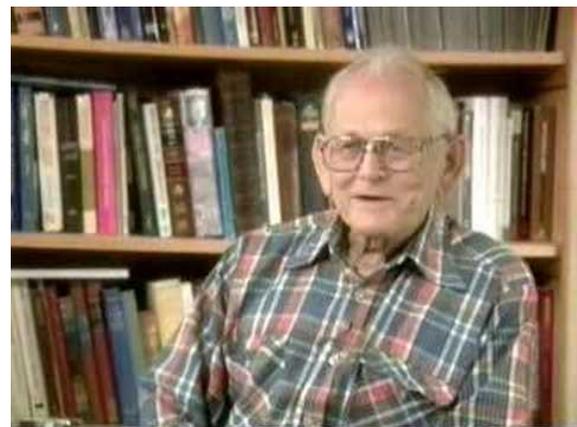
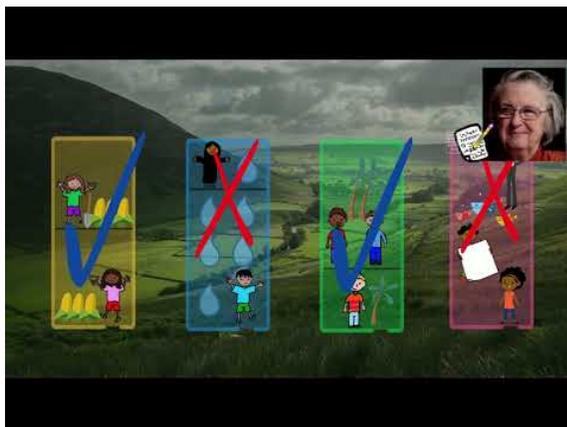


“Humankind: a Hopeful History” — 49-08
PAUSE TO CONSIDER: REFLECTIONS ON SESSION #8
**“Cynicism is just another word for laziness
— don’t punch Nazis.”**

1. We ran out of time to watch these three short videos that give a little more insight to Chapter 15. Running out of time is a great thing. Love the conversation and the contributions last night. “The Tragedy of the Commons” gives an animated detail to Jim’s contribution last night — thank you, Jim! I preferred the Brenda, Wayne and Joan analogy. I’ve included Hardin and Ostrom presenting contrasting views as to The Commons (Ostrom called the Tragedy of the Commons, a Myth.)



2. I was troubled a bit by the “Communist” talk in Chapter 15. We have been so thoroughly convinced that communism is evil and capitalism is good that we lose sight of the way of Jesus that we find described in ACTS:

... Following the way of Jesus, they abolished poverty and hunger in their community. Some might say they made poverty history. The Acts of the Apostles calls this abolition of poverty one of the “signs and wonders” which became an invitation to others to follow Jesus too, and change the world. . . . It didn’t take a miracle. **The Bible says they simply shared everything they had [Acts 4:32–35]. The movement moved them in that particular way.** HMM? (Richard Rohr, Meditation for today.)

3. Here is Michael’s Opener for last night. Words of wisdom, for sure.

HUMANKIND—OPENING

I’m going to talk about three things in this opening, ideas that have been sparked through reading of the book so far. Those things, roughly, are “questioning”, “goodness” and “balance”.

On page 254 of the book, Bregman cites a concept espoused by Bertrand Russell which he called “The Will to Doubt”. I will take off from that in a little different direction than he did.

We have become a society that receives answers and doesn’t ask questions. In doing so, that has caused us to stop looking through the kaleidoscope and instead look through blinders only. Because the only answers that will register are likely those “that we are looking to hear”. We have substituted the certainty of life for the richness of life. In doing that, have we deprived ourselves of life? Is living a life of certainty a self-fulfilling prophecy for living a life of imbalance? I’ll get to that later.

For now, I am asking how do we spread the gospel of questioning, the gospel of curiosity? Because it’s easy to mistake a hunger for information (and answers) with a hunger for curiosity (questions).

I think curiosity is an important covalent bond and connector, one that the author hasn’t spent a lot of time on to this point. It brings together creativity, imagination, adaptation, questioning, maybe even a sprinkle of hope and more than a sprinkle of fear, and, above all, an interest in someone or something other than yourself. Those kind of sound like traits you’d associate with the word “humanity”. And it’s interesting to me how close the tipping point can be on this idea in capitalist and modern society. Marketing is without a doubt rooted in imagination and creativity. But its purpose today? It’s either to keep you fixed and “certain” on what you are supposed to want and need. Or it’s to convince you to move from something certain to something else certain. This is creativity being used to tamp down creative thinking.

What’s the other thing that blooms from curiosity? How about this? THE ABILITY TO LEARN. I have a dreadful question to ask---has a large portion of society lost the ability to truly learn? Do we need to relearn how to learn?

Into this fits faith and church---can a church pivot? From a place where people go to get answers into a place that encourages questions. And more--can it be a waypoint on someone's pilgrimage---the pilgrimage to find good?

Can you, do you **need** to, separate "good" in or for people from "good for me"? Can't you do both?

How do I try to manifest this? Well, for that, I'll tell you a little story. And that story...I see I must be related to Julio Diaz when he says "well, haven't you been taught that you should be nice to everybody?"

I think it's been almost 15 years since I was a part of a little gathering of goodwill. And someone asked a group question. "What is one thing you're proud of?". Now me, I don't focus on that too much. But there was one thing that came to mind. And it was odd, because it was a rule. And I'm not a rules guy. But this was the rule. And, truly, it's a rule I hadn't broken in at least 7 years and one that I don't think I've broken in the 15 years since. Here it is. On any day that I have interacted with another member of my species? I've said something nice to someone. **Every. Single. Day.** I do feel good about that. But it fills me with some sadness that I'm not sure there are that many people out there who could say that...something that should be as natural as breathing. And it also fills me with hope that it might become commonplace because it is as natural as breathing.

Is it hard work to be good? It might be. But isn't the work worth it? It sure is for me. And there are examples. I have put one of them in my notes---the ultra-competitive Napa winemakers who helped each other in the desperate circumstances of the 2017 and 2020 fires. The winemakers who told me the thing they are proudest of in their winemaking careers is that they were able to keep and pay all their employees during these disaster seasons.

My quest for balance. I've already made mention in my notes about my question as to whether most of society today is addicted to imbalance, addicted to extremes. I admit freely---I'm a hedonistic sybarite. I like my fine things. My fine car, my fine wine, my fine china. But it is balanced with "sometimes enough". I can give money or time or a shoulder---or a hug---to a friend who needs it. I can become and live less at times and **not** have everything I want...so I can be someone I need. I want to share with everyone this saying I have kept in my head for the last 4 or 5 months—a saying I don't succeed at every day, but that I want to keep trying for.

I would **much rather be the smallest part of the biggest thing than the biggest part of the smallest person.** I don't want to be the smallest person.

The other big, big part of how I've tried to keep balanced is by having my 6-word personal mission and vision statement clearly in front of me, without any variation off the true, for 12 years now.

Lived Life. With Love. Full Cup.

It says everything about how I've lived my life. It says everything about how I want to live my life. It's not more complicated than that. In a tangential way, maybe it's my way of believing in myself. And I came up with it instinctively and very naturally, in less than a minute. I do also believe that an underlying facet of that statement is a desire to be open---to new friends, other viewpoints, the need of the world---to *NOT* be certain. And thus to be in balance. Perhaps certainty is the ultimate expression of false self. Because the world? It doesn't work that way. The balanced world, the real world, has light and dark, good and bad, certainty and uncertainty. Best to live in that world. And be brave enough to want to explore it. Frank Herbert in the Dune books put it the best way I have ever seen. Real boats rock.

In my key takeaway from Braving the Wilderness, I said that I want to be, I need to be, inadequate to my world. Because if I ever feel adequate to it, that's when I run the risk of not caring about the world any longer. And I can't do that.

So I pray that I continue to be uncertain. That I continue to ask questions. That I continue to exercise curiosity. And hopefully manifest some good every rare once in a while. Not knowing everything? That's kind of awesome.

4. And Jim's take on "The Commons."

Rutger Bregman, *Humankind, a Hopeful History*, Chapter 15

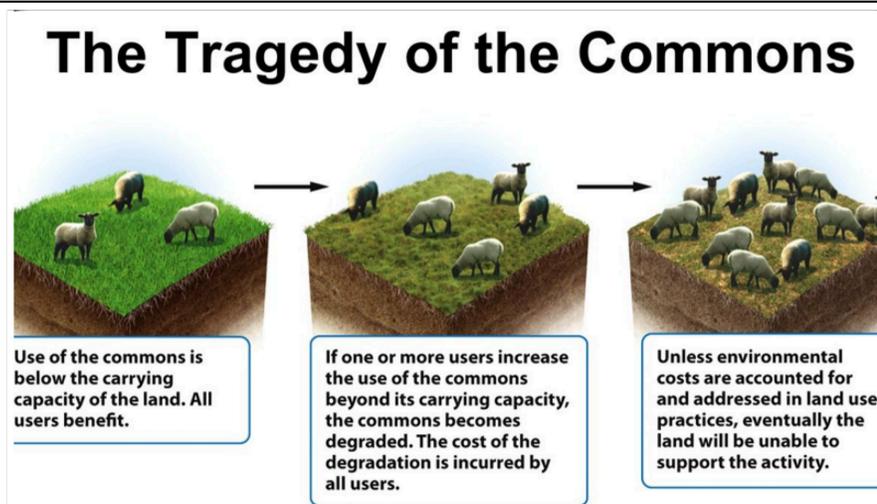


Figure 10.2
Environmental Science
© 2012 W. H. Freeman and Company

An Explanation of the Tragedy of the Commons, from Environmental Science, W. H. Freeman and Company, 2012

- The story of the tragedy of the commons is often told in relation to a British “village commons” where each villager is free to graze their cattle... or in these images, sheep.
- Without degrading the commons, three farmers – say Brenda, Wayne, and Joan – can each graze one sheep (image 1).
- But, then Brenda, being an entrepreneurial type, figures that she can almost double her profits by grazing a second sheep.
 - “Almost double” because as the resource degrades both of her sheep yield a bit less mutton and wool, but half of the cost of lower yields would be borne by Wayne and Joan.
 - Brenda does pause to think about the big picture of resource degradation, but she proceeds anyway because she realizes that she cannot stop Wayne and Joan from grazing more sheep by not increasing the number of sheep that she is grazing.
- Sure enough, Wayne as well as Brenda introduces another sheep... (image 2)
- And then Brenda, Wayne, and Joan each introduce two more sheep.... (image 3)
- In the end the commons experiences substantial degradation and may even overshoot and be destroyed.

Rutger Bregman, *Humankind, a Hopeful History*, Chapter 15

Tragedy of the Commons (Garrett Hardin, 1968; William Foster Lloyd, 1832)

- **There is a potential or tendency for common property resources to be overused**
 - The private cost of using a bit more of a resource is (nearly) zero.
 - **The social cost (imposed on other users) from using a bit more of the resource is significant.**
- **Garrett Hardin vs. Elinor Ostrom**
 - Private property vs community solutions
 - “Sure a commons can fall victim to conflicting interest or greed, but that’s far from inevitable.” (Bregman, p. 312)

-
- The problem arising from a common property resource is known as a *Prisoners’ Dilemma*.
 - It is independently rational to overuse the commons.
 - It is mutually beneficial to cooperate so as limit the use of the resource to prevent degradation.
 - Cooperation can take many forms: conventions, traditions, government rules and regulations, market mechanisms...
 - For example, perhaps after church on Sunday Brenda, Wayne and Joan agree to limit grazing on commons. They may also agree to monitoring and arbitration by the minister given that they know everyone has an incentive to cheat/free ride...
 - Oyster middens or mounds... First Nations vs. Europeans

- Privatization of the resource can sometimes prevent overuse as well, but there are often economic equity or fairness problems.
 - Enclosures of commons in Great Britain enforced by state coercion.
 - Privatization of assets in many states of the former Soviet Union after the fall of the Berlin Wall at the end of Communism.
- Private property is sometimes unworkable if the resource is essentially non-excludable.
- Bregman (perhaps conveniently?) drops the subject; the message seems to be that we can avert any tragedy of the commons...

- **Should individuals, firms and/or governments be allowed to emit greenhouse gasses for free?**
- **If not, who should they pay?**
-
- Bad news: Arguably the biggest challenge of our times is climate change, which at its heart is a tragedy of the commons issue.
- Good news: Note that I have purposely changed the running header to “Humankind a Hopeful Future?!”
 - Although the transitional challenges scaling up to a greener economy will be great: we have the climate science, we have the policy toolkit, and we have the technologies, which continue to advance rapidly.
 - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC): Its Conference of the Parties or COP 27 is under way in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt to build on the Paris Agreement.
 - Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).
- Many cooperative approaches are possible, but beware of countries and firms free-riding on de-carbonization by others!
- Somewhat ironically, after dumping on markets, Bergman discusses the Alaska Permanent Fund which pays annual dividends to every Alaskan, and then he muses that: “Whenever a part of those commons is appropriated or the planet polluted, or CO2 dumped into our atmosphere, shouldn’t we then – as members of the community – be compensated?”
- Rather than markets being the problem with climate change, perhaps the problem is “*missing markets...*”
- ⇒ Alberta’s answer (Kenny and Smith): mostly should be able to emit for free; and n.a. (This is also the US answer!)
- ⇒ BC’s answer (three-party consensus): there should be a price on emissions; pay the government.
- ⇒ Canada’s answer (Pan Canadian Framework): price on emissions; (a) cap-and-trade on big polluters – big polluters pay one another have been “allocated” emission permits; emissions tax on small polluters; pay the Canadian government with rebates.
- ⇒ Developing countries’ answer (COP 27): – “loss and damage” funding...
- One question: Should individuals, firms or governments be allowed to emit greenhouse gasses for free?

- Another question: Should individuals, firms or governments be allowed to use the labour of others for free?

5. Deb's Closing dealt with the question, "Is Democracy dead?" Thanks again, for your contribution last night!

Debra Charnuski

Is democracy dead?

In its present-day form - I believe democracy is deeply in crisis. The current structure relies on politicians and parties in power. Too often we have seen politicians become elected for all the wrong reasons (Donald Trump anyone?), or those who pursue agenda's - either their own or their party's - at the expense of their people (Putin anyone?). Then there are those who are out of touch (or worse – simply choose not to listen or care) with their constituents. Systemic corruption and favoritism run rampant.

Trust in political elites and conventional institutions is at an all-time low. Participation in elections is shrinking. According to a 2021 Statistics Canada survey, the most common reason for eligible Canadian voters not casting a ballot was "not being interested in politics because they feel that nothing will change". Political parties are losing their members. More and more people are now realizing that their elected representatives do not actually represent them. Rather, governments of both left and right bow to the dictates of the big banks, the financial institutions and the multinational corporations and their powerful lobbies. In this situation, the ballot has little meaning because we have *no real choice*. We can only change the political elites that rule us, but we do not have the right to decide upon the development of the society in which we live.

Bregman challenges us to rethink all of what we know about democracy. Rather than aiming for yet another change of politicians and parties in power, why not aim for a change of the political system itself? I agree with Bergman in that we need to go back to democracy in its original

Humankind by Rutger Bregman

meaning as *the rule of the people*. It is time to imagine what *real* democracy would look like and to create institutions and mechanisms that could be the building blocks of genuinely democratic societies. Today, democracy is equated with representative government based on free elections of political "elites" that rule on the citizens' behalf. This system, referred to as "representative democracy", has been the dominant one in the West for the last two hundred years and is being promoted as the *only* possible alternative to outright dictatorship.

Or so we are led to believe. Our schools and current politicians reinforce this belief. A *real* democracy, however, according to Bergman, is a direct and participatory democracy, in which all citizens have the possibility and the right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives and communities. While the powers that be and mainstream media argue that such a citizen-based democracy is not possible or even desirable, there exist in fact a range of new institutions and experiments - as well as some old ones - that show that a direct and participatory democracy is both possible and feasible today. These democratic innovations, however scattered and limited, could, if improved, strengthened and spread, be tools for a radical democratization of society. Bregman uses the example of Torres and its consultative process and participatory budgeting process to illustrate that it IS possible.

Imagine in Canada a system that is "bottom-up" rather than "top-down". Presently, municipalities in Canada have limited powers and jurisdiction comparative to their provincial and federal counterparts. What if that changed? What if

municipalities and their citizens were the decision makers? What would that look like? Let's explore various methods of participatory democracy.

Participatory Budgeting

If participatory budgeting is to be a tool for genuine democratization of society, then citizens must be given decision-making power over the entire or at least a large part of the municipal budget, and the process must be a bottom-up process where the sovereign power lies with the citizens in the assemblies. Local authorities must be willing to give away power to the residents in the assemblies, and there is a need for decentralization of power from national and international levels to the municipal and local levels. This latter happened in Brazil, as the country's constitution of 1988 moved considerable power to the municipalities, including economic power.

The citizens would be organized into Communal Councils. Communal councils are small local participatory institutions, composed of approximately 200-400 families in urban areas and 20-50 families in rural areas, which make decisions about initiation and implementation of local projects. Projects include basic services like water and sewage systems, electricity, medical centers, housing and road building, as well as cultural activities. All decisions are made through popular assemblies composed of at least 10 percent of residents over 15 years. The assemblies also elect committees tasked with financial management, monitoring of government, and local priorities like health, education and land management. Larger "communes" may be created, consisting of many communal councils, if a project is of a wider interest.

Sortition and Mini-Publics

Another way to ensure citizen participation is through the processes of sortition and mini-publics.

Sortition, or selection by lot, is a mechanism that effectively prevents establishment of elites and ensures the participation of ordinary citizens in decision-making and as holders of political offices. The selection by citizens of political officials as a random sample from a larger

pool of candidates ensures that all competent and interested parties have an equal chance of holding public office. It also minimizes factionalism, since there would be no point making promises to win over key constituencies if one was to be chosen by lot, while elections, by contrast, tends to foster it. The use of lot played an important role in the democracy of ancient Athens, where most positions of political authority were selected this way. In the Athenian democracy, lot ensured that citizens could "rule and be ruled in turn", and together with rotation of office, it functioned as a defense against oligarchy (defined as a small group of people having control over a country, organization or institution).

"Democracy" today is now exclusively seen in the form of competitive elections for positions of political authority.

In mini-publics, deliberation is usually guided by independent facilitators; the participants hold hearings in which they hear evidence from and question expert witnesses; and deliberations usually take place both in large and small groups.

Participants are selected for mini-publics through the use of statistical sampling to ensure that citizens from all social groups are represented. Sortition differs from popular assemblies in that equal *opportunity* to participate is replaced by equal *probability* to being selected to participate. This way, no citizens or social groups are systemically excluded from participation.

Citizens Initiatives

Then there are Citizens Initiatives.

Citizen initiatives are democratic mechanisms that let citizens propose and vote on laws and policies. By gathering a certain amount of signatures, citizens can demand a binding vote on a proposed policy or legislation. Citizen initiatives differ from referendums in which citizens only can accept or reject a law or policy proposed by parliament. Switzerland was the first country to introduce citizen initiatives as well as referendums, and several countries, especially in Europe and Latin America have since introduced them at national, state or local levels.

Face-to-face assemblies and other forms of collective decision-making ensures that

citizens are exposed to and required to recognize and take into consideration the views of other citizens with different perspectives and backgrounds and are thus better able to make considered judgements.

Participatory Democracy Has to Start at the Grassroots Level

I will readily admit that before I started to research the concept of participatory democracy, I had little to no knowledge of the concepts of participatory budgeting, sortition, mini-publics and citizens initiatives. Why is that I wondered? My cynical side responded “such information would be dangerous to our current governmental structure and politicians”. I do not think it can be argued that such a radical change to our traditional form of democracy to one that is a direct and participatory democracy in nature will *not* be handed down to us by the elites, but has to be struggled for by ordinary citizens and social movements.

For such a radical democratic change to happen, there must be large popular movements demanding and struggling for this change. But unless ideas of direct and participatory democracy are known and familiar to most people, such movements will not emerge. So a first step then, is to spread these ideas and make a strong argument for how direct and participatory democracy can be feasible today. As Kristinn Már Ársælsson from the democratic association ALDA in Iceland

points out, people will not call for what they don't know.

Perhaps the time has come to create an international outcry from the bottom-up of social movements and activists campaigning for and struggling for direct and participatory democracy. While there already exist some networks and initiatives, most of these are sponsored by or supported by agencies like the World Bank and by governments and other elite institutions. Few of these aim for participatory institutions as tools for changing democratic systems as they currently are, but rather are seen as mere additions to the existing political system. They are used mostly as a means to “appease” the masses. What is lacking is a more progressive agenda, an international grassroots-based network promoting and struggling for participatory democracy as an alternative and ultimately a replacement to the existing system. Through such a network, social movements, activists and ordinary citizens across the world could exchange ideas and experiences, learn from each other, and develop common campaigns and struggles.

The huge task of reinventing and struggling for direct and participatory democracy in the age of centralized corporate power and technocratic rule will not be easy. But I agree with Bregman, in the face of increasing ecological, social, political and economic crises, creating *real* democracy could be our only hope.

6. Housekeeping for Session 49-08:

- Craft Sale on Saturday, November 19, 9-3. P.S. I've loved the creativity of the Northminster Ladies who announced the sale in church the past two Sundays — well worth tuning in — <https://www.stdavidsunitedchurch.ca/> P.S. It's just an adventure to check out our Youtube Channel.
- Two Sundays and we will be in the time of Advent — marks a year for our live-streaming — wow! How time flies!! Come Friday noon to St. David's for a weekly Advent preparation session based on Richard Rohr's work, beginning November 27, 2022.
- December 3, noon, come for the Friendship Group's Christmas Turkey Dinner served in Robertson Hall. Tickets are \$45.
- December 4 at 2 p.m. Come to watch the Chameleon Drama Group in action as they present their Fall play, The Pink Polka Dot. The play is based on an adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island as written by their director, Janice Rider.

7. Wayne presented his three questions by reworking the meaning to him this week.
1. What Planet am I on? became Do you have a priority for caring for others?
 2. What Wolf am I feeding? Do you engage in Compassionate behaviour, readily?
 3. How can my faith help me deal with a book like this? Are you finding ways to grow your faith as we dig more deeply into this material?

8. About Surveys and their role in our political life, Wayne talked about how “level of Education” is not a true delineation when dividing people into categories — that some of our most gifted leaders are not necessarily well educated.

Ken shared some information about the origins of Democracy: He recalled a class taken at university on the Classics. Democracy’s origin dates from 500 to 300 B.C. Participatory Democracy has become the cornerstone of the western world. Freedoms like speech and philosophy were basic to the City States of Greece that formed their basic units. Athens had three main tribes: the Plains people, the city folk and the coastal people. All three were included in elections. There were set terms of office and one of their laws sent people who had failed the system to be sent away for 10 years with 10 days notice.

9. From Joan, readings for next week are Chapters 16, 17 and 18.

November 21, Session 09: Chapters 16, 17 and 18.

Come out of the closet — don’t be afraid of doing good.

November 28, Session 10: Epilogue and Summary Evening.

Be realistic.

10. Let Joan know if you wish to open or close 49-09.

11. From Last Night’s Breakout Rooms and Chat:

- Deb for Premier!! Lots of accolades for our guest speakers.
- Question: To be on the complementary side, to see the best in others, does part of that require to see less in and of yourself and an answer: I don’t think so — I think that seeing the best in others can actually inspire you to be a better person yourself.

9. Check out MINISTRIES/ADULTSPIRITUALDEVELOPMENT page if you wish to review many of our previous book studies on sduc.ca and see the pdf from last night.

- **Bible Study** on Thursday mornings on ZOOM at 10 a.m. Romans with a little of Proverbs will keep us busy.
- Pastoral Care Wednesday Morning 10:00 a.m. is a very welcoming place to be Wednesday morning. Eva will be hosting Wednesday’s gathering.

- And, if you missed last night's session, find the pdf on sduc.ca / Ministries / Adult Spiritual Development or Events/ Monday Night Book Study.

Thoughtfully yours,

Brenda 403 510 1993 wallacebj@me.com