities are as well as the formulas used for the distribution of benefits?
- Are these rules considered legitimate and fair?
- How are the rules transmitted from one generation to the next or to those who join the group?
A diversity of community attributes affects the answers to these questions. For an institutional analyst to understand the structure of the situation facing that community, and thus examine the incentives facing the participants and their likely behavior and outcomes, the analyst must assume that a community is actually using a set of rules and will continue to do so for at least the near future.

In this article, I have argued that many contemporary models of the individual and of relevant governance systems are overly simplified and have led to recommendations of policies that have not solved many problems of contemporary, complex, human-nature systems. Multiple factors determine the effectiveness of a governance system. A key to effective governance lies in the relationships among actors who have a stake in the governance of the resource and not just one level of government or private ownership. Empirical analysis provides strong support for a polycentric approach. By considering the interaction between actors at different levels of governance, it is possible to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the factors driving the variation in diverse governance outcomes. Of course, considerably more research on the impacts of diverse policies in the context of differently structured governance systems is needed.

A winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, Elinor Ostrom (1933-2012) explored how communities can manage shared natural resources and their ecosystems. A longer version of this article was originally published in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* in 2010 and is reprinted here with the permission of the Pennsylvania State University Press.
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.

In their May 2011 protest movements that set off a mass revolt against austerity policies, the Spanish Indignados were ingenious at coining slogans that captured the political exasperation of our time. “We have a vote, but not a voice,” “We are not against the system, the system is against us.” The former outcry speaks of the injustice of political impotence; the latter of the tragedy of giving up the fight.

Why has it become impossible to be heard, even as the voice of protest has become louder and more articulate? We are often told that, in the clash between neoliberal austerity and popular democracy, democracy has fallen victim to global capitalism. Even much before the global financial meltdown inaugurated the politics of austerity, much before the governance of Greece and Spain was taken over by the technocracies of Brussels, it had become clear that in a globalized, bureaucratized, technologized world, the opportunities for ordinary citizens to participate in decision making have become nonexistent.

As Stuart Hall aptly put it already in 1979 when discussing the Thatcherite commitment to free market economics and autocratic political rule, “Under this regime, the market is to be free; the people are to be disciplined.” Since then, now for 35 years, politics has taken the shape of the dictum There Is No Alternative (known by the abbreviation “TINA”) which Margaret Thatcher made famous, borrowing Herbert Spencer’s formulation of social Darwinism, with its “survival of the fittest” logic, in the mid-19th century. Under TINA’s dominium, it is raison d’economie that assumes the role of raison d’état. Thus, it seems that behind the demise of democracy stands the demise of the political.
In a 2010 piece titled “The Political,” Jürgen Habermas, joining other pronouncements of the death of the political, describes in the following way the sorry state of politics: “In the latter half of the 20th century politics was still able to wield a steering influence on the diverging subsystems. . . . Today, as economic globalization progresses . . . ‘the political’ has been transformed into the code of self-maintaining administrative system.” Our societies seem to be trapped in the limbo that systems theory sketched of social modernization—autopoetic functional systems operate by default, holding us equally far from the heaven of democratic self-rule as from the hell of an economic, moral, and cultural crisis. Convincingly, though unsurprisingly, the solution Habermas advances is to revive democracy.

Yet, democracy is not really dead. Something more tragic has happened to it: rather than disabling it, neoliberal managerialism has hijacked it, putting it to the service of its economistic libido. In order to break free of the state of limbo, we need to sharpen the diagnosis of the “death of democracy through the death of the political.” 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.

Significantly, in the midst of the financial meltdown, voters in Europe massively brought back to power center-right parties whose neoliberal economic policies admittedly caused the trouble. Yet even political parties that openly challenge the hegemonic discourse of austerity and structural adjustment, like Syriza in Greece, do not offer a viable alternative. They are stuck in a crisis management mode:

For 35 years, politics has taken the shape of the dictum, There Is No Alternative.

the TINA policy doctrine wrecks our societies as rising unemployment, economic precariousness, and increased work pressures are the combined social costs of the TINA policy dictum. All that its political rivals can do is engage in humanitarian crisis management. This is by no means a revival of contestatory politics in which the very rules of the game are challenged and alternatives compete for public endorsement.

To make matters worse, the typical neoliberal tactic of offloading the public authority’s social responsibility onto society is now being invoked in the name of democracy. Telling in this regard is the recent call of (self-identified) British radical left intellectuals, published in the Guardian, for “empowerment of everybody” via the state’s “giving away power and resources directly to the people.” Not only is the left failing to mount an opposition and propose a macro alternative, but
it is compounding the problem with positions that strangely echo a neoliberal discourse of anti-statism, thus further absolving political elites and public authority of obligations to rule in the public interest. Under neoliberalism, “democracy” comes to mean something handled by the people and markets outside of any political process. As a result, the discourse for more democracy has become part of the problem. Calling on democracy to save itself would be akin to telling a drowning person: “You have the right to life, so swim on; you can do it, we believe in you, attagirl!”

The current breakdown of democracy and substitution of administration for politics 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. This concept expresses the intuition that the people have a right that politics be the process that decides their collective fate—if politics is to be understood not just as a matter of power struggle among competing actors for occupying the highest political office but also doing so for the sake of affecting the rules, and thus, the direction, of our collective existence, thereby enabling some control of the processes that shape our way of life. If we are to reclaim democracy as a practice of collective self-rule, we need to begin by articulating and reclaiming this right to politics. Without it, other rights we hold dear—the right to have rights, the right to democracy, the right to justification—become void of their political potency even as they remain valid normative benchmarks of our collective existence.

I interpret the right to politics as having three interrelated elements that are intrinsic to the republican model of self-rule. One element is democracy as experimentation, the second is democracy as self-authorship, and the third is democratic agency.

Within the republican philosophical tradition, democracy has often been described as an experiment. And this is important. Thomas Jefferson’s pledge to democracy comes easily to mind: “I have no fear that the result of our experiment will be that men may be trusted to govern themselves without a master.” The centrality of experimental reason we find also in Tocqueville’s description of the young democracy in America—an open, experimental society with a dynamic, though fragile, political order: “In that land the great experiment was to be made, by civilized man, of the attempt to construct society upon a new basis.” The agonistic self-correction that democracy incessantly performs engages the dynamics of what Kant has described as reason making experiments with itself. Democracy’s ultimate power is to play, to experiment, with its own power.

Experimentation implies availability of choices, risk-taking, bold, even reckless thinking, and living in uncertainty of the outcomes of this experimentation. It would not be fair to burden democracy with the expectation that it
become a tool of domination. “Get people off of dependency and on to lives of self-sufficiency,” is the typical call of neoliberal hegemony, urged in the name of democracy. Reformulating the freedom of citizens as individual self-reliance, in the name of democracy, amounts to granting them the freedom of blaming themselves for their failures.

If liberal notions of self-rule as individual self-sufficiency and the old republican visions of a cohesive community governing itself through proper representation will not do, what alternative is there at hand? We need to undertake, as Seyla Benhabib has suggested in this forum, a “retranslation of republicanism” away from these categories, and I will now make a proposal concerning the form of retranslation we need. Such an alternative emerges not inside the solutions offered within republicanism and liberalism as philosophical traditions, but in their very dispute about the notion of autonomy best befitting democracy. Republicans from Rousseau to Tocqueville and Jefferson (but also Dostoyevsky—a liberal socialist) have pointed out that

Behind the demise of democracy stands the demise of the political.

security of expert rule, even if based on popular consent) means rejecting democracy altogether. From this experimental character of democracy issues the right to politics—the right that binding political rules be designed in a dynamic process of uncertain, open-ended bricolage, rather than expert political engineering.

The second element in the constitutive story of democracy is an account of self-rule not as a matter of correctly representing the collective self, but rather of actively authoring societal rules. In order to engage the right to politics in an open-ended experimentation, it would not do to invoke democracy as representation of the popular will, as per the original republican vision, as this would negate the very nature of open-ended, ateleological experimentation. Neither would it suffice, however, to equate self-rule with autonomy, as per the intuitions of philosophical liberalism. We are currently held hostage by the notion of political autonomy, of independence as self-sufficiency. In the neoliberal condition, self-reliance (individual responsibilization) has
although liberal autonomy (that is, freedom as noninterference) might be a worthy value, it does not put us in charge of ourselves—it does not allow us to think on the larger conditions of our collective existence, to question and

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.

And here, I come to the third constitutive element of democracy that contains as its logical presupposition the right to politics—namely the particular notion of agency that democracy as self-rule implies. In unfolding this part of the argument, I will take my cue from the defense of a “fundamental human right to democracy” that Seyla Benhabib has advanced. Benhabib proceeds from a discourse-theoretic account of human rights within which the subjects of rights are not just “rights-bearing” but also “reason-giving”: (1) the rights-bearing person is an agent with a capacity for communicative freedom and (2) citizens address validity claims to one another in recognition of a common and equal capacity for communicative freedom. The very practice
of claims-articulation addressed to others presupposes an active agent who recognizes and honors the active agency of others. Thus, a fundamental right to democracy emerges on grounds that, as Benhabib puts it, “a robust right to self-government is essential for being able to make justifiable claims concerning the valid range of variation in the articulation of human rights at all.” The capacity to formulate goals of action and justify them with reasons to others, which Benhabib makes central to her ontology of the rights-bearing person, allows us to valorize properly the active agency demanded for a viable conception of democracy as experimental self-authorship.

In other words, notions of moral autonomy and mutual respect that are commonly taken to underpin the idea of equal rights are insufficient to engender democracy as the political incarnation of (collectively exercised) moral autonomy. Equality of citizenship (as the political expression of equal moral autonomy) is a necessary but insufficient condition for democracy as self-rule. We need to link the dynamic side of democratic experimentation to the notion of political equality in order to account for the political agency of a self-legislating people. If, as Charles Taylor has argued, for a viable conception of human rights we need to conceive of people as “active cooperators in establishing and ensuring the respect which is due them,” then for a viable conception of democracy we need to conceive of people as active cooperators in challenging, establishing and ensuring the rules of social coexistence that bind them. This implies that we see others as active rights-deserving and rights-pursuing agents—not subjects who profit from a fair social order, but authors of the social order to which they are subjected. Without recognizing the inherent value of conflict and contestation in the process of democratic policymaking, and the value of citizens’ engaging in conflict (within which consensus might emerge), values such as equality of citizenship and shared prosperity and security become products of political consumerism, best achieved by granting a popular mandate to policy experts.

In the formula adumbrated here, democracy stands as an enterprise in which (often radical) conflicts of interests and values are articulated communicatively. As such, it presupposes that (1) participants are awarded equal agency; (2) they justify to each other their conflicting

Democracy’s ultimate power is to play, to experiment, with its own power.
are simultaneously inherent in other concepts of rights as their logical presuppositions and as empirical conditions enabling the practice of rights.

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pursuits as being merit-worthy; (3) all enact that agency of self-rule—it cannot be delegated, outsourced to experts or professional politicians in the name of assumed public interest. The right to politics is implied in this essential communicative freedom, since the proper political application of this freedom is to engage in the contestation of existing rules of social cooperation in view of actors’ particular circumstances and their perceptions of personal and collective interests.

It is in this sense that the right to politics actuates the right to democracy, in the same way that what Arendt named “the right to have rights” actuates human rights. These “meta-rights”
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.

In retelling any history of revolutions, the uprisings that spread through the Middle East in 2011 will remain watershed events. These uprisings toppled longstanding dictators, overturned entrenched interests, and unsettled authoritarian regimes in a measure and magnitude that took everyone by surprise. Yet these revolts did not emerge from a vacuum. They had their precursors—in structural changes reflected in urban growth, demographic shifts and growing disparity, the formation of new political actors, and in ongoing everyday struggles that all merged into these revolutionary moments. A new Middle East may now be on the horizon, a Middle East informed not only by the actions of the elites, military men, or foreign intrigues but a region influenced by the ordinary people.

The first edition of *Life as Politics* was published in 2010, a year before the uprisings began. In the preface to that edition, I stated that the central theme of the book was agency and change in the Muslim Middle East. More specifically, the book focused on the configuration of sociopolitical transformation brought about by internal social forces, by collectives and individuals, and by the diverse ways in which the ordinary people—the subaltern, the urban dispossessed, Muslim women, the globalizing youth, and other urban grassroots—could strive to affect change in their societies. In refusing to exit from the social and political stage controlled by authoritarian states, their moral authority, and neoliberal economies, these groups discover and generate new spaces within which they can voice their dissent and assert their presence in pursuit of bettering their lives. 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.

Streets, as spaces of flow and movement, are not only where people express grievances but also where they forge identities and enlarge solidarities.

For those urban subjects (such as the unemployed, housewives, and the “informal people”) who structurally lack intuitional power of disruption (such as going on strike), the “street” becomes the ultimate arena to communicate discontent. This kind of “street politics” describes a set of conflicts, and the attendant implications, between an individual or a collective populace and the authorities, which are shaped and expressed in the physical and social space of streets, from the back alleyways to the more visible streets and squares. Here conflict originates from the active use of public space by subjects who, in the modern states, are allowed to use it only passively—through walking, driving, watching—or in other ways that the state dictates. Any active or participative use infuriates officials, who see themselves as the sole authority to establish and control public order. Thus, the street vendors who proactively spread their businesses in the main alleyways; squatters who take over public parks, lands, or sidewalks; youth who control the street-corner spaces; street children who establish street communities; poor housewives who extend their daily household activities into the alleyways; or protestors who march in the streets, all challenge the state prerogatives and thus may encounter reprisal.

Street politics assumes more relevance, particularly in the neoliberal cities, those shaped by the logic of the market. Strolling through the streets of Cairo, Tehran, Dakar, or Jakarta in the midst of a working day, one is astonished by the presence of so many people operating in the streets—working, running around, standing, sitting, negotiating, driving, or riding on buses and trams. These represent the relatively new subaltern of the neoliberal city. For the neoliberal city is the “city inside-out,” where a massive number of inhabitants become compelled by the poverty and dispossession to operate, subsist, socialize, and simply live a life...
in the public spaces. Here the outdoor spaces (back alleys, public parks, squares, and the main streets) serve as indispensable assets in the urban population, and consequently, as fertile ground for the expression of street politics.

But street politics has another dimension, in that it is more than just about conflict between authorities and deinstitutionalized or informal groups over the control of public space and order. Streets, as spaces of flow and movement, are not only where people express grievances, but also where they forge identities, enlarge solidarities, and extend their protest beyond their immediate circles to include the unknown, the strangers. Here streets serve as a medium through which strangers or casual passersby are able to establish latent communication with one another by recognizing their mutual interests and shared sentiments. This is how a small demonstration may grow into a massive exhibition of solidarity; and that is why almost every contentious politics, major revolution, and protest movement finds expression in the urban streets. It is this epidemic potential of street politics that provokes authorities’ severe surveillance and widespread repression. While a state may be able to shut down colleges or to abolish political parties, it cannot easily stop the normal flow of life in streets, unless it resorts to normalizing violence, erecting walls and checkpoints as a strategic element of everyday life.

Thus, not only does city space serve as the center stage of sociopolitical contentions, it at the same time conditions the dynamics and shapes the patterns of conflicts and their resolution. Cities inescapably leave their spatial imprints on the nature of social struggles and agency; they provoke particular kinds of politics, of both micro and macro nature. For instance, revolutions in the sense of “insurrections” not only result from certain historical trajectories, but are also shaped by certain geographies and are facilitated by certain spatial influences. Thus, beyond asking why and when a given revolution occurred, we should also be asking where it was unleashed and why it happened where it did. As sites of the concentration of wealth, power, and privilege, cities are as much the source of epidemic conflicts, social struggles, and mass insurgencies as the source of cooperation, sharing, and what I like to call “everyday cosmopolitanism”—a place where various members of ethnic, racial, and religious groupings are conditioned to mix, mingle,
undertake everyday encounters, and experience trust with one another. Cosmopolitan experiences in cities, in turn, may act as a spatial catalyst to ward off and contain sectarian strife and violence. Urban streets not only serve as a physical space where conflicts are shaped and expressed, where collectives are formed, solidarities are extended, and street politics are displayed. They also signify a crucial symbolic utterance, one that goes beyond the physicality of streets to convey collective sentiments of a nation or a community. This I call “political street,” as exemplified in such terms as Arab street or Muslim street. Political street, then, denotes the collective sentiments, shared feelings, and public opinions of ordinary people in their day-to-day utterances and practices that are expressed broadly in public spaces—in taxis, buses, and shops, on street sidewalks, or in mass street demonstrations.

The types of struggles that characterize the societies of the Middle East are neither unique to this region nor novel in their emergence. Similar processes are well under way in other parts of the world. The integration of the Middle East into the global economic system has created sociopolitical structures and processes in this region that find resemblance in other societies of the global South. Yet the continuing authoritarian rule, the region’s strategic location (in relation to oil and Israel), and the predominance of Islam give the politics of dissent in the Muslim Middle East particular characteristics. Notwithstanding its characterization as “passive and dead” or “rowdy and dangerous,” the Arab street exhibited a fundamental vitality and vigor in the aftermath of 9/11 events and the occupation of Iraq, despite the Middle East’s regimes’ continuous surveillance of political dissent. However, much mobilizational energy is spent on nationalistic and anti-imperialist concerns at the expense of the struggle for democracy at home. Even though street politics in the Arab world has assumed some innovations in strategy, methods, and constituencies, it remains overwhelmed by the surge of religio-nationalist politics. Yet it is naïve to conclude a priori that the future belongs to Islamist politics. The fact is that Islamism itself is undergoing a dramatic shift in its underlying ideals and strategies. Thus, while Islam continues to play a major mobilizational role, the conditions for the emergence of Iranian-type Islamic revolutions seem to have been exhausted. I suggest that the evolving domestic and global conditions, namely, the tendency toward legalism and reformist politics, individualization of piety, and transnationalization (both the objectives and the actors) among radical trends, tend to favor not Islamic revolutions, but some kind of “post-Islamist resolutions”—a type of indigenous political reform marked by a blend of democratic ideals and, possibly, religious sensibilities. Given the continuous authoritarian rule that curbs organized and legal opposition
movements, the social nonmovements of fragmented and inaudible collectives may play a crucial role in instigating such transformation.

What are the “social nonmovements”? In general, nonmovements refers to the collective actions of noncollective actors; they embody shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change, even though these practices are rarely guided by ideology or recognizable leaderships and organizations. The term movement implies that social nonmovements enjoy significant, consequential elements of social movements; yet they constitute distinct entities.

In the Middle East, the nonmovements have come to represent the mobilization of millions of the subaltern, chiefly the urban poor, Muslim women, and youth. The nonmovement of the urban dispossessed, which I have termed the “quiet encroachment of the ordinary,” encapsulates the discreet and prolonged ways in which the poor struggle to survive and to better their lives by quietly impinging on the propertied and powerful, and on society at large. It embodies the protracted mobilization of millions of detached and dispersed individuals and families who strive to enhance their lives in a lifelong collective effort that bears few elements of pivotal leadership, ideology, or structured organization. More specifically, I am referring to the mass movement of rural migrants who, in a quest for a better life-chance, embark on a steady and strenuous campaign that involves unlawful acquisition of lands and shelters, followed by such urban amenities as electricity, running water, phone lines, paved roads, and the like. To secure paid work, these migrants take over street sidewalks and other desirable public spaces to spread their vending businesses. These masses of largely atomized individuals, by such parallel practices of everyday encroachments, have virtually transformed the large cities of the Middle East and by extension many developing countries, generating a substantial outdoor economy, new communities, and arenas of self-development in the urban landscapes; they inscribe their active presence in the configuration and governance of urban life, asserting their “right to city.”

This kind of spread-out and encroachment reflects in some way the nonmovements of the international illegal migrants. There exist now a massive border check, barriers, fences, walls, and police patrol. And yet they keep flooding—through the air, sea, road, hidden in back of trucks, trains, or simply on foot. They spread, expand, and grow in the cities of global North; they settle, find jobs, acquire homes, form families, and struggle to get legal protection. They build communities, church or mosque groups, cultural collectives, and visibly flood the public spaces. As they feel safe and secure, they assert their physical, social, and cultural presence in the host societies. Indeed, the
It is often claimed that radical Islamism in the Middle East voices the interests of the poor as the victim of the urban ecology of overcrowded slums, where poverty, anomie, and lawlessness nurture extremism and violence, of which militant Islamism is a variant. But this view finds less plausibility when it is tested against the general reluctance of the urban poor to lend ideological support to this or that political movement. A pragmatic politics of the poor, one that ensures tackling concrete and immediate concerns, means that political Islam plays little part in the habitus of the urban disenfranchised. The underlying politics of the poor is expressed not in political Islam, but in a poor people's nonmovement—the type of fluid, flexible, and self-producing strategy that is adopted not only by the urban poor, but also by other subaltern groups, including middle-class women.

Under the authoritarian patriarchal states, whether secular or religious, women's activism for gender equality is likely to take on the form of nonmovement. Authoritarian regimes and conservative men impose severe restrictions on women making gender claims in a sustained fashion—establishing independent organizations and publications, lobbying, managing public protests, mobilizing ordinary women, acquiring...
funding and resources, or establishing links with international solidarity groups. In the Iran of early 2007, for instance, women activists who initiated a “million-signature campaign”—to involve ordinary women nationally against misogynous laws—encountered constant harassment, repression, and detention. Many young activists were beaten up, not only by morals police, but in some cases by their own male guardians. Recognizing such constraints on organized campaigns, women have tended to pursue a different strategy, one that involves intimately the mundane practices of everyday life, such as pursuing education, sports, arts, music, or working outside the home. These women did not refrain from performing the usually male work of civil servants, professionals, and public actors, from carrying out chores such as banking, taking cars to mechanics, or negotiating with builders. They did not stop jogging in public parks, climbing Mount Everest, or contesting (and winning) in male-dominated car racing, despite unsuitable dress codes. So, women established themselves as public actors, subverting the conventional public-private gender divide. Those who did not wish to wear veils defied the forced hijab (headscarf) in public for more than two decades in a “war of attrition” with the public morals police until they virtually normalized what the authorities had lamented as “bad-hijabi”—showing a few inches of hair beneath the headscarves. In their legal battles, women challenged courthouses and judges’ decisions on child custody, ending marriages, and other personal status provisions.

These mundane doings had perhaps little resemblance to extraordinary acts of defiance, but rather were closely tied to the ordinary practices of everyday life. Yet they were bound to lead to significant social, ideological, and legal imperatives. Not only did such practices challenge the prevailing assumptions about women’s roles, but they were followed by far-reaching structural legal imperatives. Every claim they made became a stepping-stone for a further claim, generating a cycle of opportunities for demands to enhance gender rights. Thus, women’s quest for literacy and a college education enabled them to live alone, away from the control of their guardians, or led to a career that might demand traveling alone, supervising men, or defying male dominance.

The intended or unintended consequences of these disparate but widespread individual practices were bound to question the fundamentals of legal and moral codes, facilitating claims for gender equality. They at times subverted the effective governmentality of the state machinery and ideology, pushing it towards pragmatism, compromise, and discord. Women activists (as well as the authorities) were keenly aware of the incremental consequences of such structural encroachment and tried to take full
First, nonmovements, or the collective actions of noncollective actors, tend to be action-oriented, rather than ideologically driven; they are overwhelmingly quiet, rather than audible, since the claims are made largely individually rather than by united groups. Second, whereas in social movements leaders usually mobilize the constituencies to put pressure on authorities to meet their demands, in nonmovements actors directly practice what they claim, despite government sanctions. Thus, theirs is not a politics of protest, but of practice, of redress through direct and disparate actions. Third, unlike social movements, where actors are involved usually in extraordinary deeds of mobilization and protestation that go beyond the routine of daily life (e.g., attending meetings, petitioning, lobbying, demonstrating, and so on), the nonmovements are made up of practices that are merged into, indeed are part and parcel of, the ordinary practices of everyday life. Thus, the poor people building homes, getting piped water or phone lines, or spreading their merchandise out in the urban sidewalks; the international migrants crossing borders to find new livelihoods; the women striving to go to college, playing sports, working in public, conducting “men’s work,” or choosing their own marriage partners; and the young appearing how they like, listening to what they wish, and hanging out where they prefer—all represent some core practices of nonmovements in the Middle East and similar world areas. The critical and fourth point is that these practices are not carried out by small groups of people acting on the political margins; rather, they are common practices of everyday life carried out by millions of people who albeit remain fragmented. In other words, the power
of nonmovements does not lie in the unity of actors, which may then threaten disruption, uncertainty, and pressure on the adversaries. The power of nonmovements rests on the power of big numbers, that is, the consequential effect on norms and rules in society of many people simultaneously doing similar, though contentious, things.

Why are nonmovements the prevalent form of activism in particular social and political settings, such as in the Muslim Middle East? The first factor relates to the fact that authoritarian states do not tolerate any independent and organized dissent. So, they tend either to fragment the subaltern, especially the political class, or to subsume them under their own populist institutions. But the fact is that subaltern classes themselves are also experiencing new dispositions. The growing fragmentation of labor, informalization, the shrinking of public sectors, and “NGOization”—all associated with the neoliberal restructuring—further curtail the popular capacity for organized activism in the form of, say, traditional trade union organizations. Yet such a subaltern is confronted by states that are remarkably incapable of or unwilling to fulfill their social and material needs and expectations—ones that are swelled up by the escalating urbanization, educational growth, media expansion, and citizen awareness—thus pushing the populace to take matters into their own hands. When the states cannot provide adequate housing or jobs for the poor (and when the possible conventional legal channels, like lobbying, to achieve these goals are not trusted or get frustrated by state bureaucracy), the poor resort to direct squatting on land or shelters, or illegally spreading their street businesses. When the authorities fail to recognize gender rights or youth demands, women and youths may defy the official authority by directly executing their claims in the areas or institutions with least surveillance or otherwise appropriating and overturning those that enjoy official sanction. Such encroachments become possible—and this is the third point—that authoritarians preside over the states—“soft states”—that lack the capacity, consistency, and machinery to impose full control even though they may wish to. Consequently, there exist many escapes, spaces, and uncontrolled holes—zones of relative freedom—that can be filled and appropriated by ordinary actors. The genius of subaltern subjects—nonmovements—lies precisely in discovering or generating such escapes.

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We live in a time when governments face a growing number of problems they cannot deal with alone, so citizens outside government have to fill that void.

This year, I am writing the same article for all three of Kettering’s major publications—Connections, the Kettering Review, and the Higher Education Exchange (HEX). My objective is for readers of each of the publications to know what is being reported in the other two. Together, they tell a more complete story of what’s needed to make our democracy work as it faces global forces that threaten to disempower citizens.

All three periodicals have the same subject—Kettering’s multinational studies, which are the focus of this year’s research review. Their job is to share what we are learning in all of the multinational research and to solicit thoughts from readers. Connections will carry stories, not about Kettering but about civic organizations in other countries, written whenever possible by the people in those organizations. HEX will speak to American institutions of higher education about their role in democracy at a time when democracy around the world is in trouble. And the Review acknowledges our debt to authors from outside the United States whose writing has had a significant influence on how the foundation has come to understand democracy.

Two Categories of Multinational Research

The foundation’s multinational research falls into two broad categories or groups. In the first category, the foundation collaborates with nongovernmental organizations outside the United States that are interested in what Kettering is studying: how people do or don’t become engaged as citizens who exercise sound judgment, the work citizens do in communities afterthoughts by David Mathews
to solve problems and educate the young, and productive ways that people can engage large institutions, both governmental and nongovernmental, as those institutions try to engage them. This research is the way the foundation organizes its study of democracy.

At the heart of the word democracy is the demos, or “citizenry,” and Kettering refers to the ways citizens go about their work as “democratic practices.” (Kratos, or “power,” is the other root of democracy.) The democratic practices that Kettering studies require self-responsibility, which can’t be exported or imported. So the focus of our research is on the United States, not other countries. Yet our studies have been greatly enriched by what the foundation has learned from nongovernmental organizations in some 100 other countries spread across the globe.

Organizations in other countries interested in this research come to summer learning exchanges called the Deliberative Democracy Institutes (DDIs) to share their experiences with one another and the foundation. Some of the participants come back to enter Kettering’s multinational residency program, which now has a large alumni group. These alumni often return as faculty for the institutes.

Kettering’s second category of multinational research is on citizen diplomacy, and it centers on three countries—Russia, China, and Cuba. The governments in these countries have or have had serious differences with the government in the United States; communications have broken down or have been problematic. The premise of the studies, as the late Hal Saunders, Kettering’s longtime director of international affairs, explained to the New York Times, is that we live in a time when governments face a growing number of problems they cannot deal with alone, so citizens outside government have to fill that void. Citizen diplomacy is not intended to replace or compete with government diplomacy but to supplement it. And from Kettering’s perspective, this research gives the foundation a way to study dangerous conflicts, which are, unfortunately, an inescapable part of politics.

Russia
Beginning during the Cold War, the Dartmouth Conference, a joint venture with Russian partners, developed a new process for dealing with conflict that Hal Saunders called “Sustained Dialogue.” This dialogue fits between what governments do and people-to-people programs. When Dartmouth began, nuclear conflict was a real possibility, and Dartmouth opened a line of communication that took advantage of the perspective of citizens. As political scientist James C. Scott has pointed out in his writing, people don’t “see like a state” and can convey the concerns of the nation as a whole. That is, citizens who do not have the responsibilities of government have experiences from other walks of life to bring to bear on problems between countries.

The challenges Dartmouth has faced have been almost overwhelming. The possibilities for a nuclear holocaust—even if begun unintentionally—have been real. Kettering got involved because it was, in light of the enormity of the threat, simply the right thing to do. The foundation could never prove that this dialogue was or would be effective. However, it has been going on for 56 years, which is one indication of its value. For much of that time, the larger conference has been augmented by a Dartmouth task force on
regional conflicts. Most recently, new task forces have been created to foster cooperative ventures. The first promotes cooperation in medicine.

Recently, during the Ukraine crisis, when the two governments reduced their bilateral contacts, both sides agreed to reinstitute the citizen-to-citizen meetings of the large Dartmouth Conference. The conference has reconvened four times in less than two years. The next meeting has already been scheduled for early 2017.

Dartmouth has provided Kettering a unique opportunity to look at what citizens can do to reduce the possibilities for violent conflict. The dialogue involves digging behind official positions and stated interests to try to uncover what is really valuable in human, not just geopolitical, terms. Then, proceeding from that, the two sides try to imagine scenarios of reciprocal steps that the countries could take to relieve tensions and build confidence—while recognizing differences.

Conference participants on the US side have ranged from business leaders like David Rockefeller to journalists like Harrison Salisbury, from scientists like Paul Doty to small-town mayors like Scott Clemons and National Issues Forums leaders like Nancy Kranich. The Russians reciprocated in kind with cosmonauts, scientists, and scholars selected initially by the Russian Institute for US and Canadian Studies, which was led by Georgy Arbatov and later by a group headed by the former energy minister Yuri Shafranik.

China

In 1985, the foundation proposed, and the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping agreed, to begin nongovernmental dialogues to supplement the resumption of formal, government-to-government contact. The topics were contentious, such as an increasingly independent Taiwan, which China saw as belonging to them. Deng assigned the Institute of American Studies under Li Shenzhi the responsibility for working with Kettering. This year in Beijing we recognized more than 30 years of collaboration, which has included people like newspaper editor Katherine Fanning, former government official Robert McNamara, and community leader Anna Faith Jones, from the Boston Foundation.

In time, this exchange went beyond two-day conferences to take new forms. The Chinese Institute arranged meetings with others, like the China Institute for International Strategic Studies and the Central Party School of the Chinese Communist Party. The institute and Kettering also undertook joint studies that are described in a volume, *China-United States Sustained Dialogues: 1986-2001*, edited by Zhao Mei of the Institute of American Studies and Maxine Thomas, who leads our research in this area. In addition, Kettering added a program of fellowships to the exchange, which draws scholars from both the institute and Peking University.

Kettering doesn’t study China, per se, any more than it studies Russia or any other country. That research is best done by universities and policy institutes. The foundation concentrates on relationships between countries as a whole.

A full account of the roles our foundation has played in China is included in *The Destiny of Wealth*, written by Zi Zhongyun, a leading authority on the United States. The current exchange is built on earlier exchanges going back to 1972. The Chinese have put Kettering in the category of “old friends” and consider the relationship a special one.
Cuba

The relationship between the governments of the United States and Cuba has been disrupted for more than 50 years. Only recently has the relationship begun to change. But nearly 20 years ago, the foundation began a research exchange with a nongovernmental organization in Cuba, the Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation for Nature and Humanity. The exchange didn’t take the form of Sustained Dialogue; instead, it has been based on studying comparable problems, such as community responses to natural disasters and environmental damage on the Gulf Coast. Kettering also has provided fellowships in Dayton for staff from Núñez who want to become familiar with the foundation’s studies and its methods for doing the research.

The principal joint venture with Núñez is a biannual conference on “active citizenship,” a term the Cubans chose. The focus is not on the government-to-government relationship, but rather on similar problems in both societies, like the role of communities in sustainable economic development and active citizenship in urban renewal. The major papers from these conferences are published in books that are shared in the United States, Cuba, and other Latin American countries. Even though the conferences are a Cuban-US collaborative venture, participants have come from across the Americas, from Canada to Brazil. What began as a bilateral project has evolved into a multilateral one.

Cross-Pollination

Kettering has benefited greatly from the cross-pollination of its two lines of multinational research. As I mentioned, in its study of politics, Kettering has to acknowledge the human potential for violent conflict and have something to say about how it could be avoided, something that is compatible with democracy. Sustained Dialogue does that. Kettering has also found that, whether in citizen diplomacy or in the citizen deliberations of the National Issues Forums (and similar forums now in other countries), people are more likely to understand one another, avoid conflicts, and maybe even work together when they focus on what is deeply valuable to all human beings, the ends and means of life itself, and not just on facts, ideology, or interests.

What connects the research on Sustained Dialogue and deliberative practices is the same thing that connects all of the foundation’s research—it is the focus on citizens and what citizens can do to make a difference. This research is relevant today because so many Americans aren’t sure they can make a difference, even in an election season. Votes certainly count. But do they result in meaningful change in an age beset with what seem to be intractable problems—one generated here, some coming from far away? Many Americans aren’t sure.

The airwaves today are filled with promises to “empower” people. Yet the true power citizens have is the power they generate themselves by working with others to produce things that can benefit everyone. The democratic practices Kettering studies are ways this work can be done that will give citizens the power to shape their future. One of the writers in this issue of the Review, Nobel Prize-winner Elinor Ostrom, has shown that the products of the work of citizens are essential to making governments and large institutions more effective and responsive.
While the work of citizens might be accepted as essential in local matters and in communities, its value is questioned when the arena is national and international. Nonetheless, there are instances in which “just citizens” have had a global impact. Environmental initiatives are evidence of that. Diplomacy, on the other hand, has always been the province of governments. Admittedly, the people involved in what Hal Saunders called “supplemental diplomacy” haven’t generally been rank-and-file. And certainly the pseudo-populist argument that skilled, professional diplomats can be replaced by the man or woman on the street is absurd. Sustained Dialogue, however, doesn’t draw on professional expertise as much as recognize the importance of the things that human beings hold dear and the value of the distinctive perspective that citizens can bring to the table. It was Hal Saunders’ sensibilities as a human being, not just his long experience in government, that led to his insights about what citizens could contribute. Just as certainly, it was using citizens as a touchstone that has allowed the Kettering Foundation to draw rich lessons from both citizen diplomacy and citizen democracy.

Kettering board member and Dartmouth cofounder Norman Cousins spoke about the role of citizens in his remarks to Dartmouth XV in 1986:

Our meetings have come to occupy a very special place in the relationships between the United States and the Soviet Union. They have justified, I believe, the hopes of President Eisenhower in initiating the project. His deep conviction, as I think you know, was that private citizens who are well informed and who have the confidence of their governments may be able to play a useful role by probing for possible openings that, for one reason or another, do not always surface in the meetings of diplomats.

This does not mean that citizens should be expected to imitate or supercede the diplomats. Quite the contrary. Our role is to raise questions and seek answers that do not ordinarily come up in the official exchanges. We can think and speak in a larger context. We are not obligated to defend every action or decision that occurs on the official level. We can afford to think in terms of historical principle. We need not shrink from the moral issues that often underlay the political problems or confrontations. We cannot be expected to commit our governments but, just in the act of identifying such issues, we may be able to invoke the process by which public opinion has a creative and constructive effect on national policies.

Cousins makes a similar distinction to the one I made earlier: citizens can bring to diplomacy experiences outside of government. The foundation hopes that in the future its multinational research will show more about the unique contributions that citizens, in tandem with diplomats, can make. These contributions to relationships between countries are what Elinor Ostrom called “coproduction.”

I couldn’t end these “afterthoughts” without a word about my longtime colleague and
very good friend Bob Kingston, the editor of the Review since 1983. His loss leaves a vacuum at the Kettering Foundation. Noëlle McAfee, Bob’s coeditor, will honor Bob by putting her own stamp on the Review, keeping it alive and lively.

In many ways, Bob and I were the Odd Couple: He, the English gentleman, while I am from England’s Celtic rivals. Bob was northern urban; I was southern rural. He drank Scotch; I drank Bourbon. Yet we worked closely together for more than three decades, much like tennis partners in a doubles match. We constantly volleyed ideas around and learned from one another. We carried some of our volleying onto the pages of the Review, but most of what we had to say went into the continuing conversations that evolved into the foundation’s signature “learning exchanges,” the mode in which Kettering conducts its collaborative research. Those exchanges reach civic and educational organizations throughout the United States and around the world. Bob’s famous quotation, “I don’t know what I think until we have talked,” hangs in a frame over our meeting hall.

Bob was also Everybody’s Editor, a role so important that I have written the title as though it were an official position. Bob appointed himself to that position with his memos, which went to everyone on every subject. We smile when we remember them because they all began with a compliment like, “Your first sentence was great!” “But,” he would write, and then give you suggestions for improving everything that followed.

The Review shows Bob as a man with admirable aesthetic faculties and a distinctive style. That also came across during the holidays when Bob was the voice of Christmas Past and Present at our evening celebrations. I particularly appreciated him reading from a Celtic poet, Dylan Thomas. Bob’s wonderful English accent transported us to Christmas in Wales—making us forget that we were sitting in the middle of America’s Midwest. Bob loved not just poetry but also the theater. That was evident in the way he directed the televised presentation of what the foundation learned about the American citizenry as people deliberated over our country’s major issues in the National Issues Forums. The Public Voice program that presented Kettering’s findings consisted of scenes Bob carefully selected from hours of videotape showing civil conversations on difficult and emotionally charged subjects like abortion and race relations. In this election year, those programs are a useful reminder that it is possible to differ without being disagreeable.

Above and beyond anything else, Bob was a family man who dearly loved his wife, Carol, their children, and their grandchildren. He spoke of them with unmistakable pride and fondness. Carol’s drawings have long illustrated the pages of the Review, and I hope we will continue to see them there. And I hope the children and grandchildren will find their love for Bob mirrored in this tribute to such a caring human being.

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