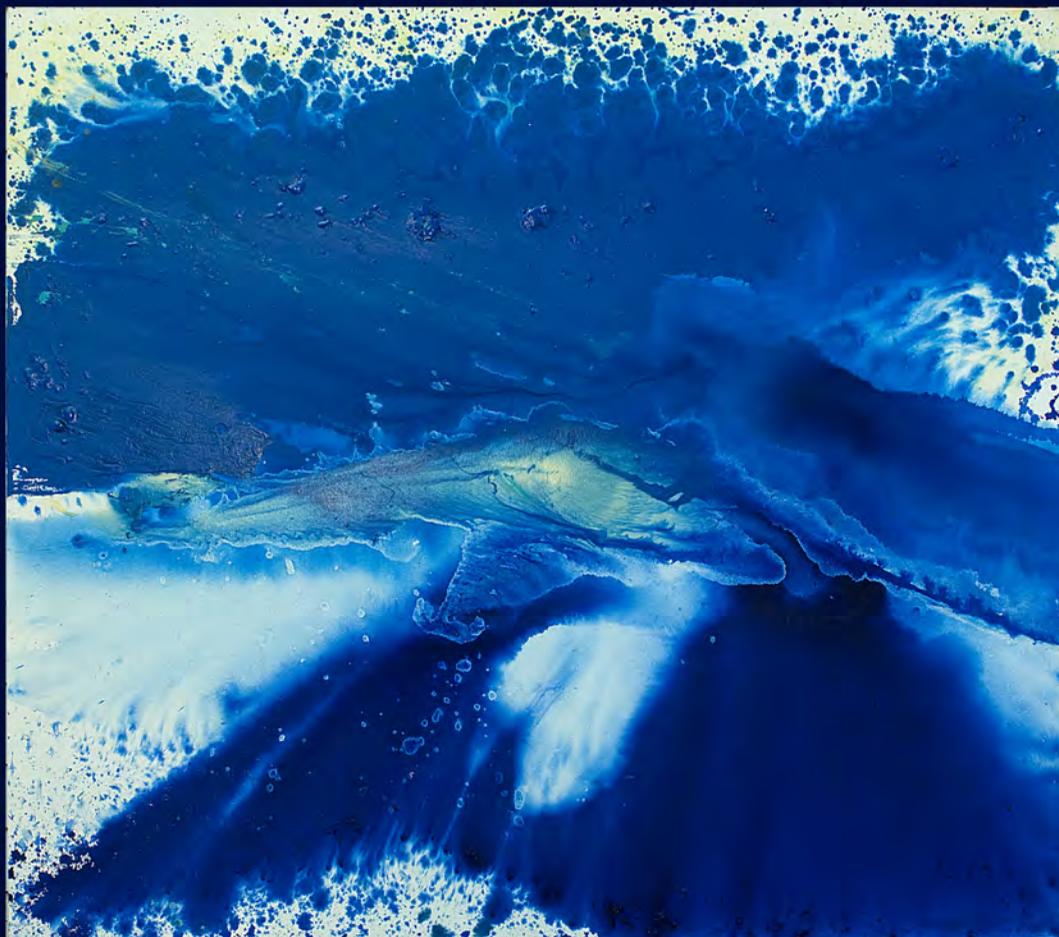


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KETTERING REVIEW



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

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KETTERING
REVIEW

Winter 2016

Our colleague for more than 30 years, Harold H. Saunders is known the world over for shepherding through some of the most important diplomatic events of the 20th century, including the Camp David peace accords and the release of American hostages in Iran. We at the *Kettering Review*, along with all our colleagues, know him also for his vision for the 21st century, which he called the “citizens’ century.” As the *New York Times* quoted him in his obituary, “An era has begun in which governments face more and more problems they cannot deal with. Citizens outside government increasingly have an opportunity to fill that void.”

After leaving government in the early 1980s, Hal Saunders led the Kettering Foundation’s multinational research, first with the ongoing US-Soviet meetings known as the Dartmouth Conferences, and then through the Sustained Dialogues with warring parties throughout the world. As a constant and steady voice in Kettering Foundation meetings and research sessions, and through his devoted leadership of the Sustained Dialogue Institute, he contributed deeply to Kettering’s work. “No one has more credibility,” David Mathews said in a recent tribute to him, “no one is more trusted and respected.”

Days before going to press with this retrospective issue of the *Kettering Review*, which culminates with one of Hal Saunders’ essays, we learned of his death. With a heavy heart, we dedicate this issue to his memory.

In Memoriam
Harold H. Saunders
1930-2016

Contents

	7	Editor's Letter
Robert J. Kingston	11	The Making of the Public, in School and Out
Daniel Yankelovich	18	How the Public Learns the Public's Business
V. O. Pechatnov	30	Civil Society in the United States and the Soviet Union
E. J. Dionne, Jr.	34	Why Americans Hate Politics: We're Drowning in Phony Issues
Václav Havel	40	Politics and the World Itself
Richard Harwood	48	Hope Unraveled
Iris Marion Young	61	De-centering Deliberative Democracy
Harold H. Saunders	72	A Citizen's Political Process
David Mathews	81	... afterthoughts

Editor's Letter

Over the past 60 years, the fortunes of democracy have been tumultuous. In the mid-20th century, dozens of countries in Asia and Africa won their independence from colonial rulers; but shortly thereafter the Cold War polarized the world for decades. Nixon's 1972 trip to China pointed to an end of a 25-year estrangement between East and West, but it took another decade for this to move forward. In 1980, Polish workers in the Gdansk Shipyard formed the labor union Solidarity, which opened up the possibility that authoritarian governments might meet their match in public dissent. Mikhail Gorbachev's appointment as leader of the Soviet Union in 1985 led to Perestroika and Glasnost and the hope for some kind of global rapprochement. And one day in November 1989, a German bureaucrat haplessly announced the opening of a passage in the Berlin Wall from East to West, which within days led to the utter destruction of that edifice that had divided the world in two. Since then and continuing through today, ancient enmities have flared even as new democratic governments form and falter.

For the past 30 years, *Kettering Review* has chronicled many of these journeys. Just as Carol Vollet's painting, *Approach Blue*, which we are delighted to feature on this issue's cover, points toward a bright spot in the midst of tumult, we have tried to identify those elements that are so central to democratic self-governance. Over the years we have taken as our point of departure the question, "what does it take for democracy to work?"—not just here in the United States but throughout the world. As a "Review" we have published pieces old and new, taking liberty to bring the words of Aristotle, Dewey, and Arendt to these pages, just as we have published new pieces by many of democracy's living philosophers and practitioners. We were publishing during the last years of the Cold War when many thought that if only communism would end then democracy would prevail. But in the past 25 years we've found that democracy raises more questions than it answers: Who are the people? How do they organize themselves as a public? What kind of power and knowledge can they have?

This issue of the *Review* comes on the heels of a year of reflection at the Kettering Foundation, a year of looking back at the work in the context of a rapidly changing and democratizing world. To mark this occasion, we are publishing here again those pieces that strike us as highpoints along this journey.

We begin with a piece by my coeditor, Robert J. Kingston, who in 1983 asked a question that remains with us today: how are citizens created, that is, how do

our schools teach the skills and self-understanding of democratic self-governance? As he wrote then, “We scarcely know what ‘citizenship’ means, let alone how to ‘inform’ it.”

In an interview conducted two years later, the public opinion researcher Daniel Yankelovich offered an answer to Kingston’s question that has since been at the heart of Kettering’s work. For people to become effective and powerful citizens, they need to deliberate together on matters of common concern. Most important, they must work through the costs and consequences of various courses of action, for that is how they develop the public will that must be at the base of sound public policy and public action.

In our Winter 1990 issue, just after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the *Review* took up the matter of civil society, which suddenly had taken center stage the world over as the space in which democracy takes place. For that issue, the Russian social theorist V. O. Pechatnov argued that the halls of state do not determine democracy’s fortunes; at best they respond to it. It is civil society that initiates and moves forward social change. As David Mathews noted in that issue, “The world is teaching us that politics is more than what politicians do.”

While some championed the end of the Cold War as the triumph of democracy and a vindication of Western-style representative liberal governments, two of our contributors in the early 1990s cautioned us against such complacency. The journalist E. J. Dionne, in a piece excerpted from his book *Why Americans Hate Politics*, argued that the political establishment offered up phony issues and false choices. We need instead to take seriously the real issues in our midst. The Czech leader Václav Havel, in a speech given to the World Economic Forum in 1992, noted that the tremors in the East were beginning to shake loose the West’s own former certainties. Modern societies cannot be “managed” with the tools of science and objectivity. What we need most, Havel said, is human insight, conscience, and courage.

In the first decade of the 21st century we found that there was widespread public longing for a different kind of politics. Rich Harwood reflected on his travels throughout the country talking with citizens about their public hopes and dreams. He found much disappointment and chagrin with broken covenants; but, he wrote, “Amid the sounds of retreat, one can hear the makings of what it will take for people to step forward.” Iris Young, who passed away prematurely between

giving us her contribution and its publication, answered a long-standing question about how deliberative forums that occur at the very local level could have any impact on national policy. These should be seen, she argued, as part of a larger democratic process “between tens of millions of strangers in multiple locales over a period of months or years.” Coupled with Daniel Yankelovich’s insight that only a deliberative public can make the tough choices for democracy to work, Young’s idea of a deliberative and de-centered politics provides a powerful idea for how democratic politics can work well in large modern societies.

This retrospective collection ends with the late Harold Saunders’ conception of citizens’ roles multinationally. Calling the 21st century the “citizens’ century,” Saunders points to the critical role citizens have in building relationships globally. Recalling Yankelovich’s emphasis on public deliberation on hard choices and the centrality of public will, he writes, “Focusing on citizens interacting in concert with one another—human beings in relationship” allows us to enlarge our perspective on politics; and echoing Havel, this will include “whole human beings in whole bodies politics.”

In closing out this retrospective issue, David Mathews asks, how will we manifest this power of public politics? The answer will depend upon where you, dear readers, take us forward.

Noëlle McAfee

The kind of talk that needs to go on in a genuinely democratic marketplace is talk that leads us to an awareness of our membership in larger communities, that exposes invisible connections, invisible links that only talk reveals, so that we begin to understand that we necessarily are engaged in a form of membership in a larger association that makes us citizens whether we really like it or not.

A lot of Americans say, "Oh, I'm not interested in politics." Maybe not, but politics is interested in them. Power touches them, affects them, and the person who says "it doesn't matter to me" is either a hypocrite or someone who is simply ignorant of the politics connections in which he or she is really involved – involved simply by virtue of breathing, living, drinking water, sending kids to school, paying taxes.

— Benjamin Barber, Fall 1988

The Making of the Public, in School and Out

by Robert J. Kingston

*The education of
consenting citizens
is not a matter of a
new textbook here,
a syllabus there: it
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knowledge of the way
in which this society
manages itself.*

Those of us who cherish democracy cherish also its indispensable corequisite, an informed citizenry. And in all of our educational enterprises we tend (perhaps too glibly) to quote Jefferson: I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion.

Easy for him to say! It was easy, to begin with, for Aristotle, whose democracy, after all, was a mere city-state governed by an oligarchy of consenting adults. And it was easy, still, in colonial America, where Washington spoke freely to Jefferson . . . and Jefferson spoke freely to the spirit of pure reason! But in these days, one citizen does not always speak readily to the next; and perhaps neither speaks the same language as a third. Few of them, probably, share a common background with Mr. Reagan or with Mr. Regan; they understand little, probably, of the intellectual and social contexts in which Carl Rowan or George Will frame dialogues; and they may be totally out of sympathy with the interests of both Lane Kirkland and the editors of the *New York Times*. We scarcely know what “citizenship” means, let alone how to “inform” it.

More and more, it seems to me, the word *citizen* is drained of meaning; or it is crammed with a multiplicity of meanings. We use it as though it meant only one thing, but it means many things—or if it does mean only one thing, then ultimately it is just that there is vested in

each of us the right to vote for those who frame our laws and execute them at the highest levels.

Less and less do citizens relate to their government, to those who govern. They shape society and make rules for it in their neighbor-

We scarcely know what “citizenship” means, let alone how to “inform” it.

hood groups and in ethnic groups, where they understand and can intervene in the rules of the game. They do so in unions and in lobbies and in all kinds of special agglomerations of special interests. But they play no part in the formulation and administration of measures for the management of their society as a whole. Relatively few citizens in the complex, self-governing democracy of today understand the processes of policy formulation. Our complex modern democracy is vastly different from anything imagined by the Greeks, or by Jefferson; and if there is one task that is worth undertaking, it is surely that of “building bridges across the organized complexity” of contemporary American society.

Designed for educated oligarchs of a city-state, democracy continually seeks new instruments as the self-governed society grows out of all proportion large and complex. We try, continually, representative methods, new federalist approaches; but what we might more earnestly search for is a pattern of citizen education that promotes

an intelligible relationship between the life of the citizen and the formulation of policies that govern that life. When legislators become victims of single-issue politics or servants of special interests or drafters more often of programs than of laws—then the pattern of participatory government is surely awry. At that point, an interest in the self-governing state ought to become in fact an interest in citizen education.

But this suggests a somewhat different educational task and a larger definition of citizen education than generally comes to mind in our schools. It evokes the notion of an education that might help ameliorate some problems that are peculiarly intractable to the skills of government practitioners. These problems include the roles and relationships between professionals and the people in a society that has become more “democratic” even as it has grown unmanageable in size and complexity. They include the problem of a society whose established institutions are not always able to deliver necessary services, and whose government can no longer honestly try to meet every



human need. And they include problems of understanding how policy can be formulated and executed, by or on behalf of citizens, in a society whose own fragmentation calls into question the very idea of a “popular will.”

For such a society education cannot be an old-fashioned “citizenship education,” generally put. Some new kind of education, for some new kinds of citizens, engaged in some new tasks of social management, seems essential. A task for educators, then—a serious task, in the public interest—is not to promulgate a set of platitudes upon citizenship but to unravel the mystery of policy formulation in the modern democracy. And this in turn will infer a sharpened social purpose in the school and the recovery of “civility” as an informing theme. And it will infer, beyond the school, a need for new vehicles for the growth of public judgment, instruments of public policy education more consistently available than the election campaign and the call for the vote.

Since Jefferson—whose “Bill for the More General Diffusion of Human Knowledge” was written only two years after his Declaration of Independence, and with scarcely less conviction—no educator has doubted the importance of educating citizens for democracy. That is the original, continuing, and underlying function of the nation’s schools. Indeed the real task of education—of formal schooling—may always have been the training of citizens in the service of their state, either secular or heavenly; and if the purpose of general education, fundamentally, is the training of democratic citizens who must exercise their own judgments in the management

of society, then the overall curriculum must be challenged to provide such training.

The liberal arts, designed as long ago as democracy itself, have always been assumed to represent the intellectual disciplines and the bodies of knowledge that best train and stock



the free mind for the tasks of democratic leadership. In our modern democracy, education for leadership is necessarily universal—for all its citizens, at least in theory, rule themselves. Yet today, no central educational philosophy—no *paideia*—guides their schooling. No quadrivium, no trivium, measures the means and the success of our educational efforts.

The public school may always have been a target of popular complaint, since any system designed to educate everybody is bound to disappoint a good many. Charged with doing all things for all children—at least all the things that parents either can’t do or won’t do themselves—the schools have inevitably sometimes appeared a natural whipping boy. By the end of the 1950s, Americans were wondering “why Johnny can’t read”; after Sputnik, they were wondering why he couldn’t add—or explain

the theory of relativity. By the 1970s, “Johnny’s” Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores were undeniably going down; he seemed to spend more and more of his time either assaulting his teachers or dealing in drugs; and he was either being bused or not bused—both of which courses inevitably upset somebody. Today, articulate

Today, no central educational philosophy—no *paideia*—guides their schooling. No quadrivium, no trivium, measures the means and the success of our educational efforts.

columnists are even beginning to wonder if we are still producing young people capable of defending our interests in this highly technical and very competitive world.

In many quarters, the public school hasn’t retained much credibility as an educational institution at all. But if there is a general sense that something is wrong with the public schools, there’s no consensus about what precisely it is. The school presents very practical problems for the public and for educational leaders—but the agendas of these two groups diverge sharply. Polls reportedly show discipline, drugs, and the curriculum at the top of parents’ concerns, while school boards have been most concerned with falling enrollment, with a diminishing tax base by which to finance education, and with layoffs and the increased unionizing of staff.

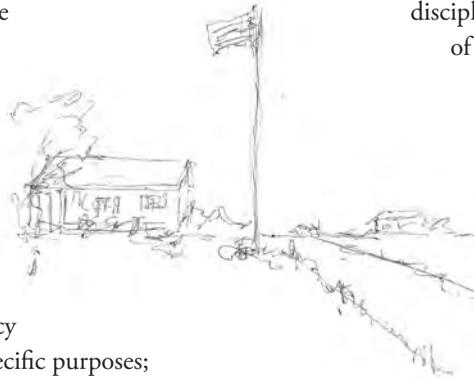
Of course, all of these problems are real, but if we fail to recognize the importance of any of them, or if we become preoccupied with one to the exclusion of another, it may be because we have not together first determined what are the distinctive and fundamental responsibilities of the school in preparing youngsters for their role in our complex and changing democracy today.

Some of the more striking movements forward in serious education have occurred when there was a clear societal purpose to be addressed: when Harvard was established (with public money) to ensure that the right kind of moral leaders could be produced for a still delicate and religious colony; when Horace Mann’s ideas were first broadly accepted as a necessary means towards the efficient functioning of small, business-based communities; when Morrill’s land-grant institutions were accepted as a way to provide advanced practical knowledge to an increasing number of young workers. As clearly as any Socratic academy or English public school, each of these institutions was designed to address a generally accepted *public* purpose. In each instance, the task of education was a social task, a specific social task. And the public schools have perhaps never been better received than when, just a few generations back, they were seen as the special means of access, of acculturation, for thousands of immigrants in a new found land.

Today we need to decide afresh what our schools are meant to do, where they are succeeding and where falling short, and what curriculum changes are needed if the next generation is to cope with the management of *this* democracy.

Perhaps equally important, we need to determine how much of children's training should come from the school alone. If the socializing function of the old "common school" is still appropriate, we need to consider afresh whether the public school or other institutions can still carry it out, because other aspects of society—at one time the church and the family, lately television and peer groups—have influenced the real learning of young people at least as profoundly as have the schools.

There's a human tendency to create institutions for specific purposes; then a generation or so later to treat those institutions as though they were immutable, maintaining their functions even though the circumstances that led to their creation may no longer prevail. Thus institutions become drifting, purposeless, not because there is no longer a place for them but because we are reluctant to redefine their purposes. So it may be with schools: first purposes grow less urgent; new missions are admitted for ephemeral social or political convenience; newly created and possibly complementary institutions are ignored. And when we begin to perceive a deficiency in the education or training of our children, growing up in a world whose demands are constantly changing, some of us take refuge in old prejudices (some of us even open new institutions to preserve old prejudices), simply because we can't quite see how the existing educating institutions may be made relevant again.



At least some of the questions about the usefulness of the public school or the value of the private school might fall away if we were to begin to look for some consensus in our own society on the purposes of schooling itself.

Questions of governance, questions of discipline—even urgent questions of financing, as the education dollar shrinks in this time of nationally falling expectations—might come into sharper focus if we were to reassess the place of the school in the polity and come to understand the "public-making" purposes of education in a democracy.

The school, as an educating and socializing institution, influences opportunity, talent, ideals—indeed character; but historically schools have been seen as sharing that influence with a range of other institutions. Over the past three or four decades, we have tended to assign more and more of society's training tasks to the school, and we have witnessed a diminution of trust and confidence in the church, the family, and the press as educators. Yet other educative and socializing influences remain: television is preeminent; established clubs and associations, as well as ephemeral subculture organizations, order ideas among peers; business and industry offer more teaching than the public purse could ever support. Education exists in their context, and we make a mistake as a society if we neglect them. Their educating functions

may be complementary to the schools; and their influence at least calls for some examination of the kinds of education available, in and out of academic institutions, for the grown-up citizens of this latter-day democracy.

Today we need to decide afresh what our schools are meant to do.

The education of consenting citizens is not a matter of a new textbook here, a syllabus there: it requires an intricate knowledge of the way in which this society manages itself. At issue is not the theoretical understanding of American history and American government but a question of civic literacy: the ability to identify the point at which self-interest merges into common interest, the private into the public, and to recognize the relationships between apparently distinct and separate legislative and political issues. The goals of citizen education are both academic and social; we seek educated individuals so that we might live in a democratic society. And therefore our interest must be in enhancing the ability of average citizens to deal effectively with the host of public issues by which their lives are defined and their horizons dimmed or enlarged.

At the simplest level, “citizen education” has always seemed to suggest just a schooling that helps to develop commitment to the values of our American political tradition. But the needs are lifelong and manifold. Conflicts threaten national political integration anew each generation;

the management of government and the formulation of policies are tasks coterminous only with each individual citizen’s life. That is the nature of democratic citizenship.

The control of specific pathologies, of particular crises or social abuses calls for particular skills that will not be found—indeed need not be found—in every individual. But the clarification of specific and broadly troublesome problems of governance, the development and adoption of strategies to insure representative policymaking, and the design of mechanisms that enhance understanding of the implications of public policy—indeed all instruments that enable particular parts to be played more effectively in democratic society are instruments of citizen education, broadly construed. Citizens need a range of learning for multifarious roles; and citizenship education for a better-managed, self-governing democracy should ask first who needs education, then what kinds of education will prove best. And these questions may need to be asked in the teeth of a sometimes naive



egalitarianism that is an American phenomenon as apparent and debilitating today as it was when first noted by Tocqueville.

Already half a century has passed since Walter Lippmann pointed out that the effective management of modern society would come to devolve more and more upon carefully trained experts; today, increasingly, his warning appears to have been prophetic. Despite the omnipresence of informing media with messages in black and white and living color, by and large the American public is hard put to stay afloat in a sea of information; it remains *uninformed*, in Jefferson's sense. Because of the ease of modern communication, as well as the very style of the most influential communication media, we tend to mistake star quality for leadership, news value for significance, and technical expertise for understanding. There is, often as not, little genuine understanding of the likely human outcomes of courses of action upon which government embarks; choices presented are seldom related to values that have been popularly examined or purposes that have been espoused consciously and with integrity. More adequate models of communicating, of educating in public policy, are required.

Public educators who are concerned with citizen education have a twofold task: they must forever seek to enhance citizens' understanding of the nature of their citizenship, and they must regularly try to enlarge citizens' knowledge of the issues that emerge as critical in their lives. To put it another way, citizen education entails both "civics" and "issue education." Both are

important, but the two are very different, and at the adult level the latter is a particularly serious responsibility.

Early or late in their lives, all of our citizens must learn how our society is ordered and how, in this modern democracy, the peculiar relationship between them and their government determines the character of national life. Churches, service clubs, community groups, unions, voter-education organizations, business councils, citizen-action movements, public interest groups, and the public media are educating institutions; and serious educators can accept the responsibility for identifying targets among them as places where citizens can be reached most effectively and secure a considerably enlarged knowledge of the ways in which policy is developed.

Not all—indeed not many—of the citizens in modern democracy will engage in contemplative and scholarly research; few will want to explore the meaning for contemporary America of those concepts and that language on which we believe our society to be built. The meaning today, for example, of "justice" or "equality" or "property" remains interesting only for some philosophers and important only for some readers. But for *every* citizen it is important—and it might be interesting—to come to understand what citizenship affords and how citizens may effectively join in the formulation of the policies by which the republic is governed.

Robert J. Kingston is coeditor of the Kettering Review and a senior associate of the Kettering Foundation. This essay first appeared in the Review's Winter 1983 issue.

How the Public Learns the Public's Business

by Daniel Yankelovich

For public judgment, as distinct from public or mass opinion, to prevail, it is necessary that an issue catch people's attention, that they be exposed to the arguments for and against various positions, and that they think deeply enough about the issue to accept the consequences of their own beliefs.

Kettering Review: *How did you get interested in the problem of public learning? Was it a direct step from your academic work?*

Yankelovich: It wasn't a direct step. I began as a philosophy major in undergraduate school and continued to study philosophy in graduate school. I was especially interested in certain lines of thought in epistemology, which deals with what we know and how we know it. I didn't set out with the problem of public learning; but a number of years ago I suddenly realized that we had no means to distinguish between the two concepts of public opinion and public judgment. I saw that the lack of that distinction was causing a lot of practical mischief.

KR: *Such as?*

Y: We know other governments are very interested in American foreign affairs, particularly as to how this might affect their own policies. But public opinion polls can mislead them. For example, when polls ask, "Would you come to the aid of Europe if it were invaded?" and the majority of Americans answer, "No way," this is terribly misleading and fateful in terms of positions allied governments might take.

To think that what the public thinks is what is measured by the polls is totally superficial and misleading. Public opinion plays a role in America that other countries don't understand. And I don't think our own public policy elite understands it. For most of them, the American public is another country. In fact, they might know other countries better than they know their own! I really entered the problem of public learning through a growing concern about the misjudgments that foreign leaders and our own foreign policy thinkers were constantly

making by misreading public opinion polls, by interpreting them too literally.

KR: *So you decided to try to decode the judgment underlying the polls?*

Y: I remember one day saying to myself, in a grumbling way, that somebody should work on this problem. Then it occurred to me that I was the logical person to do it.

KR: *What is the distinction between public judgment and public opinion?*

Y: Public judgment contrasts with public opinion in several important respects. Public opinion has come to mean what public opinion polls measure: the vagaries of the public viewpoint at a moment in time, however vague, confused, ill informed, and clouded with emotion it may be. Public judgment, on the other hand, represents the public's viewpoint after all elements of mere opinion have been distilled from it. Public judgment reflects the public's viewpoint once people have had an opportunity to confront an issue seriously and over an extended period of time. For public judgment, as distinct from public or mass opinion, to prevail, it is necessary that an issue catch people's attention, that they be exposed to the arguments for and against various positions, and that they think deeply enough about the issue to accept the consequences of their own beliefs.

Typically, this process of converting mass opinion into public judgment takes months, if not years, and often involves strenuous debate and perhaps several distinct changes in outlook. It is curious that we do not have adequate semantics to describe this distinction, which is so vital to the functioning of a modern democracy.



In the public policy tracking I have done over several decades, issues of public importance always seem to go through three phases. The first is when the public becomes aware of a problem, the phase of consciousness-raising, if you will. The second is the time of “working through.” And the third is that of political compromise, when some resolution is hammered out. American culture is terrific at consciousness-raising. If anything, we overdo it. The media is good at beating the drums and getting everybody excited. Then they go on to the next issue as though that were the end of the job, leaving everybody in a state of high anxiety and unenlightenment. In a democracy that is a disaster; it maximizes public awareness and public ignorance at the same time.

To be excited about an issue but fail to think it through makes for the worst kind of citizen. A state of moral frenzy is not public judgment.

KR: *The “working through” phase seems to be the most complicated one. What do we know about it?*

Y: You're right, it is complicated. I would say that the process of arriving at public judgment is defined by five characteristics.

First, public judgment on issues such as nuclear arms and inflation cannot be assumed

Public opinion polls measure the vagaries of the public viewpoint at a moment in time, however vague, confused, ill informed, and clouded with emotion it may be.

to preexist. What preexists is merely mass opinion. Public judgment must emerge as the end product of a long process of confrontation that proceeds on both a cognitive and emotional level. This process is not well understood. My associates and I at the Public Agenda Foundation and in my firm, Yankelovich, Skelly and White, have studied it for a number of years. We have learned that it has many distinctive characteristics and follows a set of lawful principles. Note that by public, I do not mean the general public alone, but any group of citizens or leaders that constitute themselves as a public.

Second, the process of judging is not a mere ingestion of facts, information, and analysis. In addition, it requires immersion in what Hannah Arendt called "representative thinking," that is, thinking that displays the widest possible variety of viewpoints representative of differing perspectives.

Third, as the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas has noted, this clash of divergent standpoints must be made under conditions free from domination and distortion. That is, the process must proceed in a setting of impartiality and credibility, where no one point of view carries special weight because of coercion, wealth, media bias (which is an important source of distortion these days), or other factors extraneous to the act of forming judgments.

Fourth, the process of judging must proceed by way of a dialogue that is so active and effective and highly charged that it leaves none of the participants untouched or unchanged. At the conclusion of such a dialogue no participant is quite the same person he or she was before the dialogue began. This condition presupposes that people will leave themselves sufficiently open to hear other viewpoints as well as to present their own viewpoint.

Fifth, for such a process of judging to take place, the stage must be set by preparatory analysis that separates the components of fact from the components of values, and that formulates alternative choices around which public judgment may coalesce. Where there are gross contradictions on questions of fact, the range and nature of these differences must be defined, and factual resolution must be sought.

In the course of seeking resolution, it will often be discovered that many disagreements which appear on the surface to be disagreements of fact turn out on closer inspection to mask disagreement in moral judgment and ideology, disguised as factual disparities. What we need to do, then, is unmask the core of moral values that hides itself in the guise of seemingly technical disagreement among experts and researchers.

KR: *What makes it so difficult for us to “work through” to a common judgment on some issues?*

Y: We are trying to cope with great social complexities—such as an escalating arms race—within the narrow and rigid framework of a way of thinking, a philosophy born in another era and in circumstances that no longer apply.

KR: *What do you mean by a philosophy in this context?*

Y: Not so much formal systems or the philosophical schools as they are taught in the universities. I mean more like what the Germans call *Weltanschauung*. Philosophy in this sense is a world view, the general conception we have of reality. My worry is that our prevailing social philosophy is inadequate for the problems we face.

KR: *How would you describe our prevailing social philosophy?*

Y: The dominant philosophy held by the experts on whom we most depend—economists, defense analysts, bankers, industrialists, journalists, government officials—can best be described as a “missiles-and-money” sense of reality. This philosophy assumes that what really counts in this world are military power and economic realities, and all the rest is sentimental stuff. It has overly constricted the domain of what is real and transformed the large political and moral dilemmas of our time into narrow technical questions that fit the experts’ own specialized expertise. This process of *technicalizing* political issues renders them inaccessible to public understanding and judgment because the public exists in the very domain of reality that is excluded. To narrow issues artificially is

to exclude the bulk of the citizenry from the policy-shaping process.

KR: *Is this a cynical ploy on the part of leaders to keep people in their place?*

Y: In some instances it is done to protect a special interest. But in most cases it is inadvertent, the result of a mentality that is formed more or less naturally as a result of the kind of education our leaders get. Sad to say, our most prestigious institutions of higher education that train our elites impart to them a distrust of the general public—the masses, the petite bourgeoisie, the faceless electorate, and so forth. Or, if not an active distrust, at least an astonishing remoteness—as if the well-educated experts were a class apart, sharing a rarified culture and



a pool of knowledge the uninitiated could not possibly hope to comprehend. This mentality is so much a part of our contemporary *zeitgeist* that it is difficult for us to realize how very arbitrary and one-sided it is.

KR: *Could you give an illuminating example of this zeitgeist?*

Y: Let me illustrate with the gravest problem that hangs over our lives: the nuclear arms race and the threat of nuclear war. Currently, the

To be excited about an issue but fail to think it through makes for the worst kind of citizen.

official United States position is to reject a nuclear freeze on the grounds that a freeze would deprive the Soviets of any incentive to negotiate a reduction in nuclear arms. This assumption overlooks any economic incentive the Soviets might have; it overlooks any survival incentive, or any political or human incentives—the desire for peace, the desire to avoid destruction, the desire to use resources for other purposes. It assumes that the Soviets are uniformly one-dimensional in their thinking and that their only reality is the balance of missiles. The Soviets, for their part, are equally narrow in their thinking. So we have this incredibly dangerous standoff in which the fate of hundreds of millions of people is being played with by a handful of “experts” and leaders on both sides of the Iron Curtain who have constricted their conception of reality to the narrowest possible range. They see nuclear war as a game.

But what about other aspects of reality? What about the reality of mutual distrust—the misunderstanding and fear that exists between the two superpowers? Almost everything Americans

have done since the U-2 incident and the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 has aroused Soviet mistrust, suspicion, anger, resentment, defensiveness, and competitiveness. Almost everything the Soviets have done since erecting the wall that divides Berlin has had the same effect in the United States. If our definition of reality was sufficiently broad to embrace mistrust as well as missiles, we would make a greater effort to learn the essential facts about the nature of mistrust.

One such fact is that you cannot turn it on and off as if it were a water faucet, to suit the convenience of national policy. What happens is that a deep residue of mistrust is left after every shift in policy, so that when mistrust returns the next time it is intensified and powerfully reinforced.

A second fact about mistrust is that it distorts reality, especially when the object of mistrust is a nation or other large group. In extreme forms, the object of mistrust is robbed of human characteristics. We no longer see the mistrusted nation as people like you and me, struggling with the same problems and sharing the same fate. Instead, we place them in some abstract category—the Communists, the enemy, the Jews—which permits us to suspend the taboo against destroying our own kind. Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson calls this process “pseudospeciation”—the treatment of another group of people as if they were another species. In a world swept up in a nuclear arms race nothing could pose a greater danger to world survival than our obliviousness to the prevalence of these primitive psychological mechanisms to which every nation seems as prone today as in prehistoric times.

A moment’s reflection quickly shows that this dangerous buildup of mutual mistrust is

as much a reality as missiles and power politics. But our policymakers and arms control experts are so encased within their constricted sense of reality that they pay scant heed to the causes of the mistrust and how these can be reduced.

KR: *You make your point with a measure of eloquence. One gets the chilling impression from your remarks that there has been some massive institutional failure to assess our problems in a realistic way. Where did our social philosophy get off the track?*

Y: The whole Anglo-American tradition in philosophy is off in a special corner. I spent most of my academic years in that corner. When I studied philosophy at Harvard the department was dominated by people with a very strong logical orientation. Eventually I decided it was a dead end for me. Still, positivism remains the dominant philosophy in American life.

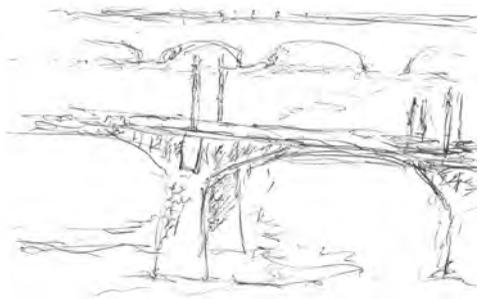
KR: *It seems a great irony that in this most democratic of societies our major institutions are affected by intellectual methodologies and attitudes whose consequences lead in almost the opposite direction.*

Y: In a culture like ours we need subcultures like the academic community. Business; for example, is organized hierarchically. We have many baronies within our democracy. Many of them are as autocratic as any medieval barony. The legal profession is perfectly comfortable with the adversarial method, even though there is widespread opinion that it favors the perpetrators of crime rather than the victims. There are many subcultures. I don't see anything wrong with that. There are still large chunks of the cultural mainstream that have a unity and inner cohesion.

The relationship between a subculture and the mainstream is complex, but they mutually nourish one another. We all belong to a number of subcultures at the same time. This pluralism; in fact, gives the American mainstream its dynamism and creativity. And ours is a very dynamic and creative society.

KR: *But is it cohesive?*

Y: I think it is. Very cohesive in fact. Precisely because of its great ethnic and geographic diversity, American society has overemphasized its coherence around a handful of social values which have extraordinary power and breadth. Take one of the central ones—the notion of equal opportunity. Everyone has a chance but not everyone will succeed. Those who succeed are not necessarily those who are richer or smarter. We do not have a meritocracy in that sense. The myth is that of effort. In making this effort you can fail or succeed because there is a large measure of luck involved. There are social critics who want to reform society because luck plays such a large role in it. I think that is a profound misreading of the American value system. Americans cherish the system precisely because there is so much luck in it. You never



know. That is why people don't want punitive income taxes for the rich. You never know. Someday you might be rich. This runs very deep in the ethos. So I think the basic social and political values of American society have an inner coherence, even though we don't all think the same way. The coherence comes not from everyone thinking the same way but from diverse thinking being organized around a handful of core values.

KR: *Which are nourished by the subcultures?*

Y: In one sense that is correct. But when you talk about public *judgment* you are talking about judgment on specific issues at specific times. A good current example is entitlements, benefits like Social Security and Medicare. We know we can't afford to expand these benefits, yet the need exists. There is a consensus in America that we have a very good system for acquiring private goods but not public goods. We agree that the market system works and that state-controlled economies of the socialist type don't work. Even many socialists see that.



We have some questions about the boundaries of the market system but there is general agreement about the system itself. But when we come to public goods like health care, retirement benefits, and defense, we come into an arena of controversy and there is widespread concern that we haven't been going about it in the right way. Judgments on issues like these can't come from the subcultures. You have to step out of the subculture to deal with them.

KR: *Does this call for institutional renewal on a large scale?*

Y: Sure they could "renew." But they would have to be different. They would have to see their role differently and organize themselves differently. They would have to develop a different mind-set. If you talk to a professor about public education, he either turns his nose up or if he engages in it at all he lectures his audience with the intention of raising their level of information a little closer to his own. That is not "working through." It's exactly the same situation with the media. They are involved in entertainment and in news. Public education is neither. The essence of news is not to repeat yourselves. Almost by definition! In the news business, you don't harp away at the same thing—because then it is no longer news. The very virtues of news coverage work against public education. The media have a fetish for information, a "these poor saps don't even know where Nicaragua is" mentality. When I do surveys and report them to journalists, it's laughable. You'd be amused if you sat in an audience with journalists. I can give a presentation that brings wonderful data and insights to bear on a given subject and they couldn't care less.

KR: *There are some very perceptive and analytic journalists on the scene. Don't the best of them meet your criteria?*

Y: Even when they are giving more than information, they still think they are giving

Collective judgment comes from dialogue.

only information. Even the most gifted journalists are perceived as just being smart. They have a lot of information and are, in addition, smart. They are not perceived as doing something different.

KR: *Don't they help shape public judgment?*

Y: They are giving points of view and that is the first step. But in order to develop judgment the points of view must generate real dialogue. Collective judgment comes from dialogue. I see that happening now in a very interesting way. There is a debate going on among thought leaders about industrial policy. It's a real debate because there are a number of points of view. You have conservatives who don't like the idea and think that market forces can do whatever needs to be done. You have liberals who want to use the resources of government to help support certain industries in a selective way. You have economists who believe that the traditional economic theories of fiscal and monetary policy are all that is required. So we have a three-way debate in which each participant accuses the others of gross naiveté. Conservatives accuse liberals of trying to pick winners and losers and plan the economy. And so on, back and forth.

In the give-and-take each side is refining its point of view. The debate goes on at two levels. In the written statements of the protagonists there is a sharp, vitriolic tone. The layman wonders how they can ever get together, or how a layman can possibly understand such complicated issues. But just below that level one can detect a core of agreement emerging because the different parties are influencing one another. Now the interesting question is: how do you take that debate, which is very important to the general public, and move it onto the public's agenda?

This debate suggests that we are doing a pretty good job at reaching some agreement among elites. There is in the United States an invisible university. It is enormous. The faculty of that invisible university consists of consultants, institutes of various sorts, and foundations. They hold innumerable meetings and discussion is going on all the time. I probably speak at one such meeting a week. Part of what is missing in all of our institutions is that we don't have a good mechanism for translating what goes on in the invisible university for the general public. What I try to emphasize is that in the "working through" process we need choices. Alternatives have to be spelled out.

KR: *What do you consider particularly good examples of the "working through" process?*

Y: One of my favorite examples is when increasingly in the 1970s women said to their husbands: "I think I'll go out and get a job dear, which means you are going to have to do more work around the house." It takes 15 seconds to impart that information. It may take *months* to work it through! The classic example is "work-

ing through” death. The information content is quickly imparted: a loved one is going to die. But it may take years to “work through” the cycles of grief, anger, depression, and lack of realism before we can put our lives back together.

The reason I like the grief reaction example is because it makes clear that there are distinct steps in the process of coming to terms with an issue. A couple of years ago I was at a conference in Sweden on the future of the welfare state. It was a particularly grim affair. At one point I turned to a friend and said: “I don’t understand what is going on here. Why are these people so gloomy?” He told me they were in a state of mourning. These were people who had spent their lives fighting for public housing, health care, and the like and they were now facing the reality that they might have been on the wrong course. Before they could begin to face alter-

It is part and parcel of the positivism and parochialism of our institutions that they fail to understand the most elementary and fundamental aspects of our democratic society.

natives, they had to go through this period of grief reaction.

I am always startled after all these years to realize that the concepts of public judgment and “working through,” organized around choices and alternatives, are so unfamiliar and new to

so many people. You would think them self-evident in a democracy, that someone who called attention to them would be accused of having a grip on the obvious, of platitudinous thinking. The fact that they are not platitudes tells us something about the state of our major institutions, about the media, about the universities, and about our political process. This is a failure of understanding, an intellectual failure. It is part and parcel of the positivism and parochialism of our institutions that they fail to understand the most elementary and fundamental aspects of our democratic society.

KR: *Are you saying anything more than that all institutions have a social responsibility; or, in your words, they have some responsibility in getting major issues on the public’s agenda and in helping the public think them through?*

Y: I would say even more narrowly that academic disciplines like the social sciences have an intellectual obligation to understand their subject matter, which is the structure of society, and to impart that information to their students. But they have failed to do this. It isn’t a failure of intelligence *per se*, but due rather to the values of the subculture—in this instance, the subculture to which the professoriat belongs. The values of the subculture have been a seduction. The aping of scientific concepts, epistemologies, and language has led disciplines like sociology and political science down the garden path for years. The notion that an academic discipline is responsible only to its peers has been a seduction. I meet young faculty members in sociology departments who almost weep in frustration because if they do interesting and important work it will count against them for tenure. They

have to play a game. I think that is a scandal. And we are not even asking the universities to do something outside their own mandate. Oddly enough, while there has been plenty of criticism of the press, the medical profession,

Virtually every important domestic change in the United States in recent years has been bottom up, from the public, not the leadership.

and secondary schools, the universities have gotten off lightly.

KR: *They were criticized in the 1960s.*

Y: But when the dust settled it was business-as-usual. The point I am stressing is the obligation of those in positions of power to balance the requirements of their particular subculture with the requirements of the larger culture. That balance has been badly skewed for a variety of reasons—ideology, self-congratulation, isolation, etc.

KR: *We've talked a lot about the failure of institutions. What must they do then? Or perhaps we need new institutions to do the job?*

Y: It is sobering to think that there is no institution in America whose imperative is to engage in this “working through” process. The political system is the closest. But it is too gross and more concerned with interests. Maybe one reason the presidency is so powerful is because

it is the only institution that is concerned with the common interest. It accomplishes the “working through” process in a quite significant way. A “bully pulpit” is one way to lead people through. It took a Richard Nixon to change our ways of thinking about Communist China. Even so, when it comes to serious issues that concern the public as a whole, we don't have any institution whose specific mandate enables it to mobilize its energies to focus on those problems.

KR: *Can the invisible universities serve this function?*

Y: The invisible university is an informal way of doing that job for elites, but not for the general public. Let me give you a striking example of where the process breaks down. The invisible university has been at work on the budget deficit over the past year. There have been innumerable meetings and discussions and it gets into some pretty arcane economics. The relation between the Third World debt, international exchange rates, and variable-rate mortgages is not the most self-evident thing in the world. So the invisible university has brought the elites of both liberal and conservative persuasions to agree that something ought to be done about the deficit. But they haven't gotten the point across to the general public.

KR: *One would think that the undesirability of a huge deficit would be fairly obvious to the citizenry.*

Y: At first glance it may seem surprising that people do not grasp the urgency. But consider how the issue looks to the typical citizen. In nearly every presidential campaign since the end

of World War II, candidates have complained about the size of the federal deficit. To the public a reasonable response might be: So what else is new? The deficit issue is abstract and remote from day-to-day concerns. Most people do not see a direct link between the deficit and their daily lives as they do between inflation and unemployment. There is also among the public a widespread pragmatism. With unemployment going down, inflation rates low, and the economy booming, people believe that we should not try to fix what is not broken. That is, they suspect that if there were really a crisis things would be worse.

KR: *How could the public understand this particular issue better?*

Y: Studies done by the Public Agenda Foundation indicate that strengthening public support for reducing the deficit depends on three factors, and this can serve as a summary of much of what I have been saying. First, the public must better understand the seriousness of the problem and the fact that it affects them directly. They must grasp the fact that a large deficit makes it harder to buy a home or car, harder for businesses to expand and create new jobs; and that if we fail to act, the problem will merely be passed on to our children.

Second, people need to give up the idea that there are easy answers, that some magical combination of eliminating waste and closing tax loopholes can, by itself, ever be enough to solve the problem.

Third, people must be convinced that their demands for equity and effectiveness will be met: that the budget will be cut across the

board, that tax increases will be shared by everyone, and that these sacrifices will truly solve the problem. Most Americans are willing to make the hard choices to reduce the deficit if these conditions are met.

KR: *Your assumption seems to be that there can be no effective public policy without an effective citizen role in shaping it.*

Y: Exactly. Policies cannot succeed without the acceptance, cooperation, and understanding of citizens. Virtually every important domestic change in the United States in recent years has been bottom up. It has come from the public, not the leadership. From civil rights to the women's movement to tax revolt, this has been the case. To an astonishing degree, the public has been the leader and the leadership has been the follower. On foreign policy it is more complex. This is because people pay less attention. They are concerned but aren't as attentive.

Political life concerns the conduct of human affairs and interactions among people. When we confront the issues of humans living together, we encounter questions such as: How can we keep from dominating and destroying each other? How can we reinforce the human bonds that hold society together? Clearly these judgments should represent the results of public dialogue that leads to constructive and healthy forms of public action.

Public-opinion researcher Daniel Yankelovich founded Public Agenda with Cyrus Vance in 1975 and also founded and chairs Viewpoint Learning and DYG, Inc. The Kettering Review conducted this interview with him for its Winter 1985 issue.

Recently the cover of a weekly news magazine was dedicated to “The People of the Year.” The past year might have been more aptly described as “The Year of the People.” We read stories of so many politically courageous individuals. But the lesson of this amazing year is not about lone individuals but about allied, united individuals and their associations. This has been the year of civil societies.

This lesson must not be lost on the United States. The world is teaching us that politics is more than what politicians do. It is teaching us that the political realm cannot become a specialized realm of governments, policies, and procedures. It is teaching us that the public is more than people organized to protect their own interests or an elite 5 percent of the supposedly influential leaders. It is teaching us that the basics of politics are in civics and citizens and forums. What yawns those words usually bring—how eyes glaze over. How utterly idealistic civics, citizens, and forums have seemed to the politically sophisticated! But no more! “Civics,” the actions of citizens, has given us a decade of political change in one year.

— David Mathews, Winter 1990

Civil Society in the United States and the Soviet Union

by V. O. Pechatnov

*As in any training,
the only way to
develop the skills
and muscles of
civil society is by
constant exercise.*

Let me start with definitions. Civil society is the most natural, organic form of social self-organization, and it would be ideally the only such form—hence the famous notion of the withering away of the state (“absorption of the state power by society”) as an ultimate ideal of socialism. In the 20th century a disappearance of mediating institutions has left atomized individuals of a mass society helpless vis-a-vis the state. Hegel, who was most prominent in developing the concept of civil society, saw its main feature in the existence of intermediate or mediating institutions between an individual and a state, the absence or lack of which leads to despotism. For Karl Marx, a Hegelian himself, civil society was the main scene of world history.

As I review the theoretical concepts and my own relevant practical experience, three features, in my view, stand out as absolutely necessary for the existence of civil society. They are:

1. a developed infrastructure of horizontal societal institutions (associations and other social organizations, churches, trade unions, clubs, etc.), and relationships independent from the state;
2. protection of civil society from the government and its influence by the supremacy of law, and constitutionally and legally guaranteed individual rights and freedoms; and by democratic control over the government itself; and
3. the presence of a public mature enough to safeguard and fully exercise those rights.

If we apply this definition to the experience of the United States we will see that this country has been fortunate enough to have all these

three conditions from the very beginning of its existence. Indeed, it may be said that civil society on American soil *preceded* big government and developed under very favorable conditions. In

Civil society itself has been the major source of initiative and pressure for social change, to which the state has had to adjust.

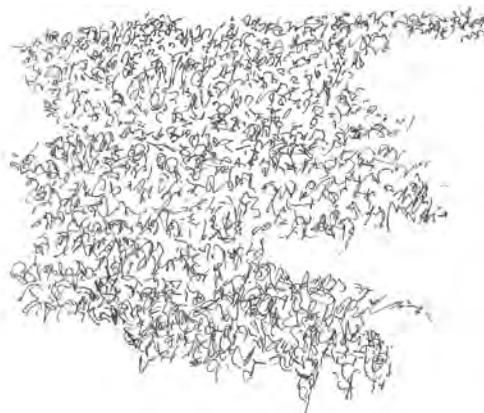
the North American colonies there was a high density of horizontal societal associations of a robust and muscular nature (as noted by Tocqueville and others). There was also a strong anti-elitist tradition in which freedom was seen as freedom from the government. The Bill of Rights is the obvious manifestation of this, but it, too, merely reflects both the antiestablishmentism of pilgrims and the self-righteous independence of “British (Colonial) gentlemen.” Finally, political democracy was easily established in North America, where it preceded industrial capitalism and thus made the political transition to it more peaceful than in Europe.

As a result of these factors, the mode of interaction between the civil society and the state in the United States has been largely incremental and reformist in character. The society itself has been the major source of initiative and pressure for social change, to which the state has had to adjust.

The traditional Russian model was almost exactly the opposite. A strongly autocratic

central state preceded civil society and capitalism, thwarting their development. In Russian authoritarian and paternalistic political culture, the state was viewed as a cruel but necessary protector, providing basic security *at the expense of* individual rights and freedoms. Mass feelings of dependency and political inefficacy went hand in hand. Because of the lack of any self-regulation by an active society the predominant pattern of sociopolitical change was one of stagnation, followed by revolution, followed by reaction, mingled with occasional and largely abortive attempts at reform from above. There was no long-term progression in the development of civil society: waves of its short-lived emancipation were always succeeded by long periods of repression—and even of almost total destruction, as during the years of Stalin.

Today there are heated debates in our country about whether such a fate of the socialist revolution in Russia was inevitable and what other alternatives there may have been. But it is commonly recognized that the old model of extremely statist socialism



has become too costly and inefficient and too ill suited for the normal development of a modern economy and a modern society. Consequently, the main challenge for us today is to reverse the gears, to achieve a radical deestablishment of society.

Thus the essence of *perestroika*, in my view, is the emancipation of civil society and of the individual from excessive interference and control by the state as the only way of unleashing the creative energies of the people. The realistic agenda here is not a withering away of the state, but rather a transition from Leviathan to a more normal, limited, and lawful state. The main facets of this transition are reasonably clear and they are being actively pursued these days in practice.

In the economic sphere there is a movement away from encompassing state ownership and controls to more plural and different forms of ownership (both collective and individual, based on self-financing and cost accounting and management). In the political sphere, a transformation of the whole political system is going on, aimed at creating more powerful and independent legislative and judiciary bodies, truly competitive elections on all levels, restriction of the Communist Party's role in the routine management of the economy, and a redistribution of powers among central, national, and local authorities. There is also a reform of the criminal code and the system of justice in order to enhance the guarantees of individual rights and freedoms.

But the most active and rapid development of pluralism is taking place in the sociocultural

sphere. Here we see the emergence of thousands of new unofficial groups and organizations—professional associations; public interest groups and movements; cultural, religious, and phil-anthropical institutions; as well as incremental restructuring of established social organizations, such as trade unions, women's, youth, and peace unions. All in all, we see the emergence of a genuinely institutionalized public, capable of organizing itself around certain public interests and of acting as a social force.

Of course, this process of development of a real civil society in the Soviet Union has just started, and the problems are numerous and difficult. There are serious structural obstacles as well as those of consciousness caused by the legacy of the old political culture. Some people even see the latter as a kind of vicious circle. They argue that we cannot have a real civil society without a critical mass of public citizens, and that these cannot be produced in the absence of truly democratic conditions. But I think that this vicious circle can be broken in only one way, as indeed it has been many times in the past, by learning through participation—which is exactly what was happening during our last political campaign and the elections. As in any training, the only way to develop the skills and muscles of civil society is by constant exercise.

V. O. Pechatnov is chair of the Department of European and American Studies at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. This article first appeared in Winter 1990 issue of the Kettering Review.

Of all the dangerous thoughts and explosive ideas abroad in the world today, by far the most subversive is that of democracy. Taken seriously, the idea of democracy threatens every established elite of privilege or power, all hierarchy and deference, the legitimacy of virtually every government in the world. It undermines the ideological support of bureaucratic state capitalism as much as that of bureaucratic state socialism. That is why governing and privileged strata everywhere seek to suppress the least sign of a genuinely democratic movement, and why those who would fight against oppression must take the idea seriously. At first glance, democracy may seem a battle long won, but that is only because we pay lip service to the term without thinking about its meaning, let alone trying to live by its implications. The idea of democracy is the cutting edge of radical criticism, the best inspiration for change toward a more humane world, the revolutionary idea of our time.

— **Hanna Fenichel Pitkin and Sara M. Shumer,**
Summer 1994

Why Americans Hate Politics: We're Drowning in Phony Issues

by E. J. Dionne, Jr.

*America's restive
majority is in full
rebellion against
a politics of
false choices.*

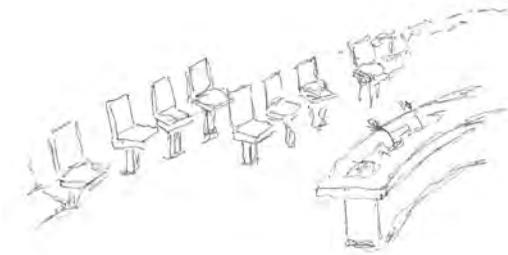
For the last quarter century, American politics has been dominated by divisive, manipulative, and largely phony debates about cultural and social issues—and the American people are weary. They still believe that the purpose of politics is to solve problems and resolve disputes, but that is exactly what politics is not doing. And that is why so many Americans have come to hate politics.

Since the 1960s, the key to winning elections has been to reopen the same divisive issues over and over again. No new light is ever shed. Instead, old resentments and angers are stirred up to get voters to cast one more ballot of angry protest. Voters are, indeed, angry. But increasingly they are venting their anger at the entire system.

Who can say the anger is misplaced? In fact, the gap between what Americans want and what the nation's leaders are doing is becoming wider. On issue after issue, there is consensus on where the country should move or at least on what we should be arguing about. Yet the dominant ideologies of American politics, conservatism and liberalism, make it impossible for that consensus to express itself. Increasingly, conservatism and liberalism are framing issues as a series of false choices because they are struggling to hold together unstable electoral alliances and to paper over philosophical contradictions.

The patterns are troublesome—and recurring.

Conservatives defend the free market and oppose government intervention in the private sector. Yet they have also made themselves champions of “traditional values”—in Ronald Reagan's famous trilogy “family, work, and neighborhood”—and these values often depend on government support. The shape of family



life, for example, is heavily influenced by how the tax system treats dependent children. The viability of neighborhoods often depends on how government shapes the market in housing and labor. Conservatives, in other words, love to talk about “values,” but usually fall silent when their values and the market collide. That’s why they prefer to keep politics focused on symbols (Willie Horton was only one of the latest) and away from problems.

Liberals often make that easy. At least in theory, they support energetic government intervention in the nation’s economic life. They helped build the welfare state. Yet when the talk turns to what values or what forms of personal behavior the welfare state should encourage, liberals fall strangely mute. So fearful are liberals of imposing “values” on anyone that they act as if billions in government money could be spent in a “value-free” way. Liberals, for example, rightly defend the interests of children who are born into poverty. Yet when it is suggested that the well-being of those children depends in large part on how their parents behave, liberals often try to change the subject.

Because both conservatives and liberals have difficulties in arriving at practical remedies, they have turned politics into a form of moral war-

fare in which much of the debate is over which sets of sins should preoccupy government.

For conservatives, the sins that matter concern personal irresponsibility: the flight from family life, sexual permissiveness, the failure to work hard. For liberals, the gravest sins are social: intolerance, a lack of generosity toward the needy, narrow-mindedness toward social and racial minorities.

Conservatives preached that the good society would be created if individuals could be made virtuous. Liberals preached that the good society was the precondition for creating virtuous individuals. Conservatives preached the re-creation of “the traditional family,” while liberals argued that the family would be improved if women were given more options. Conservatives said crime in the inner cities bred poverty. Liberals said poverty bred crime.

All these arguments are interesting. But they create enormous antipathy among the voters, who quite sensibly prefer arguments about solutions to arguments about original sins. Thus the current rebellion against American politics, which is, at bottom, a revolt against a public debate that evades problem solving in favor of abstract moralizing. Consider just a few issues that dominate the public discussion;

- Instead of a realistic discussion of how street crime might be reduced, voters get arguments about the death penalty. There’s lots to say about the death penalty, but even its most fervent advocates know it won’t do as much to stop street crime as would more cops on the beat, more prosecutors, and a streamlined court system. Voters may

worry that liberals lack the will to punish lawbreakers, but they also doubt that interminable conservative speeches about ever more odious penalties—perhaps something more inventive than capital punishment?

How did we get to the point where phony issues so consistently drive out real ones?

—will do much to solve the crime problem.

- Most Americans have long ago resolved the tensions between feminism and family. They're for both. Polls make clear that, by overwhelming margins, Americans believe that women are in the work force to stay and that this, on balance, is a good thing. The same polls also show that Americans worry that new family arrangements are shortchanging children and that economic pressures are forcing both parents out of the home too much. Americans don't want a debate on the respective glories of "the traditional family" and feminism; they want to build a world where men and women are treated equally and where kids get treated well, too.
- Washington now finds itself embroiled in a divisive, no-exit debate about "quotas." Not only does the argument largely ignore the actual achievements of affirmative action: it is also a diversion from the many other things that need to be done to distribute opportunities fairly—notably extending

college opportunities and job training to the poor and middle class alike. A debate that focuses so narrowly on "quotas" is evading the most important issues at stake in the battle for social and racial justice.

- Most Americans will tell you they hate "welfare." Yet most of these also will tell you they believe in helping the poor. They aren't lying. What they're saying is that they're impatient with a liberalism that seems to play down the importance of hard work and self-reliance—and they're impatient with a conservatism that seems to lack compassion. What they want is something the welfare reformers have had trouble delivering: a system designed to assist the needy by getting them off public assistance and into jobs. Such a system will not be easy to create; but it will definitely not be created by a public debate that casts compassion and self-reliance as enemies.

How did we get to the point where phony issues so consistently drive out real ones?

The roots of our current problems lie in fundamental miscalculations made by liberals in the 1960s and 1970s. That's when they lost touch with middle-class voters who had formed the base of the Democratic coalition. Having taken the high ground in the civil rights debate, liberals fell victim to the syndrome that so often afflicts those who find themselves on the right side of history: moralism.

In situation after situation, this moralism blinded many liberals to the legitimate sources of middle-class anger. The revolt of the middle class against a growing tax burden that began in the late 1970s was not an expression of selfishness but a reaction to the difficulties of maintaining

a middle-class standard of living. Anger at rising crime rates did not arise primarily from racism, but from genuine fear about robberies, rapes, muggings, and murders. Impatience with welfare programs grew in part from a morally defensible insight: that society should value hard work and promote it. Those who spoke about “traditional family values” were not necessarily bigots opposed to alternative lifestyles and feminism. As often as not, they were parents warned about how shifting moral standards would affect their children.

Thus were conservatives handed the mighty political weapon that came to be known as “the values issues.” They used this weapon—and phrases like “acid, amnesty, and abortion”—to destroy the old New Deal coalition, peeling off millions of votes, especially from whites of modest means. Liberals complained, often rightly, that racial intolerance was the hidden—and, sometimes, not-so-hidden—agenda behind all the conservative “values” talk. But the list of legitimate grievances against liberalism was sufficiently long that conservatives usually were successful in fending off such attacks.

The problem for conservatives is that their coalition makes it extremely hard for them to govern—and thus to solve problems. The hard core of the coalition dislikes big government and New Dealism. Later recruits—especially those “Reagan Democrats” who are less well off—like the New Deal and many other aspects of big government just fine.

The result of this uneasy alliance has been budget deficits and immobility. Conservatives in power could find the support required to

cut taxes, but they could not vastly reduce the size of government. No wonder George Bush had such a hard time in last year’s budget fight. Conservatives could speak loudly about traditional values, but could not do much on their behalf without alienating upscale Republicans who tend to be pro-choice on everything from free markets to abortion. No wonder so many Republicans would prefer to see the abortion issue go away.

Given the conservative coalition’s inability to agree on how to move forward, its best option has been to keep running against the discredited liberal past. Thus Bush’s 1988 campaign, which took Michael Dukakis—who is about as much of a hippie as Abbie Hoffman was a Marine—and cast him as the representative of everything that went wrong in the 1960s. It was not an edifying campaign, but it worked; and the rest, as the president likes to say, is history.

The good news is that America’s restive majority is in full rebellion against a politics of false choices; and at least some politicians are trying, haltingly, to turn politics back to basics. The elements of a new and more satisfying politics are visible on a number of fronts.



Fatuous arguments casting feminism against the family are giving way to talk about what can be done to relieve the pressure on parents with young children. The most popular tax talk on Capitol Hill is about changes in the code that would simultaneously make it fairer to middle-

Does it take a war to make us take politics seriously?

and lower-income taxpayers and also concentrate benefits on the people who perform one of society's most important tasks: the parents of young children.

Friends of the needy are accenting both compassion and self-reliance by a renewed focus on the problems faced by the working poor. Through mechanisms such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, reformers are saying that those who work really will be rewarded—the first step toward welfare reform.

Liberals are rediscovering the middle class and its values. For the last five years, the hot-ticket liberal ideas have sounded remarkably similar to the old GI Bill, with its emphasis on spreading the prerequisites of middle-class life—college education and home ownership—as widely as possible.

Responsibility is an in word in the 1990s. Feminists and traditionalists alike call for a new emphasis on the idea that fathers ought to contribute to the support of their children. This was an element of last year's welfare reform bill, but the idea applies to rich and poor alike.

The left-right consensus on “responsibility-ism” is popularizing the idea that divorce settlements ought to be geared to the welfare of children. At least on some issues, polarization is giving way to reasoning together.

What the country most assuredly is not looking for in the 1990s is a debate over which was worse, “the permissive 1960s” or “the selfish 1980s.” Down that road lie yet more false choices and more alienation—another decade of phony moralizing that will only aggravate popular hatred of politics and turn the world's most powerful democracy into one of its least effective.

The country wants to make peace in the cultural civil war unleashed during the 1960s by accepting the greater tolerance that was that era's greatest achievement and by tempering 1960s' values with a dose of old-fashioned civic virtue.

Last January, Americans got a glimpse of politics at its best: Congress, with seriousness, conviction, and moments of eloquence, debated whether our country should go to war. The event was remarkable because, for so many years, our public debates have been trivial and stupid. We thus face a disturbing question: does it take a war to make us take politics seriously?

The acclaimed journalist, E.J. Dionne, Jr., is a senior analyst at the Brookings Institution. This excerpt of his book, Why Americans Hate Politics, first appeared in the Kettering Review in the Fall of 1991. His most recent book is Why the Right Went Wrong: Conservatism from Goldwater to the Tea Party and Beyond (Simon and Schuster).

In politics, it is not knowledge or truth that is at stake, but rather judgment and decision, the judicious exchange of opinion about the sphere of public life and the common world, and the decision what manner of action is to be taken in it, as well as to how it is to look henceforth, what kind of things are to appear in it.

— **Hannah Arendt, from *Between Past and Future*, Summer 1994**

Politics and the World Itself

by Václav Havel

In its deepest sense, the end of communism has, I believe, brought a major era in human history to an end. It has brought an end not just to the 19th and 20th centuries, but to the modern age as a whole.

For many years, decades in fact, the West was defined against the background of the communist world. As a common enemy and a common threat, it was this communist world that kept the West united both politically and in terms of security arrangements. Against its will it also helped the West strengthen, cultivate, and develop its time-tested principles and practices, like civil society, parliamentary democracy, the market economy, and the concept of human and civil rights. Confronted by the gloomy, dangerous, and expansionist world of communist totalitarianism, the West was continually required to prove its commitment to freedom, truth, democracy, broader cooperation and growing prosperity. In other words, the communist world was instrumental in the West's own self-affirmation.

Yet in a way, it was a rather equivocal self-affirmation. There was something soothing about it. While stimulating many good things, it also led Western politics to unwittingly embrace certain stereotypes that grew from a feeling that its own status was beyond question. The “nontime” and “nonhistory” of the totalitarian regimes infected the West as well. The West became too used to the bipolar division of the world into blocs based on power and ideology. It became too used to the status quo of the Cold War—to nuclear peace, and to things staying pretty much the way they were.

As the 1980s became the 1990s, the whole Second World, as it used to be known, exploded and, in a rather frenzied fashion, collapsed in upon itself. In its place, a crater has suddenly opened up before the eyes of an astonished world, one that is now spewing forth

a lava of postcommunist surprises. Mixed up in this lava, we will find a long-forgotten history coming back to haunt us, a history full of

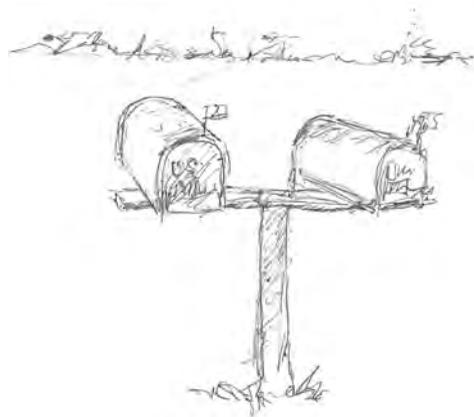
Not only is the West somewhat confused by these tremors in the East; it is beginning to shake a little itself.

thousands of economic, social, ethical, ethnic, territorial, cultural, and political problems that remained latent and unnoticed under the surface of totalitarian boredom.

As far as I can tell, this explosion astonished the West as much as it did the East. In a way, it has put Western policymaking in a state of shock. Every day, we see evidence of how difficult it is for the West to respond and adjust to the new reality, to break itself of established habits. The West feels that everything has changed, but it does not know exactly what to do about it. We have even begun to hear expressions of nostalgia for the days when the world was easier to understand. How can we deal with all these new states that have broken away from the older systems of order forged in Helsinki, Yalta, and Versailles? How are we to respond to the demise of centralized economies and the threat of economic and social crises that go along with it? What are we to do about the regional conflicts, actual or potential, the eruptions of ethnic passions and hatreds? How will we cope with the geopolitical changes—so difficult to foresee—that will result from these developments?

Not only is the West somewhat confused by these tremors in the East; it is beginning to shake a little itself, and the structure of its former certainties is beginning to come loose. A broad range of geopolitical interests, rivalries, and ambitions, dormant until recently, are now coming back to life. Alliances unquestioned until recently are now being called in doubt, because the pressures that once made them necessary are disappearing. Particular interests buried by history are suddenly emerging and clashing with each other. There are even signs, here and there, of the temptation to exploit the end of the divided world to create new divisions.

In a word, the end of communism took us all by surprise. But we all know and understand this by now, at least to a certain extent. With your permission, I would like to talk about another aspect of these developments, one that is less visible, yet more profound and substantial. It is an aspect of the matter that, to my knowledge, has not yet made the front pages.



The end of communism is, first and foremost, a message to the human race. It is a message we have not yet fully deciphered and comprehended.

In its deepest sense, the end of communism has, I believe, brought a major era in human

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The modern era has been dominated by the culminating belief, expressed in different forms, that the world—and Being as such—is a wholly knowable system governed by a finite number of universal laws that man can grasp and rationally direct for his own benefit. This era, beginning in the Renaissance and developing from the Enlightenment to socialism, from positivism to scientism, from the industrial revolution to the information revolution, was characterized by rapid advances in rational, cognitive thinking. This, in turn, gave rise to the proud belief that man, as the pinnacle of everything that exists, was capable of objectively describing, explaining, and controlling everything that exists, and of possessing the one and only truth about the world. It was an

era in which there was a cult of depersonalized objectivity, an era in which objective knowledge was amassed and technologically exploited, an era of belief in automatic progress brokered by the scientific method. It was an era of systems, institutions, mechanisms, and statistical averages. It was an era of freely transferable, existentially ungrounded information. It was an era of ideologies, doctrines, interpretations of reality, an era where the goal was to find a universal theory of the world, and thus a universal key to unlock its prosperity.

Communism was the perverse extreme of this trend. It was an attempt, on the basis of a few propositions masquerading as the only scientific truth, to organize all of life according to a single model, and to subject it to central planning and control regardless of whether or not that was what life wanted.

The fall of communism can be regarded as a sign that modern thought—based on the premise that the world is objectively knowable, and that the knowledge so obtained can be absolutely generalized—has come to a final crisis. This era has created the first global, or planetary, technical civilization, but it has reached the limit of its potential, the point beyond which the abyss begins. I think the end of communism is a serious warning to all mankind. It is a signal that the era of arrogant, absolute reason is drawing to a close and that it is high time to draw conclusions from that fact.

Communism was not defeated by military force, but by life, by the human spirit, by conscience, by the resistance of Being and man to manipulation. It was defeated by a revolt of

color, authenticity, history in all its variety, and human individuality against imprisonment within a uniform ideology.

This powerful signal, this important message to the human race, is coming at the 11th hour.

We all know that our civilization is in danger. The population explosion and the greenhouse effect, holes in the ozone and AIDS, the threat of nuclear terrorism and the dramatically widening gap between the rich North and the poor South, the danger of famine, the depletion of the biosphere and the mineral resources of the planet, the expansion of commercial television culture and the growing threat of regional wars—all this combined with thousands of other things represent a general threat to mankind.

The large paradox at the moment is that man—a great collector of information—is well aware of all this, yet is absolutely incapable of dealing with the danger. Traditional science, with its usual coolness, can describe the different ways we might destroy ourselves, but it cannot offer us truly effective and practicable instructions on how to avert them. There is too much to know; the information is muddled or poorly organized; these processes can no longer be fully grasped and understood, let alone contained or halted. Modern man, proud of having used impersonal reason to release a giant genie from its bottle, is now impersonally distressed to find he can't drive it back into the bottle again.

We cannot do it because we cannot step beyond our own shadow. We are trying to deal with what we have unleashed by employing the same means we used to unleash it in the first place. We are looking for new scientific recipes, new ideologies, new control systems, new institutions, new instruments to eliminate the

dreadful consequences of our previous recipes, ideologies, control systems, institutions, and instruments. We treat the fatal consequences of technology as though they were a technical defect that could be remedied by technology alone. We are looking for an objective way out of the crisis of objectivism.

Everything would seem to suggest that this is not the way to go. We cannot devise, within the traditional modern attitude to reality, a system that will eliminate all the disastrous consequences of previous systems. We cannot discover a law or theory whose technical application will eliminate all the disastrous consequences of the technical application of earlier laws and technologies.

What is needed is something different, something larger. Man's attitude to the world must be radically changed. We have to abandon the arrogant belief that the world is merely a puzzle to be solved, a machine with instructions



for use waiting to be discovered, a body of information to be fed into a computer in the hope that, sooner or later, it will spit out a universal solution.

It is my profound conviction that we have to release from the sphere of private whim such forces of a natural, unique, and unrepeatable experience of the world, an elementary sense of justice, the ability to see things as others do, a sense of transcendental responsibility, archetypal wisdom. Good taste, courage, compassion, and faith in the importance of particular measures that do not aspire to be a universal key to salvation. Such forces must be rehabilitated. Things must once more be given a chance to present themselves as they are, to be perceived in their individuality. We must see the pluralism of the world, and not bind it by seeking common denominators or reducing everything to a single common equation. We must try harder to understand than to explain. The way forward is not in the mere construction of universal systemic solutions, to be applied to reality from



the outside; it is also in seeking to get to the heart of reality through personal experiences. Such an approach promotes an atmosphere of tolerant solidarity and unity in diversity based on mutual respect, genuine pluralism, and parallelism. In a word, human uniqueness, human action, and the human spirit must be rehabilitated.

The world, too, has something like a spirit or soul. That, however, is something more than a mere body of information that can be externally grasped and objectified and mechanically assembled. Yet this does not mean that we have no access to it. Figuratively speaking, the human spirit is made from the same material as the spirit of the world. Man is not just an observer, a spectator, an analyst, or a manager of the world. Man is a part of the world and his spirit is part of the spirit of the world. We are merely a peculiar node of Being, a living atom within it, or rather a cell that, if sufficiently open to itself and its own mystery, can also experience the mystery, the will, the pain, and the hope of the world.

The world today is a world in which generality, objectivity, and universality are in crisis. This world presents a great challenge to the practice of politics which, it seems to me, still has a technocratic, utilitarian approach to Being, and therefore to political power as well. Original ideas and actions, unique and, therefore, always risky, often lose their human ethos and, therefore, de facto, their spirit after they have gone through the mill of objective analysis and prognoses. Many of the traditional mechanisms of democracy created and developed and conserved in the modern era are so linked to the cult of objectivity and statistical average that they

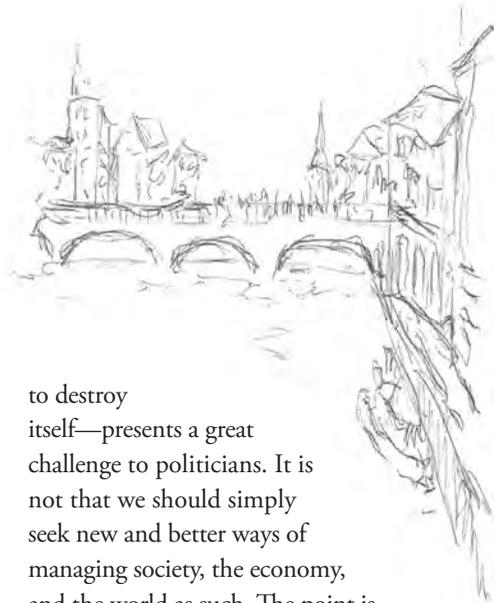
can annul human individuality. We can see this in political language, where cliché often squeezes out a personal tone. And when a personal tone does crop up, it is usually calculated, not an outburst of personal authenticity.

It is my impression that sooner or later politics will be faced with the task of finding a new, postmodern face. A politician must become a person again, someone who trusts not only a scientific representation and analysis of the world, but also the world itself. He must believe not only in sociological statistics, but in real people. He must trust not only an objective interpretation of reality, but also his own soul; not only an adopted ideology, but also his own thoughts; not only the summary reports he receives each morning, but also his own feeling. Soul, individual spirituality, firsthand personal insight into things, the courage to be himself and go the way his conscience points, humility in the face of the mysterious order of Being, confidence in its natural direction and, above all, trust in his own subjectivity as his principal

We are looking for an objective way out of the crisis of objectivism.

link with the subjectivity of the world—these, in my view, are the qualities that politicians of the future should cultivate.

Looking at politics “from the inside,” as it were, has, if anything, confirmed my belief that the world of today—with the dramatic changes it is going through and in its determination not



to destroy itself—presents a great challenge to politicians. It is not that we should simply seek new and better ways of managing society, the economy, and the world as such. The point is that we should fundamentally change how we behave. And who but politicians should lead the way? Their changed attitude toward the world, themselves, and their responsibility can, in turn, give rise to truly effective systemic and institutional changes.

You have certainly heard of the “butterfly effect.” It is a belief that everything in the world is so mysteriously and comprehensively interconnected that a slight, seemingly insignificant wave of a butterfly’s wing in a single spot on this planet can unleash a typhoon thousands of miles away.

I think we must believe in this effect in politics. We cannot assume that our microscopic, yet truly unique everyday actions are of no consequence simply because they apparently cannot resolve the immense problems of today.

This an *a priori* nihilistic assertion, and it is an expression of the arrogant, modern rational-

ity that believes it knows how the world works.

But what do we really know about it?

Can we say that a casual conversation between two bankers and the Prince of Wales over dinner tonight will not sow a seed from which a wonderful flower will one day grow for the whole world to admire?

In a world of global civilization, only those who are looking for a technical trick to save that civilization need feel despair. But those who believe, in all modesty, in the mysterious power

of their own human Being, which mediates between them and the mysterious power of the world's Being, have no reason to despair at all.

A political dissident under Communism, Václav Havel (1936-2011) became president of Czechoslovakia in 1989 and continued as president of the Czech Republic until 2003. He presented this speech, "Politics and the World Itself," to the World Economic Forum in February 1992 and gave the Review permission to publish it in its Summer 1992 issue.

Every choice is at the forking of the roads, and the path chosen shuts off certain opportunities and opens others. In committing oneself to a particular course, a person gives a lasting set to his own being.

— **John Dewey, from the *Later Works*, Summer 1994**

Hope Unraveled

by Richard Harwood

Is there something that people are trying to tell us that we fail to see and hear—and know?

In my travels to towns and cities across the United States, I am often told that people are angry or apathetic, or lack the capacity or the interest to engage in the world around them. Still another assertion is that people no longer care about each other, that they are unwilling to take the time to explore what they hold in common with their fellow Americans.

Yet another idea, this one quite recent, is that Americans have become politically divided. Anyone who tuned in to the 2004 presidential race was regularly informed that the nation had become split between red states and blue states, signifying Republican and Democratic strongholds, respectively. Each day the news media would treat their audiences to an array of color-coded maps graphically depicting this political divide. But in this case, no sooner had the 2004 election come to a close than the pundits, pollsters, and political aficionados began to backpedal, declaring that maybe the red/blue hoopla was just that—a lot of election-year hype.

Whatever the value of any particular notion, these and various other theories about why Americans have been turning away from the public arena have often led to much hand-wringing and then to much speculation, even a bit of wishful thinking, about how to revivify people's involvement—or engagement, as it is commonly called these days. Such conversations can seem endless, sometimes tortuous, as they seek to reveal the hidden mysteries of human engagement in public affairs. But are these factors so mysterious after all? *Is there something that people are trying to tell us that we fail to see and hear—and know?* It seems to me that we often

fail to look for a clear answer to the question, what do the people's voices tell us?

I have been traveling across America listening to people's voices for over 20 years. Each time

People's concerns and hopes have been mercilessly abused or mangled in the daily iterations of politics and public life.

I undertake a new round of conversations, I am reminded once more of the depth of people's concerns, the emotions embedded in their frustrations, and their enormous capacity to sustain hope that their condition will even as their fortunes seemingly take a turn for the worse. I can still recall many of the people—where they sat in the room, what they said, the expressions on their faces, people from such diverse places as Des Moines and Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Dallas, Tallahassee and Seattle.

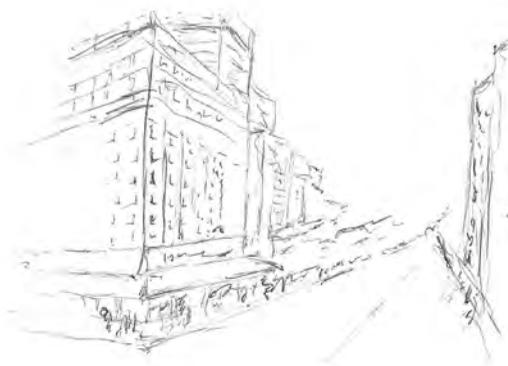
I believe these voices tell a story, and an important one. The voices speak about people's individual lives and about the collective condition of the nation. By listening to them, we come to see why it is *so* difficult for Americans to engage in politics and public life. Understanding these voices can lead us to new openings and possibilities for making real progress in restoring involvement and trust in public affairs. Those of us concerned about our country's civic health are summoned to

hear these voices and to act upon what they tell us.

When it comes to people's relationships to politics and public life, something more widespread and troubling is taking place in the United States than is often recognized. The challenge goes far beyond the purported red/blue divide; it transcends efforts to analyze the problem from the perspective of urban or suburban or rural voters or by people as church-goers and non-church-goers. Nor is it simply a matter being angry or frustrated about public affairs.

Today, we face a trend that I believe is one of the most pressing challenges confronting this nation: Americans have been retreating from politics and public life into closeknit circles of family and friends. This retreat has only deepened and calcified over the years that I have been talking with Americans. Retreat is now a default position for many people; there seem to be no other relevant choices.

There are many individual reasons for this retreat. One fundamental problem is that politics and public life have failed to address people's changing reality, leaving them with the feeling that they are on their own, without the confi-



dence that their concerns will be addressed. A second reason is even more troubling and potentially more harmful: the actual distortion of people's reality, whereby people's concerns and hopes have been mercilessly abused or mangled in the daily iterations of politics and public life. The result is that people are unable to see themselves or their concerns truly reflected in the public square, and much of what they see seems unreal. In this way, people are robbed of the vital sense of coherence that we, as human beings, so urgently seek, especially in times of great change. Noticeably missing is a sense of possibility and hope. In their place stands a politics and public life driven by manipulation, personal positioning, and material gain.

What we learn from people's voices is that, instead of seeing the possibility of being active and engaged citizens, they have come to view themselves increasingly as consumers rather than as citizens. They have become detached from their very connection and to one another. They are, in a word, freelancing their way through society, doing whatever they must to make ends meet and to pursue their individual dreams. A premium is now placed on making one's own way. For many people, retreating from the public arena is the only way they believe they can gain a sense of control over their lives. When the conditions are right, people will engage. What I find time and again as I travel the nation is that people want to step forward and join with others. They want to make a difference in society. Most of us want to do what is right and to be seen by others as being worthy of their respect. And most of us want to belong to something larger than ourselves. Many Americans say that they have too often abdicated their civic

responsibility, and yet, they can neither see nor imagine any recourse or alternate path.

As you listen to people's voices, it becomes eminently clear that we, as a nation, must find ways to expand and enliven politics and public life. We must, for it is in the public arena that people shape their destiny and that of the larger society around them. It is there that we, as a society, identify and figure out common concerns and wrestle with shared ideals—some of which have guided this nation since its inception, all of which are in a constant state of negotiation. It is through this public process that people debate different courses of action and try to determine the trade-offs they can live with. It is within the public realm that people forge relationships in the spirit of the public: good, even while maintaining their individual

People speak, with increasing clarity, about broken covenants, unspoken truths, unrecognized values, and the yearning for unsung heroes.

identities. There is much work to do in our society—in ensuring, for instance, that every child receives a good education; that people live in safe neighborhoods and strong communities; that we find ways to improve race relations and rid ourselves of prejudice; that people have good health care and an adequate roof overhead. But

such tasks can be achieved only through collective efforts —through political or civic means —by individuals working together in some loosely defined common pursuit.

People speak, with increasing clarity, about broken covenants, unspoken truths, unrecognized values, and the yearning for unsung heroes. These are the themes and forces that most clearly emerged from the conversations we conducted from 1990 to 2003. I would not deny that they likely were present before the start of these conversations. Nor would I deny that there have been other times in American history when people have struggled with the meaning of the American experience. But in these conversations, we find these themes and forces coming together into a single powerful narrative as Americans struggle to understand their experiences and try to explain why they feel so thwarted in realizing their aspirations for the nation and themselves.

People do not speak expressly in terms of covenants; it is not a turn of phrase people use. But the concerns that troubled them the most profoundly went to the heart of how they related to one another, how they exercised their responsibilities and obligations, and whether they would reap the rewards of playing by the rules. So four broken covenants sit at the center of these concerns.

First, a lost faith in the American dream. Central to people's idea of the American experience is the belief that, if you obtain a good education and work hard, you can get ahead. But over the course of this period, people expressed deep misgivings about a growing divide between the haves and havenots; about corporate actions suggesting that workers were

disposable and that corporate loyalty has become a value of the past; and about a shift in the employment of many Americans to lower paying jobs, which means that people have to run harder just to stay in place. These changes have led many people to question the meaning of the American dream and wonder to whom it applies.

Then, a free-for-all on basic values. People described a breakdown in the basic values that shape individual and family behavior. They complained that parents were failing to raise their children properly and were paying too much attention to economic and personal pursuits at the expense of their children. They argued that the expectations of too many individuals, including themselves, were out of whack with reality; that people were unwilling to put in the necessary hard work and perseverance to fulfill their expectations; and that too many individuals were unprepared to sacrifice for others.

Next, materialism and consumerism run amuck. People increasingly said that an unremitting greed and sense of materialism has overtaken many Americans, who have assumed the title of the "almighty consumer"—and expect to get what they want at the very moment they want it. An unrelenting focus on consumerism has led some people to confuse the meanings of citizen and consumer, causing them to turn their backs on the public square, only to spend more time and effort frequenting the local shopping mall.

And finally, a breakdown in community. People saw a waning sense of community; it deeply concerned them and offended their sensibilities. They lamented that many Americans did not seem to care about one another; were too



often unwilling to help each other; and had built walls around themselves, with increasing numbers literally moving into gated communities. The expanded scale of society in terms of population and sprawl troubled many people. The old African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child” was mentioned often in these conversations. In the eyes of many, this notion, which they saw as more necessary today than ever before, had been left behind.

These concerns—or broken covenants, as I term them—have had a profound impact on people. The rules of society are no longer clear to them, their ability to depend upon one another has been undermined; they feel isolated. They now believe that they must make their way in the world largely by themselves. And going it alone is what people have done. Amid these changes, people have chosen to keep their heads down, stay to themselves, and pursue their own dreams.

The vital connections that make up society are being significantly tested.

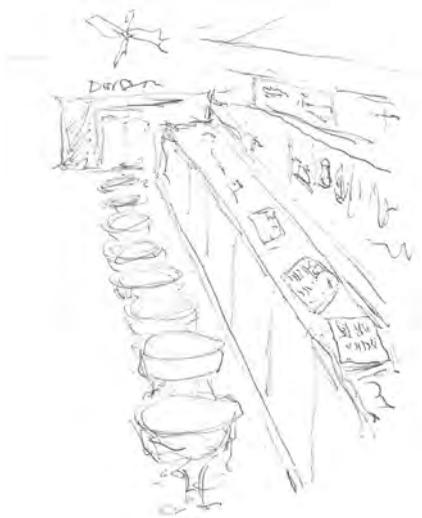
Perhaps the most salient complaint people hold about politics and public life is that the public arena has utterly failed to reflect the reality of their lives. This abject failure has caused people to question almost everything they hear and see. Indeed, the skepticism that exists often borders on cynicism.

I hear people express their lost faith in politics and public life daily. The current situation has left people openly struggling to know when something is believable and when they are being manipulated, when they should trust others enough to join together with them and when to go it alone, when they should be truly concerned about a public matter and when politicians or the news media are using an issue to pursue their own agendas. These questions dog people and give rise to self-doubt and mistrust.

My own work in communities suggests that, when such doubts in one another are found, people experience great difficulty in making judgments that they feel are well informed, reasonable, and reliable; their personal confidence to engage in public matters suffers; their belief that others will join with them is eroded. Thus, the cultivation of the public’s will for action—especially sustained action—becomes enormously difficult. But this is not the worst that can be said. When a semblance of reality is missing—when the pursuit of the truth does not seem to hold importance—then it is difficult to believe in what one sees or hears; and the trust in leaders, in various institutions, and in each other, which are necessary to make politics and public life work, disappears.

As I traveled the nation, I found that people trust few, if any, political leaders. Consider that statement for a moment; its truth is a damning

commentary on the public life of American society. There is widespread complaint that public leaders too often focus on shallow matters, especially partisan and hot-button issues and that they fail to talk forthrightly to the American people about their concerns. There is disgust among people that public officials reflexively turn to negative campaigning and



rhetoric (though there is little doubt that such negative campaigning works from time to time), and this frustration is especially deep because political leaders seem so insensitive to the effects of such campaigns on the overall mood and health of the body politic. The common belief throughout the land is that public officials actively pursue their own interests at the expense of the common interest.

Equally sharp criticism is reserved for the news media, which people see as dangerous purveyors of distortion in politics and public

life. Some people pointed out examples of good news media, and, in my own projects over the years—some of which were conducted for news media organizations seeking to strengthen their own credibility—I have found that people do see trustworthy news media outlets across the information horizon. But let me be clear: the sheer force of negativity in people's statements about the news media is overwhelming.

People are likely to say that the news media fail to cover important concerns, choosing instead to sensationalize the trivial with an unfailing focus on the negative. Thus, people reject any notion that the selection of dominant news stories represents any approximation of the reality of their own lives or the life of the nation. The news media, they assert, make their choices based on profits, ratings, and personal agendas, rather than on the fulfillment of their purpose to inform society. Using much the same terms they apply to public officials, people say that the tone and coverage of the daily news leads to distortions in their sense of reality, diminishing what is important. Here, the result of these actions is to make people feel isolated, uncertain, and filled with anxiety.

People's concerns about political leaders and the news media did not appreciably change over the time period of the studies I can report. Initially, amid people's anger, there was hope that such conditions might change. But over the years, there was an unraveling of that hope, which contributed to people's retreat from politics and public life. The very leaders and institutions they depend upon to help them make sense of the changing world are seen as

playing with reality for their own gain. This creates a powerful emotion within people, one that fluctuates between anger and resignation, and one that ultimately leads people to feeling trapped and powerless. There cannot be engagement in politics and public life without some modicum of trust.

You probably recall some of the heated “moral values” debates that have transpired over these 15 years or so. Many focused on various hot-button issues intended to tap into people’s fears and frustrations. Remember, for example, the tumultuous debates over “family values” or “welfare reform” or, more recently, “patriotism.” Recall, too, those skirmishes that have made use of various political figures—such as Hillary Rodham Clinton or Strom Thurmond or Jesse Helms—as the equivalent of human ink-blot tests to ignite battles over values. Often these values wars were promoted by one political group or another to further its own political gain; sometimes they were used simply as a fundraising tactic.

In a pluralistic society such as ours, heated debates have always been part of the political process, and it seems to me that they ought to be. But efforts to help people across the country sort out and address their growing dilemma, seemed noticeably absent during these “debates.” Instead, they were notorious for engendering name-calling and demonizing people on various sides and for their ruthless politics of personal destruction, presented as if they accurately reflected widespread concerns keeping people awake at night—as if they were some kind of genuine public service.

Listen carefully, and you will hear people discuss the values that do concern them, values that genuinely stir their emotions, values that are in direct opposition to those embedded in the big “values debates.” You will hear people ask how truth and forthrightness can find a more prominent place in politics and public life. They will speak about how people must exercise greater loyalty and trust between and among their neighbors and fellow Americans. You will hear people wrestling with the meaning of community and how to balance it with the desire for individual control in society. Notions of social fairness and personal responsibility, and how to define and restore them, are threads that run all of the conversations. They sit just beneath people’s concerns and aspirations. Listening, you cannot tell if these concerns are from Republicans or Democrats, church-goers or non-church-goers; and you cannot even determine the region of the nation in which they live.

People want to hold these values along with other time-honored American values that we



often hear a great deal about, namely those of individualism, and freedom. These values, too, are part of the American fabric. But people believe that when they are pursued without

The American people have been experiencing a long-term downward journey in their relationship with politics and public life.

sensible boundaries or limits, they can produce the materialism and greed among individual citizens, along with the unscrupulous push for news ratings and vote tallies that now mark American life and distort its goodness.

We use values to divide and manipulate and to set one group against another. The honest discussion of values will not by itself guarantee easy agreements on specific policy issues; but a dear recognition of the values common to many Americans can help produce a society—one in which people, together, can reach for their own potential and work for the public good. Without this discussion, too many of us will go our own ways, pursuing our own individual needs, without concern for the public good.

When Americans look out over the nation, they see too many people who have turned inward, too many leaders and custodians of the public trust who have turned wayward. Believe that this dynamic must change. In some cases, they see as their role models individuals they call “unsung heroes” or “everyday heroes.” Here people do not have in mind the names of ac-

claimed individuals who have been lauded for some superhuman effort or selected for high position. Rather, they refer more generally to men and women who, when facing a challenge, have found ways to summon the enduring qualities of honesty, perseverance, and helping others. It is these unsung heroes, the fellow Americans who embody these values, who will hold the credibility and trust needed to call people forward.

No matter who leads the charge, people suggest that change must emerge from small, local efforts. A strong intuition exists among people that significant changes in society must begin in this way, bubbling up from the grass roots, one action building upon the next. But, for now, despite any beliefs or desires that they should step forward, many people have found themselves struggling with what they could do to make a difference. They cannot see ways to enter politics and public life. After many years of being bystanders and spectators in public affairs, their imagination deserts them; they are left with few ideas and even fewer identifiable pathways.

There have been moments that demonstrate America’s potential to do better. Immediately following the attacks of September 11, 2001, many political leaders, news media, and citizens altered their behavior, sending a signal of hope that out of tragedy some lasting civic-minded change might emerge. But now we know that 9/11 did not change our politics and public life for the better.

What is clear is that the American people have been experiencing a long-term downward journey in their relationship with politics and public life.

In 1990, people were expressing anger primarily about the state of politics. People felt pushed out of politics by self-serving politicians, sensational news media, and powerful special interests. This was the time when people turned to “blunt instruments” in an effort to regain control of politics, including the candidacy of Ross Perot, balanced budget amendments, and term limits.

In 1992, people started to express what might be called a “felt unknown”—an inkling that something they could not yet fully articulate was fundamentally “off” in the nation. People continued to be angry about politics, but they were becoming more worried that the political system was not up to the challenges of addressing their growing concerns.

In 1995, people’s anger and the felt unknown had given way to a fundamentally different emotion, a lament that the nation had not made progress on concerns, which, by now, could be

What happens if people retreat from the public square, and those who remain seek only to fulfill their own narrow interests?

more clearly defined. The frustration with politics persisted, although people had begun to express the growing belief that individuals must play a more active role in the political process.

In 1998, people had not seen any improvement in the condition of politics and public life, and they made the following decision:



the only course of action was to retreat into close-knit circles of families and friends. This measure would enable them to gain some semblance of control over their changing lives and remove themselves from the disdainful world of politics and public life. Still, there was a growing chorus stating that individuals must step forward to create the change people seek.

In 2003, people witnessed the vast display of patriotism that followed September 11, but they became, over time, deeply frustrated that it offered a false start to repairing the nation’s politics and public life. Thus, people made the decision to retreat even farther. Meanwhile, they said they were looking for everyday heroes to help the course of their communities and the nation.

My sense is that people believe in their hearts that politics and public life is intended to work for them. Their views echo the sentiment some 140 years ago by Abraham Lincoln in his Gettysburg Address that government is by, and for the people. Lincoln spoke on that solemn day of the “great task” before the nation, making reference to the challenge of self-government that the nation would need to meet. In the years following his landmark speech, the nation dem-

onstrated that it could repair the breach left by civil war. The voices we have been listening to present a less daunting, but still a fundamental challenge: what happens if people retreat from the public square, and too many of those who

Amid the sounds of retreat, one can hear the makings of what it will take for people to step forward.

remain seek only to fulfill their own narrow interests?

Today, we must find the means to enliven politics and public life—so that individuals can tap their potential to make a difference in society and join to build a common future. The goal must be more than simply to solve immediate problems. It must be to create a good society, one that reflects people's best instincts and values.

Let me acknowledge what is plainly obvious: the news does not seem good—at least at first hearing. People have retreated into close-knit circles of family and friends. The conversations tell us of a time of broken covenants, unspoken truths, and failed politics. It is a time when society is further fragmenting, and people are feeling increasingly isolated from a larger social fabric. People are in search of some semblance of control over their lives, and with few relevant choices before them, they have chosen a path of retreat.

Yet actually—perhaps oddly—these conversations across America leave me with hope.

I take from Hurricane Katrina, I take from 9/11, this lesson: that Americans are enormously compassionate and generous; that when they see a concrete need they will act; when they see a way to make a difference they will act; when they see it is relevant to their lives they will act. That's what I think Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and 9/11 have shown us. But there's another message in these events, too. Remember, after 9/11 we were told that our politics would improve, that our news media coverage would become more serious, that somehow or other more citizens would become more engaged. I went out two years after 9/11 and interviewed more Americans across the country. I was told that there was a thin patriotism and a thin response. We responded during 9/11, but we couldn't sustain it. There was an event, a tragedy that we had to respond to. We knew what to do and there were ways to do it. But in our politics, in our public life, in our communities, and across the country, we don't have civic-



minded organizations. We don't have the right kinds of leaders and enough of them. We don't have people who think of themselves as citizens on a day-in, day-out basis to create the kind of change we need in this country.

There are pockets of activity in this country where people are responding to very specific things. Whether it's the war in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, the tsunami, 9/11, or Hurricane Katrina. The fundamental issue is not whether we have the capacity to respond to those tragedies; we do, and we will; and we have in the past. The question today for America is, do we have the conditions in our communities and across the country that will lead us to engage in everyday issues like public schools, like water, like transportation, like roads, like housing, like the environment? On those issues, on those matters, on a daily basis, I don't think the commitment is there to do it.

But my conversations across America tell me that people do not like this situation. I think in the history of America if there is one lesson for me, it is the lesson of hope. Over and over we have pursued the wrong course. We tied voting first to property; we then tied voting to gender; we had slavery; we didn't allow women to vote; we didn't have enough civil rights; we didn't have child labor laws; we didn't have environmental policies; we didn't have anti-smoking efforts. Yet time after time, we have corrected our course and reached out for our ideals in this country. That's the beauty of this country. That's the story of this country. It is a story that is in the world, I believe.

It is why we should still have hope that we can correct our course now. You know, in the *1890s* for instance, a lot of the things that created

the progressive era had been felt 20 years before; they were rooted in the 1870s. The abolition movement in the 1860s started in the 1840s and 1850s, not in the 1860s. We're in the same situation today. The question is not will we turn the ship around in the next three years? The question is whether or not we have seen enough change today to believe that, when our children—your kids and my kids—grow up they will have a different public life and a different politics in this country. That's what we're fighting for, that's what I'm fighting for.

We must turn our urgent attention to the messages of hope that can be found in people's conversations and let them guide our next steps. For amid the sounds of retreat, one can hear the makings of what it will take for people to step forward. If we take the time to listen, we can learn something essential about this opportunity. Our task is to locate the right openings through which we can pursue an alternative path for politics and public life.

My own experience tells me that too many of us will remain on the sidelines, spectators of public affairs, just at the time when we are needed most. Too many of us will buy into the assumption that we are powerless, when action is possible. Too many well-meaning efforts will fail adequately to address the great challenge of people's disaffection that now confronts us. And, worse yet, too many endeavors will be designed and implemented that further divide politics and public life and diminish hope.

The affirmation of authentic hope calls upon each of us to conduct a hard and truthful examination of our own words and deeds, and the words and deeds of the organizations or groups we lead. Then we can tap into people's latent

desire to engage. As a Richmond man stated, “If we say we’re frustrated and not going to do anything about it, then we won’t. But if we keep trying, we might make a difference.”

The people’s voices—they tell us that we must see ourselves differently, if we are to find hope in an era of retreat. They tell us that we

must act with authentic hope. They urge us to step forward.

Rich Harwood is founder and president of the Harwood Institute. This excerpt from his book, Hope Unraveled, appeared in the Review’s Winter 2006 issue.

Can we imagine a new kind of journalism—a new relationship of the profession to the public—that would equip citizens and their communities to come to sound judgment on issues before catastrophe strikes? The goal of such a new model of journalism must be to engage people in imagining the future that they want and in analyzing possible approaches that might achieve the future. Rather than settle for transmitting expert or elite knowledge, it will aim to generate public knowledge, produced by a public’s use of reason and experience. Knowledge, in this usage, is not a commodity that can be stored up and transmitted as needed; rather, this is a kind of knowledge constantly being generated by—and in turn generating—new insights among citizens, experts, and elites working with each other as a community. To the extent that the expertise and knowledge of the press—and of other professionals—can serve in generating this public knowledge, such professionals are valuable instrumental members of the community.

— Cole Campbell, Winter 2007

De-centering Deliberative Democracy

by Iris Marion Young

To be useful for theory and practice of democracy today, experiments with deliberative participation in citizens juries, deliberative opinion polls, study circles, and face-to-face consultation should be understood as a part of a democratic process between tens of millions of strangers in multiple locales over a period of months or years.

In recent years, ideas associated with deliberative democracy have caught the imagination, not only of political theorists but also of many government and nongovernmental practitioners who wish to improve the quality of public discussion and decision making. As more professionals have endorsed deliberative democracy, the term has come most commonly to refer to practices of citizen dialogue in face-to-face groups. While promoting face-to-face discussion is usually a good thing in a democracy I will argue in this essay that deliberative democracy ought not to be identified primarily with processes of discussion in face-to-face settings. Conceiving deliberative democracy in this way blunts its theoretical insight and critical force.

As an application of theory to the world of mass democracy, I suggest, deliberative democracy should be conceived primarily as “de-centered.” I take this concept from Jürgen Habermas’ theory of deliberative democracy and adopt elements of his normative model of democratic process. To consider deliberative democracy as de-centered means that we do not find the process of deliberation taking in any single forum or bounded group, whether the entire polity considered as a whole or relatively small face-to-face groups. Instead we should understand processes of discussion and decision making that we evaluate under norms of deliberative democracy as occurring in multiple forums and sites connected to one another over broad spans of space and time. Considering the process of deliberative democracy as such a mediated relation among diverse sites, forums, and events magnifies the significance of the political issues deliberative democracy deals with beyond the primarily local

issues that occupy most consultative practices that currently aim to adopt deliberative norms.

Theorizing deliberative democracy as de-centered, however, presents problems for the generation and application of criteria for evaluating the quality of public discussion and decision making. It is not obvious how criteria put forward by some deliberative theorists, such as publicity, political equality, inclusion, or accountability, should be applied to the evaluation of processes that take place across society. This paper will take some steps toward applying such criteria to de-centered democratic processes. Before doing that, however, I will propose a criterion of “linkage” as necessary to evaluation, specifically of de-centered processes.

In *Between Facts and Norms*, Jürgen Habermas criticizes Joshua Cohen’s conception of deliberative democracy for harboring what Habermas understands as an inappropriately centered view of the deliberatively democratic process. According to Habermas, Cohen sees the ideal process of deliberative democracy as involving the society as a whole in a political process steered through deliberative decision making. On the contrary,



Habermas asserts, modern societies are too complex ever to engage in a single process that can be moved in one direction or another. To the extent that democratic politics can be deliberative, its processes, even as ideal, are necessarily embedded in social processes that exceed political regulation. Democratic Theory remains bewitched by a philosophy of consciousness that conceives of an agent from whom processes of deliberation originate. When conceiving of society as a whole, the people as sovereign, or their representative legislative body, this conception of democratic will formation assumes that there is a single collective whose will it is. Habermas recommends theorizing a de-centered conception of democratic process as against ideas of deliberation as centered in a unified process of will formation:

The discourse theory of democracy corresponds to the image of a de-centered society, albeit a society in which the political sphere has been differentiated as an arena for perception, identification, and treatment of problems affecting the whole society. Once one gives up the philosophy of the subject, one needs neither to concentrate sovereignty concretely in the people nor to banish it in anonymous constitutional structures and powers.

Habermas may not be fairly representing Cohen’s position, for in the intervening years, Cohen himself (writing with Charles Sabel in the *European Law Journal*) has promoted a de-centered conception of deliberative politics.

More generally, however, Habermas is right that many conceptions of deliberative democratic politics point to a republican ideal in which the members of the society, as it were together, in a single process, make decisions

that bind members of the collective. For some others, however, such a picture of a polity itself as centered focus of deliberation is both unrealistic and disturbing. Many theorists of deliberation conceive democratic process as centered in a more mundane sense, in relatively small face-to-face groups. Some now tend to identify deliberative democracy with processes in which ordinary citizens meet to discuss and make recommendations on important issues. In these processes citizens are neither mere observers, nor is their role merely to hold decision makers accountable after the fact. Instead, they are direct participants in organized dialogues about environmental planning, police procedures, budget processes, or the quality of health-care delivery. Scholars, such as Archon Fung, David Boohar, John Gaventa, Eric Wright, John Forrester, and Bronwyn Hayward, have documented citizen participation in dialogue processes, usually involving the development and implementation of local government processes. A number of civic organizations in the United States have adopted a mission to organize or encourage participatory dialogue processes in public issues, either within government or in civil society. These include Demos, the Kettering Foundation, *AmericaSpeaks*, the National Issues Forums, the Nation Civil League, and others.

James Fishkin's method of the deliberative opinion poll has been used, at least as much for discussion of national as for local issues, both in the United States, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, among other places. This process follows more of a representative than a participatory approach to discussion. The poll randomly selects persons

to participate in a dialogue weekend; the characteristics of the participants are thus supposed roughly to mirror the characteristics of the general population in respect to gender, age, race, income, education, religions, and political

All these are centered conceptions, because they assume that deliberation takes place in a single forum within a bounded group within a delimited time.

ideology; and the deliberative poll aims to test the extent to which people's opinions about issues and proposals change as a result of discussing them with experts and fellow citizens over a few days. Though there are thus many differences between Fishkin's model of deliberation and deliberative consultative practices in local government, they share features that correspond to a centered conception of deliberation. Both conceive deliberation as a give-and-take process of discussion aimed at persuasion within a single group that meets face-to-face and arrives at deliberative outcomes in a determinate period of time.

Some theorists of deliberative democracy consider legislatures as sites of deliberation. While they would not claim that parliamentary bodies are the only sites of deliberative discussion and decision making, Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, in *Democracy and*

Disagreement, draw many of their examples of political exchange that either meets or falls short of their criteria of good deliberative process from congressional debates. To the extent that, for some theorists, legislatures appear as paradigms of

The theory does not simply describe these democracies as they are, however, but as they *ought* to be if their policy outcomes are to be considered normatively legitimate.

potentially deliberative process, then they too operate with a centered conception of deliberation. The setting is face-to-face, the group bounded, and the time span for relevant discussion relatively short, though not reduced to a single meeting.

Habermas criticizes a view of deliberative democracy that imagines political decision making in a society as *like* what occurs in bounded forums with identifiable participants who, within the time they have, try to arrive at a general will. Most deliberative theorists are less Rousseauian and more realistic than this. But they, too, look for, or aim to design, *actual* processes of discussion, exchange, and persuasion leading to an agreed upon conclusion. All these are *centered* conceptions of deliberation, because they assume that deliberation takes place in a single forum within a bounded group within a delimited time.

We can note a few problematic aspects of such a conception. First, to reiterate and expand on Habermas' objection, this centered conception assumes that there is a body politic whose discussion process should issue in a "will of the people," whether the sovereign people of a whole society or the participants in a face-to-face forum. Second, when processes of deliberative decision making are understood as enacted by representatives, whether in legislatures or citizens juries or deliberative opinion polls, it is still the representative body that is considered the site of deliberation, rather than a process that relates the representatives to those whom they might be said to represent.

To the extent that efforts to put the values of deliberative democracy into practice lead to a focus on designing participatory forums in local decision-making processes, the significance of deliberative ideas for evaluating and enhancing modern democracies becomes diluted. To be sure, local face-to-face meetings in which citizens debate with national, state, and local officials and with each other are generally a good thing. If we assume that deliberative democracy means primarily that citizens should have opportunities to participate in the decisions made close to them, however, we risk marginalizing deliberative process and failing to use its critical potential. In large democracies, what happens locally is complexly conditioned by actions and decisions that are global, national, or regional in reach. A theory of deliberative democracy must be able to conceive how political decision-making processes with this complexity and reach do or can exemplify norms of deliberative democracy. That

requires, I submit, theorizing the deliberative process and the application of its criteria of evaluation as de-centered.

To be useful for theory and practice of democracy today, experiments with deliberative participation in citizens juries, deliberative opinion polls, study circles, and face-to-face consultation should be understood as a *part* of a democratic process between tens of millions of strangers in multiple locales over a period of months or years. Concepts of deliberative democracy should be applied to this de-centered process in which social problems and policy issues are discussed and contested in public media, various forums organized by state agencies, businesses, or universities, as well as in more informal activities of civic associations.

Habermas' conception of de-centered deliberative democracy provides a valuable starting point for such an account. He describes contemporary democratic decision making as embedded in complex social relations, rather than able to direct them; and as involving complexly mediated relationships of communication and interdependence. The theory does not simply describe these democracies as they are, however, but as they *ought* to be if their policy outcomes are to be considered normatively legitimate. Let me summarize my understanding of the model.

In large highly differentiated societies, democracy is, among other things, a method of addressing social problems. However powerful and well-functioning government institutions be, they cannot know about, anticipate and control the activities of all of society and the conflicts or deprivations these may generate. Problems need to be communicated from their

socially felt sites to political institutions whose missions are to respond to problems through systems of law, regulation, and public administration. In Habermas' view, organizations and group activity in the civil society outside state institutions serve to locate problems widely felt in society, formulate an account of the experience of them, and communicate the problems to public officials.

In Habermas' model of de-centered deliberative democracy, those concerned with social problems help constitute and have access to a public sphere in which to express the problems. A public sphere is a linked set of discussion arenas through which strangers relate to one another, in principle open to anyone in the society for expressing themselves and to which everyone in principle can be witness and auditor. When the public sphere takes up expression of a problem or issue, its discussion travels to numerous sites and forums that influence one another, and thereby the voicing of the problem





becomes refined and generalized to involve the experience of more people. Its expression also becomes amplified to the extent that it is difficult for political officials to ignore the problem. In the media of this public sphere, citizens, officials, and experts discuss alternative approaches for responding to social problems, awareness of which has percolated from civic locales. Because the public sphere is open and inclusive, participants in these debates need to be careful about how they express their opinions; they should be speaking with the knowledge that unknown strangers are likely to hear them; and for their opinions persuasively to move the debate, they must be put in terms that they believe everyone can understand and accept. Public spheres therefore encourage appeal to reason and openness to the point of view of others. After a time, public opinion ideally congeals around a preferred policy approach, which participants in state institutions take up and craft into law. Democratically legitimate legislation, as well as legitimate

administrative and court decisions, thus have the function of converting expression of social needs and wants into enforceable power.

Habermas' normative ideal of de-centered deliberative democracy, then, conceptualizes a process spread across space and time, through which policymaking institutions are open to and pick up communication from the broad mass of differentiated social segments and relationships. Some of the key elements of democratic process across society in this model are publicity, communicative reasons, and, as I shall discuss below, linkage among elements of the process.

Habermas is clear that "the normal business of politics in Western democracies cannot satisfy these strong conditions." The purpose of a theory of de-centered deliberative democracy then, is primarily critical to provide norms and criteria through which the normative legitimacy of the process and many of its policy outcomes can be questioned and improved. Aside from providing some guidelines for journalistic ethics, however, in *Between Facts and Norms* Habermas offers little in the way of criteria for evaluating the quality of political processes in modern mass democracies, or guidance for applying them.

Most theories of deliberative democracy articulate criteria for evaluating the quality of political interaction from the point of view of norms of deliberateness and democracy. Thomas Christiano, in *The Rule of the Many*, offers criteria of political equality, rationality, persuasion, openness, variety, transparency, and reason-guidedness. Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson offer three major criteria for evaluating the quality of democratic political processes: reciprocity, publicity,

and accountability. James Bohman, in *Public Deliberation*, also offers three criteria: nontyranny, equality, and publicity.

In my own work related to deliberative democracy, especially at the beginning of *Inclusion*

A public sphere is a linked set of discussion arenas through which strangers relate to one another.

and *Democracy*, I have specified four criteria of good democratic process: political equality, reasonableness, publicity, and inclusion. My understanding of political equality is similar to Bohman's and Christiano's, as well as that of Charles Beitz (in *Political Equality*). Political and social institutions should be structured to afford members of the polity access to information relevant to democratic decision making and the views of each ought to have equal weight in deliberations.

In articulating the second criterion, reasonableness, I take some issue with theorists who follow Rawls in taking the object of reasonableness to be the content of contributions to a deliberative dialogue. On this understanding, we distinguish between claims that are reasonable or unreasonable, according to whether they are put in terms that are generally shared. This is too restrictive an understanding of reasonableness, I argue, and misses some important issues. Reasonableness refers more to certain dispositions of dialogue participants, I suggest, than to something about the content of their

contributions. Participants in a deliberative process are reasonable to the extent that they are willing to listen to others, revise their opinions, reserve judgment, and treat others with respect. They understand that dissent often produces insight, and that only by trying to reach agreement can dialogue continue.

My understanding of the third criterion, publicity, resonates with those of Gutmann and Thompson and of Bohman. Perhaps more explicitly than they, however, I understand the publicity of contributions to dialogue as a reflexive consequence of the dialogue situation. A major difference between speaking publicly and speaking privately is that in a public situation one does not know some of those able to hear one's statements and should assume that many of them have differing understandings, experiences, and perspectives. That awareness induces a form to one's statements that aims toward generality and in which participants move between positions of speaker and listener and thus acknowledge the multiple statements within the discussion.

I consider, however, that the most significant contribution of my own account of deliberative criteria consists in its elaboration of the concept of inclusion. All deliberative theorists specify that a process of political communication is not properly democratic unless it includes all persons likely to be affected by a decision; but I think that the meaning and conditions of this requirement are richer than most theorists acknowledge. The formal opportunity to contribute and be witness to the contribution of others is not sufficient for effective inclusion. A process of political com-

munication should also be inclusive of diverse communication styles and enable informative contributions that do not take the form of argument. In large-scale democracies characterized by massive social differentiation and inequality

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we should think of inclusion not only in terms of individuals, but in terms of structural social groups who stand in unequal relations to one another. Inclusion thus requires compensating for the potential marginalization of some groups through mechanisms of special representation. This form of inclusion is important not only as a form of giving respect to everyone, but also as a means of trying to ensure that major social perspectives on problems will contribute their situated knowledges toward solutions.

While they vary in label and nuance, the criteria that theorists of deliberative democracy have articulated for evaluating quality of political communication and decision making overlap and express similar values. With them, much about actual political processes in democracies can be criticized—for example, for allowing persons and groups with greater power to

dominate discussion, or coerce and threaten others; for effectively excluding some persons and groups from participation; for allowing appeals to fear or selfishness to guide people's opinions. The sort of criteria that deliberative theorists use, however, appears at least implicitly to be derived from experiences of good discussion in face-to-face meetings. They seem easiest to apply, moreover, to evaluate centered deliberative democratic processes—i.e., to a single face-to-face meeting, or a time-bound series of such meetings, with identifiable participants. To apply a standard of inclusion, we can observe who is present at such meetings. We can analyze the content of their utterances to determine to what extent they understand themselves and are understood by others to be offering, as reasons, considerations that anyone should be able to understand. In principle, we can find out to what extent the decisions reached result from discussion to which everyone in the forum is party, rather than the result of behind door threats, offers, and bargaining.

Each of the criteria can and should also be applied to evaluate de-centered political communication across a wide mass of persons and organizations that deal with problems and make decisions to address them. It is less obvious, however, what applying the criteria to de-centered deliberation means or how to do it. I want to begin to address this question. In it emerges a large research agenda whose elements I can only begin to identify.

If we take Habermas' account as having described the sort of process we aim to evaluate, a problem with applying criteria surfaces immediately. The process to be evaluated seems hugely

complex and to have no bounds that would allow one to pick out a unit to be evaluated. Politics in contemporary mass democracies certainly is a process in which local discussion at many sites sometimes breaks into and helps

The *ideal* of de-centered deliberative democracy requires that sites of deliberation should be open to and influenced by public discussion taking place outside them.

constitute public processes of uptake and trans-societal influence that shift what the guardians of public media regard as important, change legislative agendas, and sometimes produce new policies and programs. The problem for evaluating the quality of such processes using deliberative criteria, is that there are always many issues under consideration, often in rather inchoate form, and public processes often fluidly move among them. It seems to me that, in order to apply criteria of good deliberation to a de-centered political process, it is necessary to abstract somewhat from this complexity and fluidity to focus on an artificially bounded unit. Because we do not want this to be a centered unit like a single forum or discussion space, I suggest that a useful way to abstract such a unit is to construct an account of a process of political communication and its outcome as focused on a single issue area.

I'll give one example, Joan Scott has given us all excellent study of the movement of the discussion in France through the 1990s about representation of women in parliament, a discussion that eventually issued in the law of *parité*, which mandates that 50 percent of candidates for parliament be women. In *Parité! Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism*, she treats the discussion over a significant period of time, in many forums, and considers the relationships among its moments. Her focus is on this specific issue, even though it is embedded in and flowed among a wide array of political discussions in France.

Thus let us assume that we identify a de-centered political process, delimited by issue area, to which criteria of deliberative democracy can be applied to evaluate normatively its quality. Before considering how the criteria offered by deliberative theorists might be applied specifically to de-centered processes, I suggest that we must add another criterion, which I call *linkage*. With a criterion of linkage, we ask for evidence that various mediated sites and occasions for discussion across diverse social spaces and over an extended time, are connected to one another. Recalling Habermas' model of the movement of an issue discussion from inchoate problem expression in multiple grassroots sites, to its amplification and refinement in a public sphere,





to discussion of alternative approaches that influence public officials, we can ask whether and how activities in civil society are linked to the content of mass media, and whether and how these are linked to the agenda and responsiveness of actors within state institutions.

We do not need such a criterion of linkage for evaluating centered processes of political communication and decision making. Usually the records of a forum and the memory of participants and observers will be sufficient to preserve continuity between one occasion and another, one contribution to discussion and another, and to give participants confidence that a discussion process is connected to a decision, when there is one.

We generate criteria for evaluating the quality of a democratic process partly from our negative experiences. A particular danger of de-centered processes of political discussion is that their elements become disengaged from one another. Perhaps the most important of these possibilities is that sites of official decision making are not linked to mediated processes of civic discussion and the public sphere they generate. The *ideal* of de-centered deliberative democracy requires that sites of the deliberation and decision making of legislatures, for example, should be open

to and influenced by public discussion taking place outside them. It is often in the interests of legislators and their staff, however, to distance themselves from these wider social processes; it makes their own discussion process simpler, and it allows them to form alliances and broker with one another according to interests and power dynamics internal to the legislature.

Sites and occasions of the discussion of a social problem should also be linked with each other for mediated communication to be politically efficacious and for the outcome it generates to be normatively legitimate. Often they are not. If various groups and organizations are discussing an issue in ways that are not in mediated communication with one another, the terms and arguments in one site are not likely to influence others, and thus a space of public opinion will not consolidate. Thus in order to assess the quality of a de-centered deliberative process across mass democracy—whether at local, regional, national, or global levels—it is useful to consider whether and how sites and occasions that are part of the process appear to influence or refer to one another.

Application of criteria of the sort that have been offered by deliberative democratic theory so far are more and less straightforward, depending on the criteria. Application of criteria of reasonableness and publicity, for example, seem to me to present few problems when extended to de-centered processes. We can ask questions about the form and content of contributions to discussion in an extended mediated process among strangers across distance in more or less the same way as when the contributions occur in a single forum. Do people speak in the mass media, for example, in ways that

exhibit openness to the point of view of others, and do they speak in ways that acknowledge that anyone in principle might be listening? Do people communicate in ways designed to persuade others by trying to express themselves in ways that the others can understand? And so on.

It is more difficult perhaps to evaluate the extent to which a public discussing issues does so on terms of political equality. It is fairly easy to discern when some agents or interests dominate a discussion, whether because they use a lot of money to buy media time and space or because they otherwise have the power to command public attention. It is more difficult to evaluate degrees of political equality in a diffuse mass public wrestling with a set of issues over a significant period of time. If the majority of people who make widely disseminated contributions to public discussion have a certain limited profile—for example, if they are male, white, and middle class—this can be a sign of political inequality.

Application of a criterion inclusion or representativeness follows on this point, and may appear somewhat paradoxical. In a de-centered deliberative democratic process, it is not necessary that each and every forum for discussion include representatives from all major affected social groups. Indeed, in a de-centered process

it sometimes enhances the quality of the large-scale discussion if some discussion forums are relatively homogeneous. If members of structurally differentiated groups do indeed tend to have specific and different perspectives on how the society works, its problems, other groups in the society, and possible solutions to the problems, then a larger discussion can benefit when those who have these perspectives articulate them with one another first, before offering them to a larger public.

The existence of such segmented discussion situations are problematic when there fails to be linkage among them, or when they produce de-centered discussion that in the main tends to express the point of view of only some segments of affected people. This point raises the question of whether linkage is a phenomenon distinct from those that the other criteria evaluate. It may be that linkage is a necessary condition for or usual consequence of processes of political communication and decision making that approximate already articulated ideals of deliberative democracy when we consider those processes as de-centered.

The late political philosopher, Iris Marion Young, contributed this essay for the Fall 2006 special issue of the Kettering Review. Until her untimely death that same year, Young was a professor of political science at the University of Chicago.

A Citizen's Political Process

by Harold H. Saunders

Politics is about relationships among significant clusters of citizens, in a cumulative, multilevel, and open-ended process of continuous interaction, over time, in whole bodies politic across permeable borders, either within or between countries.

The challenges of our troubled world require political, not just technical, responses. The global project of the 21st century is political: to engage citizens in and out of government—whole bodies politic—in responding to the challenges we face. Their energies and capacities are one of the world's untapped resources—for good and for evil.

The organizing insight for this article is a practical observation: there are some things that only governments can do, and they must perform those tasks effectively. There are some things that only citizens outside government can do—such as transform human relationships, change political cultures, and modify human behavior. The two must work together. The second is being ignored.

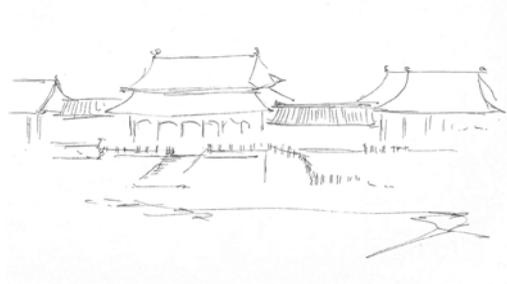
With some leap of faith, I have called this “the citizens’ century.” Engaging whole bodies politic is both a moral and a practical imperative. Polities that leave significant clusters of citizens out of the social and economic mainstream are neither morally whole nor effective in marshaling their resources. The mantra of US academic political science for at least two generations has been that politics is about power—with “power” defined as control or the ability to coerce. But politics is about relationship—a human concept in which power is but one of five elements and power is defined, not as control, but as the capacity to influence the course of events.

I propose nothing less than a new political paradigm—a fresh way of understanding the world around us, a new set of conceptual lenses to bring a rapidly changing world into focus. In the words of Czech president Václav Havel: “It is not that we should simply seek new and better

ways of managing society, the economy, and the world. The point is that we should fundamentally change how we behave.” Changing behavior is the task of citizens outside government. That task begins with changing mind-sets.

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To establish this new starting point, we will need to reflect for a moment on how we think about politics. If we are, in Havel’s words, to “fundamentally change how we behave,” we will need a new conceptual framework to understand what is happening around us and to give meaning to events. We will have to deepen the ways we think about relationships in order to change the ways we relate. Only we as citizens can change political culture in this way. My experience of working with five presidents of the United States and other world leaders convinced me that the conceptual lenses leaders wear determine how they act. The same is true for every citizen. Unless we can analyze our relationships and where change is leading us, we will not act differently or effectively.



The paradigm I propose reads this way: politics is about relationships among significant clusters of citizens, in a cumulative, multilevel, and open-ended process of continuous interaction, over time, in whole bodies politic across permeable borders, either within or between countries. This focus on a multilevel process of continuous interaction among citizens contrasts to the traditional focus on a linear sequence of actions and reactions among institutions, as in a chess game. Continuing interactions are the essence of the process. What is important are the interplay and interpenetration among entities, not just action by one on another. The framework widens to include both citizens within government and citizens in the larger body politic.

To capture that process of continuous interaction I have chosen the human word *relationship*. In some ways, it is not a good word. It is so commonly used and misused; it is not easy to translate in all its fullness into other languages. I have chosen it because it is intimately human. Relationships pervade our lives: we are born into them; we could not live without them; everyone understands them.

For the sake of analytical rigor, I define relationship in terms of five components—five arenas of interaction in constantly changing combinations within and between the parties interacting: (1) *identity*, defined in human as well as in physical characteristics—the life experience that has brought a person or group to the present; (2) *interests*, both concrete and psychological—that is, what people care about that brings them into the same space and creates a sense that they depend on one another to achieve their goals, that they are interdependent;



(3) *power*, defined not only as control over superior resources and the actions of others but as the capacity of citizens acting together to influence the course of events without great material resources; (4) *perceptions, misperceptions, and stereotypes*; and (5) *the patterns of interaction*—distant and close—among those involved, including respect for certain limits on behavior in dealing with others.

The concept of relationship can be both a diagnostic and an operational tool. In dialogue, identities can be explored and can grow. Real faces erase stereotypes. Common interests can be discovered; different interests understood may be accommodated. Patterns of interaction can change from confrontational to collaborative. As respect for another's identity grows, individuals impose limits on themselves to reflect that respect. Those changes also introduce new elements into the equation of power. As one understands that dynamic process of continuous interaction, one learns that power may emerge in part from careful and sensitive conduct of the process, rather than only from wielding material resources.

Relationships can be good or bad, constructive or destructive, mature or regressive, argumentative or cooperative, close or distant. They pervade our lives; the question is how to conduct and develop them constructively. Thinking in terms of relationship changes how we act. It enriches our capacity to conduct interactions productively and enlarges our resources for changing them without resorting to violence.

The proposed paradigm and the concept of relationship are designed to bring human beings—citizens outside as well as inside government and related institutions—into the study and practice of political life. That does not denigrate the importance of states, governments, and other institutions. I spent 25 years in the United States government and am proud of many of our accomplishments in those years. Government remains one of the most important instruments citizens can build and use in solving their problems. By itself, however, it is not enough. Citizens need instruments in their own hands. The paradigm, and the concept of relationship, broaden our focus to include the rich resources of whole bodies politic—citizens outside as well as inside government and their respective ways of working.

The medium of relationship is a dialogue—not power. The vehicle for citizens' engagement is built around dialogue to develop the relationships they need to accomplish their purposes. I call that vehicle a citizens' political process.

This process is a conceptualization of experience—years of analyzing what happens when human beings come together to solve problems or to transform conflictual relationships. It is

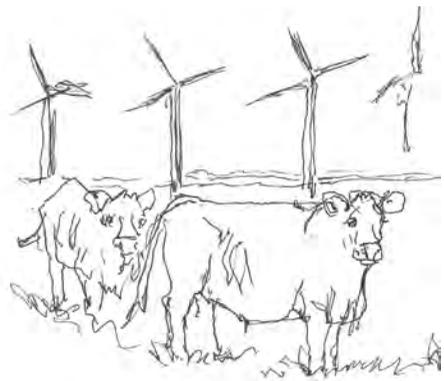
not a “model,” so it is not rigorously neat and tidy. It is a framework to keep a continuously changing set of interactions in a coherent-enough pattern for us to engage constructively. I will first lay out the essential elements of the process and will then describe ways in which it may be adapted as it is used in different situations.

Following briefly are the tasks through which the citizens’ political process seems to evolve. They are described here to make concrete the process that citizens with no formal structures to rely on use to accomplish their goals. To speak in terms of a process as though it were a sequence of tasks is not to present a rigid template for action. It is simply to open the door to thinking about how citizens can connect their actions to achieve larger objectives together. Each stage of the work reflects the broadening and deepening of a process of interaction—relationship—among citizens; but as we shall see, citizens may enter the process in different ways and may move back and forth across the stages. The critical point is that all bases must be touched—that none be skipped.

At the beginning of this process, a citizen concludes that a situation hurts her or his interests badly enough to require change. Seeing a connection between personal interests and the larger situation, the citizen reaches out to other citizens whose interests may also be hurt. A group of citizens with comparable concerns decides to come together to talk about the problem. This step can take time. The problem may seem daunting; citizens may fear the reactions of others, those who oppose change; a widening circle of talk may be needed to create a critical mass of people who are ready to come together

for systematic talk to whether relationships can be developed that can solve problems, whether the individuals involved like and fully trust each other or not. It is important that all points of view be reflected. Deciding to engage together around a problem—this is the first step.

When the group first sits together, participants need to spend time talking about the situation so as to identify its important dimensions, the relationships that cause it, and the interests affected by it. I call this “mapping” the problem—laying out its main elements. As participants say how the problem affects them, they provide the ingredients for a definition—a naming—of the problem from the viewpoint of the citizen, not the expert or the government.



An important part of this stage of their talk is to put the problem in a perspective that reflects why and how it threatens what citizens in that group value. It is also important that the voices of all who are affected be heard. Unless they define or name the problem in a way that accurately reflects their connection to it—why

it hurts their most important interests—their efforts to deal with the problem will not be as effective as could otherwise be. Naming the problem in a way that each participant can live with is essential in building a common ground

To deliberate is to agonize within oneself and with others over the advantages and disadvantages or consequences of each possible approach they have framed.

and the relationship necessary to start tackling the problem.

This work is critical; its importance cannot be overestimated. Time spent here is what makes this process different from all others because it is the entry point for human concerns about the problem. It is where the human dimension enters politics. We have seen groups blocked from acting together because they literally could not name their problem together. Mapping the problem and naming it must certainly not be skipped over lightly.

When the group has named the problem in a way that reflects the connection of this problem with their most important interests, they need to probe its dynamics in such ways as to frame the questions that enter their minds about possible approaches, opportunities, and consequences as they seek to set a direction for dealing with it. As a beginning, naming a prob-

lem may first lead citizens into a period when they need to talk with others to get their minds around it and to share their views about it to see what others think. Citizens do not frame questions or approaches as experts do in terms of technical solutions; they frame and respond in terms of what they value. This stage ends when those involved have defined the problem they must deal with, worked through questions it raises for them, and identified the possible approaches among which they must make choices if they are to tackle it.

When they are ready, citizens deliberate. To deliberate is not just to “talk about” problems; to deliberate is to agonize within oneself and with others over the advantages and disadvantages or consequences of each possible approach they have framed. Often more than one approach contains elements a person values, so trade-offs must be weighed. As they weigh the approaches they have identified with others—that is, as they deliberate—they deepen their understanding of the consequences of different approaches for themselves and for those whose cooperation is critical in dealing with the problem. Their deliberation gradually identifies common ground from which they can move to action. That common ground provides the starting point for defining the broad direction in which they want to move together. Deliberating and setting a direction does not signify total agreement—just enough agreement to undergird shared purpose in a particular situation.

If citizens genuinely grapple with their questions together, they will begin to change the quality of their relationships. They will emerge with a sense of where their aims are common; where they differ; and what is tolerable and

intolerable for each actor. And they will understand why. With that understanding, they will begin considering their commitments to engage in the common task of dealing with the problem at hand. The mutual promises they

The most essential resource in a community is political will.

may decide to make will bind them in whatever associations they eventually form to accomplish the particular task they decide to pursue.

Deliberation involves making judgments about consequences. Citizens must make those judgments before they can act. In its most basic form, taking responsibility for their own fate begins with citizens recognizing that they have choices. Recognizing their power to choose a course of action does not imply that they are not subject to external forces beyond their control. Choices come from the way they deal with those circumstances. We call the outcome of deliberation “public judgment”—not “public opinion,” which one practitioner-philosopher has called “what people think before they think.”

The ultimate experience in deliberation is determining whether there is political will to pursue the course preferred. At the end of a deliberation, the final question is this: do the consequences of doing nothing outweigh the anticipated results of the course the group leans toward, or not? If the consequences of maintaining the status quo are more serious than attempting the course chosen, there is

presumably the beginning of a will to move ahead. In some ways, the most essential resource in a community is political will—the commitment of its citizens to work on a problem until they have it under control.

When participants have determined the general direction in which they want to move, they must then figure out how they might get there. One way to do this is to work through these five steps:

- List the resources they have for tackling the problem.
- List the obstacles to moving in this direction. Responses include not just physical obstacles but deep-rooted human resistance. Often cancerous relationships are more serious than practical obstacles.
- List steps for removing those obstacles. Again, these may include change relationships as well as concrete actions to remove material barriers.
- List the actors who can take such steps. The purpose here is to involve multiple actors who can generate momentum through complementary actions.
- Try to create connections among actions so that they become mutually reinforcing and encourage cooperation among actors as one actor responds to a previous actor and stimulates another actor to join the process.

Unlike the discrete actions of institutions, complementary action is not directed toward a single objective. Rather, it is more organic and repeating, like a group in which each player supports the others within an overall theme but is free to improvise and express individual style without following a conductor.

I call planning a course of complementary actions building a scenario because the interacting, mutually reinforcing steps unfold much as the action in a drama might develop. Party A is asked whether it could take step 1 and responds

This framework recognizes power as the capacity to make things happen.

that it would consider so but only if Party B would respond in a constructive way by taking step 2. Party B agrees in principle but wants Party C to take supportive step 3. And so on until more and more actors join and momentum for change builds and is consolidated.

Once a scenario of complementary actions has been designed, the group must decide whether and how it will put that scenario into action. The options for acting together include moving insights from a relatively small group out into the larger community, through the associations to which members relate, in order to engage a complex of groups in moving in the desired direction. Before acting, however, citizens must judge whether their community is ready to move and whether capacities to act exist. If not, they may need to add a “prelude” to their scenario for preparing the way—either by a support network through further consultations or through capacity building.

An essential component of each stage but particularly of acting together is taking stock—judging achievement: What did we set out to accomplish? How are we doing? The capacity of a group to grapple with these questions honestly

and in-depth may be the ultimate experience in relationship and in developing the capacity to learn together. That capacity may be the essence of adaptability—the ability to meet new challenges.

Some have criticized thinking of this kind, arguing that it ignores a central concept of politics: power. They ask how citizens get things done if they do not accumulate power. This framework does not ignore power; it recognizes broader bases for power and defines power in terms less absolute than control. It assumes power as the capacity to make things happen that are within the reach of the actors. Citizens’ capacities to influence the course of events have a different quality from governments’ ability to coerce. I am not sure that the Czechs or the Serbs forced their governments to back down; by acting together with no apparatus of raw power they created conditions in which government could no longer function. That may be power, but it is power defined in a different way,

What I have been describing are the elements of a citizens’ political process as a conceptual framework describing the sequence of work citizens seem to go through in tackling shared problems. Now it is important to describe



different practical ways in which citizens may work within that framework depending on their circumstances.

What we call the deliberative process lends itself best for use in communities in which relationships are coherent enough to permit people to talk and work together in reasonable ways, even though they may disagree sharply about how to approach a problem. The initial purpose was to provide a framing of important issues that would provide citizens an experience with genuine deliberation. Believing deliberation to be the essence of democratic experience, those who engaged in this work hoped that citizens who came to value the deliberative experience would take it into their daily walks of life. This 20 years of work has led to perhaps the most common example of the deliberative process—a small group framing issues for deliberation among a wider array of citizens' groups.

In more recent years, a variation on this approach has evolved, probably in the earliest instances in other countries more often than in the United States. One of our colleagues in Colombia took a carefully framed issue to a rural community. When the day ended, they implored her to stay: "Can you help us to talk about two difficult issues in our community the way we talked today?" In other communities, organizers of forums, for instance, in Lebanon, Russia, and Guatemala, found citizens deeply suspicious of issues selected and framed by others. Thus was born the insight that larger groups in communities could learn from the experience of naming and framing their own issues and deliberating on them. They learned that deliberation can begin in naming and framing the formation of relationships to deal

with problems began with that early work and continued into post-deliberation collaboration.

A later adaptation, which we now call Sustained Dialogue, is designed for those communities that are divided by deep-rooted human

Focusing on citizens interacting in concert with one another—human beings in relationship—permits enlarging our perspective to include whole human beings in whole bodies politic.

conflicts. They must deal with serious relational problems before they can work together to deal with practical problems; such groups must focus on the relationships that cause problems before they can deal with problems themselves.

In deciding to engage, people on different sides of a conflict often come together with fear, because doing so is often tantamount to talking with the enemy. They can barely look at each other they are so angry. As they vent their grievances with each other, they actually provide both the ingredients for an ultimate agenda and an opportunity to analyze and "map" their interactions—to understand the dynamics of the relationships. This is anything but an orderly exercise in issue naming, but problems are being defined. This stage ends—at least for a time—when someone says: "What we really need to focus on is . . ."

Once someone focuses the talk, the quality of the dialogue changes. Participants talk with each other rather than at each other. That shift makes it possible for them to begin thinking together about possible approaches to problems. In October 2002, the Sustained Dialogue Institute was incorporated to concentrate efforts to explore applications of Sustained Dialogue in a range of situations where conflictual relationships impede or block coherent action by citizens. The possibilities to be explored range from students already using this process to improve race relations on campus to potential uses in the corporate world—improving labor-management relationships or dealing with destructive racial, ethnic, and gender relationships.

The value in defining a citizens' political process is to *give coherence* to the practices citizens need to engage their problems. I use the phrase *give coherence* to in order to emphasize that even more important than learning specific practices like “naming” and “framing” issues—to mention only two—is learning and internalizing the overall process. It is the process as a whole—not just specific practices—that builds the relationships and the power to make things happen and change the course of events.

The purpose of thinking in terms of a citizens' political process is to state that citizens outside the structures of formal power can have systematic processes, practices, and political strategies of their own with a sense of direction, destination, and potential accomplishment. Through such processes, they can generate the capacity or



power they need. Such a process is the citizens' vehicle for change, their version of political instruments, just as governments have their instruments (such as legislation, enforcement, funding, or propaganda) for getting things done.

Focusing on citizens interacting in concert with one another—human beings in relationship—permits enlarging our perspective to include whole human beings in whole bodies politic in our view of politics. It permits including the arena where political practitioners work, the arena where many conflicts are initiated and resolved, the arena where citizens build spaces for resolving differences peacefully, the arena where citizens improve the quality of their own lives. Above all, it includes the arena where most human beings live!

Formerly a senior US diplomat heavily involved in the Arab-Israeli peace process during the 1970s, the late Harold H. Saunders founded the Sustained Dialogue Institute in 2002 and was until his death a senior associate of the Kettering Foundation. This essay first appeared in the Kettering Review's Spring 2004 issue.

. . . afterthoughts

by David Mathews

If being a democracy really means what the word itself implies, which is that the sovereign power is in the citizenry, then the key question is how that power is manifest.

This past year, the Kettering Foundation examined the entire body of its research from a historical perspective. That history includes the *Review*, beginning with its inaugural issue in 1983, as well as its other two periodicals, *Connections* and the *Higher Education Exchange*. The question I try to answer here is why did the major theme in these publications, which was initially strengthening the “public” or “public life,” shift to “making democracy work as it should”? That didn’t occur until 1996, which was 13 years after the inaugural issue. “Democracy” became not just a theme; it became the central, organizing concept that connects all of Kettering’s studies.

In the piece I wrote for the 2015 *Connections*, I reported that the shift to democracy as the organizing precept for Kettering research seems to have been the result of the interplay of two forces. One was the foundation’s observation of citizens as they deliberated over the tough trade-offs that have to be made on the major issues facing their communities and the nation—issues from reforming the Social Security system to curbing crime. The foundation used its research to frame briefing books for citizens on these issues and made them available to the civic organizations, religious congregations, and educational institutions that were sponsoring the nonpartisan National Issues Forums. The issue books also went to other groups holding deliberative forums. In return, the foundation wanted to see what happened in the forums. The citizens in the deliberations weren’t civic saints, yet neither were they apathetic and grossly uninformed, as citizens are

often depicted. The people in the forums came from all walks of life, and many were deeply frustrated by a political system they felt had pushed them out of their rightful place. They wanted to get back in. A number of them were active in community work in ways that went beyond volunteering. Yet they didn't call what they were doing politics because it wasn't about partisan elections or the actions of governments. It was citizen-to-citizen rather than citizen-to-state.

The second influence came from the literature on political history and democratic theory that the foundation was reading. The first surveys of this literature were done by student research assistants (a group that included Peter Levine, who is now on Kettering's board of directors, and Cornell Brooks, who is president of the NAACP). The *Review* has had the job of sharing this literature, along with other pieces its editors select, with readers outside the foundation.

The concepts Kettering used initially as an organizing theme, like "the public," proved to be too broad. The term could mean anything from a place open to everyone (as in a public restroom) to a government officeholder (a public official). "Public life" was a little better for research; yet it was abstract and more a public relations term than a concept with a history and a rich literature. Democracy, on the other hand, does have a long history and a rich literature to draw on. It doesn't have just one meaning, however. And looking through past *Reviews* shows how a distinctive, citizen-centered concept of democracy emerged as the guiding precept for all of the foundation's research.

The *Review* has published more than 497 articles over the past 32 years. And it generated conversations with readers who brought other studies, books, and essays to our attention. The foundation realized that there was a loose network of scholars, institutional officials, and active citizens who cared a great deal about American democracy. And the interaction with people reading the publications was one of Kettering's earliest experiences with relating to a network.

Like most everyone else, the foundation was influenced by the dominant definition of democracy as a system of representative government based on contested elections. Citizens were important as voters who gave their consent to officeholders, who then governed in their name. At Kettering, we were also aware of an effort in government, perhaps in response to the public's declining confidence in the political system, to treat citizens more respectfully as the "customers" of government programs. And we were sensitive to the argument that the country's founders really didn't intend to create a democracy but instead a republic. In the 18th century, particularly after the excesses of the French Revolution, many Americans considered democracy a dangerous, radical movement that would lead to mob rule. That view is still present in the argument that people aren't capable of self-rule. But we also saw where, in drafting the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson had written over the word *subjects* and superimposed *citizens*. In time, we would come to see that bit of editing as the defining act leading to American democracy.

It took us a while to realize that if being a democracy really means what the word itself

implies, which is that the sovereign power is in the citizenry, then the key question is how that power is manifest. *Democracy* is from *demos*, “the people,” and *kratos*, “power.” Sovereigns manifest their power by producing things they believe will benefit them and the realm: castles, armies, protective walls. Monarchs who don’t produce anything are sovereigns in name only. So, it seemed to follow that a sovereign citizenry has to be a productive citizenry. Citizens are those who create or build things that serve the well-being of the realm. And they have to do the work involved in building. The implication for the foundation’s research was that it had to show how this work could be done. We may not have realized it at first, but we were following the logic in a memorandum that Cornell Brooks wrote years earlier when he was a research assistant. Back then, the foundation said its purpose was to make public life work better. If so, Brooks asked, shouldn’t the foundation first find out how the public works?

Reading through past issues of the *Review* and recalling stories about what the foundation was thinking at various points along the path its research was taking, we saw citizens and their work becoming more central to democracy. And citizens were primary actors and not on the sidelines merely consenting to the actions of an elite class of leaders.

In this piece, I’ll give you my version of the intellectual journey the foundation has taken. However, I want to emphasize that it wasn’t the ideas alone that were significant. It was the alchemy created by combining observations of people acting as citizens and the meaning those actions took when seen through the conceptual lenses provided by the literature on democracy.

An account of the evolution of Kettering’s understanding of a democratic citizenry, as reflected in the *Review*, might begin with the first issue in 1983 and an article Bob Kingston wrote on civic education. That article, by implications, put citizens at the center. Written before Kingston and Nöelle McAfee succeeded Marnie Shaul as the *Review*’s editors, this piece raised a question that would remain at the heart of Kettering research: what does citizenship mean? What must citizens do to live in a democracy? A 1984 issue followed up with Alexis de Tocqueville’s description of American citizens’ penchant for joining together in associations of all kinds. He saw our country as the most democratic in the world because citizens “carried to the highest perfection the art of pursuing in common the object of their common desires.” Citizens were not lone individuals but rather associationists who were powerful when joined together. And the foundation realized it was the citizenry, the collective body of citizens, that it should be attentive to.

By 1988, the foundation’s understanding of the democratic citizenry had developed to the point of distinguishing between what people did with other people as citizens and what they did with the government as voters, constituents, and clients. Ben Barber’s article on “Two Democracies: Ours and Theirs” is a good benchmark. That same issue carried an excerpt from John Dewey’s writing that lamented the lack of recognition of the importance of the citizenry (which he called “the public”) as anything more than voters. Combating that lack of recognition and the sidelining of citizens would become a major objective of Kettering

research as a deepening understanding of democracy began to influence what the foundation studied.

How Kettering came to use the phrase *making democracy work as it should* can be explained by looking at the essays that the editors selected to appear in the *Review* in the 1980s and 1990s. The *Review* reprinted Thomas Jefferson's letter to Edward Carrington in which Jefferson argued that people's sometime erroneous opinions could be corrected by giving them "full information," a task he assigns to newspapers. Then, in 1985, Dan Yankelovich pushed that discussion in a new direction by arguing that the public, the citizenry, is more than a body of opinions, however well informed they are by fact. He argued that citizens go about their work best by exercising the human faculty for judgment.

Judgment is required because most political questions are ultimately questions of what is the right thing to do, not just what is factually correct or technically feasible. As Hanna Pitkins and Sara Shumer would point out in the 1994 *Review*, political questions don't have technical answers, and expertise alone cannot solve fundamental political problems. Kettering found the concept of "judgment" useful in research because it, like "democracy," has a history and a literature—as in Immanuel Kant's distinction between pure, logical reasoning and judgment.

Hannah Arendt would add that, unlike logic, "judgment, to be valid, depends on the presence of others." It can't develop when people are isolated as individuals; it requires the perspective of others, the perspectives of a citizenry. Judgment requires "an enlarged mentality."

The exercise of our faculty for judgment is usually called "deliberation," which literally refers to weighing. It, too, has a rich history and literature to draw on. In the same 1994 issue, another article by John Dewey equated deliberation with action; it is, he said, the imaginative rehearsal of competing possibilities for action. It is weighing what is valuable for the purpose of deciding what is better or worse. So deliberation is a *moral* valuation, not a cost and benefit calculation. Public deliberation is deciding what kind of society we want to be, what kind of world we want to live in. It is transformative, not just transactional. And it is essential to a citizenry that must carry out its role in democracy in a responsible way. The future we want requires sound judgment.

Neuroscientists have shown that the human brain is wired for deliberation; it's a natural act and its importance has been recognized for centuries, worldwide. Terms for deliberation can be found in ancient languages from Sanskrit and Egyptian hieroglyphics to early Chinese. What is natural, however, is not necessarily easy. And as Kettering watched people deliberating in the National Issues Forums, the foundation saw them struggle when difficult trade-offs had to be made. Because it is difficult, deliberation was often referred to in the *Review* as "choice work." And as I just mentioned, the word *work* became key to the way the foundation understood the role of citizens. The work of democracy is work, Edgar Cahn noted perceptively.

The more Kettering saw how citizens did their work and how governments and other major institutions did their jobs, the more the foundation realized that there were major differences. There were indeed "two democracies."

One of the differences, for instance, has to do with the way problems are described. When making decisions, the professionals in institutions rely on their expertise, which they should. Citizens, on the other hand, consult their experiences and the things they hold dear, like their freedom and security. Of course, these differences are relative, not absolute: citizens use factual information and governments have to exercise judgment. Nonetheless, governmental and other institutional officials may not recognize the distinctiveness of what citizens do and try to get people to do what they do—and in the same way officials do their work. This can occur, for example, in opening planning and budgeting routines to citizens.

Efforts to get a better understanding of the work citizens do led to seeing citizens as producers, not merely consumers. That insight was reflected in an article Harry Boyte wrote for the *Review* in which he described citizens as people who worked productively with others, whether or not they liked or agreed with one another. He elaborated, “The notion of a public world as a world of difference, of public work, of public agency, of action, of power, of getting things done, that connects one’s own individual life in a particular environment to the larger world—this is a central concept of citizenship.”

Recognizing citizens as producers prompted the foundation to look for practices other than deliberative decision making that were essential to what Harry called “public work.” As the foundation’s understanding of the role of citizens grew, so did its understanding of democracy. Public deliberation opened the door to a richer, more complete conception of democratic

politics. Deliberation was no longer seen as separate from action but, as Dewey said, as an integral part of it. And the foundation found that there were other practices associated with deliberative decision making. These included giving names to problems, laying out options for actions to create a framework for decision making, identifying the resources citizens as well as institutions could offer, and orchestrating civic initiatives so that they would be mutually reinforcing or complementary. Together, as a whole, these practices gave citizens more control over their future.

Throughout all of the various activities that make up the work of citizens, the foundation was impressed by how much everything involved collective learning. People were not learning *only from* but also *with* others. They were learning about themselves as a citizenry as well as about what they were accomplishing. In 1994, the *Review* quoted Michael Sandel, who described this learning as knowing in common what we cannot know alone. The foundation would come to describe its own research as collaborative and carried on through learning exchanges.

Learning exchanges now go on in every area of the foundation’s research. We study citizens trying to make sound decisions on complex and controversial issues. We want to understand how they come together to do the work of combating wicked problems in their communities—even though they are not only different but often differ. And we try to dig beneath the mutual mistrust that burdens the relationship between people and the major institutions of our country—governments, schools, even

nongovernmental organizations. We've found that we learn more when we sit down with others who, from a practical point of view, are struggling with the same questions we are. If they see it in their self-interest, we can trade or exchange what Kettering has learned over the years for accounts of what other organizations are trying to do. We don't study them; we learn with them from the exchange.

The conceptual basis for this approach to research came from the understanding of democracy that evolved at the foundation, as is documented in the *Review*. In a democracy, there is no authority that can dictate what should be done, so citizens have to decide for themselves. In other words, democracy is dependent on collective learning. This was evident in one of the early descriptions of deliberation as "*prodidacthenai . . . logo*" or the "talk we use to teach ourselves before we act."

As I've said, the foundation's understanding of democracy—in this case, the importance of collective learning—evolved slowly. I emphasize

"slowly" because the foundation was fortunate to have the time for its thinking to evolve. That was due in part to a board that didn't follow the conventional trend and insist on immediate, measurable impact from the research. As one of the chairs of the board, Governor William Winter, said, many organizations are required to show quick results; there need to be some that take the long view. Not incidentally, 11 board members have written two dozen articles for the *Review* and have been interviewed for several others.

The foundation is still in the early stage of learning how to create the conditions where shared learning flourishes. When democracy is the subject, the challenge is more than just "learning from one another" or hearing other people's stories. Maybe taking on that challenge should be one of the objectives of future *Reviews*.

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