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Dyssoociation

*The first part of a slightly outrageous introduction
to post-democratic society and politics*

Dyssociation

Beyond Democracy (Monday) Version 3.1

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Monday

Moderator: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to an unusual social experiment – an experiment in which you will be both the subjects and, we hope, the ultimate beneficiaries.

You and your families are already enjoying the many amenities which are to be found aboard a cruise ship of this kind. And this meeting is the beginning of what was advertised as the special feature of this ocean cruise – our week-long, “slightly outrageous introduction to post-democratic society and politics.”

So, first of all, I would like to explain what that means. And, after that, I will introduce our three distinguished guests, who will be doing most of the hard work for us in the course of this intellectual adventure.

Our ship has already entered international waters, so we are no longer in America, and this is not an American ship. But most

of the people here today are Americans, and it is the nature and future of American society that will be our central preoccupation – though we will be using the term “American” in its broadest sense, to include people from other English-speaking nations who share a similar cultural heritage, and people from all societies where American attitudes and practices have become predominant.

Of course, the Americans in our audience are not the usual kind of Americans – the kind who would probably wonder why anyone would want to waste the better part of an ocean cruise listening to other people talking about politics and societies when Americans already get far too much of that at home.

Rather, they are Americans who are so disillusioned and frustrated with their own democratic governments that they want to learn more about some unusual social alter-

natives – even if, to do so, they must come to a place like this where the promulgation and consideration of those alternatives cannot be proscribed as “un-American” activities.

And their frustration is understandable because, in fact, American democracy – which once meant government by “the people” – isn’t even very democratic anymore. The care and management of American society has instead been “professionalized,” along with just about everything else in America today. And America’s government – which was intended to be the servant of American society – seems, with professional assurance and occasional arrogance, to have become its master instead.

That change did not come about overnight, nor even rapidly enough for most people to notice. But it is obvious in retrospect that, sometime during the past century, the basic ideas and language of American democracy – most of which were inherited from the previous two centuries – just became irrelevant, and are now heard only in nostalgic, ritual incantations.

So it seems American society has already entered some kind of new, “post-democratic”

era. And even those people who still cling to the relics of democracy seem quite satisfied with that change. Now that social management is in the hands of expert “propols” – that is, political professionals and professional politicians – America seems, on the whole, to be a happier place for most people. And, politically, it seems less dangerous than it was in the past, or is today in those many unhappy nations where social management is still in the hands of bungling democratic or autocratic amateurs.

Of course, America still has some major social problems, and many people are still concerned about the effects of those problems. But it now seems naive for ordinary people to talk about “solving” such problems. Today’s propols, with much greater knowledge and sophistication, talk instead about the professional “management” of social problems.

Anyway, we are told, the need for direct public participation in social management no longer exists because the great battles of democracy were fought and won long ago. Americans can see for themselves, for example, that social “equality” is an established

fact – all citizens today being equally faceless, anonymous spectators while “attending” the game of American politics, which is played by experts with amazing skill.

So it may seem at least slightly outrageous for anyone to suggest that, sometime in the future of this new, post-democratic era, Americans may again need the kind of social management in which ordinary, individual citizens – not faceless “people” or professionals – will be called upon to play an important role in determining their own social and personal destinies.

But that is just what we will be suggesting. And, while we have no ready-made, detailed vision of what such a new-and-better, post-democratic society might look like, we do believe the creation of such a society is possible and, for various reasons, may even become an urgent necessity for America, and for the whole world as well.

Naturally, America’s propols dread such interference by overly enthusiastic amateurs, and they are quick to discourage it. Just as physicians give Stern Warnings to knife-wielding enthusiasts who want to attempt some experimental brain surgery on

their own kitchen tables, propols have a long list of Stern Warnings about the dangers of social speculation and experimentation. And they expect those warnings to be accepted as the “Final Words” on the subject.

Such Final Words do deserve attention, and they are often sufficient to discourage amateurs from meddling in matters beyond their own competence. It should be pointed out, however, that some of those Final Words are not quite as conclusive or persuasive as they may seem to be. For example:

***First Final Word** – Americans have the kind of society they deserve.*

We did not bring any of those propols along with us on this cruise but, if we had, they would probably insist that America is still a very democratic nation. In fact, propols sometimes blame the perverse constraints of democracy for having hindered them in their efforts to make America a more perfect and glorious state.

So, those propols would say, Americans are in no position to complain about the kind of society in which they live because they are the ones who select – in regular, democratic

elections – the “representatives” who tell governments what to do. And a government’s professional managers cannot be blamed if their efforts to create a better society are often confounded by political instructions that are usually incoherent or impractical.

But anyone who is familiar with the origin and purpose of representative political assemblies, which are only a small and not very important part of most governments, knows that is a fallacy. In fact, the role of community representatives in England’s early Parliaments, like that of the jurors they were intended to resemble, was merely to add the legitimacy of their participation and “consent” to whatever schemes happened to serve the purposes of a king and his councilors.

That is why those early members of Parliament, like modern jurors, were reluctant to be selected for such duty, and expected to be made poorer by it. And the essential features of that old arrangement have not been changed very much, even in the modern American version.

It is true that the identity of America’s

“royalty” – the people to whom the government belongs, or whose purposes the government serves – is not nearly as obvious as it once was in England.

And it is also true that many Americans today are eager to become contestants in democratic elections, because they expect the winners to become rich and powerful – as would modern jurors, if they had the same opportunities to sell their votes to the highest bidder.

But the idea that political representatives serve the interests of the people who select them is as much of an illusion as it ever was, and is generally recognized as such. That is why so many Americans never bother to vote at all, except in the most amusing elections, and why so many people these days look to other organizations outside the formal political process to represent their most important social interests.

In fact, about the only useful purpose elections in America do seem to serve is giving people some comfort in the notion that their votes may at least allow them to get rid of the worst political scoundrels. But that is a very dubious notion indeed, in the face of

what seems to be an infinite supply of such scoundrels.

Anyway, that kind of role for citizens is a purely negative one, which might just as well be effected with pitchforks and ax-handles. What we will be looking for instead is the kind of society that gives all of its citizens opportunities to make positive contributions to the welfare and improvement of that society, to the extent of their individual capabilities, for their own benefit and for the benefit of others as well.

***Second Final Word** – There is no practical superior alternative to American democracy.*

Propols also point out that modern American society, which in many ways is clearly obnoxious, is still preferable to any other kind of society to be found anywhere else in the world – all of which seem to be even more obnoxious.

Of course, the professional politician who first made that claim was only stating something which seemed obvious to him – that in no other kind of society have propols ever enjoyed such power and prestige, or even

such long life expectancy. So, not surprisingly, propols are not much interested in other kinds of societies. And they have no interest at all in non-obnoxious societies, where politicians are much less important.

Yet, propols say, it is foolish for modern Americans to hope they can ever return to the kind of society and democracy that may once have existed in much smaller and simpler places, such as early New England villages or ancient Greek city-states.

That may have been just what the most enthusiastic founders of the American nation-state actually had in mind with their motto “*E Pluribus Unum*” and their optimism that the amazing variety of cultural elements present in revolutionary America could be “synthesized” into a single, new-and-better kind of society which would preserve the social virtues of small, democratic communities. And that fascination with the ideal of social synthesis may even have been inspired by the wonders of modern chemistry – a science which was also in its infancy at that time.

But, as propols point out, those early optimists did not seem to realize that, while an

unusual combination of many simple elements may produce a wondrous new substance, it is just as likely to create a poisonous or even explosively unstable concoction. In fact, by the time of the American Civil War, the original American motto had become so ironical it was already being superseded as a coin inscription by a less optimistic motto, to the effect of: "God Help Us."

Some social force besides military power was clearly necessary to keep the American nation from falling apart – as it has always seemed to be doing, to a greater or lesser extent, since its creation. But, propols say, the kind of synthesis that has actually held it together for so long was not an idealistic, social synthesis but a pragmatic, "political" synthesis. And that kind of synthesis, to be successful, required constant, complex political adjustments which could only have been accomplished by the most extremely competent professionals.

So, propols say, because America cannot survive without it, every citizen should do everything possible to support and defend that synthesis and the institutions which sustain it, to prevent America's enemies,

both within and without, from upsetting that broad but delicate political balance.

What we will be doing here this week, however, is exactly the opposite, which is another reason our experiment may seem slightly outrageous. The lexical opposite of synthesis is analysis – that is, taking something apart to determine the true nature of its component parts, and to find out how each of them affects the nature of the compound substance, for better or worse.

We must do that because it is the only way we can acquire the knowledge and understanding necessary to put those and other elements back together again in the kind of successful social synthesis that will create our new-and-better, post-democratic society – a society which should not need politicians or political gimmicks to hold it together.

Third Final Word – Ordinary Americans will never understand the most important social and political issues.

But, propols would probably say, anyone who expects ordinary people to be able to participate in such intricate social analysis, or understand its results, is probably ex-

pecting far too much, for reasons that have been known for a very long time.

Ordinary Americans today, they say, are much like those imaginary ancient Greeks who lived in the darkness of Plato's allegorical cave, and fled back in terror to that comfortable darkness when exposed to the dazzling, confusing and painful effects of ordinary sunlight.

And the political fear and confusion that afflict many Americans today, propols say, are due to a similar kind of obdurate ignorance. American society is constantly changing, they say, and it is the troublesome lag between the occurrence of such changes and public understanding of the implications of those changes that creates so much fear and confusion.

For example, propols say, America's democracy still has some serious social problems, but that is probably because America is not yet "democratic" enough. And if there has been public fear and confusion about some recent, propolistic "adjustments" that were intended to make America a more democratic nation, it is only because of persistent public ignorance about the need for

such changes.

When such ignorance is cleared away by an effective program of political "enlightenment," they say, most of that fear and confusion will also disappear, restoring America's political equilibrium. And that is why many of today's propols, like Plato's reluctant philosophers, accept it as part of their meritocratic duty to try to share their arduously acquired, superior social insights with ordinary people, however difficult and futile that may be.

But, propols go on to say, if democratic Americans are too fearful, lazy or stupid to appreciate such enlightenment – as far too many of them seem to be – there is little reason to hope such people could make any positive contributions to any new and different kind of American society.

We do agree there is something perverse about the fact that, in America today, even the newest and most powerful forms of political enlightenment seem to be having something other than their intended effects – creating even more fear and confusion, without reducing ignorance.

But those perverse results may just indi-

cate that the power of political synthesis to serve as a substitute for social synthesis has reached its limits – and that the purposes and practices of political enlightenment may even be creating new kinds of problems which make the need for real, social synthesis even more urgent.

***Fourth Final Word** – If America really needed a new kind of society, someone would have invented one.*

American propols, in moments of immodesty, may even point out that some of their own colleagues and predecessors have always been recognized as being among the world's most enlightened, imaginative and resourceful social theorists and managers. And, under the influence of such people, American history has been one of constant, creative social experimentation.

So, these days, even the most wretched politicians feel compelled to invent their own, usually fantastic visions of whole “new societies” to offer voters at every election. And propols would probably say our efforts here this week are unlikely to amount to anything much more substantial than that.

It seems to us, however, while it is certainly true that some Americans have demonstrated astonishing imagination and resourcefulness in many fields of human endeavor, those accomplishments only accentuate what seems to be an equally astonishing lack of the same kind of successful innovation in the realm of social management – in spite of, or perhaps because of, what seems to be an indecent excess of politically-motivated social experimentation.

Some propols acknowledge that discrepancy, without being able to explain it. But we think the explanation is quite simple. We believe the reason for America's lack of real social progress is a special impairment of perception and imagination that has been caused by the very intensity of political enlightenment to which Americans have been exposed over the years – an impairment we call “enlightenment blindness.” And propols, being closest to the source of it, have suffered the most severe impairment of all.

That may sound like another paradox. But it is not really difficult to understand when it is realized that the kind of “light” used for American programs of political en-

lightenment over the years is nothing like the kind of light or enlightenment Plato was talking about.

Of course, that kind of impairment is not confined to Americans – it is a common and perhaps even necessary part of most societies. So, before proceeding with our examination of different kinds of societies and politics, we will try to demonstrate the nature of that impairment – and also try to show how we think ordinary people can understand and even overcome its effects, if only temporarily.

We want to do this because, if we succeed, we will gain the very great – perhaps unprecedented – advantage of being able to release the full power of the intelligence and imagination of people like the Americans in our audience into an area from which it has been conspicuously absent, but where it is so obviously needed.

So, if you will excuse us for just a few minutes, we will make the arrangements for our demonstration of some of the peculiar effects which can be caused by the impairment of human perception.

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Moderator: All right, we are ready now for our demonstration, which is intended to help you understand the phenomenon of “enlightenment blindness” by showing you what it looks like, using some special lights we have had installed in this room for that purpose. But, before we start this demonstration, there are some things you should know about different kinds of illumination.

To achieve the effect of political “enlightenment,” a politician must use a very peculiar kind of light – the kind that not only seems to put him in a “good light” but also, at the same time, seems to put his political rivals in a “bad light.” And, of course, ordinary sunlight is of no use for that purpose because it just illuminates everything indiscriminately, making all politicians look ridiculous.

This strange kind of light, which is so useful to politicians, is actually an example of what is known as narrow-spectrum or “monochromatic” light. So a brief review of

some elementary optics may be necessary to help explain the political uses and effects of such light.

The term “monochromatic” may remind you of old “black-and-white” photographs or motion pictures that were monochromatic representations of scenes from the real world. And some of you may think that kind of photography ignored the fact that “white” light from the sun is actually made up of a “spectrum” of colors – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet.

But that is not true. In order to look “natural,” monochromatic photography actually did include most of those colors, converting each of them into an appropriate-looking shade of gray.

Monochromatic light is different. It consists of only one pure color, or only narrow parts of the color spectrum. And, while it may look peculiar, its use has become quite common in modern cities. It is the kind of light that is produced, for example, by modern, high-efficiency street lights or decorative “neon” signs.

Most people do not like to linger in that kind of narrow-spectrum light because it

produces incidental visual effects that seem quite unnatural and even hideous. But those effects can teach us some interesting things about the properties of monochromatic light. And they also reveal some peculiarities of human perception, including ways in which vision may be impaired or distorted very easily.

The special lights in this room, which are now producing ordinary white light, have a spectrum control that allows us to cause them instead to produce any single monochromatic color, or any combination of colors. And that is what will happen during this demonstration.

The other parts of the demonstration are those paper hats, in various colors, which have just been distributed. Please join me right now in putting the hat you were given on your head. Then, please look around and observe the colors of the hats being worn by other people near you.

Our special lights are now changing gradually from white to pure green. But you won’t notice much change if you just watch the lights. To the human eye, any color of light, or any combination of colors, looks like

ordinary white light when there is no other kind of light to compare it with. And, of course, this interior part of our ship has no windows.

You will certainly notice, however, that all the colors in this room, including green, now seem to be disappearing. When the change is complete, objects that were pure green in color will look white. Objects with no green in their color will look black. And things like human skin and clothing, which contain various amounts of green, will become various shades of gray – shades that will probably look quite inappropriate and not very appealing.

If you look at the people who were wearing green paper hats, you will notice those hats now look white, while the hats being worn by everyone else look black. But we can make those white hats look black, and hats of any other color look white, by simply adjusting the color of the lights. And you can see that happening right now, as we shift the lights slowly through the whole color spectrum.

So it should be obvious by now that you can't always trust your own eyes to give you

accurate information about what the real world looks like – you are seeing for yourselves what can happen when other people are given the power to alter your perceptions. And some of you might have been astonished by this kind of “magical” demonstration if we had not told you what was going to happen.

Of course, none of you will have much trouble coping with the effects of the pure green light to which we have now returned because, while it may seem unpleasant, it merely hides some non-essential things that you know still exist. And as those effects become more familiar, they will seem less unpleasant. If you were to stay in this kind of light for a long time, you might even begin to appreciate the resulting simplification of your visual perception.

But what we really want you to think about right now is just the opposite. Please try to imagine what would happen if you had always lived in this kind of light and were suddenly exposed, for the first time, to the effects of full-spectrum light. Obviously, it would be much more confusing and frightening if you were thrust into a world of

many different colors you had never seen before.

And that is important because, in fact, Americans really do live in a monochromatic society. Just as the light spectrum includes a range of different colors, there is also a “social” spectrum that includes many different kinds of societies. So, when we talk about social “enlightenment” we are, in effect, combining those two ideas, and that combination also has some interesting metaphorical results.

American society, for example, can be called a “green” society because green is found at about the middle of the color spectrum and most Americans like to think of themselves as being socially central or, politically, in the “middle of the road.”

American society is a bit more tolerant than other societies so its social spectrum is somewhat wider than just pure green. Many Americans are also aware of, and some even prefer, the fringes of adjacent parts of the social spectrum – slightly yellow societies to the “left” which are said to be more compassionate, and slightly blue societies to the “right” which are said to be more cerebral.

But ordinary Americans are almost completely unfamiliar with societies at the orange-red end of the social spectrum, beyond yellow, or societies at the indigo-violet end of the spectrum, beyond blue, because those kinds of societies are virtually invisible in bright green light. And that is the kind of social “blindness” which is the inevitable result of an excessive amount of monochromatic green political “enlightenment.”

While most of the paper hats in this room now appear to be black because of the green light, we know they really have various colors which just happen to be invisible at the moment. We also know every social color is also present in America – though most seem invisible – because America is a land of immigrants from many different societies all over the world and the social assumptions those immigrants brought with them extend all the way from one end of the social spectrum to the other.

Many of the earliest immigrants, for example, including the intellectuals who created the original American nation-state, were actually quite “bluish” – while later immigrants, and later American intellectu-

als, were more likely to be “yellowish.” And, in spite of the famous American “melting pot,” many Americans today, at least on ceremonial occasions, still like to wear the social hats or other clothing accessories which identify the societies from which they came, or the social colors they prefer.

It would not have been possible, of course, to create or sustain a single nation that preserved all of those multi-colored sub-societies. So, as already mentioned, it was necessary to form a synthetic political arrangement that created the illusion of an American society, the predominant color of which would eventually become mid-spectrum, democratic green, because that was the social color most Americans were likely to accept as the “lowest common denominator” among their various preferences.

And, to sustain this social illusion, American programs of political “enlightenment” ever since have, in effect, used high-intensity green, monochromatic light to make all other social colors less visible. In fact, one of the main reasons for the establishment of “public” schools in America was so all young people, and eventually all citizens, would

learn to feel most comfortable with green as the predominant color of American “public opinion.”

That is also why both of America’s political parties, and most American politicians, usually wear symbolic green hats. Under green light, those hats look white – the recognized symbol, according to American public opinion, of a “good guy” or good group. Any political hat that is not the purest green appears, under that light, to be slightly soiled and not quite as good.

Any political party or politician who wears a hat of some other color – or even a hat that is just more yellow than green, or more blue than green, appears to be wearing a dark or black hat – the recognized symbol, according to American public opinion, of a “bad guy” or a social “deviant.” And that phenomenon is not merely a political trick. It is an important element of stability in most societies.

Under green light, an orange political hat, for example, looks black even to people who have recently come from an orange society, where an orange hat looked white. So, because of that, many new immigrants prefer

to settle in separate neighborhoods where the predominant color of public opinion is just as orange as it was in the society from which they came.

But, through the influence of such things as public schools and the “mass” media, the children of those immigrants soon learn to prefer green hats for most purposes – and even scorn the color of their parents’ hats – because green is the color that looks whitest in the larger American community.

It is this kind of “integration” which is said to offer those young people the greatest opportunities in the larger American community, while enhancing the stability of that larger community by reducing apparent social differences. Or, at least, that was how it was supposed to work.

So it should be quite obvious that “public opinion” is not a manifestation of what Americans actually believe. Rather, public opinion is the boundary that limits public perception to just those things it is generally regarded as being “correct” for individual Americans to believe.

And it should be equally obvious that ordinary Americans are not really as stupid or

as color-blind as they may seem – it is just that their powers of social perception and imagination have been severely impaired by all that high-intensity green light which constantly pours down on them.

For the purpose of our discussions here this week, however, we will need to explore the entire spectrum of social options, past and present. Clearly, no new and better, post-democratic social structure could be erected using just those social building materials that are most visible and familiar to Americans today.

But introducing people from any monochromatic society to a world of full-color social perception is something which, as we mentioned earlier, must be done very carefully and gradually. Trying to make that change very quickly would be much too confusing and even painful, for two reasons:

First, full-spectrum social light will reveal many things that will probably seem grotesque to ordinary Americans who have never seen such things before. And it will take some time for those things to become familiar enough to be examined without too much fear and revulsion.

And, second, without the reassuring and simplifying, black-and-white effects of monochromatic social light, it is much more difficult for anyone to decide quickly which things or people are “good” or “bad.” Undertaking this voyage of exploration without such a moral compass may even seem like an act of madness to many Americans because of the very real danger of becoming hopelessly lost on a sea of uncertainty and confusion.

So we will remind you one last time of Plato’s warning that this kind of exploration, even with the most prudent and helpful guidance, can be one of the most difficult and uncomfortable of human experiences. But that is an unavoidable part of real enlightenment – a truth that is often overlooked today, even by the people who operate and attend America’s schools:

***Enlightenment** – Learning is the process of changing your mind.*

For most students and teachers today, the very idea of people “making up” their own minds probably seems perverse or old-fashioned, when it is so much easier and less

expensive to buy one “off the shelf” at some political supermarket or fashionable ideological boutique.

So why, you may be wondering, would any sane person want to subject himself to such a painful experience, and the danger of intellectual injury, if all he is going to learn about are things that are not even visible to ordinary Americans, and which are therefore of little interest and probably little social importance?

The answer, of course, is that it can be even more painful and dangerous to ignore invisible things we know to exist, if only by their effects. A person who tries to ignore invisible, ultraviolet light, for example, may “wake up” with a painful and dangerous sunburn, without knowing why it happened or how it could have been prevented.

But how, you might also ask, can we possibly find time, during this brief cruise, to examine more than just a few of America’s many, multicolored “subcultures,” or even know where to start looking for useful social examples?

That is a good question – especially since we will also be looking far beyond the bor-

ders of the American nation and far back into time. There is an almost infinite number of social possibilities, with lessons to be learned from all of them. But, fortunately for us, a process of natural selection through the ages of human existence has isolated three basic social forms or models which seem to have produced the best results.

Besides that, those three models come from different parts of the social spectrum – one from each end and one from the middle. So, taking a good look at just those three basic models will be almost as good as a survey of the whole spectrum. Such a broad, introductory survey will, we admit, have little depth or precision. But it should be adequate for what we are trying to accomplish here this week.

Our three primary social models have different colors because each of them emerged at a different stage of human development. For convenience, some people associate those three stages with roughly corresponding developments in methods of human communication – inadvertently creating some needless confusion about causes and effects.

At one end of the social spectrum is the oldest social model, which we call the “Obso” model. It probably appeared about the time people first learned to speak, making complex, cooperative social interaction possible. So it has been around for many thousands of years and it is the context in which most of mankind’s basic social instincts were formed. It is the only social model that has ever been known to people in many parts of the world, or to many people even in so-called advanced societies today.

At the other end of the social spectrum is the “Novo” model, which is often associated with the first appearance of rudimentary written languages. Over the few thousand years since then, the effects of this other prehistoric social model have appeared from time to time in various places – which, in retrospect, some people call “Golden Ages,” though other people regard them as humanity’s greatest social disasters.

And in the middle of our social spectrum is what appears to be a third major social model, which may have originated in the Mediterranean cities of classical times, but did not become important until the inven-

tion of modern, mass media of communication. That model has been around for only a few centuries or just decades in various places, but is the model apparently used by most modern industrial democracies, which is why we call it the “Demo” model.

The problem today is that, while each of those three social models came along at different times, in different places, later models did not replace earlier ones. They did affect each other – there are no “pure” examples of societies based on the Obso or Novo social models left in the world today.

And even in modern, democratic nations like America, the two older models, though made virtually invisible by monochromatic, democratic public opinion, have remained influential and may even regain predominance when certain, special circumstances cause a sudden shift in the color of public opinion. In times of war, for example, some hats that normally look black suddenly begin to look white, and *vice versa*.

Such a combination of visible and invisible social elements and effects certainly does cause plenty of political confusion. But our understanding of the effects of monochro-

matic illumination should at least allow us to overcome some of the confusion caused by misperception.

Of course, politicians do not really use colored lights to manipulate public opinion. They use colored words. And words are the names of ideas.

All three social models, for example, use the words “right” and “wrong” as the names of ideas – but not the same ideas. Sometimes, they are not even the same kind of names. In one model, “right” is an adjective; in another model it is a noun; in the third model it is merely the opposite of “left.” So it is not enough to know what a word looks or sounds like – we must also know which model the word comes from if we are to understand which idea it represents, and avoid such absurdities as a “Bill of Lefts.”

This was not as great a problem for older, more-isolated societies where almost all words and ideas were the same color as their society. Words of other colors were so obviously “foreign” they were not likely to cause much confusion.

But in modern societies – especially those with greater toleration and “free speech” –

words and ideas of different colors get mixed together, often causing great confusion. That confusion might be reduced if each word were printed in an appropriate color, or pronounced differently, to indicate which idea it represents. But that is not really practical.

So, since we will be using words and ideas of many different colors, and need a way to keep them in their proper places, we have asked our three guests to play roles. Each of our guests will try to represent just one of our three social models, as if that were really possible, and to use words of only one color – the color most appropriate to the model each guest represents.

If one of our guests uses the word “right,” for example, he will try to use it only in the sense that is consistent with his role. When there is any possibility of misunderstanding, he will not use the same word without warning to represent a different idea, creating the kind of smoke-screen of confusion behind which real politicians so often like to hide.

The cynics among us may say this will make our guests sound like real experts –

apparently unable to comprehend or articulate any view of the world except their own. But, by knowing which one of them is speaking, we will at least know the color and intended meaning of his words. Even when all of them use language appropriately, however, we should also keep in mind that “truth” is another word that comes in many different colors.

Having said all that, it is now my very great pleasure to introduce our three guests ... Mr. Obso, who will represent the social model with that name ... Mr. Novo ... and Ms. Demo. Since they will be playing roles, we will not ask them to reveal their real names or nationalities. But we do welcome them and thank them most sincerely for coming here to help us.

During this week, we will be looking in detail at each of these three social models and the bad ends to which each of them eventually came. Tomorrow – Tuesday – Mr. Obso will describe his model and, on Wednesday, Mr. Novo will tell us about his. We will look at the nature and history of the Demo model on Thursday. And, on Friday, we will see if what we have learned will help

all of us to devise some new and better social models for the future – though learning first and talking later will be another reversal of customary American procedure.

As each of our guests describes his own social model, the others will be allowed to question or challenge him at any time. This “political” method may not lead to much agreement, and will probably leave us with many unanswered questions. But, besides revealing the widest possible range of ideas, we also want to show you what a simplified political debate looks like, with the hope it may provide some vaccination protection against the real thing.

This method also means we will not be able to observe the academic etiquette that some of you may expect. We will not be able to pay much attention to the provenance of various ideas we will be borrowing from many different times and places. And we will not be able to protect anyone from ideas that may seem offensive or embarrassing. We have, for the purposes of this discussion, asked our guests to refrain from the use of academic name-dropping and euphemism as much as possible, so all ideas can be consid-

ered on their own merits.

We justify this indelicacy and indiscriminate intellectual poaching with this excuse – we are hungry people and our hunt through the wisdom of the ages is in search of nourishment, not trophies.

As moderator of this discussion, it will be my role to speak for you – the members of our audience and the subjects of this experiment in full-spectrum social enlightenment – with questions and comments that may be necessary to avoid excessive confusion, digression or dissimulation.

And that is the end of our demonstration, so we are turning off our special lights and returning this room to normal illumination. We are finished with the paper hats, but you may keep them, or swap them according to your own social color preferences as we go along.

That demonstration may also have caused some of you to decide this is not the kind of experiment in which you want to participate. So, before I start our main discussion, we will take another short break and those of you who wish to leave us to our folly may do so discreetly.

3

Moderator: We are ready now to proceed with our investigation of social problems and solutions across the whole human social spectrum. But, to further increase the possibility of a useful outcome, we are also going to do this in a rather un-American way.

When an ordinary American feels unwell, he does not rush off to a library to try to learn something about what his ailment might be, and what can be done about it. He is much more likely to rush off to a pharmacy in search of some medicine that purports to be an instant cure for all personal ailments – like the magical solutions politicians offer for all social ailments.

For the most serious ailments, however, there is no such panacea – serious ailments usually require specific treatments. And that, in turn, requires expert diagnosis of specific problems to determine which treatment is most likely to be appropriate and effective for a specific case, in specific cir-

cumstances.

So, rather than starting this discussion with American-style advertisements for various social models – each of which is a unique combination of several specific social solutions – we are going to spend this first day instead talking about those fundamental social elements and problems that seem to be common to most societies, using familiar American examples whenever possible. Then, with a better understanding of several kinds of social problems and their probable causes, we should be in a much better position tomorrow to begin our evaluation of different social models, as we try to determine which social solutions seem most appropriate in the social circumstances of today and tomorrow, in America and the rest of the world.

And those basic social elements and issues are nothing like the ponderous propositions that have kept philosophers busy over the ages. Rather, they are simple social axioms that all of us observe in everyday life. The two most important axioms – the axioms of society and politics – are also among the most obvious:

Society – *A human being is a natural dilemma; a creature that can be self-conscious but not self-sufficient.*

We start with the simple fact that a single member of this species called *homo sapiens* has a poor chance of survival alone in nature and, of course, could not reproduce himself. Human survival and reproduction require personal and social relationships among individuals that allow us to live and work together in ways that provide essential support for individuals as members of groups.

But being human also means each member of a social group is capable of self-consciousness – the ability, in certain circumstances, to see himself as being distinct from other humans and the rest of the natural world – with interests of his own that may conflict with the interests of others.

And that means human societies cannot be as simple as other, pre-programmed social structures found elsewhere in nature, because every human group reflects the complicated interaction of individual and group interests, whether that group is a small family or a much larger and more

complicated community.

As well, each society is subject to continual evolution as it responds to changes in its physical environment, as its members grow older and are replaced by new generations, and as each individual struggles at various stages of his life with his own contradictory human desires for both personal security and personal fulfillment.

Continual social change requires continual social adjustment, but such adjustment can be difficult. Change has different effects on different members of a community and people often disagree – sometimes violently – about the kinds of social adjustments that may be necessary or appropriate. And that brings us to the axiom of:

Politics – *There are only two effective ways to resolve social conflict; neither of which is politics, which is a symptom, not a solution.*

An obnoxious society with a lot of conflict and politics is, in our view, a sick society – and that is why we won't waste much of our time here this week discussing "political" issues. Much more important, we believe, are

“social” issues about what makes good societies healthy, what makes some societies sick and what, if anything, can be done to cure such sickness – starting with the problem of social conflict, which is probably the most fundamental social issue.

We do know many good human societies, down through the ages, have been able to resolve major social conflicts and other problems because, if they had not done so, we would not be here as their descendants.

So, let us start our discussion with what we know, or can surmise about the nature of social problem-solving in the most elementary human societies. Or perhaps we should start even earlier, with the social groups and conflict that existed in this world long before the first humans came along.

We know many kinds of animals instinctively formed “social” groups to improve their chances of survival in a dangerous world, where all living things were divided into just two broad categories: “family” and “food.” Within those social groups, however, there must have been social conflict as well – the existence of any social structure raises questions about the proper place for each in-

dividual within that structure.

And, certainly, no social group or its members could have hoped to survive very long if they did not have ways to make social adjustments to resolve such disputes. According to the axiom of politics, there are two such methods, but only one of them seems to be older than the first human societies:

***Combat** – The process of natural selection, in the short term, is the process of self-selection.*

In other words, the most successful individual animals, or groups of animals, were those that made themselves successful, using brute force as the most effective method. And the same kind of brute force that was used to feed and defend families was used to determine social arrangements within and among those families as well.

So, common sense suggests the very earliest human societies were also based on that law of the jungle, where “might made right.” But what were the critical developments that made humans different from animals? And what was the human alternative to brutal combat that provided the basis

for better forms of social organization – which, in turn, made human social groups so much larger and more successful than most groups of social animals? We’ll ask Mr. Obso to begin ...

Obso: Well, for a start, our discussion is not likely to get very far unless we recognize the difference between common sense and popular delusion. Of course, most Americans seem to think there is something “wrong” with the law of the jungle – or at least they assume it is greatly inferior to their own ideal of what a society could be or should be. But that is mainly because few Americans take the trouble to learn very much about how jungles and societies really got to be the way they are. Instead, they merely accept the easy explanation offered by a popular delusion called “progress.”

If people believe they are living in an “advanced” human society, they logically assume there must once have been some less-advanced forms of society – and even less-advanced forms of humanity, going right back in unbroken regression to a time of non-human, animal ancestors.

But that assumption is full of dangerous

nonsense. In the first place, it implies we humans invented ourselves through some ingenious contrivances but, beneath those contrivances, we still remain much like animals.

Secondly, it implies that, if we humans are merely ingenious animals, then ideas that seem to apply to animals, such as the “law of the jungle,” may also be used to explain and justify the actions of some people in human societies. But that is also nonsense, and a slander upon animals as well. The kinds of senseless, mass destruction in which humans too often indulge themselves, for instance, are clearly the product of social degeneracy that has no parallel elsewhere in nature.

And that is why your “common sense” view that mankind evolved from animals or animal-like ancestors, through progressively-more-human states, is a sad delusion. It might be useful, as a method of introducing some elementary social axioms and problems, to speculate about how such evolution *might* have happened. But you will never be able to find any convincing explanation of how it *could* have happened.

Demo: I don't think you can deny, however, that a jungle is a violent place and, even in the best human societies, we still find many examples of powerful people using their "might" to dictate what is "right" and "wrong." We try very hard to control that tendency, but it seems to be an essential part of human nature that causes us occasionally to behave like animals ...

Obso: But you are confusing animal violence with human violence, which is an entirely different thing. Jungle violence is an appropriate form of violence because it serves a natural purpose. But, when more than one kind of creature is involved, it is not a "social" purpose. And just because political conflict in modern America often resembles animal brawling, it is not correct to say that kind of human behavior is either natural or appropriate.

The reason for human social violence and coercion is more difficult to understand because, depending on the circumstances, it may be necessary and appropriate or it may be inappropriate and destructive. But what is never appropriate, or useful, is a debate about whether human violence is, in itself,

either a "good thing" or a "bad thing" because that kind of argument produces only bad results.

For instance, people who regard human violence as an unavoidable part of human nature may just accept or ignore even the worst atrocities – as long as those atrocities are happening to someone else.

And other people, who are properly appalled by such atrocities, may make the mistake of fleeing to the opposite extreme – mindlessly rejecting all forms of human violence and coercion and, in the most extreme cases, even animal violence as well ...

Novo: Those are the people who want to turn all of the world's jungles into sanctuaries where animals can be taught to be "nice" to each other. But "nice" predators would soon die off, and so would everything else, right down the food chain, until the highest life-form left on earth would be pond scum. And, in the peculiar terminology of modern American politics, people who promote the notion that peace-loving pond scum, or its human equivalent, will one day inherit the earth, call themselves "progressive" ...

Obso: Yes, but a few people do make a serious effort to learn something about the natural world and, as they do, they begin to appreciate the way a jungle works is not accidental, nor is it something that can be improved by human interference. A jungle is a complete creation that usually works very well, just the way it was intended to work – violence and all.

A human society is not a jungle, nor is it just an improved version of a jungle. To most people who have ever lived in this world, it seemed perfectly obvious that humanity was also a complete, though separate, creation. And human societies also worked very well, as long as they worked the way they were intended to work – a way in which a certain amount of appropriate violence made the more destructive kinds of human conflict unnecessary.

There are many tragic historical examples of societies that were damaged or destroyed by excessive violence. But those were not societies whose members were still too animalistic to find ingenious, non-violent solutions for their social problems. They were usually just people who had lost sight of the

simple, natural, social truths with which they were originally endowed – they couldn't see the truth because they had turned their backs on it. And that is also why it is very difficult or impossible to repair any kind of society after it has been damaged by such carelessness.

Modern America is not a bad example – obsessed with the notion of progress and always searching for new social solutions, each of which seems to create even more new problems. And Americans are notoriously reluctant to admit the possibility that many “new” problems are merely the consequences of the thoughtless haste with which some inconvenient, “old” social solutions were discarded.

Novo: It may hardly seem necessary in this modern age, but I think I had better point out that Mr. Obso's ideas about “natural” human instincts – individual and social – are products of his belief about where humans came from. And, while it may be true that those old myths about miraculous human creation have, in various forms, been the most popular explanation throughout the many ages of human exis-

tence, there are also some newer theories about human origins and instincts, such as:

***Prehuman Nostalgia** – There is a strong possibility the first creature with human characteristics was just an ape with a stress-related birth defect.*

From the evidence that is available today, it seems the first “ape-men” appeared in Eastern Africa a few million years ago, about the time that region was undergoing drastic climatic changes. Many plant and animal species were wiped out by those changes, as often happens when any organism’s natural habitat is disrupted.

Some species did manage to survive those changes by adapting themselves to the requirements of their new environment. But the most dramatic adaptation of all was the one that apparently produced those first apemen – members of a super-adaptable new species that would never again be entirely dependent on, or restricted to, any particular natural habitat.

Those apemen were clearly a very special product of the “hostile” environment that had destroyed the habitat of their ancestors.

And the members of that new species were apparently destined to remain natural “misfits” who would be forced to depend for survival on some of their own contrivances – one of which was human societies. But those contrivances did allow humans to venture forth into ever-more-hostile environments in every part of the world. Adaptation to more-hostile environments just required more and better human contrivances.

Of course, it took many hundreds of thousands of years of further evolution before those human characteristics became predominant and turned some APEmen into apeMEN – a process that is still going on today. And that kind of development might be expected to produce “natural” human instincts quite different from the ones Mr. Obso has described – certainly, at least some of those early people had the special instincts that would have made them superior contrivance-makers.

Crossing the subtle threshold from APEman to apeMAN would hardly have been noticeable to the people who did it. But, in taking that step, those people became even greater natural “misfits.” And being a misfit

makes many people feel uncomfortable – which may help to explain why speculation about that transformation still causes so much confusion and controversy today.

Besides that, human characteristics gave young people the ability to acquire notions about selectively remembered “good old days” from their ancestors, through many generations. Even today, some people still instinctively imagine there once were “natural” habitats where humans lived in perfect harmony with their environment. But hopes of finding such places may just be nostalgia for a vaguely remembered world that may have existed before the threshold of humanity had been crossed. Or perhaps it was merely inter-species envy, which would have amounted to much the same thing.

Demo: Well, I am a pragmatist, not a theorist, so all I believe right now is that it would be a complete waste of time for us to get into a long debate about fantastic theories of human creation or animal transformation. Let’s just get on with Mr. Obso’s description of those human characteristics he seems to think make us different from animals and made human societies different

from jungles.

Obso: All right, but the danger of mentioning the most obvious differences, such as human speech and language, is that Mr. Novo may try to convince us that speech was the contrivance some animals used when they turned themselves into people ...

Novo: No, I didn’t say humans invented themselves, nor would I say speech turned animals into people. I wouldn’t even say speech is conclusive evidence some animals really are human. What I would say is that the first humans – wherever they came from – were a new kind of animal that, unlike other animals, had human potentiality. Speech and language may have been among the first manifestations of that human potentiality – some of the first humans were able to perceive a need for language, so they invented it. And, later, humans would invent writing, books, printing, newspapers, radio, television, computers and so on, as those things were needed ...

Obso: Well, in any case, the use of language obviously made a great difference in social relationships. Among humans, unlike animals, individual physical strength

and ferocity were not sufficient to ensure dominance and resolve social conflict. Weaker men could get together and, using language, negotiate an arrangement that increased their power, as a group, to defeat individual aggression.

So, when someone says human might makes right, he is almost always talking about organized group action – not the instinctive individual or herd actions found among animals.

Demo: So you would say that, as a method of resolving social conflict, the human alternative to combat was verbal negotiation. And, I suppose, in the earliest societies, as in America today, ordinary people just naturally used a continuing process of negotiation to work out the most acceptable social arrangements, so they wouldn't have to fight with each other ...

Obso: No, that kind of negotiation is certainly not the alternative to combat that is implied by the axiom of politics. And it seems most unlikely the human species could have survived very long if it started out in as much of a social mess as the one found in America today.

Demo: But I think everyone would agree it is always better for people who disagree with each other to be talking with each other, rather than fighting ...

Obso: No, not always, because what we are looking for goes far beyond that consideration. We are looking for positive social relationships – relationships that allow people to accomplish much more by working together than they can ever accomplish separately. And sometimes people may be required to fight to protect that kind of positive relationship.

Obviously, conflict and combat among groups of people are negative, destructive relationships. But combat can have a positive result if it removes a source of unnecessary conflict – by defeating, for instance, a disruptive group that is seeking, for its own selfish reasons, to increase social conflict and reduce constructive cooperation.

In an obnoxious society, disruptive groups of that kind may become too numerous or too strong to be defeated easily. And, in that case, negotiation may seem preferable to constant warfare. But that kind of negotiation is an expedient, not a real alternative.

Various hostile groups may try to avoid the high cost and risk of physical combat by negotiating a temporary “truce.” That kind of negotiation is called “politics” and that kind of truce is called a political “compromise.” But a political compromise is never the kind of positive “resolution” of a conflict that restores good social relationships. At best, a compromise may produce neutral, non-negative relationships based on some kind of social stalemate. And compromise often fails to achieve even that much because it has two great shortcomings – precariousness and persistence.

A political compromise is precarious because it merely reflects the relative strength of opponents at some particular time – weaker groups must give up more to end or avoid fights with stronger groups. So, when the balance of strength among those groups shifts even slightly, the political compromise breaks down – members of weaker groups that are growing stronger will want to recover what they gave up earlier.

And, since the terms of the next compromise will be based on the new balance of strength, that strength must be tested and

demonstrated in renewed combat before negotiation can be resumed – though in some countries the symbolic combat of periodic democratic “elections” may serve almost as well as the real thing to intimidate weaker groups into submission.

So politics never “resolves” social conflict. Once such a cycle of conflict, combat and compromise gets started, it tends to become self-perpetuating. Every conflict renews, and every compromise entrenches the differences among hostile groups.

Moreover, persistent political combat may be even more destructive than occasional, physical combat because the maintenance of a social stalemate that does no one much good can consume great amounts of human talent and energy that might be used for other, better purposes.

In fact, it is doubtful the human race could have survived at all without a very different, uniquely human method of conflict resolution which, as you will see, not only encouraged the kind of human cooperation that produced great social benefits for everyone, but made most kinds of political conflict and compromise unnecessary.

4

Moderator: That first part of today's discussion was about the most primitive kinds of social relationships, both animal and human. And it seems, despite the fact that cooperation was essential for human survival, it was not inevitable. Instead, the "natural" state of many human groups may have been one of constant conflict, for as long as those groups managed to survive.

Even such special human advantages as speech and negotiation did not necessarily ensure cooperation because those things could also be used as weapons in endless cycles of conflict, combat and compromise – as they still are today in the usual course of American politics.

But at least some of the earliest human groups did manage to survive and prosper. So, obviously, they must have found some better method to resolve social conflict and encourage cooperation – a method that required neither physical combat, which is a

very costly way to resolve disputes, nor political combat, which may seem somewhat less costly and unpleasant, but never resolves anything.

So now we need to know what that superior social method was. And we also need to know how that superior method could have been used by the earliest humans to create the first good, constructive societies ...

Obso: Well, again, you have your question turned around backward. You cannot ask how people created good societies because it is quite certain that people never created good societies, and never will. Many people have lived in good societies over the many ages of human existence. But understanding where those societies came from requires an understanding of the nature of successful social organization, starting with the axiom of:

***Association** – To be beneficial, a social group must have a positive purpose that is greater than the personal purposes of its members.*

A good association is not created by good people. It is created by a good purpose, and

its members “join” that association because of its purpose. Or an association may be an imitation of a good one that already exists, or once existed, somewhere else.

There is no reason for conflict, nor any need for political controversy and compromise among people who voluntarily join a good association that already has a clear purpose. And if personal conflict does arise later, that kind of association naturally provides, as part of its purpose, a much superior method for resolving such conflict – a method that is a uniquely human alternative to physical or political combat:

***Arbitration** – Without good rules and referees, all sports eventually become boxing.*

Demo: Well yes, some idealistic people even today seem to think that, if a perfect person could be found to act as a perfect arbiter, then all human conflict would be resolved quickly and easily. But I think most people have learned by now – often as a result of some unhappy experiences – that there is no such thing as a perfect person ...

Obso: Of course there is no such

thing as a perfect person. But, in a good association, the arbiter is not a person – the arbiter is the positive purpose that is the group’s reason for existence. One member of such a group may be called an arbiter, but that is only because he is acting as a good “agent” of the group’s social purpose. If such a leader attempted instead to use his position of authority to promote his own, personal purposes, he would not be called an arbiter – he would be called a “bogus” or “rogue” agent, and treated as such.

The captain of this cruise ship, for instance, is our social arbiter because he is acting as the agent of a positive purpose that is called a destination. Our destination, and the most desirable route to the destination, were selected by the owners of this ship before it left port and it is beyond the power of any of us – even the captain – to change that route or destination without a very good reason. And all of us who joined this cruise did so voluntarily because that is where we apparently wanted to go, and how we wanted to get there.

If any conflict should arise among the people aboard this ship, we can depend on

our captain to resolve the dispute with whatever decision best serves the purpose of reaching our destination safely. And, if some people would rather resolve such a dispute by combat or mutiny, we may assume our captain and his crew are prepared to deal with that as well, and would have our support in doing so ...

Novo: This may be one of those ideas that sounds much more complicated in theory than it really is, when applied to ordinary social situations. So let me offer a simple example of a peaceful and beneficial association that may seem paradoxical.

A social group called a “chess club” is not a place of peaceful pursuits. The game of chess is a war game and the purpose of a chess club is to encourage people to participate in the kind of mock combat where a “stalemate” is never regarded as a good outcome. Yet chess clubs are seldom thought of as being violent places – most people think of them as being rather boring places ...

Obso: But there is not much real conflict among members of an ordinary chess club because it is a “civil” association whose members are civilians, not real war-

riors. If they were warriors, chess clubs would be governed by the kind of martial law that is invented and enforced by victorious warlords to serve their own personal purposes. And not many ordinary civilians would want to join such a group.

A civil association is a social framework with rules that reflect the purpose of the association – the positive purpose which attracted people to join it. And members respect those rules because they support that purpose, and because the benefits they seek from a civil association can only be provided if all members accept those rules and govern their own behavior accordingly.

So, while the rules of a chess club permit and encourage “combat” among players, the “winners” have no more authority to change the rules than anyone else because the game itself is always regarded as being more important than any of its players. And so a chess club’s arbiter need not even be one of its better players – he may be anyone who owns a chess rule book because disputes are resolved by “looking up” the rules, not by making them up.

Demo: But I don’t see how those

rules, or the game itself, could exist today if someone, somewhere, hadn't invented them for some purpose of their own ...

Novo: Yes, but no one knows where the game of chess came from originally, and no one really cares because that is not important. Actually, the game of chess is not the most interesting or challenging game of its kind, and some of its rules are quite illogical. But the game itself is interesting enough to have attracted the attention of many different people, in many different places, for a very long time. And, because its rules have been fairly consistent and known widely for the past few centuries, the game now serves as a social bridge within and among many parts of the world.

And that is the real social purpose and value of the game. Obviously, people who get together to play chess receive a benefit that is not available to any of them when they are alone – a real intellectual challenge and an opportunity to test and improve their own skills. And that benefit has encouraged many people to invest the time and effort necessary to develop high levels of skill in playing the game, which has made the game

even more interesting and attractive.

So the game of chess encourages social cooperation among all kinds of people who have nothing else in common – even a common language. And you can see that for yourself in our ship's library where several former strangers have been getting together to play chess, creating a sort of spontaneous, beneficial association.

But, of course, the game is particularly interesting because its rules do encourage a kind of “civilized combat” or competition that is neither meaningless nor ineffectual. Even accepting the rules, players may disagree strongly about the best way to play the game – about the best moves to make. Instead of fighting with each other, however, they simply go ahead and play the game, because the game itself is the most convincing arbiter of theories of play. And a person with a new theory who wins more games may even become famous and change the way the game is played all over the world, without changing any of its rules.

Obso: But the rules of chess are a human contrivance, subject to human manipulation that can affect both the way

people play the game and the outcome of games. So, as an instance of simple association, some people prefer to use a gardening club. The rules of gardening are the rules of nature, which are not human contrivances. If some people have tried to change those rules, it was usually because they had a different purpose, such as some kind of commercial purpose ...

Demo: Well, playing chess or gardening may be interesting pastimes, but I thought we were supposed to be talking about the kind of associations that help to satisfy human needs that are much more important than the need for amusement. And I don't think chess or gardening clubs have ever contributed much to the satisfaction of those greater human needs ...

Novo: No, chess clubs are not expected to provide any broader social benefits in modern societies because those societies have many other kinds of organizations besides chess clubs. But neither can any other voluntary association provide those benefits if it doesn't meet the same basic requirements – without a good purpose there can be no association, and without an association

there are no social benefits.

On the other hand, if a chess club were the only association in a particular place, it probably would provide its members with other social benefits. In those circumstances a chess club, or any other kind of club, would tend to become a “fraternal” association, and members of fraternal groups often do help each other overcome problems that may not seem relevant to the primary purpose of the group. And, of course, the established arbitration facilities of any good association can also be used to resolve many other kinds of personal disputes among members, based on what is best for the group as a whole.

The earliest human “societies” were probably not much more elaborate than that. Later societies did become much more complicated because they became associations of groups, as well as individuals, but the basic principles remained much the same.

Demo: But I still don't see how a chess club could provide any help to people who are not interested in chess – especially if those people were expected to try to learn how to play chess before receiving any benefits from the association ...

Novo: Quite often, however, the greatest personal and social benefits a club gives people is teaching them how to do something useful. A gardening club, for example, can teach people how to grow their own food – which is a far greater benefit, in the long term, than the “benefits” provided by an organization that just gives hungry people free food, because “free” things have a price that may not be apparent.

Even learning how to play chess, or some other social skill, may be a great benefit for people who use such skills to increase their own range of social participation and opportunities, if only for their own enrichment or amusement.

And anyway, before you can talk about the benefits a group should provide, you must try to understand where those benefits come from. An association cannot have beneficiaries unless it also includes benefactors who have the ability and some incentive to create such benefits.

People join chess clubs because the best way to learn how to play chess is to play games with superior opponents. Of course, those superior players don’t usually learn

much from playing against inferior opponents – they prefer to play against even-more-superior opponents. So it may seem that the people who can provide the greatest benefits to other members of a chess club are also the people who would be least likely to join such a club.

But superior players do support chess clubs because they understand the purpose of those clubs. They were probably beneficiaries of chess clubs when they were learning how to play the game. And without organized, continuous development of new players, superior players might eventually run out of good opponents. So superior players voluntarily “do their duty” at chess clubs, acting as benefactors by spending at least some of their time helping inferior players.

Demo: But that kind of “benefit” also has a high hidden price if it means giving people labels like “superior” or “inferior,” or “winners” and “losers” – especially if benefits to inferior members depend on the condescension of superior members. It seems to me the very idea of “voluntary” association should mean “equality” of mem-

bership – people don't join groups because they want to be degraded or humiliated ...

Novo: Well it is, by definition, an example of condescension for a superior player to play a game of chess with a player who is clearly inferior. But it is condescension of the very best kind if both players have the same goal – because that is called cooperation, and cooperation makes everyone a “winner.”

There would be no benefit for anyone, for example, if an inferior chess player achieved “equality” by finding some way to reduce a superior player to his own, inferior level of skill – or just tried to take some of the superior player's skill away from him:

***Superiority** – Social skill is a special kind of treasure that can never be reduced by robbery, and is only increased by generosity.*

Skill is something each person must create for himself, but other people are often willing to help him do it. Certainly, there is no benefit for a superior chess player in preventing an inferior player from improving his skill. The greatest benefit for both

players comes when an inferior player finally manages to become a superior player and a real “equal” of his teacher, so the teacher can learn something from his students, making the teacher even more superior.

Besides that, while there is probably no explicit rule of chess that requires superior players to treat inferior players with respect, it should be obvious that the purpose of a chess club would not be served if beginners were humiliated and driven away.

So “voluntary” association does require an assumption of social equality for all members. But a good, stable association usually defines equality in a very broad sense – over several years, each member's benefits and contributions are expected to achieve an approximate balance as he gradually moves from inferiority, when he receives help from others, to superiority, when is able to help others.

Obso: There are limits, of course, to such assumptions of equality. Superior players are not expected to waste their time helping people who are not serious about learning how to play chess better, or on people who simply do not have the maturity or

mental equipment necessary to play the game very well. It should be obvious that “voluntary” association means not only that an individual must be willing to become an equal member, but that other members must be willing to accept him as being someone who seems capable of fulfilling the expectations of long-term, social equality.

And it should also be obvious that, while superior members are also treated as social equals, they are really expected to act more like benefactors than beneficiaries. That is why every voluntary association must have some compelling, higher social purpose that inspires superior members to help other people – not just the selfish interests of people who need that help.

Demo: But you said members of an association should have equal social status. And now you say associations, by their nature, treat some of their members as if they were superior or inferior. So, it seems to me, rather than making people more equal, your kind of association might force people to choose between association and equality ...

Novo: No, you should not confuse social equality with personal equality be-

cause they are not the same thing. In fact, the principle of social equality in a successful association is almost the opposite of the notion of personal equality, because of the axiom of:

***Receptibility** – Members of an association that provides benefits equally never receive equal benefits.*

Our imaginary chess club, for example, may have started with a few friends getting together for casual games. But the social benefits of that association would have helped some of them to improve their skill – which, in turn, would have increased the benefits of the club for other players who could learn more from the best players. And the presence of good players would have attracted more new members.

So, over the course of several years, the benefits of social cooperation, which were available equally to all members, would have increased the skill of members to even higher levels. A few of them might even have attained the status of “international grandmasters.” And that would have been cause for celebration by all members of the

club because that kind of success would have enhanced the reputation of the club and all of its members.

But the consequence of that kind of success would have been an inevitable increase in the personal “inequality” of group members. As the best players reached higher and higher levels of accomplishment, they also would have increased the distance between themselves and other players. And that should be quite obvious, since no one has ever found a way to make a building higher without increasing the distance from the bottom to the top.

So the most successful chess clubs always have the greatest amount of personal inequality among members and, in most chess clubs, that inequality is made quite explicit with a numerical “ranking” of players. And no one objects to that kind of discrimination because each player can use his rank as a measure and confirmation of progress while increasing his own skill, through his own efforts, experience, and assistance from better players.

Of course, a player’s ability to benefit from that kind of assistance and experience also

depends on his basic aptitude for playing chess, which tends to vary significantly from one individual to another. When a person approaches the limits of his own aptitude, each increment of skill requires more and more effort.

In an extreme case, a person who has very little aptitude for playing chess will probably receive very little personal benefit from a chess club, regardless of how generously and indiscriminately its social benefits are offered to him. And, at the opposite extreme, a chess club’s greatest benefactors are usually those people who have been its greatest beneficiaries, and *vice versa*.

Demo: But I think most people who have little aptitude for playing chess would be sensible enough to look elsewhere for some other kind of amusement ...

Novo: Yes, but when an association becomes a society, whatever game its members play is likely to become the “only game in town,” or at least the most important game. So the most successful societies, like the most successful chess clubs, have the greatest personal inequality. And, while members of unsuccessful societies, like un-

successful chess clubs, may seem to be less unequal, that is usually because none of their members has accomplished much of anything.

Demo: But that is why I think it is absurd to suggest an association like a chess club could ever be used as the model for a society. Most Americans, for example, have no interest in playing games like chess, and Americans would simply refuse to belong to any “society” based on an association whose benefits were distributed so unequally, or an association that tried to impose social rules that were irrelevant or detrimental to most members’ personal interests ...

Novo: Well, that’s not really true either because most Americans do play a game called “money-making” that seems, most of the time, to be the only game in town. And the benefits of that game are also distributed quite unequally because some people have much more money-making skill than others.

Demo: But I don’t think the kind of skills required for money-making are a very good example of beneficial social skills. It seems to me that most of America’s biggest

“winners” in the game of money-making have always been people who owed their success to some combination of luck, theft or extortion ...

Novo: Of course, that is the way the game of money-making, and most other games, are played in “uncivil” or obnoxious societies where the predominant human skills are brutal combat skills, and where successful warlords make up their own rules because they think they, as players, are more important than any of the games they play.

In places like that, social benefactors and beneficiaries are not the same people. They are two entirely different kinds of people. Some people become “winners” by taking something away from other people, who become “losers.” So those winners are beneficiaries who are negative benefactors, while losers are benefactors who are forced to accept negative “benefits.”

And, because the rules of the game are usually “fixed” by the winners, those winners keep on winning while the losers keep on losing. So there is constant political conflict and frequent, destructive combat be-

tween those winners and losers in what is just the most extreme, life-threatening, form of gambling. The winners keep trying to “fix” the game in their own favor while losers keep trying to “beat” the game so they can fix it in their favor. And the usual result is that those societies, as a whole, are usually very poor and unsuccessful.

America, however, is less poor and obnoxious because some Americans have developed positive money-making skills that are so great they can be used to create new wealth without taking anything away from other people. And people with those skills, like many chess masters, are often willing to help other people learn how to do the same thing, within the limits of receptibility.

Demo: Well, if that’s your idea of an idealistic, positive social purpose, I can see why most people are naturally suspicious about that kind of association. And, anyway, in the real world, it seems to me most societies are usually established for practical, negative reasons – when faced with a common threat or enemy, individuals just naturally get together to defend themselves as a group ...

Obso: Yes, and many Americans do seem to think the preservation of a “good” society requires nothing more than getting good people together once in a while to exterminate “bad” alternatives. But that merely defines “good” as being the opposite of “bad,” rather than something that has its own definition and justification.

It is true that a negative purpose can sometimes serve almost as well as a positive purpose to provide a basis for group action. But a negative purpose is usually temporary – when a common threat or enemy disappears, so does the group’s purpose and reason for existence.

And when a group loses its purpose, it also loses its ability to provide the kind of social arbitration that can prevent members of the group from fighting with each other. So a temporary, negative social relationship of that kind is not a real society or association at all, but is merely the form of organization that is known as:

***Alliance** – Enemies may be less dangerous than friends, because at least you know whose side your enemies are on.*

Novo: Yes, and because alliances have negative, rather than positive purposes, they can only be destructive, not constructive. Alliances don't usually last long enough to undertake such projects as making gardens grow – they just feed themselves by plundering other peoples' gardens.

And alliances often do as much harm to their members as they do to their enemies or victims. One “ally,” for example, may just use the strength of an alliance as a bargaining tool to make his own deal with an enemy – the people who benefit most from any alliance are often the ones who are the first to betray it.

Or another ally, who has other enemies, may drag the whole alliance into a costly fight in which most members have no real interest. Or the enemy may respond to the alliance with an alliance of its own, starting an “arms race” that just impoverishes every participant.

So, it seems to me, an alliance is just about the most unlikely place to look for the beginning of a good, civil society. And, because American “society” has always been dominated by political alliances of various

kinds, it is not surprising that America's social agents have always seemed to be more destructive than constructive.

5

Moderator: Our previous question was about the methods that may have been used by the earliest humans to create the first good, elementary societies. And we did find one good answer in the principle of positive social purpose, which helps to explain the success of such simple associations as chess and gardening clubs.

In fact, American society in earlier times included countless numbers of such associations and those associations served many useful social purposes. Some people even say those voluntary associations provided the original model for American society itself – American society being the one big, voluntary association to which all Americans would eventually belong.

But modern American society does not seem to be a very good example of a success-

ful association. It seems more like a very bad case of "dysassociation" in which the best social intentions and efforts are defeated by just those kinds of political conflict that a good association is supposed to prevent.

So now we need to know if there is something wrong with Americans, which makes it difficult for them to act together as good members of a single, civil association. Or is there something wrong with the kind of association we have been talking about as the basis for a good society?

Demo: Well, I certainly don't think there is anything wrong with Americans, so there must be something wrong with your definition of association. And I think the main thing wrong with it, as a model for a whole society, is the emphasis it places on the notion of "social" purpose.

Americans do not need an association to give them a purpose or to tell them what to do because, in America, "the people" *are* the purpose. There are many different kinds of American people and all of them have their own, personal purposes. And America has the kind of democratic society which is based on the belief that all of those people

should be free to pursue any purpose that makes them happy.

So, since I can't imagine any "social" purpose large enough to encompass such a huge variety of different interests anyway, it seems to me Americans have probably discovered the greatest social purpose of all – which is simply an aggregation of all of their own, individual purposes.

Of course, Americans do understand that no one can be totally self-sufficient and societies have always been necessary for human survival. But that is just because it may not be possible, for various reasons, for some people to attain their personal goals without some help from others. So it seems to me the most successful societies would be those that try to ensure all of their members get all the help they need to become successful – each according to their own definition of success ...

Obso: That might be true if "the people" of America, or the members of any other human group, had personal purposes that were always complimentary. But the nature of personal purposes makes it much more likely those purposes will be contradic-

tory, and that there will be much more conflict than cooperation.

Of course, personal purposes need not be a barrier to association if a person can join an association which has a social purpose that seems to coincide with his own, personal purpose. And America certainly has a wide enough variety of associations to serve just about any worthwhile personal purpose. But associations that seem to serve personal purposes are also more likely to conflict than to cooperate with each other.

We know there are only two ways to resolve such conflict and we know “civilians” prefer to use arbitration rather than combat. But arbitration requires the kind of association that has a social purpose its members recognize as being more important than any of their own personal purposes.

So it should be obvious that higher levels of association which transcend the narrow interests of individuals and small groups – all the way up to a single association that might include all Americans and give the American nation a real reason for existence – would require social purposes of a even higher order.

Social purposes that are much greater and more constructive certainly do exist. In fact, there is a whole spectrum of such purposes – which is why there is a whole spectrum of social possibilities of many different colors, though most of those possibilities may seem invisible to people living in America’s bright “green” society.

Right now, however, we are supposed to be discussing the simple mechanics and problems of social organization. Higher social purposes, and different social models that make societies successful and distinctive, are a separate subject which, according to our moderator’s schedule, we will not be talking about until tomorrow.

Demo: But I think you are still missing something very important. Americans certainly do have a common purpose because all of them have their own, personal purposes, and they believe all of those purposes have equal social validity. So the social purpose that America’s democratic government is forced to serve is the provision of equal protection and support for *all* of “the people.” And the only good measure of a government’s success or failure in serving that

purpose, it seems to me, is the actual personal equality of all of those people ...

Novo: But that is merely a common personal purpose that may become a “political” purpose but not a real social purpose because, once again, the only way a successful society can reduce personal inequality is by making itself less successful.

Demo: But, once again, much of the personal inequality in America today is the result of theft, extortion and “fixes,” especially in the game of money-making. Some day America may have the kind of social management that will finally abolish such immorality. But, in the meantime, because that lack of control has been a major social failure, it seems to me the victims of that failure deserve at least to be compensated for their undeserved “inferiority” ...

Novo: Well, there are several misconceptions in that. First of all, it is not at all clear most Americans really do want to be more equal. Most Americans seem to want to become “big” winners and, because they think their personal ambitions are more important than any moral or social consideration, they don’t seem to worry very

much about whether their own success will make other people, or their whole society, bigger losers.

Some people say that kind of uncivil behavior, when undertaken voluntarily, is no more than gambling, which has little social significance. But big winners do tend to look down on mere civilians, whose social benefits seldom greatly exceed their social contributions. And so do most losers. Serious gamblers want to stay “in the game,” however uncivil, immoral or fixed it may be, because they think, with a bit of luck, they will eventually become big winners too.

The second misconception is the hope that eliminating immoral factors from games like money-making would produce less inferiority or more personal equality. But eliminating those things from the game of money-making would just make it more like the game of chess, where luck, theft and extortion play no part. And, again, while chess clubs have no real losers, their purpose is to create more personal inequality, not less.

And, third, if the kind of personal inequality that is produced by social equality seems to be a problem for some people who are less

successful than others, that is clearly a personal problem, not a social problem. And there are no “social” solutions for personal problems, or *vice versa*.

Obso: It should be pointed out, however, that a good, civil association does offer people several ways to solve their own personal problems. A person who has no aptitude for playing chess, for instance, may have other talents that allow him to support a chess club’s purpose. He may have an aptitude for organization that makes him the best person to arrange chess tournaments. So, while he will never be a great chess player, he may still be able to earn a respected position among members of a successful chess club. Or a civilian who cannot support the social purpose of an association directly, or play any part in its management, may still find ways to make himself useful and successful by providing personal services for other members.

It is true that some people who have a special aptitude that coincides with their association’s purpose will probably become bigger “winners” than others. But they can only be big winners as long as they are the kind

of benefactor-beneficiaries who serve their association’s good purpose by creating more benefits for all members.

So most people in real, civil associations – whether it is a chess club or even the kind of money-making association known as a “business” – understand that the best way to increase their own personal success is by helping to increase the success of their association. And that is why even America’s “smallest” winners, whose social contributions and benefits are minimal, seldom repudiate their citizenship. They know they are probably better off in a wealthy country like America than they would be anywhere else.

Novo: Yes, but while most Americans do seem to understand those things well enough in small-scale associations, many of them do not seem to understand that the same things apply to higher levels of association as well.

People who complain about personal inequality among Americans, for example, are the kind of people who may also suggest that a chess club’s best players are being selfish or greedy when they try to win more than

their “fair share” of games with inferior players. And those people may say a chess club, like the American nation, could be improved socially if the best players were less aggressive or more “polite.”

But that kind of “mediocritization” would not help very much because, if good players were “charitable” enough to allow inferior players to win more games, that would be the worst and most humiliating kind of condescension. And it would also be destructive – “polite” games of chess would be very boring games, from which no one would learn anything.

Or someone else might suggest that the game of chess could be improved by adding dice or some other elements of chance, to make the outcome of games less predictable and give inferior players a better chance of winning more games. But that would serve no useful social purpose, and produce no social benefits, because gambling clubs have no benefactor-beneficiaries – just winners and losers – and do not provide much social security.

So, again, there is no “social” solution for the personal “problem” of inequality in a

good association because personal inequality is an inevitable consequence of successful social equality. And that fact of life cannot be altered or obscured without corrupting the purpose of an association and undermining its reason for existence.

Demo: No, I think the greatest threat to any association’s reason for existence is the idea that some of its members can be sacrificed to such a simple-minded notion of “social” equality. It is true that, in an ideal society, everyone would be treated equally. But, in the real world, such things as immoral behavior and ordinary misfortune can cause a strict application of social equality to produce a lot of unnecessary and intolerable personal inequality.

So, in America today, people are wise enough to realize that the principle of social equality must be adjusted sometimes to compensate for those real-world deficiencies, to improve personal equality, which is the only thing that really matters ...

Obso: But when social equality becomes “adjustable” then everyone, naturally, demands that it be adjusted to better serve his own interests. And that causes

conflict that cannot be resolved by arbitration because, when an association's purpose has been corrupted or abandoned, there is no basis for civil arbitration. And the only alternative to arbitration is physical or political combat.

Of course, Americans have never had that kind of common, positive, social purpose so they have never really looked much like civilians. Rather, when normally self-absorbed Americans do occasionally become socially "active" because of personal ambition or frustration, they tend to regard themselves as being soldiers fighting for some great cause – a cause that usually turns out to be nothing greater than an attempt to advance their own personal or political interests by forcing some other people to become greater "losers."

Novo: Yes, and that is why the notion of "adjustable" social equality – which was borrowed, inappropriately, from an altogether different kind of association – has never solved any real social problems. But many Americans still cling to that notion because it seems so obvious.

What they are probably thinking about is

ordinary "insurance" that can compensate people for the bad effects of certain kinds of personal misfortune. And insurance is a simple and constructive contrivance that can even reinforce, rather than contradict, the principle of social equality. So it may seem that simply extending the range of "social" insurance would eventually solve all personal problems.

But certain kinds of risks and problems are "uninsurable." And insurance may become both socially and personally destructive, rather than constructive, when an attempt is made to compensate people for the bad effects of certain kinds of "misfortune" that are largely self-inflicted.

It may seem, for example, that some "disadvantaged" members of an association have the kind of personal problems that suggest a need for additional social protection because they have a tendency to recklessness. But providing that extra protection, besides being costly, just encourages those people, and many others, to become even more reckless. And some people may have problems that suggest a need for extra social support because they have a tendency to in-

dolence. But providing that extra support, besides being costly, just encourages those people, and many others, to become even more indolent.

In fact, it was just that kind of social experimentation over the past few decades that seems to have made so many of today's Americans such unusually reckless and indolent people.

Obso: Yes, the advocates of the "welfare state" did claim that, if social equality could be adjusted enough, the axiom of receptibility would eventually "break down," producing perfect personal equality. And, acting on that belief, several nations squandered huge amounts of their wealth in foolish and futile attempts to cure the incurable, educate the uneducable, comfort the uncomfortable and manage the unmanageable.

But, for the reasons just mentioned, the axiom of receptibility never did break down. What broke down instead was the economic capacity of even the richest nations to sustain such experimentation. And the uncivil methods used to impose the supposition that America's biggest "losers," rather than its

biggest "winners," should become its biggest social beneficiaries just produced more and more controversy and social conflict ...

Demo: But, as someone said earlier, people must be willing to stand up and fight for what they believe. And it seems to me American society has been spared many of the ravages of immoral big "winners" like autocrats and aristocrats only because ordinary Americans, unlike people in many other countries, have always been ready to fight to protect their democracy and their own personal interests ...

Obso: But what Americans don't seem to understand is that democracy, or any other form of government, must serve some useful social purpose – democracy for the sake of democracy is not, by itself, a useful social purpose.

It is often just assumed, for instance, that democracy must be a good thing because it is the opposite of aristocracy, which is a bad thing. But an aristocracy that acts as the agent of a good social purpose is probably the most beneficial and stable form of social leadership. In fact, most voluntary associations like chess and gardening clubs usually

depend for their success and survival on inordinate contributions of time and effort by small “aristocracies” of their most talented and dedicated members, who are also their greatest benefactor-beneficiaries.

An aristocracy does become obnoxious, however, if aristocrats start thinking like democrats and confusing social purposes with their own, personal purposes. Being great social beneficiaries obviously does serve the personal interests of selfish aristocrats. But being great social benefactors may seem to be onerous and inconvenient.

So those people may become “rogue” aristocrats who use their powerful positions, along with various forms of theft and extortion, to make the kind of social “adjustments” that create a “winner takes all” society – a society in which nearly all social benefits are appropriated by a small group of aristocrats because, as the “best class” of people in that society, they claim to be “most deserving” of those benefits.

Demo: Yes and, as far as I know, the only kind of government that has ever been able to prevent that from happening is a truly democratic government which repre-

sents all of the people ...

Obso: Well, in a “winner takes all” society, the egalitarian ideals of anti-aristocratic democracy – or even the extremely democratic notion of a “losers take all” society – may seem preferable to most people. And, with the support of an alliance of those people, democratic leaders may become powerful enough to depose a self-serving, rogue aristocracy. Then those new leaders can make up their own social rules to serve their own purposes.

But just being “against” aristocracy does not produce any positive or practical alternative to aristocracy. And, if democratic leaders are chosen because of their opposition to superiority, the only ones likely to qualify for the highest positions are people like “politicians” who are invulnerable to any accusations of superiority.

So successful democratic politicians, not knowing what else to do and because it is not an unattractive expedient, usually just assume the positions and privileges of the rogue aristocracy they defeated. They claim that, because the rules they “make up” to serve their own purposes also seem to serve

the interests of most of “the people,” they are “most deserving” of aristocratic status and its benefits anyway.

Then those bogus or bandit aristocrats go on to become just as corrupt and destructive as the rogue aristocrats they replaced – while most of their supporters, who become even bigger losers, are left to wonder what their democracy has accomplished, or to continue their futile search for “good” leaders to replace bogus political aristocrats.

A real, civil society, on the other hand, is a “sociocracy” in which the “best” people are those who best serve that society’s good purpose. So there is not much dispute about the identity or legitimacy of those genuine aristocrats. But, of course, in order to determine which people are best serving the good purpose of a society, that society must have a good purpose.

Demo: But I think most Americans would insist, correctly, that the only leaders who ever have any real social legitimacy are those leaders who are chosen freely by all members of an association, according to their own interests ...

Novo: No, social or civil legitimacy

is something that must be obvious to, and recognized by, all members of an association all the time. A chess club’s true aristocrats have that kind of legitimacy because everyone knows who they are – they are the ones with superior skill that cannot be feigned or borrowed or stolen from anyone else. And, as long as they are the association’s greatest benefactors, it is appropriate that they have been, and should be, its greatest beneficiaries as well.

Democratic politicians, on the other hand, only need the support of the dumbest or most gullible 51 per cent of members – and often much less than that – to “take over” an association. And, to acquire such support, they only need to be “popular.” But popularity is not real legitimacy because it is usually acquired by chicanery, and is always controversial and ephemeral.

Demo: Well, I know it is fashionable these days to say all democratic politicians are liars and crooks. But I don’t think you can deny that, throughout American history, there have been many honest politicians who have provided real social leadership and benefits to many deserving people.

Novo: Now you are probably confusing social benefits with political benefits. Social benefits are always the product of cooperation inspired by a good social purpose. But the only way politicians can ever become more popular than an association's "natural" aristocrats is by attacking or corrupting that purpose. So, as the popularity of politicians increases, real social benefits usually decrease – for everyone except bogus political aristocrats and their allies. Of course, politicians must provide some kind of benefits to other people in order to remain popular. But what they usually provide are political benefits that are both illusory and socially destructive.

For example, politicians do not become popular by doing good things for ordinary people. If they were capable of being social benefactors, they would not need to be politicians. But they can become very popular by promising to do very bad things to certain exceptional people – especially members of "elite" minorities – for whom the majority of people have the greatest fear and hatred, and whose suffering would give them the greatest joy. While often very effective, how-

ever, that tactic may backfire because what many Americans seem to enjoy most of all is the persecution of crooked politicians.

So politicians who take over a chess club, for example, may just do things like inventing a new rule that requires the best chess players to help other players learn how to play chess better. Of course, that is what the best players had always been doing. But now, while superior players would continue to do all the work in providing such benefits, the politicians could take all the credit for those benefits.

And that illusion might even seem to promote greater personal equality. The most inferior players in the club might have been denied further assistance because they were obviously learning nothing from it. But, because of the new rule, inferior players would no longer need to ask for help. They could just "demand" such help because, according to the new rule, they would be "entitled" to such help. And when they still failed to learn anything, they could blame their teachers for that failure and even demand some kind of "compensation" for the skill and success they had been "denied."

For people who suspect they really are inferior, that kind of “counter-condescension” is clearly a very valuable psychological benefit. But it does nothing to alleviate their inferiority or lack of real success. And political condescension and counter-condescension always incite the most vicious kinds of personal enmity and conflict within an association, making any kind of beneficial cooperation even less likely.

Demo: But if, as you say, America has no real society that can protect everyone equally, then Americans can hardly be blamed for forming political alliances that are powerful enough to protect their members’ personal interests and, especially if they are already “losers,” to prevent them from being further victimized by America’s “winners” ...

Novo: But losers are not victims – they are just unsuccessful gamblers. And the purpose of a losers’ alliance is not to prevent victimization. The purpose of a losers’ alliance is to try to become powerful enough to “beat” a game so its members can become winners by turning former winners into losers – though an alliance of big winners is

usually able to ensure that a “fixed” game cannot be beaten.

In fact, the only real “victims” of that kind of uncivil behavior are involuntary participants who are not supposed to be involved in such “games” at all, because they are not capable of protecting themselves from victimization.

That is usually most obvious in national societies dominated by “winner takes all” political alliances, where many people may be reduced to street begging for survival. Desperate parents in that situation are even known to mutilate their children’s bodies to make them look more like “victims” so they will be more pathetic and more successful beggars. And it is those mutilated children who are the real victims.

That kind of victimization does not happen very often in America, where there are many counteractive, “democratic” political alliances, including political parties, labor unions and several powerful “losers take all” affliction cults. But many American parents, who are members of such alliances, are known to mutilate their children’s minds to make them think more like victims, so they

will not undermine the solidarity of those alliances by trying to think for themselves.

Obso: And that is why many of America's "under-privileged" children, like the children of other countries' over-privileged, rogue aristocrats, often find themselves trapped in a "culture" of personal idleness and aimlessness – a culture that is often passed on from generation to generation as a kind of "birthright" ...

Demo: Well, whether those people are called losers or victims or anything else, it is still true that too many Americans today have personal problems that threaten their very survival. And it seems to me, since the primary purpose of any society is to ensure human survival, the primary duty of a good society must be the protection of those members whose survival is threatened the most ...

Obso: No, that is not really true because people who seek social protection for selfish reasons are likely to discover that societies can have selfish interests as well. Obviously, if a society is necessary for human survival then the primary duty of that society is to do whatever is necessary to ensure

its own survival. If the society survives then so, presumably, will most of its members – though some individuals may be excluded or constrained if they seem to be a greater danger or burden than the society can afford. That is one of the reasons America, despite its "ideal" of personal equality, still has so many prisons and slums.

It also means the exclusion of many eager, potential members who would only increase that danger or burden. And that is perfectly logical – no society can afford to risk its own survival, and the welfare of most of its members, in a futile attempt to accommodate everyone. That is why America and most other nations have laws to prevent illegal immigration. And many countries also have special social sanctions to discourage "illegitimate" immigration – children produced within a society by individuals and families who cannot afford to support them – because illegitimate immigrants cannot be sent back to the place from which they came.

So, to avoid looking foolish, people who "demand" social protection should ask themselves, first of all, whether any particular social group really needs them as much as

they need it. And, if such people decide to form their own social group, they should be aware that attracting beneficiaries is always easier than attracting benefactors.

It is true, of course, that there have always been marriages of personal convenience, alliances of convenience and even associations of convenience. But there has never been such a thing as a society of convenience. Once again, a real, civil society requires all of its members to subordinate their own personal desires to the larger purpose of the whole group because that is the only way any social group can survive long enough to provide any protection or benefits to anyone. And that is what is called:

***Commitment** – A society whose members are willing to die for it is usually more successful than a society whose members expect it to die for them.*

Such commitment is certainly much more than just a negative, personal reaction to frightening circumstances, or an opportunity to acquire special, unearned benefits at the expense of others. It requires a positive, shared conception of a purpose that both

benefactors and beneficiaries can support, and to which it seems worth making a genuine commitment.

Earlier Americans, in their struggle for survival in an “untamed” environment, apparently understood that simple truth very well. But, more recently, that truth seems to have become an entirely “foreign” concept. And that is what is wrong with Americans and their dysfunctional society today.

6

Moderator: Our previous question was about why American “society” has seldom managed to realize most of the benefits of even a simple association – whether there is something wrong with Americans, or something wrong with the idea of association.

And it does seem that, unless the American people can find themselves a positive, common social purpose, and learn how to protect that purpose from political conflict and corruption, even such an apparently simple goal as comprehensive, beneficial as-

sociation will always remain some distance beyond their reach.

But, on the other hand, it also seems quite clear that even a good, fraternal association is a model that is much too simplistic and fragile to provide a basis for anything except the most elementary human groups.

Mr. Novo said real societies are more complicated than simple associations because societies are made up of groups, as well as individuals. But the difference seems to be much greater than that. An ordinary association is voluntary and exclusive – most associations concentrate on their own special purposes and ignore all others. That is why people can belong to several different associations at the same time without much conflict among those different interests.

A real society, however, is usually inclusive – within a certain area, all kinds of people with all kinds of different interests belong to just one society. And membership in that society may be involuntary – almost everyone “joins” his society through birth, and his membership in that society has profound effects on all aspects of his life, regardless of his own personal interests or

preferences.

The least complicated example of a real society, we suppose, is the kind of human group that is called a “community.” So now we need to know how the definition of a community differs from that of a simple association. And we also need to know what kinds of social problems elementary communities – especially obnoxious communities – can expect to encounter in trying to be both inclusive and, for many of their members, involuntary ...

Novo: Well, each different society has its own ideas about what a community is, and its own opinions about which kinds of social problems are more or less important. But I think there is a general definition of “community” that is valid for nearly all real societies, including the most modern and most complex ones.

We said an association is a purposive, voluntary group of socially equal members. So let’s say a community is a purposive, voluntary association of the owners of several equal, nondependent groups, both voluntary and involuntary. And I do realize that definition may seem strange to many Ameri-

cans because their purposeless “green” communities don’t fit that description very well.

The most obvious difference between a simple association and a community is that a community has two levels – it is a group of subgroups. And the equal members of the upper-level, community association are called “owners” because ownership provides the essential link, or social nexus, between those two levels.

Of course, if everyone in a particular place were exactly the same, there would be no need for community organization. In such a “community,” each subgroup would have a single member and the association of equal owners of nondependent, one-person subgroups would have the same structure as any ordinary association.

But people are not all the same and, in real communities, they naturally form several subgroups based on various different needs and interests. And, while the separation of people into subgroups may seem to contradict the idea of social “inclusion,” it is this kind of separation that actually gives a real, inclusive community its strength and stability, for two reasons:

First, bringing different subgroups of people together peacefully and beneficially in a single, inclusive community requires special arrangements to prevent accidental or deliberate collisions and unnecessary conflict between members of those groups.

And, second, those separate subgroups also serve much the same purpose in a community as do the water-tight compartments in this cruise ship. Some of those subgroups may, from time to time, be damaged or destroyed by internal conflict or political corruption. But social separation of subgroups can prevent that conflict or corruption from spreading to other subgroups. So a community with a few corrupted groups, like a ship with a few flooded compartments, can usually stay afloat long enough to repair the damage before it causes the whole ship or community to founder.

The American nation, for example, once had a huge number of such subgroups which, despite many local problems, made the nation as a whole seem quite “unsinkable.” But the growth and centralization of government authority over the past century removed many of those water-tight doors.

So, today, every little local crisis seems to become a national crisis, making the whole country seem much less stable.

Demo: But it seems to me most Americans reject that kind of social “segregation” because they believe all individuals should be free to go wherever they want to go, and do whatever they want to do, without the hindrance of discriminatory social barriers ...

Novo: No, most Americans may reject the idea of social segregation based on nothing more than specious or irrelevant distinctions. But in a community with many different kinds of people, with many different interests, some kind of social separation is clearly necessary to prevent or resolve social conflict.

That is what the word “resolution” means – a “high-resolution” telescope is one that can resolve a hazy blob of light in the sky into its separate stars or galaxies. And a social resolution is something that extricates members of different groups from destructive entanglements with each other, so each group can do whatever it wants to do without fear of interference by others. It is

nothing like political compromise, which just perpetuates unnecessary entanglements and unnecessary conflict among different groups.

That kind of benign separation is necessary even in such simplistic communities as the one formed by the passengers and crew aboard this ship. Our ship’s library, for example, is a place for people who want to borrow and read books, though some of its reading tables are also used for playing chess. But let’s say there was a dispute between the people who play chess and some other people who would like to use the same facilities for other games.

A “democratic” American solution for such conflict might be to bring all game players together and take a vote to see which game is most popular. Then the people who play the most popular game would decide when, or if, the library could be used for other games.

But that would just perpetuate conflict by encouraging backgammon players, for example, to throw enough chess players overboard to give backgammon players “democratic” control of the library. So it is prob-

ably fortunate that our little community on this ship does not use such crude American methods of social management:

***Resorts** – A cruise ship is a wonderful place to visit because people like us are not allowed to live here.*

Our captain's purpose includes the duty to take care of all passengers, not just a majority of them, and that purpose gives him the authority to act as a social arbiter. So he might have resolved this dispute simply by drawing up a schedule that fairly allocated certain periods of time, when the library is not busy, for various other activities.

Obso: But our captain is much too busy with his primary duties to act as an arbiter for every little personal dispute that may arise among passengers ...

Novo: That's right. So let's take this one step farther. Setting up a schedule with certain hours for each game would give chess players, for example, "ownership" of the library tables during those periods, with the privilege of being able to play chess without interference.

But no ownership privilege can be created

without some reciprocal ownership duties – a duty not to interfere with other library users, a duty to see that all chess equipment is put away in its proper place at the end of the allocated period, and so on.

That is what is meant by group "nondependence," which is a necessary requirement for the separation of subgroups in a community. Each group is free to pursue its own special interests without interference, as long as it does so without creating a mess that becomes a nuisance, burden or danger to any other nondependent individual or subgroup.

Now, in practice, that kind of ownership always requires the selection of a specific "owner" for each group – a person who can ensure that the group as a whole does fulfill its social duties, or a person the captain can call to account for any failure to do so.

The captain certainly can't become involved in any delinquent group's squabbles about which member failed to do something he was supposed to do, or any other personal dispute. Trying to resolve such conflict within a group would make the captain, in effect, the owner of that group and, as Mr. Obso

pointed out, the captain certainly does not have time for that.

So, other members of the chess group recognize that their owner has acquired some of the captain's "higher" arbitration authority, to help ensure that the group fulfills its social duties. And each of those other members is usually willing to do his fair share of helping with those duties when asked to do so because members know that, if they do not fulfill those duties or if they depend on someone else to "clean up" after them, the whole group will lose its nondependent status and its social privileges.

Obso: It should be pointed out, however, that the choice of an owner has limited significance within the chess group itself, because such ownership has nothing to do with the purpose or rules of chess. Ownership is an extra, social duty that any "respectable" member of a group may be persuaded to assume.

So it is not even necessary to organize chess players into a formal association in order to choose an owner – it might just as well be done by lot. And it is probably not necessary for the captain or a member of his

crew to draw up the library schedule – the various equal owners of nondependent groups could do that by themselves because each of them has the authority to make and enforce fair social commitments on behalf of his group.

It is only necessary to establish the principle that an association of equal owners of nondependent groups will be the method used to keep different groups apart and resolve any disputes among them – to allow people with different interests to share a single facility and enjoy its benefits, without interfering with each other and without constant need for outside arbitration.

Those group owners, acting as a community association, would not need the captain to act as their arbiter because they could simply use the captain's purpose as their own arbiter, and do for themselves what the captain might have done for them, in serving his own, higher purpose.

Novo: Of course, democratic Americans are always suspicious of anyone who claims to be serving a "higher" social purpose because that may seem to imply personal as well as social superiority. So per-

haps a better description of a community association of group owners – and one that may seem somewhat more familiar to Americans – would be to call such an association the “inner circle” of a community. Or people who prefer something even more picturesque may imagine a group of equals seated around an ancient round table with the social purpose of the community as its centerpiece.

A simple association consists of nothing more than that inner circle or round table. But the purpose of a community association also extends to the protection of an “outer” circle where the owners and members of the community’s separate voluntary and involuntary groups can pursue their own, different interests, according to their own rules, without invidious distinctions, interference or conflict.

Demo: But I don’t think the idea of exclusive “inner” and “outer” social circles is any less objectionable than the idea of “higher” and “lower” social levels. And I certainly don’t understand how your community could also include “involuntary” groups if those groups, or their members, did not

want to be included in such an objectionable social arrangement ...

Obso: Well, it was mentioned earlier, when we were talking about voluntary association, that the term “voluntary” does not become a question of willingness until it has satisfied certain standards of competence.

The people who form the community of voluntary passengers aboard this ship, for instance, did not invent the ship or its community. The fact that we are here does indicate our willingness to “join” such a community and enjoy its many benefits. But this community did not voluntarily accept us as members until it was determined that we were both willing and able to meet certain requirements.

Voluntary passengers were required to accept the terms and conditions of a contract for passage aboard this ship that included a fee or fare for this particular voyage. A person’s acceptance of that contract created an obligation to pay that fare, and an obligation to respect the terms of the contract that govern his behavior while he is a passenger aboard this ship.

Of course, some passengers were not able to meet those requirements. Young children, for instance, are not regarded as being capable, in spite of their willingness, to accept such obligations – not just because they do not have money for the fare, but because they are not yet capable of understanding all the implications of contractual obligations, or of controlling their own behavior in accordance with regulations that are both reasonable and necessary.

That is why young children are never accepted voluntarily as passengers on this cruise ship, even if someone else is willing to pay their fares. They are acceptable only as members of an “involuntary” group, such as a family, that is limited in size because its voluntary owner must be capable of paying a fare for each child, and must also be capable of supervising the behavior of the family’s children, to ensure they do not violate the terms of passage that apply to all kinds of passengers.

So those involuntary passengers have a special relationship with some of the voluntary members of the community aboard this ship, and that relationship is known as:

***Dependency** – Families with dependent members must have voluntary owners because a community with dependent members would be an involuntary association.*

Each family group aboard this ship is expected to have an owner, and all owners are expected to ensure the nondependence of their groups by seeing that their dependents receive adequate care within the family’s own quarters and adequate supervision elsewhere – young children are not allowed to run around the ship by themselves, where they might be a danger to themselves and a nuisance to other passengers.

Demo: But I don’t think most people here, or in any other kind of good community, are so selfish they would refuse to help take care of another family’s children if such help were needed ...

Novo: Of course not. If a child went missing on this ship, for example, I’m sure just about everyone – passengers as well as crew members – would be very concerned and would do everything possible to help find the child, because that is the kind of

help people in any good community are usually willing and able to give each other.

But if the same child were to go missing a second or third time, that willingness would soon turn to resentment about the nuisance and danger being created by the failure of the child's owner to fulfill his basic ownership duties. And that whole family might eventually find itself confined to its own quarters for its own protection, and the protection of the voluntary members of this community.

In other words, our captain and most passengers expect exactly the same thing of the owners of involuntary groups as they expect of the owners of voluntary associations – that they will ensure their own groups will, in ordinary circumstances, remain nondependent and clean up their own messes, so they will not become an unnecessary nuisance or burden to other individuals and families.

Demo: I realize certain communities, such as the one aboard this ship, may have some special requirements because they are not natural communities. But it seems to me any social structure that makes

any person “dependent” on anyone else is surely the most obnoxious kind of society – as everyone knows, the only people who have “owners” are slaves.

You just said our captain has a duty to take care of all passengers. And I don't see how he can fulfill that duty by confining young children and other people with special needs to “involuntary” groups, as if they were prisoners who have done something wrong ...

Obso: Well, it is part of our captain's purpose to see that dependents receive the special care they need. But, in doing so, he must also respect the subgroup separation that is the essential foundation of this and every other stable community. His purpose, for instance, does not give him the authority to violate that separation by doing something directly to or for children, against the wishes of their parents.

And it certainly does not give him the authority to take children away from “inadequate” parents, just because he thinks he, or someone else, would be a better owner. Attempting to do so would be much like thoughtlessly opening the water-tight door

of a flooded compartment – creating an ownership dispute that could turn a small family problem into a political controversy which might involve and endanger everyone aboard this ship.

Moreover, to avoid possible confusion, it should also be pointed out that when our moderator uses the word “obnoxious” to describe a degenerate community, he is probably using the word in its broadest sense, which many Americans may not understand. In fact, the modern meaning of the word is almost the opposite of its original meaning and, unfortunately, there is no modern synonym that conveys the original meaning quite as well.

Modern Americans use the word obnoxious to mean “foul” or “repugnant,” ignoring the “ob” prefix altogether. But that prefix originally gave the word a very different meaning – that is, it meant something that was particularly vulnerable to some noxious force or element.

So an obnoxious community was one whose social purpose and structure were inadequate to protect the community from negative, noxious forces that could damage

or destroy it, from within or without. Of course, a community like that was also an obnoxious place for people to live, in the modern as well as the original sense, because a community too weak to protect itself could not provide much protection for many of its members either.

So it should be obvious that the only way to make a community less obnoxious and more beneficial is by strengthening its social purpose and structures – including the kind of ownership and arbitration that is necessary for adequate group separation and protection.

Only a very foolish person would suggest an obnoxious community could be improved simply by demolishing what is left of an inadequate social structure. That would just make the community even more obnoxious, or destroy it altogether.

Every real community must have a sound social structure, with rules to support that structure. And those rules must apply to all members – not just to voluntary members who understand the need for such rules. Some rules may seem “unreasonable” to involuntary members because those people

are not yet capable of understanding the reasons for those rules. And young children, for instance, cannot be blamed for their lack of such capability. But that is why a community must ensure all children have someone who can be held accountable for their behavior until those children “grow up” – as well as adequate supervision for some children who never will.

Those rules may frustrate the immediate personal interests of some people, and fail to satisfy everyone’s personal desires. But that is the “fare” people must pay, and the terms they must accept, to belong to a community that provides real benefits and social security because, in that kind of community, no one gets a “free ride.”

Novo: On Wednesday and Thursday of this week, when we get around to our analysis of societies that were much more sophisticated, we will also encounter a particularly vile and insidious social phenomenon called “obnox” which is the thing that apparently made so many ancient societies – including some of America’s ancestors – so obnoxious. But that phenomenon is much too complicated and controversial to try to

deal with at this point in our discussion.

It should be mentioned now, however, because it is another cause of much social confusion. When a good society becomes obnoxious, many people naturally look for the “obnox” that caused the failure. If they are unsophisticated people who, like many Americans, tend to think of their society as being a big machine, they may think obnox is a simple mechanical failure or design flaw that can be “fixed.” But, unfortunately, obnox is not nearly that simple. More-sophisticated people tend instead to think their societies are something like biological organisms, and they think obnox is a social poison or disease to which even the most perfect societies may be vulnerable.

But it is not that simple either because finding an antidote or cure requires a clear understanding of causes and effects. While social purposelessness, for example, is the most obvious deficiency in every obnoxious society, it is not even clear in most cases whether obnox is the cause of that deficiency or just one of its many consequences.

Obso: It certainly is inappropriate to mention “obnox” at this point in our dis-

cussion because, as you know very well, it is the kind of affliction that is found only in degenerate, Novo-model societies and their obnoxious descendants – which is why it may seem important to you. But obnox was unknown in earlier, uncorrupted societies, which is what we are supposed to be talking about right now. Even America, it should be remembered, was almost entirely free of obnox infection until just a few centuries ago, when it was inflicted by European invaders who also carried with them such other vile, contagious diseases as smallpox and politics – and who inadvertently acquired such afflictions as syphilis to take back home with them.

Except for those kinds of infections, which are a common consequence of social or sexual invasion, healthy societies never had to worry very much about the diseases of social degeneracy because their good social hygiene protected them against such degeneracy and its many maladies. And prevention is very important because a society that has become degenerate, purposeless and obnoxious, like an individual with an untreated “social” disease, may also be afflicted with

the kind of personal madness that defeats even the very best attempts to find good remedies.

People who are trapped in an obnoxious society that is “out of control” and full of conflict and violence, for instance, usually become much more concerned about their own immediate, personal problems than about the larger problems of their society. And that often leads desperate people to seek desperate solutions. That is, they may try to find ways to make their society less obnoxious for themselves by making it more obnoxious for someone else – turning that society into the kind of political jungle where all personal and social relationships are reduced to the distinction between “me” and “food.” And that just makes social disintegration irreversible.

Novo: Yes, but Americans do live in just such an obnoxious society, so I expect they will be interested in learning more about the nature of obnox and the symptoms of dyssociation in their own communities – including constant conflict among various individuals, groups and alliances of groups, each seeking to improve its own position at

the expense of others, which just makes a bad situation worse for everyone.

As you said, a desperate situation may lead people to embrace a desperate, destructive solution – such as the kind of bogus political “governance” that is based, at best, on a precarious social stalemate or truce among warring factions – the kind of “solution” that has given Americans so many very bad governors and governments for such a long time, both before and since the formation of the American nation.

Perhaps the greatest mistake made by early Americans, for example, was to accept the notion that, because a government was supposed to be the agent of a social purpose, the best way to reduce the power and menace of bad governments was by trying to reduce the power of social purposes. But, as you have already pointed out, the truth is actually the opposite. Only a very strong society with a positive purpose can control the people who control governments – which is why the most powerful and most dangerous rogue governments are always found in “green” societies like America’s, which have no social purpose.

Or, in other words, if the pedestal at the center of a community’s round table or inner circle is not occupied by a good purpose, then someone will probably try to put himself and his own purpose on that pedestal. But then he must try to force others to serve that purpose, which may consist mainly of trying to avoid being knocked off that pedestal by someone else. And the things that are necessary for that purpose are almost always detrimental to the personal interests of most other people – even individual members of the most powerful political alliances.

But some kind of society – or just a rogue government masquerading as the agent of an imaginary society – is necessary for personal, as well as national survival. So Americans must depend for protection on a government that often seems to be an enemy of their personal purposes. And that is why Americans have always had to waste so much time and effort trying to find more effective contrivances with which to protect themselves from their own obnoxious “protector” – a futile quest that only leads to even more personal insecurity, confusion and frustration ...

7

Moderator: That second part of today’s discussion was an attempt to define the structures and some of the basic elements of associations and communities in real societies. And it does seem that the benefactor-beneficiary, owner-association model can help to explain the nature of some of the most successful civil societies of past ages – the kinds of communities that were able to become something much greater than the sums of their human parts, through positive, constructive cooperation.

Some of the same social elements, such as ownership and collaboration, have also been used in America by special groups of benefactor-beneficiaries to create some truly astonishing accumulations of wealth and knowledge over the past couple of centuries. But modern American communities that attempt to include many different individuals and groups are more likely to be obnoxious, uncivil places – battlefields of conflicting

personal and group interests, full of controversy, violence and politics – amounting to something much less than the sums of their human parts.

So now we need to know why so many Americans, in spite of all that wealth and knowledge, seem willing to tolerate so much violence and social squalor in their communities. And we need to know why ordinary Americans seem to have such a “negativistic” view of the kind of social structures and elements that might help make those communities much less obnoxious, and much better places in which to live and work ...

Obso: Well yes, that kind of individual “negativism” or extreme cynicism in relationships with other people is usually irrational, and was once regarded as being a psychological aberration, even in America. But it has become so ubiquitous today it is beginning to seem quite normal.

The most extreme forms of cynicism are usually the results of the greatest disillusionments. And the illusion that America ever had a real society has certainly been abandoned by most people. But, again, an even greater disappointment has been the

failure of America's democratic government to live up to the expectation it would be a superior substitute for a society. And among the most obvious reasons for that failure is the simple logic of ends and means.

Most Americans think their own personal purposes are much more important than any social purposes. So they naturally think a society or government should serve as the means to help them attain their personal ends. But when a government tries to serve personal purposes, the inevitable result is constant conflict among people with different purposes about whose purposes should prevail. And that kind of conflict inevitably breeds corruption and cynicism.

America's "winners," for instance, think a good government is one that acts as a policeman to protect them and their property from theft or extortion by "losers" who are trying to become winners. But, of course, any government or other force that is powerful enough to provide such protection is also powerful enough to force wealthy winners to pay extortionate prices for that kind of "social" service.

America's poorest "losers," on the other

hand, think a good government is one that acts like a "Robin Hood" or bandit force – confiscating wealth from winners for "redistribution" to poor losers, as compensation for the immoral practices which, it is assumed, must have been used by those winners to become wealthy, because poor losers don't know of any other way for anyone to become wealthy.

No one really believes any more, as many once did, that drastic redistribution of wealth might even rectify the personal inequality that is a natural consequence of social equality in successful communities. But many losers want governments to keep trying anyway because the persecution of winners does at least seem to prevent communities from becoming even more successful and more unequal.

Like the Robin Hood legend, however, the notion of using redistribution of wealth as an element of "social" policy has always been a fantasy. Bandits do not share their loot with poor losers unless those losers have something to offer in return. And people who need help the most usually have the least to offer. So, if bandit governments

share their loot at all, it is with those people, winners or losers, who best serve the government's own ends – especially people who, as members of powerful political alliances, help to keep those bandits in power.

Novo: Yes, it is not difficult to understand why Americans have become so cynical about their own government. They support that government because it is a powerful evil that seems necessary for national survival, and because they keep hoping to be able to use some of that power to ensure their own personal survival and prosperity. But a rogue government never serves anyone's personal purposes very well unless those purposes happen to coincide with the government's own purposes, either directly or indirectly.

So perhaps the real problem is that Americans have not yet become cynical enough. If they were to become sufficiently disillusioned with their own negativism, they might start seeking rational social solutions that are more positive and constructive. But negativism is irrational, and America's only "positive" alternative seems to be even more irrational.

Ordinary Americans don't usually care, for example, if their selfishness and cynicism make American communities bad places in which to live because they don't expect to live there. The only people who are forced to live in the most obnoxious "communities" are America's biggest losers. America's winners have always made their homes in socially secluded places, some distance away from the worst parts of those communities, where they have been able to dissociate themselves from most kinds of social unpleasantness.

Obso Yes, an ordinary American's definition of "success" seems to be the ultimate form of dissociation. The Americans who are admired and envied the most by others today are those winners who are so rich and powerful they seem able to pursue their own interests and satisfy their own appetites without having to pay any attention to the interests of anyone else, or to any inconvenient social rules that may reflect other people's interests – except, of course, for those rules which also serve their own, personal interests. And that is an illusion which, at least in America, is known as:

***Independence** – Dissociation is a luxury that no one can afford, unless someone else is paying for it.*

The notion that any American could ever become rich or powerful enough to dissociate himself completely from all social dependence, or want to do so, is obviously absurd. Every American demonstrates his social dependence every time he uses the English language, a public road, or any other part of an elaborate social “infrastructure” that everyone takes for granted.

Of course, in the days when America was still a vast, underpopulated frontier, it was actually possible for some individuals to achieve that kind of independence from an obnoxious society by hiding themselves in the wilderness. But even if that frontier had not disappeared long ago, it seems unlikely that many Americans today could endure the obvious privations of such isolation.

So, if America’s perpetual social “crisis” seems to have become much more acute in recent decades, even for America’s winners, it is probably just because independent Americans are finally running out of places

to hide from each other, and may finally be forced to undertake the truly frightening task of trying to learn how to live with each other.

Demo: But just a few minutes ago it was said that “civil” societies do not allow people to depend on them directly. And the opposite of dependence is independence. So it seems to me that people who are just trying to make themselves less dependent on their society should be congratulated for doing so, not blamed for the disintegration of their communities ...

Obso: No, it is not quite that simple. To indicate the opposite of “dependence,” Americans tend to use the negative, personal notion of “independence” because that reflects their negative, personal view of human relationships. A civilian member of a real society, on the other hand, would be more likely to use the word “nondependence” because that better reflects his positive, social view of human relationships.

In a civil society whose members are benefactor-beneficiaries, the idea of “nondependence” is a social relationship that begins when a young person – who, since birth, has

been a social beneficiary – is finally ready to assume the role of social benefactor as well. And that is a very profound transition which happens only once in a lifetime, though some people may eventually return to dependency due to accident, illness or old age.

Personal independence, however, is neither a personal nor a social relationship – it is merely a selective, temporary denial of such relationships. And it does seem to provide most of the personal advantages of non-dependence without its irreversibility – whenever a dependent person who is merely claiming to be “independent” needs the protection and support of dependency, he can simply stop denying his dependence, for as long as that seems advantageous.

That is why independence seems to be such a good personal solution for many social problems. It is something anyone can claim, in most circumstances. And the transition back and forth between independence and dependence is so easy that every “independent” American can do it several times every day.

But, of course, the full illusion of independence is something that can only be

sustained by America’s “winners,” who have the means to take advantage of their society’s benefits while ignoring social obligations. America’s “losers” who, like all unsuccessful gamblers, pay most of the cost of sustaining such illusions, can only aspire or conspire to use whatever negative means are available to them to try to become independent winners themselves, at someone else’s expense.

And even those losers have little interest in becoming nondependent civilians instead because, in the American view of things, benefactors who are willing to contribute more to a community than they are currently receiving from it are the most foolish kind of losers – or just remorseful winners who are trying to buy some absolution for the sins that made them successful.

Novo: Yes, but while that American illusion of independence, as a negative, personal solution for social problems, is both irrational and socially destructive, it is certainly very popular – especially in its most extreme form which, in America, is usually associated with the strange social phenomenon known as:

Adolescence – If growing up seems to be getting harder and harder, it is probably because “up” keeps getting higher and higher.

In older, simpler societies, the dividing line between childhood and manhood, and the privileges and duties of both, were usually quite clear. Dependent children had the privilege of support and protection by their parents, but the duty to do what their parents told them to do. Nondependent adult males had the privilege of not being told what they were supposed to do, for the support and protection of themselves and others, but the duty to do those things anyway – each in his own way.

In those societies, the transition from dependent childhood to nondependent “manhood” usually took the form of some kind of ceremony, around the time of puberty, when a young man was accepted as a member of his community’s inner circle, after having proved in some way that he was no longer a dependent child. In modern America, however, the transition from childhood to manhood usually extends for a period of several

years beyond puberty because of the extra training young men must endure in learning how to cope with all of their nation’s many social and technical contrivances.

The original American idea of adolescence was probably that, during the necessary extension of dependency, young men would be expected to assume the duties of both childhood and manhood – to do what they were told to do while gradually learning to do more and more of those things for themselves and others, without having to be told what to do, until they eventually attained real nondependence.

But not all young men were willing or able to accept such onerous expectations – which, after all, only seemed to serve the personal purposes of their parents. And American society had no greater social purpose that parents could use to justify and enforce such expectations.

So, eventually, some cynical young men discovered that adolescence could be a much less unpleasant experience, and better serve their own, equally-important personal purposes, if they just assumed the privileges, rather than the duties, of both childhood

and manhood – enjoying the support and protection of parents, without having to listen to anyone who tried to tell them what to do.

Among those young men, that happier form of extended dependency even came to be regarded as a manifestation of their own personal equality and independence. Their inherent personal equality entitled them to depend on their parents for support and protection, whenever such dependency served their personal purposes. But their independence also entitled them to deny any such dependence – rejecting the constraints and obligations of dependency while denouncing any attempt by parents or anyone else to tell them what to do – whenever that served their purposes better.

Over the past several decades, that illusion of adolescent independence has become more and more popular in America and other nations – even inspiring a somewhat sillier, female version called “feminism.” And so, among most young people in many places today, there is a desire to have adolescence begin earlier and earlier, and last longer and longer – often encouraged by

those lucky people who have reached special pinnacles of perpetual adolescence, such as editors, judges and “tenured” professors whose employers are required to support and protect them, but are not supposed to tell them what to do ...

Demo: But it seems to me that “growing up” is hard enough for young Americans to do these days, without depriving them of some harmless illusions that may help make a time of difficult adjustments seem a bit less unbearable ...

Obso: No, there is nothing wrong with childhood fantasies. But fantasies that are indulged too long tend to become chronic delusions which can make growing up even harder, and sometimes impossible. Of course, most American parents want their children to feel like winners, even if that encourages those children to treat their parents as if they were losers. But parents are not usually expected to indulge such delusions after their children reach a certain age – an age at which it is assumed all children have reached “maturity” though, in fact, many have not, and some never will.

And an over-age adolescent who is not yet

capable of nondependence, which is the minimum requirement for entry into his society's inner circle, and is too old to be treated as a dependent child, may just find himself relegated to a "no man's land" at the periphery of his community's outer circle.

Demo: But Americans no longer accept such archaic social notions as inner and outer social "circles," or ownership and dependency. In fact, it seems to me the greatest social achievement of the past few centuries, particularly in America, has been the progressive destruction of separate social circles by people who made themselves, and everyone else, equal and truly independent members of new kinds of societies – societies where, for example, even women and young children have been liberated from the abuses of family dependency with unconditional assurance of equal social protection and support ...

Obso: But that kind of "single-circle" group would be an association, not a community. And the requirement of nondependence for membership in a community's inner circle is not fulfilled by "independent" people who merely deny their dependence

whenever it seems convenient to do so. Nor does "liberating" young children and other dependents from separate family groups make them any less dependent – it just turns them into "ownerless" dependents.

A community which attempts to attain that kind of equality of membership is not even a voluntary association. It is trying, in effect, to become one big, involuntary group, with uncertain ownership. And that, in turn, is socially destructive because nondependent members of such a community would neither need, nor want to "belong" to such an involuntary group.

If a community treats children as the "equals" of adults, for instance, it would have the same rules for adults and children. But those rules cannot treat children as if they were adults because children are not capable of acting like adults. So, instead, those rules would probably treat everyone as if they were children, which would be an egregious insult to nondependent adults.

And that, or course, is yet another reason why nondependent Americans – both winners and losers – try so hard to dissociate themselves as much as possible from their

paternalistic, rogue government which, as an agent of its own notion of “social equality,” often tries to treat adults as if they were children, or men as if they were women, and so on. And when negativistic, nondependent adults do find ways to dissociate themselves from a such a “society,” ownerless dependents are just left behind with no real support or protection at all.

Demo: But the idea of a universal, unconditional social “safety net” for everyone is at least a positive, democratic attempt to do something about that kind of negativism, and the violence and social squalor in many American communities – which is what we are supposed to be talking about right now. And I don’t think you can just dismiss that idea as mere delusion when it is being embraced by more and more people today, not just in America but all over the world ...

Obso: Well, there is so much social confusion in America and the rest of the world these days that people can, and often do, embrace all kinds of strange ideas – even ideas borrowed from a circus. But the notion of a universal safety net would seem bizarre

even there. A circus may provide a safety net for some of its high-flying performers, to encourage them to attempt to reach even greater heights. But no circus has ever provided a safety net for spectators as well.

In fact, the absurdity of that notion as a basis for social policy became quite apparent, even to Americans, when attempts were made to export it to other societies – particularly to the world’s most dysfunctional society, which is the world itself and its “community of nations.”

At one time, Americans thought their democratic social model was such a wonderful thing it would eventually be adopted by every other nation in the world, and by the world “community” itself. And when, after the Second World War, something like the American social model was used as the centerpiece of an international round table called the “United Nations,” there was great optimism that such an association of national owners would soon create a much more peaceful and prosperous world community.

Novo: But that optimism didn’t last very long ...

Obso: No, it did not, because those

optimists thought the many newly “independent” nations, which soon came to dominate the United Nations General Assembly, would bring to the world community a fresh wave of the kind of unspoiled innocence and democratic idealism that many Americans like to think attended the creation of their own nation.

But, in its haste to become “universal,” the United Nations suspended the usual requirements of voluntary association and accepted as members many new “nations” that were not yet nondependent, with the assumption those nations would “grow up” to become real members – even though many of those nations were such tiny or artificial creations there was little reason to believe they could ever become nondependent. So no one should have been surprised when many of those dependent nations rejected the expectations of nondependence and were attracted instead to the American notion of adolescent independence.

Of course, most Americans were horrified when they realized those dependent, adolescent nations would use their “democratic” numerical domination of the United

Nations to promote the idea that America, along with other rich nations, had a special obligation to support and protect all of the world’s poor, adolescent nations, without trying to tell those nations to “grow up.”

And Americans were appalled by all of the counter-condescension and contempt which the people of those adolescent nations heaped upon all things American, in order to deny their dependence and demonstrate their “independent” equality. That was just too much like the kind of abuse American parents were already getting from their own adolescent children at home.

Novo: Yes, something certainly did go wrong. Americans, as the world’s biggest winners, thought the United Nations would become the agent of a voluntary international association and, through its Security Council, something like an international policemen as well. But most other nations – particularly the world’s poorest losers – had joined the United Nations because they thought it would become the democratic agent of an involuntary community that would “redistribute” American wealth to other nations, to help those nations – or at

least their rulers – sustain their own delusions of independence.

Obviously, Americans were not very enthusiastic about being cast as the “bad guys” in a world-scale revival of the Robin Hood fantasy. So they soon became cynical about the United Nations organization as well. And, because that organization owed so much to the American social model, that disillusionment also increased the cynicism of many nondependent Americans about their own rogue government, which sometimes seems to have as little real purpose or legitimacy in the American community as the United Nations organization in the international community.

Demo: But, in spite of all that, it seems to me people all over the world today have at least come to realize all humans have certain common interests, such as mutual aid in times of disaster, and that kind of aid is provided by various international agencies. So, I would say, those things are something like a social purpose and the beginning of a beneficial world community, even if there is no world government ...

Obso: Perhaps, but even good so-

cial intentions without a clear social purpose usually do more harm than good – which is certainly the result of many international “aid” efforts, and sometimes the intended result. And there are no real “international agencies” because no one can be an agent of something that does not exist. Organizations which now operate internationally are merely bogus agents which serve their own purposes, or the purposes of the nations from which they come.

If there were a world community with an inclusive social purpose, that community would probably create a world government to act as its agent in doing whatever served that purpose. But without such a community and purpose, any world government like the United Nations would only become another rogue agent serving its own purposes or someone else’s purposes – which would certainly do wealthy nations like America much more harm than good. That is why there is no world government today, and why no sane person regrets that fact.

Novo: But it is quite right to say a major natural disaster, for example, can produce a positive human response on a glo-

bal scale – which is the kind of thing we are looking for, as the reason for higher levels of social organization.

Natural disasters do tend to inspire positive, voluntary alliances among all kinds of nations, where they agree to set aside their different interests and work together to solve specific human problems. But, of course, natural disasters are simple problems with obvious solutions, so even those good alliances seldom outlive their temporary purposes.

Demo: Yes, and I think it is really quite shameful how people from rich nations, after congratulating themselves for coming to help some poor, weak nation with a fashionable, temporary problem, always pack up and leave very quickly when asked to help with that poor nation's more difficult, long-term problems ...

Obso: Well, it is true that wealthy nations are much more reluctant to involve themselves in trying to deal with the greater human problems of weaker, badly-managed nations – nations whose people not only tolerate bad social management but seem to insist on it. But there are two important

political reasons why wealthy nations are reluctant to try to do anything positive about that kind of ownership failure.

First, a wealthy nation cannot provide a dependent nation with the kind of assistance that makes the poorer nation even more dependent without creating the implication of an owner-dependent relationship. And no wealthy nation is likely to assume such an ownership burden unless the wealthy nation has a very good, strategic reason for doing so.

And, second, when any wealthy nation today does try to improve its own strategic position in the world by making other nations more dependent, creating the implication of ownership, that action is denounced as colonialism or imperialism – which is just the kind of ownership dispute that can quickly ignite the most dangerous international suspicions and hostilities.

Demo: But wealthy nations cannot just ignore the problems of poor nations. In most cases, it was the actions of powerful nations, past and present, that turned those weak countries into “losers.” And the people of those poor nations can't be blamed for the

quality of their own leadership when many of the worst leaders were imposed on weak nations by powerful nations, to serve their own purposes ...

Novo: Yes, that is the kind of bullying of the weak by the strong that usually happens in obnoxious communities, where there is no legitimate arbiter to prevent it from happening.

And it should be obvious that the purposeless American social model has done little to discourage such selfish behavior by “independent” nations, or provide any real alternative to costly military combat, or ineffective political compromise, as a way to reduce international conflict and injustice.

Of course, the obnoxious world community does have the excuse of being an accidental community, created by modern developments in transportation and communication that made the world suddenly seem much smaller. And individual nations have not had much time to adjust to the fact that they can no longer just dissociate themselves from the world’s larger problems – as if they were located on separate planets, or could behave as if they were.

So we should keep in mind, when we do eventually get around to trying to find a more positive, post-democratic social model for the future that, to be useful at all, such a model will have to be something that can be accepted and applied with good effect in all places, at all social levels – not just in local communities and national communities but in the larger world community as well, which seems to need an entirely new kind of social model most of all.

Demo: But I don’t think the world community is ever likely to find any real purpose, or that poor nations will ever become less dependent, without help from some kind of international authority. So it seems to me the creation of the United Nations organization, despite its many faults and failures, was at least a step in the right direction ...

Novo: Well, perhaps it was, if only to demonstrate how difficult it will be to establish the kind of real world community – or even a real national community – to which most Americans would really want to belong. But the deliberate creation of a dysfunctional community, even as an expedi-

ent, is always dangerous because it may create certain expectations that will not be fulfilled, and new problems that cannot be solved.

Each of America's 13 original "United States," for example, regarded itself as being at least as independent as most of today's so-called nation-states. And, in their original "union," they all thought they were creating something like the round table of today's United Nations. But they didn't realize until it was too late that the creation of such an "inner circle" without a real social purpose at its center would also create a political vacuum that would be filled with something quite unexpected and not very desirable.

When any social group gets into trouble, it naturally expects to be able to look to its community's inner circle for support and protection. And, if the pedestal at the center of that inner circle is occupied by a person instead of a social purpose, that person might be expected to be able to act as a benevolent "father figure" who, like our ship's captain, can "solve" difficult social problems by just telling everyone what to do, for their

own good.

But the people who occupy political pedestals do not have social purposes. They may actually believe, if they are democratic politicians, that whatever is good for everyone is good for them. But, in reality, they can't know what is good for anyone but themselves. So they simply assume whatever is good for them is good for everyone – which is the kind of thinking that eventually led to the preposterous notion that what is good for the American government is good for all Americans.

And, when such notions are left unchallenged, some ambitious politicians may even come to believe that what is good for them is good for even larger parts of the world. Just during the 19s century, for example, ruthless tyrants like Hitler and Stalin, to serve their own purposes, tried to put themselves on much larger pedestals by convincing many people that only an imperial tyrant could protect them from fearsome, imaginary "enemies" both at home and abroad. But what their misguided followers got instead of support and protection was social and personal catastrophe.

Obso: You probably meant to say the “twentieth” century ...

Novo: No, when I said “nineteens” century, I meant the 100 years from 1900 to 1999 just as, within that century, everyone understands that a reference to the “forties” means the years 1940 to 1949. What you must mean is the “XX” century, if you’re going to use Roman numerals instead of zero-based, decimal numbers. And, if you do, I’d say you’re about a thousand years behind the times – except we both know it’s closer to ten thousand ...

Obso: And you probably have your own, “updated” rules of chess, which nobody else needs either.

8

Moderator: Our previous question was about the perversity of Americans’ social negativism, and their frantic attempts to dissociate themselves from each other and from their obnoxious society. And those things are apparently symptomatic of the

hope of many Americans to attain the alluring but impossible goal of finding personal solutions for their nation’s social problems – attempts which, for all but a few big “winners,” are seldom very successful.

So America’s purposeless “green” society is full of social confusion that encourages many people to use such illusions as personal equality and independence as excuses to avoid “growing up” at all, or learning how to see beyond their own selfish interests – which is why American society so often resembles a playground full of squabbling children.

And attempts to use America’s “democratic” social structure as a model for the international community just encouraged other nations to behave in similarly childish and selfish ways, with similar social results. But the world has grown too small today for Americans to respond to the adolescent behavior of other nations by just trying to run away and hide in the wilderness of “isolationist” independence, as if other nations and their interests did not exist.

The American community does at least have an established political-military struc-

ture which, to serve its own interests, tries to keep violent conflict among Americans within certain limits – enough violence to justify the existence of such an oppressive structure, but not enough to threaten the stability of that structure. There are, however, few such limits on dangerous violence in the world community, which lacks any illusion of social purpose or even the possibility of arbitration through intimidation in many cases.

So now we need to know if there are ways to reduce international violence and injustice by encouraging all nations and their people to act as if the world did have such a social purpose – as if all of them were grown-up members of a positive, voluntary, civil world community that even Americans might someday be willing to join, with social rules and expectations that even Americans might be able to understand and be willing to accept.

And, of course, we need to know if that is what America – which is surely doomed, whether it likes it or not, to be a part of any future world community – has actually been encouraging people to do ...

Novo: Well, I don't think the behavior of nations in a good world community, in general, would be much different from the behavior of families and other groups in a good local community. But there are several different ways to encourage better behavior – easy ways that may seem impractical, and expedient ways that are not very effective.

The easiest way, once again, is when families join a community that already has a good social purpose, so the relationship among those families is a positive, cooperative one. In that kind of community, every family is expected and encouraged to act like a “good neighbor” – making voluntary social contributions and receiving appropriate benefits, while resolving disputes using the community's purpose as an arbiter.

Unfortunately, the use of that easy, positive method may seem impractical in today's world community because most nations, including America, do not recognize any positive, global purpose that is greater than their own, “independent” national purposes – just as, in American communities, most families do not recognize any community

purpose that is greater than their own family purposes. And even within American “families,” many individuals do not recognize any family purpose that is greater than their own personal purposes.

So when America is asked to act as an agent of social improvement for the international community, by defining and encouraging the kinds of “good” national behavior that would be good for the whole world, all it usually has to offer is the definition used by most bogus social agents – that is: “Whatever is good for America is good for the whole world.”

Of course, Americans expect people in other nations to say the same thing, using the names of their own countries instead, because individualistic Americans assume all people and nations think the same way – turning every social issue into the personal question: “What’s in it for me?”

And perhaps that is all that can ever be expected of adolescent nations. But even among mature and apparently enlightened nations today, attempts to achieve national independence, rather than global, mutual nondependence, create constant conflict and

occasional violence as each nation seeks to impose its own, self-indulgent expectations on other nations, while repudiating any social expectations the rest of the world seeks to impose on it ...

Obso: Actually, there are some special purposes that do seem to be good for all nations, and Americans have helped to establish several international associations to serve such purposes as, for instance, the control of communicable diseases. But those are very specific, narrow purposes. And even those associations and their purposes are often corrupted by “improvements” made by powerful nations, or powerful alliances of weaker nations, to better serve the commercial or political interests of those nations, at the expense of others.

And there are certain kinds of bad behavior that are so obviously bad they may provoke a violent, negative response. If, for instance, members of one bad family in a neighborhood are attacking and injuring the members of other families, those other families may form the kind of alliance called a “lynch mob” to deal with that problem.

Sometimes, large numbers of people may

even visit foreign nations to discourage behavior that has become an international nuisance or menace. That is called “world war” and Americans did participate in a couple of those international behavior-improvement projects during the twentieth century – if only to prevent some overly ambitious nations from behaving in their parts of the world the way the American nation behaves in its own part of the world.

But those destructive forces are international alliances, not associations, and that kind of violence, if not justified and controlled by some common, positive purpose, usually turns into endless cycles of conflict and combat among various nations and various alliances, as each nation seeks to eradicate “bad” international behavior – which each nation defines for itself as any kind of behavior that does not serve its own selfish purposes.

In a real society, that kind of conflict would be prevented or resolved through ordinary group separation and arbitration. But in a world of “independent” national groups, there is no reliable arbiter who can keep nations apart or resolve and restore

such separation when it is overwhelmed by conflict. And, because the only alternative is military or political combat, modern nations must keep wasting enormous amounts of their talents and wealth in fighting with each other, or just getting ready to fight with each other.

Demo: But it seems to me that America does try, most of the time, to act like a good international “neighbor” because its military power is usually used for making peace, not war. And America often bears the entire cost of acting as a world “policeman,” which is the only thing that discourages the “owners” of many other nations from acting like criminals ...

Obso: Well, of course, since it is the world’s biggest “winner,” America would like to have a world policeman to protect it from any poor losers who threaten American interests. But, because Americans realize a real world policeman would be powerful enough to become an international bandit as well, they usually prefer to use their own, private “security” services.

In fact, the American nation, in protecting its own interests, has always acted like a

neighborhood bully in its own part of the world. And other nations in that neighborhood have not always regarded that kind of negative “leadership” as a bad thing because it did seem to keep some other, more dangerous international bullies from doing even greater harm to their most important interests.

As America became even richer and more powerful, it also began acting like a bully in other parts of the world – which, again, was not entirely objectionable to many other nations when America seemed to be acting as a world “policeman” – in the sense that a policeman is a “good thug” to whom good people look for protection against worse thugs.

So, while Americans have sometimes looked like thugs to people in other parts of the world, even those people have been willing to recognize America as a world leader, and perhaps even the world’s owner, because America seemed powerful enough to help the world community avoid worse alternatives, such as constant conflict and combat among various other, more destructive gangs of political and military thugs.

Novo: Yes, and even that kind of

negative leadership might have helped to improve the world if Americans themselves had ever had a positive social purpose – a real policeman is a “good” thug because he serves a good social purpose, unlike a “bad” thug who serves only his own, or someone else’s personal purposes.

But America has never had such a purpose. And the apparent purpose of the American government, or any of its various component parts at any particular time, merely reflects the interests of whichever gang of politicians or bureaucrats happens to be the most popular, or have the most powerful supporters, at that moment.

So the American nation, in spite of its military and economic power, has seldom been able to exert any coherent, positive social influence in the rest of the world. Instead, people in other nations find themselves dealing with several different American agents, representing various American interests. Or they may deal with the American government, which is supposed to act as the agent of all Americans, but whose interests seem to change every day.

And that’s why the application of Ameri-

can power abroad has always been so incoherent, sporadic and capricious – like a “loose cannon” smashing around all over the world, causing all kinds of damage to other nations, for reasons that don’t even seem to make much sense to most Americans.

Obso: Yes, and when problems caused by inadequate national separation cannot be resolved with simple methods – either positive or negative – the only expedient way to reduce international violence caused by conflicting national interests may be a “political” method that never really resolves anything.

Americans may try to help stop a regional conflict, for instance, by encouraging the agents of hostile nations to negotiate a compromise truce – usually based on some kind of military stalemate – that encourages everyone, at least temporarily, to refrain from the kinds of bad behavior which may upset that arrangement.

But, once again, the terms of any international compromise will always reflect the relative power of various nations at that moment, which is why such agreements always serve the interests of strong and wealthy

nations much better than the interests of weaker nations.

Even the strongest nations, however, are never fully satisfied with any compromise agreement, and seldom expect it to last very long. So agreements of that kind never encourage anyone to think “what is good for the whole world” might be a good thing for his own nation as well.

And that is why compromise agreements seldom encourage anyone to act like a “good neighbor.” A political compromise is merely an attempt to encourage anti-social families or nations to act, for a while, like “non-bad” neighbors – neighbors who can live in the same place, probably uneasily but more or less peacefully, as long as no member of the community violates group separation by becoming a nuisance or burden to others.

We have already talked about the practical difficulties and perverse results of trying to use negative social methods to produce positive results. But “independent” Americans have no positive national or global purpose that would allow them to use positive methods. So non-bad, political stalemates and “peaceful coexistence” are probably the

very best social results they can ever hope to achieve, either at home or abroad.

Demo: But I think that is much too pessimistic. It seems to me America does try to act like a good international neighbor whenever possible. And many American groups are also working very hard these days to encourage better social behavior in their own communities, and in other communities and nations all over the world ...

Novo: Yes, but those efforts are seldom very effective because they usually consist of trying to make other people live up to American expectations – which might be good for America, or for some Americans, but not much good for anyone else. And in a world where every nation has its own, self-serving expectations, even America’s “good” expectations and influence may just produce more confusion and conflict.

For example, political compromise may seem to be the only practical alternative to international violence in today’s world. But, before there can be compromise, there must be negotiation. And, before there can be negotiation, there must be recognition – recognition that other nations actually do exist

and that they do have separate national ownership and interests. Without such recognition and mutual respect among national owners, there can be no international relationships, or negotiations, or compromise, or any kind of peaceful coexistence.

And in a world of constant conflict and the threat of combat, the only kind of national ownership that usually has much practical importance is military ownership – all nations today are defined by national boundaries, and all of those boundaries are military boundaries of one kind or another. Of course, military leaders are not the actual governors of most advanced nations today because only “popular” governments are usually capable of collecting enough taxes to support modern military forces. But military leaders are not reluctant to assume that role whenever it seems necessary. And no other kind of national government or ownership today can be sustained for very long – even in America – without military participation and protection.

So any attempt by Americans to meddle in the affairs of a dysfunctional nation – even for the very “best” reasons – is usually re-

garded by that nation's owners, correctly, as a threat to their own personal and national security. In fact, international recognition of national ownership strongly implies other nations will refrain from any individual or joint action that might interfere with, or undermine such ownership – a condition on which independent Americans have always insisted most vociferously of all.

And, while many Americans may dislike the consequences of that kind of ownership in some other countries, the security of national boundaries and ownership usually does serve the purpose of international stability. Those nations may look like fortified prisons whose owners are beyond the reach of Americans who would like to “improve” their behavior. But, on the other hand, those nations are also water-tight compartments whose owners are expected to be able to “keep a lid on” their own people and problems, so they do not become a danger, nuisance or burden to people elsewhere.

Demo: But I don't think even such “practical” considerations can be used to justify the international community's tendency to recognize some of the worst kinds of dic-

tators, or just powerful gangs of rapacious thugs, as the “owners” of some unfortunate nations. Those kinds of owners have no real interest in the welfare of most of the people in those nations – just as, in American communities, the so-called owners of many families are almost as abusive or uncaring. So that kind of ownership is probably the cause of most human misery in the world today.

And, anyway, it seems to me such “ownership” in most cases is not so much a social necessity as it is the product of something like a criminal conspiracy. A gang of thugs that “owns” one nation may justify its ownership by saying it is “defending” that nation and its people from the gang of thugs that owns a neighboring nation. And, of course, the thugs in that other nation tell their victims the same thing ...

Obso: Yes, it is true that gangs of rapacious thugs, or even “democratic” mobs, who take over the ownership of some countries by military or political force are usually bogus social agents. Those gangs or mobs may claim legitimacy by saying they are defending the interests of “the people” of those nations. But such gangs seldom provide any

beneficial ownership. They are much more likely to indulge themselves in the kind of “consumptive” ownership that is only really appropriate to the ownership of material possessions – using the people and other resources of those nations to serve their own purposes until they are “used up,” or “worn out,” or just discarded. That is why other nations often try to make it clear that they are only “recognizing” the reality of such ownership, which does not necessarily imply approval.

But it is difficult to imagine any criteria Americans could use – other than their own self-interest – to decide whether people in any other independent nation are being treated well or badly, or to justify any kind of American interference. In today’s world, it is also hard to imagine why independent Americans would care about such things – the mistreatment of people in distant lands seldom seems to affect the national interests of America, or the personal interests of Americans, in any obvious way.

And it is not as if American recognition of a gang of rapacious thugs as the owner of some other nation is always detrimental to

human welfare. In fact, most nations today are ruled by rapacious gangs of one kind or another. Some of them do include elected representatives of “the people” who, in return for a share of the loot, may act as their apologists. But even the best of those gangs are always more concerned about their own interests than the interests of the people who elected those representatives.

So people in a poor, unfortunate nation may actually welcome a powerful gang of rapacious thugs as their rulers because the only alternative may be much worse. They might instead be ruled by a weak gang of thugs, whose ownership would be challenged incessantly by other rapacious gangs – including gangs from other nations. And it is that kind of ownership instability, with inevitable military or political violence, that always produces the greatest amount of human suffering.

Demo: But I don’t think you can say the international community ever fulfills its obligations to the people of any troubled nation just by “recognizing” the most powerful gang of thugs in that country as its effective rulers – even if that exped-

ient seems to be the quickest way to end a destructive civil war or foreign intrusion.

After that, it seems to me, other nations still have a real obligation to take care of the victims of such “ownership” disputes – even helping and encouraging them to rise up and throw off bogus owners so they can take care of themselves and select their own, legitimate leaders.

It is because the international community has failed to live up to that greater obligation in the past that too many countries today have become despicable places where thuggish “owners” and their relatives and friends have taken advantage of careless international recognition to set themselves up as ruling “elites” who live in obscene luxury while ignoring the plight of large numbers of people living in poverty and squalor all around them ...

Novo: Well, many Americans do seem to enjoy indulging their own personal indignation when they denounce wealthy, complacent, bogus aristocrats in other countries, who live in luxury while ignoring the plight of poor people.

But, to people in other countries, that

indignation seems strange, to say the least, because the world today, when viewed as a whole, looks very much like a larger version of the same thing – a relatively-small elite, including Americans and the people of some other wealthy nations, who live in great luxury while largely ignoring the fact that people in most other nations still live in various degrees of poverty.

And America, as a rich country in a poor world, is no more willing than rich families in poor countries to give up much of its wealth to help poor people, because making rich people poorer does not necessarily make poor people any richer. It is true, however, that Americans may be somewhat embarrassed by their own wealth, when they are reminded of the extent of poverty in other nations, and of America’s own egalitarian ideals.

And that is probably the reason Americans have always been so eager to impose their own illusion of “independence” on other nations, whether those nations want it or not. When other nations appear to be independent and free to do whatever they want to do, Americans do not need to feel

any guilt about whatever happens to those nations or their people.

But those people may be reluctant to have that kind of “independence” or bogus nondependence imposed on them because accepting it would mean recognizing that Americans are also free to do whatever they want to do. And what Americans too often seem to want to do – and have the power to do – is prevent other countries from doing the things they need to do to become less poor and powerless, because those things might conflict with America’s own interests as the world’s biggest winner.

Demo: Well, in a world of many nations ruled by an “old boy’s club” of mutually sustaining, rapacious thugs, I suppose the American government may be forced to act that way sometimes to defend its own citizens and interests. But it still seems to me those circumstances are the result of historical misfortune, rather than something any good person ever thought was desirable or necessary. If, for example, the rulers of those nations had been women instead of men, they probably would have made peace with each other a long time ago. And they

would have abolished the whole idea of ownership and all of the rapacious thugs who inevitably come with it ...

Obso: Yes, it is true most individuals in obnoxious societies do not “need” or desire any kind of ownership in times of peace and prosperity – when nations, men, women and even children seem to be able to do just about anything they want to do, with few constraints or obligations. But when misfortune and conflict return, as they inevitably do in that kind of society, those people quickly seek the protection of the most powerful thugs they can find – though, of course, they wish those thugs would disappear when they no longer seem to be needed, like the gunslingers in old “Western” American melodramas who rode off into the sunset when their dirty work was done.

However, the real reason for group ownership, once again, is to prevent such conflict by providing essential social separation – even if that separation is a negative expedient rather than part of a positive social purpose – because any community without such separation is likely to be a place of constant conflict and uncontrollable violence, like

today's international community and many American communities.

Group separation can only be accomplished through some kind of agreement among effective group owners – an association of owners in the inner circle of a civil community, or just a compromise agreement among independent owners in an obnoxious community. And, to be effective, those owners must be able to fulfill at least the negative obligations and expectations of ownership by ensuring their own behavior, and that of other members of their groups, does not violate the terms of agreement or compromise with other owners.

So, for instance, the fact that the owners of social groups are usually men, rather than women, really has more to do with biology than conspiracy. Women normally lack the competence to fulfill the basic requirements of group ownership, such as the ownership of families, simply because women are seldom willing to accept any blame for antisocial behavior by the male members of such groups. And that is probably because most women are physically or psychologically incapable of doing very much to prevent

or punish such misbehavior anyway.

But ineffectual owners, either male or female, who cannot be held fully accountable for the behavior of all members of their own groups – whether those groups are families or whole nations – are never accepted as equal members of an association of nondependent owners, or even as significant participants in political negotiations among gangs of independent thugs.

9

Moderator: Our previous question was about the ways in which all nations might be encouraged to become better members of a civil world community – and whether America, as a principal world leader, has been providing such encouragement.

But, unfortunately, just as American individuals vainly seek personal solutions for social problems, the American nation seems to keep seeking national solutions for international problems. And, for most ordinary Americans, that probably seems to be the

only sensible way to deal with “foreigners” because, besides a few national friends and allies, the only kinds of foreigners Americans know very much about are ones they are unable to ignore – dangerous international bandits and terrorists, or burdensome international refugees.

So the only kind of “non-bad” world community most Americans have ever been able to imagine is one with the most extreme national separation and dissociation – a world in which the poorest losers are locked up in their own national, water-tight compartments so their problems do not become a danger, nuisance or burden to the world’s winners, whose own national compartments are usually “high-and-dry.”

Of course, that means large numbers of people in the lowest and poorest national compartments are more likely to perish than prosper, as many of them do every day. But Americans, like people in most other nations, really do find it difficult to convince themselves that a world with fewer foreigners would be an entirely bad thing.

On the other hand, there are some very outspoken Americans who say they are not

willing to accept such a pessimistic view of international relations or the great amount of human misery it seems to condone. Those people may not be any less self-interested than other Americans, but they do seem to think the interests of ordinary people everywhere in the world would be better served by a more positive approach.

So now we need to know if those people are offering any better social alternatives. And we also need to know if those people are really helping other Americans to imagine a better national or world community that might even, someday, become a “good” community, rather than just a “non-bad” one ...

Novo: Well, the Americans who complain the most about human misery in other countries are usually America’s dependents – especially those dependents who are “independent” adolescents. And the reason for their concern is not difficult to understand.

The greatest fear of all dependents, obviously, is the fear of being abandoned by the people on whom they depend. And, for adolescents, that fear is much greater because losing the support they need also means

losing the illusion that allows them to believe they do not need such support. So dependents become very concerned when, for example, America's government tries to ignore the problems of "refugee" dependents who have been abandoned by other nations.

When an American government seems to condone the abandonment of dependents by anyone, anywhere, it raises the possibility – however remote – that the same thing might be allowed to happen to some American dependents as well. So America's dependents often claim to believe the support and protection of dependents should be recognized as a social principle that is absolute and universal.

And they think their government should be playing a much more "positive" role in the world today by using its power to impose that principle everywhere – as if it were part of the purpose of a real international community. In fact, some people seem to believe the same principle should be applied to dependent animals that are kept by people as pets or livestock – and even to certain kinds of wildlife which, while not usually dependent on humans, may be endangered by hu-

man carelessness.

But if those dependents are asked to identify the entity on which all of the world's dependents should be able to depend, they become quite confused. And if they turn to an ordinary American dictionary, which is the usual place to find authoritative definitions of such things, all they are likely to find is the euphemistic "SOS" – Something Or Someone else – as a definition of the thing on which dependents depend.

Now, everyone likes to believe that, when they are in trouble, SOS will bring assistance. And it probably will, because other people know they may need the same kind of help some day. But SOS assistance, while indiscriminate, is voluntary and temporary – it is not Something Or Someone on which any dependent can depend for long-term support and protection.

The world's human dependents would prefer, of course, that such assistance-on-request be involuntary and permanent, to ensure that none of them would ever be abandoned completely. But if such assistance were involuntary, the resulting relationship would be more parasitic than humanistic

and that, in the worst case, might seem to justify a defensive response of passive, if not active, extermination.

And even when such assistance is given voluntarily, permanent support is obviously much too expensive to be provided indiscriminately. So, for example, those of the world's dependents who happen to be Americans tend to assume assistance from the part of the world's SOS that also happens to be American will be reserved primarily for Americans.

But that, in turn, suggests America's dependents believe they have a special relationship with their own SOS which is different from the relationship between that SOS and all the rest of the world's dependents – even those international refugees whose need for assistance is much more obvious and urgent. America's dependents, however, have no idea what kind of special relationship that might be, or how it could be defined or justified.

Obso: But if it seems difficult for American dependents to find any satisfactory definition for that kind of relationship, it is probably because their perception of

that relationship is upside-down – or, more precisely, downside-up. And misperception is often the cause of delusion and confusion.

It is obviously absurd, for instance, to suggest on one hand that the principle of support for dependents should be absolute and universal but, on the other hand, that the world's wealthiest SOS should “belong” exclusively to America's dependents.

In fact, the only kind of SOS that would voluntarily bestow its favors with such discrimination is not an SOS that belongs to any particular group of dependents. Rather, it is an SOS to which a particular group of dependents belong. And, in the terminology of social relationships, that kind of SOS is called an “owner” – or some other name that means the same thing.

So if America's dependents also complain when “their” owner shares too much of its wealth with foreign dependents or refugees, it is not because Americans are any more callous or hypocritical than anyone else. They are merely reminding us why dependents have owners – and why everyone assumes America's owners, like owners everywhere, will take care of their own depend-

ents first of all, before trying to help ownerless or neglected dependents elsewhere.

Certainly, no sensible national or family owner would endanger the welfare of his own dependents by impoverishing himself in a futile attempt to become the SOS that responds to every human cry for help. Nor is there any great danger to an owner or his dependents in refusing to make such an attempt. It is true that ignoring certain kinds of problems only makes those problems worse. But the problem of ownerless dependents is usually self-limiting – human refugees tend to dispose of themselves quite rapidly when left without adequate ownership protection.

Moreover, the interests of different kinds of dependents are not always the same. International refugees may expect America's dependents, who already have the wealthiest, most powerful and most indulgent owners, to show some gratitude for their own good fortune by helping desperate refugees to find good owners as well.

But America's dependents, who take their own good fortune for granted, may be reluctant to provide such assistance. They are

much too busy trying to increase the indulgence they already receive by denying and denouncing all such dependency and ownership, as part of their claim to personal "independence." And refugees who are seeking such ownership rather than renouncing it – especially those lucky refugees who seem embarrassingly grateful to be adopted and given refuge by America – do not make very good allies in that cause.

Demo: But I don't think that is as hypocritical as you are trying to make it seem. Of course, some desperate refugees may think finding a good "owner" will solve all of their problems. But America has advanced far beyond the need for, or tolerance of such barbaric social arrangements because Americans realize there are other human needs that are much more important than mere survival.

In fact, America abolished that kind of human ownership a very long time ago – along with all the old royal tyrants, aristocrats and slave-owners whose privileged positions depended on it – because even the earliest Americans were dedicated to the higher ideal of human freedom.

And that is why I think Americans today feel a special obligation to denounce the very idea of human ownership and slavery anywhere in the world, and to demand the liberation of all people who are oppressed by such owners, so those people will be free to become their own masters ...

Obso: No, human ownership does not always mean a condition of “slavery.” Slavery is just the most consumptive, – rather than constructive – form of ownership. And neither is “freedom” the opposite of dependency.

The human need for freedom – which Americans did not invent – is merely a desire that, together with the need for security, is the contradiction that creates the human dilemma. Americans may seem to be much more concerned about freedom, which is a personal issue, than about security, which is a social issue, but that is because Americans tend to define all social issues as if they were personal issues.

So if Americans do not seem to understand some of today’s most important social issues – many of which, like refugee problems, are human ownership issues – it is

probably just because those larger issues extend far beyond the scope of their own personal interests or experience. And that is why American preoccupation with personal freedom has no real social meaning at all, unless it is treated as a particular kind of ownership issue:

***Freedom** – The two greatest crimes against humanity are to deny freedom to people who know what to do with it, or to impose it on those who don’t.*

It is true that bad, consumptive owners are the people who commit the greatest crimes against humanity, which is why human ownership has acquired such a bad reputation in some parts of the world today. And it is also true that America has helped to impose such vile ownership on some other nations because it seems to serve America’s interests to support powerful thugs or democratic mobs who can “keep a lid on” social problems in nations that are unable to cope with the “freedom” America also helped to impose on them.

Those kinds of thugs often deny freedom to their nondependent subjects, who are

fully capable of self-government, because such freedom would undermine the authority and prosperity those thugs and their supporters enjoy. The same thugs, however, are just as likely to impose unwanted freedom on many of their dependent subjects because such abandonment seems to be an easy way to “export” the burden and nuisance of large numbers of such people, as refugees, to other nations.

Obviously, there is no place in a good world community, or any good national or local community, for either of those crimes against humanity. But it is just as obvious that an attempt to abolish such crimes by abolishing ownership would only increase social chaos, violence and the suffering of “ownerless” dependents.

So if America’s dependents were really interested in improving the welfare of dependents in other nations, they would probably realize that the only practical and desirable alternative to bad ownership is either non-bad or good ownership. But that would require an understanding and appreciation of the nature of social ownership in all of its various applications, from the ownership of

pet dogs to the ownership of human families or whole nations.

Novo: And, while the ownership of pet dogs is not the most profound example of social ownership, it is something that even Americans should be able to understand. So let me begin with that, and try to provide a brief description of the nature of such ownership, which has three component parts – provision, protection and possession.

The first component of ownership is an owner’s obligation to see that his dog is provided with the necessities of life – food, shelter and so on – to the extent the dog is unable to provide those things for itself.

The second component is protection. An owner is expected to keep his dog under sufficient control, with some kind of leash if necessary, to protect it from injury by various natural hazards, or the special hazards of a modern, urban environment – and, of course, to protect other people, animals or property from injury by the dog.

The third component of ownership is possession, which really has nothing to do with dogs, but with relationships among people concerning the ownership of dogs – or any-

thing else – especially when there is some dispute about who owns what.

An ordinary American does not usually care very much whether other people “possess” dogs, any more than he cares whether other families have children or whether other nations have more or fewer inhabitants. But if someone does own a dog, other people in his neighborhood certainly do expect him to fulfill the ownership obligations of provision and protection. If an owner’s failure to live up to those expectations allows the dog to become a neighborhood nuisance or menace, that owner will be criticized by his neighbors and, in a case of extreme failure, he may be forced to give up possession of the dog.

And all of the blame for such “ownership failure” falls on the owner of the dog because that is where it belongs. A community cannot blame or punish a neglected dog – or neglected young children – for being hungry or mischievous. And a community does not allow an owner to escape blame by saying his dog really “belongs to” someone else, such as one of his dependent children.

Nor does a good community ever reward

and encourage ownership failure by allowing misguided “altruism” to obscure the bad effects of inadequate possession. If an owner knows some other family will feed his dog whenever it is hungry enough to become a nuisance, the owner will be even less likely to fulfill his obligation to feed it himself. Or if some other family were to try to take possession of the neglected dog, for the good of the dog, that might cause a disruptive and perhaps even violent ownership dispute.

Demo: But people aren’t animals and they can’t be treated as “possessions.” So, while that kind of ownership may seem appropriate for pet dogs, I can’t imagine any decent American ever allowing it to be applied to any kind of people anywhere.

It is true that, even in America today, some unfortunate people may find themselves trapped in obnoxious families, in something like abusive “owner-dependent” relationships. But that is why American society provides special places of refuge to which those people are encouraged to escape – and even many places of refuge for abused dogs and other animals ...

Obso: But dependents who want to

escape from bad ownership cannot just repudiate the idea of ownership because, obviously, “ownerless” dependents are people who have no one on whom they can depend:

***Nondependence** – The only real escape from dependency is not escape from ownership but growth into ownership.*

Dependents with bad owners may seek better ownership, but better owners may be very difficult to find. Or, failing that, they may seek to escape from dependency. But even that is not an escape from ownership. The only people who ever really “escape” from dependency are people who “grow up” to become self-owned. And the obligations of self-ownership are exactly the same as those of any other kind of ownership – provision, protection and possession.

Self-owned people are nondependent people who can support themselves, so they are not a burden to others. They are people who have enough self-control to protect themselves from obvious hazards, and to protect others from themselves, so they are not a nuisance or danger to other people in a civil community. And self-owned people are suffi-

ciently self-possessed to accept blame for their own shortcomings and transgressions, rather than trying to blame them on someone else.

Some dependent people, especially “independent” adolescents, may desire the privileges of self-ownership, but that desire is obviously meaningless if they are incapable of fulfilling the basic requirements of self-support, self-control and self-possession. And dependents who are encouraged to run away from bad owners before they are capable of self-ownership usually just become involuntary additions to America’s huge and growing accumulation of domestic refugees – a burden that has become the greatest nuisance, as well as one of the most controversial political issues, in many American communities today.

Demo: But I think it is quite proper for those people to become a very great “nuisance,” if that is what is required to awaken communities to their social obligation to help people who cannot help themselves ...

Obso: But, again, there is no social solution for most “refugee problems” be-

cause those are personal problems, not social problems. Dependents who run away from truly bad homes often feel forced to do so because they have already, in effect, been “disowned” by someone who is unable or unwilling to fulfill ordinary ownership obligations. And making it seem easier for dependents to run away from bad owners, by providing places of “refuge” or some other kind of “social” ownership, just makes it that much easier for people to abandon unwanted dependents – creating even more ownerless refugees with even more problems.

Demo: But those American “refugees” are not looking for any kind of “owner” or special treatment. All they want or need, it seems to me, is enough help to allow them to live their own lives like everyone else ...

Obso: Yes, and they would like to get that help from some indefinable American “SOS” that will support and protect them without trying to tell them what to do. But that is merely an adolescent fantasy. In fact, it is no less obvious in America than anywhere else in the world why dependents need owners to support and protect them. So that is not a real issue.

The real question, especially in an obnoxious society like America’s, is just the opposite. Obviously, a person must be able to attain self-ownership before he is capable of undertaking the ownership of dependents as well. But why would anyone who has attained the “freedom” of self-ownership either want or “need” to assume the burden or nuisance of owning dependents? And, if he acquires dependents inadvertently, why should he feel any obligation to treat those dependents any better than his own convenience permits?

Novo: Yes, we should keep in mind that a “community” is just an association of group owners in which ownership is voluntary and dependency is involuntary – there is no social relationship in which dependency is voluntary and ownership involuntary. And the abuse or neglect of dependents by consumptive owners in an obnoxious community does not create any social obligation for other owners to adopt those dependents – any more than the abuse or abandonment of people in other nations creates any real obligation for America to adopt refugees from those nations.

In America today, family “owners” usually acquire or produce dependents for the same reason they acquire material possessions – because it seems to serve their own personal purposes to do so. And many of those owners feel quite free to abandon dependents, like “worn out” material possessions, whenever such ownership no longer seems to serve their personal purposes. It is true, in many cases, that the acquisition of dependents and other possessions may be inspired by some very intense personal passions and purposes. But personal passions and purposes tend to be superficial and transitory.

In fact, the only personal purpose that prevents the abandonment of even more dependents by family owners in obnoxious societies like America’s is one that comes from the very lowest level of human relationships – or a level even lower than that:

Ownership – *Owners have dependents because dependents always pick the best men for the job.*

Among groups of “social” animals, for example, females have always sought the protection of dominant males as the best way to

ensure the survival of themselves and their offspring. So the ability to attract and protect dependents became, in turn, an important confirmation of animal dominance.

Likewise, in the earliest human communities, men probably sought to increase their own social status by attracting the most desirable females – which, along with the children they could produce, were the only possessions that could be used as significant symbols of personal superiority.

Of course, each community has its own definitions of “status” and “desirable.” In materialistic American terms, for example, the wealthiest men usually have the most expensive-looking wives because those men think the possession of expensive wives and children is a good way to demonstrate their own “success.” And men who are unable or unwilling to make their dependents look or feel expensive enough may be subject to public ridicule and contempt – especially by their own consumptive dependents ...

Demo: Well, I can see how it may have served the purposes of primitive men to use the ownership of women and children as a measure of their own self-importance.

And I suppose women in the most primitive societies may have been so helpless they had to accept such ownership, which implied they were no more than mere possessions of their fathers or husbands.

But American women and children today, along with more and more enlightened men, are no longer willing to tolerate any kind of “dependency” that requires anyone to serve the personal purposes of any owner, at the expense of their own personal interests. And those people have become a political force in America today that is much too powerful for anyone to try to ignore ...

Obso: But again, that political “purpose” is merely a collective personal purpose, not a social purpose. Consumptive dependents who think their personal purposes are more important than any social purposes only encourage consumptive owners to think their personal purposes are more important than any social obligations. And dependents who think politicians or governments would be better owners for domestic refugees are usually disappointed because political ownership is always the most consumptive and least reliable kind of own-

ership.

Moreover, there is no political solution for the “problem” of America’s flood of domestic refugees because, in fact, the real problem lies much farther “upstream” – in the purposelessness of American families and the selfishness of their members, which causes the disintegration or abandonment of so many of those families. And the only solution for that kind of problem is positive social expectations that would serve the interests of everyone – owners, dependents and their community.

Demo: But I still don’t see how even the most positive “social” expectations could make any difference, as long as selfish “owners” of families or nations are free to ignore those expectations ...

Novo: That’s right. The only way to encourage good ownership is with good expectations, but those good expectations are only effective in a community that has a good social purpose to justify and enforce such expectations. American communities do not have such social purposes, so their dependents may not have very good owners. But there are special circumstances in

which even some American communities have found practical purposes that have a positive effect on the fulfillment of ownership obligations.

In an Arctic or rural community, for example, where sled-dogs or sheepdogs are helpful human assistants rather than just pets, the social expectations of dog ownership are much more positive, and much more strictly enforced, because the welfare of dogs can directly affect human welfare as well. So those working dogs are regarded as being very valuable possessions, and are treated accordingly, by their owners and everyone else.

Unfortunately, most of America's human dependents today seem to want to be treated as pampered pets, rather than productive family partners. And it is true that consumptive owners often prefer their dependents to be pets, rather than partners, because pets look more expensive than partners, which may be the only reason an owner has dependents.

But a good, civil community is never governed by personal purposes and cannot afford to have any "pet" members. A real com-

munity can only afford to include individuals and groups whose existence is a benefit – or has been a benefit, or will be a benefit – rather than a burden to that community.

Demo: But I don't think you can ignore the fact that social "benefit" is also a matter of personal perception. The social contributions of American women, for example, are at least as valuable as those of men. But in America's male-dominated society, women's contributions have always been greatly undervalued.

It is only through their own efforts that American women have finally begun to attain the independence, recognition and social benefits they deserve. And, it seems to me, if we are really trying to invent a better kind of society, or a good international community which Americans might someday be willing to join, it will have to be one that recognizes all of those enlightened social accomplishments – not something that only encourages other, unenlightened people and nations to cling to primitive and barbarous social practices that most modern Americans will no longer tolerate ...

Novo: No, I disagree with that. If

anything, I think American men tend to greatly overestimate the value of women's "social" contributions. What American men underestimate so greatly is the value of a civil society. But an American society in which women became bigger "winners" by making men bigger "losers" would be no less obnoxious than a society where men look like winners and women feel like losers.

In fact, the only way women could ever become bigger "winners" than men in any obnoxious society would be by becoming even more anti-social than men. And, while I freely admit my own male bias in such matters, I just do not think ordinary women – especially mothers – will ever be capable of becoming that selfish and cynical.

But that is their advantage, not a disadvantage because, it seems to me, the only good way for dependent American women to advance their own personal interests, the interests of their children and other dependents, and the interests of dependents everywhere else in the world, is by helping to promote the value of good, civil societies – societies in which everyone is a benefactor-beneficiary and where all real social contribu-

tions by men, women and children, whether owners or dependents, eventually bring commensurate recognition and rewards.

Demo: Well, that sounds very idealistic, but I doubt if it will ever be practical. And I certainly do not believe trying to take America back to the days when "traditional" families and other groups were ruled by corrupt little paternal dictators would make American society any better.

Of course, you will say good families would have good owners, rather than bad owners. But, it seems to me, the only way family "owners" could ever be compelled to behave like good owners would be by requiring all owners to have their own good owners, who could tell them how to behave. And then those owners would also need to have good owners. So who, finally, would own all those owners ... ?

Obso: That is not quite right. We have been talking about owner-dependent relationships as a social mechanism used by all good communities – and imitated by many bad ones, like the world community – to reduce conflict by providing essential social separation among different individuals

and groups. But no one has suggested that just the use of such devices could make a bad society any better, in spite of itself.

You do, however, seem to be learning something – at least you are beginning to stumble onto some of the right questions.

10

Moderator: Our previous question was about those people who say they believe the American government could greatly reduce human misery everywhere in the world by insisting that governments in other countries, or Something Or Someone else, be required to give dependent people in those countries the same special privileges America's democratic government is required to give its own dependents. But, besides being unrealistic, that belief seems to be based on little more than the dubious assumption that what is good for America's dependents is good for America, and what is good for America is good for the whole world.

America's dependents may decry the kind

of social ownership that makes their special privileges possible, but it does seem clear that good ownership is an essential prerequisite for all stable and beneficial social relationships – whether it is nondependent individual self-ownership, the ownership of groups of voluntary associates, or the voluntary ownership of groups of involuntary dependents.

Of course, there is always a danger, as Ms. Demo pointed out, that bad, consumptive group owners or governors may abuse their authority by trying to turn themselves into petty, personal dictators. And, certainly, nations ruled by petty dictators today are not good examples of either social stability or social benefit.

So now we need to know how strong, civil communities that did, and sometimes still do, manage to achieve so much real social harmony, stability and benefit, were able to do so without allowing strong leaders – or the owners of involuntary subgroups like families – to become the kind of bad, oppressive dictators that Ms. Demo and most Americans seem to fear so much ...

Novo: Well, it is true that most

Americans, because of their own experiences, seem to fear the idea of a society that is too strong and healthy because they think such a society would have a natural tendency to become tyrannical and oppressive. But, again, that is because the pedestal at the center of the inner circle of America's "society" is occupied not by any social purpose but by a consumptive government that has its own purposes. And Americans have seen that obnoxious inner circle transform itself from something which, in the beginning, was a relatively unimportant round table, into an insatiable "black hole," growing ever larger and larger, and consuming more and more of everything other people need to serve their own purposes.

That is why so many Americans seem to think the only way to protect their own interests is by trying to dissociate themselves from that inner circle, or by trying to keep it as isolated and weak as possible. But that is no real solution because a weak society, like a sick person, may not survive very long. Or it may survive only in a state of chronic distress or disability, unable to serve the purposes of any but a few of its most powerful or

fortunate members.

The inner circle of a good, healthy society, on the other hand, does serve the purposes of all of its members because it is a positive association that gives everyone more than they could expect to attain by their own efforts, or by being somewhere else – benefits that only increase as an association and its leadership become stronger and more successful. And that kind of society cannot become oppressive because, to be healthy, a good association must have a good purpose that gives nondependent people a good reason to join and support a community voluntarily – a purpose that takes precedence over the personal purposes of any of its members, including its leaders.

Demo: But I think experience everywhere has proved again and again that people who trust any kind of society or its leaders too much, or allow them to become too powerful, are just inviting corruption and oppression ...

Obso: It is true that, if people are careless enough to allow a good social purpose to be corrupted, their community and its leaders probably will become obnoxious

and oppressive. But, if that happens, a voluntary community's members can just go somewhere else.

America's local communities, for instance, are less oppressive than they might be because most Americans are able to choose the communities in which they will reside. But, of course, it has become difficult for people who want to live in good, civil communities to find such places because American communities are not as free to choose the people who will be allowed to live there.

And that is because misguided efforts to prevent American communities from excluding certain kinds of people surreptitiously, for the wrong reasons, have made it more difficult for communities to exclude certain kinds of people openly, for the right reasons – which every good community or association must be able to do, if it is to avoid becoming involuntary and obnoxious.

Novo: Yes, to prevent corruption and oppression, membership in a good, civil community is always voluntary – for both members and the community. And the voluntary members of such communities don't need much additional social protection be-

cause they know the most effective personal protection is self-control, which helps them to avoid foolish risks and helps all of them to protect each other from themselves.

Obso: And they exercise that self-control not because any authority forces them to do so but because they know it is the “right thing to do,” for the benefit of their community and all of its members.

Demo: Well, Americans may disagree about which kinds of social arrangements are “good” or “bad.” But, when it comes to “right” and “wrong,” I think there is one thing on which they all agree. That is, any society that even attempts to tell its members what is right or wrong must surely be a dictatorial and oppressive society, which is not good for anyone ...

Obso: No, in fact, societies in which people “do the right things” are much less dictatorial and oppressive than societies like America's, where people just do their “own” things. In good communities, the “right thing to do” is not something that is imposed on people by someone else. It is something those people impose on themselves voluntarily, as an alternative to social chaos:

Conventions – *Universal Time is the right time because it is more useful than the wrong time, which may seem like the right time to someone who thinks the sun revolves around him.*

Novo: Yes, there may be personal disputes about “right versus wrong” but civil communities can use their own good purposes to resolve such disputes. And even obnoxious communities, which have no social purpose, may try to imitate that method as a way to reduce conflict and confusion.

Before the invention of reliable, inexpensive time-keeping devices in the 18s century, for example, even the “right time” was something of a social preoccupation in communities in many countries. Whenever people gathered, they compared their unreliable watches and usually found all of those watches showed different times. That caused unnecessary confusion, so those people often consulted a time-keeper of recognized authority, such as a church clock or bell, and reset their watches accordingly.

While that was a clear case of “right versus wrong” and one that had real social

significance, it was neither complicated nor controversial. No great fault was found in anyone who had the “wrong” time, and it was not difficult for anyone to make adjustments to conform with the “right” time. Everyone recognized the benefits of a single time standard for the synchronization of social activities in their community, even if it created some personal inconvenience.

Demo: Everyone, I imagine, except those people who had superior watches that were more accurate than the church clock – but had to keep changing them anyway, to conform to the community’s “dictated” standard ...

Novo: No, accuracy was never a real issue because there have always been many different kinds of accuracy in time standards. There is star time and solar time, and local time and Standard Time, and so on. So it was not important whether the old church clock was perfectly accurate – just that it was visible to anyone who wanted to know what time other people were using.

An astronomer may have claimed his time standard was much better than the time used by other people. And that may have

been true, if he was only concerned about his own purposes. But if he tried to use his own standard for social purposes and showed up for meetings at the wrong time, he would have been regarded, properly, as an arrogant fool.

Obso: Yes, and strong, “traditional” communities had many standard practices of that kind, derived from their own social purposes. Those practices became conventions in those communities and those conventions were the most important influence on the beliefs of all members of those communities about which kinds of social behavior were the “right” things to do.

Those conventions made all human relationships within healthy communities and families much more predictable and dependable and helped to prevent many misunderstandings and transgressions that might have led to personal and social conflict. And those conventions were not “oppressive” because they simply confirmed what was already accepted – they were “bottom-up,” voluntary practices, not “top-down” rules imposed by some dictator.

Demo: But I don’t think anyone

would voluntarily “go along” with conventional practices if doing so did not serve their own personal purposes. So it seems to me more accurate to say conventions may be useful if they are a true, current, “bottom-up” reflection of what most people in a community believe to be the “right things to do.” No American, for example, would ever suggest something is the right thing to do just because it is the conventional thing to do ...

Novo: No, you have that upside-down. A “bottom-up” community is not one in which each individual decides for himself what is right and wrong. “Right” and “wrong” are social concepts, not personal preferences. A bottom-up community is one in which everyone who is capable of doing so participates in the validation of that community’s top-level, social purpose by freely choosing to make a commitment to serve that purpose. But, after that, it is the purpose, not the people, which will determine what is right and wrong.

And anyone who is unwilling to subordinate his personal purposes to that greater social purpose is usually excluded from the inner circle of a real, civil community because

that is how a good community prevents a strong leader – or a weak leader held hostage by some strong political faction – from trying to impose his own purposes on that community, from the top down.

Demo: But it seems to me that is exactly the way a democratic society is supposed to work. You may say weak leaders are “held hostage” by political factions. But what you really mean is that democratic leaders are, quite properly, subject to the “will of the people.” And I would say that is the only valid basis for any kind of authority or social conventions ...

Obso: No, there is an important difference. The imitation “conventions” used by obnoxious communities are not derived from any real social purpose. They are just temporary, nonsensical “fads” and “fashions” that may occasionally seem to serve social purposes, but only inadvertently.

People in an obnoxious community who once depended on a church clock for the “right time,” for instance, did not do so just because the church was popular, but because its clock seemed to serve a higher purpose. It was used by the church for the

timing of prayers, and those prayers were addressed to an authority which, it was assumed, could not be fooled by a clock that was excessively inaccurate.

Likewise, it was once fashionable for people to believe newspapers served a useful social purpose, so Americans adopted the idea of a “free press” as a social standard, and so on. But then the owners of newspapers, like the owners of churches, discovered they could make more money by serving their own purposes, rather than those inadvertent social purposes – just as other people in weak, unhealthy societies found ways to corrupt such social standards as money and language to serve their own purposes. And that is why people in obnoxious communities often find, to their dismay, that their inadvertent, popular social standards are being used to justify anti-social behavior that clearly contradicts the purposes those standards were originally expected to serve.

Novo: And, of course, as early America’s small towns became much bigger and less isolated – because of such things as railways and electrical communication that greatly expanded the range of social inter-

action – inadvertent local standards were no longer adequate anyway. Even if people in bigger towns, with many churches and clocks, managed to agree on a single time standard, it was impossible to properly organize large-scale transportation and communication services among many separate towns when each of them had its own “local” time.

A good way to resolve that problem for all communities, once and for all, while serving the purpose of encouraging the greatest possible range of coordinated social interaction, would have been the adoption of a single time standard for the whole world. In the 18th century, however, the only widely recognized “universal time” also happened to be the local time in England, where longitude was invented. But that just seemed to serve the purposes of the British Empire, which was anathema to Americans. So America instead adopted a compromise called Standard Time, which attempted to divide the country, and the rest of the world, into democratic time “zones,” so people in every zone could pretend their time was the right time – around which the sun, and the rest of

the world, seemed to revolve.

But that compromise was a great nonsense that just set off all kinds of boundary disputes, with communities “defecting” back and forth from one zone to another, until time zone boundaries became convoluted lines, twisting and turning through a maze of conflicting political interests, producing an endless accumulation of complicated rules and regulations that made no sense to anyone. And that is why most transportation and communication services today, and many other people who cannot afford that kind of political nonsense, just use Universal Time instead because it is the only time that is recognized as the “right” time by everyone whose interests extend beyond their own, parochial parts of the world.

Demo: But I don’t think you can say the Standard Time compromise was just nonsense – it still seems quite sensible to most Americans today. In fact, sensible compromise has always been the most important element in all of America’s democratic traditions. And, it seems to me, those traditions have been a lot more sensible and beneficial, and much less oppressive, than the

“uncompromising” traditions that are sometimes forced on unwilling people by zealots in other countries ...

Obso: But that does not mean temporary “compromise” standards are less oppressive than the real thing. In fact, compromise is only necessary in very sick, purposeless societies where there is constant warfare among many political factions – each of which is attempting to impose its own standards on all others. And, once again, a compromise is useful only if it can serve as a truce among those conflicting factions. But the only kind of truce that is usually acceptable to all factions is one that the leaders of each faction can claim to be a “victory” for themselves and a defeat for their enemies. And any agreement which is open to so many different interpretations is one that must be full of nonsense.

To be given any effect, that nonsense must also be translated into nonsensical “laws” that can be enforced on everyone. And the enforcement of nonsensical laws is always oppressive because no one knows what those laws are supposed to mean – judges chosen by the strongest factions just “interpret”

that nonsense to mean anything they want it to mean. And if many people object to such oppression, or seek to amend such laws to make them seem less nonsensical, that just produces even more conflict and controversy which is also full of nonsense.

In modern America, for instance, the opposing sides of a political dispute are often called “conservatives” and “liberals.” Conservatives are people who want to conserve existing laws because the political compromise those laws represent serves their purposes well enough. Liberals are people who want to “liberate” themselves and others from some old, nonsensical laws by replacing those laws with some new kind of nonsense, creating a new compromise that seems to serve their purposes better.

So conservatives are often made to look foolish in political debates because they are trying to defend old nonsense that is obviously indefensible. But, while liberals may look less foolish because their nonsense is newer and not yet discredited, each day’s successful liberals are doomed to become tomorrow’s conservatives, fighting a two-front war to defend their new nonsense against

older, “reactionary” nonsense on one side and even newer nonsense being advocated by the next “new wave” of liberals on the other. And so on, in endless, destructive confusion.

That is why it was really quite fortunate, in terms of their own survival, that the earliest societies did not have written languages and laws, and were not burdened with all that nonsense and confusion. Their simple, unwritten, social conventions were carried in the memories of all members of the community, so no one was ever in doubt about the right things to do.

And those unwritten conventions were another form of protection against oppressive dictators or zealots who tried to impose self-serving, “top-down” rules that did not serve any real social purpose, or which contradicted traditions that did serve such purposes. No dictator had the power to force people to remember bad or stupid unwritten rules. So all such rules, like most stupid American fads and fashions, were soon forgotten, with little lasting effect.

Demo: Well, America may have too many laws, and it might be nice if some laws

left behind by obsolete fads and fashions could be made to disappear so easily. But, as I think you know, American lawmaking is a progressive, evolutionary process by which new, more-enlightened social rules have gradually been replacing older, more primitive social practices and attitudes.

So it seems to me that human memory, rather than being an adequate repository for social rules, is often the main hindrance to the improvement of those rules. That is why the greatest importance of many new laws is their educational value – helping people to understand what will be expected of them in the future or telling them, if necessary, how to do the correct things in more enlightened social circumstances ...

Obso: No, you were right when you said America already has too many laws, because that is the real problem. Those laws, piling compromise upon compromise, from the top down, have become a gargantuan maze of incomprehensible nonsense that offers no guidance to anyone about the right things to do – which is why Americans today are frequently confronted with situations where they find that doing the “right” thing

is not “legal,” and *vice versa*. So each American just does what seems like the “right” thing to him, according to his own purposes – or whatever he thinks he can legally “get away” with.

In fact, the only kind of laws that can ever affect anyone’s fundamental beliefs or behavior are laws that are perfectly transparent. In a healthy, civil society, everyone can easily “see through” social rules to the conventions from which those rules were derived, and through those conventions to the social purpose they serve.

In an obnoxious society, however, government law-makers just “make up” laws to serve their own purposes. And one of those purposes is to surround the government with an opaque, protective shell of laws which allows it to maintain the illusion that it is also serving some greater social purpose – though that purpose is never revealed nor explained to anyone except certain political “insiders.”

So, again, such oppressive, top-down governance by a bogus inner circle – even if it includes some elected apologists – is just the opposite of a bottom-up, civil society where

all group owners and other voluntary members participate directly in the development and destruction of social rules. And transparent, bottom-up rules are the only kind that are really effective because those are the only rules group owners will regard as being the right things for them to do, and the only kind of rules that have any “educational” value for dependents, who also need a better reason for obeying rules than fear of punishment if they don’t.

Demo: But if group owners are at the “bottom” of your kind of society, I would like to know where that leaves “involuntary” members – besides being out of sight and out of mind somewhere below that social floor, with no protection at all from oppression by those owners ...

Obso: No, the word “oppression” is not really applicable to a community’s involuntary members. Adolescent children, for instance, may think they are being “oppressed” when the people who support and protect them also try to tell them what to do. But the simple solution for that kind of oppression is for the child to do what he is told to do, and grow up to become a nondepend-

ent, voluntary member of his community and its inner circle ...

Demo: But I doubt very much that involuntary members of any community would ever get the support and protection they need unless they or their representatives were members of the community's inner circle, where they could force "voluntary" members to recognize that the support and protection of involuntary members is the most important part of any good community's central social purpose ...

Obso: Of course, involuntary dependents, like the members of every other subgroup or faction in an obnoxious community, think they are the ones who should be placed on the pedestal at the center of their community's inner circle. But, in fact, there is no real society where the support and protection of involuntary, as well as voluntary members is part of its central purpose. And no society ever provides such support and protection just because some people think they are "good" things to do.

In order to receive any "social" support and protection, involuntary members of a community would have to serve some social

purpose. But obnoxious societies have no such purpose. So, to receive any kind of protection in those societies, dependents can only try to serve some owner's personal purposes, some employer's commercial purposes, or some government's political purposes. And those are consumptive purposes that may not provide much security for any but the most fortunate dependents.

A good, civil society, on the other hand, does have a good purpose, so it can usually provide social protection for involuntary members who serve that purpose. But it cannot do that directly. And it is not done for unselfish reasons. It is done because the support and protection of involuntary members are the means by which a civil society seeks to attain its own ends, which include the support and protection of its own good health and social purpose.

Obviously, a "good" community's selfish purpose must be a *positive* purpose, if it is to produce and provide any social benefits, directly or indirectly. But even a positive purpose is not sufficient unless it is also a *permanent* purpose. Otherwise, people like consumptive owners and consumptive depend-

ents, who are interested only in their own personal purposes, will just try to “use up” all of their society’s resources and benefits within their own lifetimes, leaving nothing behind but their garbage and debts. That is the kind of “disposable” society recent generations of Americans inherited from their predecessors, and probably intend to leave to their even-less-fortunate descendants.

But in a civil society, which has a permanent purpose, each generation serves that purpose, leaving behind more than it started with. In a world of impermanent people, however, the only way a healthy community can sustain such a positive, beneficial purpose with any permanence is by being able to reproduce itself, its purpose and its benefits, in more or less the same form, from one generation to the next. And, to do that, a healthy society needs good, healthy families, which are the natural instruments of human reproduction and acculturation in all kinds of communities.

Novo: Yes, but members of obnoxious “societies” like America’s do not really care whether their society is healthy or sick, or whether it will live or die when they are

gone. So they think they can afford to be careless about whether other members of their communities – especially ownerless, involuntary members who seem to be a nuisance or burden – will live or die, or live in misery and oppression.

Members of a good, civil community are not like that because they expect all family owners to act as agents of that community’s permanent social purpose by providing proper support and protection for all dependents – especially those young dependents on whom the community must eventually depend for its own survival, and other family members on whom those children depend.

Modern American “society,” which is more obnoxious than civil, does not provide that kind of support for “traditional” families. And that is why America no longer has many real families – except for some extended families that exist for special financial, cultural or criminal purposes. And those exceptions have become so unusual they sometimes seem to be ominously un-American.

Instead of families, America has “marriages” – simple associations of consenting partners in which the accoutrements of hu-

man reproduction are treated as if they are little more than a special kind of adult entertainment, without any social significance. And those associations are often disbanded carelessly, without much injury or regret, when their entertainment value is “used up,” or some other kind of association or activity looks as if it would be more fun.

Obso: But a marriage that produces children is no longer a simple, disposable, voluntary association. It is a group with involuntary members. And, while that change does not alter the legal status of an American marriage, it does invoke some unwritten social expectations about the proper conduct of members of involuntary groups – including the expectation that people who voluntarily join or create involuntary groups should not so thoughtlessly repudiate that membership or abandon their dependents.

In America, of course, those expectations do not have the support of written laws because American laws do not recognize any “family” purpose that is greater than the purposes of individual family members. But most Americans still think those expectations are the “right things to do” because

they remember the conventions from which they were derived – conventions that they or their ancestors brought with them to America from other societies where it was conventional for each family or other involuntary group to have an owner who could be held accountable for the support, protection and acculturation of involuntary, dependent children, to ensure the family as a whole would be a benefit, rather than a burden, to its community.

Demo: But an American marriage is a personal commitment, undertaken voluntarily. It does not imply acceptance of the possibility of being forced into involuntary membership in an oppressive little family dictatorship, just because that kind of family might seem to serve some expedient “social” purpose ...

Obso: No, there is no such thing as a “personal” commitment – people change, and no one can make a commitment to a moving target. That is why marriage vows, to mean anything, must be commitments made by both men and women to some permanent, higher purpose and the expectations that are derived from that purpose.

That kind of marriage can provide the foundation for a real family. And that kind of family is actually the least oppressive kind of involuntary group because a family owner who is committed to serving a social purpose, rather than just his own personal purposes, can also act as a family arbiter. In an involuntary group without such an arbiter, the only way personal conflict can be resolved is through combat that usually goes on and on until family members finally submit to the tyrannical dominance of the strongest individual – man, woman or child – or until some kind of negotiation leads to a temporary compromise that satisfies no one. Or, more and more often, families exhausted by that kind of combat simply fall apart, adding their dependent members to America's growing multitude of matrimonial refugees.

It is true that, even in an obnoxious, un-supportive society like America's, the members of some marriages find an alternative to family combat or disintegration by adopting inadvertent standards of behavior that help both owners and members to do the right things. The children of "religious" fam-

ilies, for instance, are often better behaved, and better treated, than children in families without such inadvertent standards. And that good effect can be quite persistent – even after those children come to realize their church is serving no real social purpose, but only its own purposes.

Demo: But if you don't think modern American laws can help people do the right things, I don't see how you can seriously suggest today's churches, with their quaint, old-fashioned "Thou shalt nots," could possibly be any more influential ...

Novo: No, American churches, unlike the American government, do not have the power to enforce opaque, self-serving rules on their members. But that may be why "old-fashioned" church rules have had so much more real influence on people's beliefs and behavior.

Church membership in America was never entirely compulsory, so attempts by powerful "immigrant" churches to impose elaborate, oppressive rules on American communities were never entirely successful. And distinctively American churches that became more successful and influential

were not something new. They were more influential because their rules, conventions and fundamental purposes, like those of older, less-powerful churches, were much more transparent and their inner circles much more accessible.

Obso: In fact, some of the most influential American churches have very few written rules. Instead, they use a social device, borrowed from “preliterate” societies, that is much more effective than written rules in helping their members to understand and remember permanent conventions and social purposes – and in helping parents to pass that understanding on to their children:

***Fictions** – People learn much of what they believe from their own experience, and even more from experiences no one ever had.*

As an aid to understanding and memory, preliterate communities and families used stories – stories that were passed down orally from generation to generation, recounting the real and imaginary experiences of their ancestors. And every fictional story, then as

now, contained a “lesson” about the probable consequences of certain kinds of behavior, both for the individual and for the social group to which he belonged.

In that kind of community, children heard those stories from their own parents, and also saw those stories acted out in the form of social rituals. Through the lessons of those stories, children learned about the purpose of their society and about what was expected of its members.

Demo: I suppose young people have always had to put up with their parents’ fictional stories about the “good old days.” But do you really think young people, even in the earliest societies, ever took any of those stories seriously ... ?

Obso: Well, besides the fact young children usually believe what their parents tell them, those stories and their lessons also gained authority as they were passed down from generation to generation, with further elaboration and refinement. Those were not just the fads and fashions of one generation, which young people of the next generation felt free to replace with their own. Those were ancient traditions that

young people knew had been respected long before they were born and would still be respected long after they were dead, for as long as their society survived.

And the greatest social importance of those conventions was probably the fact that they were standards which existed in collective memory, apart from any particular leader or family owner. So the protective force of those conventions could be invoked, for instance, by any member of a community or family in times of crisis – such as a contested change of leadership or ownership, or reckless new ownership – to help control personal purposes and ambitions that might endanger community or family stability and welfare.

Demo: All right, I can see how it may have been an advantage for primitive societies to pass on the benefits of social experience in the form of traditions, because they had no other way to do it. But the use of “fictions” would have tended to preserve a lot of superstition and other old nonsense – such as the idea that dead ancestors could haunt families, and protect or punish family members according to how well they con-

formed to traditional standards.

Actually, I think most of those fantastic superstitions were simply a reflection of the ignorance of the people who invented them. And modern, enlightened societies have managed to sweep away most of that ignorance and superstition, replacing such things with social management based on a better understanding of social and political realities, not old fictions ...

Obso: Well, some of the earliest fictions may seem quite fantastic today, but Americans cannot feel superior about that. Even the most “modern” societies still use many fantastic fictions – often because fiction is the only way to convey social insights that are beyond the scope of ordinary experience, or to implement social devices that are beyond the power of written laws.

Money, for instance, is an important social device that is a pure fiction, existing only in the minds of people who believe it exists. And when people stop believing in its existence – as happens occasionally – money simply ceases to exist, despite all of the laws which purport to govern its existence.

Demo: No, I am not talking about

those kinds of fictions. I mean such foolish, archaic fictions as those which suggest, for example, that women and children are fragile, inferior creatures who cannot survive without the protection of egotistical, superior men ...

Novo: But those are not the kinds of fictions that serve any social purpose in a civil society. They are just imitation fictions that tend to persist in obnoxious societies because they are about the only effective restraints available in purposeless families where personal conflicts are resolved by combat rather than arbitration.

Males in combat are naturally inclined to use physical force. But it is dangerous for a man to use physical force in conflict with a woman because she usually lacks the physical size and strength necessary to defend herself. And, likewise, men are not usually equipped to defend themselves against the kinds of psychological weapons women commonly use in combat with each other, such as some of the more vicious forms of character assassination.

So, while quaint old fictions about fragile females and fragile male “egos” may seem

silly today, they cannot be discarded carelessly by societies like America’s because they are among the few things that help keep the casualties of family combat from becoming even greater. No one is asked to believe those fictions, and probably no one ever did. People in obnoxious societies are only asked to behave “as if” they believe those fictions, because that is less damaging than any “realistic” alternative.

Demo: But the trouble with those kinds of fictions is that they also obscure some real social issues that should not be ignored. I’m sure you appreciate that the “fragile female” myth, for example, is still being used to deny many American women the opportunities and social status they deserve ...

Novo: Perhaps, but most of those issues can only be addressed usefully as matters of family or community purpose, not as personal problems. The animosity created by a great debate about the balance of family benefits between men and women, for example, just reduces those benefits for both, or destroys more families. But serious consideration of the social purposes of fami-

lies, and the different kinds of contributions that men and women can make to serve those purposes, would increase the security and benefits of family life for everyone in a community.

Obso: And that is just the most trivial consideration. If a war-between-the-sexes, which Americans tend to treat as a subject of comedy, ever became serious, it would threaten the very basis of human and social reproduction. So the purpose of sexual war-mongers who promote such conflict, and even find ways to benefit personally from it, is clearly not a human purpose.

People with such “subhuman” purposes are all too common in obnoxious societies. And the presence of subhuman degenerates is often the greatest single threat to the social health of civil communities – which soon become obnoxious communities if they do not face the threat of such degeneracy squarely, and deal with it ruthlessly.

Novo: Well, no one can say what threatens the purpose of a community without knowing what that purpose is. So, once again, we are back to where we started: virtually all social issues, finally, are ques-

tions of social purpose.

That simple truth, and the many problems that afflict people who try to ignore it, are usually fairly obvious to thoughtful people just about everywhere. Even in places like America, one of the more fashionable social activities for the past few decades has been the laborious discussion and construction of elaborate “mission statements” for various organizations, because many people do realize no human organization can accomplish very much if it does not have some sense of purpose and direction.

Obso: Yes, it is probably true that many, if not most of the Americans in our audience today already did understand the importance of social purposes before they came on this cruise. And they probably even thought it would be nice if American society had more of those purposes – just as some people think it would be nice if the Antarctic continent had more trees and less ice.

It hardly seems necessary to explain why planting trees in Antarctica would not make the ice go away. But even the most thoughtful Americans still seem to find it difficult to understand why the planting of “mission

statements” in American organizations has not had the good effect of making those organizations, or American society as a whole, much less obnoxious.

If our introductory discussion here today has accomplished anything, however, it will have helped those people to understand better why America’s social climate causes social purposes, like trees in Antarctica, to wither and die so quickly. They may by now even understand why America’s social climate makes it almost impossible for any “mission statement” to include a real social purpose. A typical American mission statement is just an attempt to find a temporary, compromise truce among some organization’s warring political factions or – like the preamble to the American Constitution – is just a pile of pious platitudes that are acceptable to everybody because they do not mean anything to anybody.

Modern America does provide many lessons about all of the things that can go wrong in a dysfunctional society. Obnoxious “green” societies may even provide some in-

teresting examples of accidental “success” in avoiding poisonous purposes by remaining mostly purposeless. But America and its obnoxious social ancestors, reaching right back to the beginning of recorded human history, have never been good places to look for positive, constructive solutions for the most important social problems.

To find those good solutions, which will be needed as parts of any better social model for the future, we should be looking instead at the “red-orange” end of the social spectrum and the model that, by serving humanity’s most essential purpose, produced humanity’s most successful societies. Those societies, while “prehistoric,” were not primitive – they survived for many thousands of years because their beneficial, cooperative social climate was very different from the climate of obnoxious societies.

Novo: That is what we will be doing tomorrow, and this has already been a long day. So I think now would be a good time to adjourn ...

Moderator: Yes, we agree.

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