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URBAN ONTOLOGY: WHO IS THE SUBJECT OF THE CITY?

Abstract

Margaret Kohn raises but does not resolve an important ontological and ethical issue in her recent book, *The Death and Life of the Urban Commonwealth* (2016), when she attempts to justify her claim that all of the people who live in a city are entitled to claim property rights in it, including a right to continue living in their current neighborhood instead of being dispossessed when forces of “gentrification” increase the market price of its housing. A philosophy of the city that can guide interdisciplinary urban theory, democratic political processes, and justice-focused advocacy on this and related problems requires a reasonable and persuasive answer to the question, “Who is the subject of the city?” Many influential classical and contemporary liberal political theorists have answered this question in the first person singular, “I am,” understanding cities as nothing more than loose and protean collections of individuals linked only by a voluntary, unequal, power-differentiated social contract from which they can withdraw at any time. However, my thesis in this essay is that the question, “Who is the subject of the city?” is best answered in the first person plural, “We are,” because a city’s enactors are inextricably interlinked.

Key Words: City; Urban ontology; Commonwealth; Justice; Operability; Planning.

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Ontologia urbana: quem é o sujeito da cidade?

Resumo

Margaret Kohn levanta uma importante questão ontológica e ética, mas que não consegue resolver, na sua recente obra, *The Death and Life of the Urban Commonwealth* (2016), onde procura justificar a sua afirmação de que todas as pessoas que residem na cidade têm direito a reivindicar direitos de propriedade, incluindo o direito de continuar a viver no seu bairro atual, em vez de serem desapossados quando as forças de «gentrificação» aumentam o valor de mercado dos imóveis. Uma filosofia da cidade que seja capaz de orientar uma teoria urbana interdisciplinar e os processos políticos democráticos, bem como uma defesa de esse e outros problemas relacionados, focada na justiça, requer uma resposta credível e persuasiva à pergunta «Quem é o sujeito da cidade?». Os teóricos políticos liberais contemporâneos respondem a essa pergunta na primeira pessoa do singular, «eu sou», entendendo as cidades como meras coletividades soltas e mutáveis de indivíduos ligados apenas por um contrato social voluntário, desigual, diferenciado pelo poder, do qual se podem desvincular a qualquer momento. No entanto, a minha tese neste artigo procura sustentar que a melhor resposta à pergunta «Quem é o sujeito da cidade?» se conjuga na primeira pessoa do plural, «Nós somos», porque os agentes da cidade estão inextricavelmente interligados.

Palavras-chave: Cidade; Ontologia urbana; Comunidade; Justiça; Operabilidade; Planeamento.

Introduction

Margaret Kohn raises an important ontological and ethical problem in *The Death and Life of the Urban Commonwealth* (2016) in attempting to justify her claim that all of the people who live in a city are entitled to claim property rights in it, including a right to continue living in their current neighborhood instead of being dispossessed when forces of «gentrification» increase the market price of its housing¹. A philosophy of the city that can

¹ Calling for more careful use of the concept and better data, Ronald R. Sundstrom has challenged the characterization as «gentrification» of urban neighborhoods processes of market revaluation that lead to changes in the predominant class, race, ethnicity, and other social characteristics of their residents, especially if gentrification is understood as unjust displacement. He argues that in some cases, such changes may exemplify ethically neutral processes of «succession», in which previous residents choose to live elsewhere for their own good reasons, e.g., better amenities, easier access to work, the possibility of building family wealth through home ownership, or imaginative inspirations from other places. See «The Concept and Harms of Gentrification», Sundstrom's Keynote Address to the Fifth Annual Conference of the Philosophy of the City Research Group at

guide interdisciplinary urban theory, democratic political processes, and justice-focused advocacy to effectively address this and related issues requires a reasonable and persuasive answer to the question, «Who is the subject of the city?». Many influential classical liberals and contemporary neo-liberal political theorists have answered this question in the first person singular, «I am», understanding nations, like cities, as nothing more than loose and protean collections of individuals linked only by a voluntary, unequal, power-differentiated social contract from which they can withdraw at any time. However, many considerations suggest that this question is best answered in the first person plural, «We are», based on understanding cities, their diverse citizens, and their regions as inextricably interlinked through ecological, social-cultural, and communicative transactions, as well as shared ethical-legal norms, imaginative identifications, and daily living in distinctive local «places» to which we contribute and from which we derive support.

My argument proceeds in two stages. First, I present a list of realistic philosophical considerations that support a shift in our thinking about these issues away from the dominant, singularity-centered ontological grammar of liberal individualism to a pragmatist reconstruction of the deeply familiar, but currently undervalued, plurality-centered ontological grammar of community life. Then, I offer some examples from various fields of current research—philosophical ethics, applied epistemology, social psychology, public health, political history, democratic political economy, and urban planning—that support such a shift in our thinking from the primacy of the «I» to the primacy of the «We». My conclusion is that such a shift in the ontological grammar that underlies our research, law, public policy processes, and «common sense» expresses a realistic understanding that our urban regions and their diverse citizens are ultimately interconnected in our ecological, social-cultural, and communicative transactions, in our shared ethical-legal norms, in our identities and loyalties, in our imaginative visions, and in our decentralized processes of daily living in our neighborhoods and our other special «places» as residents, workers, and caring, purposive visitors. Through our inter-actions as co-laboring members of practical communities, «we» together constitute, energize, and build up our cities and their regions as long-living natural-architectural-social entities and «common wealths» of ideas, goods, tools, and artifacts that need and deserve our continuing efforts to sustain them while also sustaining our larger Biotic Community. At the same time, our diverse urban «we's» and the «I's» who emerge within

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them need and deserve the support of their city and its region as well as their fellow members in a community solidarity that is both moral and practical.

Part I: Some Realistic Philosophical Considerations

The following list of realistic philosophical considerations should ground our common sense about urban ontology, both because they reflect our human experience as had and because they are well-supported by contemporary research in the social sciences, medicine, and ecology.

1. The human «I» emerges out of prior, empowering familial and local «We's» as well as grand «We's» that potentially outlast that individual person².

2. Every «I» has an intrinsic dignity that does not derive from social recognition or market valuation, but rather out of that individual's participation in a grand «We»—humanity—nested within an even grander «We» of the Biotic Community, the eco-social sources and supports for any individual human life and of all the other valuations we humans make³.

² Many «non-Western» philosophical traditions concur with this ontological first premise. See, for example Fred Lee Hord (Mzee Lasana Ospara) and Jonathan Scott Lee's helpful introduction to *I Am Because We Are: Readings in Black Philosophy*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst 1995, and Michael Battle's *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu, Revised Edition*, Pilgrim Press, Cleveland 2009, which analyzes how *ubuntu*—an African concept recognizing that persons and groups form their identities in relation to one another—guided the necessarily public-inclusive work of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which made it possible to move past the violent horrors and losses of the apartheid period within a shared project of actualizing the possibility of multicultural democracy in their diverse country. See also Christopher W. Gowans' explanation of the concept of «dependent rising» in *Buddhist Moral Philosophy: An Introduction*, Routledge, New York 2015, as well as Walpola Rahula's classic work on Buddhist thought, *What The Buddha Taught*, Revised and Expanded Edition Grove Press, New York 1974 and the Dalai Lama's, *Ethics for the New Millennium*, Penguin Books, New York 1999. See also Roger Ames' many works on Daoist and Confucian thought, including *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu 2011. Many non-Western feminist theorists (and some Western feminists, too) also concur; see, for example, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists*, Random House, New York 2012, which originally was presented as a TED talk, and Rita Manning's widely anthologized essay, «Just Caring», from *Speaking from the Heart*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 1992.

³ This generalization draws on Aldo Leopold's concluding essay, «The Land Ethic» in *Sand County Almanac*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1949, one of the founding documents of ecology as a natural-social scientific interdisciplinary field. For Native American thinkers about the ontological nesting of humanity within Earth's larger community of life, see Black Elk's «The Great Vision» in John G. Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln 1932, George Linden's «Dakota Philosophy» in *The Black Elk Reader*, ed. Clyde Holler, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse 2000, Joseph Epes Brown's «I Become Part of It» in *I Become Part of It: Sacred Dimensions of Native American Life*, ed. D. M. Dooling and Paul Jordan-Smith, Harper San Francisco, San Francisco 1992, Joseph Epes Brown and Emily Cousin's *Teaching Spirits: Understanding Native American Religious Traditions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001, Roger Dunsmore's

3. Individuation processes that lead to increasingly distinctive «I's» require participation and support from other individuals who value and encourage such «careers» as «what We do»—in the absence of such active co-participation and effective support from others, human individuation processes are suppressed or distorted⁴.

4. At every point in their «careers», individuating «I's» need, desire, and seek respect, recognition, and critical or appreciative responses from members of «We's that matter for them, gaining their sense of what is worthy, significant, and contributive (or the converse) from these «We»-members, even as the individuating «I's» become increasingly influential (or disrespected, ignored, and alienated) in the transactional processes of community life⁵. As the movie *Avatar* expresses this general idea, every «I» needs recognition from well-embedded We-members who say, «I see you»⁶.

5. The grandest «We»—the Biotic Community and the dynamic ecological forces to which it continually adapts—conditions, inspires, supports, and limits the *decentralized experiments* of the grand human «We» in search of ways to sustain widely scattered, intergenerational populations in living long, healthy, meaningful, and productive lives that contribute to the social-cultural richness, complexity, and diversity of the grand human «We» and its smaller «We's» by fostering both effectively adaptive collaboration and creative individuation⁷.

6. Cities and their regions are the oldest and most enduring form and

Earth's Mind: Essays in Native Literature University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque 1997, and Jonathan Lear's *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2006.

⁴ This generalization draws on the work of two classical pragmatist philosophical texts, John Dewey's 1932 *Ethics, Revised Edition*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale 1985 and George Herbert Mead's *Mind, Self, and Society*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1966.

⁵ This language of individual «careers» derives from John Dewey's 1939 essay, «Time and Individuality» in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, Vol. 14, University of Southern Illinois Press, Carbondale 1988, which interconnects then-contemporary physics with human processes of social-relational individuation over time through transactions that call forth some potentials rather than others into actuality. Dewey's philosophy of education reflects this same idea; see, for example, *Democracy and Education*, originally published in 1916, in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, Vol. 9, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale 1980, *Experience and Education*, originally published in 1939, in *John Dewey: The Later Works*, Vol. 13, University of Southern Illinois Press, Carbondale 1988, and various essays collected in *The Essential Dewey: Vol 1*, ed. Larry A. Hickman - Thomas M. Alexander, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1998.

⁶ See *Avatar*, directed, written, produced and co-edited by James Cameron, Lightstorm Entertainment and Twentieth Century Fox, 2009.

⁷ This list of neutral, cross-cultural criteria for desirable human lives combines those that Amartya Sen deploys in many of his major works, including Sen, Amartya, *Development as Freedom*, Random House, New York 1999, with those that William James, John Dewey, G. H. Mead, and other classical pragmatists deploy in various works.

process of human living; nation-states, empires, and international entities come and go, organized around and sustained by cities and their regions, *unless and until* these larger social-political structures become impediments to the eco-social sustainability and growth in richness, complexity, diversity, and ability to foster the highly adaptable solidarity of their constituent «We's,» as well as their processes of individuation, recognition, and contribution of distinctive, differing, creative «I's».

7. Human architecture—including buildings, communicative grids, landscaping, cultivated land, purposively shaped earth forms, roads, sidewalks, parks, monuments, canals, levees, berms, dunes, and sea walls—is a hybrid natural-social project involving intentional, intergenerational collaborations and decentralized, institution-mediated coordinated actions of countless «We» - members of cities and their wider regions, as well as the creative contributions of highly individuated «I's».

8. Human architecture influences the future of the local «We» that makes and uses it, as well as that of other local «We's» that come into contact with it or with the ideas, «goods» of various kinds (and harms of various kinds) that it causes or makes possible; through these contacts, its influence spreads contagiously for good or for ill throughout thousands of other urban and regional «We's», affecting the neighborhood and familial «We's» that constitute and are constituted by their urban and regional «We's»—as well as the millions of «I's» that emerge within these neighborhood and familial «We's», filled with inchoate longings to belong, to individuate, and to leave their mark within or beyond the particular natural-architectural-social environment that is their natal and formative niche. Ultimately, locality-specific human architecture affects the future of the grand human «We» and the even grander «We» of the Biotic Community.

9. However, all of our purduring natural-architectural-social structures, as well as the «We's» and «I's» who make and transform them, are *experimental*—and sometimes these experiments go *radically wrong* through ignorance, forgetting, hubris, or toxic desires for dominance, for revenge, or for timeless acknowledgment of the worth of a particular «I» or a limited «We» at the expense of others' quality of life. Sometimes initially promising experiments go radically wrong because too many people become addicted to various pleasures as substitutes for the more challenging, fully human processes of learning, caring, building, and celebrating others' achievements and the beauty of our shared «We's».

10. Regrettably, both authors of historically influential philosophical

texts and history-impacting political leaders have perversely treated such *experiments run amok due to toxic misleadings* as humanly normal, historically progressive, and universal ideal guides for desirable ways of future human living, including the natural-architectural-social structures these will require:

- Thomas Hobbes, author of *Leviathan*, the English Civil War-tinged vision of life without an authoritarian national government as a never-ending war among all human individuals⁸
 - Those who rationalized and benefitted from chattel slavery in the Americas
 - Those who celebrated the global empires of nations and corporations achieved and maintained through violent domination, dispossession, and cultural conversion
 - Hitler and Stalin
 - Le Corbusier and contemporary egotistical “star-architects” who ultimately serve only their own aesthetic vision, and who resist democratic public inputs in their designs⁹
 - Democratic urban theorist and activist Jane Jacobs’ powerful opponent, Robert Moses, who was New York City’s unelected land use, parks, and transportation «czar» from the 1930’s to the 1970’s, destroying neighborhoods and redesigning the natural-architectural-social structures and systems of the city and its wide suburban-rural region based on his own vision of progress, in consultation only with like-minded, equally powerful men¹⁰
 - Neo-liberal theorists who generate abstract “I”-centered models of value, rights, and obligations at individual and national level levels of analysis and policy prescription
 - Al Qaeda and ISIS, terrorist «We’s» bent on destroying all other

⁸ See Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil* (1651), reprinted with a valuable introduction by C. B. Macpherson, Penguin Books, New York 1982.

⁹ On the destructiveness of Le Corbusier’s kind of top-down, «I am the artist» vision of architecture, see Scott, James C., *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1999.

¹⁰ Jane Jacobs says very little about Robert Moses in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Random Books, New York 1961 and a series of subsequent books that have become urban studies classics and now are finding a new audience. However, a recent film that focuses on her urban activist legacy even more than on her writing, *Citizen Jane: Battle for the City*, produced and directed by Matt Tyrnauer, Altimeter Films 2016, gives Moses a central role and analyzes his rival vision of urban planning processes in great detail.

«We's» in pursuit of an ideal vision of an international «we» structured as a caliphate of believers, with the social power to form and control only one kind of male «I» and only one kind of female «I» as approved by a single top leader-interpreter of holy texts that are said to express God's timeless will for all aspects of human life and nature

- Donald Trump, Marine Le Pen, other authoritarian, ethno-centric «populists» who stimulate and manipulate the formation of fearful, angry, ignorant «We's» that follow the various cultural, political, economic, and ecological directives of these powerful «I's» uncritically, no matter how empirically ill-founded, eco-socially toxic, damaging to the emergence process of creative individuals within valuable alternative «We's», and destructive of their cities and their nations' hard-won relations with others

- Wall-builders between nations and between conflicting cultural and religious «We's»

- Normalizers of urban gentrification and dispossession in public policy, law, and business who analyze unequal wealth-based individual property rights as moral and legal “trumps” over all other kinds of rights and values, including basic human rights to food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, work, and social membership listed in the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, as well as shared access to high-quality shared ecological resources like air, water, soil, viewsapes, and experiences with other species that large numbers of citizens of diverse regions and cultures highlight in the «national happiness studies» that Jeffrey Sachs and his international team of researchers produce annually for the U.N.¹¹

11. However, other philosophical voices from the past and the present have critically challenged such visions of a contract-based, gang-like, Leviathan «we» that allows some «I's» to dominate all other «I's», all other «We's» and the great «We» of Earth's biotic community – and they have proposed feasible and desirable processes for achieving more deeply democratic and more caring national and urban «We's» that can sustainably meet the needs of current and future generations while supporting the emergence of ethically committed, creative «I's» who can bridge the gaps that now divide us. These

¹¹ See the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948) at www.un.org. See also the annual *World Happiness Report*, www.worldhappiness.report, researched by Jeffrey Sachs et al., which includes ranked assessments of the “gross national happiness” of 155 nations.

voices include:

- The former slave become great orator, Frederick Douglass, and the white, middle class mother and visionary writer, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who joined forces at the highly controversial 1848 meeting in Seneca Falls, New York, that produced the «Declaration of Sentiments» both spoke for and signed, and in the conflict-riven years that followed, to demand both the abolition of chattel slavery and the liberation of women from their subservient, highly controlled, and individualization-limiting social, religious, political, and economic status¹²
- Anna Julia Cooper, who rose out of American chattel slavery to achieve a doctorate from the Sorbonne, and who called in *A Voice from the South* for gender-inclusive epistemologies in our academies and in public policy-making that can collaboratively construct wider and wiser truths¹³
- Charles Mills, whose work on «the racial contract» argues that the revolutionary founders of powerful modern democracies never imagined their «social contract» as including the people of color whose violently extorted labor built up the national wealth and systems of race-linked privileges their «white» beneficiaries now regard as «normal» and just¹⁴
- Jane Addams, who founded and lived with her collaborators in Chicago's Hull House, America's first settlement house, as a neighborhood place of mutual hospitality to welcome and empower culture-rich immigrants fleeing wars, religious pogroms, and bleak poverty, to foster intercultural exchange, and to organize collaborative efforts to help this young city to develop effective institutions, systems, and social habits while helping their new nation to fulfill its

¹² See *Frederick Douglass: Selections from His Writings*, ed. with a valuable introduction by Phillip S. Foner, International Publishers, New York 1945, which includes information about his active support of Stanton's "Declaration of Sentiments" at the 1848 Convention on Women's Rights in Seneca Falls, New York, as well as some of Douglass's later editorials in support of women's rights. See Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al., *The History of Woman Suffrage*, Ayer, North Stratford 1911.

¹³ See Cooper, Anna Julia, *A Voice from the South*, first published 1892, Oxford University Press, New York 1999. See also May, Vivian M., *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist*, Taylor & Francis, New York 2007.

¹⁴ See Mills, Charles, *The Racial Contract*, Cornell University Press, Cornell 1999.

ethical potential as a social democracy¹⁵

- Addams' fellow American pragmatist philosophers, founding social scientists, and progressive change-makers, including William James, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, W.E.B. Du Bois, Mary Parker Follett, and Martin Luther King, Jr., all of whom made contributions of lasting value to the theory and praxis of creating deeper democracies in «imperfect» conditions of social conflict, actual injustice, unmet basic needs, and underdeveloped human capabilities through processes of education, cross-difference collaborative inquiry, institution-building, and activist struggle¹⁶

- Alain L. Locke and later analysts of colonial exploitation, cultural conversion, and the long-lasting post-colonial impacts of these toxic processes on both the colonized and the colonizers, who have proposed «culturally relative» processes of education, social inquiry, and cross-difference communication through the arts to create the social basis for shared, «rooted cosmopolitan» visions of democracy within and among peoples, as well as transformative paths to actualize these¹⁷

¹⁵ See Addams, Jane, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, first published 1902, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2013, and *Twenty Years at Hull House*, first published 1910, University of Illinois Press, Champaign-Urbana 1990. See also Seigfried, Charlene Haddock, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric*, University of Chicago, Chicago 1996, Marilyn Fischer (ed.), *Jane Addams and the Practice of Democracy* (University of Illinois Press, Champaign-Urbana 2008), and Maurice Hamington (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Jane Addams*, Penn State University Press, State College 2010.

¹⁶ See James, William, *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition*, ed. John J. McDermott (Random House, New York 1967), John Dewey, *The Essential Dewey, Volumes I and II*, ed. Larry A. Hickman - Thomas M. Alexander (Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1998), George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society: The Definitive Edition*, ed. Charles M. Morris, annotated edition by Daniel R. Huebner and Hans Joas (University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1934, 2015), W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, first published 1903 (Bantam Books, New York 1989), Mary Parker Follett, *The New State: Group Organization the Solution of Popular Government*, first published 1918 (Penn State University Press, University Park 1998), and Martin Luther King, Jr., *Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (HarperCollins), San Francisco 1986.

¹⁷ See Alain LeRoy Locke's 1915-1916 lecture series, *Race Contacts and Interracial Relations: Lectures on the Theory and Practice of Race*, ed. Jeffrey Stewart (Howard University Press, Washington 1992), his introductory essay in the path-breaking collection he edited, *The New Negro*, first published 1925 (Simon & Schuster, New York 1992), the collection of essays he co-edited with Bernhard J. Stern, *When Peoples Meet: A Study in Race and Culture Contacts* (Progressive Education Association, New York 1942), many of his other essays Leonard Harris has collected and introduced in *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond* (Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1989), as well as *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education*, ed. Leonard Harris (Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 1999), and chapter 4, "Cosmopolitan Unity Amidst Valued Diversity: Alain Locke's Vi-

- Contemporary feminist theorists, including Carole Pateman, Patricia Hill Collins, Iris Marion Young, Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, bell hooks, and Martha C. Nussbaum, who have criticized the continuing exclusion, suppression, and exploitation of women in diverse nations and cultures, and who draw on the differing experiences and imaginative visions of diverse women to propose for more inclusive, caring, and just ways of living¹⁸
- Native American thinkers such as Black Elk, Chief Seattle, Chief Joseph, the founders of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy and its contemporary orators and healers, including Oren Lyons and Jake Swamp, as well as the visionary Cherokee leader Wilma Mankiller and the other indigenous women leaders with whom she worked effectively in cross-difference efforts to improve the quality of life of the members of their tribal «We's» by reflecting together and collaboratively planning *with* rather *against* nature¹⁹

sion of Deeply Democratic Transformation,” in my own *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation* (Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 1999). Later great post-colonial and cosmopolitan thinkers who contribute to this stream of thought and action include Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (Paris, Editions du Seuil 1952), Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Random House, New York 1978), Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (W. W. Norton & Company, New York 2006), and Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism*, with commentaries by Jeremy Waldron, Bonnie Honig, and Will Kymlicka (Oxford University Press, New York 2006).

¹⁸ See Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1970) and *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford University Press, Stanford 1988); Patricia Hill Collins “Searching for Sojourner Truth” in *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1998) and *Intersectionality*, with Sirma Bilge (Polity Press, Malden 2016); Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 1990) and *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2000); Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1982); Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (University of California Press, Berkeley 1984); Bell Hooks, *Feminism Is for Every Body: Passionate Politics* (South End Press, Boston 2000); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (Oxford University Press, New York 1999) and *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Harvard University/Belknap Press, Cambridge 2011); and Chimamand Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists* (Random House/ Anchor Books, New York 2012).

¹⁹ See Black Elk, op. cit. On Chief Joseph and Chief Seattle, see «Earth's Mind» in Roger Dunsmore, op. cit. On the founding of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, see Bruce E. Johansen, «Dating the Iroquois Confederacy», Akwesasnee Notes at radical.org/AkwesasneNs.html. For contemporary Onandaga oratory in the Haudenosaunee tradition, see Oren Lyons, «Our Mother Earth», in D. M. Dooling - Paul Jordan-Smith, op. cit. For the Mohawk healing tradition, see Sub-Chief Jake Swamp in *The Native Americans*, Episode 2: “The Northeast: Give and Take” (TBS Productions, 1994). See Wilma Mankiller, *Mankiller: A Chief and Her People* (St. Martin's Press, New York 2000). See also her edited collection of her conversations with women leaders of diverse Native American tribes, *Every Day Is A Good Day: Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women* (Fulcrum Publishing, Golden 2004).

- Founding ecologist Aldo Leopold, as well as contemporary ecologists and eco-philosophers, who have not only demonstrated the humanity-destroying consequences of narrowly anthropocentric conceptions of our shared natural environment, but have offered an empirically well-grounded, ethically rich, and imagination-inspiring alternative vision of our human place in nature as «citizens of the Biotic Community»²⁰

- The thinkers on whose work Margaret Kohn draws in proposing new forms of shared property grounded in recognition of shared contributions to the city, including the early twentieth century French Solidarists—Alfred Fouillee, Leon Bourgeois, Charles Gide, and Leon Duguit—the mid-twentieth century French political theorist Henri Lefebvre, and the mid-twentieth century American architectural critic, urban visionary, and change agent, Jane Jacobs

12. These thinkers and their allies in various disciplines offer good guidance for experimentally fostering more complexly sustainable «We's» who foster more humble, creative, and caring «I's»—individuals who can feasibly and desirably reimagine our cities, regions, nations, and transnational networks and systems, and can who can actualize these through democracy-deepening processes of collaboratively building up, sustaining, and sharing these natural-architectural-social achievements together. Consider the following as guiding ideas:

- The comprehensive architecture of livable cities and their regions—their buildings, communicative grids, landscaping, cultivated land, purposively shaped earth forms, roads, sidewalks, parks, monuments, canals, levees, berms, dunes, and sea walls—has always been a hybrid natural-social project involving intentional, intergenerational collaborations as well as the decentralized, institution-mediated coordinated actions of countless «We» - members of cities and their regions, aided by the creative contributions of highly individuated but humble, caring, mutuality-minded «I's»—not just the famous names our histories remember.

- Human architecture influences the future of the local «We» that makes and uses it, as well as that of other local «We's» that come into contact with it or with the ideas, as well as the «goods» of vari-

²⁰ See Aldo Leopold, «The Land Ethic», op. cit.

ous kinds (and the «harms» of various kinds) that it causes or makes possible.

- Through these experiences of contact, a city's architecture, the activities it empowers, and the values it expresses contagiously influences thousands of other cities and their regional «We's», as well as the neighborhood and familial «We's» that constitute and are constituted by their cities and regions, and the millions of «I's» that emerge within them, filled with inchoate longings to belong, to individuate, and to leave their mark within or beyond the particular natural-architectural-social environment that is their natal and formative niche.

- Ultimately, locality-specific human architecture affects the future of the grand human «We» and the even grander «We» of the Biotic Community.

- A city's «We» includes a large but indefinite number of diverse, eco-socially interlinked groups and their individual members, transacting in a kind of place-specific practical solidarity, not only through participatory political institutions and locality-focused communications media, but in a more basic way by playing distinctive, interlinked roles in their region's economic, cultural, religious, legal, political, educational, nutritional, recreational, and tourism aspects and in processes of daily social living that include sharing sidewalks, streets, mass transit, parks, stores, banks, libraries, arts spaces, sports, coffee shops and other «locals».

- A city's constantly changing «We» perdures through countless historical events.

- A city's «We» is composed and continuously renewed by individuals who enter and depart from the whole, contributing to and being deeply shaped by its distinctive character.

- A city's «we» expresses critical tensions as well as mutual reliances among its diverse local neighborhoods and their distinctive living-working-cultural-religious- artistic-aesthetic communities.

- A city's «we» relies heavily on what Aristotle calls practical wisdom (*phronesis*), John Dewey calls social intelligence, and James C. Scott calls expert practical know-how (*metis*), within the collaborative transactions of making and exchanging goods and services, devising and communicating ideas, and decision making in daily life, in business, and in government, including in those sectors of govern-

ment in which professional public administration is necessary²¹.

- A city's «we» has no single center, but rather multiple nodes and nexus points of communicative, practical, and interpretive power where its intersecting social, political, financial, scholarly, cultural, religious, and artistic networks converge.

- All of a city's individual citizens are architecturally, socially, and ecologically

dependent on and contributive to its life-sustaining, educative, wealth-creating, culture-transforming, and meaning-making resources.

- For reasons of operational effectiveness as well of justice, all of a city's individual citizens and significant groups, including neighborhoods, are responsible for and entitled to social and civic voice in expressing the city's «We» and all are entitled to share in the city's «common wealth».

- A shift to thinking of «We» as the subject of the city in the ontological grammar of democratic theory, property law, public policy, and everyday life can make the lives of cities and their citizens more vital, more meaningful, and more sustainable.

Part II: Supportive Interdisciplinary Examples from Contemporary Research

Although it may initially seem like a daunting prospect to try to achieve such an ontological shift in our laws, public policies, and shared social habits from thinking about all of these matters in terms of a primordial atomic «I» who deliberates, chooses, and acts for narrowly self-interested reasons, to thinking of them in terms of antecedent and still-emerging intergenerational «We's» who make the emergence of distinctively individuated «I's» possible through the intended and unintended outcomes of their direct, mediated, and long-distance transactions, such a shift is well-supported by current work in many fields.

²¹ On *phronesis* or practical wisdom, see Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. On social intelligence, see John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, originally published 1927, in *John Dewey, The Later Works, Volume 2* (Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale 1984) and *Liberalism and Social Action*, originally published 1935, in *John Dewey, The Later Works, Volume 11* (Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 1987). On *metis* or expert practical know-how, see James C. Scott, *op. cit.*

1. Philosophical ethics, which at its heart is a guide to «we» feeling, thinking, and acting:

- The concept of caring
- The concept of obligation
- The concept of justice
- The concept of property rights as moral claims on others

2. Social psychology:

- The well-documented need of human babies for face-time, touching, familiar voices
- The well-established fact that crowding (a toxic «We») leads to psychopathology, as does neglect (an absent «We»)
- Inspiring «We» experiences, such as those New Yorkers shared after 9/11 when they felt the support of other urban «We's» around the world, giving rise to shared social hope and renewed individual capabilities to get on with life and meet others' needs

3. Public health:

- The recognition that epidemics are a «We» problem that require a «We» response
- The recognition that urban childhood asthma requires a «We» response, including reducing car, truck, and bus emissions
- The recognition that urban and regional health requires «green» buildings

4. Applied epistemology:

- The recognition that scientific advances require team collaboration as the ground for individual creativity
- The «epistemic bubble» phenomenon that Dan Kahan and Cass Sunstein research²²
- *Paideia*—the long-recognized fact that people develop citizenship attitudes and skills by participating in community problem-solving, including Dewey's famous example of Abraham Lincoln, who became the Lincoln we remember by responding to the com-

²² See Dan Kahan, «Cultural Cognition and Public Policy», *Yale Law and Public Policy Review* (Vol. 24, 2006) and See Cass R. Sunstein, *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 2017).

mon needs of his times²³

5. Recent political history:

- The struggle of the Greek people—an ancient «We» —for recognition, as well as for sustainable debt relief and political autonomy within the institutional structures of the European Community’s younger, diverse, highly contentious grand «We»
- The struggle of Barcelona and the Catalan people with Madrid and the Andalusian people over the status of their various «We’s» and the possibility of a more just grand «We» within Spain’s young multicultural democracy
- The struggle of «We, the people of the United States» in the Trump era over whether «We» will fulfill our obligations to Earth’s Biotic Community and to all the other local and national «We’s» now at risk from climate change, as agreed in the Paris Accords

6. Democratic political economy:

- The recognition by Amartya Sen, Thomas Piketty, Joseph Stiglitz, Jeffrey Sachs, Muhammad Yunus, and many other influential economists that sustainable economic systems that promote both common and individual flourishing without generating human inequalities that damage families, cities, nations, and the Biotic Community must be neither top-down, command and control systems nor unregulated market systems—both of these models focused on and enacted by “I’s”—but rather democratically organized, intelligently regulated, decentralized webs that interconnect the members of local and widely dispersed «We’s» within looping processes of contributing and receiving²⁴
- The emerging recognition that such a democratic, «We» - focused paradigm is preferable not only for reasons of justice, but also

²³ See John Dewey, «Time and Individuality», originally published 1939, in *John Dewey, The Later Works, Volume 14* (Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale 1988).

²⁴ See Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999) and *The Idea of Justice* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2007). See Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Harvard University/Belknap Press, Cambridge 2014). See Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Euro: How A Common Currency Threatens The Future of Europe* (W. W. Norton and Company, New York 2017). See Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The Age of Sustainable Development* (Columbia University Press, New York 2015). See Muhammad Yunus, *A World of Three Zeros: The New Economics of Zero Poverty, Zero Unemployment, and Zero Net Carbon Emissions* (PublicAffairs, New York 2017).

for operability, because excluding community members from participation and benefit creates unsustainable carrying weights on an economy, and alienated people can stop all aspects of complex social systems, including law, politics, transportation, and the daily processes of urban life

7. Urban and regional planning:

- The recently renewed appreciation of Jane Jacobs' insight about livable cities as sustained and energized by the on-going contributions of countless numbers of individuals to the «We» of their neighborhoods as places of safety, beauty, work opportunities, rich resources for meeting basic needs, and for experiencing many of the small pleasures of living, and that without neighborhoods and their countless intergenerational makers, cities and their regions cannot survive and thrive²⁵

- The widely emulated «Seattle model» of community-led, consultant-assisted, mutually educative visioning as the beginning phase of neighborhood residents' planning for their shared future, out of which feasible and desirable city-wide plans can grow²⁶.

Conclusion

When we realistically understand cities as our primary places of human habitation and as the «centers of gravity» for their regions, nations, and global networks of human transactions of all kinds, it becomes clear why we need a new philosophy of the city grounded in a realistic, «We» - focused ontology that is reflected in a deeply democratic, pragmatist ethics. A philosophy of the city

²⁵ See two recent biographies of Jane Jacobs: Peter L. Laurence's *Becoming Jane Jacobs* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2016) and Robert Kanigel's *Eyes on the Street: The Life of Jane Jacobs* (Knopf Doubleday, New York 2017).

²⁶ See Carmen Siriani, *Investing in Democracy: Engaging Citizens in Collaborative Governance* (Brookings Institution Press, Washington 2009). See my *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation* (Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham 1999) for the original account of the consulting work of GreenWoods Associates, which David Woods and I continue to lead, to assist stakeholders in the Crown Hill-Ballard Neighborhood in Seattle in the future visioning process, Stage I in developing a neighborhood plan within the city's planning framework. This neighborhood was the only one in the city of Seattle that successfully completed this Stage I visioning process—all the others broke down in irreconcilable conflicts. See also Chapter 6, «The Continuously Planning City: Imperatives and Examples for Deepening Democracy», in my *Pragmatism and Social Hope: Deepening Democracy in Global Contexts* (Columbia University Press, New York, 2008).

that reflects such an urban ontology and such a pragmatist ethics can guide our efforts to transform humanity's non-ideal ways of living together toward more just, mutually committed, and sustainable ones, including our inextricably interlinked processes of collaboratively building up more adaptable architectures, institutions, and processes. When we recognize that such «We's» are the proper subject of our cities and acknowledge the immensity of their achievements, we will begin again to value them for their own sake, as well as for the sake of the individuals who will emerge within them, and we will recognize that *We are the city*, even more than the built forms, the artistic achievements, and the goods and services for which cities are known to others.

On this ontological and ethical basis, we will recognize that the urban «common wealth» that a city's «We» builds up belongs to them together, and that its constituent groups and their individual members have various kinds of moral claims on it to meet their basic human needs, to support their creative individuation processes, and to support their on-going efforts to sustain, to improve, to enjoy, and to reflect on the meaning of the complex transactions of their lives. Finally, we will recognize the importance of our human «We's» for the even greater «We» of Earth's Biotic Community, which relies on all of us to practice wise stewardship together in our daily living, including our committed efforts to plan for urban and regional futures in which our children's children will continue to experience the awe and wonder at its natural beauty that Aristotle regarded as the starting place of philosophy, as well as its bountiful provision for the needs of all of us humans and all of our other-than-human companions on life's journey.

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