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These institutions are demonstrably connected—not in one organized structure but as a dense network with many common ties. The same network also encompasses such organizations as Campus Compact, Demos, the League of Women Voters, and the Industrial Areas Foundation, with which I have not worked as directly. Most important, the network touches many citizens who are members of one or more of these organizations or who simply participate in, or follow, civic renewal as individuals.

This book is primarily addressed to that network and to anyone who wants to join it. My theory of change is to try to elucidate the underlying values of the network—anticipating that my analysis will provoke some disagreement—and then to propose strategic next steps in light of the current situation. If the network grows and has political impact, the reasons will go far beyond this book. But if the book contributes to its success, its theory of change will be vindicated.

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Values

COLLABORATION, DELIBERATION, AND CIVIC RELATIONSHIPS

IN CHAPTER 2, I argued that we need a combination of values, facts, and strategies to think wisely about politics. Chapter 3 turns to values. The core proposition is simple: most Americans should be involved in deliberation and collaboration. In other words, they should talk, listen, and work together on public problems. To do so requires certain kinds of relationships with one's fellow citizens. Thus chapter 3 introduces deliberation, collaboration, and civic relationships as its core concepts. I argue that a combination of these three produces beneficial results, it yields knowledge about what is right, and it enhances the dignity and agency of participants. In other words, the advantages of civic engagement (thus understood) are pragmatic, epistemological, and ethical.

Talking and Listening

The dominant view of political scientists during the 1950s and 1960s was that individuals and organizations *wanted* things. They had options, such as to vote, to contribute money, to run for office, to strike, to sue, or to threaten violence, and they made their choices in order to get as much of what they wanted as possible. Political outcomes were the result of many simultaneous choices. Harold Lasswell's famous book was entitled *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How*.¹

Since then, "deliberative democrats" have argued that we should not be satisfied with policies that arise because individuals and groups try to get what they want. People may not want good things, their power is starkly unequal, and some of their tactics are unethical. Besides, people often don't know what they want until they have communicated with others. Although our views about matters very close to our own lives may emerge out of private

experience, we will not know what to think about Iraq, Social Security, or stem cells until we have heard arguments and formed responses.

Even if you know what you want, you cannot try to get it unless you belong to some kind of political entity that makes decisions. A Parent Teacher Association, a corporate board, a jury, a town, the Supreme Court, the whole United States, and the United Nations General Assembly are examples of political communities with voters and powers. They did not spring fully formed from the air. Creating, defining, and redefining political communities; deciding who belongs in each one; and negotiating among them are essential parts of politics. So is moving from one community to another, which is a common political act for Americans.

We don't even know *who* we are (in a political sense) until we have communicated. Deciding whether you are a Yugoslav, a Serb, a European, or Christian is more fundamental than identifying what you want or what strategies you will choose to get it. You can be persuaded to become something like a Serb or a Croat, and such persuasion is part of politics.

In short, the formation of identities, motivations, goals, and communities are aspects of politics; thus, talking and listening are politically important. That insight does not imply that politics is any better than the political scientists had claimed in the 1950s and 1960s. After all, communication can transform peaceful, tolerant individuals into murderous racists, as the example of Hitler shows. Thus a crucial second step for deliberative democrats is to define some kinds of communication as better than others and to name the better kinds "deliberation." The definition of a deliberation cannot be a conversation that reaches the correct outcome, because a computer algorithm might work just as well for that purpose. Instead, for deliberative democrats, the intrinsic qualities of the conversation are what mark it as valuable.

Typically, those qualities include the diversity of the participants, their equality of influence, freedom of speech, openness and transparency, reasonableness, and civility. A less academic but equally insightful and precise account of good conversation comes from a student at the East Los Angeles Renaissance Academy. Cathy Davidson, a Duke University professor, recalls that she asked a young woman, "What do you mean by 'critical thinking'?" She didn't even pause, "It means being able to see where I am standing and also where you are. It means having enough knowledge and research and discipline not to over-react if you disagree with me or if you dislike me or disrespect me but to pause, and think about who you are, and then help bridge the gap between us."²

A conceptual distinction is important here. To negotiate is to come into a discussion with predetermined goals. You know what you want, but because

others may not permit you to get it, you are prepared to settle for less than the whole. Negotiation can be desirable: it is certainly better than violent conflict, and it is the ideal way to settle issues that truly represent nothing but conflicts among equally valid interests.³ Negotiation is basically the *only* way that organizations can interact if their fiduciary responsibility is to maximize returns for their owners. Thus negotiation is the main form of political interaction permissible to public companies.

Deliberation, in contrast, means trying to decide what is right to do. Self-interest is relevant to that decision—it is one legitimate consideration—but it is not the only factor. People who deliberate should also consider the implications for other people, as well as abstract considerations of ethics and justice.⁴ Deliberation is different from negotiation because the participants' goals, judgments, preferences, and values are open to change. They not only seek what they wanted before they entered the discussion; they are also interested in changing what they want. Deliberation can build legitimacy in a way that negotiation cannot, because it says: This is what is right or just to do. In Michael Sandel's influential phrase, "When politics goes well, we may know a good in common that we cannot know alone."⁵

In the very first paragraph of the Federalist Papers, Alexander Hamilton asks whether "societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend, for their political constitutions, on accident and force."⁶ The ideal of deliberative democracy holds that we *can* govern by reflection and choice. It suggests concrete and practical ideas for reforming politics so that transparent, fair, reasonable conversations become more common and more consequential.⁷ A whole field (described in chapter 6) is now devoted to organizing tangible public deliberations at a human scale: meetings, summits, citizens' juries, community dialogues, moderated online forums, and various hybrids of these.

Hamilton remarked "that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide" whether human beings can govern "from reflection and choice."⁸ But actually, in other nations, deliberative democratic experiments have gone much further than in the United States. For example, since 1992, the constitution of India has required every rural village to have both an elected council and an empowered open meeting called a *gram sabha* (GS) that allocates funds and makes other binding decisions. Vijayendra Rao of the World Bank and Paromita Sanyal of Wesleyan write, "The GS has become, arguably, the largest deliberative institution in human history, at the heart of two million little village democracies which

affect the lives 700 million rural Indians." This experiment has strengthened the confidence, standing, and voice of the poor, of women, and of low-caste Indians.⁹

In practice, "deliberation" means convening a diverse group of citizens and asking them to talk, without any expectation or plan that they will reach one conclusion rather than another. The population that is convened, the format, and the informational materials are all supposed to be neutral or balanced. There is an ethic of deference to whatever views may emerge from democratic discussion. Efforts are made to insulate the process from deliberate attempts to manipulate it.

In contrast, activism or advocacy implies an effort to enlist or mobilize citizens toward some end. At their best, advocates are candid about their goals and open to critical suggestions. But they are advocating *for* something. Many advocates for disadvantaged populations explicitly say that deliberation is a waste of their limited resources.¹⁰ They note that just because people are invited to talk as equals, the discussion will not necessarily be fair. Participants who have more education, social status, and allies may wield disproportionate power.¹¹ Individuals and groups who are satisfied with the status quo have an advantage over those who want change, because they can use the discussion to delay decisions. (They can filibuster.) Sometimes, the way the topic is defined can benefit one side over the other. If we meet to discuss the *deficit*, the conversation will favor fiscal conservatives, whereas if our topic is *poverty*, liberals will have an edge. When grievances are especially serious, it may be inappropriate to call for discussion among the opposing parties. For instance, the great African American antislavery campaigner Frederick Douglass simply refused to answer arguments in favor of slavery, understandably viewing the whole discussion as offensive.¹²

Talking with people who hold different views can cause us to temper or censor our sincere views in order to avoid confrontation, and such self-editing reduces our passion and our motivation to act.¹³ Social movements that oppose injustice seem most likely to arise when there is regular and intense communication among people who share the same opinions.¹⁴

Iris Marion Young lists some of the tactics that can be more effective than deliberation: "picketing, leafleting, guerilla theater, large and loud street demonstrations, sit-ins, and other forms of direct action, such as boycotts." As she notes, activists may even choose to "make noises outside when deliberation is supposedly taking place on the inside. Sometimes activists invade the houses of deliberation and disrupt their business by unfurling banners, throwing stink bombs, or running and shouting through the aisles."¹⁵

For their part, proponents of deliberation often see organized advocacy as a threat to fair and unbiased discussion; hence they struggle to protect deliberative forums from being "manipulated" by groups with an agenda. One tactic for this purpose is to select potential participants randomly (like a jury), so that it is impossible for an interest group to mobilize its members to attend. Overall, deliberation seems cool, cerebral, slow, and middle class. Activism seems urgent, passionate, effective, and available to all.

In my view, the main contribution of deliberation is not to allow people to speak (for they may rightly prefer other modes of expression that are more confrontational). Rather, its value is in helping people to *listen*. You don't need to listen if you are correct in all your values, factual knowledge, and strategies. Frederick Douglass was correct that slavery was evil, and he had a winning strategy for ending it. He did not need to listen to slavery's apologists, except perhaps to find weaknesses in their political coalition. But most of us, most of the time, are not in Douglass's position. We cannot know that we are right. Other people's information, values, strategic suggestions, and expressions of interest, identity, and desire may improve our views. So what we get out of deliberation is a chance to learn.¹⁶

From Talk to Work

Deliberation is most fruitful for learning—and deliberative democracy is a most attractive and realistic political ideal—when talk is embedded in relationships among citizens and connected to their common work.¹⁷ One reason is motivational: we are unlikely to want to talk and listen unless doing so strengthens relationships and leads to action. Another reason is epistemic: we will not know enough to talk *well* unless we gain experience from acting together. To put this point in slogan form: deliberation without collaboration is empty, but collaboration without deliberation is blind.

Consider first the issue of motivation. We know that most people do not actually deliberate. Eighteen percent of the Americans whom we polled in 2007 said (a) they had "been involved in a meeting (either face-to-face or online) to determine ideas and solutions for problems in their community" within the past year, *and* (b) those discussions had included people who held views different from their own.¹⁸ That response implies a substantial amount of deliberation. But the estimate was probably inflated by respondents who exaggerated their behavior; and even if the results were precisely accurate, 82 percent of Americans did *not* deliberate that year. Besides, we used a loose definition of "deliberation": some of the 18 percent who attended diverse

discussions may never have listened seriously to other perspectives or tried to reach any kind of conclusion with their peers.

If you are in charge of a government or another important institution, you can create incentives to deliberate. As briefly noted in chapter 1, the former mayor of Washington, DC, Anthony Williams, decided that he wanted more informed public input regarding the budget of the city, which profoundly affects its citizens. So he hired *AmericaSpeaks* to organize large, representative "summits" at which thousands of citizens could deliberate about budget priorities. Participants were selected (not randomly, but purposively) to reflect the diversity of the city and to minimize the impact of deliberate mobilization by interest groups. Citizens worked at small tables within the vast expanse of the city's convention center, and the results of each discussion were shared transparently on a computer network. People participated because the few hours they were asked to contribute seemed worthwhile. The event promised to be interesting, and the mayor had committed to incorporate the results into the formal process of budgeting.¹⁹

Mayor Williams truly wanted to share power with a representative group of Washingtonians, and he genuinely wanted them to be provided with the most neutral possible materials and choices. In theory, however, he had the power to manipulate the process or withdraw his support. In fact, his successor, Mayor Adrian Fenty, chose not to continue the annual citizens' budget summits. Apparently, he calculated that they would not advance his political agenda. When governments or leaders invite citizens to deliberate, they control the process in a way that makes deliberative democracy fragile, at best.²⁰

Meanwhile, if you are a citizen with strong views and commitments, a carefully screened deliberative forum offers you no outlet. The whole point of randomly or otherwise purposefully selecting participants is to *exclude* people like you—at least in large numbers—because the substance or the intensity of your views will be atypical. But you have a right to hold intense views and to want to act. In 2009, angry opponents of health care reform deliberately disrupted open "town meetings" convened by Democratic members of Congress. The Stanford political scientist James Fishkin published an argument for randomly selecting citizens to discuss health care instead of holding such open forums. The *New York Times* chose to give his essay the headline, "Town Halls by Invitation."²¹ But democratic participation cannot be "by invitation"—it must be a right claimed or created by ordinary people, whether elites like it or not.²²

Official deliberative forums are helpful innovations in governance. When they are well organized, they provide legitimate input into formal decisions

and complement traditional institutions such as legislatures and agencies. They can also offer prominent examples of civil, constructive discourse. Yet running such events should not be our main objective. The fundamental goal is to increase the amount of real listening that occurs in America. Citizens should listen to people different from themselves on topics of mutual concern. Usually, that listening will take place in settings that are not pure public deliberations. The participants will not simply meet, talk, listen, judge, and reach conclusions. Rather, their talk will be sporadic, sandwiched between other activities such as working, playing, advocating, or performing together. Their communication will not be purely civil or rational. They will not merely exchange proposals and reasons but will also give personal testimony, tell stories, form friendships, express self-interest, communicate with anger or irony, and indicate positive emotions such as camaraderie and even love. The groups in which such listening occurs will not be randomly selected or otherwise representative of any larger population; people will tend to know one another already.

Even if people do not rush to deliberate, they like to talk. As the philosopher Anthony Laden argues, an ordinary conversation is not goal directed.²³ On the contrary, a skillful and amiable conversationalist is one who can keep the discussion alive by making comments or asking questions that elicit further remarks from others. There is an art to conversation, and it is a sign of success that a dialogue does not end promptly but continues to engage and please the participants for a long while. Asking and listening are more important to the maintenance of a conversation than speaking. In those respects, natural or everyday conversation is quite different from the formal and episodic deliberations of New England town meetings, citizens' summits, legislatures, and courts, whose purpose is to reach a conclusion efficiently.

By engaging in prolonged or repeated conversations that are not goal directed, we develop ethical obligations to our interlocutors. If you merely pass a stranger on the street, your obligations to him are limited. You may not harm him; you must aid him under certain extraordinary circumstances (for example, by shouting a warning if a brick is falling toward his head), and you must pay taxes that may benefit him. Otherwise, you are free to pass without paying him much attention. But if you have voluntarily spoken for hours to a person about matters of shared interest, you must show greater concern for his welfare. It is not always desirable to incur obligations of this kind; there is such a thing as being over-obligated. Yet a life with very few such relationships would be narrow and impoverished. This is why we respect conversationalists who begin and prolong engaging discussions that are not aimed at reaching

decisions. It is also why community organizers, ever since Alinsky in the 1930s, have encouraged citizens to conduct "one-on-one" interviews (exploring one another's interests and values) that lead to "mutual commitments" based on "reciprocal relationships."²⁴

Conversations that involve stories, humor, and personal testimony are part of ordinary life—in contrast to deliberative forums, which are rather artificial. But natural conversations are not automatically adequate. If they are to address our serious public problems, conversations must ultimately relate to public or social issues and they must involve politically diverse participants. Three troublingly common phenomena are (1) unreflective people banding together in ideologically homogeneous groups that reinforce their prejudices, (2) diverse groups who avoid any mention of public concerns or issues in order to preserve harmony, and (3) discussions that neglect valid options because a premature and narrow consensus prevails.²⁵

Fortunately, people are already motivated to *work* together on public problems. In the United States, one-quarter of the adult population reports volunteer service within any given year, half of us say we belong to at least one voluntary association, and we give 2 percent of our disposable income to charity. People need special incentives to participate in formal deliberations, but they are already quite busy working together. But their work is often disconnected from their talk and vice versa. Thus our goal should be to embed a greater degree of reflection and more diverse discussions in this common work. The tangible experiences that people obtain in service or in their paid work can inform their discussions, and their discussions can move them to serve or work better.

On this definition, "deliberative democracy" does not mean new institutions that look rather like juries or legislatures and that produce decisions. It is not about "neatly packaged episodes of reasoning."²⁶ It looks more like a busy, heterogeneous civil society, composed of networks and associations, in which there is a relatively high frequency of actual listening among people who do not start by agreeing. This theory blurs the distinctions between decision-making and implementation, talk and work, and state and society. The goal, after all, is not to democratize those special moments when formal policy decisions are made by the government—leaving bureaucrats to implement the decisions and the private sector to follow regulations and pay taxes. Rather, the goal is to democratize the whole process of shaping our common world. To that end, it is just as important to infuse talking and listening into the daily work of the public and private sectors as it is to deliberate periodically about formal policies.²⁷

Imagine, for example, that neighbors love a local stream and are concerned about its health. Thanks to them, a pedestrian footbridge is built over it to provide access and to reduce car pollution. It does not matter much whether they cause this bridge to appear by voting at a town meeting to fund it, lobbying the local government to build it, persuading a private company to donate it, or physically erecting it themselves. So long as the bridge was their idea and the fruit of their collective discussion and effort, several advantages are likely to follow: (1) Because they designed it, it will meet their needs and reflect their talents. (2) Because they made it, they will feel a sense of ownership and will be motivated to protect it. (3) Because they are formally equal as neighbors—not ranked in a hierarchy—each will feel a sense of dignity and status. (4) By combining discussion with collaborative action, they will develop skills, relationships, and political power that can transfer to other settings. (5) In shaping their public world together, they will gain a feeling of satisfaction and agency. As the philosopher Hannah Arendt wrote, the Americans of the Revolutionary era "knew that public freedom meant having a share in public business, and that the activities connected with this business by no means constituted a burden but gave those who discharged them in public a feeling of happiness that they could acquire nowhere else."²⁸

None of these advantages is guaranteed, nor would I ignore arguments, tensions, and downright failures, which are common enough. But some of the *benefits* are, as Arendt knew, impossible to obtain in other ways. If you work in a construction company, you may take appropriate satisfaction in the bridges that you help build, but they are generally not your ideas nor your property once you are done. If you are asked for input by the local government, and you propose a new bridge, you may feel that your intellect and values have been respected—but the government fundamentally ran the process. It is when you have been part of initiating change in the world, combining talk with some kind of action, that you can attain full civic satisfaction or "public happiness."

The bridge is just a metaphor. We need not burden the earth with unlimited numbers of new structures. Restoring nature is equally valuable, as are various forms of intangible and nonpermanent goods: events, performances, ideas, cultural innovations, and educated children.

Although I have suggested that satisfaction is higher among citizens who gather to create a bridge than among employees of a construction company that builds bridges, I doubt that the fundamental issue is the public sector versus the private sector, in the legal sense of those phrases.²⁹ A fine example of a publicly created space might be a coffeehouse, papered with posters for

local events, populated by a cross-section of the community. That coffeehouse may belong to and profit one person, who (along with his or her customers) can rightly feel responsible for building a common space. Meanwhile, a government-owned underpass nearby may be the most forbidding and hostile, antipublic space in town—whether it was built by a public agency or a private contractor.

As Elinor Ostrom noted in her Nobel Prize Lecture, how people manage a common pool resource depends in part on whether they are organized as (for instance) “private water companies, city utilities, private oil companies, [or] local citizens meeting in diverse settings.” Their behavior differs, too, depending on the rules of the game: for example “when they meet monthly in a private water association, when they face each other in a courtroom, and when they go to the legislature.”³⁰ Despite these differences, Ostrom and her colleagues have begun to build one overall framework for understanding the creation and management of common resources—a framework that tends to downplay the dichotomy between the state and private sectors that seems fundamental in other theories. One could say that in this framework, citizens are at the center, and they have available a plurality of institutional forms and combinations of forms.

Still, there is a sense of “public” that makes the creation of public goods particularly precious. My imaginary bridge and coffeehouse may have different legal status, but they share the five advantages enumerated earlier. The outputs of government bureaucracies and private corporations usually lack those advantages, which is why people are alienated from the world that those entities jointly create. Governments can incorporate public discussion, creativity, and work into their operations, which would be the best way to increase trust. Unfortunately, it is not the main trend in public administration anywhere in the developed world.

When diverse people—including truly representative samples of the whole population—are invited to participate in better forms of politics, they rise to the occasion. Here I mention just three examples from a large literature:

Formal deliberation: In 2009, the Congressional Management Foundation randomly invited Americans to deliberate about the contentious issue of immigration with their own members of Congress.³¹ Researchers evaluated this experiment carefully, using a randomly selected control group.

Usually, disadvantaged people are relatively unlikely to participate in voluntary political actions, such as voting. But in this experiment, lower income people, racial minorities, women, individuals who do not attend religious services, and people with weak or no partisan affiliations were *most* likely to accept the invitation to deliberate.

In keeping with many other experiments, these discussions proved substantive, civil, and well informed. Participants liked them: “95 percent Agreed (72 percent Strongly Agreed) that such sessions are ‘very valuable to our democracy’ and 96 percent Agreed (80 percent Strongly Agreed) that they would be interested in doing similar online sessions for other issues.” Participants’ opinions of the politicians with whom they deliberated rose dramatically. Participants also came closer to agreeing with these politicians about the issue under consideration. They were more likely to vote in the next election (compared to the randomly selected control group), and more likely to vote for the politician with whom they had deliberated. This example is just one of many in which representative groups of citizens perform exceptionally well when asked to deliberate about serious matters.³² It is an episodic interaction, however, and not likely to build lasting relationships among the participants or lead to civic action. The next two examples are stronger on those dimensions.

Youth service: Teenagers have a reputation for being disrespectful, unruly, and damaging to themselves and others. Adolescents from poor communities are especially likely to be seen that way—and not simply because of prejudice: many low-income urban high schools are actually disordered places. Yet when young people from disadvantaged or marginalized backgrounds are enlisted in constructive service projects, they regularly act with discipline, solidarity, respect, and ethics. The atmosphere in a room devoted to service or activism is virtually the opposite of the atmosphere in a high school cafeteria or in many conventional classrooms, even when the individuals are the same.

Reed Larson, a distinguished psychologist, is one of several scholars who explains this difference in terms of “agency” and “initiative.” Most activities available to adolescents are either required by authorities (like homework assignments) or voluntary but episodic and ultimately pointless (like video games). Neither type of experience encourages or even permits long-range planning, strategic thinking, and deliberation about means and ends. When teenagers are encouraged to address significant public problems, many of them rise remarkably well to the challenge.³³ Richard F. Catalano and colleagues have identified 22 programs that include elements of service or youth contribution to society, that have been rigorously evaluated, and that “showed significant improvements in problem behaviors, including drug and alcohol use, school misbehavior, aggressive behavior, violence, truancy, high-risk sexual behavior, and smoking.”³⁴

Participants as evaluators: The assessment of public employees creates a dilemma, illustrated by the example of teachers. Everyone who has ever been inside a school knows that teachers differ in their skills, relevant knowledge,

and motivation. It seems appropriate to measure these differences and use the results to guide decisions about hiring, retention, promotions, and assignments. But raw student test scores are poor measures because they do not take into account students' backgrounds and other external factors. Measuring the change in individual students' scores also poses technical problems. Besides, it is not clear that even an accurate measure of a teacher's impact, if such a statistic were available, would have beneficial results. When teachers use standardized test scores to modify their own performance, they often "teach to the test" and narrow the curriculum. When administrators use such data, they do not consistently enhance the strength of their teaching staffs; they certainly don't make the workplace more desirable for talented teachers.³⁵ Evidence from other fields shows that when self-accountability is replaced with external measures and sanctions, people often become less motivated to do good work.³⁶

The civic alternative is "internal accountability": processes that allow the members of a community to assess themselves and encourage them to improve.³⁷ The most civic approach would be an internal accountability process not only *used* by a community but also *created* by it.

Consider, for example, the Constructive Feedback Forms that all Boston high school students complete for each teacher each semester. These carefully constructed surveys do not ask the students to rate their teachers as good, bad, nice, smart, or by any overall measure. Instead, they ask a series of specific questions about teaching practices. How soon after the bell does the class get down to work? How many students participate in discussions? In what ways does the teacher provide feedback on homework?

The union and school system endorsed this policy, which is modest so far because only the teacher receives the anonymous results to use in self-improvement. The next step might be to share the survey results in some form with administrators, mentors, other colleagues, students, or parents.

An important aspect of this policy is its origin. Students on the Boston Student Advisory Council developed it—both the outline and the details—and succeeded in persuading the Boston School Committee to approve it. Those students are supported by Youth on Board (a nationally recognized nonprofit) and by the school system's Office of High School Renewal, so they perform excellent, well-informed, and effective work as public leaders. I saw the survey before I knew anything about its origin and assumed it was the product of highly trained professionals.

The initiative represents a shift to internal accountability: participants in the educational process—including the "clients" (in this case students) develop a sophisticated tool that they use for continual self-improvement.

The Content of Our Conversations

The examples given so far are all about deciding what is right to do. But how can we tell what is right? Moral intuitions are unreliable: for many centuries, almost everyone's intuitions told them that women were unsuited to public life. General principles may help: for example, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." But such principles cannot resolve subtle and complex cases, and plausible moral principles conflict in particular instances. We cannot reason our way privately to acceptable conclusions, because we are too prone to bias, and because no individual knows enough to make valid judgments about social issues. We must reason *together*, deciding what is right by sharing ideas and perspectives and, in the process, building a common life, which will be richer and more satisfying than a purely private one. In this section, I argue that reasoning together is not merely a matter of exchanging arguments, but must be embedded in shared activity.

Actual public discussions are messy and often indecisive. So many perspectives, interests, reasons, and opinions are in play that it seems impossible to reach any principled or organized resolution. We talk for some arbitrary amount of time, and then a decision must be made by the pertinent authorities or by a popular vote. It is not clear whether the decision was correct based on the discussion that preceded it.

It seems beneficial to organize and systematize public discussion, and several kinds of experts stand ready to help:

- Social scientists propose to organize public discussions by identifying reliable causal relationships among concepts that can be empirically identified in the world. For instance, *success* comes to mean passing a test or graduating on time, and *class size* is found to influence (or not to influence) success. The hope is—if not to end the discussion—at least to focus and rationalize it.
- Managers (both actual administrators of our institutions and experts on management) hope to limit or organize public discussions by pronouncing on which *strategies will work* and which are *permissible* under the current rules and policies.
- Ideological thinkers try to simplify the discussion by putting heavy weight on certain moral concepts, which then trump others. (For example, *personal liberty* is a trump card for libertarians; *equal welfare*, for social democrats.)
- Lawyers are trained to guide public discussions by explaining which options are *legal* or *obligatory* under laws, precedents, and constitutions.

- Moral and political philosophers have less public influence than the other groups mentioned so far, but they hold the most subtle and sophisticated views of how public discussions ought to be improved. Contemporary academic philosophers are often disarmingly modest about their contributions, yet a core professional goal is to improve discussions by identifying morally clear and invariant concepts that should then influence decisions. Depending on which philosophical school one defends, those concepts might include *rational autonomy*, *maximum utility*, or *virtue*.³⁸

All these forms of expert and disciplined guidance can be useful. But they often conflict, and so the very fact that they *all* help should tell us something. There is no methodology that can replace or discipline our public discussions or bring them to a close. This is because of the nature of moral reasoning itself.

Moral concepts are indispensable. We cannot replace them with empirical information. Even if smaller class sizes do produce better test scores, that does not tell us whether our tests measure valuable things, whether the cost of more teachers would be worth the benefits, or whether the state has a right to compel people to pay taxes for education.

But moral concepts are heterogeneous. Some have clear moral significance but controversial application in the world. (Fairness is always good, and murder is always bad.) Others have clear application but unpredictable moral significance. (Homicide is sometimes murder, but sometimes it is justifiable.) Still others are morally important but are neither predictable nor easily identified. (Love is sometimes good and sometimes regrettable, and whether love exists in a particular situation can be hard to say.) A method that could bring public deliberation to closure would have to organize all these concepts so that the empirically clear ones were reliably connected to the morally clear ones.

That sometimes happens. For instance, waterboarding either happens or it does not happen. The Bush administration's lawyers defined it in obsessive detail: "The detainee is lying on a gurney that is inclined at an angle of 10 to 15 degrees to the horizontal. . . . A cloth is placed over the detainee's face and cold water is poured on the cloth from a height of approximately 6 to 18 inches."³⁹ Waterboarding is, in my considered opinion, an example of torture. Torture is legally defined as a felony, and the reason for that rule is a moral judgment that torture is always wrong (in contrast to punishment or interrogation, which may be right). Therefore, waterboarding is wrong as well as illegal. This argument may be controversial, but it is clear and it carries us all the way from the concrete reality of a scene in a CIA interrogation room to a

compelling moral judgment and a demand for action. The various kinds of concepts are lined up so that moral, legal, and factual ideas fit together. There is room for debate: Is waterboarding torture? Who waterboarded whom? But the debate is easily organized and should be finite.

If all our moral thinking could work like that, we might be able to bring our discussions to a close by applying the right methods—usually a combination of moral philosophy plus empirical research. But much of our thinking cannot be so organized, because we confront moral concepts that lack consistent significance. They are either good or bad, depending on the circumstances. Nevertheless, they are morally indispensable; we cannot be good human beings and think without them. Love and freedom are two examples. To say that Romeo loves Juliet—or that Romeo is free to marry Juliet—is to say something important, but we cannot tell whether it is good or bad until we know a lot about the situation. There is no way to organize our thinking so that we can bypass these concepts with more reliable definitions and principles.

A structured moral mind might look like the blueprint of a house. At the bottom of the page would be broad, abstract, general principles: the foundation. An individual's blueprint might be built on one moral principle, such as, "Do unto others . . ." Or it might start even lower, with a metaphysical premise, like "God exists and is good." At the top of the picture would be concrete actions, emotions, and judgments, like "I will support Principal Jones's position at the PTA meeting." In-between would be ideas that combine moral principles and factual information, such as, "Every child deserves an equal education," or "Our third grade curriculum is too weak." The arrows of implication would always flow up, from the more general to the more specific.

Our actual moral thinking is much more complex than this.⁴⁰ Grand abstractions do influence concrete judgments, but the reverse happens as well. I may believe in mainstreaming special needs children because of an abstract principle of justice, and that leads me to support Mrs. Jones at the PTA meeting. Or I may form an impression that Mrs. Jones is wise; she supports mainstreaming; and therefore I begin to construct a new theory of justice that justifies this policy. Or I may know an individual child whose welfare becomes an urgent matter for me; my views of Mrs. Jones, mainstreaming, and justice may all follow from that. For some people, abstract philosophical principles are lodestones. For others, concrete narratives have the same pervasive pull—for example, the Gospels, or one's own rags-to-riches story, or *Pride and Prejudice*.

We must avoid two pitfalls. One is the assumption that a general and abstract idea is always more important than a concrete and particular one.⁴¹

There is no good reason for that premise. The concept of a moral "foundation" is just a metaphor; morality is not really a house, and it does not have to stand on something broad to be solid. Yet we must equally avoid thinking that we just possess lots of unconnected opinions, none intrinsically more important than another. For example, the following thoughts may all be correct, but they are not alike: "It is good to be punctual," "Genocide is evil," and "Mrs. Jones is a good principal." Not only do these statements have different levels of importance, but they play different roles in our overall thinking.⁴²

I would propose switching from the metaphor of a foundation to the metaphor of a network. In any network, some of the nodes are tied to others, producing an overall web. If moral thinking is a network, the nodes are opinions or judgments, and the ties are implications or influences. For example, I may support mainstreaming because I hold a particular view of equity; then mainstreaming and equity are two nodes, and there is an arrow between them. I may also love a particular child, and that emotion is a node that connects to disability policy in schools. A strong network does not rest on a single node, like an army that is decapitated if its generalissimo is killed. Rather, a strong network is a tight web with many pathways, so that it is possible to move from one node to another by more than one route. Yet in real, functioning networks, all the nodes do not bear equal importance. On the contrary, it is common for the most important 20 percent to carry 80 percent of the traffic—whether the network happens to be the Internet, the neural structure of the brain, or the civil society of a town.⁴³

A healthy moral mind is similar. It has no single foundation, and it is not driven only by abstract principles. Concrete motives, emotions, and judgments (such as love or admiration for a particular individual) may loom large. Yet the whole structure is network-like, and it is possible for many kinds of nodes to influence many other kinds. My respect for Mrs. Jones may influence how I feel about the concept of the welfare state, and not just the reverse. I need many nodes and connections, each based on experience and reflection.

To have a complex moral network is not a fully reliable sign of good moral thinking. A fascist might have an elaborate mental map composed of many different racial and national prejudices and hatreds, each supported by stories and examples, and each buttressing the others. That would be a more complex diagram than the ones possessed by mystics who prize purity and simplicity. *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*, wrote Søren Kierkegaard, and the old Shaker hymn advises, "'Tis the gift to be simple / 'Tis the gift to be free / 'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be." A righteous Shaker would do more good than a sophisticated fascist. But even if complexity is not a

sufficient or reliable sign of goodness, a complex map is both natural and desirable. It reflects the actual complexity of our moral world, it reduces the odds of becoming fanatical, it hems in self-interest, and it is resilient against radical doubt.

Let us assume that we learn what is right through interactions with other people. It is easier to converse with individuals who hold many different interests, commitments, and beliefs, because each such idea is a point of contact. A person with diverse beliefs is like an organic molecule with lots of surfaces for other molecules to bond to. Reasonable conversationalists may hold very strong commitments, including general philosophical or religious beliefs that they consider fundamental. But if they constantly and immediately cite those beliefs, it is impossible to deliberate with them. To put the point in network terms, your map can include nodes that are fixed points for you, but they ought not carry all the traffic; it should be possible to route around them.

Four conclusions follow from this discussion. First, we should banish a certain kind of moral skepticism which arises from thinking that moral conclusions always rest on foundations, but alas there is nothing below our biggest, most abstract ideas. For example, you may believe in the golden rule but be unwilling to say *why* it is true. You may feel that there is no answer to the "why?" question, and therefore morality is merely prejudice or whim. Your moral house has a foundation (the golden rule), but the foundation is floating in air. Fortunately, our whole morality does not rest on any such rule, nor must a principle rest on something below it to be valid. The golden rule is part of a durable network. It gains credibility because it seems consistent with so many other things that we come to believe. If it or any other node is knocked out of the network, the traffic can route around it.

Second, moral thinking is influenced by worldly experience, by practice and by stories, and not only by abstract theories and principles. The business leader who enters public debates having struggled to meet a payroll while paying taxes speaks from authentic experience. So does the soup kitchen volunteer who has faced a long line of homeless people with insufficient welfare benefits. Civil society functions best when both kinds of people (and many others) bring their experience into a common conversation and then take what they learn from discussions back to their work in an iterative cycle. In Laden's terms, moral reasoning is a "deeply social activity."⁴⁴ It is less about offering arguments that go all the way from premises to conclusions than about trying to form a common view of the world that integrates many people's perspectives and experiences so that they can live and work effectively together.

Third, we can handle diversity. If individuals' conclusions derived from the foundations of their thought, we would face a serious problem whenever we encountered people who had different foundations from our own. It is hard to tolerate them, let alone deliberate with them. The existence of a different foundation can even provoke vertiginous skepticism. If my worldview rests on utilitarianism, and yours depends on faith in Jesus's resurrection, then perhaps I should doubt that my own fundamental premise is valid. But if our respective worldviews are more like networks, then they probably share many of the same nodes even though they differ in some important respects. What's more, each person's network must be slightly different from anyone else's—even his twin brother's. Thus when we categorize people into cultures, we are crudely generalizing. There is actually one population of diverse human beings who are capable of discussing their differences even though they may not reach agreement. Since my moral network map shares many nodes with yours, we can think of a whole community as one elaborate, interpersonal moral network (full of tension as well as consensus), and civic engagement as a process of enriching and enhancing that shared network. Danielle Allen reaches a similar conclusion by a different route, arguing for friendship among strangers as the basis of democracy. "Friendship is not an emotion, but a practice, a set of hard-won, complicated habits that are used to bridge trouble, difficulty, and differences of personality, experience, and aspiration. Friendship is not easy, nor is democracy. Friendship begins in the recognition that friends have a *shared* life—not a 'common' nor an identical life—only one with common events, climates, built-environments, fixations of the imagination, and social structures. Each friend will view all these phenomena differently, but they are not the less shared for that."⁴⁵

Finally, expertise plays a limited role in reaching good decisions. The moral network in my mind cannot be—and should not be—radically simplified by applying any sophisticated methodology. I can learn from experts about causation and about how we should define various concepts and principles. But at the end of that process, I will still have my own moral network map, nourished by many sources other than the experts, and I will have to make decisions both alone and in dialogue with my peers. There is no substitute for thinking together about problems and solutions.

The most important intellectual resource for citizens to possess is a set of considered judgments about how public institutions should run. People do and should disagree about that question, but everyone's judgments should be based on informed and reflective thoughts about how to balance equity, participation, minority rights, voice, and efficiency; how much to reward

innovation and hard work versus protecting people against failure; when to preserve traditions and when to innovate; how much to demand of individuals and when to leave them alone; what to do about the lazy and the disruptive; and how to relate to newcomers and outsiders. They should also know how to participate in constructive debates about such issues when people disagree.

To some extent, those matters can be discussed in classrooms and informed by readings. But much of our civic learning is and must be experiential. From Jefferson's idea of ward republics that would manage "the small and yet numerous and interesting concerns of the neighborhood" and give "to every citizen, personally, a part in the administration of the public affairs,"⁴⁶ to Tocqueville's observation that juries and voluntary associations were schools of government, to John Dewey's notion of democracy as a set of learning opportunities, our wisest thinkers have always understood that the American system depends on knowledge and virtue that must be learned through experience. Our problem today is that such experience is sorely lacking.

Civic Relationships

Participants in politics and civic life frequently say that they prize relationships with other participants. Civic relationships generate power, they build communities, they reflect values and principles, and they are intrinsically rewarding.

In 2001, Doble Research Associates conducted focus groups for the Kettering Foundation on the topic of testing and accountability in schools. That year, the No Child Left Behind Act codified the national movement toward regular measurement of students and schools and promised parents choices if their schools were deemed to have failed. In short, the relationship between a public institution (the school) and its citizens was defined in terms of information and choice. But in the Doble focus groups, parents were highly resistant to the idea that testing would improve education. For one thing, they wanted to hold other parties accountable, starting with themselves. A Baltimore woman said, "If kids don't pass the test, is that supposed to mean that teachers are doing a lousy job? That's not right. I mean where does the support come from? You're pointing the finger at them when you should be supporting them." Another (or possibly the same) Baltimore woman explained, "When I think about accountability, I think about parents taking responsibility for supervising their children's learning and staying in touch with teachers." This respondent not only wanted to broaden responsibility but also saw it in terms of two-way communication.

Many participants wanted to know whether schools, parents, and students had the right values. They doubted that data would answer that question. And although the Doble report doesn't quite say this, I suspect they envisioned knowing individuals personally as the best way to assess their values. The focus groups turned to a discussion of relationships:

FIRST WOMAN: People don't know people in their communities anymore.

SECOND WOMAN: That's right. I was raised in an area where you knew everyone. That's just the way it was. But you don't know your neighbors anymore.

THIRD WOMAN: I have neighbors that lived next door to me for nine years and they don't even wave or talk to anybody in the neighborhood.

And so on—the conversation continued in this vein. Note that this was supposed to be a focus group about accountability in education. One Atlanta woman summed it up: “What we've got to do is develop a stronger sense of community between the schools and families in the community.” I suspect that she envisioned a situation in which school staff and parents knew one another, shared fundamental values, and committed to support one another.

Similar results emerged from focus groups conducted ten years later, after American parents had gained access to a deluge of new data on test scores and school spending. According to the Public Agenda Foundation's summary, “Typically, people know almost nothing about specific [accountability] measures, and they rarely see them as clear-cut evidence of effectiveness. For most people, the best evidence that a system is working is its responsiveness and the personal interactions they have with it. ‘You can't even get a human being on the phone’ is perhaps the chief indicator of failure.”⁴⁷

Implicitly, these citizens understand the concept of “social capital.” In fact, when the Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam revived that technical term in his scholarly article entitled “Bowling Alone” (1995), he hit such a chord with the public that within a year he was featured in *People* magazine. Depending on one's theoretical framework, social capital can be understood as a public good or resource that people *produce* by engaging civically, as a *measure* of their engagement, or as a *precondition* of active citizenship. In any case, it means the strength, distribution, and quality of relationships in a community. In the book version of *Bowling Alone*, Putnam defines social capital thus:

Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to properties of individuals [such as their own skills], social

capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations.”⁴⁸

Before Putnam, the most influential scholar of social capital had been James S. Coleman, who had found that young people benefited tangibly from “the social relationships that exist among parents,” the structure of those relationships, and “the parents' relations with institutions of the community.”⁴⁹ If social capital predicts important outcomes, such as success in school, then enhancing relationships becomes a promising strategy. In keeping with the work of Coleman and Putnam, many grassroots organizing groups now explicitly aim to reform education by strengthening relationships that involve educators, parents, and students themselves.⁵⁰

In traditional issue-based organizing, an organizer “already has an issue such as education reform in mind.” He or she may believe that a particular change in official policy (such as more or less testing) would benefit the students. But “in relational organizing, an organizer builds a one-on-one relationship with individuals, trying to know everything about these leaders and members—even things that might at first seem to be irrelevant to education reform. The ideas for campaigns come about more slowly that way, but some argue that groups engaging in relational organizing can be more successful in the long term.”⁵¹

Even in Saul Alinsky's day, community organizing was explicitly concerned with creating and building relationships among diverse residents of poor neighborhoods. Alinsky, however, was skeptical about relationships with the government, which he treated mainly as a distant target of public pressure. His skepticism was evident in his writing and in his daily practices. The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), which he started, would never take government grants, because Alinsky wanted to retain its fundamental independence. However, in the decades after his death, the IAF has broadened its conception of relationships to include government officials and corporate executives. Sirianni and Friedland report that “IAF ‘accountability nights’ with public officials have undergone a significant shift, from confrontational meetings designed to embarrass and expose leaders in the 1970s to forums designed to consolidate incipient relationships in full public view.”⁵² More generally, the modern IAF now teaches a “relational” view of organizing and of power.⁵³

Similar ideas pop up in other networks. Helen Johnson, who organizes in Mississippi, observes, "The whole idea of community organizing is really about relationship building."⁵⁴ Often community organizers say that when they seek new recruits, they are looking for people with a "relational" sense.⁵⁵

This vocabulary is not limited to community organizing but is also seen in kindred fields, such as civic engagement for youth. Sistas and Brothas United in the Bronx works on school reform but devotes time to cultivating relationships among youth and between young people and adults. Nathaniel, a teenage organizer, reports, "We have fun things. We do trips. And, on a personal level, we chill with each other . . . We definitely relate differently." And one of his colleagues observes that these relationships have made her "able to understand people better, not only personally, but what they're trying to say when they speak at meetings."⁵⁶

Of all the strands of civic renewal, formal public deliberation seems the most remote from "relational" politics, because individuals are recruited to talk for a limited time and then disband. But participants in juries and policy deliberations often develop strong emotional ties. Further, the organizers of deliberations tend to believe that their own role is to strengthen relationships among citizens.⁵⁷ Thus Harold Saunders describes the West Virginia Center for Public Life, which organizes statewide deliberations on public issues, as having a "relational paradigm."⁵⁸

For democracy, reciprocal relationships of concern and support are not sufficient. A *civic* relationship has the following specific features: (1) Unlike a family tie, a deep friendship, or a romantic partnership, a civic relationship is nonexclusive. In fact, a community's social capital is higher if diverse residents are connected by a broad and dense web of relationships. Citizens ought to expand and diversify their own relationships; exclusion and partiality are problematic in civic life. (2) Although civic relationships involve identities, interests, private concerns, and personal stories, they are not *simply* personal. For a relationship to be "civic," it must involve talking, listening, and working on public issues or problems. (3) A civic relationship need not be "civil," if that implies politeness and frequent expressions of positive emotions. It can rather encompass sharp disagreements. But the relationship must be predicated on the value of the other person as a fellow citizen, seen as someone who should be encouraged to participate in the common life.⁵⁹

Thus civic relationships are connected to particular civic virtues, starting with loyalty. In his short, classic book entitled *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, Albert Hirschman argued that we have two basic options when we are dissatisfied with any institution or group, whether it is a restaurant, a church, a railroad

company, or a nation-state.⁶⁰ We can leave it and join a different institution ("exit"), or we can try to persuade our fellow members to change it ("voice"). Exit is a human right: except in extraordinary situations, people should not be trapped in institutions. Besides, exit can improve the world, because institutions that lose members are forced to reform. That is the logic of market competition, and it works.

But voice is also valuable, and it is the harder path. When a city is deindustrializing or a school system is failing, exit will simply strip it of members and resources. It will not die completely—American Rust Belt cities and their school systems are not going to vanish like ancient Carthage and Thebes—but it will suffer from shrinking. Those who are left behind will be the weakest and the most vulnerable. These communities need internal reform and rebirth, and that requires voice. As Hirschman argued, *loyalty* is what causes people to exercise voice when exit is an option.

It would be difficult to measure the ratio of exit to voice in modern America, especially if one tried to assess the quality as well as the mere frequency of voice. Since I do not know how to measure this ratio, I cannot demonstrate that we are substituting exit for the voice and loyalty that we once had. But problematic examples of exit are widely visible. Wealthy parents exit public school systems, and middle-class families exit cities for suburbs. Partisans exit politically heterogeneous communities in favor of homogeneous ones so that they do not have to persuade fellow citizens to agree with them. (Bill Bishop argues in *The Big Sort* that Americans now live in counties—and other fixed geographical jurisdictions—that are far more politically homogeneous than they were in previous generations, because we "vote with our feet."⁶¹) During the last third of the twentieth century, the composition of American civil society changed profoundly as people exited associations that were diverse in terms of occupation, social class, and ideology (but rooted locally) and instead joined single-issue organizations that advanced causes they favored. You need not use voice within a single-issue organization: it speaks for you. You can exit as soon as you cease to agree with its agenda.⁶² Finally, millions of Americans have exited public life altogether in favor of purely private concerns and networks. Overall, it is my impression that we are substituting exit for voice. That may be a natural (although undesirable) process, because voice is the more difficult mode.

But there are countertrends, particular efforts to enhance voice. I have already noted the revival of practical deliberative democracy: efforts to engage citizens in open-ended discussions of public issues. I have also mentioned positive youth development (PYD): the theory that institutions can enhance the welfare of adolescents by giving them opportunities to contribute to their

societies. To read the scholarly literature on these two strategies, one would think that their main justification is that they “work”: in other words, they produce better concrete outcomes than alternative strategies, such as top-down public administration or didactic instruction. But to the extent that they work, that is thanks to the committed people who have designed interventions, raised the funds to implement them, struggled to make them succeed, and refined their original plans to address challenges. Why would anyone go to all that trouble?

Underlying both deliberative democracy and PYD is a similar moral commitment. We should develop relationships with the other people who inhabit our communities, treating them as fellow citizens, not as threats or problems. We should use voice to engage them, which means both talking to them and genuinely listening. We should invest in their civic skills: leadership, effective speaking, and organizing. Those premises apply even if our fellow citizens happen to be younger than 20. Thus deliberative democracy and PYD are manifestations of civic loyalty.

The same could be said of several other movements described more fully in chapter 6. For example, proponents of asset based community development (ABCD) recommend taking a positive inventory of the good things in any community before attempting to change it; their underlying value is loyalty to places. Relational community organizers try to include everyone in their discussions and work, instead of simply mobilizing people who might agree with them. Again, an underlying value is loyalty to the place and its people.

A related virtue is *hope*, meaning a belief that collaborative and deliberative initiatives (such as ABCD, relational organizing, or PYD) can work and that their participants can improve their world. Hope is not mere optimism or a sunny disposition. It does not presume that matters are likely to improve, but only that we have a chance to improve things if we develop appropriate relationships.

Arendt saw hope and loyalty as a pair of related political virtues that matter because human beings are born and develop from infancy. Martin Heidegger, one of her teachers, had seen mortality—the inevitable movement toward death—as the fundamental metaphysical fact. Human beings were defined by our finitude and our one-way journey through time. In politics, Heidegger had been a Nazi. Whether his death-centered philosophy and his Nazi politics were related is a controversial question, but Arendt thought they were. Without naming him, she replied to him in *The Human Condition*: “Since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, not mortality, must be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical thought.”⁶³

This was the response of a little-“d” democrat, someone who believed that we should create the world freely but together. (“Action,” in her lexicon, meant talking with peers and acting in common.) Her democratic commitment arose from the fact that human beings are constantly being born, thus renewing the world and making its future basically unpredictable and up to us. Racism, to name just one example, is not written in nature but is produced by people, and the new people who arrive on earth every few seconds do not have to reproduce it. We are free to remake the world in a way that would be impossible if our earthly lives were immortal. Our finitude is a blessing if we consider it as an opportunity for births.

History is the story of the tens of billions of people who have lived so far. Many were killed by other people, and many died well before their natural life spans because of human-created social injustices. History, from one perspective, is a vast slaughterhouse. But all those people were also born: they came into the world as infants whose possibilities were radically open. From that perspective, history is a vast nursery.

Newborns compel our love. There are physical, biological causes of that response, the same with us as with all warm-blooded animals. But an appropriate interpretation of our human love for infants is our knowledge that each new baby represents the possibility of a better world. This is its meaning, in our terms. Arendt elaborates:

The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal “natural” ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope, those two essential characteristics of human existence which Greek antiquity ignored altogether, discounting the keeping of faith as a very uncommon and not too important virtue and counting hope among the evils of illusion in Pandora’s box. It is this faith in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their glad tidings: “A child has been born unto us.”⁶⁴

For Arendt, our highest calling is to love the world. To love the world is to remake it in each generation with our contemporaries. We count on the newly born to replenish our efforts, and we owe them the virtues of hope and loyalty. We must welcome each new generation to common action, which is “politics.”

Whether or not we accept Hannah Arendt's whole philosophy of politics rooted in natality, I think we must treat our fellow human beings in a developmental way. A developmental ethic is fundamental to many of the concrete, practical projects I describe in this book, from civic education to community-based economic development.

A theory of development expects constant change, as opposed to any stance that assumes stability, ignores the dimension of time, or overlooks the potential for bad things to improve. Development is not random change, but it also is not fully predetermined and predictable. When something develops, we can say that changes occur *because* the object is moving toward some kind of objective or end, whereas ordinary physical objects change only as a consequence of what is done to them. In the case of a biological organism, we are able to talk about development and change *toward* objectives or ends because the physical structure of the object includes guidelines for its own growth and transformation (mostly encoded in its genome). In contrast, we would not say that a mountain develops, even though it changes, because there is no design encoded in it that makes it change in a particular direction.

Human beings' development is more complex, because we are able to reflect on our own trajectories and strive to change them. Not every influence is random or encoded in our genes. On the other hand, we are never fully free, because our developmental course up until the present influences our efforts to change. Thus development can involve intentions and self-consciousness, but it is not simply a matter of choice.

Nor do human beings pass through automatic "stages." Personal decisions and external events and opportunities disrupt the standard progression and can produce wide variation.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, some sequences of development are encoded genetically, or are deeply embedded in our cultural traditions, or flow logically. For example, there are important reasons that individuals typically babble before they talk, learn to read before they become sexually active, attend school before they vote, fill the roles of children before they are parents, and hold jobs before they retire. Some of these sequences are biologically necessary; others are wise conventions; and some might be mistakes. To think developmentally is to pay attention to the typical (and atypical) sequences and the timing of opportunities and experiences. The usual course of human development is open to critique but it cannot simply be ignored.

Human beings are distinctive because we can have ordinary desires plus desires concerning our desires. For example, I may want to put down a difficult scholarly book that I am reading so that I can watch a trivial television show, and at the same time want *not* to have that desire. Such "second-order

volitions," as the late philosopher Harry Frankfurt named them, are important for several reasons.⁶⁶ A form of freedom only comes into play when we have second-order volitions. I may be free to read academic books or to watch TV (in other words, to *do* what I want), but I do not have freedom of the will unless I am also free to want what I want to want. In turn, my freedom of the will makes me morally responsible. We say that an addict who wants to quit and fails is more responsible than an addict who doesn't even care whether he is addicted. Meanwhile, freedom of the will permits certain satisfactions that cannot come from ordinary action.⁶⁷ That is because it is possible to change our basic desires in line with our second-order volitions, which is a deeply satisfying achievement. If I turn myself into someone who enjoys scholarly books more and trivial TV shows less, I am not only entitled to believe that I have done the right thing with my time, but that I have also improved myself. In that way, the self (personal identity) is connected to second-order volitions.

I introduce this concept here because we are capable of assessing and altering our own second-order volitions in ways that produce conscious development, not just random change. In the words of the Port Huron Statement that inaugurated the New Left in America, we "have unrealized potential for self-cultivation, self-direction, self-understanding, and creativity." The Statement proceeds to note that this process of self-cultivation is not individualistic, on the model of a Romantic artist developing his or her own genius. "This kind of independence does not mean egoistic individualism—the object is not to have one's way so much as it is to have a way that is one's own. . . . Human interdependence is contemporary fact."⁶⁸

Indeed, most of the effective techniques for improving our second-order volitions are relational and collaborative. Religious congregations, study circles and other deliberative forums, internally democratic associations, and participatory social movements convene people to decide on what they should want and then to hold one another accountable for changing their identities by changing what they want. In the Book of Proverbs, it is written, "Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them. . . . Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats" (Prov. 24:1–3; 23:5–7). I would not claim that these verses are especially famous or influential, but they are representative of an important kind of discourse—one that asks us to change our desires as well as our actions.

Meanwhile, as a whole country, we have both desires and second-order volitions. We want to drive our big SUVs to work, and we want to be the kind of country that does not want to do that. Whereas individual consumer choices elicit our ordinary desires, civic acts such as making arguments in

public and voting make us think about our second-order volitions. A good law is not a reflection of what we want but of what we think we should want.⁶⁹

Like individuals, communities and institutions have developmental trajectories that are shaped by their initial designs, constrained by logic, affected by random events, and yet susceptible to deliberate alteration by the group itself. Sun Belt boom towns are at a different stage of development from Rust Belt inner cities. The government of the United States has developed rapidly since the ratification of the Constitution and cannot now reverse course. To think developmentally about a community is to take its past seriously, and not imagine that it can simply start over from scratch, but recognize the potential for deliberate change.

An ethic of development, then, is a particular way of making judgments and intervening in the world. It does not presume that every person, community, or institution has equal merit and virtue: some are better than others once they develop past their infancies. But if we think developmentally, we are alert to the ways that the past has shaped each one's present, the limits of choice, and the potential for any person or community to change, for better or worse, in and through relationships with others.

For example, some college professors are offended that their students are relatively superficial and undisciplined thinkers. That perspective fails to view students as individuals in development; their thinking will change rapidly. On the other hand, if you are a college teacher who simply tolerates and expects your students to think immaturely, you are not contributing to their development. You fail to exhibit hope in their potential and loyalty to them as fellow citizens. If you try to *make* them think better, you ignore the inevitable responsibility of human beings for their own development. But if you leave them to do and think whatever they want, you forget that healthy development requires guidance and support. If you treat a 12-year-old just like your college students, you are unreasonable. But if you try to shepherd a fellow adult intellectually, as you would your own students, you misunderstand your limited rights and responsibilities for other people's development. In short, thinking developmentally is not easy—it raises a host of empirical, strategic, and ethical questions—but it is indispensable in politics based on human relationships.

Youth Build USA can serve as a model of the core values illustrated in this chapter. It enlists young people who have dropped out of high school, assigns them public work (building houses for the homeless), engages them in conversation about strategy and policy, invests deeply in their individual development, and emphasizes loyal relationships among the participants and between participants and staff. As one graduate told us in an evaluation interview, "All

the staff—it wasn't just one person—but they would sit down and have a one-on-one conversation with you throughout the year. It wouldn't be just a classroom, you know. If they saw you outside, they would just stop and ask you how it's going. It wasn't just asking the question, and not really caring. They actually listen, they actually respond."