

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

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Editor's Letter

The subject of this *Review* is the practice of public politics in democratic communities. Each of our authors will be familiar to *Review* readers, we suspect, for all have honored our pages before; three of the essays are themselves drawn from long-published works; and the remaining three may well be in print, via other publishers, as the works from which we here present brief previews reach completion in coming months.

In his “. . . afterthoughts” to this issue of the *Review*, David Mathews bluntly explains our focus as being on “the roles of citizens in a democracy,” specifically on what they do with other citizens in a democracy—in *communities*—to solve their problems. “We draw,” he says, “upon ideas about what citizens need to do if democracy is to work as it should.” That concern with “what citizens need to do” is distinctively what drives each seasonal issue of the *Review*: our writers, over the decades, have all seasonably wrestled with it.

The great philosopher of our modern democracy, John Dewey, was of course consistently addressing this concern—and he helped to formulate our understanding of it in the first half of the 20th century, long before that challenge became the *Review*'s chosen territory. Thus it seemed appropriate to acknowledge, first, the steps Dewey himself explained that helped reshape the politics of what had been an aristocratic ruling class in ancient Greece to suit the multiethnic citizenry of a brave new USA, through our still relatively few modern decades. That given, it might become useful, we thought, perhaps to reexamine some familiar concerns of *Review* contributors from the past 30-some years as, decade-by-decade, they have slowly themselves come to affirm governing “of and for and by the people” as the work of citizens, themselves. With such a focus, then, we have selected a little library of colleagues and writers to contribute their insights—and some record of their practice—while addressing the difficulties of popular democracy, over the years.

Dewey, of course, had spelled out the challenge long before the *Review* was born. And Dan Yankelovich, the nation's most profound analyst of public opinion in our time, recognized that understanding the process of a nation coming to judgment was more challenging—and valuable—than measuring the outcomes of mere polls. Yankelovich has analyzed his decades of experience in polling and opinion research in several studies from which we have been privileged to draw over the years; and Harry Boyte, who began his practical work during the challenging years of the Civil Rights Movement, reports from an academic career bound with practical politics in both the United States and South Africa over the past half century. Hal Saunders, too, is one of the world's leading expositors of the practical democratic

process, having explored its import internationally, both as a representative of the US government and a private citizen. Ramón Daubón has similarly pursued the phenomena of deliberative democracy around the world, writing extensively wherever he works. And Noëlle McAfee (who has been associate editor of the *Kettering Review* for the past two decades.) manages consistently to keep a professorial schedule, insatiable scholarship, and common sense in ageless harmony, despite the proper self-concerns of scholars, students, and international editorial critics like the rest of us.

So there are the valued analysts whose insights we here sample.

Long before the first issue of this *Review*—or of the Kettering Foundation’s definition of its commitment to the concept of popular self-government—John Dewey had explained democracy as entailing “the participation of every mature human being in formation of the values that regulate the living of men together.” Dewey argued that citizenwide dialogue was necessary, both for the general social welfare and the full development of human beings as individuals. Half a century later, as the nation’s leading public opinion analyst—founder of *Public Agenda* and himself a sometime board member of the Kettering Foundation—Dan Yankelovich cited former President Lyndon Johnson and the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas for sketching “what might be called a ‘dialogue of democracy’—the unique and difficult form of communication between public and leaders that genuine democracy requires.” The significance of this “daring dialogue’s” approach to popular democracy is thence quickly evidenced by another persuasion of writers. Harry Boyte was a young scholar when he began to travel from the challenges of the civil rights struggles in the United States to the divisive complexities of popular politics in South Africa and Latin America. Hal Saunders, who followed his many years of distinguished international service in the US government by developing a multinational vehicle for Kettering’s research, was impelled, as he writes, by concern that

a focus on the structures of power leaves out most of the world’s citizens.

Yet many of today’s conflicts and problems are beyond the reach of governments acting alone.

So Ramón Daubón’s special contribution to this issue of our magazine (in refreshing, “talk-to-me” English) underscores why the theme has seemed to us still worthy of attention in our 21st century democracy. And Noëlle McAfee’s still-in-process “concluding” essay may remind us that, while the volume of practitioners in the world’s deliberative democracies may have increased, the challenge to public understanding—and academic collaboration—remains.

Or has aggrandized—as David Mathews’ “. . . afterthoughts” may suggest. The practice of public politics—that we have long called *democracy*—is a practice of people, facing their *concerns* as a people . . . *together!* Dewey would have understood!

Robert J. Kingston

Democracy

by John Dewey

“Unless democratic habits of thought and action are part of the fiber of a people, political democracy is insecure.”

Democracy is much broader than a special political form, a method of conducting government, of making laws and carrying on governmental administration by means of popular suffrage and elected officers. It is that of course. But it is something broader and deeper than that.

The political and governmental phase of democracy is a means, the best means so far found, for realizing ends that lie in the wide domain of human relationships and the development of human personality. It is, as we often say, though perhaps without appreciating all that is involved in the saying, a way of life, social and individual. The key-note of democracy as a way of life may be expressed, it seems to me, as the necessity for the participation of every mature human being in formation of the values that regulate the living of men together—which is necessary from the standpoint of both the general social welfare and the full development of human beings as individuals.

Universal suffrage, recurring elections, responsibility of those who are in political power to the voters, and the other factors of democratic government are means that have been found expedient for realizing democracy as the truly human way of living. They are not a final end and a final value. They are to be judged on the basis of their contribution to an end. It is a form of idolatry to erect means into the end which they serve. Democratic political forms are simply the best means that human wit has devised up to a special time in history. But they rest back upon the idea that no man, or limited set of men, is wise enough or good enough to rule others without their consent; the positive meaning of this statement is that all those who

are affected by social institutions must have a share in producing and managing them. The two facts that each one is influenced in what he does and enjoys and in what he becomes by the institutions under which he lives, and that therefore he shall have, in a democracy, a voice in shaping them, are the passive and active sides of the same fact.

The development of political democracy came about through substitution of the method of mutual consultation and voluntary agreement for the method of subordination of the many to the few, enforced from above. Social arrangements which involve fixed subordination are maintained by coercion. The coercion need not be physical. There have existed, for short periods, benevolent despotisms. But coercion of some sort there has been; perhaps economic, certainly psychological and moral. The very fact of exclusion from participation is a subtle form of suppression. It gives individuals no opportunity to reflect and decide upon what is good for them. Others who are supposed to be wiser, and who in any case have more power, decide the question for them and also decide the methods

and means by which subjects may arrive at the enjoyment of what is good for them.

This form of coercion and suppression is more subtle and more effective than is overt intimidation and restraint. When it is habitual and embodied in social institutions, it seems the

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normal and natural state of affairs. The mass usually becomes unaware that they have a claim to a development of their own powers. Their experience is so restricted that they are not conscious of restriction. It is part of the democratic conception that they as individuals are not the only sufferers, but that the whole social body is deprived of the potential resources that should be at its service. The individuals of the submerged mass may not be very wise. But there is one thing they are wiser about than anybody else can be, and that is where the shoe pinches, the troubles they suffer from.

The foundation of democracy is faith in the capacities of human nature; faith in human intelligence, and in the power of pooled and cooperative experience. It is not belief that those things are complete but that, if given a show, they will grow and be able to generate progressively the knowledge and wisdom needed to guide collective action. Every autocratic and authoritarian scheme of social action rests on a belief that the needed intelligence is confined to a superior few who, because of inherent natural gifts, are endowed with the ability and the right to control the conduct of others, laying down principles and



rules and directing the ways in which they are carried out.

It would be foolish to deny that much can be said for this point of view. It is that which controlled human relations in social groups for much the greater part of human history. The democratic faith has emerged very, very recently in the history of mankind. Even where democracies now exist, men's minds and feelings are still



permeated with ideas about leadership imposed from above, ideas that developed in the long early history of mankind. After democratic political institutions were nominally established, beliefs and ways of looking at life, and of acting that originated when men and women were externally controlled and subjected to arbitrary power, persisted in the family, the church, business and the school; and experience shows that as long as they persist there, political democracy is not secure.

Belief in equality is an element of the democratic credo. It is not, however, belief in equality of natural endowments. Those who proclaimed the idea of equality did not suppose they were enunciating a psychological doctrine, but a legal and political one. All individuals are entitled to equality of treatment by law and in its administration. Each one is affected equally

in quality if not in quantity by the institutions under which he lives and has an equal right to express his judgment, although the weight of his judgment may not be equal in amount when it enters into the pooled result to that of others. In short, each one is equally an individual and entitled to equal opportunity of development of his own capacities, be they large or small in range. Moreover, each has needs of his own, as significant to him as those of others are to them. The very fact of natural and psychological inequality is all the more reason for establishment by law of equality of opportunity, since otherwise the former becomes a means of oppression of the less gifted.

While what we call intelligence may be distributed in unequal amounts, it is the democratic faith that it is sufficiently general so that each individual has something to contribute whose value can be assessed only as it enters into the final pooled intelligence constituted by the contributions of all. Every authoritarian scheme, on the contrary assumes that its value may be assessed by some prior principle, if not of family and birth or race and color or possession of material wealth, then by the position and rank a person occupies in the existing social scheme. The democratic faith in equality is the faith that each individual shall have the chance and opportunity to contribute whatever he is capable of contributing, and that the value of his contribution be decided by its place and function in the organized total of similar contributions—not on the basis of *prior* status of any kind whatever.

I have emphasized in what precedes the importance of the effective release of intelligence in connection with personal experience in the democratic way of living. I have done so purposely because democracy is so often and so naturally associated in our

minds with freedom of action, forgetting the importance of freed intelligence which is necessary to direct and to warrant freedom of action. Unless freedom of individual action has intelligence and informed conviction back of it, its manifestation is almost sure to result in confusion and disorder. The democratic idea of freedom is not the right of each individual to *do* as he pleases, even if it be qualified by

Democracy is faith in the capacities of human nature; faith in human intelligence, and in the power of pooled and cooperative experience.

adding “provided he does not interfere with the same freedom on the part of others.” While the idea is not always, not often enough, expressed in words, the basic freedom is that of freedom of *mind* and of whatever degree of freedom of action and experience is necessary to produce freedom of intelligence. The modes of freedom guaranteed in the Bill of Rights are all of this nature: Freedom of belief and conscience, of expression of opinion, of assembly for discussion and conference, of the press as an organ of communication. They are guaranteed because without them individuals are not free to develop and society is deprived of what they might contribute.

There is some kind of government, of control, wherever affairs that concern a number of persons who act together are engaged in. It is a superficial view that holds government is located in Washington and Albany. There is government in the family, in business, in the church, in every social group. There are regulations, due to custom if not to enactment, that

settle how individuals in a group act in connection with one another.

It is a disputed question of theory and practice just how far a democratic political government should go in control of the conditions of action within special groups. At the present time, for example, there are those who think the federal and state governments leave too much freedom of independent action to industrial and financial groups and there are others who think the Government is going altogether too far at the present time. I do not need to discuss this phase of the problem much less to try to settle it. But it must be pointed out that if the methods of regulation and administration in vogue in the conduct of secondary social groups are non-democratic, whether directly or indirectly or both, there is bound to be an unfavorable reaction back into the habits of feeling, thought and action of citizenship in the broadest sense of that word. The way in which any organized social interest is controlled necessarily plays an important part in forming the dispositions and tastes, the attitudes, interests, purposes and desires, of those engaged in carrying on the activities of the group. For illustration, I do not need to do more than point to the moral, emotional, and intellectual effect upon both employers



and laborers of the existing industrial system. Just what the effects specifically are is a matter about which we know very little. But I supposed that everyone who reflects upon the subject admits that it is impossible that the ways in which activities are carried on for the greater

The democratic idea of freedom is not the right of each individual to do as he pleases.

part of the waking hours of the day, and the way in which the shares of individuals are involved in the management of affairs in such a matter as gaining a livelihood and attaining material and social security, can only be a highly important factor in shaping personal dispositions—in short, forming character and intelligence.

In the broad and final sense all institutions are educational in the sense that they operate to form the attitudes, dispositions, abilities, and disabilities that constitute a concrete personality. The principle applies with special force to the school. For it is the main business of the family



and the school to influence directly the formation and growth of attitudes and dispositions, emotional, intellectual and moral. Whether this educative process is carried on in a predominantly democratic or non-democratic way becomes therefore a question of transcendent importance, not only for education itself but for its final effect upon all the interests and activities of a society that is committed to the democratic way of life.

Absence of participation tends to produce lack of interest and concern on the part of those shut out. The result is a corresponding lack of effective responsibility. Automatically and unconsciously, if not consciously, the feeling develops, “this is none of our affair; it is the business of those at the top; let that particular set of Georges do what needs to be done.” The countries in which autocratic government prevails are just those in which there is least public spirit and the greatest indifference to matters of general as distinct from personal concern. Where there is little power, there is correspondingly little sense of position responsibility. It is enough to do what one is told to do sufficiently well to escape flagrant unfavorable notice. About larger matters a spirit of passivity is engendered.

Incapacity to assume the responsibilities involved in having a voice in shaping policies is bred and increased by conditions in which that responsibility is denied. I suppose there has never been an autocrat, big or little, who did not justify his conduct on the ground of the unfairness of his subjects to take part in government. But habitual exclusion has the effect of reducing a sense of responsibility for what is done and its consequences. What the argument for democracy implies is that the best way to produce initiative and constructive power is to exercise it. Power, as well as interest, comes by use and practice.

The fundamental beliefs and practices of democracy are now challenged as they never have been before. In some nations they are more than challenged. They are ruthlessly and systematically destroyed. Everywhere there are waves of criticism and doubt as to whether

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democracy can meet pressing problems of order and security. The causes for the destruction of political democracy in countries where it was nominally established are complex. But of one thing I think we may be sure. Wherever it has fallen it was too exclusively political in nature. It had not become part of the bone and blood of the people in daily conduct of its life. Democratic forms were limited to Parliament, elections, and combats between parties. What is happening proves conclusively, I think, that unless

democratic habits of thought and action are part of the fiber of a people, political democracy is insecure. It cannot stand in isolation. It must be buttressed by the presence of democratic methods in all social relationships. The relations that exist in educational institutions are second only in importance in this respect to those which exist in industry and business—perhaps not even to them.

I can think of nothing so important in this country at present as a rethinking of the whole problem of democracy and its implications. Neither the rethinking nor the action it should produce can be brought into being in a day or year. The democratic idea itself demands that the thinking and activity proceed cooperatively.

John Dewey (1859-1952) delivered this talk on February 22, 1937, to the National Education Association. It is published in The Collected Works of John Dewey, Later Works, vol. II, published by Southern Illinois University Press.

Searching for Public Judgment

by Daniel Yankelovich

“The American Dream depends on replacing the present state of mass opinion with public judgment.”

In an early work, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, published in 1968, Habermas argued that knowledge conceived as a body of facts and truths existing apart from human purpose is a myth. He developed his thesis that knowledge is *always* linked to purpose and is never properly conceived as a stand-alone body of information and theory.

Habermas described three categories of knowledge, the human purpose each serves, and the procedures we use in each for distinguishing between valid and invalid modes of knowing. Empirical-analytic science, as pursued in the natural sciences, is the first type of knowledge. This form of knowing is to exercise control over nature, so as to accommodate it to human uses. It is closely linked to learning by trial, error, and experimentation. The second category is knowing that we associate with insight into people’s motives, character, values, and world views. To refer to this form of knowing in the American vernacular, we would probably use terms such as *intuitive understanding* or *interpretive insight*—to enhance human understanding and communication. Habermas’ third category is knowledge having an emancipatory purpose—to make people free, to emancipate them mentally from false forms of consciousness, ideology, prejudice, and mental coercion.

Habermas redefines the concept of human reason, deemphasizing its identification with logic and analysis and emphasizing instead its biological rootedness in the universal human ability to communicate across barriers of language and culture. It is this concept of reason that is reflected in public judgment. He believes that the gift of reason is wired into our genes, but not merely in the sense of formal reasoning ability. Habermas believes that people are endowed

by nature, as an inherent part of the human condition, with a larger form of reason. This larger form is a gift that enables people to communicate with each other across national, linguistic, and ideological boundaries in ways that can lead to a shared concept of what is true and what is false.

This genetic endowment does not find expression under any and all conditions. It is not as robust, say, as the ability to walk upright or to express anger or sexual desire. It is intimately linked to speech and language, but speech and language expressed under special conditions. For reason in this sense to prevail there must (1) be dialogue rather than monologue (i.e., people must be talking *to* and *with* each other, not *at* each other) and (2) the dialogue must be free from domination and distortion.

This subtle capability to achieve mutual understanding through language and speech when coercion is absent is a concept of human reason that differs markedly from traditional definitions equating reason either with logic or with objectivist forms of knowing. Its survival value is that, in enhancing people's ability to understand each other, it permits them to take concerted action when necessary.

One way to grasp what Habermas has in mind is to apply his concept of reason to the American scene. One of President Lyndon Johnson's favorite phrases was "Let us reason together." Johnson would often make this appeal when confronted with opposition to his point of view. We know from many anecdotes of the Johnson era that, in these sessions of "reasoning together," LBJ was not talking about formal logical reasoning or scientific empirical inquiry any more than Habermas is. (Johnson never hesitated to use the power at the command of a forceful President of the United States to "communicate" his point of

view.) For Habermas on the other hand, the use of power, coercion, or manipulation undermines the possibility of genuine communication. And yet, despite this profound difference, one senses that the two men, the earthy Texas wheeler-dealer President and the highly theoretical

People can reach mutual understanding even when their interests and points of view collide.

German philosopher, at some deep level shared the same faith—that people can, through dialogue and discussion, reach mutual understanding even when their interests and points of view collide; and that this capability is, in some sense, a process of reasoning together.

Communicative action, Habermas urges, is a form of reason just as compelling as those embedded in our technology and objectivist modes of knowing. In Habermas' own words, part of our natural endowment is "a gentle but obstinate, never silent although seldom redeemed claim to reason, a claim that must be recognized whenever and wherever there is to be consensual action." It is this "claim to reason" that can eventually lead to the kind of open dialogue among public, experts, and leaders in which there is give-and-take, two-way communication rather than monologue, and the genuine encounter between leaders and citizens on which true democracy depends.

Only through mutual understanding created by such a process can citizens participate in the decisions that shape our common destiny as a nation and a community. Throughout the history of Western civilization, from the polis in ancient Greece, through the ideals of the Enlightenment of the 18th century, to the revolutions of the

20th century, thinkers have searched for the conditions within which human community and freedom can thrive. Habermas, working in this tradition, attempted in his theory of communicative action to sketch what might be called a “dialogue of democracy”—the

The gift of reason is wired into our genes.

unique and difficult form of communication between public and leaders that genuine democracy requires.

One can look at Habermas’ dialogue of democracy either as a philosopher’s utopian ideal that is largely irrelevant to the power-driven, money-driven world in which we live, or as a practical and realistic way to accomplish national goals we believe are important. Habermas himself always stressed his practical intent. Indeed, one of his harshest criticisms of German philosophy was that it had become so disconnected from the everyday life of the nation that an ugly Nazified culture could coexist side by side with professors mouthing the most lofty and noble sentiments and not be aware of their bad faith in doing so.



With some qualifications, I find the “practical intent” of Habermas’ theory of communicative action credible. Transferred from the German to the American scene, a few modifications are in order. But overall, from my perspective as a practitioner who has long been engaged in objectivist research on social-political processes, I believe Habermas and like-minded philosophers have successfully reconnected theoretical philosophy to the practical goals of Western democratic society.

What are the chances of mobilizing the nation’s political will? Can an abstract-sounding objective, such as raising the level of public judgment, come close to priorities as urgent as preserving the environment and curbing drug abuse? The answer to these questions is “yes, *if*. . .” The *if* is whether the public comes to see how much the American Dream depends on replacing the present state of mass opinion with public judgment. The public needs to grasp the connection between improving the quality of public opinion and making our democracy work better in a practical way.

The essence of democratic dialogue is conveyed in Martin Buber’s concept of the “I-thou” relationship. When “I” and “thou” engage each other, something deeper than a mere exchange of views is going on. The I-thou interaction implies a genuine receptivity to the other: I do not listen passively to what you are saying; I respond to it with my whole being. I may argue and dispute the correctness of your views, but “I take them in,” in the deepest sense of the word. And you do likewise. From the encounter, both I and thou emerge changed. Each of us has internalized the point of view of the other.

Another concept supporting the vision is Habermas’ insight that it is disastrous to divorce

human reason from the world of ordinary life—the struggle to make a living, raise families, and live peacefully as a community. When experts, influenced by the culture of technical control, conceive reason as something separate and apart from everyday life—the property of

Reason is not the exclusive property of a class of experts.

a trained class of specialists, scientists, and other elites—then the deepest ideals of the founding fathers of the nation are betrayed. Reason is *not* the exclusive property of a class of experts whose training and credentials certify the possession of a special endowment. Reason is a more humble, more universal, more democratic gift.

To my mind, these are stunning insights. They shape a vision of a democracy that encourages people to listen to each other and to weigh each other's views seriously. It is a vision of a democracy that involves those who wish to be involved and recognizes that the highest expression of human rationality is not nuclear physics or econometric models but ordinary people speaking and reasoning together on issues of common concern.

It is a vision of what David Mathews calls a *deliberative* democracy, as distinct from a representative or participatory democracy. It is a democracy that revives the notion of thoughtful and active citizenship. Citizenship now is treated like a passive form of consumer behavior: people “fail” at citizenship not because they are apathetic but because they do not think their actions or views make any real difference. We need to expand the notion of citizen choice, now confined to elections, to include making choices on the vital issues that confront us every day.

In the 1988 presidential campaign, candidate George Bush promised a “kinder, gentler nation.” This appeal struck a responsive chord in the electorate. But after the election, the phrase *kinder and gentler* became a stock laugh line for TV comedians who used it satirically. Why did this happen? It was not because George Bush was hypocritical. There is no reason to question his sincerity. But it did not take long for observers to realize that his invocation of a kinder, gentler America was a mere slogan, empty words devoid of implementation. This well-meant bit of rhetoric added one more stimulus to the growing cynicism of the American public.

The vision I have is of an America where average citizens engage in serious dialogue about



what would truly make America a kinder, gentler nation. This is what the public wants for America. But with limited resources and conflicting needs, it is difficult to achieve. Slogans and top-down leadership cannot achieve it. It requires serious democratic dialogue to shape a political debate in which the public—the whole public—participates.

As our society is presently organized, few institutions are responsible for the common interest. The theory is that the general interest emerges out of the interplay of special interest. This theory, straight from the textbooks of liberal

The concept of the general interest is an urgent concern.

political philosophy, is today the dominant practice in Washington and the state capitals. It is one of the principal causes of the nation's political gridlock: competing special interests exercise a veto over projects to serve the general interest. The concept of the general interest is, however, an urgent concern for average Americans. As individuals, senior citizens, for example, will give far greater weight to the general interest than will the lobby that represents their special interests. My vision, then, is of a society in which the general interest is as well represented as special interests, and in which average citizens play a decisive role in defining it.



I see this vision as “actively conservative.” It is conservative in the sense of staying true to long-standing American traditions. We need, for example, to recover the public traditions of our political culture, particularly those that understand politics as more than the clash of special-interest groups, mediated by government. The modern concept of a professional government has no place in it for the public or its citizens; the public really is not necessary for the prevailing vision of how we govern ourselves. People feel pushed out of this kind of system; they feel incompetent; and so they reject politics.

Staying true to tradition requires a change of direction. The root meaning of *conservative* is “to save, to conserve.” Sometimes this translates into protecting the status quo. But sometimes it means transformation! If the tradition is losing its way, then keeping faith with it means finding one's way back to the true path—to let in the light of knowledge to elevate the freedom and dignity of people. But in doing so we must also recognize that this means changing our culture and institutions to accommodate a more democratic concept of the light of human reason, one that is not the exclusive property of learned experts but, potentially, of everyone.

For this concept, one does not need a graduate degree to develop sound public judgment. One educates oneself for it but not in the manner the culture of technical control dictates. Eventually, we must reintroduce a broader concept of politics into the educational system. We now teach young people to know about “things”; we teach them forms of scientific knowledge. We do not teach them how to make choices with others. We do not develop the kind of intelligence needed to make public judgments. Not only is our concept of knowledge limited to expert knowledge, so is our pedagogy. Our version of civic education is based on how many students know their state capitals. But the

movements that are now changing the political history of the world are not led by people who knew their state capitals better than other people.

What specific goals would translate this vision from rhetoric into reality? At least three suggest themselves. If American society were to achieve them, much of the vision could be realized.

If our democracy is to remain vital, no goal is more important than bringing the expert-public relationship into better balance. For decades now, a vicious cycle has been unfolding: as the experts usurp more and more of the nation's decision making, the public slumps ever more into mass opinion. There are several logical alternatives for stopping the vicious cycle. We can weaken the experts. We can try to strengthen the public. Or we can combine the two approaches.

In practice, however, it makes no sense to weaken the experts. A populist, anti-expert, anti-intellectual rampage might give some activists emotional satisfaction, but it would be short-lived. The conservative nature of the vision demands that we accept our identity as heirs of the Enlightenment. To be true to that tradition, we must also accept its conviction that scientific knowledge gives our civilization vast powers of control over the material conditions of life. A concomitant of such acceptance is a willingness to give a place of honor to experts and to scientific/technological knowledge. Given the nature of modern industrial society, to discourage the experts from making their optimum contribution would be mindlessly self-destructive. The great task of our era is to tame the culture of technical control, not destroy it. The strategy of choice, then, is to seek to strengthen the public.

A second goal is to broaden several shared cultural meanings, namely, what it means to be

a leader in our society, what it means to be a citizen, and what it means to pursue knowledge. Literature on leadership is vast, but seldom does it focus on the leader as a person who helps to shape public judgment. Strong leaders usually are regarded as individuals who arrive at decisions through individual gifts of character, intelligence, and insight. They then exercise leadership through persuasion, calling upon additional gifts of communication, sincerity, and charisma. It is fashionable among elites to regard as craven



and despicable the tendency of political leaders to “follow the opinion polls” rather than their own convictions.

It should be clear that the two alternatives of slavishly following the opinion polls or standing on one's own convictions irrespective of public opinion are false choices for a democracy. In a democracy, one of the major qualifications of leaders is that they develop the skill to move the public toward consensus by playing a constructive role at every stage of the public

judgment process—consciousness raising, working through, and resolution. For this to happen, the culture has to broaden its definition of leadership to incorporate this ability.

What it means to be a citizen must also evolve culturally. In today's America, citizenship is largely a matter of rights and of voting. People are far more mindful of the rights of citizenship

Experts and public have different roles to perform.

than of its obligations. The general view is, "This is a free country. I have the right to say what's on my mind, move wherever and whenever I want, and do whatever I want as long as it doesn't interface with the rights of others."

On the obligation side of the equation, people acknowledge that they ought to vote and pay some taxes (though not as much as they are now paying). Almost no one feels a personal obligation *as a citizen* to struggle with the issues that confront the country and contribute to their solution. Most Americans do not think they *can* contribute ("I don't know enough about the issue"); and even if they could, they do not think that their contributions are wanted.

They are, of course, correct in this latter assumption: policymakers do not really seek public input. But the task of coming to public judgment requires that people grow convinced that their views count. Making an intelligent contribution is hard work. Americans will not do it unless they have an incentive. It does not have to be a big incentive. But Americans must, at the very least, know that leadership is listening and is responsive. There is no way to change the meaning of leadership without simultaneously changing the meaning of citizenship.

To improve public judgment, the adversarial relationship between experts, and public must be transformed into a cooperative, mutually supportive one. There is no need for conflict. Experts and public have different roles to perform. The public should not try to play amateur expert. The expert should not permit personal values to preempt the rights of citizens to make their own value judgments.

Parts of the education and training system must be redesigned to pay more attention to the *unfamiliar* methods of representative thinking, public choice formulation, working through, and democratic dialogue. This part of the system is almost totally neglected. If more institutions were devoted to improving the methods needed to advance public judgment, the chances of creating a better expert-public balance would be greatly enhanced.

It would be naïve to minimize the scope of the task. Success requires not only changes in existing institutions, such as the media and the nation's elite professional training systems, but also the creation of new institutions and the stimulation of cultural change. Moreover, changes need to occur on both sides of the expert-public gap: the public has to change as well as the



experts. And, perhaps most difficult of all, these changes must occur despite formidable resistance to the concept of public judgment.

On the other hand, the practical experience gained by the Public Agenda and Kettering foundations over the past several decades gives reason for optimism. They show that the task is doable. Through a variety of programs, these two organizations have been chipping away at the many obstacles to public judgment. Their experience suggests that, given enough time, some mass opinion can be converted into public

judgment. In absolute terms, the amount may be small. But its effects may be far-reaching—enough to change American history.

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Reinventing Citizenship

by Harry C. Boyte

“The challenge in politics is to cultivate the political skills that allow people to work productively with others.”

As a pundit once put it, we get the government we deserve. Today, politics is seen as the work of politicians. If most citizens claim a role, it is as marginal players in the game of politics: volunteers, complainers, or special interest advocates. Unless we reinvent the concept of “citizen,” few things are likely to change. Simple anger at politicians lets the rest of us off the hook.

What some have called the “paradox of democracy”—its efflorescence around the world and decline in the United States—is usually wrongly diagnosed. Symptoms are mistaken for causes. In this vein, many problems are identified in politics. Washington writer, E. J. Dionne argues for a shift from moralized posturings to a politics of pragmatic problem solving. *Common Cause* documents the corrosive impact of large sums of money and political ads. Conservatives argue for term limitations on the grounds that politicians have forgotten their status as “ordinary people.”

We might, however, reimagine these various proposals as attempts to address the underlying *civic* crisis rather than—as they now appear to be—attempts merely to address the crisis in governmental machinery. Term limits emerge, after all, from an intuition that a political class no longer sees itself as part of the citizenry. Proposals for change in the format of television commercials address the dilemma that campaigns are no longer discussions and debates among citizens about the challenges facing the country, but largely public relations efforts. Today’s dominant understanding of politics—as something politicians do—reflects that of James Madison’s *Federalist Paper* #10, where Madison argued that deliberations of representatives, “a

chosen body of citizens,” are “more consonant to the public good than if pronounced by the people themselves.” He gave title to officeholders. But in fact, this view has been contested from the beginning of the republic. Thomas Jefferson had a far different understanding of politics—one that was eventually reflected in the ninth and tenth amendments to the Constitu-

Politicians have forgotten their status as “ordinary people.”

tion, reserving all powers not specifically assigned to officials to the citizens themselves,

where everyman is . . . participator in the government of affairs, not merely at an election one day in the year but every day [and] he will let the heart be torn out of his body sooner than his power be wrested from him by a Caesar or a Bonapart.

Whatever Madison’s hopes for an enlightened and virtuous political class that would adjudicate the contending narrow interests of the nation, in fact Americans’ voluntary and political involvements were closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Ordinary people acting in the world beyond government gained a sense of their stake and role in government itself. This is what gave rise to Abraham Lincoln’s famous formulation at Gettysburg: government of the people by the people and for the people. The decline of civic involvement in politics in recent years means that people lose a sense of their stake and ownership in the nation. They become outsiders and tourists of the age. The politics of serious democracy is the give-and-take, messy, everyday, public work through which citizens set about dealing with the problems of their common existence. Politics

is the way people *become* citizens: accountable players and contributors to the country. In place of government of the people by the people and for the people—a politics in which we have a role and personal stake—we see government as “for” the people, providing us services and giving us answers. From a nation of citizens, we have become a nation of clients. Many dynamics contribute to the erosion of responsible political participation, from mass communications and patterns of mobility to the emergence of the corporate economy and a consumer culture. But perhaps the least remarked and most central is this: civic relationships have become expert-client relations. In the process, public life has eroded from the fabric of America’s civil society. Politics is not likely to improve in any substantial fashion until this pattern, itself, is challenged and changed.

In the 19th century a flowering of voluntary, civic, and reform efforts in America significantly expanded citizens’ sense of the public world and the meanings of politics. Alexis de Tocqueville was surprised again and again in his travels across the country, in the 1830s, to discover that the public substituted its own activity for that of officials or government. In America when he observed that 100,000 citizens had declared their intention to refrain from alcohol, he said that in Europe they would have sent a petition to the king!

It is a commonplace of recent historical scholarship to observe that citizen-centered ideas of politics came under assault in the world of large institutions and transcontinental communications of the 20th century. The Progressive period of the early 20th century sought the radical relocation of politics to the state. Progressives spoke in democratic accents to confront rhetorically “the mighty forces” of commerce

and industry that dominated the American economy. But they also envisioned “control” over commercial interests in a sense far different than had earlier democratic movements of the 19th century. While Progressive reformers took aim at corrupt urban machine politics they also saw officials and professionals as the significant

The State is as real as the people who compose it.

public agents. Herbert Croly, the *New Republic* editor who redefined democracy away from any local civic activity to what he called the “great community” of the state, argued that democracy no longer could mean that citizens “assemble after the manner of a New England town meeting.” Instead of the communal experience of towns, the nation as a whole must be bound together by “a comprehensive social ideal,” mediated by modern media. Direct civic encounter was not necessary since “the active citizenship of the country meets every morning and evening and discusses the affairs of the nation, with the newspaper as an impersonal interlocutor,” providing “abundant opportunities of communications and consultation without any meeting” at all.



Yet historians who take such rhetoric at face value have also neglected a more complex side to 20th-century history. More active understandings of politics continued to flourish in what might best be called “mediating political institutions,” like parties, ethnic groups, local business organizations, active unions, neighborhood schools, settlement houses, publicly minded churches or synagogues, foreign language associations, and local press. Women’s suffrage organizations and their offspring, for example, did not only fight for the rights of formal citizenship through enfranchisement of women voters. They also sought to teach an understanding of politics and citizenship as “civic housekeeping” on a range of problems. Thus, the *Woman Citizen’s Library*, a 12-volume collection of practical and theoretical material on “the larger citizenship,” included among its authors leading suffragists such as Jane Addams and Cary Chapman Catt. In its 1913 inaugural edition, it declared that:

The State is as real as the people who compose it. The duties of citizenship are as definite as the duties of house-keeping. Only as these self-evident facts are fully appreciated will women be able to share in those many and splendid reforms which we can see must come in our social life.

The volumes included topics that ranged from the mechanics of political parties to questions of “the larger citizenship,” like “the liquor traffic,” “child labor,” “equal pay for equal work,” “schools,” and “safeguarding the woman immigrant.” Such a view of citizenship inspired lasting organizations like the League of Women Voters, direct successor to the National American Women’s Suffrage Association. Ethnic and machine political organizations continued as a strong presence in many large cities until the

1950s or 1960s. In Chicago, Mike Royko has described how precinct captains and ward bosses of the political machine created the connections between immigrants and larger society:

The immigrant family looked to the captain as more than a link with a new and strange government: he was the government. He could tell them how to fill out their papers, how to pay their taxes, how to get a license. He was the welfare agency, with a basket of food and some coal when things got tough, an entree to the crowded charity hospital. He could take care of it when one of the kids got in trouble with the police.

None of this should be romanticized; it had strong personal and parochial dimensions. Middle-class suffrage organizations which called for a “new citizenship” had racist and nativist features. They justified women’s voting in part by arguing it would reduce the influence of undesirable foreigners and blacks. Ethnic political bosses created organizations that resembled feudal strongholds. Neighborhoods like Bridgeport, the Irish enclave that produced Richard Daley and two earlier mayors of Chicago, was a parochial small town within the city, as quick to threaten an errant black as are the Howard Beaches of our day. Daley’s boyhood club, known as the Hamburgs, was found by a Chicago commission to have played a major role in instigating the race riot of 1919, which left 15 whites and 23 blacks dead after a black youth crossed the line separating the 27th Street beach from the 29th Street beach.

For all their limitations, however, political institutions like the suffrage organizations and the urban party machines created an everyday public scaffolding for politics, a kind of civic capital, that the nation could draw on in times of challenge and crisis. Under the umbrella of urban machines, for instance, immigrants



became involved in a range of civic initiatives, from building churches, synagogues, native-language newspapers, and ethnic organizations to launch reform efforts. All these could be considered a form of everyday politics that helped widen people’s particular identities to include a larger understanding of their role and stake in the nation. Boundaries between formal institutions like the local school and union were not nearly as distinct as they were to become.

The Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s was a powerful extension of these traditions of citizen centered politics. When Martin Luther King Jr. stressed the need to “make real the promise of democracy” and to bring our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the Founding Fathers,” he meant considerably more than simply winning for blacks an end to segregation or the right to vote in elections. He also meant recovering a strong practice and understanding of citizenship and democratic politics. The Citizenship Schools of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference sought to put such language into practice, teaching skills of public problem solving and politics to black communities across the South.

Despite civil rights, however, our civic capital had begun to erode significantly with World War II. A view of the professional, manager, and expert as the significant problem solver spread through European and American politics alike. In the 1950s, the Swedish sociologist

The increasingly media-centered nature of election campaigns furthered the distance between citizens and politics.

Gunnar Myrdal could argue that “increasing political harmony [is emerging] between all citizens in the advanced welfare state. The internal political debate in those countries is becoming increasingly technical in character.” Social policy in countries like Sweden—long a model for progressively inclined Americans—was if anything farther advanced toward a professionalized view.

In America, McCarthyism and the atmosphere of the Cold War further contributed to a depoliticized, professional-dominated public environment. The citizen was reinvented as the oxymoron, “private citizen.” Home ownership, seen by community activists like Mary Parker Follett earlier in the 20th century as analogous to Jeffersonian small freeholds, a foundation for involvement in the public life of the community, had changed its meaning. The house was a “castle,” a fortress from the world. The ideal became isolated suburban families tied together by the consumer culture.

Television and the increasingly media-centered nature of election campaigns furthered the distance between citizens and politics. Candidate “packaging” reworked the link between citizens and candidates into a connec-

tion between audience and spectacle, with periodic moments of consumption when voters got to select the best “package.” Simultaneously, the growth of professional services in every field—from education to trade unions to voluntary organizations like the Red Cross and the YMCA—more and more rendered citizens as clients, not problem solvers, and detached professional knowledge from any larger civic meaning or context. Unions switched from being centers of community life, becoming service organizations that provide packaged benefits to members. Schools became suffused with professional jargon, which made them seem foreign territory to many parents. Organizations like the YMCA de-emphasized citizenship and stressed sports facilities and programs to enhance self-esteem. At the center of this, people came to see government less as their instrument—“of and by the people”—but as a service provider.

The professionalization of mediating political institutions, and the spread everywhere of the professional-client pattern, created a vacuum that has had disastrous consequences for both officeholders and citizens. The vacuum has been filled over recent generations by the rise of an insular, professionalized politics, on the one hand, often accompanied by a therapeutic language of caring and concern. On the other hand, it is populated by utopian, personalized, and righteous strands of activism.

The active understanding of democracy that emerged in the Civil Rights Movement inspired a generation of young radicals on college campuses and helped to spark important social movements such as contemporary feminism; but the New Left’s stance as critic on the outside of American institutional life and culture also created a considerably different dynamic than those SCLC citizenship schools that aimed at helping blacks become “first-class citizens.”

Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" positions the black struggle for freedom as the embodiment of America's diverse traditions and institutional aspirations. In contrast, *The Port Huron Statement*, a manifesto of 1960s' student radicalism, is an unrelenting attack on virtually every American institution.

Thus despite their democratic creativity, youthful protests generated a personalized, moralistic politics that advocated *for* the dispossessed and powerless even while activists sought to bypass the compromises and ambiguities of existing communal and institutional life. Such radicalism ironically but easily accommodated patterns of expert-client relationships in which professionals present themselves as benevolent outsiders who seek to rescue the unfortunate from depraved environments.

Today, a politics of professionalized, intimate care structures large sections of the economy, while it also is advanced as the solution for America's fragmentation and civic disengagement.

The language of care suffuses the community service. Educators and politicians advance community service as the most promising method for reconnecting the younger generation with the duties, values, and practices of citizenship. Yet in fact the common use of a personal development approach in community service turns programs into apprenticeships for professional service delivery, not environments in which young people learn the civic and political skills of public leadership. One recent study of high school community service programs found that educational objectives typically include such aims as "learning to care for others," "developing self-esteem," "a sense of personal worth," "self-understanding," and "capacity to persevere in difficult tasks." Learning "politics" through time worn *political* themes like interest, power,

and strategic thinking was absent. In settings like this, students may become "politicized" about the larger social problems and policies they confront in individual terms, but their resulting activism is moralistic, personalized, and not informed by any deep understanding

We are all inevitably implicated in the world's ambiguities and compromises.

of problems. Thus, it reproduces the pattern of middle-class solicitude for the poor and the unfortunate that erodes civic politics.

One result of this utopian, intimate, and sentimental quality of citizen activism is that people see themselves as aggrieved, righteous, and misunderstood outsiders. Countless variations on the theme of "send them a message" have, in consequence, become the main way in which many people are connected to the larger political world. People ask to be heard in politics and to receive things from government. They rarely imagine themselves as creators or producers of politics. As John Brandl, an economics professor who served several terms in the



Minnesota Senate, puts it: today government largely means the delivery of benefits to the appreciative, paid for by the oblivious.

The challenge in politics is not so much to generate larger numbers of experts, to find moral consensus, or to develop capacities for emotional self-revelation, as it is to develop a vocabulary and cultivate the political skills that allow people to work productively with others, whether or not they like or agree with each other.

Critics such as Michael Lerner or Amitai Etzioni proposed that in response to the fragmentation and discontents of the time, America needs a renewed spirit of community, shared values, and service to strengthen citizenship. But when community becomes the centerpiece of the vocabulary of public action it takes on an ethereal quality, sliding into a therapeutic idiom of care and solicitude that covers the boundless expansion in professional interventions. If we are to do much about the disconnection of ordinary people from democracy, we need a practical politics in which citizens claim and develop their own, self-directed efforts in a world of diverse communities, values, and points of view. Americans need to relearn the skills of

everyday problem solving—how to deal with others with whom we may not desire at all to share life in community, but with whom we recognize the need for common work.

To renew any substantial citizenship is a difficult and challenging task because it means shifting from righteous “clienthood” to an understanding that we are all inevitably implicated in the world’s ambiguities and compromises. It also means learning the strategic sense and practical skills of everyday politics.

Project Public Life, a civic and political education initiative at the University of Minnesota, regularly asked groups of young people and adults what to do about critical issues they saw in society. Almost invariably, “respondents” look to professionals and government to solve their problems. They had never been asked—nor have they imagined—what they might do about significant public issues, even those with immediate consequences for themselves. In one session, a group of deaf youngsters listed dozens of problems, from discrimination to phones that were unusable and teachers who did not know sign language. Afterwards, the two social workers with the group told our workshop leader that in more than 20 years of combined work with the deaf, they had never heard anyone ask hearing-impaired teenagers what they themselves could do about the problems they experienced in their lives.

Most mechanisms for citizen political action, aside from voting, involve learning the techniques of lobbying, pressuring officials, and gaining access to policymakers. But in fact, these techniques are in many ways a distraction. They assume that the citizens’ main role is to pressure government officials to act, rather than to take action themselves.

Politics comes from the Greek word, *politicos*, meaning “of the citizen.” Citizens need to include



themselves again in politics for reasons of both practicality and larger purpose. A class of issues has emerged that require for their resolution significant changes in behavior, values, and cultural assumptions—issues such as racial conflict, drugs, crime, homelessness, the education of a literate and sophisticated workforce,

We will have to learn to be more than outsiders.

entrepreneurial development, and protection of the environment. Recycling depends on citizen involvement. School reform requires parents as significant stakeholders and participants in the process. Reducing crime rests upon stronger neighborhoods and new cooperation between police and residents. Political problem solving is today too complex and many-sided a process to be satisfactorily left to political leaders, government, or any large systems alone. New ways to involve citizens as public problem solvers are essential.

To meet the challenge of developing a renewed practice of citizenship and public life, politics must show the connections between political society and public affairs, on the one hand, and citizens' daily lives and community interests, on the other. This requires remembering a history of practical Politics.

We will have to learn to be more than outsiders, innocents, and supplicants. "They" are neither the problem nor the solution. There is no they in this case. As Pogo put it, we have met the enemy and he is us. To do much about the challenges facing the nation, citizens will have to reenter the arena that we hate, rediscover its rewards, and take up its challenges. We need to become political again if we are to become participants in the creation of our common world.

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Politics Is About ...?

by Harold H. Saunders

“The capacity of citizens, outside the structures of power, to relate constructively is critical to human survival and progress.”

Starting points for thinking about the character of politics have varied widely. It is worth taking a few moments to situate the paradigm presented here in that larger spectrum. As Thomas Kuhn says about paradigm shifts in science, “the decision to reject one paradigm is always simultaneously the decision to accept another, and the judgment leading to the decision involves the comparison of both paradigms with nature and with each other.”

On one side of the spectrum have been scholars of politics, understandably concerned to define the study of politics as an academic discipline. Their need is to define their field rigorously so as to make research manageable and to distinguish it from others. The prevailing mantra has been, “politics is about power”—with power defined as control or coercion. This approach has led to focus on institutional politics, while others in the field argue for a broader approach. Many have defined problems in terms amenable to mathematical analysis. But across the spectrum have been some political and other social scientists, philosophers, practitioners, and citizens-at-large who felt that the capacity of citizens, outside the *structures* of power, to relate constructively has been neglected, yet is critical to human survival and progress. They have relied more on the description and conceptualization of experience than on quantification.

I suggest that the mantra of this second group might be “politics is about relationships,” of which power is one component—only one and frequently not the most important. My own deep concern is that a focus on the structures of power leaves out most of the world’s citizens. Yet many of today’s conflicts and problems are

beyond the reach of governments acting alone. Power as traditionally defined—whether the power of office or the power of a gun—has proven itself a deadly principle around which to organize politics. It is divisive, exclusive, and too often destructive.

A paradigm that limits thinking about politics to the actions of governments and institutions is incomplete. A paradigm that builds thinking about politics around the struggle for power, defined as control, cannot capture the complexity of human efforts to act together peacefully and constructively. A paradigm that leaves out most of the world's people can only be of limited use. Most important, such a paradigm ignores human resources critical to meeting the countless challenges to our survival. Politics is what happens when citizens outside government come together and build relationships to solve collective problems. Power—their capacity to influence the course of events—is generated by their capacity to concert. This seems quite different from a government's power to control, to coerce, or to impose punishment or sanctions. The capacity to influence the course of events through an open-ended political process seems sharply different from “producing intended results.”

Five ideas are basic to this view of politics: First is the concept of the citizen as a political actor. Second is the concept of civil society as the complex of associations that active citizens form and through which they interact with other groups to do their work and to extend their reach. Third is the view that politics is a cumulative, multilevel, open-ended process of continuous interaction—not just action and reaction—involving these citizens and associations. Fourth, the interactions of citizens around a particular problem seem to unfold and deepen through a progression of

stages that I call the “citizens’ political process.” Fifth, since citizens do not normally exercise power in the form of coercion, power, in *their* context, must be defined as the capacity through the relationships they form to influence the course of events.

A disparate collection of citizens can form itself into an engaged public.

Through the citizens’ political process, a disparate collection of citizens, taking responsibility to deal with problems, can form itself into an engaged public with capacity to change the course of events. The process, in effect, provides the public space in which citizens can come together to make the choices and form the relationships and associations within civil society that they need to solve their problems in the larger body politic. That public space is where each citizen can feel he or she belongs,



not the territory of any single faction. It is psychological in that participants experience the views and feelings of other citizens in a way that creates a new context for personal thought and a different way of relating. By working within that process, citizens can generate their

To deliberate is to agonize within oneself and with others over advantages and disadvantages.

form of power, which lies partly in their effective conduct of the process.

Lest I be charged with idealizing this process, or ignoring that many citizens choose not to engage, let me say that this is a conceptualization of the experience through which citizens seem to progress when they tackle a problem together, over time. In transforming their relationships, they develop the capacity to talk, plan, and work together to accomplish goals on which they agree. This conceptualization is rooted in participation with and observation of countless groups that have chosen to engage.



The process begins when a citizen concludes that a situation hurts her or his interests badly enough to require change. Seeing a connection between personal interests and this situation, the citizen reaches out to other citizens whose interest may also be hurt. Citizens with comparable concerns talk informally. This can take time; the problem may seem daunting; citizens may fear the reactions of those who oppose change; widening circles of talk may be needed to create a critical mass who are ready for systematic talk.

Then beyond the internal interactions that define individual groups are the interactions among groups. Much new thinking about politics recognizes that many political problems are fundamental problems of relationships. Sometimes citizens' organizations have concluded that basic change can be made only by fundamentally changing working relationships—how people habitually deal with one another. Their idea is to construct relationships that can solve problems whether or not the individuals involved like and fully trust each other. The associations that citizens form are held together by the promises citizens make to each other, that is, their covenants.

When such groups meet, participants need to spend time talking about the situation 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 “naming” of the problem from the citizen's viewpoint, not the experts' or the government's. An important task at this stage of their talk is to learn why and how the problem threatens what these citizens value. Unless they name the problem in a way that reflects their connection to it—why it hurts their interests—their efforts to deal with it will not be as effective as they

might be. Naming the problem in a way that engages each participant is essential in building the common ground necessary to start tackling it. When the group has named the problem in this way, they need to probe its dynamics in ways that help them frame the questions that enter their minds about possible approaches, opportunities, and consequences as they prepare themselves to weigh possible directions for dealing with it. But citizens do not frame questions as experts do, in terms of technical approaches; they frame choices in terms of what they value: they have defined the problem they must deal with and identified the approaches they must take in tackling it.

Citizens meet to deliberate—to weigh possible approaches in light of what they value. To deliberate is not just to “talk about” problems; to deliberate is to agonize within oneself and with others over the advantages and disadvantages—the consequences—of each possible approach they have framed. Often more than one approach contains elements that a person individually values; so, too, together they must

The most important resource in a community is often political will.

make difficult trade-offs. As they weigh the approaches with others, 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, and this defines the starting point for setting the broad direction in which to move together to create a situation that all can live with. It does not signify total agreement—just enough agreement to undergird shared purpose in a particular situation.

Thus deliberation involves choice. Citizens must choose before they can act. Taking responsibility for their future begins with citizens recognizing that they have choices. They remain subject to forces beyond their control, but choices come partly from the way they deal with those circumstances.

As citizens grapple with their questions and possible approaches together, they begin to change the quality of their relationships. They emerge with a sense of what is tolerable and intolerable for each actor—and why. They consider their commitment to engage in the common task of dealing with the problem. The mutual promises they make will bind them in whatever associations they form to accomplish the task.

Deliberation leads to determining whether there is political will to pursue the course chosen. Their final question is this: do the consequences of doing nothing outweigh the anticipated results of the chosen course, or not? If the consequences of maintaining the status quo are more serious than attempting the course chosen, there is presumably a tentative will to move ahead. The most important resource in a community is often political will: citizens’ commitment to pursue a problem until they have it under control.

When citizens have determined the direction in which they want to move, they must then decide how to get there. Perhaps to work through these five steps:

- List resources they can marshal for tackling the problem.
- List 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 these obstacles. (And these may include psychological moves to change relationships as well as concrete actions to remove material barriers.)



- List actors who can take such steps. The aim is to engage multiple actors who can generate momentum through complementary actions.
- Try to connect actions so they become mutually reinforcing and encourage cooperation, as one actor responds to a previous actor and stimulates another to join the process.

Unlike the discrete actions of institutions, complementary actions are not directed toward a single objective. Rather, they are organic and repeating, like a jazz 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. Or sometimes I call this “building a scenario” of interactive steps because it unfolds much as a scene of a play might develop. Party A is asked whether it could take Step 1 and responds that it could do so but only if Party B would respond constructively 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 include moving insights from this small group out into the community through the associations to which members relate in order to engage a complex of groups. If the group has not consulted with others along the way, it may need to spend time within its own associations sharing the experience in the deliberation with others and allowing time for them to digest insights from the deliberation.

An essential component of each stage is taking stock: What did we set out to accomplish? How are we doing? A relationship is not fully formed until parties to it have asked and responded to these questions together. The process of learning together—the systems analysts write of feedback—strengthens a relationship.

These five stages are not intended to be rigid or linear. A group can at any point go back and reexamine initial assumptions or judgments in light of new developments, learning, or insights. The human mind is not always bound by a conclusion that has been reached; it often washes back and forth through thoughts that are in formation or relationships that are unfolding in unexpected ways. Nor does this framework ignore power; it recognizes broader bases for power and defines power in terms less absolute than control—essentially 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 government’s ability to coerce: by acting together with no apparatus of raw power they create conditions in which government could function adequately.

I do not suggest that any group will necessarily follow the stages of the citizens’ political process exactly as described here. But, experience does suggest that these stages reflect a *progression of interaction*, through which citizens seem

to move in tackling a problem together. The process is a conceptualization of experience rather than a theoretical construct. Citizens, outside formal power structures, can have their own systematic processes, practices, and political strategies with a sense of direction, destination, and potential. Through such processes, they can generate the capacity, or

This view of politics as relationship—the citizens’ capacity to concert—opens a door.

“power” they need. Such a process is a citizens’ instrument for change, *their* version of political instruments. Focusing on citizens interacting in concert—human beings in relationship—enables us to integrate whole human beings, in whole bodies politic, into our view of “politics.” It includes 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!

This view of politics as relationship—the citizens’ capacity to concert—opens a door from politics to economics, particularly economic development. One exciting idea formulated in the 1990s was the concept named “social capital” that burst on the scene with Harvard professor Robert Putnam’s 1993 book, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. It observed that, as citizens interact through their associations, networks among these groups develop. These networks nourish continuous interaction that becomes the context for gradual development of what Putnam calls a “normal

generalized reciprocity.” As citizens observe the predictability and the reliability of how each interacts with others, trust grows, and a glue of potential cooperation is added to the social mix. This reservoir of predictable reciprocity becomes part of what Putnam calls “social capital.” It is essential to sound relationships.

The economic premise underlying the concept of social capital is that the economy of a community with dense civic interactions is more likely to function effectively than one without. Citizens in a community with a rich civic culture have developed broadly accepted “rules” of interacting that one might call “unwritten covenants.” A consistent environment makes investors’ calculation of risk more reliable than when economic behavior is unreliable or erratic.

Economists at the World Bank, after analyzing this proposition in widespread communities, have generally accepted this analysis. The problem next is how to put the theory into practice. Michael Woolcock, then at the Bank, distinguished between the “bonding” social capital of smaller, coherent communities or regions where inhabitants know each other, and “bridging” social capital when strangers interact. In smaller regions, people are likely to meet commitments because they believe that a favor for a known person will be reciprocated or that a promise



broken will be “punished” in some way. The greater economic opportunity results when communities of strangers develop shared rules of relating—covenants.

It is now clear that a long missing ingredient in economic development theory is the citizens’ capacity to act in concert. Placed in the context of the citizens’ political process, the common practice of international organizations providing development assistance has been to enter the picture when a community has a problem. They bring experts, design a solution for the problem as they define it, and offer money to implement that solution. They ignore or short circuit these stages in the citizens’ political process when people in the community themselves name the problem and decide what needs to be done, utilizing methods and materials consistent with their culture and skill level. International grant-makers began to recognize, in the mid-1990s, that loans for big projects had not produced the broadly based, sustainable development that funders had anticipated.

Those who say that politics is about power defined as control or coercion focus on instruments that institutions of state and government use: force, economic sanctions, taxation, law enforcement, mediation, negotiation. Those whose point of entry into the study and practice of politics is the citizen as political actor focus on the instruments for change that citizens use—their instruments of power. If citizens generate the capacity to change through the relationships they form, the key to their generation of that capacity is the instrument they use to form these relationships. At the heart of the citizens’ political process is dialogue in some form. Its exact form as a political instrument depends on the setting in which it is used.

In some communities with well-formed relationships, citizens can talk together reasonably,

even when they disagree sharply about how to approach a problem. Relationships and political practices are strong enough to enable citizens to resolve their differences collaboratively. Toward the other end of the spectrum are communities that are divided by deep-rooted human conflicts,

Citizens generate the capacity to change through the relationships they form.

ranging from violent intercommunal wars to subsurface tensions not yet violent that nevertheless block collaboration. For these situations, we have developed a process of “Sustained Dialogue” to transform relationships that block collaboration and must be changed if citizens are to work together. This process develops with distinctive attention to a *dual* agenda—*both* the practical problems at hand *and* the relationships that may be the main cause of these problems. Such a process can extend over months or even years.

The stages of Sustained Dialogue are essentially those of the citizens’ political process, but the process itself is anything but neat and orderly. When they sit down together, participants are often so angry that they can barely look at each other. Their language for mapping problems and relationships is accusation and vituperation. One stage does not fully end before the next begins. Participants move back and forth across the stages when they need to update a situation, rethink an earlier judgment, or tackle a new problem. Or their minds may be all over the place when they are groping for focus. Despite their rocky path, they continuously deepen their experience with their relationships, through dialogue.

At the heart of citizens' capacity to act in concert are nonviolent and constructive ways of relating. Human beings in relationship—acting in concert with one another—have too long been neglected in the study of politics. It is time to highlight the human dimension of politics and the enormous potential of citizens working in concert to complement the work of governments in meeting the world's challenges.

As a practitioner, I am interested in what would happen to political thought if one started from citizens outside formal structures of traditionally defined power as a point of entry into the study and practice of politics. Some conflicts seem beyond the reach of governments until citizens achieve understanding on living together in peace. Some problems such as drug addiction, alcoholism, and AIDS will not be dealt with until human beings change their behavior. Even corruption has roots in what citizens will tolerate in their daily interactions. It is unfair to expect governments to solve problems that can only be dealt with by citizens in and out of government collaborating as citizens of whole bodies politic.



Many of us hold to an aspiration of whole bodies politic in which governments and citizens each take a strong place and, in the best of worlds, collaborate creatively. As this happens, political thinking must respond to the new reality. Not to change lenses to bring this emerging, troubled, and demanding world into focus seems unthinkable and possibly catastrophic. As our political thinking makes room for multiple actors, the focus of our senses widens. Whereas we used to focus on a few key institutions, we must now find a way to keep track of a complex of continuous human as well as institutional interactions. It probably never was adequate to think only about how institutions *acted on* each other. Even in the simplest of communities, human beings shaped interactions. Now we must focus on politics as a multilevel process of continuous interaction among citizens in whole bodies politic.

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“We no longer live in distinct little burghs. We live in multiple nested communities where familiarity decreases as it radiates out . . . disconnected communities, related to our work. . . . Each of these ‘communities’ will be a civic ecology of human interaction.”

People don't just talk. They interact with the people they talk to; they relate. They relate with kin, friends, and acquaintances using one kind of talk. They talk differently to people who don't fall in those categories, people in other circles whom they may or may not recognize individually but who are yet seen as “on their level.” And they talk to yet other people—and to disembodied institutional presences—who inhabit another planetary structure: actors with the impersonal authority to make things happen; government officials; store clerks; traffic cops. Of course the separating lines are ill-defined, blurry, and somewhat flexible. (Your bartender may become more like a friend or kin, and your confidences to him become more intimate as the night wears on.) But we relate to people in these three basic ways: to those in our circle of trust, to those in other circles, and to those connected to impersonal organizations or institutions, with authority, and who may remain unseen.

For each of these ways of talking we have a set of norms for what's appropriate—all rather well known, and applicable specifically to one or another of these settings. These norms apply to verbal as well as nonverbal communication: intonations, timing, phrasings, and “body language.” The norms are heavily influenced culturally: this is the reason cross-cultural communication is wrought with peril and is taught in business and diplomacy schools. Wars can be started and deals ruined from a misconstrued word or gesture. Some people are naturally sensitive to these nuances, while others—we've all met them—can be clueless. Yet the effect of miscommunication can be unstoppable, even if sometimes bewildering.

In *public politics*—that is the relating among citizens attempting to deal with their community’s issues of shared importance—the value of such communication is multiplied. It is socialized. We are unmistakably social animals: from our primate ancestors we inherited, as a survival mechanism, the skills of relating in a

We knew that we needed them and that they needed us. And we knew that *they* knew.

bonded group. This gave us power in a common defense; it allowed specialization of tasks such as hunting, gathering, and child-rearing; and it established an order of authority that held things together. The norms of relating, and the pecking order that came with it, were well known and there were mechanisms for handling challenges to either: chastising, expulsion, or accepted dethronement! We didn’t even have to *enjoy* the company of those in our circle; we knew that we needed them and that they needed us. And we knew that *they* knew.

As clear as these rules was the notion also of who was *in* our circle, as *one of us*, and who *wasn’t*. Outsiders—“*they*”—were recognizable but kept at a safe distance outside our circle of trust. We realized that we might need each other under some specific circumstance but we also knew that in a bind they would give priority to their own. Trust thus was likelier to be negotiated on a case-by-case basis ... and verified.

Over successive generations the survivor groups deepened and honed this innate and increasingly complex sense of tribe or community. We related to those within our comfort zone in some specific ways and to those outside in different ways. The *institutions* that ruled us

—family, kinship, tribe, neighborhood—and the norms that ruled them were simple but effective. They were also able to evolve autonomously in response to change—from within, as the size and composition of the group changed, and from without, as the natural environment was altered or the geography became more crowded. The process by which the norms *changed* may or may not have been conscious, but an unscripted interaction revealed that survival of the commons was best served by minute alterations, perhaps emanating from the most local levels or one-on-one interactions, but eventually bubbling up, by comparison and success, to a level sanctioned broadly by habit. Undoubtedly there was friction. People must have talked about the felt pressures to change, and about tensions brought forth by experimenting with it. (Change can be enticing but it is always irritating.) It probably meant speaking out of turn, or acting beyond the edge of the norm. But some things stuck. Consciously or not, choices were considered and made. People *deliberated*. We not only made decisions about relating and acting in different ways; we were possibly also able to alter the mechanisms and norms by



which decisions were made. People related in novel ways and maybe involved new people in their talk. With this unstructured deliberation we *evolved* politically. Unawares or not, like Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, we spoke in political prose.

As we advanced technologically and our “community” grew in size and intricacy, new layers of institutions emerged to manage it. Again the norms changed and new norms were created to deal with new realities; but survival of the commons remained the *organizing principle* in this emergent, adaptive complexity. To manage evolving change, a new set of relational rules was needed to deal with the ever-more-impersonal structures of governance. They emerged organically and were likely fed by a continuing process of deliberative trial and error—probably also with substantial violence flaring to deal with the tensions. In Darwinian terms, the best-structured burgs survived. To this day, and in our exponentially complicated world, we still aim to govern ourselves by continually evolving variants of those three basic sets of norms: to relate with those we trust, to others like us around us, and to the impersonal institutional actors that manage “the world out there.”

This of course is by now an oversimplification. We no longer live in distinct little burgs. We live in multiple nested communities (family, neighborhood, town) where familiarity decreases as it radiates out. We also participate in disconnected communities, related to our work or to issues that absorb us, some of which (the office, village, e.g.) can be highly personalized, while others (say environmental or gay “communities”) can be intense but highly institutionalized and impersonal. Nevertheless each of these “communities” will be a civic ecology of human interaction, with all

the characteristics of its more familiar biological counterparts, each with its rules of relating and perhaps in all three levels as described above. Still, in all of these cases, as the personalized level of comfort—the *social distance*—becomes less familiar the norms of relating will be different. Likewise, the norms in each specific case

People related in novel ways and maybe involved new people in their talk. We *evolved* politically.

can evolve in response to changing circumstance: groupings of different interests or ethnicities can discover either affinities or conflicts and the ways of relating for these dispersed topical communities will change in response. In my personal experience, for example, diverse Hispanic and Asian national associations at one time forged bonds over the issue of “English only,” leading not only to collaboration but to new cross-cultural language and norms. Similarly, Puerto Rican and Ukrainian immigrants, engaged in turf battles over access to a major hospital in Chicago, led to stereotyping and tensions beyond the neighborhood between groups who would have otherwise been oblivious of each other.

The Harlem community in New York City is a real and complex case in point. It has a unique history and cohesion forged by a history of racial struggle and Afro-American artistic success. Yet Harlem in 2013 is being rapidly gentrified, drawing the ire of old-time residents not only because of rising property and rental costs but because the “soul” of the old community is being “watered down.” Bereft of public ornamentation, the city assisted a couple of young artists to erect an iconic sculpture symbolizing rebirth near the intersection of Lennox Avenue and

125th Street, the main crossroads of the community. While most neighbors expressed pleasure with the addition, a number complained that the artists were Latinos and the piece symbolized the community's rebirth as something different.

Nevertheless, for simplicity in this analysis let us attempt to visualize a single compact geographical community and observe how people would talk politically in it. Envision first the borders of this imagined village. These will be imprecisely defined and porous enough to allow traffic in and out. Still, members in this community can recognize who belongs in it and who doesn't. And depending on the history and cohesion of the community, acceptance of immigrants into it will be easier or more difficult.

Inside these loose borders grows a whole menagerie of stakeholders. Most noticeable will be the three traditional "sectors" of community analysis: a government or public sector, a business sector, and an organized nonprofit sector. The three are typically presented as interlocking circles in a Venn diagram, with their relative sizes representing the relative strength of their presence in the community. Their overlaps too merit consideration: government often contracts out "public" services to businesses or to nonprofits; business often engages in philanthropy and social responsibility in support of nonprofit, civic causes; and the latter often engage in commercial activities and frequently also volunteer to provide traditionally public services such as rehabilitation of public spaces or community policing. At the center of the triple intersection will be activities such as hospitals and universities that may be nourished by all three sectors.

Surrounding those three larger sectoral structures, and often partially embedded in them, are a number of "quasi" organizations that replicate activities of each of the former, although they may be either formally established or informal. Thus public ornamentation advisory commit-



tees or police auxiliary organizations complement the roles of the government institution they attach to. In the case of business, semi-formal and informal firms either complement, replicate, or unfairly compete with their formal counterparts. Likewise informal volunteer groups attach themselves as supplementary adjuncts to formal nonprofits. But in all cases, and through experience, each of these will have evolved a set of norms that guide their relationship with the parent sector, fluid norms that evolve through ongoing deliberative trial and error that adapts to changing circumstance and manages the practical tensions and conflicting values that may arise.

U nattached to the larger sectors, but constantly interacting with them as well as with each other, are innumerable autonomous associations, either formally structured or totally spontaneous, that occupy the great mass of the public space. These are coffee clatches, book clubs, and church choirs, Friday-night dominoes gatherings under corner lamp-posts in Latino neighborhoods, nail salon and barbershop habitual hangouts, Saturday sports leagues, neighborhood play-group parents,

and all the other associative opportunities, almost *ad infinitum*, where ordinary folk seek each other for mutual help, entertainment, comfort . . . and in passing to talk about things that concern them. *Civil society*, a term often mistakenly applied only to the organized non-profit sector, really resonates in this mass of

Civil society really resonates in non-formal associational civic life.

non-formal associational civic life. It is the civic equivalent of the dark mass and dark energy that account for the “missing” 96 percent of the mass of the universe. It is in this largely unorganized, mostly unstructured and totally unscripted and unpredictable “emergent space” that civic life is continually brewed: the cauldron of new civic values, the cutting edge of civic culture, the wetlands of a perennially evolving germ of democratic life, generally unavailable to the more rigid structures of the formal systems. Precisely because it is so free to change, change happens here first and is only—and subsequently—legitimized elsewhere, when it is allowed.



Each of these shapeless civic *blobs* (as distinguished from the formal organizational *squares*) is governed internally by a habitual pattern of interaction among its members, a particular set of norms that evolves as the blob . . . well . . . “blobs” along. Its internal rules deal with immediate issues of gender and family norms, of friendship, and of age- and class- and race-specific behavior. Each blob evolves and ends up tailored for what its members make it out to be. The social crucible of the family is ruled by clear gender and age-specific norms. The ladies in a beauty salon relate by age and status and by the ethnicity and social class of their attendants. The sports teams have clear gender and age lines. The rules are all very clear. In mid-America the waitress in the friendly diner can call her habitual male customers “honey” but the latter cannot return the complement in the same way. When change in these aspects begins to happen, in response to chance or circumstance, it will *first* happen here. And it will happen because someone, alone or in conversation with others, consciously or instinctively will weigh the need for doing things differently, deliberate its costs and its benefits, and as a result, perhaps, change the way he relates to those either in or outside his blob.

Then, finishing off the menagerie of stakeholders, finally, is a large number of unaffiliated free-floating individuals. They habitually bump against each other in the open space of this civic protoplasm, against the blobs and against the squares—be they public, business, or nonprofit. Times may join any of these, but they basically keep to themselves. Yet in all their contacts these free-agents are also vector carriers of the culture and may be purveyors of changed attitudes.

Among all the potential interactions, the most important in terms of political evolution are perhaps the interactions *among* the blobs, and *of* the blobs *with* the institutional space.

Such relations among non-intimates are the norms of public political culture. They offer a proper, recognized way of relating—to partial strangers in other blobs or in institutions—that enables public life either to function smoothly or to be a constant obstacle path. Not surprisingly this proper way of relating is called *civility*. These bridging connections between partial strangers, or those access links of individuals or groups with anonymous institutional actors, form the bedrock and may be the most important determinant of the effectiveness of public political life. Effective trust in the fundamental good intentions of *the other*, personal or institutional, is the basis of democratic public life. It requires trusting that the personal or institutional *other* has a stake in making the system work. Absent that basic covenant, hidden agendas will rule and the system will be functionally paralyzed.

Social and economic underdevelopment is in effect the result of an incapacity of individuals to come to joint understandings outside of their bonded trust groups and of the inability of the collective to come to trust the behavior of their institutions. This is where speaking in a conscious deliberative political prose becomes essential to democratic public life. In a society where relational norms have been built upon *mistrust* of the others' intent—or sadly, as in the US case, where that has been a recent trend—the ability to *hear the other* does not happen naturally. It must and can be encouraged by efforts and spaces devoted to that advancement.

Consider furthermore that formal organizations, with their prescribed rules and structures, are also peopled by individual citizens each with his own notion of formality, filtered through his own culture and set of values about what is appropriate. Even the most bloodless bureaucrat will not tow the organizational rulebook all of



the time. A clear sense of institutional purpose will compel judgment, and an occasional bending of the rules in the service of that purpose. In fact “work to win” is an effective labor pressure stratagem where the employers’ rules are strictly adhered to . . . but not an inch more! As no rulebook can contemplate the universe of possibilities that may arise in even the simplest industrial process, attempting to disallow all judgment by “sticking to the book” ends up paralyzing the process.

Therefore even in structured organizations it is the informal norms—including a commitment

The personal or institutional *other* has a stake in making the system work.

and sacrosanct respect for the purpose of the organization—that ultimately govern and make the system work. Decades-long efforts of development assistance for institutional strengthening, particularly for government and nonprofit institutions, have thus missed the mark; institutions can be strong by design, but lacking an



informal political covenant of purpose they will remain rigid, misutilized, and thus ineffective. Governance for human progress is not simply an engineering or management challenge; it rests on an implicit covenant of trust. That trust is built by a conversation among all the stakeholders, by socializing speech in a consciously deliberative prose.

All of the relational connections discussed here—within bonded groups, between them, and with (as well as within) formal organizations—*emanate* from individuals, *are generated* by individual needs, and *are filtered* by a composite of shared norms and values we recognize as *culture*. They are manifested in patterns of talk and behavior that are specific for each of these connections. Underneath the observable behavior, though, lie iceberg-like, layers of preconceived explanations and prejudices about *the other* in the relationship: of gender, age, and class, even within bonded groups; of reciprocal attitudes toward “other tribes” however construed; of people toward institutions; and of people *in* institutions toward people *out* of them. A different colored filter is applied, selectively, to each category of *another*.

These preconceptions are themselves built upon deeper motivations: on perceptions of power—either *by me* or *over me*—as an instrument of possibility to make things happen; of a constructed sense of one’s interest, be it rational or visceral. And all rest on a fundamental sense of one’s identity. A deliberative conversation among persons is capable of percolating to each of these levels, as it purveys new information and neurologically confronts the emotional *limbic* part of the human brain with its rational *frontal* part. Emotion deliberates within each person to counterpose values, prejudices, interests, and identity, generating on the surface a modified pattern of acceptable behavior toward and with “the other.” We do it all the time in political prose. But most of the time we are not conscious of doing it. And like Molière’s Jourdain, we might be grateful for realizing it and learning to do it better:

By my faith! For more than forty years I have been speaking prose without knowing anything about it, and I am much obliged to you for having taught me that.

The trick is carrying the realization through.

Implicit of course is a theory of how change happens—that change emerges from the myriad interactions that innovate the way things are done. Change is not planned; it is typically an adjustment. It happens in response to minute alterations in the interaction of members in the social ecosystem; it happens from the tendency of all systems to address internal disequilibria, as each actor pushes for his interests and in the process generates a new disequilibrium which itself needs to be addressed; it happens because random external forces, resulting from connected larger political or natural systems, produce major disequilibria, needing readjustments at all levels. And it happens because conscious human decisions end up, authoritatively or by serendipity, introducing disarticulating noise.

This is *politics*, seen broadly as the collective of relationships that mobilize power to deal with issues of collective interest. Seen through our lens, politics would be inherently democratic as it self-organizes in the freely emergent cauldron of new ideas, where a hundred flowers bloom and the better ones

Where a hundred flowers bloom the better ones float to the top.

float to the top. Of course things typically don't happen that way. While new behavioral adjustments are constantly being born and essayed, most will run into the rigid constraints of engrained preconceptions; of an unequal distribution of power to effectively make things happen or ensure that they don't; of deeply vested interests with the muscle to resist change; and of a sense of identity, too often recognized at the expense of the identity of others. As a result, the civic prose that generates innovations may often not transcend its immediate surroundings, and decisions and adjustments will have to be made around the rigid rules. In the best case where the civic culture is committed to institutional probity, these parallel rules may serve to sustain the system; but such a generalized commitment cannot be assumed. In fact, creating this dedication is a challenge of democratic development: for absent this commitment the confrontation of emergent solutions against unresponsively rigid rules ends up producing a parallel ethos where opportunistic violation of formal norms becomes accepted practice. In this climate valuable institutions are delegitimized and corroded, trust in them deteriorates and corruption becomes endemic.

It is not enough to speak in civic prose to an uncivic audience. The latter must change. Institutions devoted to democratic development have for decades invested in advancing in their beneficiaries a capacity to give civic heft to these conversations, their *capacity to concert*. But these well-intentioned efforts of capacity building—*institutional development, participation, civic engagement, and co-production*—have too often misfired, resulting instead in an enhanced capacity for the interveners themselves to define the setting for conversation. Meanwhile, for decades the business community worldwide has seen its interest in investing in the civic quality of the communities where its markets, their workers, or their operations are located. Corporate *ethics* evolved into *corporate social responsibility, pro-poor and fair trade* corporate policies; *socially conscious entrepreneurship* spawned *conscious capitalism* which inspired legislation for *benefit corporations (b-corps)* and *flexible purpose and low-profit limited capability companies*.



All of these institutional interventions—of governments, development agencies, and companies engaged in civic encouragement—might yet conceivably end up emerging from a society where citizens have previously taken ownership and perfected their conscious capacity in governing themselves. But to the extent that such interventions occupy space that should be the sole domain of citizens they will not be instrumental in letting citizens determine the character of their own interactions. Left to their own devices citizens may well produce such mechanisms, as instruments for their own civic—and we now know, economic—advancement. But they will be their own instruments. Structured interventions by the institutional *squares* that

occupy the civic miasma in our community image should therefore limit themselves to observing and only facilitating a space wherein the natural speaking in civic prose would be able to refine by itself its more lyrical political quality. Let the people speak.

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The Affective Dimensions of Public Will

by Noëlle McAfee

“In recognizing themselves as jointly affected, then communicatively addressing what ought to be done, a public arises.”

Years ago I heard the well-known observer of American society, Daniel Yankelovich, make a statement that left an indelible impression. He said, “Any public policy that is not built on public will is built on sand.” Since then, I have noticed that when Congress or an administration would try to push a policy through without public support, more often than not it would eventually fail. Though we are far from being a grassroots democracy, a curious fact is that what the public thinks does indeed seem to matter. Couple that with the problem that the public rarely has full access to information—or opportunity to think through matters with their fellow citizens—and we get a political system that needs sound and reflective public will but lacks mechanisms for creating it. We have a ship of state steered by sailors intoxicated by fear, misinformation, rumors, and demagoguery; themselves split into factions that often won’t even talk with each other. A ship listing terribly!

I will try to address this puzzle by thinking through topics of public opinion, choice, deliberation, judgment, and will. Moreover, I will argue, contra Habermas, that public will formation is not just a cognitive process but an affective one, that calls for the public to engage in both imagination and the work of mourning.

I use the term *the public* in a way that might cause suspicion. It is easy to refer to the public as a mass audience, a body waiting in the wings, even if never called on to the stage; but I prefer to think of the public—as well as “the public sphere”—as a phenomenon, an occurrence, something that arises under certain conditions and dissipates under others. When I walk through a crowded airport, I am not walking through a public—that is, unless a crisis arises there

and people turn to each other to decide what to do.

The public sphere, Habermas writes, is “a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed” and in which all citizens can participate. “A portion of the public sphere,” he writes, “is constituted

Members of the public need to communicate together to create public knowledge.

in every conversation in which private persons come together [freely and without coercion] to form a public” and discuss matters “connected with the practice of the state.” Habermas’ formulation echoes Dewey’s: a public is something that communicatively comes into being as private citizens grapple together with matters of widespread concern. For Dewey, it is in recognizing themselves as jointly affected—then communicatively addressing what ought to be done—that a public arises. Absent such conditions the public is inchoate, the phantom that Walter Lippmann claimed it be, that we invoke in empty platitudes to pretend we have a democracy.

By the term *public*, then, I mean what John Dewey articulated in his response to Lippmann in *The Public and Its Problems*: an array of people who are related vis-à-vis some common interests or concerns. “The public consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for.” Identifying problems and beginning to see how these problems affect them and their fellows

starts to help a public find itself. Dewey also noted two other processes that need to happen: a public needs to be able to produce a knowledge of what could be done to address these problems, knowledge that might take the form of public opinion, public judgment, or public will; knowledge and resolve that ideally could help shape public policy. And second, members of the public need to be able to communicate together to help create this public knowledge.

As I see it, a public can find itself, or to put it more aptly, *make* itself by coming together to talk about the pressing problems of the day, to identify the sources of problems, to see how these problems differentially affect others, to try to decide together what should be done. Out of these processes—processes that amount to what we call “public deliberation”—might emanate informed public opinion about what *should* be done. This information has a special status. Dewey put it this way, “The man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches, even if the expert shoemaker is the best judge of how the trouble is to be remedied.” Public problems are best fathomed by the public itself: it may enlist experts or governments to fix the problems, but it alone is the best judge of what needs to be addressed and of whether the remedy is successful.

The space in which the public makes itself is the public sphere. By *public sphere* then, I mean the space that publics create as they participate with others, to coordinate action and produce outcomes; a space in which public uses of semiotic structures, discursive and otherwise, construct meaning, identity, purpose, and political direction. Such a public sphere involves not just problem solving but world building. Whenever people come together to shape their world and their common future—especially on matters where there is much uncertainty and no prior agreement—a public emerges through what

Harry Boyte calls “public work.”

Public work has a different conception of the citizen—as co-creator of democracies, viewed as a way of life, not simply formal systems of elections and public agencies. To take seriously this concept entails theorizing the civic agent who constructs the common world. Agency, in these terms, involves people’s capacities to co-create their environments, both proximate and extended in space and time. In civic terms, agency infers the capacities of citizens to work across differences, to address problems and shape a common world, in diverse settings without predetermined outcomes.

The literature on deliberative democracy is vast, but there are two constants throughout virtually all of it. First is the idea that a collectivity of free and equal citizens can and should address together political questions about what ought to be done. As Habermas puts it, “A collectivity is confronted with the question ‘What ought we to do?’ when certain problems that must be managed cooperatively impose themselves or when action conflicts requiring consensual solutions crop up.” Second is the idea that deliberation on such questions is first and foremost a cognitive enterprise in which participants engage in the back and forth of reason-giving.

There is a rich philosophical history that sees deliberation as a matter of inquiry, interpretation, meaning making, and hermeneutical engagement. This is a history that stretches from Isocrates and Aristotle to Dewey, Arendt, and Gadamer. In Isocrates’ writings, Timotheus defends his actions in part by saying that we first teach ourselves by talking. Learning is not a solitary venture but something that occurs in conversation. In Aristotle we find a rich literature on deliberation and choice, starting with

the simple observation that we deliberate about matters that are indeterminate. In Dewey we get the idea that the choices we make are, at bottom, choices about what kinds of people we want to be. We also get the powerful notion that the meaning of things is not something waiting to be *discovered* but something communicatively

A public sphere involves not just problem solving but world building.

to be *made*. All told, this literature defies the contemporary conceit that deliberation is about arriving at a “right answer,” even if by that we mean something to which all will agree. When we are talking about *ends*, *values*, and *meaning*, we are not necessarily talking about ascertaining or agreeing but about making and choosing.

As Aristotle noted, we do not deliberate about what is the case; we deliberate about what we might bring about: “What we do deliberate about are things that are in our power and can be realized in action”; about things that are inexact



and whose outcomes are unpredictable; about matters of action rather than matters of science. And “when great issues are at stake, we distrust our own abilities as insufficient to decide the matter and call in others to join us in our deliberations.” Ultimately, “the object of deliberation and the object of choice are identical,” because what we are doing in our deliberation is trying to decide what to do. Aristotle went to great pains to make sure his students understood that deliberation is not aimed at matters of fact but is aimed at indeterminate matters of choice and action. This is a lesson missed by those who may think of deliberation as ascertaining moral truth or doing what is “right.” We deliberate about what we *should do*. And on questions of great consequence we bring others—different others—into our deliberations so that we have a better chance of making a better choice that will work for our community as a whole.

Aristotle’s way of framing deliberation is pragmatist because deliberation is about choosing what to *do*, not about deciding what is true or false; and what we should do will stand or fall depending upon what our *purposes* are. In deliberation, as John Dewey later noted, we



try imaginatively to mesh our purposes, goals, or values with possible courses of action: “In imagination as in fact, we know a road only by what we see as we travel on it; in thought as well as in overt action, the objects experienced in following out a course of action attract, repel, satisfy, annoy, promote, and retard.”

We are not talking about ascertaining or agreeing, but about making and choosing.

These choices have consequences. As Dewey noted, in a way that is consistent with Aristotle’s view:

Deliberation has an important function ... because each different possibility as it is presented to the imagination appeals to a different element in the constitution of the self, thus giving all sides of character a chance to play their part in the final choice. The resulting choice also shapes the self, making it, in some degree, a new self.

All of us are who we are thanks to the choices we have made in the past, and who we will be in the future depends upon what choices we make down the road. There have been and always will be roads not taken; the roads we do take shape who we are. “Every choice is at the forking of the roads,” Dewey writes, “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... In choosing this object rather than that, one is in reality choosing what kind of person or self one is going to be.” The phenomenon that Dewey describes

holds for communities as well as individuals. While it might seem that deliberation is merely about weighing the merits of different possible outcomes, “below the surface, it is a process of discovering” what kind of a people we want to be.

Now any path taken means that another will not be. In choosing, we have to deal with consequences and mourn the losses of what we chose not to pursue. This is a truly difficult and momentous aspect of choice. To appreciate it one needs to recognize that much political choice is not simply a choice between what one group wants versus what another wants. Often any one of us has to choose because we cannot have it all, no matter how much we want to. We have to decide, and going through the process of decision involves mourning the path not taken. Any community that is undergoing a difficult choice is dealing with deep questions of identity. It is when we—individuals, communities, peoples—are undergoing difficult choices that we find that what is difficult is at bottom a question of what kind of people we want to be.

The qualitative difference between public *opinion* formation and public *will* formation is that the former only calls on us to opine, to mouth our preferences. The latter calls on us to decide. If the public is considered merely as generators of public opinion, then everyone wants everything and no one need decide what the right ends are or how to achieve them. We will get a cacophony of competing claims, disagreement without deliberation or choice. The bar needs to be raised for public discourse: don't just tell me what you like; tell me what you want to do—and what you are willing to give up. And tell me you are ready to do this! Dewey hints at the gravitas of political deliberation. It is not



just an opportunity for developing a sounder public opinion about matters of common concern (which is what Habermas says goes on in the informal public sphere). Nor can deliberation be relegated to the political arenas of legislatures and courts (where, Habermas maintains, actual political decisions are made). A public must itself be involved in deliberating and choosing, not merely in opining or even forming opinions.

Anything less is a diminution of political freedom. This is not merely the freedom that liberalism champions—the freedom to be let alone—but the freedom that the civic republican tradition has championed: the freedom to participate in creating their common world. Hannah Arendt called this “revolutionary” freedom or “the lost treasure of the revolution.”

The bar needs to be raised for public discourse.

Many other thinkers have walked along the same path: Aristotle, Machiavelli, Rousseau, Jefferson, and Dewey, and contemporary thinkers—Hannah Pitkin, Ben Barber, Jane Mansbridge, Mary Dietz, and Harry Boyte, among others. This is not to say that they are all civic republicans—I doubt that few of them would describe themselves that way—but that they see freedom of participation as a central aspect of democratic life.

What they provide on the question at hand is a stepping stone between public opinion and public will, namely a kind of thinking. Arendt calls it judgment: it is a kind of perspectival, representative thinking. Drawing on Kant she writes:

Judgment appeals to common sense and is the very opposite of “private feelings.” In ... political judgments, a decision is made, and although this decision is always determined by a certain subjectivity, by the simple fact that each person occupies a place of his own from which he looks upon and judges the world, it also derives from the fact that the world itself is an objective datum, something common to all its inhabitants.

While participants occupy different positions, in the process of engaging in political judgment people are attending to things they do in fact share, the public goods over which they might disagree but still are forced to make a collective decision. In the space of a public, deliberative forum—in a *democratic* space—there are at least two palpable shifts: first, deliberators encounter the stake they have in things common. These things common are not “common interests,” not anything like a set of agreed-upon goods or views, but rather these things are overlapping places, geographies, institutions, things common about which they might disagree vehemently. But the “sharedness” of these things pulls them into a democratic space in which they find themselves in a world with others, others whom they may not know or like, but still with whom they have to contend as they deliberate over what will come of this world they share and what this world will do. And second, deliberators find that such deliberation calls for an openness to things unexpected. Deliberation has a discernible posture. It is a leaning toward other possibilities, a leaning toward what others might expose.

A key part of coming to public judgment, in Arendt’s view, is persuasion. Where Habermas thinks that persuasion comes about through the unforced power of the better argument, Arendt claims that such compulsion is as forced as any. “Judgments, furthermore, do not compel—in the sense in which demonstrable facts or truth proved by argument compel—agreement.” Rather than coercion, political discourse involves a rhetoric of persuasion.

The judging person—as Kant says quite beautifully—can only “woo the consent of everyone else” in the hope of coming to an agreement with him eventually. This “wooing” or persuading corresponds closely to what the Greeks regarded as the typically political form of people talking with one another. Persuasion ruled the intercourse of the citizens of the *polis* because it excluded physical violence; but the philosophers knew that it was also distinguished from another nonviolent form of coercion, the coercion by truth.

So in political speech, people appeal to each other; not to their dispassionate rational side, if there is such a separable faculty, but to their passions and concerns.

I have been drawing on Dewey, Arendt, and other allies to develop a pragmatic understanding



of the public and of what deliberative public judgment might be. When we look for the meaning of an event or a problem, it is not just what *it* means but what it means *for us*. Public deliberation helps elucidate the topography of a problem and the range of political permission on what can be done. In fact, in deliberations, a seemingly inordinate amount of time is spent

The process of decision involves mourning the path not taken.

trying to understand the problem itself (whether it's crime, immigration, health care, the US role in the world, or anything else). This may be the case because understanding the problem, and its meaning for us, is not just a matter of excavation and discovery but also of creation, interpretation, and working through. In articulating what a problem means for us, we also begin to articulate (both retrospectively and prospectively) the meaning of "us": who we are, what we want to stand for, with whom we are in relation, including those who might have seemed to be our enemy.

In keeping with Arendt's conception of judgment, in a deliberative forum, participants can contribute their various perspectives on an issue. They can show how any policy will differentially affect them and their loved ones, point out consequences and promises that others might not have noticed. Not only can they increase the store of public knowledge, they can work through, in the Freudian sense, what they might be willing to give up in order to make progress in light of the



broader public judgment they are developing.

To the extent that deliberation is about choice it is about developing public will. But here public will is more than a rational and cognitive decision about what to do. It is a much more *existential* matter. I propose that in the words *public will* we hear more than the result of a choice: we hear a matter of resolution, deep resolve, willingness borne of having mourned the roads we have chosen not to take. As Arendt noted:

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.

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*“Focusing on citizens,
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They are our fellow
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I n these “. . . afterthoughts” to each issue of the *Review*, I try to bring our readers up to date on concerns that are informing the Kettering Foundation’s research. Ideas “fund” our research—in the sense that, if our understandings resonate with the concerns of other people and organizations, then this resonance may help build a network of “fellow travelers” who enrich what we are exploring with their own experiences and insights. This network then may generate more new ideas to fund or inspire new research.

The foundation tends to look at a particular line of its research each year, asking the *Review* to present some of the ideas that are informing what we are doing. This year, our focus has been on the roles of citizens in a democracy—specifically on what they do with other citizens; what they do in communities to address problems and what they do in relation to institutions, both governmental and nongovernmental. In all of these studies, we draw from ideas about what citizens may need to do, if democracy is to work as it should.

This said, I should note that Kettering’s research has to do with political practice, not with political theory. So when I say that ideas fund our work, I don’t mean we engage in theoretical discussions. Rather, we look at how ideas play out in practice. By focusing on citizens—as the essays in this issue do—we are able to concentrate on problems that seem to keep citizens from playing effective roles in politics; and we also can see what practices are helping them. We look for people and organizations that are experimenting with ways to combat such problems. We learn from one another.

Democracies face all kinds of problems, and we have some ideas about what they are. We see differences among the kinds of difficulties democracies encounter. Some problems are circumstantial. As worldwide economic recession sweeps down, poverty rates soar. That's terrible. But every country is affected, democratic or not. Other problems cause democratic systems themselves to malfunction. They are fundamental or systemic. We call these "the problems behind the problems," or problems *of* democracy.

These Kettering has on its radar.

Americans are quite aware of circumstantial problems in our democracy because they hit us in the face every day: mortgage foreclosures; the high price of medical care (including the little pills that cost big bucks); the factory that had been in the community forever but is being dismantled to go overseas. We may suspect that there is more to these problems than meets the eye. Behind the obvious difficulties are often more fundamental problems that cripple our ability to respond: these problems of democracy are like the pollution that kills the microorganisms of a pond or bay; they foul the inner workings of the political system.

Systemic problems aren't always eye catching. They don't provoke the emotional reaction that circumstantial problems in democracy do. Laid off and no job prospects! Homes lost; couldn't pay the mortgages! Children going to school hungry! Those are the circumstances that get our blood boiling. Underlying problems, on the other hand, may lack this visceral oomph. Nonetheless, the less obvious problems behind the problems cripple a democratic system and its ability to respond to the more visible, "in-your-face" problems. People have less control over their future, and this frustrates them.

Many Americans feel about the political system the way they feel when the remote to their TV set no longer controls the screen. The battery seems to be dead or some kind of bug has invaded the electronics. Their frustration with politics can be heard in comments like "The system is out of whack"; "The rules have changed—and I don't know what they are anymore." Jean Johnson, reporting recently on research by Public Agenda, described a discussion where citizens talked at length about their frustrations. When asked what would help, Johnson found that people "immediately started talking about citizens taking a stronger role." Concerned Americans want more control in their own hands, not in the hands of those who say they will take care of their problems for them: such reassurance isn't reassuring.

"Getting a stronger hand" is a practical application of a powerful idea—the idea that we should rule ourselves, the idea of democracy itself. So far, Kettering has identified a number of problems behind the problems that keep citizens from having the control they would like to have over a future that they see as increasingly dangerous and uncertain.

The first of these systemic problems strikes at the heart of democracy: citizens aren't engaged; they are on the sidelines. Some people are clearly reluctant to get involved in conventional electoral politics or even civic efforts with other citizens. The low turnout at polls suggests this. But another example is revealed in community projects that fail because citizens—except for "the usual suspects"—don't show up to do the work. Maybe people don't see their concerns, or what is most valuable to them, being addressed. Maybe there is little space for them to reason together without expectations of a predeter-

mined conclusion. Maybe the political system has pushed them to the sidelines by gerrymandering their voting precincts so their ballots don't really count. Or maybe they've sidelined *themselves*—by retreating to small enclaves out of frustration or cynicism. Whatever the cause, the absence of people who think of themselves as *active citizens* is a serious problem of democracy.

A second problem comes on the heels of the first. Problems are discussed in ways that promote divisiveness and polarization. All of the options for acting on a problem may not be considered. Or only two options, which are polar opposites, are addressed, leading to an unproductive debate. Or the inevitable tensions among different options, and the necessity for trade-offs, are not recognized. And sometimes the fear of disagreement produces merely bland discussions. And a third problem follows suit: people may get involved, yet make very poor decisions about what they should do, or which policies are in their best interest. Hasty reactions, fueled by misinformation and emotional biases, rule the day! Morally charged disagreements aren't worked through—as they must be, for example, when there are clear differences over what is right, or when already scarce resources have to be redistributed. The resulting lack of *sound public judgment*—is a serious problem of democracy.

A systemic problem has to do in effect with citizens' perception that they can't really make a difference in politics because they don't themselves have the necessary resources to combat the problems that are at issue. Lack of money is a common-enough obstacle; yet certain kinds of in-your-face problems can only be solved if the citizenry does act. Issues involving keeping young peo-

ple out of harm's way provide an example: institutions like schools and social service agencies are essential, yet they can't do the job alone, and people have often unrecognized resources that aren't monetary.

Citizens, indeed, may act, yet their efforts sometimes go in so many different directions that they are ineffective; they aren't mutually supportive. And the standard remedies for this lack of coordination can themselves be equally debilitating when a central agency is put in charge and creates burdensome rules and regulations that drain the energy out of citizens' various initiatives. This can happen following natural disasters when the spontaneous actions of volunteers fail to mesh with the efforts of professionals. When there is no shared sense of purpose for citizens' initiatives—or if bureaucratic control takes away people's own sense of control—then democratic self-organizing is undermined. This, too, belongs on the list of systemic problems.

These problems of democracy are perennial because they are rooted in the human condition. They never go away. That is why democracy is called a journey, not a destination. We are prone to try to get off the field and onto the comfort of the sidelines, prone to make poor decisions, prone to underestimate our resources. Where democracy is concerned, we can't declare victory and go home. To keep up the necessary momentum for dealing with systemic problems, democracies depend on constant collective learning, which promotes both experimentation and persistence. The absence of shared learning, itself keeps democracy from working.

So a further problem—to round out our list—has been acute for some time. It is the mutual distrust that burdens the relationship between citizens and many institutions: schools,

government agencies, even civic organizations. Institutions seem to doubt that citizens are themselves responsible and capable. And citizens see institutions as unresponsive as well as ineffective. Yet the problems behind the problems of democracy can't be solved without citizens. So exactly what role are citizens supposed to play? Is being voters, taxpayers, advocates, or volunteers enough?

It all depends on what kind of democracy you have in mind. The concept of democracy that has informed much of Kettering's research is that of a political system where citizens are producers; they work with other citizens to solve common problems and make things that benefit society as a whole. The examples I use of the things people make range from those

that are ordinary and local—such as building a playground to get children off the streets—to those with both local and national significance, like organizing mothers to stop drunk driving. In a range of other publications, the foundation reports in more detail on what we are learning about how people actually do the work of citizens, not only to make things, but also, more important, to give themselves a stronger hand in shaping their future. And the *Review* serves to contribute reflections on the ideas that have helped Kettering understand the roles citizens have to play for democracy to work as it should.

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